



H M praises WTO’s efforts to streamline global trade

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq gave an audience to Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of World Trade Organization (WTO) at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan welcomed the guest. His Majesty appreciated WTO’s efforts to streamline global trade

and ensure its stability, and also lauded its role in overcoming challenges facing the global economy.

Dr Ngozi expressed WTO’s pride in its relations with the sultanate. She commended the open trade and investment policies espoused by Oman under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

Cabinet approves Social Protection Draft Law

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Council of Ministers has approved the draft law on social protection and referred it to the Council of Oman to complete its legislation. In addition, a sum of RO400mn has been introduced in 2023 to implement programmes and benefits endorsed for the social protection system.

The step was undertaken within the context of the Council of Ministers’ eagerness to finalise procedures linked to the restructuring of retirement and social protection systems.

The Council of Ministers commended the new social protection system designed in line with the best international practices, standards and experiences based on transition from case-study programmes to a comprehensive system of coverage.

It also introduces a transition from providing assistance to needy families to a concept of protection against life-cycle risks for all segments of society. The overall objective is to achieve social and economic stability in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The draft law allocates new social benefits to the elderly, children, orphans, widows and low-income families. It also caters to aged retirees and unified retire-



(Image for illustrative purpose)

HOUSEHOLD INCOME SUPPORT BENEFIT

A monthly benefit to support families with low income and fewer earning opportunities, based on the number of family members and total household income.

BENEFITS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Monthly cash benefit for people with disabilities (congenital or acquired), whose condition requires care and support.

BENEFIT FOR ORPHANS AND WIDOWS

A monthly cash benefit for orphans and widows who are not covered by the social insurance system or pensions (less than the entitlement specified in this benefit).

BENEFITS FOR THE ELDERLY

A monthly cash benefit for the elderly, who have fewer options and capacity to earn due to their age.

CASH BENEFITS

The Social Protection Draft Law establishes a system that includes tools and programmes directed at all segments of society aimed at achieving an integrated system through monetary social benefit programmes.

CHILDHOOD BENEFITS

A monthly cash benefit for each child, which targets the risks they face during childhood.

Western powers, Saudi strongly oppose Israel settlement moves

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Foreign ministers of five Western powers said on Tuesday they were ‘deeply troubled’ by the Israeli government’s decision to legalise nine West Bank settlements and build thousands of new units.

The ministers from Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the US said, “We strongly oppose these unilateral actions which will only serve to exacerbate tensions between Israelis and Palestinians and undermine efforts to achieve a negotiated two-state solution.”

They underlined their backing for a “comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, which must be achieved through direct negotiations between the parties”.

They added, “We continue to closely monitor developments on

the ground which impact the viability of the two-state solution and stability in the region.”

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who signed Tuesday’s statement, had on Monday criticised Israel’s plans on advancing settlements. The US, however, gave no indication it would take any action against its close Middle Eastern ally.

Israel’s security cabinet announced on Sunday that it would legalise nine settlements in the occupied West Bank, resulting in approval of some 10,000 housing units.

Criticising the Israeli plans, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister, said on Monday, “This announcement of annexation of nine settlements is a blatantly illegal act which will only serve to further increase and inflame tensions and complicate the situation.”

CYCLONE GABRIELLE WREAKS HAVOC ACROSS NORTHERN NEW ZEALAND

An aerial photo taken on Tuesday shows flooding caused by Cyclone Gabrielle in Awatoto, near the city of Napier. New Zealand declared a national state of emergency as Cyclone Gabrielle swept away roads, inundated homes and left more than 100,000 people without power. Hundreds of flights were cancelled. “The severity and the damage that we are seeing has not been experienced in a generation,” Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said on Monday (AFP)



Graduate team researches green hydrogen production from algae

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Three students of German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech) have researched a project to utilise the diverse types of algae found in the sultanate as a source of medicine, food, fertilisers and alternative energy, such as biofuels and green hydrogen.

The project envisages reducing air pollution by absorbing carbon dioxide, as well as using microalgae for water treatment.

“Our project explores the potential applications of microalgae in bioenergy, food and pharmaceutical industries,” said Mona al

Maashani, leader of the student team, comprising Maryam Anwar al Balushi and Fatma al Hinai.

According to Mona, the team was concerned about air pollution and so came up with the idea for the research project to use algae in mitigating the consequences of such pollution.

Called ‘Design of Photobioreactor for Microalgae Cultivation towards hydrogen production’, the project was declared one of three winning projects of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation’s Upgrade Programme recently.

“We started conducting our research in February last year,



(Supplied photo)

Left to right - Fatma al Hinai, Mona al Maashani and Maryam al Balushi

having several meetings with our supervisor and co-supervisors. In the following few months, we analysed photobioreactors fur-

ther, designed a mechanical prototype, and finished the research in September.”

Mona added that the project

aims to achieve goals aligned with Oman Vision 2040 for renewable energy and resource diversification. “Our research explores the potential applications of microalgae in bioenergy, food and pharmaceutical industries, as well as the challenges and limitations that may arise and ways to overcome these. We employ photobioreactors to cultivate microorganisms that can produce biofuels, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, which may be more sustainable and cost-effective than traditional methods. Additionally, bioreactors can be used to treat industrial and agricultural waste, ensuring a more sustainable and

environmentally friendly future.”

According to Mona, the main challenges faced during the project included logistical issues related to obtaining materials and specific algae species, as well as the need for advanced equipment to monitor and isolate cells during cultivation.

“During the design and experimentation phase, issues such as leaks caused by improper use of silicone glue and lack of information on microalgae biology and growth conditions were encountered. Additionally, problems with temperature sensors and the high cost of special glass for larger reactors and equipment were encountered. Despite these

challenges, solutions were found, and the project continues to progress,” said Mona.

The group thanked their parents, saying, “This project would not have been possible without the support of our parents and family. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to them for all the love, sacrifice and patience over the years to ensure the success of this project.”

She noted that the project leverages the availability of diverse microalgae in the country for the benefit of various industries. “Overall, this project is a valuable scientific achievement that helps meet the needs and goals of Oman.”

28-day national immunisation survey to kick off on Feb 20

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health will conduct National Immunisation Coverage Survey of children aged 18 months to five years and mothers of children younger than five years across all governorates starting February 20. The survey will run till March 19. It aims to validate the results of routine reports and provide information on the number of people who have been adequately immunised. It also aims to guide executive policies by presenting best practices, highlighting challenges that require intervention to improve the effectiveness of the



national immunisation programme, and identify the reasons for any delay in taking vaccinations at scheduled appointments, besides reasons for reluctance to get vaccinated. The survey targets 5,289 home visits to obtain immunisation data of at least 16,470 individuals of the target groups, and verify if mothers - who have children under the age of five years - were vaccinated during pregnancy. Field survey teams will visit randomly selected houses in various wilayats across the country. Surveyors will first ask if there are individuals of target groups in the house. If there are any, verbal consent will be ob-

tained to conduct the survey. The immunisation data of the target groups will be obtained directly from mothers or the child's caregiver. Survey teams will use an electronic or paper questionnaire form prepared in advance to collect the relevant data. Survey teams will use immunisation cards (pink for children and green for mothers) for documentation. Physical presence of the child is not required during the survey. Unvaccinated children will be referred to the nearest health institution. No vaccination, medicine dispensation or sample collection will be performed during the survey.

Sayyid Badr to preside over HM Cup football final

Muscat - Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, will preside over the final match of the His Majesty the Sultan Football Cup on March 9 at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat. In the first leg of the semi-finals of the tournament, A'Seeb Club, reigning champions, will take on A'Suwaib Club on February 20 at A'Seeb Stadium. In the second fixture to be held on the same day, A'Rustaq Club, current runner-up, will face Al Nahdha Club at A'Rustaq Complex. In the second leg of the semi-finals, Al Nahdha Club will host A'Rustaq Club at Al Buraimi Complex on February 25, whereas A'Suwaib Club will encounter A'Seeb Club at A'Rustaq Complex on February 26.

Sultanate deposits instrument of accession to Montréal Protocol 2014

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman deposited an instrument of accession to the Protocol to Amend the Convention on Offences and Certain Other Acts Committed On Board Aircraft, executed in Montréal on April 4, 2014 (Montréal Protocol 2014) on February 9. Mohammed Mansoor Ali Hamed al Ruqaishi, Representative of Oman in International Civil Aviation Organization, and Juan Carlos Salazar, Secretary-General of ICAO, presided over the deposit ceremony. It was also attended by



Michael Gill, Director of ICAO's Legal Affairs and External Relations Bureau (LEB), and Andrew P Opolot, Legal Officer of the bureau. The Montréal Protocol 2014 addresses the issue of rising incidents of unruly and disruptive be-

haviour on board aircraft by significantly improving the ability of states to expand jurisdiction over relevant offences and acts to the state of landing and the state of the operator. The protocol also serves to enhance global aviation security provisions by expressly extending legal recognition and protection to in-flight security officers. By Resolution A41-4, Appendix C, ICAO urges all states that have not done so to ratify this protocol. The protocol will come into force for Oman on April 1, 2023. With the sultanate's accession, there are now 43 parties to the Montréal Protocol 2014.

Pact signed to operate Bait ar Rudaydah Castle in Nizwa

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) signed an agreement with Birkat al Mouz Investment Company to operate Bait ar Rudaydah Castle in Nizwa, Dakhliyah, on Tuesday. The agreement was signed by H E Ibrahim bin Saeed bin Khalaf al Kharousi, Undersecretary for Heritage in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and Zaher bin Ghosn al Riyami, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the company. The agreement is in line with MHT's plan to revitalise the tourism sector and increase national income, including finding suitable investors for the architectural and cultural heritage buildings of the sultanate. An official of MHT said the ministry aims to develop a wide



range of tourist destinations and experiences in the governorates to diversify tourism activities, while highlighting Oman's civilisation and its cultural heritage. It also aims to revive cultural heritage sites in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the strategic programmes of the Tenth Five-Year Plan.

According to the official, the agreement signed on Tuesday will also provide direct and indirect job opportunities, create marketing outlets for artisans, and enrich tourism through projects of local added value. In May 2022, MHT announced that it was looking to partner with the private sector to

develop Bait ar Rudaydah. The 17th century castle is located 24km away from Nizwa at the beginning of Al Ma'ydan valley. It was built by Imam Sultan bin Saif al Yarubi, who ruled from 1649 to 1679, and expanded by Mohammed bin Imam Ahmed bin Saeed. Falaj Khatmayn, which springs from Jabal Akhdar and counted among Unesco World Heritage sites, passes through the castle. The castle also houses the Centre of Excellence for Historic Arms featuring a collection of small arms from Oman, Europe and the Americas. Bait ar Rudaydah includes defensive features and traditional elements of architecture, with multiple arches, painted ceilings, elaborate plaster engravings and thick walls topped with towers constructed of brick clay.

DENSO SALES MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA FZE partners with Oman's Al Arabiya Group



Al Arabiya Group

DENSO Corporation, a global manufacturer of automotive components offering advanced automotive technologies, systems and products, was founded in Japan and spun off from Toyota Motor Corporation in 1949. Driven by Oman's market needs and DENSO's network expansion mission in Oman, DENSO MENA announced a partnership with Al Arabiya Group (Al Arabiya Unlimited), an Oman-based automotive spare parts company. Al Arabiya will be DENSO's authorized distributor for car AC parts in Oman and distribute DENSO's genuine high-quality aftermarket parts. DENSO will continue to collaborate with Al Arabiya Group to cover the aftermarket car AC parts demand and customer satisfaction in Oman. DENSO fulfils its corporate social responsibility by providing the world's top products and

technologies with 170,000 employees from its 200 global subsidiaries. Working in partnership with a range of car manufacturers, DENSO has invested extensively in car AC components, producing a range that is unique and consistent with OE part quality. Through product performance, R&D and a range tailored to the needs of manufacturers, the DENSO car AC system has gained a reputation for efficiency and reliability. With the utmost reputation achieved, DENSO has successfully marked its status as the No.1 AC supplier all over the world. Having a mindset that automation and mobility are vital tools of infrastructure, DENSO aftermarket mission is to establish a sales and service network, where end users can purchase high-quality parts and obtain high-quality service anywhere across the globe.

COMEX 2023 to offer tech bonanza in May

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With numerous conferences, workshops, seminars, training certification programmes, coding events, gaming activities and B2B meetings, the 32nd edition of COMEX is set to attract thousands of visitors over four days from May 22 to May 25 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC). Speaking at a discussion of the Advisory Board of COMEX held in Crowne Plaza Hotel OCEC on Tuesday, Dr Salim al Ruzaqi, Chairman of Oman Information Technology Society and the board, said, "This edition of COMEX will be one of the largest fairs for IT, telecommunications and consumer electronics in the region, bringing together the biggest and



Dr Salim al Ruzaqi

strongest brands in the world to introduce to visitors the latest products and services. The fair is an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues and business partners." The board presented the mission, vision and strategy for COMEX 2023 and detailed the achievements and growth in the last few years. Pavilions to look forward to this year include those of e-governance, enterprise arena, ICT



Amr Baabod

EDU, EDTECH, coding and gaming, banking and fintech, and ecommerce. On the occasion, Amr Baabod, Executive Director of COMEX, said, "For the last many years, we have successfully done the largest tech events in the country. This edition will witness new additions and attractions. COMEX believes that Oman will see new heights in tech advancements, especially in the fields of medicine, mobil-

ity, robotics, advanced and applied artificial intelligence, 3D printing, cybersecurity solutions, drones and e-commerce. This will enable human capital development in the field of advanced and future technologies. We have started meeting exhibitors, both government and tech giants, to showcase more than one future technology at COMEX 2023." Baabod also added that COMEX will go to Bahrain later this year in September. "The tech industry will witness an astounding showcase of business solutions from local and international companies at COMEX Bahrain. One can explore cutting-edge concepts in everything from AI, the metaverse, quantum computing, programming and cybertech, among many others."

