



HM the Sultan meets sheikhs of Dakhliyah, Al Wusta

Manah - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq held a meeting with sheikhs of the governorates of Dakhliyah and Al Wusta at Hisn A'Shumookh Castle in Manah on Tuesday.

This was announced in a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court reading as follows:

'Within the context of the Royal attention of His Majesty the Sultan to confer with Omani people in all governorates, study their needs for basic projects and development services, converse with them face-to-face about all that benefits this noble country and its loyal people and overcome all the difficulties that

might come in the way of the country's march of comprehensive growth, HM Sultan Haitham bin Tariq today held a meeting with sheikhs of Dakhliyah and Al Wusta at Hisn A'Shumookh Castle in the wilayat of Manah.

'At the outset of the meeting, HM the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the prosperity He has bestowed on Oman. HM the Sultan prayed to the Almighty to perpetuate these bounties so that the blessed Omani renaissance attains wider horizons of progress.

'Then, HM the Sultan spoke about a number of developmental, economic and social projects

that respond to the aspirations of the country and its citizens. He gave directives for collaborative action between the government and citizens to help realise these aspirations. The desired action stems from the wise Royal vision for the governorates to play their roles and fulfil their responsibilities in terms of the provisions of the system (statute) attached to Royal Decree No 101/2020 promulgating the Governorates and Municipal Affairs System (law), so that they can deliver their missions in a manner that conforms with the requirements of the current period and aligns with Oman Vision 2040.

'HM the Sultan also issued directives to increase the sums accorded to the Governorates Development Programme from RO10mn to RO20mn for each governorate during the current Five-Year Plan, with effect from 2022. The Royal directives require the respective governors to present annual executive plans to the departments concerned about ways to expend the sums.

'HM the Sultan also tasked the governors with the responsibility of following up on the execution of social and service projects in their respective governorates.

'Then, HM the Sultan issued

directives to provide appropriate financial support to Omani Women's Associations and to public and private rehabilitation centres catering to people with disabilities, in all governorates of the sultanate, so that these organisations can better perform the significant role in serving society and developing its potentials.

'May the Almighty Allah protect HM the Sultan and assist him with power to pursue the path of bounties. May He eternalise Oman's riches and endow the country and its people with further peace and security.'

ONA

HM greeted on ROP Day

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has received a cable of greetings from Lt Gen Hassan Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector of Police and Customs, on the occasion of Royal Oman Police (ROP) Day (January 5) reading as follows: 'On the anniversary of Royal Oman Police Day, I am honoured, and so are the personnel of ROP, to express our heartfelt greetings and wishes, praying to the Almighty Allah for the return of this and similar occasions, with Your Majesty relishing abundant bliss and Oman and its people enjoying full security and prosperity.

'ROP personnel highly appreciate Your Majesty's care and pledge to remain loyal. May the Almighty Allah perpetuate His divine support for Your Majesty and the Omani people all the time.'

ONA

Our Correspondent Muscat

Rain continued to lash several parts of Oman on Tuesday as a result of the Al Azm low pressure currently affecting many parts of the sultanate causing flooding and significant damage to property in several areas. Several wadis overflowed and cars were stuck in waterlogged roads.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) stated that the wilayat of Bausher, Muscat governorate, recorded the highest rainfall in the sultanate in the period from January 3 to 4. 'Ministry weather stations registered 110mm of precipitation in Bausher, 108mm in the wilayat of Seeb, 59mm in Nakhal, 40mm in Muttrah, Muscat and Liwa, and 32 mm in Khasab.'

Mahdah, Mussanah and Sohar received

25mm of rain, while Amerat received 28mm, Buraimi 14mm, Khabourah 9mm, 5mm in Shinas and 4mm in Hamra.

The weather is expected to be cloudy over most governorates with the trough of low pressure continuing on Wednesday, according to the latest weather update from the National Multi Hazard Early Warning System.

The Ministry of Education extended its decision to suspend classes in some schools in Muscat governorate until Wednesday. Thuraya bint Mohammed al Busaidiyah Basic Education School for Girls (Grade 5-9), Al Tawfeeq Basic Education School (Grades 1-4), Faith al Marifa Basic Education School for

Capital Market Authority called on citizens, residents, property owners and owners of industrial establishments and shops to adhere to instructions during rains to ensure the safety of their property

Girls (Grades 5-10) and Al Oula Basic Education School (Grade 1-4) will remain closed on Wednesday.

On Friday, six people died and several others were rescued during heavy rains in different governorates.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health temporarily suspended the COVID-19 vaccination service in the former airport building in Seeb.

'Due to the climatic condition, the Directorate General of Health Services in the Governorate of Muscat announces the suspension of the vaccination service against COVID-19 at the vaccination centre in Oman Airports' building in the wilayat of Seeb until further notice,' a statement said.

It said that comprehensive vehicle insurance provides coverage for damages resulting from natural disasters, including hail, flash floods, storms and cyclonic storms, but policyholders must be cautious and not take risks like trying to cross wadis.

Mwasalat announced the suspension of some routes of its ferry and bus services on Tuesday. 'All ferry routes to and from Musandam governorate are suspended. Operations on the Shannah-Masirah route continue,' it stated. It suspended city bus routes in Muscat and intercity bus routes in all governorates. City bus routes in Salalah were not affected.

The Capital Market Authority called on citizens, residents, property owners and owners of industrial establishments and shops to adhere to instructions during rains to ensure the safety of their property.

It said that comprehensive vehicle insurance provides coverage for damages resulting from natural disasters, including hail, flash floods, storms and cyclonic storms, but policyholders must be cautious and not take risks like trying to cross wadis.





Al Azm brings

Darsait

Muscat Daily staff set off from Darsait to Seeb and back via Muscat Expressway on Tuesday morning to capture the sights and sounds of the city during the deluge caused by the Al Azm low-pressure trough

(Pix - Suresh Kumar Laxman/Muscat Daily)

Qurm

A swollen wadi raged behind Qurm garden



Al Sarooj

Motorists splashed through a waterlogged Sultan Qaboos Street



Qurm

Motorist lined up on the fast lane to avoid deep waters in the curb

Stranded between home and office on waterlogged roads

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Heavy rains lashed Muscat and its surrounding areas on Tuesday morning bringing life and work to a standstill. With overflowing wadis, flooded neighbourhoods and traffic jams on waterlogged roads, some offices opted to close for the day or allow employees to work from home.

For a few hours, Burj al Sahwa Roundabout and the Amerat-Bausher road were closed for motorists' safety. Traffic was disrupted on Sultan Qaboos Street opposite the Ministry's Area, in Azaiba, Rusayl near the Nizwa exit and in Seeb.

Many office-goers were stuck in their cars in their commute to work for hours. Unable to reach office, many were stranded when the road back home was also flooded. As the drizzle continued, vehicles drove at snail's pace with blinkers turned on.

Ahmed Hilal Darwish, a private sector employee, was stuck in his car for four hours. "I stay in Seeb and drive to work in Qurm. I was in stranded my car in Ghubra with the water level rising around me, unable to go to office or return home. Luckily the police came and assisted the cars move away slowly."

Bangladeshi national Mohammad Aslam and his wife were shopping in Wadi Kabir Lulu when it started raining. "We have guests tonight for who were shopping. We had just left Lulu, when it started pouring. We stay in Wadi Kabir and the area is prone to water logging. It was a challenge for our sedan to



If we do not act fast, this problem will cause more havoc. It is high time the drainage system of the city is re-done in line with proper urban planning

SAIF AL HARTHY

cross the knee-high water and manoeuvre through the loose rocks from the mountains. It took us two hours to reach home safely."

Many neighbourhoods in the

city looked unsightly in the afternoon with pebbles, rocks, uprooted trees and overturned dustbins scattered on roads.

The Al Azm low pressure prompted a debate - much like earlier instances following inclement weather - on the efficiency of the city's drainage system. Water logging has been a continuing problem for the city even after light rains.

"The recent Cyclone Shaheen and today's rain are proof of the fact that if we do not act fast, this problem will cause more havoc. It is high time the drainage system of the city is re-done in line with proper urban planning," said Saif al Harthy, a businessman based in Amerat.

Tender Notice

Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), announces following E-Tenders for 2022:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Deadline for Specifications Request	Deadline for tender bids	Tender Price
01/2022	Renewal of Nutanix licenses	10 Jan 2022	17 Jan 2022	25 OMR
02/2022	Renewal of NetApp Infrastructure Support	10 Jan 2022	17 Jan 2022	32 OMR

Interested companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender document from the E.Tendering website: <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. The Vendors must provide electronic bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (2%) of the Tender value valid for (120) days on website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> and addressed to Public Authority for Social Insurance.

CORRESPONDANCE:

1. Tender inquiry : All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at E-Tendering system (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
2. E-Tendering system inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: Tel : +968 24402200 , E-mail : etenderhd@ita.gov.om

PASI is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other tender that may be received

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Muscat to a standstill



CDA in action
Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDA) teams sprung into action saving people stranded in cars on waterlogged roads

Expressway
A view of the mountains shrouded in clouds from Muscat Expressway. The cloudy weather is expected to continue on Wednesday



Ghubra
Sultan Qaboos Street was a river by 10am. Water stood more than a metre-deep in some places in Ghubra



Muttrah

A haplessly unprepared citizen tries to keep dry under a child's umbrella



Hamriya Muscat Municipality swiftly deployed teams to clear debris from roads



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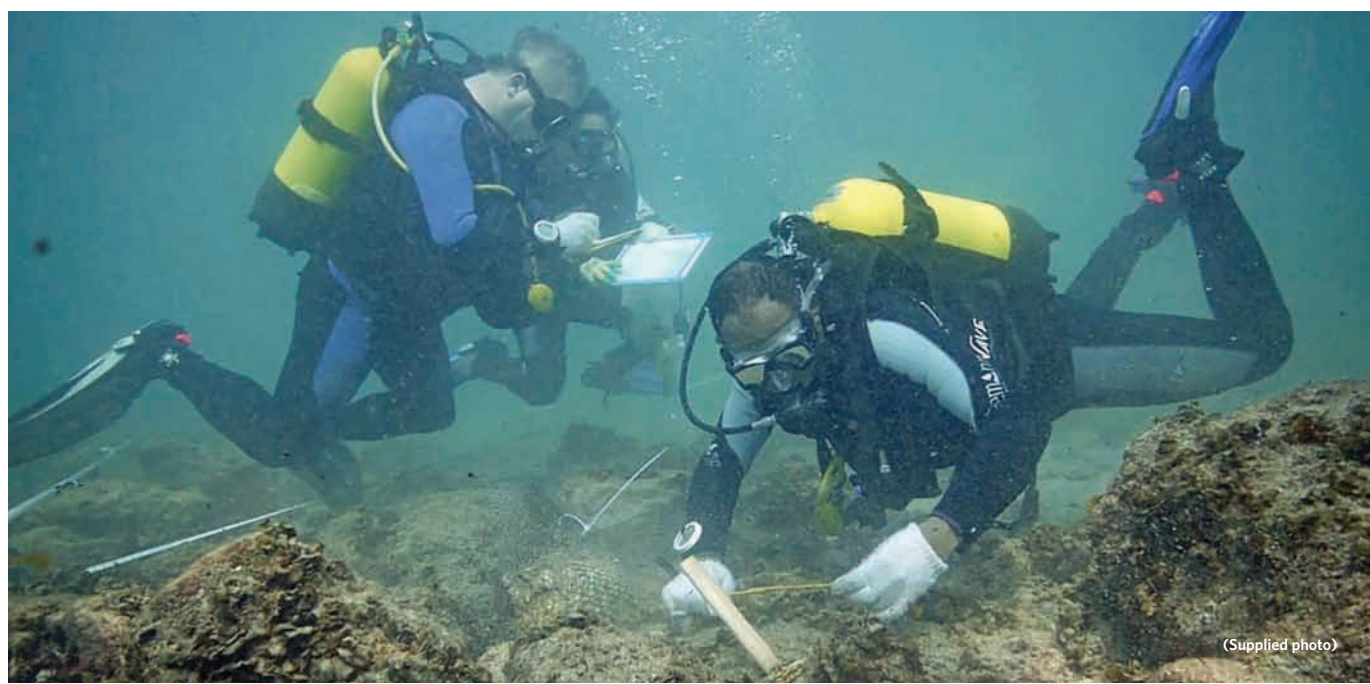
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MoHT to set up lab to restore antiquities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has announced a tender to set up a laboratory to preserve antiquities. The restoration lab will be set up in the ministry building.

According to an MoHT official, the ministry is working to restore numerous archaeological artefacts found through its programmes of research and excavation, including the wreckage of the *Esmeralda*, which was part of a fleet led by the legendary Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama in his second voyage to India (1502-1503).

"In 2016, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture announced that the oldest shipwreck from Europe's Golden Age of Exploration had been found off the coast of Oman. The wreck was initially located in 1998 and excavated between 2013 and 2015 in a partnership between the ministry and the shipwreck recovery company Bluewater Recoveries Ltd," the official said.

"MoHT invites interested parties to bid to set up the labora-



tory. The last date for submission of bids is February 9, 2022."

Additionally, the ministry has announced a tender for invest-

ment in five tourist sites to capitalise on historical structures at these places.

The five tourist sites open for

The ministry is working to restore numerous archaeological artefacts, including the wreckage of Vasco da Gama's 'Esmeralda'

MOHT OFFICIAL

investment are Bukha Castle in the wilayat of Bukha, Musandam governorate; Harat al Jama in the wilayat of Adam, Dakhliyah governorate; Harat al Ramal in the wilayat of Ibri, Dhahirah governorate; Burj al Askar in the wilayat of Taqa, Dhofar governorate; and Burj Thiajr in the wilayat of Mirbat, Dhofar governorate.

The ministry announced the tender with the aim of allowing the local community to invest in these tourist sites and called on those interested to submit an action plan for the development of these five tourist sites.

The deadline for submission of bids is February 3, 2022.

MoCIIP urges commercial and industrial establishments to abide by COVID-19 measures

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has called upon all commercial and industrial establishments to abide by the precautionary measures set to curb the spread of the coronavirus pandemic and the decisions issued by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling the developments resulting from COVID-19 pandemic.

The ministry urged all commercial establishments to cut down the number of visitors in their outlets by 50 per cent of the total capacity.

The establishments are also required to ensure their cus-

232
NEW CASES

COVID-19 UPDATE

The Ministry of Health (MoH) announced 232 new cases of COVID-19 on Tuesday taking the total number of positive cases in the sultanate to 306,240. There were no COVID-19-related deaths.

'The total number of COVID-19-related deaths stands at 4,117,' an MoH statement said.

It added that 27 new cases of recovery were reported, accounting for a total of 300,559 recoveries.

tomers compliance with all precautionary measures, including wearing face masks and observing 2m physical distance.

'Commercial outlets have to sanitise shopping trolleys and surfaces, provide customers with sterilisers and ask them to

show the two-dose vaccination certificate, among other precautions,' MoCIIP said in a statement issued on Monday, noting that its teams will intensify checks on commercial and industrial activities to ensure compliance.

Environment Authority plants 2,300 mangrove saplings in Al Wusta

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) carried out a campaign to plant over 2,000 mangrove seedlings in Al Wusta governorate with the aim of increasing green spaces and preserving the environment.

A statement issued on Tuesday by EA said, 'As part of the efforts made by the Environment Authority to implement the national initiative to plant 10mn trees and rehabilitate lagoons in the sultanate, the authority planted 2,300 mangrove saplings in Khor Ghawi in the wilayat of Al Jazir in Al Wusta governorate.

'The Environment Department in Al Wusta conducted several awareness campaigns among the members of the community on the importance of mangrove trees.

'Mangroves are considered very important in maintaining



ecological balance and preserving beaches from erosion while helping the growth of commercially valuable fish and other marine creatures.'

The campaign was part of a

project, which started in 2001 and aims to plant 1mn seedlings of mangrove on Oman's coasts within 20 years. EA has already planted over 680,000 saplings in 30 shores in various coastal areas.

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Oman achieves advanced rank in ICAO

Muscat - Oman, represented by Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), scored 100 per cent and achieved an advanced rank at an international level after the successful implementation of the ICAO Global Reporting Format (GRF) for Runway Surface Condition Assessment and Reporting.

A new GRF for runway surface condition assessment and reporting became applicable as of November 4, 2021, for all ICAO contracting countries.

The GRF is a globally harmonised methodology that is intended to be the only reporting format for international aviation, with the objective of reducing runway excursions, which continues to be the most common form of aviation accidents.

The harmonisation of the assessment and reporting of runway surface conditions will not only benefit runway safety, but also efficiency and environmental impact through improved decision-making, fewer runway closures and better air traffic management.

In alignment with ICAO's new requirements, CAA started the process to implement GRF in early 2021, in close coordination with the ICAO Middle East office at Cairo.

ONA

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,178.93
BSE Sensex	59,855.93

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)	
Indian Rs	194.06
Pakistani Rs	459.52
Bangladeshi Taka	223.05
Philippine Peso	133.79
Sri Lankan Rs	527.44

*Rates as on January 04
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Algeria energy firm to invest \$40bn in five years

Algeria's state-owned hydrocarbon firm Sonatrach will invest US\$40bn into oil exploration, production and refinement as well as gas prospecting and extraction between 2022 and 2026, CEO Toufik Hakkar said on Monday.

"Our investment plan between 2022 and 2026 is approximately US\$40bn, including US\$8bn in 2022," Hakkar said, noting that a third of investments will involve foreign partners.

"The largest part will be dedicated to exploration and production, to maintain our production capacities, as well as refining projects to meet the national demand for fuel."

The plan includes a refinery project at the largest oil field in Algeria, Hassi Messaoud, as well as an extension of the Skikda refinery in the northeast to convert certain derivatives into fuel, the CEO added. The turbocharger will allow for the provision of supplies to Spain in accordance with contractual quantities, estimated at 10.5bn cubic metres, as well as meet any additional demand, he said.

Oman's government issues RO216mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Tuesday announced the issuance of RO216mn worth of treasury bills to raise funds on behalf of the government.

A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 131) worth RO216mn was issued this week by the central bank.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager for the treasury bills issuance and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

Total value of the allotted



treasury bills amounted to RO216mn, for a maturity period of 28 days, from January 5, 2022 until February 2, 2022.

The average accepted price reached RO99.951 for every RO100 bill, while the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.950, as per the CBO statement.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.63972 per cent and 0.64003 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the repo operations with CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 0.75 per cent.

The government treasury bills in Oman promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates.

Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.



Omifco signs deals with three local firms in Sur

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In line with efforts undertaken by Sur Industrial City to explore business opportunities for the local SMEs with leading companies, Oman India Fertiliser Company (Omifco) has signed three handling agreements with local companies under the supervision of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

This step comes within Omifco's efforts to provide new opportunities for the local companies and enhance partnership

and integration approaches. Along the same lines, Sur Industrial City aims at presenting effective growth enablers for the local companies by exploring collaboration opportunities with major companies.

These efforts shall allow the local SMEs to deliver products and services with required specifications and standards to meet the needs of the leading companies operating in the industrial city, which will eventually contribute to the growth of these SMEs and create job opportunities for the Omani cadres.

Stocks rally on easing Omicron fears, oil up

London, UK – Stock markets around the world rallied on Tuesday as investors bet on reduced economic fallout from the Omicron variant, while oil prices edged higher before a key OPEC output meeting.

Traders kept a close watch also over high inflation concerns and potential fallout stemming from embattled Chinese property giant Evergrande.

London kicked off its 2022 trading with strong gains for the travel sector, while the British pound reached a near two-year

high versus the euro.

"The FTSE 100 has set off on a sprint of New Year optimism, shaking off worries of inflation and concerns about the Chinese property market," noted Susanah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown.

"Stocks reliant on international travel are powering ahead, with British Airways owner, International Consolidated Airlines Group, rising 7 per cent in early trade."

While COVID variant Omi-

cron is spreading like wildfire around the world, it appears to be far less severe than initially feared, raising hopes that the pandemic could be overcome and life return to more normality.

However, inflation, supply chain snags, central bank policy tightening and geopolitical woes continue to weigh on sentiment and analysts have warned that the blockbuster stock market gains seen in recent years could be tougher to attain.

Despite the strong start, 'we expect 2022 to be far more chal-

lenging from an investment perspective', said Heather Wald of Bel Air Investment Advisors.

"Rarely has a market delivered three consecutive years of double-digit returns, as we have seen from 2019-2021."

European and Asian equity markets enjoyed strong gains on Tuesday following fresh all-time highs on Monday on Wall Street.

The Nasdaq rallied thanks to a surge in big-name stars including Apple, which briefly became the first firm valued at US\$3tn.

Elsewhere, OPEC and its allies

were expected on Tuesday to maintain their practice of modestly boosting oil output as the rapidly spreading Omicron variant has so far not heavily hit demand.

The OPEC+ grouping, including top producers Saudi Arabia and Russia, has resisted pressure to more widely open the taps as high energy prices are fuelling a surge in inflation across the world.

Brent North Sea crude price increased 0.3 per cent to reach US\$79.21 per barrel on Tuesday.

Investors were looking ahead also to Wednesday's release of minutes from the US Federal Reserve's December policy meeting, hoping for insight into its plans amid surging inflation, that is forcing central banks to wind back pandemic stimulus and raise interest rates.

The Fed has already started tapering its bond-buying programme and the focus is now on what it will do with interest rates, with some commentators predicting three hikes before 2023. AFP

Apple becomes first \$3tn company

New York, US - Apple became the first US company to hit US\$3tn in market value, briefly reaching the landmark on Monday in the latest demonstration of the tech industry's pandemic surge.

The iPhone maker scaled the record level near 1845 GMT, reaching US\$182.88 a share before slipping back slightly.

The tech giant also was the first US company to hit US\$2tn in August 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic that stoked demand for personal electronics and digital services, such as Apple's streaming and smartphone app store.

And it likewise was the first American firm to overtake US\$1tn in August 2018.

The surge marks the latest accomplishment for Tim Cook, who became chief executive of the Cupertino, California giant in 2011 shortly before the death of the company's visionary co-founder, Steve Jobs.

While the top tier of US stock markets are dominated by Silicon Valley companies, Microsoft



Apple CEO Tim Cook

is the only other American company worth more than US\$2tn.

In October, Apple reported net income of US\$20.5bn on revenue of US\$83.4bn, a record high for the quarter ending in September. The company's fiscal 2021 revenues were US\$365.8bn, more than triple the level of a decade ago.

But as with many other tech giants, Apple has seen pressures

in recent months due to supply chain problems, including a global shortage of semiconductors and COVID-related manufacturing disruptions in Southeast Asia.

Apple shares tumbled following that October earnings report, but rallied thereafter, winning nearly 20 per cent in the final two months of 2021.

Some 45 years after its estab-

lishment that helped make personal computers a mainstream profit, Apple's revenues today are mostly closely tied to the iPhone, which was first unveiled in 2007. But increasingly smartphones are also crucial gateways to services revenue, an increasingly pivotal component of Apple's prowess. Revenues for services, which includes the Apple TV streaming product and the Apple Pay services have tripled over the last five years.

This business has taken off under Cook, who initially faced questions about his ability to navigate and create the technology frontier as ably as the charismatic Jobs.

But Cook has won over Wall Street with clear communication and effective execution as he has helped build new business, including wearables, which accounted for more than US\$38bn in sales last year.

Like other Big Tech honchos, the Apple CEO has parried lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

While Apple's image has arguably emerged less bruised

than some Big Tech names, it is hardly free of controversy.

The tech giant has clashed in court with Fortnite creator Epic Games, which has sought break Apple's grip on the App Store, accusing the iPhone maker of operating a monopoly in its shop for digital goods or services.

A federal judge in November ordered Apple to loosen control of its App Store payment options, but said Epic had failed to prove that antitrust violations had taken place.

Apple has also recently sparred with regulators in Europe.

In November, Italy's competition watchdog imposed fines totaling over US\$225mn on Amazon and Apple, saying a 2018 deal between the two giants had 'barred official and unofficial resellers of Apple and Beats products from using Amazon.it, allowing the sale of those products in that marketplace only to Amazon and to selected parties in a discriminatory manner'. AFP



Malabar Gold and Diamonds to open 22 new showrooms in January

As part of its global expansion plans for 2022, Malabar Gold & Diamonds will open 22 new showrooms in GCC, Far East and India in January itself, pitching itself firmly on the path towards emerging as the largest retail jewellery chain in the world. This is for first time a jewellery retailer is opening so many showrooms in a single month.

Out of the 22 new showrooms, 12 will be in GCC and Far East and 10 in India where the brand already has presence.

The addition of these stores will also grow the brand's retail footprints into Tier 2 and 3 towns of India where the brand is rapidly gaining acceptance.

The massive expansion drive in January will begin with the launch of the Artistry concept store in M G Road in Bengaluru on January 8 followed by showroom inaugurations in Solapur in Maharashtra on January 9, Siddipet in Telangana and Mydin Mall Seremban Malaysia on January 13, Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu on January 14, Penang in Malaysia on January 20, HSR Layout in Bengaluru on January 21, Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Landmark Shopping Mall at Gharafa in Qatar, Al-Meera Jeryan Jenaihat in Qatar, Al-Khoud and Mall of Oman in Muscat on January 22, Raipur in Chattisgarh on January 27, Hadapsar, Pune in Maharashtra on January 28, City Centre Al-Zahia, Sharjah, Three Showrooms in Dubai Gold Souk, Crown Mall Jebel Ali in Dubai, Lulu Muweilah Hypermarket in Sharjah on January 29, Gurugram in Haryana and Preet Vihar in Delhi on January 30.

The Group will invest a total of US\$107.5mn for this new phase of expansion in January



Malabar Gold and Diamonds' 22 Stores in 22 Days being officially announced by group chairman M P Ahammed at an event held at Malabar Group HQ in the presence of K P Abdul Salam, vice chairman Malabar Group, Shamlal Ahamed, managing director - International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds and O Asher, managing director - India Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds



this year. With the aim of becoming the largest jewellery group in the world, Malabar Gold and Diamonds is targeting to open 750 stores and become the number one gold retailer in the world.

This expansion programme

will create approximately 5000 job opportunities in the retail, manufacturing, technical and management areas related to jewellery trade, said Malabar Group chairman M P Ahammed.

"In 28 years of our illustrious

journey, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has grown from strength to strength. We will continue to strengthen our retail presence in the regions where we have established a robust presence and also enter new markets with our differentiated services and products," he said.

"With the launch of 22 showrooms in January, we are all set to make an impactful beginning to the New Year."

"We are confident that our customers will enjoy the world-class jewellery shopping experience at all our new showrooms and also appreciate our values based on transparency, trust, quality and service. Our mission is to Make in India and Market to the world. Our commitment is to highlight further the brand value of Indian jewellery at the international level and create more job opportunities in the manu-

facturing sector domestically. This is our core policy," said Ahammed.

Abdul Salam KP, vice chairman of Malabar Group, said, "We are excited about our future growth. On the one hand, the plan involves a large-format Artistry store in Bengaluru while on the other hand, we continue to focus on optimal store sizes internationally and in smaller cities across India. We are confident that this two-pronged strategy will yield positive results."

"Our retail expansion is a part of our strategy to further strengthen our retail footprint in the territories where we have strong presence as well as foray into new markets with our differentiated services and product offerings," he said.