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91105912

MOH No: 44/2023

Dakhliyah announces 17 development projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In order to stimulate the economy and implement recreational facilities, Dakhliyah is offering 17 projects for development in the governorate.

Bids are invited for a variety of projects, including public parks, recreational areas, and livestock barns.

An official of the governorate said, "Dakhliyah is calling on bidders to set up a recreational game area in the wilayat of Al Hamra on an area of 2,500sqm, a game area with electronic rides in Adam Park on 9,000sqm and

another in Manah Park on an area of 5,000sqm."

He informed that Dakhliyah Municipality is also inviting bids to establish an agricultural nursery in Nizwa of 560sqm and another in Izki of 1,439sqm. "Development and operation of Tanuf Park in the wilayat of Nizwa, spread over an area of 10,789sqm, is also open for bidding."

Tenders have also been announced to set up barns for livestock in Nizwa (1,500sqm) and Manah (270sqm).

Bids have been invited to establish a municipal park in Manah on an area of 7,787sqm,



Supplied photo

and separately, a recreational area for bicycles and electric scooters in Manah Public Park on an area of 448sqm.

A number of cafes in Nizwa and Jabal Akhdar are also being offered on rent.

The last date for submission of bids is March 30.

The developments are being undertaken under the Governorate Development Programme for which His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik raised the amount from RO10mn to RO20mn for each governorate for the current Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), starting from 2022.

Sheikh Khalifa receives US Special Envoy to Iran

Muscat - Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthi, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, received Robert Malley, US Special Envoy to Iran, on Tuesday.

The meeting touched on bilateral relations between the two countries in various fields. The two sides also discussed a wide spectrum of regional and international issues of mutual interest, as well as the efforts exerted to achieve peace and stability in the region.

The meeting was attended by officials from both sides.

On Sunday, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a written message to President Ebrahim Raisi of Iran, dealing with the bilateral relations binding the two countries and their peoples.

The message was handed over by Ibrahim Ahmed al Mu'aini, the sultanate's Ambas-



sador to Iran, when Dr Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, received him in Tehran.

During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed His Majesty the Sultan's sincere greetings and

best wishes of good health and happiness to President Raisi, as well as His Majesty's wishes of continuous progress and prosperity to the friendly people of Iran.

On his turn, the Iranian minis-

ter asked the ambassador to convey the Iranian President's greetings, appreciation and best wishes of further welfare and prosperity to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people.

The meeting covered the bilat-

The meeting touched on the bilateral relations between the two countries. The two sides also discussed a wide spectrum of regional issues, as well as the efforts exerted to achieve peace and stability in the region



(Supplied photo)

CPA shuts down manufacturing unit in Sinaw for violations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A home furniture manufacturing unit has been shut down for violating the Consumer Protection Law in North Sharqiyah.

A statement issued by the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) said, 'The Consumer Protection Department in Sinaw temporarily closed a commercial establishment for fraud and fail-

ure to provide the promised services to consumers.'

The authority confirmed that it is continuing to follow up and monitor markets to ensure that these are free of commercial fraud and to control malpractices that affect consumers' rights and safety. It called on all to cooperate with it by reporting such practices as soon as they are noticed in order to ensure a healthy and safe market.



Ministry survey launched to assess competency of Omani graduates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation launched Graduate Survey 2023 on Monday.

The month-long survey is aimed at assessing the output of higher education institutions and the compatibility and relevance of academic programmes and majors with requirements of the

labour market. It will also provide an opportunity to get information on the courses, training and programmes required for the labour market.

More than 72,000 graduates from different educational institutions in Oman and abroad are taking part in the survey, which seeks to assess the knowledge, skills and capabilities of Omani graduates and their preparedness to join the labour market.

The survey will give insights into the transition period between study and employment, including the time it takes to get a job.

The Graduate Survey 2023 is being implemented by the ministry's Department of Statistics and Information. It targets the graduates of 2018/2019, 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 from all higher education institutions in Oman and abroad.

Hajj registration open from Feb 21 to Mar 4

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) has announced that citizens and residents of Oman who wish to perform hajj in 1444 AH can register, starting from February 21 to March 4, through its electronic platform for pilgrims.

The quota for Oman in this year's hajj is 13,098 citizens and 500 residents.

MERA informed that registration can be done through www.hajj.om directly at the specified time.

The electronic platform presents three ways for direct registration - by entering the mobile, civil or ID card number - if the phone number and personal ID card are supported by the Electronic PKI authentication system.

Citizens and residents can request technical support and submit their queries through the MERA hotline 80008008 during official working hours, or through www.hajj.om.

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Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

EU adds Russia to its tax haven blacklist

The European Union added Russia to its tax haven blacklist on Tuesday, the latest in a series of economic and diplomatic measures taken against Moscow since its invasion of Ukraine.

In a statement, the bloc said Russia's 2022 tax legislation had failed to allay concerns over its opaque treatment of the tax affairs of international holding companies.

"In addition, dialogue with Russia on matters related to taxation came to a standstill following the Russian aggression against Ukraine," the European Council said.

Three more jurisdictions, the British Virgin Islands, Costa Rica and the Marshall Islands were also added to the now 16-strong "EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes".

Al Mouj launches Middle East's first ocean-side business park



Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Mouj Muscat has launched Al Mouj Business Park which offers 39,000 square meters of office space within eight mid-rise buildings set across two districts. The new business destination is situated within Al Mouj Golf, one of the world top 100 golf courses, with an exemplary location not seen anywhere else in the Middle East. At the launch event at Kempinski Hotel Muscat on Tuesday, a group of business leaders from across Oman were presented with the premier lifestyle destination's vision for a business park where its occupiers will enjoy an ocean-front setting and a delightful outlook across the golf course. They will also benefit from superb connec-



Al Mouj Business Park is a unique business district of 8 cutting edge ocean and mountain-view office buildings set within Al Mouj Golf

tivity and transport links and the support of Al Mouj Muscat's world-class leisure, commercial and tourism amenities. Al Mouj Business Park, a state-of-the-art complex, offers 39,000 square meters of office

Built to exacting Grade A standards, the buildings are separate yet seamlessly connected by beautifully landscaped gardens and outdoor spaces designed to be convivial to business networking. Offices range from 3,990 to 5,320 square meters with flexible floor plans and where the average floor plate is 1,300 square meters. There will be rooftop gardens and each building will have controlled access base-

ment car parking of between 115 and 148 spaces per office block. Companies choosing to locate at Al Mouj Business Park can take advantage of a sophisticated meetings and events ecosystem within neighbouring 4 and 5 star hotels and event spaces including those at Al Mouj Golf which has both a restaurant and an events marquee. The upcoming Okura Hotel and St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort are adjacent to the park

and the Kempinski, the Mysk and Rotana are in close proximity. Sheibani said, "It is a great honour to launch Al Mouj Business Park, a unique destination where business can be reimagined. We are looking forward to seeing Omani companies take their enterprises to the next level by choosing a base that, unlike traditional business parks, provides staff with a high-tech working environment which also supports their well-being and productivity." "The launch of Al Mouj Business Park clearly shows that it is possible to mix business with pleasure and we are confident of its success and how it will build on the extraordinary impact Al Mouj has had over the last 17 years as an engine for growth across tourism, employment and development," he added. A joint venture between the Omani government and Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Al Mouj Muscat is a dynamic and diverse community, now home to 8,000 residents and which attracts 4.9mn annual visitors to its coastal setting, boulevard style retail and dining experiences, luxury hotels, 400-berth marina and multi award-winning golf course.

Vale buys OQ's 30% stake in Vale Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Brazilian mining giant Vale on Tuesday announced the acquisition of OQ Group's 30 per cent stake in Vale Oman. After this acquisition, Vale Oman will become a 100 per cent foreign capital company in the sultanate, according to an Oman News Agency report. The acquisition, as per the report, is in line with OQ's efforts to attract foreign investment and enter partnerships that maximise the utilisation of Oman's natural resources. The ownership transfer is expected to conclude in the second quarter of this year with the full support of both parties as Vale Oman continues to make meaningful investments and expand its business in Oman and the region. On conclusion of the ownership transfer, Vale Oman will be 100 per cent owned by Brazil-based Vale SA. Vale Oman was established in 2007 as a 70:30 joint venture between Vale SA and OQ. The company owns a sophisticated iron ore pelletizing plant in Sohar with a production capacity of



Ownership transfer is expected to conclude in the second quarter of 2023 and after that Vale Oman will be 100% owned by Brazil-based Vale SA

over 9mn tonnes, in addition to a distribution center with a capacity of 40mn tonnes.

Vale is experiencing growth in the region with the introduction of a briquetting plant in Sohar. The new plant is expected to be approved by Vale's board in the middle of 2023, which will significantly contribute towards employment opportunities in Oman and enhance cross-border trade. Guilherme Reinisch Neves, chairman of Vale Oman, said, "OQ has been an invaluable partner in Oman guiding Vale through several successful business decisions and investments in the region. Our company is in-

credibly grateful for our long-lasting cooperation. In line with our strategic objectives to be a leader in sustainable mining and a talent-driven organization, Vale Oman continues to bolster its expansion in Oman and the region in line with global net-zero objectives, while investing in local human capital and in-country value initiatives." Talal Hamed al Awwi, CEO of OQ Group, said, "Selling OQ's stake in Vale Oman is in line with Oman Investment Authority's objective to attract and increase

foreign direct investment. We are proud to have been part of Vale's success in Oman and look forward to witnessing the company's growth in the coming years." He added that the deal emphasises Oman's position as an attractive destination for foreign investors. As an active corporate citizen in Oman, Vale supports in-country value (ICV) initiatives, including local supply chain development and CSR projects, with investments topping US\$1.4bn to date.



This file photo taken on January 20 shows an Air India aircraft on the tarmac at the Indira Gandhi International airport in New Delhi (AFP)

Air India to buy 250 Airbus planes in 'historic' deal

Bengaluru, India - Air India will buy 250 Airbus planes in a deal aimed at transforming the former national carrier, it said Tuesday, after decades as a monumental burden on the public purse. The airline will purchase 210 narrow-body A320neo jets and 40 long-haul A350 aircraft in an ambitious plan to capture domestic market share and fashion Indian airports into global travel hubs. "We are going through a massive transformation," said Air India chairman N. Chandrasekaran, announcing the deal with French President Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in virtual attendance. "One of the most important things is a modern fleet which can perform for all routes."

cent in September. The carrier is aiming to take a 30 per cent domestic share by the end of 2027 while expanding its fleet to cover more international routes. "According to several estimates, India will need over 2,000 aircraft in the next 15 years," said Modi. "This historic announcement will help in catering to this increasing demand." Macron said the deal highlighted the bond between Paris and New Delhi. "I want to tell everybody that for me, this very important contract and this achievement today is one of the milestones of the in-depth strategic and friendly partnership we have between India and France," he said. New Zealander Campbell Wilson was appointed Air India's first foreign chief executive last May to overhaul operations and return it to profitability. But the airline faced an onslaught of criticism for its response to a Wells Fargo executive who was allowed to disembark as normal after allegedly urinating on an elderly woman aboard a flight from New York late last year. AFP

Central Bank of Oman issues RO29mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week issued three tenders of government treasury bills worth a total of RO29mn. For the first tender, the value of allotted treasury bills amounted to RO12mn, for a maturity period of 28 days. The average accepted price reached RO99.654 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.650. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.5081 per cent and 4.5238 per cent, respectively.



For the second tender, the value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO12mn, for a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price reached RO98.774 for every RO100 bill,

and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO98.770. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.9168 per cent and 4.9778 per cent, respectively.

On the other hand, the third tender allotted treasury bills worth RO5mn, for a maturity period of 182 days. The average accepted price reached RO97.545 for every RO100 bill, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO97.545. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.9234 per cent and 5.0474 per cent, respectively. Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance. These instruments provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo). The repo rate with the CBO is 5.25 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 5.75 per cent. Treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. The government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

EU approves 2035 ban on new petrol cars

Strasbourg, France – The European Parliament on Tuesday gave its final approval to a ban on new sales of carbon-emitting petrol and diesel cars by 2035, with a view to getting them off the continent's roads by mid-century.

European Union member states have already approved the legislation and will now formally nod it into law at an upcoming ministerial meeting, despite opposition from conservative MEPs, the parliament's biggest group.

Supporters of the bill had argued to that it would give European carmakers a clear timeframe in which to switch production to zero-emission electric vehicles, and spur investment to counter competition from China and the United States.

This, in turn, will also support the European Union's ambitious plan to become a "climate neutral" economy by 2050, with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. "Let me remind you that between last year and the end of this year China will bring 80 models of electric cars to the international market," EU vice president Frans Timmermans warned MEPs.



Latvia's President Egils Levits delivers a speech as part of a plenary session at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, on Tuesday (AFP)

"These are good cars. These are cars that will be more and more affordable, and we need to compete with that. We don't want to give up this essential industry to outsiders."

But opponents argued that neither European industry nor many private motorists are ready for such a dramatic cut off in production of internal combustion

engine vehicles – and that hundreds of thousands of jobs are at risk.

"Our proposal is ... to let the market decide what technology is best to reach our goals," said MEP Jens Gieseke, a member of the centre-right European People's Party.

Gieseke declared that arguments from Green and socialist

MEPs that electric cars are cheaper to run had been rendered "null and void" by the crisis of soaring energy costs.

"In Germany 600,000 people work on ICE production, those jobs are at risk," he declared, urging the European Commission to rethink plans to also extend the ban to trucks and buses.

The EPP group warned of

what it said would be the "Havana effect" -- Europeans continuing to drive vintage fuel-burning cars after new sales are banned because they can't find or afford an electric.

Opponents also argue car batteries are produced abroad by Europe's competitors like the United States, but Timmermans argued that thanks to EU-backed

investment European production would increase.

Green MEPs stressed the importance of the ban in reducing emissions and pollution.

Victory for the planet?

Karima Delli, president of the transport committee, declared: "Today's vote is a historic vote for the ecological transition.