"Having seen in our research that both rural and urban mar-

kets are rapidly emerging in terms of potential, we are all geared up to set new standards of customer comfort and convenience in these new markets," said O Asher, managing director, India Operations of Malabar Gold and Diamonds.

"Malabar has played a vital role in making Indian jewellery more acceptable and trustworthy at the global level in the recent years. The current expansion plans will further consolidate its pole position both domestically and internationally," said Shamlal Ahamed, managing director, International Operations'

Well-known for its high standards of purity and quality, Malabar Gold and Diamonds offers a wide range of jewellery in gold, diamond and precious gemstones to cater to both traditional and contemporary sensibilities. The brand also offers a variety of specially curated jewellery which represents the diverse traditions and cultural heritage of Indian design.

The popular jewellery sub-brands from Malabar Gold and Diamonds such as Mine in unique designs, Ethnix hand-crafted jewellery, Precia Gemstone jewellery, Divine jewellery with classic touch, Era uncut jewellery, Viraaaz polki jewellery, Starlet collection for children etc offer a great variety of options to its customers.

Malabar Gold and Diamonds upholds its status of a responsible jewellery retail brand by maintaining optimum transparency at various stages of operations from sourcing gold to offering jewellery to its consumers.

The group sells responsibly sourced gold from authorised sources. Malabar Gold and Dia-

monds, one of the top five jewellers in the world dominate the different market with transparency and credibility.

The brand reinforces its commitment to ensuring the best value for money for customers with the Fair Price Promise, which focuses on assigning reasonable making charges to a vast array of jewellery.

Taking transparency to the next level, the assurance of 10 promises by Malabar Gold and Diamonds include a transparent price tag indicating stone weight, net weight and stone charge of the jewellery, assured lifetime maintenance for the jewellery, best value for gold when reselling old gold jewellery, zero deduction on exchange, 100 per cent hallmarking certifying the purity of gold, IGI and GIA certified diamonds ensuring 28-point quality check of global standards, buyback guarantee, responsible sourcing and fair labour practices.

Malabar Gold and Diamonds has a robust retail presence in 10 countries. In addition, the group has 14 wholesale units and 14 jewellery making units in India and abroad.

The company has an annual turnover of US\$ 4.51bn.

Malabar Gold and Diamonds earmarks 5 per cent of the company's profits for various CSR initiatives focusing on education, health, women's empowerment, housing for the poor and environmental protection.

The organisation has also launched an initiative recently to rehabilitate and care for abandoned and orphaned mothers in Kerala, for which it has already conveyed its willingness to construct rehabilitation provided the government allots a suitable location for the same.



Oman International Hospital all set for official opening

Oman International Hospital (OIH), Oman's newest multi-specialty hospital, which soft-opened a few months ago, is all set for a full-fledged, grand official opening tomorrow! With five Centers of Excellence, expert doctors and support staff from Oman and across the globe, state-of-the-art facilities and technologically advanced equipment, OIH is the newest 'Healthcare Destination' for the people of Oman.

The specialized five centers of Excellence at OIH are; Women and Children Center, Heart and Vascular Center, Ortho and Spine Center, Oman Vision Center and Derma and Cosmetic

Center. These Excellence Centers are dedicated to the respective specialisations offering complete consultations, procedures, treatments and services.

With the Omani football legend Ali al Habsi as OIH's brand ambassador, the Ortho and Spine Centre has highly advanced facilities and technology to treat pro-athletes. Oman vision Centre is home to some of the latest hi-tech equipment such as 3D microscope and Neo FemtoSecond Z8 laser while the Derma and Cosmetic Center offers a wide variety of procedures offering mesotherapy, BOTOX, Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP) and much more.

Apart from the excellence centers, OIH has a fully equipped and an actively functioning emergency department ready to attend any emergency case. In addition, OIH is the home to hybrid operation theatre that is unique to the Middle East region.

Marcelo Pereira, OIH's CEO said, "Our focus is you - your health is our priority, and we want you to feel at home when you are at OIH. Our expert doctors, nurses and para-medical staff drawn from Oman and across the globe are highly experienced making sure you receive world class treatment at affordable rates. Last but not the least, we welcome members of all

major insurance companies, namely, NLGIC, OQIC, CIGNA, MSH and Better Health."

OIH during the pandemic, joined the Ministry of Health in its fight against COVID-19 in administering vaccines for thousands of people and became a preferred destination for the vaccine. Recently, OIH has started RTPCR test facility with results available from 24hours to within 2 hours.

Oman International Hospital is co-owned by Suhail Bahwan Group, Oman Brunei Investment and IdealMed GHS, Portugal, who are managing the hospital. IdealMed GHS manages many hospitals across the world.

Ooredoo brings more than 20 SMEs together for special event highlighting digital opportunities



Reinforcing its role as the digital partner of choice for a growing number of companies, Ooredoo recently held an exclusive networking event at W Muscat.

The event, which included the participation of more than 20 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), highlighted the telecoms company's latest B2B solutions including mobile, fixed, ICT, the mobile app, as well as its loyalty programme, Nojoom.

Attendees were also intro-

duced to Idea Hub, a productivity tool for smart offices and part of Ooredoo's recent partnership with Huawei.

Ooredoo's support of SMEs, has sparked innovative digital technologies that fit changing requirements, while building awareness about how they can utilise these solutions to maximise growth while incorporating digital technology.

As well as offering a variety of benefits and rewards, the B2B solutions are carefully designed to empower businesses

and enable them to be more agile, efficient and data-driven.

As a data experience leaders, Ooredoo continues to expand and enhance its offerings, providing innovative products and customer-centric services to businesses of all sizes.

By investing in the latest infrastructure and tapping into next-generation technologies, as well as an expanding number of partnerships and collaborations, it is placing Oman firmly in the global race towards digital innovation.

Qatar Airways launches global sale for passengers in Oman



Qatar Airways celebrates its 25th Anniversary by launching a Global Sales campaign for passengers in Oman, offering great savings of up to 25 per cent on flight tickets.

This is in addition to special savings on seat selection, extra baggage allowance, hotel bookings and car rental, for a seven-day campaign period starting January 4, 2022.

Passengers joining the airline's award-winning loyalty programme, Privilege Club, using the enrolment promo code FLYQR22, will instantly earn an additional 2,500 bonus Qmiles in celebration of Qatar Airways 25th Anniversary.

Travellers can experience Qatar Airways' award-winning services and utilise the special promotion with guaranteed flexibility* on Business and Economy Class with savings of up to 25 per cent* on an expanding network of more than 140 destinations across Asia, Europe, Middle East and the Americas.

The Global Sale 25th Anniversary Campaign is valid on all Qatar Airways flights for travel until October 31, 2022. To take advantage of this offer, passengers must book on qatarairways.com/25Years or visit any local Qatar Airways sales office or visit their preferred travel agents.

Qatar Airways marks its 25th

Anniversary and celebrates its achievements by offering passengers around the world a great saving on their next travel. The award-winning airline was established in 1997 by His Highness The Father Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, who outlined a vision to turn Qatar Airways into a leading international carrier with the highest standards of service and excellence. Since then, Qatar Airways has earned many awards and accolades, and was recently announced as the 'Airline of the Year' by the international air transport rating organisation, Skytrax, for the sixth time.

Privilege Club, the official Frequent Flyer Programme of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022TM, has recently launched an initiative to continue honouring the loyalty of its valued members by extending their tier status.

This will benefit all Silver, Gold and Platinum members whose tier status is due for renewal between December 2021 and December 2022.

Privilege Club has also launched multiple partnerships over the past year to provide members with increased opportunities of earning Qmiles, including the recent launch of reciprocal loyalty partnership with JetBlue. Privilege Club members can earn Qmiles when flying with Qatar Airways,

oneworld airline partners, and other airline partners, as well as with a number of financial and lifestyle partners. Qmiles can be redeemed towards a range of rewards including award flights, cabin upgrades, extra baggage and much more.

The national carrier of the State of Qatar continues to rebuild its network, which currently stands at over 140 destinations. With more frequencies being added to key hubs, Qatar Airways offers unrivalled connectivity to passengers, making it easy for them to change their travel dates or destination as required.

Earlier this month, Qatar Airways earned the title of 'World Class' airline and '2022 Five Star Global Airline' at the APEX/IFSA Awards, in addition to securing two additional awards including APEX Passenger Choice Awards for Best Food & Beverage and Best Seat Comfort.

Throughout the pandemic, the airline has been recognised for its continued emphasis on innovation and an unparalleled commitment to creating the most premium passenger experience in the industry.

A multiple award-winning airline, Qatar Airways was announced as the 'Airline of the Year' by the international air transport rating organisation, Skytrax, in addition to securing five additional awards including

'World's Best Business Class', 'World's Best Business Class Airline Lounge', 'World's Best Business Class Airline Seat', 'World's Best Business Class Onboard Catering' and 'Best Airline in the Middle East'.

The airline continues to stand alone at the top of the industry having won the main prize for an unprecedented sixth time (2011, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2021).

The airline's hub, Hamad International Airport, was also recently recognised as the 'Best Airport in the World 2021', ranking at number one in the Skytrax World Airport Awards 2021.

In addition to this, Qatar Airways has become the first global airline in the world to achieve the prestigious 5-Star COVID-19 Airline Safety Rating by Skytrax.

This follows the success of Hamad International Airport (HIA) as the first airport in the Middle East and Asia to be awarded a Skytrax 5-Star COVID-19 Airport Safety Rating. These awards provide assurance to passengers across the world that the airline's health and safety measures are subject to the highest possible standards of professional, independent scrutiny and assessment. For full details of all the measures that have been implemented on board and at HIA, please visit qatarairways.com/safety.



NBO wins award from MoSD for helping people with disabilities

National Bank of Oman (NBO) was recently awarded by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) for its continuous work supporting people with disabilities in Oman.

The award was announced during an event organised by the Ministry to celebrate the International Day of Disabled Persons, held under the patronage of H H Sayyida Dr Mona Fahad al Said, the assistant vice chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), and in the presence of H E Dr Laila Ahmed al Najjar, the Minister of Social Development.

Through its active corporate social responsibility programme, NBO continues to fulfil its commitment to giving back to the community, while fostering partnerships between the private and public sectors. Its activities, which are carried out throughout the year, include a range of educational and youth-led programmes, donations and sponsorships, all aimed at supporting the government's vision for social and economic development.

NBO, the first local commercial bank in the Sultanate of

Oman, was founded in 1973 and is today one of the leading banks in Oman. The Bank serves its customers in Oman through 60 Branches, more than 180 ATM/FFM/CCDMs as well as two Branches in UAE.

The Bank is committed to community improvement through its corporate citizenship programmes and is an active supporter of a range of worthy causes in Oman, with emphasis on health and human services, civic, education, environment, youth, women, arts and culture.

Ahmed Aftab Naqvi elevated to global CEO of Gozoop Group

Gozoop, a leading global and independent marketing group announces the elevation of co-founder, Ahmed Aftab Naqvi as the group's global CEO from his current role as CEO of India.

In his new role, Naqvi will now lead operations in the Middle East region while overseeing the India business. Additionally, he will continue to diversify Gozoop's service offerings, enable strategic acquisitions and identify new markets to further the group's international expansion. This announcement comes at a time when Gozoop is on track to consolidate its standing as one of India's largest independent homegrown global advertising groups.

Gozoop India currently works with brands such as Dell, Bisleri, Taj Hotels, Saint Gobain, Tata Steel, GNC while Gozoop Middle East has an impressive array of clientele including Mashreq UAE, Mashreq Egypt, Emirates Cricket, Oman Cricket, PureGold and has earlier worked with brands like Tim Hortons Coffee,



Ahmed Aftab Naqvi

and managing director, Gozoop Middle East said, "We are in the midst of a very exciting phase and Naqvi's understanding of the global advertising and marketing landscape is remarkable, making him a perfect fit to lead our next wave of growth. Gozoop Middle East has been significant for the group's success outside India and will play a critical role going forward. With Gozoop Middle East now under Naqvi's aegis, we are confident of accelerating growth by diversifying our existing offerings in the region and beyond."

Speaking on his elevation, Naqvi said "From scaling global brands to accelerating startups that have become unicorns today, Gozoop has been at the forefront of new-age marketing since 2008 - pioneering trends that have shaped the industry. With a strategic roadmap in place, I look forward to working with the leadership teams in both India and the Middle East as we embark on our next phase of growth."

Swarovski, Ajmal Perfumes, OYO Middle East, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, VOX Cinemas, SOUQ.com and Khaleej Times among others.

Congratulating Naqvi, Rohan Bhansali, chairman, Gozoop Group said, "Naqvi's elevation as our Global CEO is well-deserved. His love for all things creative, his diverse expanse of knowledge and his growth-oriented mindset leave me ever confident of Gozoop's bright future. We have built a team of incredible people at Gozoop who will further shine under Naqvi's leadership."

Dushyant Bhatia, co-founder

Renault Trucks completes delivery of ten K 380 trucks to Sijimix

Renault Trucks has announced the brand's first deal with Sijimix, one of the United Arab Emirates' leading ready-mix concrete suppliers, to supply a total of ten new K 380 trucks, which will be used to transport concrete across the eastern UAE.

Sijimix's ten new Renault Trucks, supplied by the brand's partner in Dubai, United Diesel, will expand the company's existing fleet of over 140 units, and are set to start operations in December.

The K 380 P6x4 Rigid Chassis models, which meet Euro 5 emission standards and are equipped with a wide range of technological features as well as 9 CBM transit Concrete Mixers, are set to optimise Sijimix's local operations thanks to the K range's functionality and fuel efficiency.

The K 380 P6x4 Rigid Chassis models have a reputation for robustness, exceptional reliability and optimal fuel efficiency.

They are equipped and designed to ensure maximum productivity and safety for their drivers, as the new models meet



concrete suppliers' operational needs. The K 380 models, in addition to their robust build, also reduce operational costs by minimising fuel consumption by combining a Euro 5 380hp engine, the Optidriver AT 2612F gearbox with automatic clutch, and a 445ltr tank.

Sijimix's new K 380 P6x4 trucks, which will mainly be op-

erating from Fujairah, are also driver-centric as they feature numerous advanced technological and safety features.

To minimise risk and increase safety, the trucks are equipped with EBS (Electronic Braking System), Hill Start Aid (HSA), Anti-Spin Regulation (ASR), Wheel Antilock Braking System (ABS) and Emergency Braking

Assist, all of which assist drivers in tricky situations and provide comfort.

Mahmoud Attourah, CEO of Sijimix, commented, "We're proud to have established a partnership with Renault Trucks and United Diesel in the United Arab Emirates."

"Our deal came through numerous studies we've con-

ducted, where Sijimix concluded that Renault Trucks are the best choice in terms of financial cost of operation and quality and reliability of the product, which are ideally suited for our operations across Fujairah."

Guillaume Zimmermann, commercial director of Renault Trucks Middle East, said, "Completing this first deal with Sijimix

is another great step forward for the Renault Trucks team as we embark on another new partnership with a top local supplier."

"The quality of our trucks along with their features, technological advancements and efficiency, in addition to United Diesel's services and strong network, are key factors that contribute to the high de-

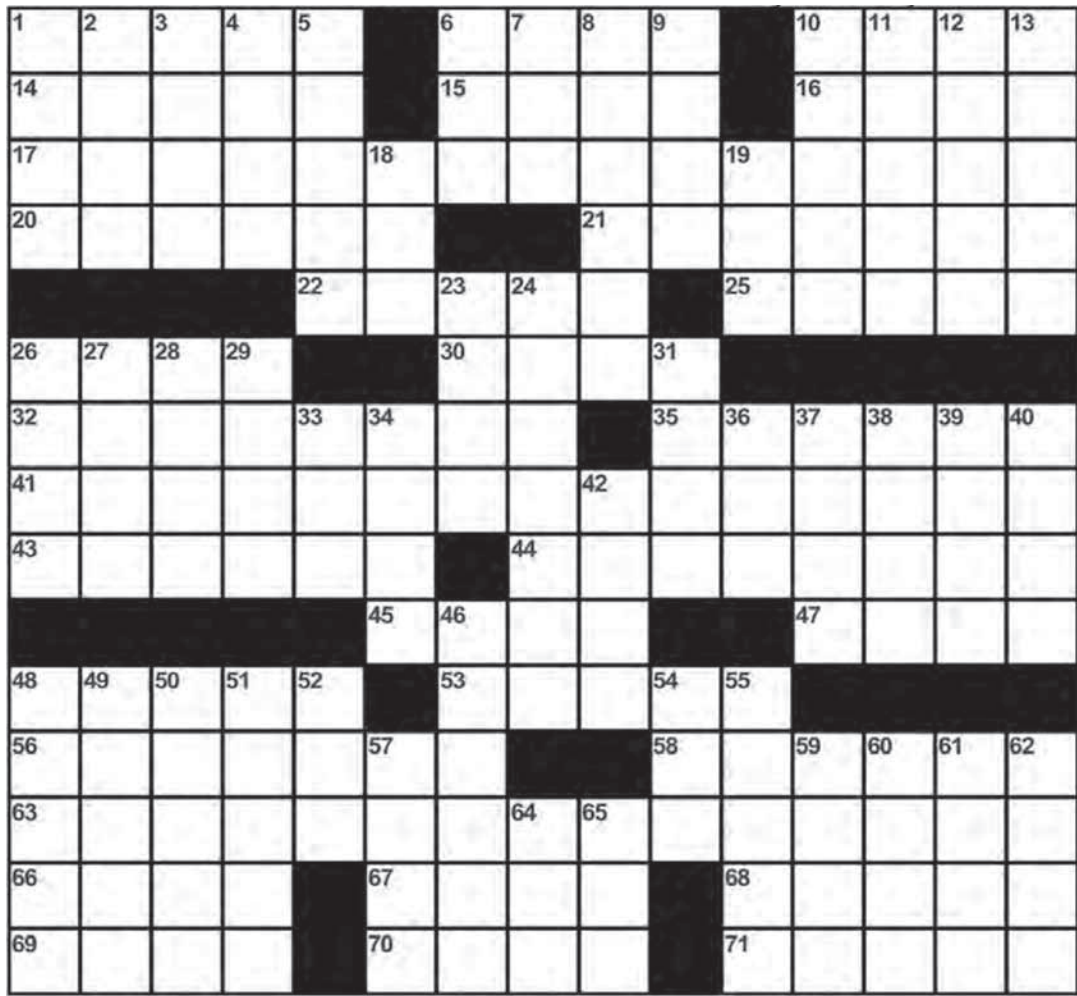
mand for Renault Trucks in the UAE."

Mike Mokhles Makary, general manager of United Diesel, said, "Renault Trucks offers an excellent range of trucks that is perfectly suited to the varied requirements of our customers across the United Arab Emirates. In turn we are focused on ensuring the optimum standards of customer service and financial support."

"Combined, this forms an unbeatable package, and this new deal with Sijimix demonstrates its appeal to the country's leading businesses."

The deal between Renault Trucks and Sijimix is not only down to the quality of the trucks and the reputation of the Renault Trucks brand, but is also greatly due to United Diesel's excellent customer support and aftersales services. Sijimix have been offered Site Drivers Training, Technical Training for staff and technicians beside other services, reflecting Renault Trucks' and United Diesel's objective to ensure optimum peace of mind for its customers.

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

1) Just plain terrible

6) Object of finger-pointing?

10) Extras in a Tarzan movie

14) Tibet's Forbidden City

15) Thus

16) Change homes

17) Three big things

20) Two-dimensional sound

21) Throwing into confusion

22) Ancient Greek instruments

25) Sight or taste, e.g.

26) Snakes in hieroglyphs

30) Prefix for "freeze"

32) Best

35) Pick

41) Three big things

43) Bathing suit brand

44) Convention freebies

45) Paving stone

47) Parking-meter opening

48) Greenhouse pest

53) Necessary things

56) The late Mr. Nimoy
- 58) Convicted one's hope

63) Three big things

66) Eye layer containing the iris

67) Babies' needs, thankfully

68) Accepted practices

69) Untidy situation

70) Catch using trickery

71) "The_ of Kilimanjaro"

DOWN

1) Money for the poor

2) "Could you repeat that?"

3) Thing washed daily

4) Nation in stunning 1991 news

5) Place for a clip-on mike

6) "Alice in Wonderland" party drink

7) 9-5, e.g.

8) Horror-struck

9) In-law to Lincoln

10) Like Santa's girth

11) Visit unannounced

12) Equalizes

13) Twilled worsted fabric

18) Powell partner of old Hollywood
- 19) Cards with a photo

23) Gravelly voice feature

24) Treaty of a sort

26) Some are unspeakable

27) Do more than browse

28) Vatican leader

29) Builder's workplace

31) Weapon of modern warfare

33) Spanish hero El _

34) Grand-scale poetry

36) Unharden earth, in a way

37) Selects

38) Aussie gem

39) UtahA's lily

40) Prefix for "while"

42) Put on a scale

46) Make lovable

48) Photograph book

49) Pet _ (grievance)

50) Makes perfect

51) Ancient Peruvians

52) "Well, lah-di-_"

54) Divided U.S. terr.

55) Bombards with junk email

57) Get a lease on
- 59) Unit measuring loudness

60) Continental dollar

61) Once more

62) Highland girl

64) Resort feature

65) Clairvoyant's claim, briefly
- NOTE PAD**
-

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

-  **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

New sights will give you a rush today, and the best part is you won't have to step too far from your own home in order to experience something special! Your roommates or family members have something to show you and it's going to spark a conversation that lasts for hours. It's like you're finally seeing the wonders that are right in your own backyard. Gaining a new appreciation for the beauty in the everyday is a rewarding goal.
-  **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You need to go back to the beginning if you want to get inspiration to keep going today. Your past can hold the key to your future, so look back and reflect. Remember back when you were enthusiastic about where you were going in life? The passion is still there, you just have to dig down deep enough to find it! Call up a fun friend and reconnect. Getting back in touch with who matters will be invigorating.
-  **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Try to be as generous as you can today. Your generosity can open up doors and make people remember you in a favourable way, which could come in handy soon. Step up and be the first one to give someone a compliment. Lend a friend a few bucks or offer to give a co-worker a hand on an ambitious project. The more outgoing you are with your time and goodwill, the faster you'll start to get results back in the form of very good karma.
-  **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your intuition might not be totally on the mark today, so beware. This doesn't mean you should doubt yourself at every turn. It only means that you should get a second opinion about what you gut is telling you, especially if it's telling you something negative about a good friend. Suspicious thoughts could merely be manifestations of what you're afraid is true, not the truth itself. Talk it over with a mutual friend to get some clarity and insight.
-  **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your family obligations are at the centre of your world right now, and that is as it should be. But they could be causing a few conflicts in your social life, so let everyone know about it. Explain the situation to your friends honestly and completely. Don't leave out any details that you think aren't important. All the information is relevant. Your friends also have families and will understand why you're reorganising your priorities.
-  **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

How do you keep hope alive? Just keep going. If you think you're losing your grip on something you want, stop thinking! It's time to be irrational. Go ahead and just ignore reality. Things won't seem possible, but they will be if you persevere. Forget about what other people are saying and close your ears to the discouraging comments. They're coming from a place of jealousy and petty thinking. You can rise above it and move on.
-  **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Friendships, like any other kind of relationship, require give-and-take. It's only natural to switch back and forth between you in terms of who has control. But if you're feeling like you've been giving a lot and not getting much in return, today is the day to communicate this to your friend. If they're just not getting what you're saying, then save the conversation for a time when they can give you their full attention. Don't push it too hard today.
-  **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your relationships are going through a shift right now, and you're going to find yourself drawn to certain people more than others. Don't feel guilty if suddenly you want to spend more time with a new person. Just be sure to honour all your current commitments. Cancelling a date at the last minute sends the wrong message. You're not choosing one person over another; you're just exploring new ways of being with people.
-  **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

A change is coming to your immediate surroundings. The world around you is going to be a different place by the end of today than it was yesterday. And with a change in environment, you'll experience a change in attitude as well. What used to seem like a waste of time or a lost cause could suddenly ignite a flicker of hope in your heart. It's time to pick back up what you thought was a lost cause, because it might not be so lost after all!
-  **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

You simply can't afford to be selfish with your time today. Like it or not, you have to get together with other people and be social. It will be in your own best interests in the end. While you might like to spend all day curled up with a good book, your public demands your presence! The good news is that after about five minutes of being with the people you like most in the world, you're going to have one of the greatest days of your life.
-  **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Retail therapy is a very bad strategy for dealing with the drama you're going through right now. You can't spend yourself out of the blues. You need to avoid shopping today! Any impulse buys you make now might provide temporary relief of your symptoms, but they definitely won't deal with the underlying cause. Save your money for another day. Instead, take a walk, visit with a friend, or do something else that doesn't cost a dime.
-  **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

A person you see a lot but don't know very well has a unique energy that you admire, and they can help you build that same kind of energy inside of yourself. Try to spend more time with this person. Accept the advice they give. Their encouragement will buoy you to a new level of excitement and make you see that your life isn't boring. You can change the direction you're going and spice up your romantic life with small changes.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. The sacred text of Confucianism is**

a. The Tripitaka

b. The Analects

c. Quran

d. no specific text
- 2. The state having maximum cities is**

a. Uttar Pradesh

b. West Bengal

c. Madhya Pradesh

d. Kerala
- 3. The Sports Authority of India was registered as a society in**

a. 1982

b. 1983

c. 1984

d. 1985
- Answers: 1. b 2. a 3. c**



BOGGLER

N	T	E	U
R	E	R	O
P	A	E	R
S	E	K	S

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

China calls on US, Russia to reduce nuclear stockpiles

Beijing, China - China said on Tuesday it will continue to 'modernise' its nuclear arsenal and called on the United States and Russia to reduce their own stockpiles a day after global powers pledged to prevent such weapons from spreading.

In a rare joint statement setting aside rising West-East tensions, the United States, China, Russia, Britain and France reaffirmed their goal of creating a world free of atomic weapons and avoiding a nuclear conflict.

The five nuclear powers also committed to full future disarmament from atomic weapons, which have only been used in conflict in the US bombings of Japan at the end of World War II.

But squaring that rhetoric with reality will not be easy at a time of spiralling tensions between those same global powers not seen since the Cold War.

There are growing global concerns about China's rapid military modernisation especially after its armed forces last year announced they had developed a hypersonic missile that can fly at five times the spread of sound.

The United States has also said China is expanding its nuclear arsenal with as many as 700 warheads by 2027 and possibly 1,000 by 2030.

On Tuesday, China defended its nuclear weapons policy and said Russia and the United States - by far the world's largest nuclear powers - should make the first move on disarmament.

"The US and Russia still pos-



Fu Cong

sess 90 per cent of the nuclear warheads on Earth," Fu Cong, director general of the department

maintain our nuclear capabilities at the minimal level required for our national security," he said.

it claims as part of its territory, by force if necessary.

Beijing's sabre-rattling towards Taiwan has reached new heights under President Xi Jinping, China's most authoritarian leader in a generation.

Fu dismissed speculation over the possibility of deploying nuclear weapons near the Taiwan Strait.

"Nuclear weapons are the ultimate deterrent, they are not for war or fighting," he said.