"We will no longer, or almost no longer, have petrol or diesel cars on our roads in 2050 ... it is a victory for our planet and our populations"

Cars currently account for about 15 per cent of all CO2 emissions in the EU, while transportation overall accounts for around a quarter.

In October last year, EU member states, the European Commission and parliament's negotiators agreed on a proposal to reduce CO2 emissions from new cars in Europe to zero by 2035.

In practice, in the final legislation, this means a halt to sales of new petrol and diesel cars, light commercial vehicles and hybrids in the bloc by that date, in favour of all-electric vehicles.

Car-making giant Germany and conservative MEPs have

been dubious about the new rules, fearing the burden of re-tooling their plants and retraining workers while global rivals have looser targets.

But the European car industry itself did not lobby hard against the law, with many firms already jockeying for position in the race to become electric vehicle giants.

Since the law began its journey through the EU legislative process, however, the United States has unveiled a huge plan to subsidise the green transition of its own industry with government hand-outs.

This has led to fears in Europe that its US rival will siphon away investment and jobs in electric vehicle and battery production.

Currently around 12 per cent of new cars sold in the European Union are electric, with consumers shifting away from CO2-emitting models as energy costs and greener traffic regulations bite.

Meanwhile, China – the world's biggest automobile market – wants at least half of all new cars to be electric, plug-in hybrid or hydrogen-powered by 2035.

The law passed the Strasbourg assembly by 340 votes to 279, with 21 abstentions.

AFP

India's scandal-hit Adani Enterprises back to profit

Mumbai, India – Indian billionaire Gautam Adani's flagship firm returned to profit in the December quarter, earnings reports showed Tuesday, as the tycoon insisted his businesses would bounce back from damaging corporate fraud allegations.

Investors wiped out around US\$120bn in value from Adani Group after US short-seller investment group Hindenburg Research last month accused it of using offshore tax havens to manipulate stock prices.

Indian regulators confirmed Monday that they were probing allegations raised in the report for potential instances of securities fraud and insider trading.

The conglomerate has been working to restore market confidence by pledging early repayment of US\$1.1bn in loans, and shares in its listed entities have since recovered from their rout.

Flagship Adani Enterprises posted a net profit of 8.2bn rupees (US\$99mn) for the three months to December, up from a loss of 116mn rupees from a year before, in a filing Tuesday.

"Our success is due to our strong governance, strict regulatory compliance, sustained performance, and solid cashflow generation," Adani, 60, said in the earnings report.



"The current market volatility is temporary," he added, saying the company was committed to keeping leverage "moderate" and looking for growth opportunities.

Revenue jumped 42 per cent on-year to 269bn rupees (US\$3.3bn).

Adani Enterprises shares closed 1.9 per cent higher in Mumbai.

The company's founder was until last month Asia's richest man but the stock market rout delivered a dramatic hit to his personal fortune, tumbling him down from third to 23rd on Forbes' real-time billionaires' list.

Hindenburg's report accused Adani of a "brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud scheme" in "the largest con in corporate history".

Adani artificially boosted the

share prices of its units by funneling money into the stocks through offshore tax havens, the investment group said.

The conglomerate has rejected the claims as a "maliciously mischievous" reputational attack.

India's capital markets regulator said in a Monday filing to the Supreme Court that it was probing "the allegations made in the Hindenburg report" and market activity before and after its publication. The Securities and Exchange Board of India said it was in the "early stages" of investigation and did not go into details.

Political opponents accuse Prime Minister Narendra Modi of abetting Adani's rapid rise, allowing the billionaire to unfairly win contracts and avoid proper regulatory oversight.

AFP

Japan GDP rebounds less than expected

Tokyo, Japan – Japan's economy expanded just 0.2 per cent in the last quarter of 2022, a smaller rebound than expected despite the long-awaited reopening of the country to tourists, government data showed Tuesday.

The figure for the three months to December fell short of the 0.5 per cent growth forecast by analysts surveyed by Bloomberg, with the world's third-largest economy growing 1.1 per cent for the calendar year.

Japan reopened its doors to tourists in October after two-and-a-half years of tough Covid-19 restrictions, lifting a cap on the number of arrivals and ending a rule requiring visitors to come on package tours.

In 2019, a record 31.9mn foreign visitors came to Japan, putting the country on track for its goal of 40mn by 2020, when Tokyo was supposed to host the Summer Olympics.

But in 2021, the figure plummeted to just 250,000.

"Japan saw moderate growth in Q4 2022," Hiroyuki Ueno, senior economist at SuMi TRUST, said in a note before the data was released.

"Consumer services benefited from an increase in domestic travel and a rise in inbound tourists," he wrote.

"Exports were resilient, reflecting the easing of supply constraints on automotive-related



In this file photo, cars bound for shipment are seen parked at Kawasaki Port in Tokyo, Japan (AFP)

goods and moves to restore inventories overseas."

A cheaper yen in the last year may have encouraged foreign visitors to spend more in Japan, though it also weighed on the spending power of Japanese households and the bottom line of some firms.

"Enterprises dependent on domestic demand enjoyed cheap imports and could reduce costs," wrote Ueno.

"However, export industries did not fare as well. Overall, a strong yen is still negative for the Japanese economy as a whole but not to the extent it was in previous decades."

External trade was positive for the quarter, compared to the

preceding period, as exports improved and imports were tamed with the slight recovery in the yen and the cost of fuel.

However, inflation hit four percent in December, a figure not seen in Japan for more than four decades.

Despite the price pressure, Japan's central bank has declined to shift gears on its ultra-easy monetary policy, convinced that inflation is being driven by temporary factors like fuel costs.

It wants to see sustained two-percent price growth to help turbocharge the economy, particularly through wage increases.

A new Bank of Japan governor will be nominated later Tuesday,

with economics professor Kazuo Ueda widely expected to replace Haruhiko Kuroda after his decade-long tenure ends in April.

Analyst Ueno said the outlook for the first half of 2023 "is positive", with the rise in import prices expected to taper off as inflation stabilises in Europe and the United States.

But others were less optimistic, with Taro Saito of NLI Research Institute forecasting that solid domestic demand would be counterbalanced by declining exports "mainly due to the slowdown in overseas economies."

"Therefore, low annual growth of around zero percent is currently estimated."

AFP

Oil prices fall over US crude reserve release plan

Ankara, Turkey – Oil prices fell on Tuesday over expectations of another release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) in the US, which offset market supply concerns.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$86.31 per barrel at 0646 GMT, down 0.3 per cent from the closing price of US\$86.61 a barrel in the previous trading session.

At the same time, American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at US\$79.50 per barrel, a 0.8 per cent drop after the previous session closed at US\$80.14 a barrel.

Oil prices came under pres-



sure after US President Joe Biden announced a plan on Monday to release oil from the

SPR. The plan includes the sale of 26mn barrels, which are set to

be delivered to the market from April 1 to June 30, according to international media

outlets.

The announcement came at a time when the SPR, the world's largest supply of emergency crude oil, fell to its lowest level since 1983.

Meanwhile, global markets continue to monitor upcoming macroeconomic data, especially the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in the US, and statements from US Federal Reserve (Fed) officials.

A higher-than-expected CPI reading will support expectations that the Fed will apply for a stronger interest rate hike, fueling recession fears and curtailing oil demand.

Anadolu Agency

US inflation eases in January but kept high by energy costs

Washington, US – US consumer inflation cooled slightly in January but the figure remains markedly above policymakers' target, boosted by rent and energy costs, Labor Department data showed on Tuesday.

The consumer price index (CPI), a key gauge of inflation, has come down from a blistering 9.1 per cent peak last June while the central bank embarked on an aggressive campaign to rein in soaring prices.

As households were squeezed by decades-high inflation, the Federal Reserve raised

the benchmark lending rate eight times over the past year, attempting to dampen demand and slow the pace of price increases.

With the effects of policy rippling through the economy, the CPI rose 6.4 per cent in January from a year ago – just a touch below December's figure and the smallest annual increase since October 2021. From December to January, CPI rose 0.5 per cent, picking up from 0.1 per cent in December and signaling the Fed's battle is not yet over.

AFP

Indian School Sur holds valedictory ceremony



Indian School Sur recently conducted a valedictory ceremony for the outgoing batch of class XII students of science and the first commerce stream batch of Indian School Sur.

Mohammed Ameen, president, School Management Committee and general manager of Sea Pride, was the chief guest of the occasion, a press release said. Ameen, urged the students to abstain from mediocrity and focus on doing extraordinary things in life. He stated that ordinary people look for security but extra-ordinary people look for opportunities and appealed to all the students to make the most of opportunities to demonstrate their success.

The programme began with a symbolic lighting the candle by principal Dr S Srinivasan who kindled the 'flame of hope and knowledge'. The SMC members congratulated the students on their successful completion of schooling and wished them a bright future as they march ahead towards greater academic pursuits. A group of teachers also presented a farewell song to the students wishing the students prosperity and success in their future endeavours.

The programme culminated with the presentation of mementos and citation scrolls to the prospective alumni.

HUAWEI AppGallery offers many V-Day gifts

Shopping apps have become a vital part of our daily lives, allowing us to purchase goods and services with just a few taps on our smartphones. For Valentine's day, shopping apps available on HUAWEI AppGallery offer help to select gifts for this special day.

From personalised gifts to unique experiences, AppGallery has everything to make Valentine's Day special. Whether you're looking for a romantic present or a unique experience, the available shopping apps cater to all your needs, providing a range of options to choose from. Explore some of the most popular shopping apps available on HUAWEI AppGallery, the official app distribution platform for HUAWEI devices, and one of the world's top three app marketplaces.

In addition, given Huawei emphasises user safety, you won't have to worry about the security of your transactions, and concentrate on great shopping.

Ooredoo introduces advanced solutions for businesses

Providing businesses in Oman with superior connectivity and cutting edge digital solutions, Ooredoo recently brought together over 50 Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs), as well as Small and Home Offices (SOHOs).

Ooredoo organised the SME event to connect with its partners and showcase opportunities and industry trends. The company also shows how its leading Information Communications Technology (ICT) can support the growth of businesses of various sizes, sectors, and demographics, a press release said.

"A majority of small businesses in Oman have a strong value proposition and a great impact on our communities and the economy," said Saied al Lawati, director of Business Marketing and ICT Solutions at Ooredoo. "The event was a great opportunity for business owners and employees to network and also further strengthens our relationship with companies of all sizes and across all industries. With excellent fixed and mobile services and smart solutions in place, we continue to elevate to our service offerings in order to support our partners to successfully run, digitise and optimise their operations."

Smart, state of the art solutions offered by Ooredoo to businesses include, Dahua



SAIED AL LAWATI
DIRECTOR-BUSINESS MARKETING & ICT SOLUTIONS,
BUSINESS MARKETING

Smart interactive Screen, Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV), and Private Automatic Business Exchange (PABX), WiFi Solutions, and Microsoft 360 to name but a few. Leading Oman's digital transformation, Ooredoo is continuously focused on supporting the requirements of businesses.

The company's growing portfolio includes several highly innovative, dynamic and flexible business products, services, and solutions, covering both, mobile and fixed technologies.

Ooredoo has everything its corporate customers need to take their businesses to the next level.

Muscat Fighting Championships gets WBC nod

Muscat Fighting Championships (MFC) opens doors to the boxing arena in Oman on March 10 with a fight card sanctioned by the world-renowned international boxing federation, the World Boxing Council (WBC).

MFC is a non-profit private martial arts sporting league established to serve as a vehicle to promote local Omani athletes and act as a catalyst to launch them to the international arena. With the support of its international sanctioning bodies and affiliations such as the World Boxing Council (WBC), MFC aims to uncover young, talented MMA enthusiasts and set the stage to launch them into the world of international competitions, a press release said.

Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) is the fastest growing sport today. Amongst other disciplines, it comprises judo, boxing, taekwondo, kickboxing, wrestling and jiu jitsu. Since 2010, martial arts have attracted over 250,000 students across Oman with over 10 mainstream private clubs having more than 25 actively competing athletes at present, all of which will be competing in the MFC.

In-line with Oman Vision 2040, MFC aims to bridge the gap between the private and public sector whereby promoting sports tourism in Oman which will contribute to the socio-economic of the sultanate, particularly in creating new employment opportunities for the Omani youth.

Furthermore, through promotion of martial arts, MFC aims to promote healthier lifestyles.

Dr Richard Leandri joins KimsHealth

Eminent plastic, aesthetic, and reconstructive surgeon, Dr Richard Leandri has joined KimsHealth Hospital, in Darsait.

Dr Richard is a highly experienced surgeon, who, in his 46-year career has successfully completed over 36,000 major surgeries. Hailing from France, Dr Richard is an award winning surgeon, and has obtained his training in Europe and Canada.

Dr Richard has been practising



in Oman for the past ten years in treating complex cases emanating from accidents, metabolic troubles, excess fat, hernias and cancers, minimising physical deformities. He excels in plastic, aesthetic, reconstructive and micro-surgery, body reshaping, arm plasty, liposuction, abdominoplasty, breast augmentation, gynecomastia, repair surgery for genital tractus (male and female) and many others.

Online registration for admission to Indian schools begins

The online registration for admission in Indian schools in the capital area for the next academic year (2023-2024) is in progress and the last date to register is February 28.

Parents who seek admission for their wards in Indian schools in the capital area may visit www.indianschoolsoman.com for more details regarding the admission procedures, a press release said.

In addition to the CBSE curriculum, Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir and Indian School Al Ghubra provide International Curriculum as well.

For admissions in the international wing (IGCSE/AS Level/A Level Cambridge Syllabus) of Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir, parents need to approach the school directly.

(For more information, visit the School website www.iswki.org or call at admission hotline number and WhatsApp number: +968 90122012, Landline number: 22356050, or click on <https://iswki.org/admissions/online-admission/> for inquiries.)

Indian School Al Ghubra International provides Advanced Subsidiary (AS Level) and Advanced (A Level) Cambridge curriculum as well. For admissions in the International wing of Indian School Al Ghubra, contact the Vice Principal at 24493377 or write to isgi_office@indianschool.com.