While the United States and Russia have had a formal strategic stability dialogue since the days of the Cold War, producing several disarmament agreements, that is not the case between Washington and Beijing.

In Europe, tensions with Moscow have deteriorated over

The US and Russia still possess 90 per cent of the nuclear warheads on Earth. They must reduce their nuclear arsenal in an irreversible and legally binding manner

FU CONG

of arms control at the Chinese foreign ministry, told reporters.

"They must reduce their nuclear arsenal in an irreversible and legally binding manner."

Fu dismissed US claims that China was vastly increasing its nuclear capabilities.

"China has always adopted the no first use policy and we

But he said Beijing would 'continue to modernise its nuclear arsenal for reliability and safety issues'.

Taiwan, Ukraine

Ties between Beijing and Washington have been strained over a series of issues including China's intentions to take Taiwan, which

a Russian troop build-up close to the Ukrainian border.

That has raised fears that the Kremlin, worried by the possibility of further eastward expansion of NATO, is planning a new attack on its pro-Western neighbour.

Crunch talks between Russia and the US on European security are expected in Geneva on January 10. Against this backdrop, Monday's joint statement on nuclear weapons was a rare moment of consensus between the UN's five permanent Security Council members.

"A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought," the statement said, adding that "further spread of such weapons must be prevented".

The statement was issued after the latest review of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) - which first came into force in 1970 - was postponed from its scheduled date of January 4 to later in the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The statement also pledged to abide by a key article in the NPT under which states committed to full future disarmament from nuclear weapons.

The joint statement also came as the world powers seek to reach an agreement with Iran on reviving the 2015 deal over its controversial nuclear drive, which was rendered moribund by the US walking out of the accord in 2018.

AFP



Members assisting a vehicle stuck in floods in Hormozgan Province in the south of Iran on Tuesday (AFP)

Eight killed in southern Iran flash floods: State media

Tehran, Iran - At least eight people have been killed in flash flooding in Iran's south due to heavy rains expected to last until later this week, state media reported on Tuesday.

"Following the floods and rains of the past few days in the southern regions of the country, we have seen an increase in casualties and deaths," spokesman for the national rescue service Mojtaba Khaledi said, quoted by state news agency IRNA.

"So far eight people have died and two others are still missing," Khaledi said, adding that 14 others had been injured.

Five of the deaths occurred in Fars province, local crisis management official Rahim Azadi told the state news agency.

A local official had said Monday that at least two people were killed in flash flooding in the province.

Heavy rain damaged 'agriculture, infrastructure, urban and rural housing', Azadi said. Iran's Red Crescent has provided 'emergency accommodation for more than 3,000 people, and over 20,000 have received relief assistance', its head of rescue and emergency operations Mehdi Valipour told state television.

"Houses have been flooded and infrastructure such as roads and communication systems have been damaged," he said, adding

that more than 500 teams were providing assistance in parts of the country's south and east.

Pictures published by the Red Crescent on Tuesday showed its personnel setting up tents in sports halls and assisting cars trapped on flooded roads or stuck in snow-covered mountain areas.

Relief operations were underway in 87 cities across more than half of Iran's 31 provinces, it added.

The weather system is expected to last until Friday, an official from Iran's meteorological agency told state television.

Bad weather has been affecting not only southern Iran but also Arab countries in the Gulf in recent days, with several issuing weather warnings.

Torrential rainfall has hit the United Arab Emirates, including Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and caused widespread flooding in the region.

Largely arid, Iran has endured repeated droughts over the past decade, but also regular floods.

In 2019, heavy flooding in the country's south left at least 76 people dead and caused damage estimated at more than US\$2bn.

Scientists say climate change amplifies droughts and that their intensity and frequency in turn threaten food security.

AFP

200 killed as fighting surges near Yemen's Marib

Dubai, UAE - About 200 fighters have been killed in fresh clashes near the strategic Yemeni city of Marib, military and medical sources said on Tuesday, as the seven-year war witnesses a surge in violence.

More than 125 Huthi rebels were killed in air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition and clashes with pro-government forces in Shabwa and Al-Bayda provinces, bordering Marib, medical sources told AFP. The pro-government Giants Brigade, backed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, also lost 70 fighters, Yemeni government sources said. The clashes took place over the past 24 hours.



This TV footage shows a view of vehicles belonging to the Royal Saudi Land Forces aboard the Emirati-flagged vessel 'Rwabee' in the Red Sea seized by Yemen's Huthi rebels, at an undisclosed location on Monday (AFP)

The Saudi-led coalition has been fighting for nearly seven years in support of Yemen's gov-

ernment against the Huthis, in a conflict that has displaced millions and created the world's

worst humanitarian crisis, according to the United Nations. As hostilities escalate, the

rebels on Monday said they had seized a military ship flying a UAE flag. The coalition insisted it was carrying medical supplies.

In September, the rebels intensified their efforts to take Marib, a provincial capital which is the government's last northern stronghold. Recent weeks have seen another spike with Saudi air strikes on rebel territory multiplying, while the Huthis have ramped up missile and drone assaults on the kingdom.

Thirty-nine wounded arrived at Shabwa's Ataq hospital in just one day on Sunday, according to a Medecins Sans Frontieres team that arrived in late December.

AFP

Hundreds rally in Sudan against military rule as security tightens

Khartoum, Sudan - Hundreds of Sudanese anti-coup protesters rallied on Tuesday chanting slogans against the military as security forces deployed in Khartoum and neighbouring cities, witnesses said, days after the resignation of the country's civilian premier.

Protesters shouted 'No, no to military rule' and called for the fall of Sudan's ruling council headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who led a military coup on October 25 that derailed a transition to civilian rule.

Streets leading to the presidential palace and army headquarters in central Khartoum were sealed off amid a heavy presence of riot police, paramilitary forces and army personnel, the witnesses said.

Dozens also gathered in the neighbouring city of Omdurman and barricaded streets using rocks and bricks.

Pro-democracy activists have stepped up calls for demonstrations since the October coup



Demonstrators chant slogans during a protest demanding civilian rule in the Sudanese capital's twin city of Omdurman on Tuesday (AFP)

which saw then-prime minister Abdalla Hamdok and cabinet

ministers detained. The coup has triggered mass demonstrations

and a violent crackdown that has so far left at least 57 dead and

hundreds wounded, an independent union of medics has

said. At least 13 women have allegedly been raped during the unrest, according to the United Nations.

On November 21, Burhan reinstated Hamdok in an agreement promising elections in mid-2023, but the protest movement slammed the deal as 'betrayal' and has kept up street pressure. Late on Sunday, Hamdok announced that he was stepping down, saying he had tried to prevent the country 'from sliding toward disaster' but that it was now at a 'dangerous crossroads threatening its very survival'.

Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit said Tuesday that he 'respects' Hamdok's decision and called for 'urgent action' to resolve the crisis.

The United Nations' secretary-general 'regrets that a political understanding on the way forward is not in place despite the gravity of the situation in Sudan', UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday. Sudan has been navigating a

fragile transition towards full civilian rule since the April 2019 ouster of veteran president Omar al-Bashir following an unprecedented wave of youth-led protests.

Activists online have urged demonstrators to head to the presidential palace in Khartoum 'until victory is achieved', according to the Sudanese Professionals Association, an umbrella of unions that were instrumental during the anti-Bashir protests.

General Burhan last month issued a decree allowing security forces to arrest individuals 'over crimes related to the state of emergency', effectively banning street protests.

Security forces are allowed to enter and search 'any building or individual' and impose 'surveillance of any property and facility'. Since the coup, authorities have often disrupted internet services and communication lines to prevent mass gatherings.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

US sets global record of over 1mn daily cases

Omicron strain accounted for around 59 per cent of national cases in the week ending Dec 25

Washington, US - The United States recorded more than one million COVID-19 cases on Monday, according to data from Johns Hopkins University, as the Omicron variant spread at a blistering pace.

There were 1,080,211 new cases in the country, a global record, with the number of cases doubling on the previous week.

It comes a day after top US pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci said the country was experiencing 'almost a vertical increase' in COVID-19 cases, adding the peak may be only weeks away.

The heavily mutated Omicron strain - the most transmissible to date - accounted for around 59 per cent of national US cases in the week ending December 25, according to government modeling.

Fauci said the experience of South Africa - where the strain was first detected in late November and peaked quickly, then subsided nearly as speedily - offered some hope.

Rates of death and hospitalisation in the US have been far lower in recent weeks than dur-



People register for a free test at a COVID-19 testing tent in front of a City Bank in Los Angeles, California, on Monday (AFP)

In the last seven days the country has recorded 3.4mn cases at an average of 486,000 per day with a peak on January 3. The US record during previous waves was 258,000 cases per day for the week of January 5 to 11

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

ing previous COVID surges.

With 9,382 deaths over the past seven days, the nation's death toll has fallen by 10 per cent, week on week.

In the last seven days, the country has recorded 3.4 million cases at an average of 486,000 per day with a peak on January 3, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

The US record during previous waves was 258,000 cases per day, for the week of January

5 to 11, 2021. Officials have struggled to find a balance that will protect public health without gravely damaging the economy or slamming key services like policing and air travel.

Last week, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention halved the isolation period for asymptomatic COVID-19 cases to five days, in a bid to blunt mass Omicron-induced disruption as infections hit new highs in multiple US states.

And on Monday, the US Food and Drug Administration approved Pfizer's COVID-19 booster shot for children as young as 12 ahead of the re-opening of schools following the holiday break.

COVID-19 has killed at least 5,441,446 people globally since the outbreak emerged in December 2019, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources on Monday.

Taking into account excess mortality linked to COVID-19, the World Health Organization estimates the overall death toll could be two to three times higher.

AFP

Britons warned of hospital crisis over Omicron surge

London, UK - Britain on Tuesday faced warnings of an impending hospital crisis due to staff shortages caused by a wave of Omicron infections, as the country returned to work after Christmas.

Daily case numbers chalked up multiple records in the run-up to New Year, with Prime Minister Boris Johnson promising action to plug staffing gaps in the worst-hit areas.

Hospital admissions have not hit anything like the peaks of previous waves of the pandemic and the number of people requiring ventilation has remained flat so far.

But the state-run National Health Service (NHS), which is regularly under strain during the winter months from seasonal respiratory infections, is struggling with staff forced to stay at home after testing positive.

Transport networks also battled absences, leaving commuters facing long waits on their return to work, while other public services such as household bin collections were hampered.

Minister for vaccines and



Volunteers hand out boxes of COVID-19 antigen Lateral Flow Tests in north east London on Monday (AFP)

public health Maggie Throup told Sky News it was unclear how many Britons were currently in self-isolation after the Christmas surge in the highly transmissible virus mutation.

"But what is good news, it doesn't seem to be resulting in severe diseases as some of the other variants did," she told Sky News.

Around 50,000 NHS staff were absent from work last week because they were ill or self-isolating, *The Sunday Times* has reported.

At least six hospital trusts have declared critical incidents, which mean crucial services may be under threat.

'Almost impossible'

Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation which represents healthcare providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, said cases appeared to have levelled off in London.

But he told Times Radio that staff shortages and rising cases across the rest of the country

were a concern.

"The unpredictability of staff absence means NHS leaders having to work around the clock just thinking about how they can deploy their resources best to deal with the most urgent and pressing needs," he added.

"Even using all their imagination and creativity, it is becoming almost impossible, which is why we see hospitals declaring critical incidents."

Anyone testing positive for the virus has to self-isolate for 10 days, or seven days if they produce a negative test.

There have been calls to ease those restrictions for health staff to ease what Johnson on Monday said was 'considerable pressure' on hospitals.

Taylor said reducing the self-isolation period to five days should only be done if the data indicated it was 'absolutely safe'. Pupils returning to school also faced the prospect of mass staff absences and merged classes. Secondary school pupils have been advised to wear face masks in class as a 'temporary' measure.

AFP

Blow for Macron's centrist party as opposition blocks COVID bill

Paris, France - The centrist party of French President Emmanuel Macron was left red-faced on Tuesday after opposition parties joined forces to hold up a bill tightening measures against COVID-19.

The lower house National Assembly was debating the implementation of a health pass that will require a full course of vaccination to attend events, eat out or travel by inter-city train, rather than a recent negative test or proof of recovery.

But when the government asked the chamber late on Monday to continue debating the legislation after midnight to ensure it could be adopted by the end of the week, the right-wing Republicans (LR) teamed up with the far-right and far-left to stop the debate.

In an embarrassment for Macron's Republic on the Move (LREM) party that controls parliament, not enough of its MPs were still present in the chamber when the vote was taken on continuing the debate.

French media said the surprise move by the LR - which has backed the main thrust of the legislation - pointed to rising



Emmanuel Macron leads a Cabinet meeting in Bormes-les-Mimosas, on December 27, 2021, to discuss new COVID vaccine pass (AFP)

political tensions ahead of April 2022 presidential elections, which Macron appears the favourite, but is not certain, to win.

Government spokesman Gabriel Attal lashed out at a 'procedural coup' by opposition MPs, saying they wanted to 'derail the calendar' for the vaccine pass for purely political reasons.

"We will do everything to stick to the calendar as has been set out," he told France Inter radio. The government wants the new legislation to be implemented from January 15.

Government officials were also incensed by the cheering of opposition MPs that greeted the holding up of the legislation, which Attal described as 'quite shocking' in the face of the pandemic.

The delay underscored the frailties of LREM, an upstart centrist party that has failed to build up a solid base since Macron's meteoric rise to the presidency in 2017.

"Once an amateur, always an amateur," commented Damien Abad, head of the LR faction.

AFP

Cyprus mulls new COVID measures as per capita rate tops world

Nicosia, Cyprus - Cypriot authorities were meeting on Tuesday to consider new restrictions to rein in a COVID infection rate that is now the highest in the world per capita.

Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades was to meet with scientific advisers to discuss measures that could include a delayed start to the new school term and restrictions on church gatherings as the island prepares to mark Epiphany, a key date in the Greek Orthodox religious calendar, on Thursday.

Like other European countries, the Mediterranean island has been hit by a surge in cases of the highly contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

According to Agence France-Presse figures, Cyprus recorded the world's highest COVID in-

fection rate per 100,000 inhabitants over the past seven days.

It was top with 2,505 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Denmark (2,117), Ireland (1,946), Greece (1,762) and France (1,680).

Last week, Cyprus registered five consecutive daily record highs culminating in a New Year's Eve spike of 5,048 in a population of around one million. Monday's caseload of 5,024 neared that record.

The cabinet is expected to announce any new measures on Wednesday. Further restrictions could be imposed on nightclubs and entertainment venues as well as home visits.

So far, the government has been reluctant to contemplate a fourth national lockdown.

But on Tuesday, Cyprus



Parents queue at a vaccination centre alongside their children set to receive the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in the Cypriot capital Nicosia, on Sunday (AFP)

tightened entry requirements at its airports in a new blow for its tourism dependent economy.

Everyone arriving in the Republic of Cyprus must present a negative PCR test carried out no more than 48 hours before departure. Passengers are already required to undergo a PCR test at the airport on arrival, at their own expense.

Companies are required to ensure 40 per cent of their staff work remotely while venues can only have seated customers and no dancing.

Access to nightclubs, venues and wedding receptions requires vaccinated patrons to present a negative COVID-19 test carried out within 24 hours, though those with a booster shot are exempt.

All hospital visits have been

banned, and sports stadiums are restricted to 50 per cent capacity, down from 75 per cent.

Last week, Health Minister Michalis Hadjipantelas told reporters that Omicron was now the dominant strain in the community, accounting for 80 per cent of cases.

The Republic of Cyprus has officially registered 177,721 coronavirus cases and 641 deaths since the start of the pandemic in 2020, including two fatalities on Monday. Mask-wearing is mandatory for everyone aged six and over in public areas, both outdoor and indoor. Double-vaccinated employees must undergo weekly tests, and unvaccinated individuals are banned from hospitality venues and nightclubs.

AFP

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Australia's Omicron surge drives record infections, testing rush

Sydney, Australia - Australia reported a record daily tally of nearly 50,000 COVID-19 cases on Tuesday as the Omicron variant raced through the population and sent people scrambling for tests.

While the Omicron surge has apparently left relatively few dangerously ill, it has driven a rush on increasingly scarce self-administered rapid antigen kits and created hours-long queues at centres providing more reliable PCR tests. Australia had successfully suppressed infections for much of the pandemic through border closures and aggressive testing and tracing.

But an earlier wave fuelled by the Delta variant dashed zero-COVID ambitions in much of the country, including the major cities Sydney and Melbourne.

Now, like many countries, it relies on vaccines for protection with 91.5 per cent of the over-16 population fully vaccinated. About 2.5mn people have received a booster.

Deputy chief medical officer Sonya Bennett said Australia had recorded 47,738 infections in the past 24 hours, up from about 38,000 cases the previous day, as the Omicron variant took hold.

COVID-19 cases being treated in hospitals across the country had nearly doubled in a week to 2,362 infections, she said.

But the number in intensive care was much smaller: 184. And of those, 59 were on a ventilator - unchanged from a week



Australia had recorded 47738 infections in the past 24 hours, up from about 38000 cases the previous day as the Omicron variant took hold

SONYA BENNETT

ago.

"Talking about those significant case numbers, they do continue to rise. They are large numbers that we have never before seen in Australia," Bennett said.

"I think at this point we all

know somebody who has either got COVID or we have got coworkers off work because they are quarantining or isolating or we have had events cancelled and other impacts in our daily lives."

Early evidence indicated that most COVID patients in intensive care had been infected with the Delta variant, she said, and a significant proportion had not been fully vaccinated or were

suffering from other illnesses.

Despite the soaring infection rate, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has resisted calls to make the rapid antigen tests free.

"We are at another stage of this pandemic now where we just cannot go round and make everything free," Morrison said Monday.

"We have to live with this virus."

AFP



Residents queue up to undergo nucleic acid test as a staff member sprays disinfectant in Ningbo in Zhejiang province on Tuesday (AFP)

Chinese city of Yuzhou shuts down after three virus cases

Beijing, China - More than one million people in a city in central China were being confined to their homes on Tuesday after three asymptomatic coronavirus cases were recorded in the country's latest mass lockdown.

Beijing has pursued a 'zero COVID' approach with tight border restrictions and targeted lockdowns since the virus first emerged.

But the strategy has come under pressure with a series of recent local outbreaks and with just a month to go until the Winter Olympics.

Yuzhou, a city with a population of around 1.17mn people in Henan province, announced that from Monday night all citizens were required to stay home to control the spread of the virus. The announcement was triggered by the discovery of three cases in the last couple of days.

People in the central area 'must not go out', according to a statement posted on Monday, while all communities will set up 'sentinels and gates to strictly implement epidemic prevention and control measures'.

The city had already announced that it was halting bus and taxi services and closing shopping malls, museums and tourist attractions.

China reported another 175 new COVID-19 cases on Tuesday, including five in Henan province and eight more in a

separate cluster linked to a garment factory in the eastern city of Ningbo.

Although the reported cases are low compared with elsewhere in the world, new coronavirus infections in recent weeks have reached a high not seen in the country since March 2020.

There were 95 fresh cases recorded in Xi'an Tuesday - a historic city of 13mn people in neighbouring Shaanxi province - which has been under lockdown for nearly two weeks.

Xi'an has reported more than 1,600 cases since December 9, although numbers in the last few days have started to slide compared to last week's figures.

Local authorities deemed to have failed in preventing virus outbreaks in China are often fired or punished, prompting a series of ever-stricter responses from provincial governments as they try to stamp out any cases quickly.

In Xi'an, two senior Communist Party officials in the northern city were removed from their posts over their 'insufficient rigour in preventing and controlling the outbreak'.

And last month, China's disciplinary body announced that dozens of officials were punished for failure to prevent the outbreak in the city.

The spike comes as Beijing prepares to host the Winter Olympics next month.

AFP

Delhi imposes weekend curfew as cases surge

New Delhi, India - India's capital New Delhi will lock down over the weekend as authorities grapple with a fresh surge in coronavirus cases, partly fuelled by the fast-spreading Omicron variant.

The country was battered by a devastating COVID outbreak last year that overwhelmed hospitals and crematoriums, but daily case numbers had since then stayed reasonably low until last week.

Delhi's new restrictions came the same day the sprawling megacity's chief minister,



Health workers administer COVID-19 vaccine during a vaccination drive for youths at a school in Kolkata on Tuesday (AFP)

Arvind Kejriwal, announced he had been infected and was suffering 'mild symptoms'.

Kejriwal said he was isolating at home and urged those in contact with him in the past few days to get tested.

The capital last week closed gyms and cinemas, as well as imposing an overnight curfew in an effort to stem the spread.

All residents besides essential workers will now be asked to stay home from Friday night to Monday morning.

"The government is fully prepared to fight any COVID situa-

tion," the city's deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said in a Tuesday address.

More than 200,000 people died across India last spring after a wave of Delta variant infections that brought the healthcare system to its knees.

India's 481,000 known COVID deaths is the world's third-highest toll, behind the United States and Brazil.

But under-reporting is widespread and some studies have estimated its actual toll could be up to 10 times higher.

AFP

Philippines widens COVID restrictions outside capital

Manila, Philippines - The Philippines will expand coronavirus restrictions in Manila from Wednesday to include more than 11mn people living near the capital as cases surge, the government said.

Daily infections have spiked to a two-month high in January and the health department warned of higher caseloads in the coming days following the detection of local cases of the highly contagious Omicron variant.

The provinces of Bulacan, Cavite and Rizal surrounding Manila have been placed under the third highest alert 'due to a sharp increase of COVID-19 cases', presidential spokesman Karlo Nograles said in a statement Tuesday.

Under the tighter restrictions, which will be in place until mid-January, unvaccinated residents have to stay at home unless buying essentials or exercising.



This file photo shows cops checking documents of motorists at a border check point in Quezon City, suburban Manila on August 6, 2021 (AFP)

We did initial estimates. Omicron is eight times more transmissible than Delta. The peak will happen at the end of January. It will be more than the numbers we saw during the Delta peak

ROSARIO VERGEIRE

Restaurants, parks, churches and beauty salons will operate at lower capacity while in-person classes and contact sports are suspended.

The order comes a day after Manila went to Alert Level 3.

Around 70 per cent of residents in Metro Manila are fully jabbed but less than half the na-

tional population is fully vaccinated, according to government data.

"We did initial estimates. The assumptions would be ... Omicron is eight times more transmissible than Delta, and that the peak will happen at the end of January," health under-secretary Rosario Vergeire told CNN Philippines.

"It will be more than the numbers we saw during the Delta peak," she added.

The health department has deemed the entire country of 109 mn at 'high risk' following a spike in cases in recent days, Vergeire said, even as hospitalisations remain under control.

Before the tighter quarantine rules, the Philippines had been under its second-lowest alert level since December 3 as cases fell, which allowed restaurants and indoor venues to ramp up capacity and in-person classes to resume on a limited basis.

AFP

Capitol siege: US democracy still faces test

Americans were stunned by the assault, so was the world, as US was a model of stable democracy

Washington, US - One year after supporters of Donald Trump stormed the US Capitol and shut down Congress, Americans still await a reckoning on the unprecedented challenge to the country's democracy.

Was it a simple protest-turned-riot? An insurrection? A coup attempt plotted by Trump?

Videos from January 6, 2021 bear witness to the violence wrought in the former president's name.

Attackers are seen beating security officers with iron bars and clubs. A policeman is crushed in a doorway, howling in pain.

Rioters clad in assault gear chant 'Hang Mike Pence', while the vice president and Democratic and Republican lawmakers flee. A woman is fatally shot in a Capitol hallway.

Americans were stunned by the hours-long assault, and so was much of the world, accustomed to seeing the United States as a model of stable democracy.

One year later, the brazen attempt to prevent Democrat Joe Biden from taking office after his victory in the November 2020 presidential election needs an accounting.

"Not even during the Civil War did insurrectionists breach our Capitol, the citadel of our democracy," Biden said in July.

"This was not dissent. It was disorder. It posed an existential crisis and a test of whether our democracy could survive."

Trump defiant

A year later, more than 700 people involved in the January 6 attack have been charged, for assaulting law enforcement officers and breaking into and desecrating the halls of Congress.

Investigations have shown a concerted effort by Trump and his allies to prevent Pence from leading Congress in certifying Biden as the lawfully elected president. The looming question is: how are the attack and Trump's effort linked?

A special committee of the House of Representatives is investigating, but the deeper they get, the more sensitive it becomes.

If they find evidence suggesting that Trump knowingly incited the attack, or plotted to illegally keep power, should they risk more turmoil by seeking an unprecedented criminal prosecution of an ex-president?

For the first anniversary of the attack on Thursday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has ordered a 'solemn observance' in Congress.

Trump, who remains the most powerful figure in the Republican Party, plans his own January 6 commemoration in Palm Beach, Florida, which he says will focus on the 'rigged' presidential election of 2020.

Although he has shown no evidence that the election was



This file photo shows protesters demanding a 'forensic audit' of the 2020 presidential election, outside of the Michigan State Capitol , in Lansing, on October 12, last year (AFP)



This file photo shows supporters of the then US President Donald Trump, entering the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on January 06, last year (AFP)

fraudulent, polls show that around two-thirds of Republican voters believe him.

And Republican lawmakers, aware that Trump can make or break them politically, have almost uniformly fallen in line.

Even Pence won't speak against him.

Instead, the party is seeking to regain power in the 2022 congressional elections and in 2024, when Trump could run again for president.

Concerted effort to nullify election

The arc of events leading to Jan-

uary 6, 2021 has become clearer.

Months before the vote, Trump declared it would be fraudulent and he would not accept losing.

On election night when Biden's victory was clear, he refused to concede.

For six weeks, Trump and his backers sought to reverse vote counts in key states by lawsuits and pressure on leaders.

When that effort failed, they set their sights on January 6, when Pence was to convene the two houses of Congress to certify Biden's victory.

There has been no stronger case in our nation's history for a congressional investigation into the actions of a former president. We cannot surrender to president Trump's efforts to hide what happened

LIZ CHENEY

regain control and remove the attackers.

Finally, in the early morning hours of January 7, Pence officially certified Biden as president-elect.

Rush to complete probe

Many thought the rapid-fire impeachment of Trump over the following two weeks, and Biden's inauguration on January 20, would consign the whole episode to history.

But Trump didn't go away. He secured his power over the Republican Party, rejected all criticism, and pledged a comeback.

Democrats, aghast, are demanding a public reckoning.

"Inaction - or just moving on - is simply not an option," said Democratic Congressman Bennie Thompson, who leads the House investigation.

The committee, which has already interviewed around 300 people, needs to complete its work before the November 2022 midterm elections, when Republicans could retake control of the House and snuff out the probe.

In December, committee vice chair Liz Cheney, one of a handful of Republicans to support the investigation, made clear the panel's sights were on Trump. "There has been no stronger case in our nation's history for a congressional investigation into the actions of a former president," Cheney said. "We cannot surrender to president Trump's efforts to hide what happened."

Experts say baring the truths about January 6 poses huge political risks for the Biden administration. But leaving them buried is also dangerous.

"January 6 was the harbinger of a clear and present danger," William Galston, a political scientist at the Brookings Institution, told AFP.

"The effort to nullify the results of a democratic election failed," he said.

"Will that be true three years from now? That's not so clear. Because the people who were determined to nullify the effects of the 2020 election have learned a lot."