Oman to host Pakistani veterans' hockey series from Feb 23-27

Oman will be hosting a bevy of Pakistani hockey greats as a star-studded Pakistan veterans hockey team will be playing a hockey series with Oman national veterans hockey team at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex - hockey ground.

Three matches are scheduled to be played on February 23, 25 and 27, a press release said.

According to Oman Hockey Association, these matches are a part of Oman Veterans hockey team's preparation for the upcoming Masters hockey tournament in Hong Kong China.

Legendary hockey star — Olympian Islahuddin Siddiqui will be coming to Oman as team manager, while many former Olympians and International hockey players will be part of the team. Hockey lovers and fans will have a great opportunity to meet former hockey Olympic gold medalists and world hockey champions.

BMW presents new luxury X5, X6

BMW presents the extensively updated new editions of its successful Sports Activity Vehicle (SAV) and Sports Activity Coupé (SAC) for the luxury segment. The new BMW X5 and new BMW X6 emphasise their inherent poise and assurance with detailed design revisions and additions to their standard specification.

The update will provide the BMW X5 with everything it needs to maintain worldwide market leadership in its segment and enable the BMW X6 to secure its position as number one ahead of competitors from other premium German manufacturers. The two models will be built at BMW Group Plant Spartanburg in the USA, the competence centre for BMW X models, and their global launch gets underway in April 2023, a press release said.

The inclusion of the xLine design elements as standard gives the BMW X5 significantly greater presence and visual robustness. Its front end is shaped by the fresh interpretation of the hallmark BMW headlights and



kidney grille. The new headlight units now have a 35mm slimmer outline. Their arrow-shaped daytime driving light elements point outwards and also serve as turn signal indicators. Matrix LED headlights with adaptive control and BMW Selective Beam non-dazzling high beam, plus M Shadowline lights, are included on the options list.

The new BMW X6 also has slim headlight units with arrow-shaped daytime driving light elements. As before, the BMW kidney Iconic Glow is offered as an option for the six-cylinder models. The dynamic character of the new BMW X6 is highlighted even more intently with the now standard M Sport package. The M Sport package is available as an option for the new BMW X5 to convey the feeling of exclusive dynamism, as it does as standard in the design of the new BMW X6. They include double bars and an M logo for the BMW kidney grille, M exterior mirror caps in Black high-gloss, exhaust system tailpipe trim in the hallmark M quad-pipe style.

Connect Oman Conference highlights energy prospects

The Energy Industries Council, the world's leading energy-agnostic trade association, has launched its first EIC Connect Oman, part of EIC event solutions which bring together supply chain businesses with decision and policy makers from around the globe.

EIC Connect Oman, held in the capital Muscat on February 7, presented a unique opportunity for energy companies to network, share knowledge, and establish partnerships in one of the Middle East's major energy producers, which also boasts an ambitious green hydrogen strategy. The event attracted participants, including government officials, national operators, EPC contractors and developers, a press release said.

"Oman has been making major investments in the energy



sector and is indeed an important regional hub for both conventional and unconventional energy industries," said Ryan McPherson, EIC's regional director for Middle East and Africa. "We at the EIC are always keen to create business opportunities for our members and clients and connect them with important decision makers, and our first EIC

Connect Oman has successfully achieved that. It is, indeed, a testimony to the ever-increasing global demand for our events and data solutions."

Connect Oman opened with remarks by Michael Eyley, director of Trade and Investment and first secretary Defence & Security at the Department for International Trade, the event's

supporting partner. Faiza al Harthi, head of Energy Environment and Natural Resources at Oman Vision 2040, also gave introductory remarks.

In an overview of Oman's energy market, Dina Magdy, an EIC business development manager, presented EICDataStream data showing that Oman will invest US\$91.6bn till 2030.

Wali of Salalah recognises Muriya's positive impact

Muriya, Oman's largest real estate and tourism developer, was recently recognised by Sheikh Mohammed Saif al Busaidi, Wali of Salalah, in the Governorate of Dhofar for its efforts to make a positive impact on the community, near its flagship destination, Hawana Salalah.

Receiving a token of appreciation on behalf of Muriya were Younis al Kindi, head of Government Affairs and Samira al Bahri, director of Human Resources and Administration. As one of the largest and most diversified developers in Oman, Muriya contributes to the nation's economic development by ensuring long-term value for tourism, real estate, and leisure, a press release said.

Muriya, master developer of Hawana Salalah and Jebel Sifah, is a partnership between OMRAN, the leading government arm for tourism development in Oman, and Orascom Development Holding, an internationally acclaimed developer of fully-integrated towns.



many impact-driven Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. Meanwhile, as a future-ready organisation, we always put the empowerment of local talent first. We consider this approach to be one of the most impactful ways to grow and thrive together with our communities."

Muriya's contributions are designed to benefit the local community, contribute to people's health and well-being, empower women and young talent. What unites all these various areas of endeavour is that they are part of Muriya's wider Corporate Social Responsibility programme to create a difference in all the communities in which it operates.

Education is an important pillar for Muriya's CSR strategy. The company upgraded and redecorated the library at the British School in Salalah and distributed gifts at school events. In addition, the developer collaborated with the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs to help build a Mosque in Salalah. When it comes to women entrepreneurs in the Governorate of Dhofar, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development, Muriya helped Omani women in showcasing their products and crafts in Hawana Salalah.

Step Conference 2023 to launch new Earth Track

Step Conference 2023, the leading technology festival for emerging markets, is introducing the Earth Track for the first time this year, powered by C3 - Companies Creating Change.

The conference will bring together more than 400 global startups, hundreds of global investors and more than 8,000 attendees on February 22-23 and is presented by Dubai Internet City, a leading technology hub

and a member of TECOM Group PJSC a press release said.

In line with the announcement of UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan that 2023 will be the 'Year of Sustainability' in the UAE, Step is launching a new strategic forum, the 'Earth Track'. Discussions in the Earth Track will focus on financing a net-zero future, the realities of a circular economy, edtech, health-tech and web3,

amongst others.

Ammar al Malik, executive vice president - Commercial, TECOM Group, said, "A sustainable future is digitally driven. As digital transformation touches all industries, the tech sector must lead the change for innovative solutions to pressing environmental problems. With the Earth Track, Step is leveraging its platform to start a conversation that involves innovators, policymakers,

investors, and corporate decision-makers. We are delighted to support Step since this new chapter aligns with Dubai Internet City's values of collaboration and innovation for the greater good. Not only do we hope to see impactful partnerships and insights come from this year's conference, but we also believe it demonstrates how the UAE champions sustainability and carbon neutrality."

Ministry of Education launches Bait Al Zubair reading competition

The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with Bait Al Zubair Foundation, inaugurated the third edition of Bait Al Zubair Competition for School Reading Initiatives on Tuesday under the auspices of H E Professor Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, at Bait Al Zubair Museum in Muscat.

In a statement, H E Ambosaidi said, "The Ministry of Education is keen to strengthen the partnership between various institutions in order to improve the work quality, and the launch of this competition will enhance

reading awareness and reading skills among students. We hope that schools will encourage their students to participate in this competition. We also hope that this partnership will extend to other aspects in the future."

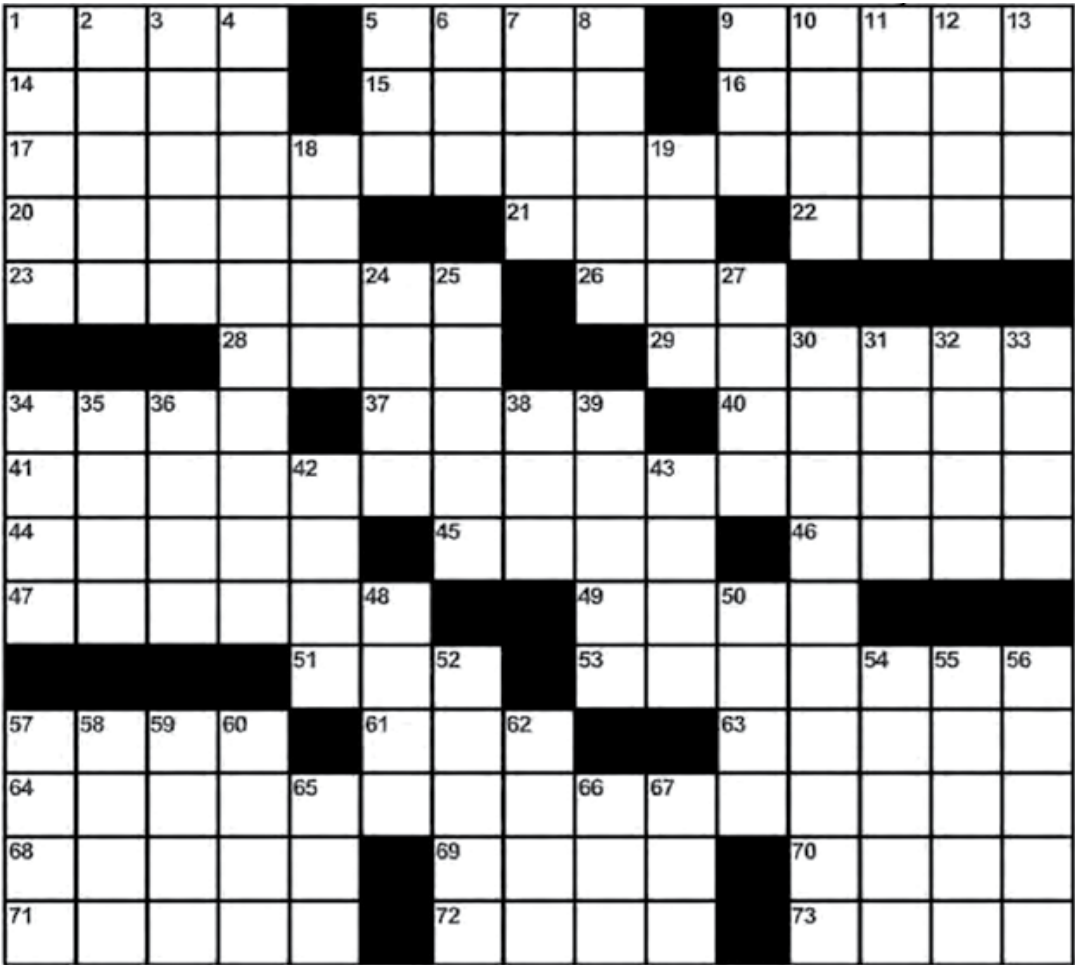
The inauguration ceremony included a speech by Younis al Kharboushi, in which he emphasised the ministry's belief in the continuity and consolidation of partnership between the government and private sectors in these qualitative and sustainable initiatives. He also pointed that the shared vision between the ministry and Bait Al Zubair to launch an initiative that serves



the school community to continue the process of learning and education is the main reason for the continuation and development of this competition and its development, a press release said.

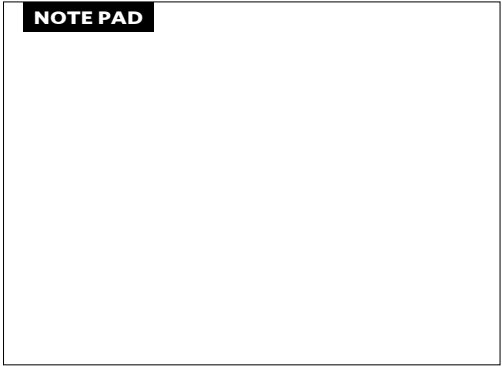
Fatima al Shukri, on behalf of Bait Al Zubair, said the competition aspires to achieve many goals in line with Oman Vision 2040, the most prominent of which is strengthening community partnership with educational institutions to build a knowledge society, instill values of initiative and creativity, and discover student talents in order to encourage and refine them.

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Delivery advice
 - 5) Ty of the Baseball Hall of Fame
 - 9) Group of female elephant seals
 - 14) Populous continent
 - 15) Common fertilizer compound
 - 16) Nice school?
 - 17) Three before "down"
 - 20) Armistice
 - 21) Red, white and blue inits.
 - 22) Ago, long ago
 - 23) Cement alternative
 - 26) Barley bristle
 - 28) Tool for a duel
 - 29) Try again, legally
 - 34) Alphabetize, perhaps
 - 37) "... does it"
 - 40) One time through
 - 41) Three before "down"
 - 44) "That was_ miss!"
 - 45) Bunker, for one
 - 46) Male turkeys
 - 47) _and Herzegovina
 - 49) London art gallery
 - 51) Type of tide
 - 53) Arctic parkas
 - 57) Squelches a squeak
 - 61) William Tell's Canton
 - 63) Extra-important exam
 - 64) Three before "down"
 - 68) Public perception
 - 69) Particular pop
 - 70) Nautical direction
 - 71) Chic or jaunty
 - 72) Eat supper backward?
 - 73) For fear that
- DOWN**
- 1) Carbo loader's en tree
 - 2) Manipulative ones
 - 3) Promote good posture
 - 4) Professional killer
 - 5) It can be chalked up
 - 6) Dungeons & Dragons humanoid
 - 7) Boyfriend
 - 8) Light wood
 - 9) Males
 - 10) Sense of soreness
 - 11) Have a good laugh
 - 12) Masons' colleagues
 - 13) Join up
 - 18) Look before you do this
 - 19) Bryn _ College
 - 24) Bruce and Jason
 - 25) Instruct
 - 27) Head holder
 - 30) More than funny
 - 31) Sound effect
 - 32) Many a homecoming attendee
 - 33) Steeps flax
 - 34) Bayonet thrust
 - 35) Words of woe
 - 36) Wishes it weren't so
 - 38) Hindu holy man's address
 - 39) Black Sea port
 - 42) Creamy cracker topper
 - 43) Chieftain's group
 - 48) Border on
 - 50) Curdled soybean milk
 - 52) Prepare for a collision
 - 54) Tarsus location
 - 55) Hardy cabbages
 - 56) Icy wet stuff
 - 57) Kimono sashes
 - 58) "Joy of Cooking" author

- Rombauer
- 59) Grassy meadows
- 60) Droops down
- 62) Xerox competitor, once
- 65) Lock opener
- 66) Seed remover Whitney
- 67) Terrible



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

As devoted as you are to your friends and loved ones, you cannot be responsible for them. So if one of them comes under attack today, you need to think twice before stepping up to defend them. In doing so, you could be inserting yourself into a situation that is much more complex than you truly understand. Instead, you should step back and let them handle this thing on their own. They won't feel let down -- deep down, they know that you're there if they need you later.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

A friend or coworker is doing something exciting with their life. You want to be doing this, too. So what's stopping you? You don't need any more resources than you already have. Just up your creativity and throw in a little bit of drive. What's the best way to enliven your creativity and drive? Get out and mix it up with different types of people! It's a good time to make a date, meet up with an old friend, or just go out into the world by yourself and start some sassy conversations.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Don't worry -- the power struggle you are having with an authority figure today won't create long-lasting tension in your life. These things happen from time to time, and are simply part of dealing with powerful people. In a way, they are very effective educational tools: You learn more when you challenge someone than when you just go along with what they say because you are afraid to disagree. If everyone doesn't agree it isn't the end of the world -- it's the beginning of a great discussion.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which kingdom, established by King Wickramabahu in the 14th century, repelled invasions by the Portuguese and the Dutch in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and the British in the 19th century, until the signing of a treaty with the British in March 1815?

A. Burma
B. Goa
C. Kandy
D. Siam

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

The interpersonal energy of a person who you will have to deal with today is going to be less than ideal, so it will be up to you to even out the balance and keep the conversation positive. Luckily, you are in a very positive communication phase. If an interaction takes a strange turn, you'll be totally ready to steer it back onto a more productive track. Meanwhile, taking extra-good care of yourself is a must. Give yourself a treat. Then and relax and enjoy it!

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Karma is definitely on your side right now, so you can expect some valuable payback for all the good deeds you've performed in the recent past. Don't brag about this windfall, though. It will only send the wrong message about who you are to the world. Humility is part of who you are. You're learning more about how to use these wonderful victorious moments to feed your self-esteem in a healthy way, and it will start bringing very important people to your side.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You don't need to completely check out of whatever's going on in your world in order to delve into deep self examination today. But it would be a very good idea to take another look at yourself and what your short-term goals are. Do some research -- there are many loose ends dangling, and each one of them will lead you to a host of new ideas for improving your current situation. Explore, analyze, and then formulate a new plan. It's time to revise your approach, based on solid facts and figures.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

If you hit the ground running this morning, you will be able to get all your errands done earlier -- which means you will have a lot more free time, when you can do anything you want! If you have been feeling a bit overwhelmed by everything, be sure to get some alone time this afternoon. How about taking in a movie? Or, if you have been meaning to have a long catch-up phone call with a long-distance loved one, give them a ring early this evening! Use your time wisely.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your keen eye will help someone out, today, when you notice that they've forgotten a very important element. This element could be a fun person who has been left off the guest list, a busy but smart coworker who hasn't had time to weigh in about a project, or a fact they have neglected to double check. The overall effect will be a rise in your prestige among the group of people involved. No more holding back due to the fear that people will think you're a know-it-all! That's not wise behavior.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You are smart enough to know that you have to be careful in business deals, so don't listen when someone encourages you to 'go for broke' and dive headfirst into a shady-sounding enterprise. Even if you are tempted by their promises of easy money, do not listen to them. This person is insulting your intelligence by thinking that you don't know that nothing in life is free, but they themselves are probably not as savvy as you are. They don't know what they're talking about, so educate them.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Even if you don't quite know how to express your feelings to someone today, any kind of communication is going to be good communication. Get a conversation started -- that's all that really matters. Don't worry that you're not being clever enough, articulate enough or serious enough. The tone of your discussions will be organic -- it will evolve in whatever way it needs to evolve. If you think too far ahead, you will keep yourself from speaking. And that is counterproductive.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Withholding your true feelings about a person might seem to you like a wise strategy. You know, 'if you can't say something nice it's better to say nothing at all.' But to some, holding back on your true feelings is the same as keeping a secret. They feel left out, not knowing what you really think. You can't be the perfect diplomat all the time, so loosen up and feel free to share your genuine thoughts. It's not idle gossip -- it's just honest communication.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If someone seems like they are being a little bit too critical about something you said or did today, try not to take it personally. Take it for what it is - honesty. You can't blame another person for saying what they think. They're giving you credit for being a person whose ego can handle it. If you value their opinion, you value it for a reason. Don't start doubting their judgment now, just because they might not be telling you what you want to hear.

02. Which Apollo mission was the first to land on the moon?

A. 11
B. 12
C. 10
D. 13

03. In the first half of the 18th century in Great Britain, what drug became so popular, particularly in London, that several laws were passed trying to restrict its use?

A. Gin
B. Laudanum
C. Morphine
D. Brandy

Answers: 1. C, 2. A, 3. A

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

V	K	A	B
S	O	R	S
V	E	R	O
Y	I	T	O

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

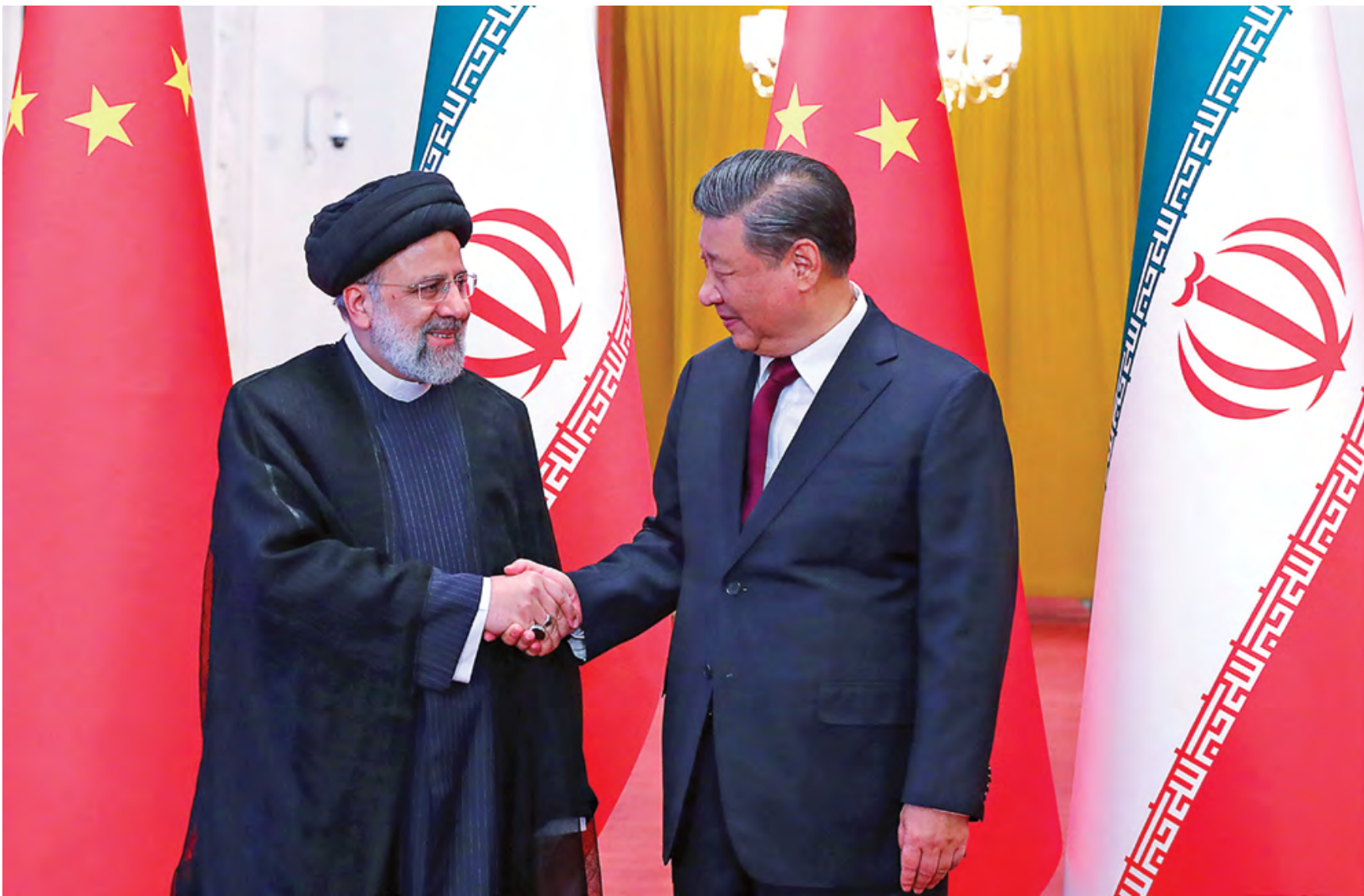
Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

China's Xi hails Iran 'solidarity' during 'complex' world situation

It was first visit by an Iranian president to China in more than 20 years



Chinese President Xi Jinping welcoming the Islamic Republic's President Ebrahim Raisi during his visit in Beijing on Tuesday (AFP)

Beijing, China - Chinese President Xi Jinping hailed Beijing's 'solidarity' with Iran on Tuesday as he hosted the Islamic republic's President Ebrahim Raisi at the start of a three-day trip.

For the first state visit by an Iranian president to China in more than 20 years, Raisi has brought a large trade and finance delegation to Beijing and was earlier greeted by Xi on a red carpet. "In the face of the current complex changes in the world, times, and history, China and Iran have supported each other (and) worked together in solidarity and cooperation," Xi said, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Both countries face pressure from Western nations over their positions on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while Iran is already under strict US sanctions due to its nuclear programme.

Iran has emerged as one of Russia's few remaining allies as Moscow has been pushed

deeper into international isolation over the invasion.

Western countries have accused Tehran of supplying armed drones to Russia for use in the war in Ukraine, a charge it denies.

In December, Washington outlined what it said was an extensive relationship between Iran and Russia involving equipment

guarding national sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national dignity... and in resisting unilateralism and hegemonism', CCTV reported Xi as saying.

Beijing also 'opposes external forces interfering in Iran's internal affairs and undermining Iran's security and stability', and will con-

According to CCTV, the two sides signed a number of bilateral cooperation documents in the fields of agriculture, trade, tourism, environmental protection, health, disaster relief, culture and sport.

Largest trading partner

Raisi and Xi met for the first time last September at a Shanghai Co-operation Organisation summit in Uzbekistan, where the Iranian president called for expanded ties.

According to Iranian state news agency IRNA, Raisi will take part in meetings with Chinese businessmen and Iranians living in the country.

China is Iran's largest trading partner, IRNA said, citing the 10-month statistics of Iranian customs authorities. Tehran's exports to Beijing stood at US\$12.6bn, while it imported US\$12.7bn worth of goods from

China.

Raisi is being accompanied by the country's foreign minister and the ministers for the economy, roads and transportation, and oil. Also attending is the minister for industry, mining and trade, as well as the minister for agriculture, according to Iranian state television.

His delegation also includes Ali Bagheri, Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs and its chief nuclear negotiator.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said Raisi would meet with Premier Li Keqiang and top Chinese legislator Li Zhanshu.

Raisi's first visit to China comes days after he declared victory over the nationwide protest movement triggered by the death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, following her arrest for an alleged breach of Iran's dress code for women.

AFP



Faleh al-Subaie (right) from King Salman Humanitarian Aid And Relief Centre, speaks with officials in northern Syria on Tuesday (AFP)

Saudi plane with aid lands in Syria, first in a decade

Aleppo, Syria - A Saudi Arabian plane carrying aid to quake-hit Syria landed in second city Aleppo on Tuesday - the first in more than a decade of war, a transport ministry official told AFP.

Planeloads of foreign aid have landed in Syria since a 7.8-magnitude quake struck the war-torn country and neighbouring Turkey killing more than 35,000 people.

"This is the first plane from Saudi Arabia to land on Syrian territory in more than 10 years," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he is not allowed to speak to the press.

The Saudi plane landed at Aleppo International Airport carrying 35 tonnes of food aid, state news agency SANA reported.

Two more Saudi planes are scheduled to land Wednesday and Thursday, another transport ministry official, Suleiman Khalil, told AFP.

The last such flight landed in Syria in February 2012.

After more than a decade of war, President Bashar al-Assad's

government remains a pariah in the West, complicating international efforts to assist those affected by the quake.

The Arab League suspended Syria in 2011 and some Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, have severed ties. Saudi Arabia broke off relations with President Bashar al-Assad's government in 2012 and backed rebels in earlier stages of the war.

Riyadh has pledged aid to both rebel-held and government-controlled areas of the country.

On Saturday, it sent a first aid convoy of 11 trucks to rebel-held northwestern Syria, loaded with 104 tonnes of food and tarpaulins, the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said.

There was no direct contact with the Assad government, an official at King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre told AFP earlier.

More than 3,600 people have been killed by the quake in Syria alone, according to the government and emergency services in the rebel-held northwest.

AFP

Israel troops kill Palestinian teen during raid in West Bank

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian teenager in the occupied West Bank early on Tuesday, Palestinian officials said, with the army saying troops opened fire after the suspect approached them with explosives.

The Palestinian health ministry said Mahmud Majid Mohammed al-Aidi, 17, died from

'critical wounds he sustained by live occupation (Israeli) bullets to the head' at Al-Fara refugee camp north of Nablus.

"During activity in the Al-Fara camp, a Palestinian suspect approached the soldiers with an explosive device. The soldiers responded with live fire. A hit was identified," the army said.

AFP

Crackdown on bandits: Kenya to deploy troops in country's north

Nairobi, Kenya - Kenya will deploy troops in the country's drought-stricken north on Wednesday, the government announced, accusing bandits and livestock rustling terrorists' in the Northern Rift Valley region over the past six months, the interior ministry said in a statement late n Monday.

More than 100 civilians and 16 police officers have lost their lives at the hands of 'marauding bandits and livestock rustling terrorists' in the Northern Rift Valley region over the past six months, the interior ministry said in a statement late n Monday.