AFP

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BIRTHDAY WISHES



MANN GULANI
January 04

Wishing you a very happy birthday and many more happy returns of the day.
Best wishes from
Parents and Relatives



HAITI'S TRADITIONAL JOUMOU SOUP

A tasty reminder of freedom

A mix of meat, vegetables, pasta and the squash for which it is named, Haitians enjoy joumou soup every January 1 to celebrate the New Year and their country's independence.

Before it became a symbol of Haiti's freedom, the soup was one of oppression.

The enslaved Haitians who grew the 'giraumon' or turban squash, the key ingredient, were forbidden from eating the dish. It was reserved solely for the French plantation masters.

But on January 1, 1804, when the first black-led republic was born, Marie-Claire Heureuse Felicite - the wife of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a leader of Haiti's revolution and the independent nation's first ruler - chose to serve the soup.

Cooking joumou soup 'was a way to mark those years of deprivation and oppression, and to claim victory over the colonisers', says Port-au-Prince resident Nathalie Cardichon as she buys ingredients for the national dish at the market.

"That's the meaning of this soup," she adds.

Traditionally, serving the dish is also a time of reunion for families. But for many, 2022 will be different.

Rise of gangs

In 2021, not long after Haiti's president was assassinated, the country suffered a devastating earthquake. Political turmoil and poverty have intensified, as have violence and kidnappings by gangs that have become all-powerful.

A lack of security and inability to travel on roads guarded by armed gangs have forced many Haitians to spend the symbolic day far from their loved ones.

"I have friends at university whose parents don't live in Port-au-Prince and who can't go home to the provinces because of the security situation, so I invited them" to my house, says Stephanie Smith, a student in the Haitian capital.

Her mother, Rosemene Dorceus, often makes joumou soup for their family. But for the national holiday, she makes whole pots of it.

It's enough to feed 'about 20 people', the 54-year-old estimates modestly - but her daughter thinks it all could easily feed at least 30.



Relatives gather for a traditional lunch in Port-au-Prince, Haiti on January 1 (AFP)



Rosemene Dorceus cooks joumou soup in Port-au-Prince on Haiti's national holiday (AFP)

Cooking joumou soup 'was a way to mark those years of deprivation and oppression, and to claim victory over the colonisers

Nathalie Cardichon

"We are eight in my family but unfortunately, in the neighbourhood, there are people who can't afford to make the soup, so we think of them," explains the 27-year-old Smith.

The work in the kitchen starts on December 31.

Before the sun has even risen on January 1, the women in the family are busy around the stove.

Dorceus recalls a time when she and her husband would make the soup together, when the children were small.

"Now that my daughters are grown, they help me," she says.

Delighted with the family time spent preparing the feast, Smith says her younger brothers do help a little, 'but they mostly come by to eat, especially the meat'.

'Tradition of our ancestors'

The richly storied soup has just received international recognition, with Unesco designating it as part of the "intangible cultural heritage of humanity."

"Haiti's struggle and its voice have been made invisible, and this is now a way to record it," said Dominique Dupuy, Haiti's ambassador to the UN cultural agency. She noted Haiti's 'fundamental and crucial role in humanity's history', as the first country to have abolished slavery.

The designation of joumou soup constitutes a 'just historical rectification', according to Dupuy.

Her delegation did everything possible to obtain the listing, requesting accelerated processing for the request in August. On December 16, the designation was granted.

With 2021 having been an "exceptionally painful year," it was necessary to have "systems to help us keep our heads high," said Dupuy, a native of Cap-Haitien, which suffered a tragedy on December 14 when a gas truck exploded, killing dozens.

In Haiti, cooking joumou soup, a custom that dates back more than two centuries, is a way to honor the country and its past.

For Cardichon, the market-goer, it's a way of inviting the world to 'discover Haiti's history' - and a way to show 'how proud we are as a people, that we take and continue the tradition of our ancestors'.

AFP

FOOTBALL ROUND-UP



Wolverhampton Wanderers' midfielder Joao Moutinho (centre) celebrates after scoring the opening goal of the English Premier League football match against Manchester United at Old Trafford, in Manchester on Monday (AFP)

Moutinho wants Wolves to kick on from Man Utd win

Manchester, UK - Wolves' Joao Moutinho wants his team's victory at Manchester United to act as a springboard after scoring the winner in the club's first success at Old Trafford in 42 years.

Moutinho's goal gave Wolves a 1-0 win on Monday to leave the Midlands club eighth in the Premier League -- just one place and three points behind United.

It was no more than Wolves deserved after they managed an impressive 15 shots in the first

half alone before the 35-year-old Moutinho struck late on to secure the team's first win at United since 1980.

"For me, I wanted to help the team of course with a goal, winning here at Old Trafford, against a big team, very good players, a good coach, it's amazing for us," Moutinho told Wolves' website.

"We came here to play our game, play football, play with the ball - that's what we did in the first half."

The Portuguese midfielder added: "I think we created a lot of opportunities, a lot of shots, but we didn't score... We deserved this victory, this win, and I hope we can continue with these performances."

The result saw United suffer their first defeat under interim manager Ralf Rangnick, with a lacklustre display leaving the English giants four points adrift of the top four and a place in next season's Champions League.

United defender Luke Shaw even went so far as to question the attitude of his team-mates, prompting former Red Devils and England centre-back Rio Ferdinand to write on Twitter: "For any team to be described like this is terrible... but by a player who participated it's a damning reflection on the team!"

One consolation for United was the performance of centre-back Phil Jones, who betrayed few signs of a lengthy injury lay-

off in what was his first appearance for the club in 708 days.

"What Phil's been through the last few years... criticised daily, been injured for over a year," left-back Shaw told MUTV. "He's had it all going against him, people against him, but he's stuck by it."

"He's been a great professional, trained so well. I think maybe his chance has been coming because he's been training really well and he's deserved it."

AFF



Chelsea's head coach Thomas Tuchel (right) embraces Chelsea's striker Romelu Lukaku after the match against Aston Villa, in Birmingham (AFP)

Chelsea's Tuchel recalls Lukaku

London, UK - Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel has accepted an apology from Romelu Lukaku for comments he made in a television interview, with the star striker now available for Wednesday's English League Cup semi-final first leg clash against Tottenham Hotspur.

Lukaku, who returned to the Blues for a club record £98mn (US\$132mn) in August after two successful seasons with Inter Milan, was dropped from Tuchel's squad for last weekend's 2-2 draw against Premier League title rivals Liverpool.

In an interview with Sky Italy, recorded in mid-December but only aired last week, Lukaku revealed he would like to return to Inter in the near future.

But Tuchel said Tuesday that talks with the Belgium international had convinced him the 28-year-old Lukaku had not intended to disrupt dressing-room harmony at Stamford Bridge and was now determined to "clean the mess up".

Tuchel said Tuesday that talks with the Belgium international had convinced him the 28-year-old Lukaku had not intended to disrupt dressing-room harmony at Stamford Bridge and was now determined to "clean the mess up".

"He apologised and is back in the squad for today's (Tuesday's) training."

The German boss added: "For me the most important thing was to understand and clearly understand and believe that it was not intentional."

"He did not do this intentionally to create noise in front of such a big game. And it's the very first time even he has behaved like this."

Tuchel tried to put the interview in perspective by saying: "It's not that big as maybe people want it to be, but it's also not small."

"But it is small enough to stay calm, accept an apology and to move on forward. He's very aware of what happened and what he created and he feels the responsibility to clean the mess up."

"Maybe we will have a bit of smell still from it, of course. He can handle it, but he also has no other choice. He cannot expect everybody to be super happy the very next day."

"But he's still our player and we have good, good reasons and a lot of reasons to make him play for us, and to convince him and to fight hard that he's our player. We're happy he's our player, we will protect him."

AFF

Former Dutch midfielder Propper quits football

The Hague, Netherlands - Former Dutch international and PSV Eindhoven midfielder Davy Propper on Tuesday announced his retirement from professional football, citing lack of motivation and isolation because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Propper, 30, who scored three goals in 19 appearances for the Orange 11, was released from his contract with the southern Dutch club, which was to last until mid-2023, PSV said.

"I find it exceptionally difficult to maintain the discipline needed for optimal performance and to have my life completely dominated by a frantic football schedule," Propper said in the

statement, issued by PSV.

"The corona period and the lack of visits from family and friends did me no good then either," Propper said, referring to his time with English Premier League side Brighton from 2017 until mid-last year.

He returned to PSV in June, saying he hoped playing at his former club would "bring back the joy of playing football."

"Unfortunately, that has not turned out to be so easy, partly because I don't feel comfortable in football culture."

"I don't want that anymore and that's why I'm done with it now," Propper said.

AFF



Xavi tells Dembele to stick with Barcelona

Madrid, Spain - Xavi Hernandez is still hopeful Ousmane Dembele will decide to stay at Barcelona, insisting the Frenchman would not be happier anywhere else.

Dembele's contract expires in the summer and a new deal is yet to be agreed, with Barca's negotiating power hampered by debts of more than 1 billion euros (\$1.13 billion).

Renewing the 24-year-old's contract on reduced terms would also allow Barcelona to register new signing Ferran Torres. Torres has signed from Manchester City but currently cannot play due to La Liga's spending limits.

"I am hoping that he makes an effort," said Xavi in a press conference on Tuesday. "This sporting project is the best one for him. He will not be as happy any-



We are fifth and we're coming back little by little

XAVI HERNANDEZ

where else as he is at Barca. We are going to see what he decides.

"I am calm and waiting for news. It does not depend on me. It depends on the club, the player and the agents."

The signing of Torres from City has further lifted the mood at Barcelona, who climbed to fifth in La Liga on Sunday after winning 1-0 at Mallorca.

They are now just a point behind Atletico Madrid in fourth, while Barca president Joan Laporta said on Monday the club are "back" and ready to compete again for the world's best players.

"We are fifth and we're coming back little by little," Xavi said. "We are working on our style of play. The signing of Ferran Torres allows the fans to breathe as well. We are working practically 24/7."

"We have to follow the president's lead because it's a positive message to say that we are back. That's the mentality we want. If we sink into misery, that won't achieve anything."

Barcelona play at Segunda B side Linares Deportivo on Wednesday in the last 32 of the Copa del Rey, a competition they have won five times in the last seven years.

Xavi said Memphis Depay and Ansu Fati are not yet ready to return from injury but that they could be available to face Granada in La Liga on Saturday.

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Djokovic heading to Australian Open with COVID-19 exemption



Melbourne, Australia - World number one Novak Djokovic said Tuesday that he was heading to the Australian Open to defend his title after being granted a COVID-19 medical exemption to play.

All participants at the opening Grand Slam of the year, which starts on January 17, need to be vaccinated against Covid-19 or have the exemption, which is assessed by an independent panel of experts.

The Serb has repeatedly refused to confirm if he has been

inoculated, with his participation at Melbourne Park the subject of intense speculation after he pulled out of the ongoing ATP Cup in Sydney.

"I've spent fantastic quality time with my loved ones over the break and today I'm heading Down Under with an exemption permission. Let's go 2022!" the nine-time Australian Open winner, who beat Daniil Medvedev in last year's final, said on Instagram.

His post was accompanied by a picture of the 34-year-old at an

airport, looking relaxed, with his bags on a trolley.

"Djokovic applied for a medical exemption which was granted following a rigorous review process involving two separate independent panels of medical experts," Tennis Australia said in a statement.

Tournament director Craig Tiley last week confirmed a number of players had been granted exemptions, without naming Djokovic, while explaining the process involved.

"There are two medical panels

that assess any application, and they assess it in a blind way. They don't know who the applicant is," he told reporters.

"Against the ATAGI [Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation] guidelines, an exemption gets granted or not. The reason for granting that exemption remains private, between the panel and the applicant."

He said on Tuesday there had to have been a "genuine reason" to grant an exemption.

AFP



Daniil Medvedev



Alexander Zverev

Medvedev, Zverev keep ATP Cup hopes alive

Sydney, Australia - Daniil Medvedev and Alexander Zverev both clocked impressive victories on Tuesday as they ramped up preparations for the Australian Open by keeping Russia and Germany on track at the ATP Cup.

US Open champion and world number two Medvedev bounced back after being shocked by Frenchman Ugo Humbert at the weekend to crush Australia's Alex de Minaur 6-4, 6-2.

Third-ranked German Zverev, meanwhile, came through a workmanlike 6-4, 6-4 clash against American Taylor Fritz, his second straight win of the new season.

Seventh-ranked Italian Matteo Berrettini also tasted victory, responding after he was upset by De Minaur on Sunday to battle past Humbert 6-4, 7-6 (8/6).

Medvedev, who will be the second seed at this month's Australian Open after defending

champion Novak Djokovic confirmed his participation, said afterwards he had taken painkillers before the match, because of soreness.

"Before the match, to be honest, I was not feeling great," he said.

"I took some painkillers and was able to play some good tennis."

His win sealed the tie 2-0 for the defending champions' second group win after Roman Safiullin earlier ground past James Duckworth 7-6 (8/6), 6-4 in the other singles match.

Germany also enjoyed a win with Jan-Lennard Struff giving them a 1-0 lead with a gutsy 7-6 (8/7), 4-6, 7-5 victory over big-serving John Isner, who smashed 34 aces, before Zverev wrapped up the tie.

The victory kept Germany's ATP Cup hopes alive after they lost to Britain in their opener, with only the top nation from

each of the four groups progressing to the knockouts.

Last year's runners-up Italy suffered a disappointing defeat on Sunday against Australia, largely down to Berrettini losing in straight sets to De Minaur.

But he made amends against Humbert, winning 85 per cent of his first-serve points.

World number 10 Jannik Sinner set Italy on their way, defeating France's Arthur Rinderknech 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) in the opening singles, rallying from a break down in the second set.