The theft of livestock or quarrels over grazing and water sources are common between cattle herding communities in northern Kenya.

"The murderous gangs have in recent days escalated their terror on innocent Kenyans and law enforcement agencies and in the process burnt down schools, police vehicles and other social amenities," the ministry said.

Hundreds of people have been forced to flee their homes, it added, declaring a national emergency and ordering citizens



A US Army soldier offers training to Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) soldiers during training in Isiolo county on Monday (AFP)

to surrender any illegal firearms within the next three days.

"On the 15th (of) February, 2023, the Kenya Defence Forces shall be deployed in support of the National Police Service in response to the security emergency... caused by rampant incidents of banditry," the government said in a gazetted notice published on Monday.

The deployment is subject to approval by parliament.

At least 11 people, including

eight police and a local chief, were killed by cattle rustlers in September in northern Turkana county.

In November 2012, more than 40 policemen were killed in an ambush as they pursued cattle thieves in Baragoi, a remote district in Kenya's arid north.

And in August 2019, at least 12 people, including three children, were killed in two attacks in northern Kenya by cattle rustlers.

AFP

Turkey-Syria quake: Focus turns to survivors

Kahramanmaras, Turkey - Among the rubble, hundreds of thousands of homeless people face cold and hunger as authorities in Turkey and Syria tackle the dire humanitarian disaster caused by the earthquake that has left more than 35,000 dead.

As hopes of finding people alive under the debris fade more than a week after the quake struck, the focus has switched to providing food and shelter to the vast numbers of survivors.

According to the Turkish government, about 1.2mn people have been housed in student residences, more than 206,000 tents have been erected and 400,000 victims evacuated from the devastated areas.

The disaster has also exacted a psychological toll. In a tent city near the quake's epicentre in Kahramanmaras, father-of-four Serkan Tatoglu, 41, described how his family was haunted by their losses as they waited out the aftershocks.

"The youngest, traumatised by the aftershocks, keeps asking: 'Dad, are we going to die?'" Tatoglu said of his six-year-old.

Turkey's Vice President Fuat



People wait hoping for news of their relatives as rescue teams search in Kahramanmaras on Tuesday (AFP)

Oktay said 574 children pulled from collapsed buildings were found without any surviving parents. Only 76 had been returned to other family members.

One voluntary psychologist working in a children's support centre in hard-hit Hatay province said numerous parents were frantically looking for missing kids. "We receive a barrage of calls about missing children,"

Hatice Goz said by phone. "But if the child still cannot speak, the family is unable to find them."

'Millions need to be fed'

In the devastated Turkish city of Antakya, clean-up teams have been shifting rubble and putting up basic toilets as the telephone network started to come back in parts of the town, an AFP re-

porter said.

The city was patrolled by police and soldiers deployed to prevent looting following several incidents over the weekend.

"Send any stuff you can because there are millions of people here and they all need to be fed," Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu appealed late on Sunday.

AFP

Philippine bachelor mayor gives single staff extra pay on Valentine’s Day

Manila, Philippines - A life-long bachelor mayor in the Philippines is giving single staff extra pay on Tuesday for Valentine’s Day, to show gratitude for the extra hours they work and show that ‘someone loves them’.

Lonely hearts at General Luna town hall in Quezon province will receive three times their normal daily wage if they have been single for more than five years, Mayor Matt Florido told AFP.

Other footloose and fancy-free staff will get double pay - or the option to take a paid day off.

“I know what they’re going through today, I feel for them,” said Florido, 42, who says he has been single ‘since birth’.

“On Valentine’s Day no one will give them chocolates, flowers... so we thought of giving them this kind of incentive so they can also feel someone cares for them, someone loves them.”

It is the third year in a row that Florido has handed out bonus payments to singletons in local government.

Of the 289 town hall employees, 37 qualified for the compensation after passing a stringent vetting process to confirm their claimed single status.

Eligible staff were asked questions about when they were last in a relationship, the reasons they broke up, and why they are still single.

The eldest recipient was 64.

“We are just a small town so everyone knows everyone. You can’t hide anything,” said Florido of the pineapple-growing municipality.

Florido said he would finance the 28,000 peso (US\$511) handout from his own pocket, adding that the money was also an acknowledgement of the demands placed on single staff to work additional hours when needed.

“They have light responsibilities at home so every time

We thought of giving them this incentive so they can feel someone loves them

MATT FLORIDO

we need them to work overtime, when we have relief operations, or lose sleep to serve the town, we can always count on them,” he said.

Florido said staff already romantically attached did not seem to object to their single colleagues getting extra pay.

“Maybe they understand what the single people are going through,” he said.

The payments will be given to singletons at a Valentine’s Day party for all staff on Tuesday evening.

Activities on the night will include dating games.

AFP

As Ukraine seeks jets, NATO pushes to keep ammo flowing

Brussels, Belgium - Ukraine’s Western backers focused at a meeting on Tuesday on keeping ammunition and arms flowing to the war-torn nation, as Kyiv presses for fighter jets to push Russia back.

President Volodymyr Zelensky has knuckled down on his plea for Western aircraft after securing commitments for tanks, air defence and precision missiles. But allies insist they are scrambling to ensure his forces have the ammunition they need on the ground to push back renewed Russian offensives.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov tweeted he was focused on building an ‘aviation platform’, winning more promises of tank supplies and ensuring ammunition stocks.

Representatives from over 50 nations backing Kyiv were involved at the meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

“This has become a grinding war of attrition and therefore it’s also a battle of logistics,” NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said.

“This is a huge effort by allies to actually be able to get in the ammunition, the fuel, the spare parts, which are needed.”

Ukraine’s Western supporters - spearheaded by the United States - have already supplied billions of dollars of arms to help Kyiv hold Moscow back.

‘Hold and advance’

Now, just under a year into the war, Stoltenberg said Russian President Vladimir Putin appears to have started a long-awaited new offensive in east Ukraine.

“We will support Ukraine’s fight for freedom over the long



Various representatives attend the two-day meeting of the alliance’s Defence Ministers at the NATO headquarters in Brussels on Tuesday

haul, and help Ukraine hold and advance during the spring counter-offensive,” US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin said.

“We must intensify our focus. Ukraine has urgent requirements to help it meet this crucial moment,” he said.

The fighting is consuming vast quantities of ammunition, straining stockpiles and industries on both sides of the confrontation.

Stoltenberg warned that Kyiv’s current rate of expenditure was ‘many times higher’ than the output in NATO countries.

Allies continue to raid their shelves for the rounds - espe-

cially 155-mm shells - that Ukraine is firing by the thousands each day.

NATO is scrambling to get its factories to pump out more, and allies are eyeing plans for joint weapons purchases, higher defence spending and longer-term contracts.

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said Berlin had signed a deal with manufacturer Rheinmetall to restart production of ammunition for Gepard air defence guns sent to Ukraine.

Jet not ‘most urgent’

Zelensky issued a powerful call

We will support Ukraine’s fight for freedom over the long haul, and help Ukraine hold and advance during spring counter-offensive. We must intensify our focus. Ukraine has urgent requirements

LLOYD AUSTIN

during a trip to London, Paris and Brussels last week for NATO members to send fighter planes and longer-range missiles.

The Ukrainian leader won a commitment from Britain to train pilots but did not get any firm promises that his forces will get Western planes.

Slovakia has said it is willing to discuss sending Soviet MIG-29 planes to help replace losses to Ukraine’s current stocks.

Dutch Defence Minister Kajsa

Ollongren said Kyiv had requested US-made F-16 jets from the Netherlands.

“We have to debate this with our partners, also with the United States, and we have to think about feasibility,” she said.

“It is something that will take time and it is best done behind closed doors.” Stoltenberg insisted ‘the issue of aircraft is not the most urgent issue now, but it is an ongoing discussion’.

AFP

Sweden, Finland joining NATO together not ‘main question’, says Stoltenberg

Brussels, Belgium - NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said on Tuesday it was important Sweden and Finland joined NATO as soon as possible, but ratifying them at the same time was not the ‘main question’.

Parliaments in all 30 members of the military alliance must formally ratify Finland and Sweden before they can be admitted. Turkey and Hungary are the only two NATO members not to have done this.

Stoltenberg’s comments come after Turkey suggested it could greenlight Finland’s bid to join without accepting Sweden into the alliance.

“So the main question is not whether Finland and Sweden are ratified together. The main question is that they are both ratified as full members as soon as possible,” Stoltenberg said ahead of



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg speaks to the press as he arrives at NATO headquarters in Brussels on Tuesday (AFP)

a meeting of NATO allies.

“I’m confident that both will be full members and we are working hard to get both ratified as soon as possible,” the NATO secretary general added.

Finland and Sweden dropped decades of military non-align-

ment and applied to join NATO in May last year in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

But Turkey has so far refused to ratify the two countries’ membership bids, primarily because of Sweden’s refusal to extradite dozens of suspects that Ankara

links to outlawed Kurdish fighters and a failed 2016 coup attempt.

Ankara reacted with fury to a decision by the Swedish police to allow a protest at which a far-right extremist burned a copy of the Q’uran outside the Turkish embassy in Stockholm last month.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has drawn a clear distinction between the positions taken by Sweden and Finland in the past few months and said ‘we can give a different response’ to Helsinki.

Finland insists its ‘strong desire’ remains to join NATO together with Sweden.

But a majority of the people of Finland said in a poll this month that they wanted to join NATO even if Sweden’s membership was delayed.

AFP

Beijing tells US to investigate balloons ‘flown’ over China

Beijing, China - China urged the United States on Tuesday to conduct a ‘thorough investigation’ into what Beijing claims was a string of incursions into its airspace by US balloons.

Relations between Washington and Beijing have nosedived following the shooting down of what the US alleges was a Chinese spy balloon - China insisted it was an errant weather observation aircraft with no military purpose.

A number of unidentified aerial objects have subsequently been shot down over North America, though the US has not attributed them to China.

On Tuesday, Beijing doubled down on unsubstantiated allegations that the US has sent over 10 balloons since last year.

“The US has launched several high-altitude balloons from the



This file photo shows sailors recovering a high-altitude surveillance balloon off the coast of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina on February 5 (AFP)

US that made continuous round-the-world flights, illegally flying over the airspace of China and other countries on at least 10 occasions,” foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told a regular briefing.

“The US side should conduct

a thorough investigation and give an explanation to China,” he added.

Wang did not provide evidence of the alleged incursions, which he said started in May 2022.

AFP



A workman treats the ground damaged by a fire outside the Suites Hotel in Kowlesy, near Liverpool in north-west England on February 11 (AFP)

Charities urge UK politicians to oppose attacks on asylum seekers

London, UK - Nearly 200 charities on Tuesday urged the UK’s political leaders to ‘take a clear stand’ against attacks on asylum seekers, days after an anti-immigrant protest descended into violent disorder.

Clashes broke out when troublemakers disrupted a pro-refugee gathering outside a hotel housing asylum seekers near Liverpool, police said.

A far-right, anti-immigrant group had protested outside the same hotel earlier this month.

The open letter, co-ordinated

by coalition campaign Together With Refugees and signed by 180 charities, condemned the ‘horrifying’ scenes on Friday outside the hotel near Liverpool, in northwest England.

Merseyside Police arrested 15 people after fireworks were thrown at officers and a police van was attacked with hammers and set alight during several hours of mayhem.

One of those arrested, a 19-year-old man, appeared in court on Monday charged with violent disorder and assault for beating

an emergency services worker.

“With the high risk of more premeditated extremist attacks around the country, leaders of all parties must now take a clear stand and condemn any further violence against those who come here to find safety,” the charities’ letter stated.

It also urged political leaders to ‘set out the action they will take to prevent it’.

Hardline interior minister Suella Braverman has faced sustained criticism for her inflammatory rhetoric over

immigration, in particular her description of the growing number of migrants crossing the Channel. Opponents accuse her of demonising asylum seekers and fuelling hostility towards people seeking sanctuary.

In November, she sparked an outcry by saying in parliament that England’s south coast was facing an ‘invasion’ of illegal migration. Tens of thousands of people arrived in southeast England on small boats from the European mainland last year.

AFP

Tax authorities raid offices of BBC India

New Delhi, India - Indian tax authorities raided the BBC's New Delhi and Mumbai offices on Tuesday, weeks after the broadcaster aired a documentary on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's actions during deadly sectarian riots in 2002.

Press freedom in the world's biggest democracy has suffered during Modi's tenure, rights activists say, and the opposition Congress party condemned the raids, saying there was an 'undeclared emergency' in the country.

A spokesman for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accused the broadcaster of engaging in 'anti-India propaganda', but said the raids were lawful and the timing had nothing to do with the government.

"India is a country which gives an opportunity to every organisation," Gaurav Bhatia told reporters, "as long as you don't spew venom."