France are now 0-2 at the tournament, having also lost to Russia.

In the day's other tie, Canadian world number 11 Felix Auger-Aliassime edged Britain's Cameron Norrie, ranked a place below him, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 after teammate Denis Shapovalov crashed to Dan Evans in straight sets.

AFP

Azarenka turns back time in dominant win over Badosa

Adelaide, Australia - Two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka sent out a message ahead of the opening Grand Slam of the year with a dominant win over Spain's Paula Badosa in the Adelaide International on Tuesday.

The 32-year-old was in ruthless form as she blasted the world number eight off the court 6-3, 6-2 in just 77 minutes.

Badosa had a breakthrough year in 2021, culminating in winning the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells, where she beat Azarenka in an epic three-set final.

But the 24-year-old was never in the hunt against the Belarusian on Tuesday, with Azarenka superior in every department.

Azarenka won the Australian Open in 2012 and 2013, and she showed against Badosa that she could again threaten this year.

"I wasn't expecting to play the way I did today," Azarenka said. "I felt really focussed, I was re-



Victoria Azarenka from Belarus celebrates her first set against Spain's Paula Badosa at the Adelaide International 2022 WTA women's singles, in Adelaide on Tuesday (AFP)

ally prepared and I'm glad the way I started the year.

"For me to come out and produce this type of tennis really makes me proud."

Earlier, former French Open champion Iga Swiatek launched her season and defence of her title with a straight-sets win over qualifier Daria Saville.

The Pole took an hour and 20 minutes to see off the Australian 6-3, 6-3 and book a second-round clash against US Open finalist Leylah Fernandez.

The 20-year-old Swiatek burst onto the world stage when she won the French Open in 2020, then claimed titles in Adelaide and Rome in 2021 to move into the world top 10.

Against Saville, who missed most of 2020 and 2021 with injury, Swiatek came away with a comfortable win.

The 17-year-old American prodigy Coco Gauff brushed aside Norwegian qualifier Ulrikke Eikeri 6-2, 6-1 to book a tasty second-round clash with top seed Ashleigh Barty.

Also through is the 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin. The sixth-seeded American was pushed hard by Italian qualifier Lucia Bronzetti before winning 7-5, 7-5.

Kenin will now take on Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic.

There was an upset in the first match on centre court when 22-year-old Russian Anastasia Gasanova came from a set down to beat eighth seed Elina Svitolina 5-7, 6-4, 6-3.

Svitolina looked lethargic after the first set and Gasanova took full advantage, outlasting the Ukrainian in a match a shade over two-and-a-half hours long.

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SCOREBOARD

India 1st Innings 202

SOUTH AFRICA 1st INNINGS

D Elgar	c Pant b Thakur	28
A Markram	lbw b M Shami	7
K Petersen	c Agarwal b Thakur	62
R van der Dussen		
	c Pant b Thakur	1
T Bavuma	c Pant b Thakur	51
K Verreynne	lbw b Thakur	21
M Jansen	c Ashwin b Thakur	21
K Rabada	c M Siraj b M Shami	0
K Maharaj	b Bumrah	21
D Olivier	not out	1
L Ngidi	c Pant b Thakur	0
Extras:	(b 4, lb 4, nb 3, w 5)	16
TOTAL:	229 allout in 79.4 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-14, 2-88, 3-101, 4-102, 5-162, 6-177, 7-179, 8-217, 9-228, 10-229		
Bowling: J Bumrah 21-5-49-1, M Shami 21-5-52-2, M Siraj 9.5-2-24-0, S Thakur 17.5-3-61-7, R Ashwin 10-1-35-0		

INDIA 2nd INNINGS

KL Rahul	c Markram b Jansen	8
M Agarwal	lbw b Olivier	23
C Pujara	not out	35
A Rahane	not out	11
Extras:	(b 2, lb 4, nb 2)	8
TOTAL:	85 for two in 20 overs	
Fall of wickets: 1-24, 2-44		
Bowling: K Rabada 6-1-26-0, D Olivier 4-0-22-1, L Ngidi 3-1-5-0, M Jansen 6-2-18-1, K Maharaj 1-0-8-0		

SHARDUL'S 7-FOR MAKES INDIA DREAM SERIES WIN

Johannesburg, South Africa - A career-best performance by Shardul Thakur enabled India to fight back on the second day of the second Test against South Africa at the Wanderers Stadium on Tuesday.

Thakur took seven for 61 - the best figures by an Indian bowler in Tests against South Africa - as the hosts were bowled out for

229, a first innings lead of 27.

India reached 85 for two at the close, an overall lead of 58 runs, to finish the day on level terms and keep alive their hopes of clinching a series victory with a match to spare.

South Africa played themselves into a strong position by bowling out India for 202 on the first day and then advancing to

88 for the loss of one wicket half an hour before lunch.

Thakur, bowling at a brisk medium pace on a responsive pitch, broke South Africa's only two partnerships of note.

He dismissed Dean Elgar (28) and Keegan Petersen (62) after the pair put on 74 for the second wicket. He followed up by having Rassie van der Dussen caught

behind for one, although replays shown during the lunch interval suggested wicketkeeper Risabh Pant may have taken the ball on the bounce.

Temba Bavuma (51) and Kyle Verreynne (21) added 60 for the sixth wicket before Thakur trapped Verreynne leg before wicket and had Bavuma caught down the leg side by Pant.

Thakur then ended some tail-end resistance by taking the last two wickets off successive balls.

Thakur, 30, played a relatively minor supporting role in India's 113-run win in the first Test in Centurion but rose to the challenge of added responsibility caused by an injury to Mohammed Siraj.

Siraj left the field clutching his

right hamstring shortly before the close on Monday. He returned to action on Tuesday but only bowled six overs during the day and appeared to be below his best. Thakur's best in five previous Tests was four for 61 when a spate of injuries to Indian players provided him an opportunity to play a starring role in a series-clinching win against Australia in

Brisbane last January. He took a total of seven wickets in the match and also top-scored with 67 in the first innings.

India's batsmen came out with attacking intent in the second innings but left-arm fast bowler Marco Jansen had stand-in captain KL Rahul caught at third slip for eight with his fifth ball of the innings when he came on as second change.

Mayank Agarwal padded up to Duanne Olivier and was palpably leg before wicket after scoring 23.

Cheteshwar Pujara (35 not out) and Ajinkya Rahane (11 not out), both under pressure because of lack of recent form, added 41 unbeaten runs before the close.

AFP

Bangladesh eye historic Test win in New Zealand



SCOREBOARD

New Zealand 1st Innings 328

BANGLADESH 1st INNINGS

S Islam	c & b Wagner	22
M Hasan Joy	c Nicholls b Wagner	78
N H Shanto	c Young b Wagner	64
M Haque	lbw b Boult	88
M Rahim	b Boult	12
L Das	c Blundell b Boult	26
Y Ali	c Blundell b Jamieson	86
M H Miraz	c Blundell b Southee	47
T Ahmed	lbw b Southee	5
S Islam	b Boult	7
E Hossain	not out	0
Extras:	(lb 8, nb 3, w 7, pen 5)	23
TOTAL:	458 allout in 176.2 overs	
Fall of wickets:	1-43, 2-147, 3-184, 4-203, 5-361, 6-370, 7-445, 8-450, 9-458, 10-458	
Bowling:	T Southee 38-4-114-2, T Boult 35.2-11-85-4, K Jamieson 35-11-78-1, N Wagner 40-9-101-3, R Ravindra 28-5-67-0	

NEW ZEALAND 2nd INNINGS

T Latham	b Taskin Ahmed	14
W Young	b Ebadat Hossain	69
D Conway	c S Islam b E Hossain	13
R Taylor	not out	37
H Nicholls	b E Hossain	0
T Blundell	lbw b Ebadat Hossain	0
R Ravindra	not out	6
Extras:	(b 2, lb 4, nb 1, w 1)	8
TOTAL:	147 foe five in 63 overs	
Fall of wickets:	1-29, 2-63, 3-136, 4-136, 5-136	
Bowling:	T Ahmed 9-1-22-1, S Islam 11-1-30-0, M H Miraz 22-5-43-0, E Hossain 17-4-39-4, M Haque 4-0-7-0	

Mount Maunganui, New Zealand - Bangladesh had New Zealand on the ropes and were eyeing a historic victory after ripping through the hosts' top-order on the penultimate day of the first Test on Tuesday.

Bangladesh have never before tasted success in New Zealand, losing all 33 matches played across three formats, including nine Tests.

But the odds of a maiden victory rose as they reduced New Zealand to 147 for five at stumps, a lead of just 17, with Ebadot Hossain at one stage taking three wickets for no runs in eight balls in his 4-39 off 17 overs.

New Zealand batting coach Luke Ronchi said all his world Test champions could do now was bat for as long as possible on the final day at Mount Maunganui.

"Bangladesh have had the upper hand on us for quite a

massive part of this Test" he said.

"We've got to play a positive style of cricket. We've got to get a lead that's sufficient enough to defend."

New Zealand's top three scorers from the first innings, Devon Conway, Henry Nicholls and Will Young, have all been dismissed.

Captain Tom Latham and Tom Blundell then both fell without scoring, leaving Ross Taylor unbeaten on 37 with Rachin Ravindra on six at the close of play.

There did not appear to be any demons in the pitch, which is unlike a typical New Zealand Test surface, lacking an emerald green cover and showing little sign of wear after four days.

When Bangladesh were all out for 458, a 130-run lead on the fourth morning, Latham and Young took New Zealand to lunch at 10 without loss.

Fielding woes

But when play resumed, Latham (14) chopped Taskin Ahmed on to his stumps and Conway (13) edged Ebadot on to his pads and the ball ballooned to Shadman Islam, who took the catch.

Young and Taylor mounted a rescue mission but when their 73-run stand ended, with Young out for 69, Nicholls and Blundell quickly followed without bothering the scorers.

Bangladesh's only problem on a dominant day was their fielding.

Liton Das dropped a regulation chance from Young early in his innings and Taylor also survived when he should have been out on more than one occasion.

Shadman spilled a straightforward offering from Taylor off Mehidy Hasan, and there was a run-out opportunity where Bangladesh originally threw the ball to the wrong end, and Taylor was still out of his crease when the throw went to the right end

but missed the stumps.

Bangladesh, sent into bat before lunch on day two, occupied the crease for 176.2 overs before Shoriful Islam was the last man out before lunch on Tuesday.

It was an impressive team effort with half-centuries for skipper Mominul Haque, Liton Das, Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Najmul Hossain Shanto, as well as 47 from Mehidy.

When New Zealand thought they had seen off all recognised batsmen, Mehidy and Yasir Ali put on 75 for the seventh wicket.

Unfortunately for Bangladesh, Joy required stitches to a split hand, injured while fielding, and it was unsure if he would open the batting when Bangladesh begin the final chase.

AFP

Boland keeps place, Khawaja only change for Australia

Sydney, Australia - Melbourne Test hero Scott Boland held his place as Australia made only one change to their winning side for the fourth Ashes Test against England in Sydney which begins on Wednesday.

Batsman Usman Khawaja was confirmed in the team announced Tuesday as a replacement for Covid victim Travis Head. Khawaja last played for Australia in the Headingley Test of the 2019 Ashes series.

Paceman Boland, who was man-of-the-match on Test debut with his 6-7 in Australia's crushing innings win to clinch the series in Melbourne, kept his place with Josh Hazlewood again unavailable with a side strain.

"Scotty gets a go. Josh Hazlewood had a few bowls and Jhye Richardson a bit similar, but they were not quite up to 100 percent," Cummins told reporters at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Tuesday.

"We gave Josh every chance



we could, but he felt he couldn't bowl at full tilt yesterday so we're still hoping he will be right for the final Test in Hobart.

"You are not going to blast them out on this wicket," he added.

"There's a little bit of grass on it, but traditionally it's hard work, it goes the full five days and you need that disciplined stump-to-stump bowler, that's what Scotty brings.

"There's no secret that if Josh

Hazlewood was fit he would play, but it's a real luxury to have someone like Scotty. It would have been a shame to see him not play this week after his efforts in Melbourne last week."

Australia: David Warner, Marcus Harris, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Usman Khawaja, Cameron Green, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins (capt), Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Scott Boland.

AFP

Broad back for England in for Sydney Test

Sydney, Australia - England on Tuesday recalled veteran bowler Stuart Broad to partner Jimmy Anderson in the fourth Test against Australia in Sydney, the only change to the side that meekly surrendered the Ashes last week.

The seamer comes in for Ollie Robinson, who has been rested for a clash in which the tourists are playing for pride after three heavy defeats in Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne.

Robinson is the only England bowler to have played in all three previous Tests and pulled up with a shoulder niggle after their



crushing innings-and-14-run defeat in the third Test in Melbourne.

Chris Woakes is also dealing with a shoulder problem, ruling him out of a potential return.

It opened the door for Broad, who will play alongside Anderson for only the second time this series after Adelaide, bolstering an attack also featuring Mark Wood and spinner Jack Leach.

"We felt like it was too much of a risk to go in with a couple of lads who are carrying niggles," said batting coach Graham Thorpe, who is acting coach for

the fourth Test with Chris Silverwood isolating after a family member caught Covid.

"So therefore, it was right to bring Stuart back in."

Ben Stokes will add support to the attack and Thorpe said he hoped the star all-rounder would finally make his mark after a disappointing tour so far.

"I hope we've got a couple of caged tigers coming into this match, Ben being one of them and Stuart Broad another," he told reporters at the Sydney Cricket Ground on the eve of the match.

England: Haseeb Hameed, Zak Crawley, Dawid Malan, Joe Root, Ben Stokes, Jonny Bairstow, Jos Buttler, Mark Wood, Jack Leach, Stuart Broad, James Anderson

AFP