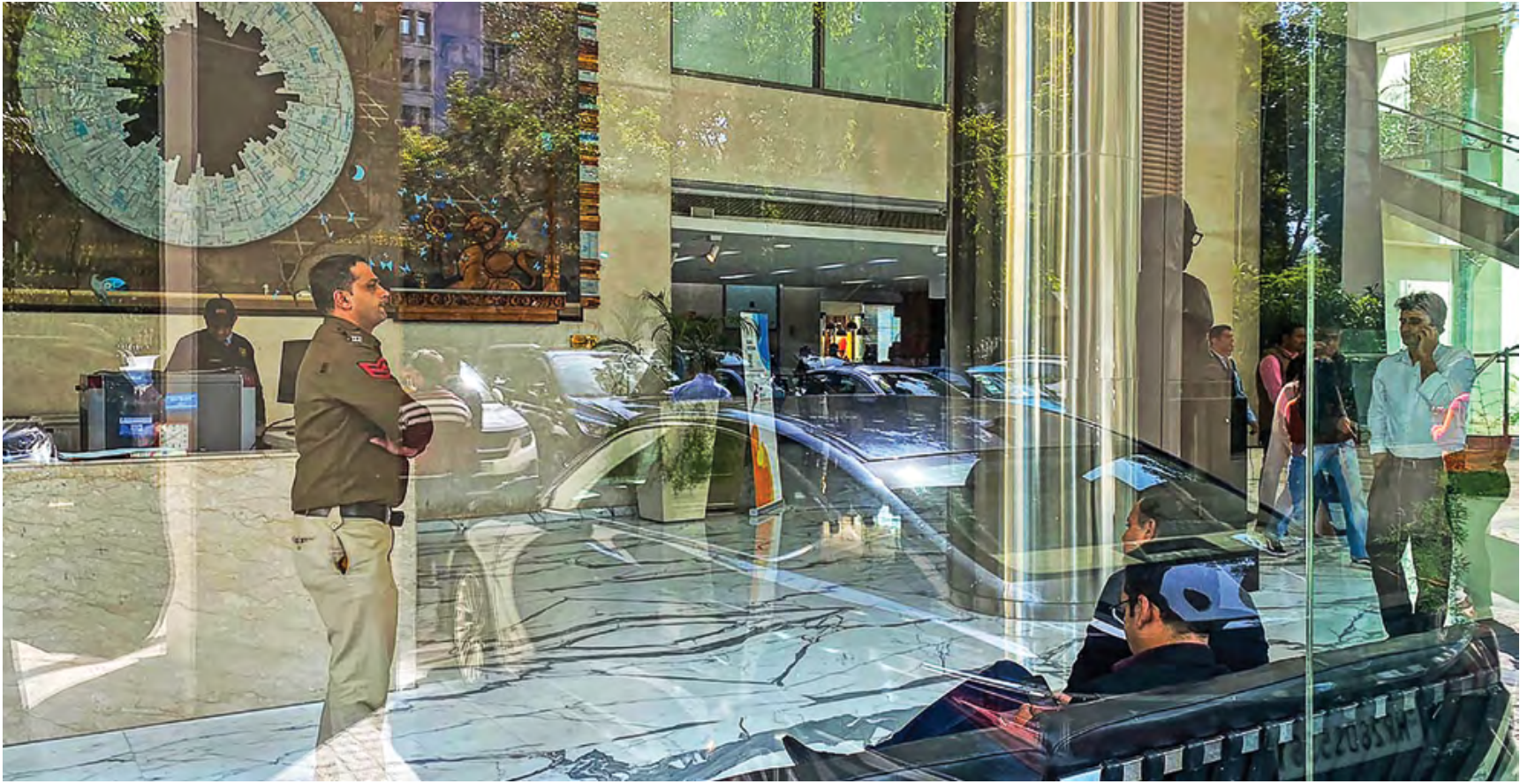
"If you have been following the law of the country, if you have nothing to hide, why be afraid of an action that is according to the law?"

In a statement on Twitter, the broadcaster said it was 'fully co-operating' with authorities.

"The Income Tax Authorities are currently at the BBC offices in New Delhi and Mumbai," it said. "We hope to have this situation resolved as soon as possible."

Police sealed off the BBC's New Delhi office, which occupies two floors of a high-rise on a leafy avenue in the capital's commercial heart.

A New Delhi-based BBC employee said that officials had been 'confiscating all phones'



A police officer stands near the reception desk of the office building where Indian tax authorities raided BBC's office in New Delhi on Tuesday (AFP)

during the tax raid.

Last month, the BBC aired a two-part documentary alleging that Hindu nationalist Modi ordered police to turn a blind eye to sectarian riots in Gujarat state, where he was premier at the time. The violence left at least 1,000 people dead, most of them minority Muslims.

India's government blocked videos and tweets sharing links to the documentary - which was not aired in India - using emergency powers under its information technology laws.

Government adviser Kanchan Gupta had slammed the docu-

mentary as 'hostile propaganda and anti-India garbage'.

University student groups later organised viewings of the documentary despite campus bans, defying government efforts to stop its spread.

Police arrested two dozen students at the prestigious Delhi University after stopping a screening there in late January.

"First came the BBC documentary, that was banned," the opposition Congress party said on Twitter. "Now IT has raided BBC," it continued, referring to the Income Tax Department. "Undeclared emergency."

India is a country which gives an opportunity to every organisation as long as you don't spew venom. If you have been following the law, why be afraid of an action that is according to law?

GAURAV BHATIA

Press freedom

Press freedom in the world's biggest democracy has suffered during Modi's tenure, rights activists and opposition lawmakers say.

India has fallen 10 spots to 150 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, compiled by Reporters Without Borders, since Modi took office in 2014.

Critical reporters, particularly women, say they are subjected to relentless campaigns of online abuse.

The Editors Guild of India said Tuesday's tax raids were part of a wider 'trend of using govern-

ment agencies to intimidate or harass press organisations that are critical of government policies". Other media outlets, international rights groups and foreign charities have found themselves subjected to scrutiny by India's tax authorities and financial crimes investigators.

Late Catholic nun Mother Teresa's charity last year found itself temporarily starved of funds after the home ministry refused to renew its licence to receive foreign donations.

Amnesty International announced it was halting operations in India after the

government froze its bank accounts in 2020, following raids on its offices. In 2021, Indian tax authorities raided a prominent newspaper and a TV channel that had been critical of the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, triggering accusations of intimidation.

'Campaign of violence'

The 2002 riots in Gujarat began after 59 Hindu pilgrims were killed in a fire on a train. Thirty-one Muslims were convicted of criminal conspiracy and murder over that incident.

The BBC documentary cited a previously classified British foreign ministry report quoting unnamed sources saying that Modi met senior police officers and 'ordered them not to intervene' in the anti-Muslim violence by right-wing Hindu groups that followed.

The violence was intended 'to purge Muslims from Hindu areas', the ministry report said.

The 'systematic campaign of violence has all the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing' and was impossible 'without the climate of impunity created by the state Government', it concluded.

Modi, who ran Gujarat from 2001 until his election as prime minister in 2014, was briefly subject to a travel ban by the United States over the violence.

A special investigative team appointed by India's Supreme Court to probe the roles of Modi and others in the violence said in 2012 it did not find any evidence to prosecute him.

AFP

Three dead, five wounded in US campus shooting

Washington, US - A gunman who killed at least three people and wounded five on a US university campus shot himself dead on Monday after a massive police manhunt.

Thousands of students at Michigan State University were ordered to shelter in place after shots were fired in a campus building in the early evening, leaving two dead.

The gunman fled to the students' union, where he killed one more person, sparking a major police operation as officers swarmed the 5,000-acre campus. Gun violence is alarmingly common in the United States, a country where there are more guns than people and where attempts to clamp down on their spread are always met with stiff resistance.

Police confirmed just after midnight the suspected MSU gunman had shot himself dead a short distance from the university.

"We are sad to report that there have been three confirmed fatalities," Deputy Chief Chris Rozman of the university's police force told reporters.

"This is in addition to the five victims who were injured and transported to the hospital. Some of those five victims still have life-threatening injuries."

Rozman said hundreds of officers from several agencies had been involved in the operation to try to find the gunman, releasing a photograph of a Black man in a baggy blue jacket, and wearing red shoes.

"The suspect in this incident was located outside of the MSU campus," he said.

The 'suspect has died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound'.

"This truly has been a nightmare that we are living tonight. We are relieved to no longer have an active threat on campus," Rozman said.



The suspect of the shooting at Michigan State University campus in East Lansing, Michigan on Monday (AFP)

This truly has been a nightmare that we are living tonight. We are relieved to no longer have an active threat on campus

CHRIS ROZMAN

pus," Rozman said.

Police later said the man had no connection to the university and no motive for the shooting was immediately apparent.

"We have no idea why he came to the campus to do this tonight," Rozman said.

Police refused to give details of the victims, including whether they were students or faculty members of the university, one of the top institutions

in the United States.

MSU officials said all campus activities would be canceled for the next 48 hours.

Around 50,000 students are enrolled at MSU, the bulk of them undergraduates, according to the university's website.

Tens of thousands of people die every year in the United States after being shot, and many more are wounded.

AFP

UK's Camilla to wear Queen Mary's Crown

London, UK - British Queen Consort Camilla will wear Queen Mary's Crown at her and King Charles III's coronation in early May, Buckingham Palace said on Tuesday.

The crown is more than a century old and was commissioned by Queen Mary for her 1911 coronation alongside King George V. It will be modified for the landmark ceremony on May 6.

This is the first time in recent history that an existing crown will be used for the coronation of a consort instead of a new commission being made, according to the palace. It said the move was being made 'in the interests of sustainability and efficiency'.

The crown will be reset with several Cullinan diamonds - cut from what was the largest diamond ever mined when it was discovered in South Africa in 1905 - in tribute to the late



Britain's Camilla, Queen Consort

Queen Elizabeth II.

The diamonds were part of her personal jewellery collection for many years and she often wore them as brooches.

Some of the diamonds were set into Queen Mary's Crown for the 1911 coronation and for King George VI's coronation in 1937, when it was worn as a regal circlet. It has been removed from its usual display at the Tower of London for the modification, which will also include some other minor changes and addi-

tions by the crown jeweller.

Four of its eight detachable arches will be removed to create a new impression, different from that of 1911.

King Charles will wear the St Edward's Crown for the coronation service in Westminster Abbey. It has already been modified and returned to public display in the Tower of London.

Concert ballot

Preparations for the May 6 crowning, set to be attended by dignitaries from around the world and watched by billions, continue to gather pace.

The palace announced last month that the weekend-long celebrations will feature a star-studded concert, nationwide 'big lunch' and volunteering initiative, as well as the traditional ceremony and royal processions.

Last week it unveiled a 'coro-

nation emblem', which will feature throughout.

The emblem pays tribute to Charles's love of the natural world, depicting the floral symbols of the UK's four nations - the rose, thistle, daffodil and shamrock - in the shape of St Edward's Crown.

Also last week, an online national ballot opened so 5,000 members of the public can be selected to receive a pair of free tickets for the concert in Windsor Castle's grounds on May 7.

After the ballot closes at the end of this month, the 10,000 tickets will be allocated based on the geographical spread of the UK population, and not on a first-come first-served basis.

Camilla, 75, has been forced to pull out of public events this week after testing positive for coronavirus, the palace said on Monday.

AFP

Nikki Haley announces US presidential bid

Charleston, US - Former US ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley announced on Tuesday she is running for president in 2024, challenging fellow Republican candidate Donald Trump by proposing a 'new generation' of leadership in Washington.

"I'm Nikki Haley and I'm running for president," the 51-year-old former governor of South Carolina and the child of Indian immigrants said in a video statement. "It's time for a new generation of leadership - to rediscover fiscal responsibility, secure our border, and strengthen our country, our pride and our purpose," she said in the video shot in Bamberg, the South Carolina town of her birth.

Casting herself as a younger, fresher alternative to the 76-year-old former president



Former South Carolina Republican Governor Nikki Haley (AFP)

Trump, Haley had been hinting at a possible run for weeks and teasing a 'big announcement' on February 15.

In the end, she made her presidential aims official a day early, on Valentine's Day.

Haley is positioning herself as a changemaker who can reinvigorate a party and country

she says have lost their way in recent years, and she played up her personal background as a way to unite a nation strained by racial tensions.

"I was the proud daughter of Indian immigrants. Not black, not white. I was different," she said in the clip.

"But my mom would always

say, 'Your job is not to focus on the differences, but the similarities.'"

"Some look at our past as evidence that America's founding principles are bad," she went on.

"They say the promise of freedom is just made up. Some think our ideas are not just wrong, but racist, and evil. Nothing could be further from the truth."

Haley is unlikely to be the last Republican to throw their hat in the ring.

Some Washington watchers speculated that her announcement might prompt a stampede from rivals such as Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and Trump's vice president Mike Pence.

Haley also took a swipe at the current president saying 'Joe Biden's record is abysmal'.

AFP



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah (R) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Everton in their English Premier League match at Anfield on Monday (AFP)

Mohamed Salah sees fresh start for Liverpool in victory against Everton

Liverpool, United Kingdom - Mohamed Salah said Liverpool's 2-0 win over Everton in the Merseyside derby on Monday is just the start of a revival for the Reds.

Salah scored for the first time in the Premier League since Boxing Day as Jurgen Klopp's men snapped a four-game winless streak. Cody Gakpo then grabbed his first goal for the club in the second half.

A positive night for Liverpool was rounded off by the return of Diogo Jota and Roberto Firmino from injury, while Virgil van Dijk made the bench after six weeks on the sidelines.

"It's a huge win for us," said Salah. "We had a perfect week to train and the players were so excited and we couldn't wait for the game to turn everything around. Hopefully it was a start."

Liverpool are still nine points off the top four in ninth.

But that gap to fourth-placed Newcastle could be cut to six points when they travel to St. James' Park next weekend.

That clash comes just days before Real Madrid's trip to Anfield in the Champions League last 16 and Klopp will be hoping he has finally stumbled upon a solution to some of his side's woes in time for another tilt at the European Cup. "Tonight we were there and that has to be the sign now for us for what we have to do," said Klopp. "The performance for the

full 96 minutes was the best for a while."

Liverpool's optimism has to be put in the context of facing an Everton side with just one win in 12 games. That victory came last weekend in Sean Dyche's first match in charge as league leaders Arsenal were shocked 1-0 at Goodison Park. But Dyche was given a better understanding of the problems he has inherited with the Toffees languishing in the relegation zone.

Everton were still left to rue what might have been had James Tarkowski's header gone in rather than come off the post just seconds before Liverpool took the lead. Instead, the hosts collected the loose ball and freed Nunez down the left, who squared for Salah to prod into an unguarded net with Jordan Pickford caught in no man's land.

Everton were undone by another swift counter-attack at the start of the second period.

Andy Robertson charged through midfield and found Trent Alexander-Arnold, whose inviting ball across the face of the goal just required a simple finish from Gakpo.

The Dutch international will hope a derby goal proves the turning point after a difficult start to life in the Premier League following his January move from PSV Eindhoven.

AFP

Inter fall further behind leaders Napoli after Samp stalemate

Genoa, Italy - Inter Milan allowed Napoli to pull 15 points clear at the top of Serie A after being held to a goalless draw at struggling Sampdoria on Monday.

Simone Inzaghi's side already had little hope of recapturing the league title conceded to local rivals AC Milan last season and the yawning gap between them and Napoli widened following an underwhelming display in Genoa.

Napoli cruised past Cremonese 3-0 on Sunday and look with each passing week more likely to claim a first league crown since 1990.

Second-placed Inter are three points ahead of Atalanta, Roma and Milan in the race for next season's Champions League.

Lazio are five points back in sixth after being beaten by Atalanta in Rome on Saturday night.

When asked if the title was beyond his team, Inzaghi said "I keep saying we can only look at ourselves". "We're not satisfied with the result, in fact we're very disappointed as we should be."

Inzaghi picked Romelu Lukaku alongside in-form Lautaro Martinez, the powerful strike partner-



Inter Milan's Milan Skriniar (L) and Sampdoria's Sam Lammers battle for the ball during their Italian Serie A match at the Luigi-Ferraris stadium in Genoa on Monday (AFP)

ship which won Inter the 2021 Scudetto. But Lukaku is nowhere near the form which led to Chelsea paying a club-record fee for his services the following summer and the Belgium forward was replaced by Edin Dzeko midway through the second half hav-

ing made little impact.

Turkey midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu went close with distance efforts in either half on a night in which the Inter fans in the stands at the Stadio Luigi Ferraris honoured the victims of the devastating recent earthquake which hit

his country and Syria.

Over 35,000 people have been killed by the earthquake and Calhanoglu appeared to be in tears when supporters unfurled banners which read "close to Turkey and Syria, Calha one of us".

Real Sociedad close in on Madrid with win at Espanyol

Cornellà De Llobregat, Spain - Real Sociedad cut the gap on second-place Real Madrid to three points with a 3-2 win at Espanyol in La Liga on Monday.

The champions have played a game fewer and host Elche on Wednesday, with Real Sociedad third, hot on their tail, although they were left holding on at the end against struggling Espanyol.

Takefusa Kubo and Alexander Sorloth's goals gave Real Sociedad a commanding lead at the RCDE Stadium as Imanol Alguacil's side bounced back from three games without a win across all competitions.

Espanyol defender Leandro Cabrera headed a Kubo cross into his own net to further sink his side, before Sergi Darder netted a consolation goal from close range. Brian Olivan smashed in another for Espanyol with three minutes remaining, setting up a tense finale, before Cabrera was sent off in stoppage time.

Real Sociedad are 14 points behind leaders Barcelona, who are 11 clear of Real Madrid after their 1-0 win over Villarreal on Sunday.

After a tight opening period,



Real Sociedad's Alexander Sorloth (L) vies with Espanyol's Sergi Gomez during their Spanish League match on Monday (AFP)

albeit one in which the visitors had more of the ball, Kubo broke the deadlock with a bolt from the blue. The Japan international fired Real Sociedad ahead with a sharp near-post strike from the edge of the box after a cross was cleared into his path.

It was his fourth league goal of the season, a mark of his improved form for Real Sociedad after seasons of flattering to deceive. Espanyol brought Denis Suarez on at the break to try and gain some control, but Sorloth quickly pounced.

UEFA 'responsible' for Paris Champions League final chaos: report

Paris, France - UEFA itself bears "primary responsibility" for failures which "almost led to disaster" at the 2022 Champions League final in Paris between Liverpool and Real Madrid, a report commissioned by the European football body said Monday.

The report also claimed the policing model was influenced by a view of Liverpool based on the deadly 1989 Hillsborough disaster on incorrect assumptions that the city's supporters were a threat to public order.

The report said that the panel "has concluded that UEFA, as event owner, bears primary responsibility for failures which almost led to disaster."

The panel also said it was astonished that the policing model was influenced by a view of Liverpool hooliganism based on Hillsborough.

"The safety, security and service model laid out in the Saint-Denis Convention was ignored in favour of a securitised approach," the report said.

Real Madrid's 1-0 win at the Stade de France on May 28 was overshadowed by events surrounding European football's showpiece event.

Kick-off was delayed by 37 minutes as fans struggled to access the stadium after being funnelled into overcrowded bottlenecks on approach.



Police patrol at the gates prior to the UEFA Champions League final between Liverpool and Real Madrid at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis on May 28, 2022, file photo (AFP)

Police then fired tear gas towards thousands of supporters locked behind metal fences on the perimeter to the stadium.

UEFA then tried to pin the blame on Liverpool fans arriving late despite thousands having been held for hours outside the stadium before kick-off.

The French authorities then claimed an "industrial scale fraud" of fake tickets was the problem.

A French Senate enquiry in July found that poorly-executed security arrangements were the cause of the mayhem.

Images of the final tarnished France's reputation for holding major sports events ahead of the

Rugby World Cup this year and the 2024 Olympic Games, both of which will host events at the Stade de France.

UEFA General Secretary Theodore Theodoridis made an apology for the lapses that led to a breakdown in the organisation of the crowd and thanked Dr Brandao Rodrigues and the panel who created the report for their work. "On behalf of UEFA, I would like to apologise most sincerely once again to all those who were affected by the events that unfolded on what should have been a celebration at the pinnacle of the club season," Theodoridis said.

AFP

RETURNS NEEDED

Pressure on Potter to deliver after Chelsea’s huge investment

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea may have spent over £500 million (\$603 million) on new players, but their first season under new ownership will end without any trophies to show for it unless they can conquer Europe in the coming months.

The Blues travel to face Borussia Dortmund in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie on Tuesday already out of both domestic cups and languishing 10th in the Premier League.

Winning the Champions League for a third time could be Chelsea's best route back into the competition next season as they sit 10 points adrift of the top four in the English top flight.

Graham Potter's men have won just two games in their last 12 since European football shut down for the winter.

Potter has had to juggle a lengthy injury list and bed in an avalanche of January signings, while also trying to maintain harmony in a bloated squad of 33 first-team players.

The former Brighton boss has already had tough choices to make for the rest of his side's European campaign.

With only three new players allowed to be added to Chelsea's Champions League squad and eight new signings, Benoit Badia-shile, Noni Madueke, Andrey Santos and David Datro Fofana

have been left out, while Malo Gusto will spend the second half of the season back on loan at Lyon.

Three 100 million euro men

But the three additions of Joao Felix, Mykhailo Mudryk and Enzo Fernandez should add firepower and a creative spark to a side badly lacking in a goal threat.

All three have commanded a 100 million euro (\$107 million) fee at some point in their careers.

Fernandez's 121 million euro move from Benfica last month broke the British transfer record just weeks after Mudryk was signed from Shakhtar Donetsk for an initial 70 million euros that could rise to 100 million.

Winning the Champions League for a third time could be Chelsea's best route back into the competition next season as they sit 10 points adrift of the top four

Felix failed to live up to his 126 million euro price tag in three-and-a-half years at Atletico Madrid, but has looked lively in the early days of his loan spell at Stamford Bridge either side of a three-game ban for a red card on his Premier League debut.

The Portuguese international



Graham Potter

scored his first goal for the club from Fernandez's fine cross in Saturday's 1-1 draw at West Ham. But Felix's strike was just Chelsea's third in the last seven games.

"The second-half is probably more of a reflection of where we are as a group and as a team,"

said Potter after Chelsea's bright start at the London Stadium quickly fizzled out.

"In terms of players getting up to speed, returning from injury and players adapting to the Premier League."

Potter is aware patience is wearing thin among a fanbase

that got used to a hire-and-fire culture under Roman Abramovich that reaped rewards.

In each of the two seasons Chelsea won the Champions League during the Russian's 19-year tenure, they changed managers mid-season.

Chelsea have already done that

this season as Potter replaced Thomas Tuchel in September.

A nine-game unbeaten run to start his spell in charge now seems a long time ago for Potter with the pressure ramped up to produce results, even if the bulk of Chelsea's unprecedented level of spending has been on young

players. "You can't talk about the long-term because that doesn't exist in this job," added Potter.

"You have to acknowledge there's a long-term but there's a short-term and medium-term that is challenging for us in terms of results."

AFP

GoPro Mitoma dribbles his way to Premier League stardom

Tsukuba, Japan - Kaoru Mitoma strapped a camera to his head to study dribbling for his graduation thesis. Now his former university coach is enjoying watching him teach Premier League defenders a lesson.

The Japanese winger has been in electric form for Brighton since returning from the World Cup, scoring four times in his last six league games.

The 25-year-old also conjured up an exquisite injury-time winner against Liverpool in the FA Cup and has been linked with a big-money move to Jurgen Klopp's side, as well as Arsenal.

Brighton signed Mitoma for a bargain £2.5 million (\$3 million) from Kawasaki Frontale in 2021 and he arrived in England a virtual unknown last summer following a loan spell in Belgium.

His ascent has been unusual by Premier League standards -- he only turned professional in 2020 after completing a four-year physical education degree at Japan's University of Tsukuba.

It was there he honed his devastating dribbling style, analysing training footage from GoPro cameras attached to his and his team-mates' heads to see which



Kaoru Mitoma dribbles past Liverpool's Trent Alexander-Arnold



Masaaki Koido, an associate professor at Japan's University of Tsukuba, looks at the graduation thesis done by his former student Kaoru Mitoma

techniques were most effective.

"It was an excellent idea," Masaaki Koido, who coached Mitoma at the university football team, told AFP at the institution near Tokyo.

"No one else had ever studied it and there are no essays like it in academic journals."

Mitoma got together 10 players who were recognised as good dribblers and 10 who were not.

He studied which direction

the players were looking when they received the ball and found the better players would already be casting a glance at the defenders and planning their next move.

Koido says there were "limits" to how much the findings could be put into practice but praised Mitoma's desire to learn.

"He wanted to become a better player, so he wanted to be able to clearly understand why he was good at dribbling and other players weren't as good."

It's not uncommon for footballers in Japan to go to university before turning professional -- nine of the country's 26-man squad at last year's World Cup in Qatar were graduates.

Mitoma was in J-League side Kawasaki's youth system but worried he would not see much first-team action if he turned professional straight out of high school.

Instead he enrolled at Tsukuba aged 18, studying for his degree while playing in a university league. Koido's first impressions of Mitoma were of a "good but weak" player with a "very light" physique.

AFP

History 'should teach Bach a lesson' over Russian Olympic conundrum: Ukraine's Olha

Paris, France - IOC president Thomas Bach should learn from history when it comes to his move to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete at the 2024 Olympics, one of Ukraine's most high-profile former athletes Olha Saladukha has told AFP.

It is approaching a year since Russia invaded Ukraine - with help from its ally Belarus - and Saladukha, now a lawmaker in the Ukrainian parliament, said it was unimaginable that Bach's desire to have athletes from both countries compete in Paris should become reality.

Saladukha said Bach was "an intelligent person" and he should see the historic parallels between World War II and now.

"After the (Winter) Olympic Games in Sochi 2014, the war in Ukraine began.

"Even after the World War II, Germany was alienated from the Games (they were not invited to the 1948



Olha Saladukha

Olympics).

"After this evil, it was difficult for the world to behave otherwise. We see the same thing here, especially since the war is still going on!"

Saladukha says she can see where Bach is coming from.

"Bach's logic can be understood, but one cannot agree with it," the 39-year-old said.

"He may want as many athletes as possible to compete."

But she said "a murderous state, where the people, including athletes, support crimes, should be out of sports."

AFP

US Open golf qualifying back in England for first time since 2019

Los Angeles, United States - A final US Open golf qualifying event will be staged in England this year for the first time since 2019 after a three-year hiatus for the Covid-19 pandemic.

The US Golf Association announced qualifying venues on Monday with Walton Heath Golf Club in Surrey, England, to host the first final round qualifying event on May 16. Walton Heath, a site in 2005 when international qualifying began, has two courses designed by W. Herbert Fowler, the original architect of the North

The US Open provides thousands of professional and amateur golfers with diverse backgrounds from around the world the opportunity to earn a place in the championship

JOHN BODENHAMER

Course at Los Angeles Country Club, where this year's 123rd US Open will be staged June 15-18.

Other international final qualifying events will be staged on May 22 at Japan's Ibaraki Golf Club in Osaka prefecture and on

June 5 at Toronto's Lambton Golf and Country Club in Canada.

Local qualifying will be staged in April and May at US and Canadian venues. Ten US sites will also be used for final qualifying events on May 22 and June 5.

"The US Open provides thousands of professional and amateur golfers with diverse backgrounds from around the world the opportunity to earn a place in the championship through local and final qualifying," USGA chief championships officer John Bodenhamer said.

Player registration begins on February 22 and runs through April 12. There were 9,265 entries for last year's event at The Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts - where England's Matthew Fitzpatrick won.



England's Matthew Fitzpatrick will defend his US Open title in June at Los Angeles Country Club

'SERIES AGAINST HONG KONG TO BENEFIT OUR BOYS'

Oman U19 coach Adeel Shafique hopeful of his team to put up a strong show in the four-match series beginning on Wednesday on Wednesday

Muscat - Oman U19 cricket team coach Adeel Shafique is hopeful of his boys gaining lot of experience and match exposure when they tackle the visiting Hong Kong U19 team during the four-match 50-over-a-side series, beginning on Wednesday, at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat.

Ahead of the series, Shafique said: "Such series helps the boys to gain exposure and experience match situations that will do a world of good for these youngsters."

The first of the four-match series begins on Wednesday while the other three games will be played on Thursday, Sunday and Tuesday.

Shafique added: "I think it is another great opportunity for our boys to showcase their talent. After a brilliant showing in the World Cup qualifiers that took place in October 2022 where we fell just short in the semi-final, I think it's great that the boys can play some more cricket together as a group."

"After the last tournament,



Coach Adeel Shafique talking to the Oman U19 boys during a practice session

there wasn't much cricket planned or scheduled for the U19 boys. During the World Cup qualifiers, we had a close game against Hong Kong. There is a mutual respect between both sides and an appreciation that our boys are extremely competitive."

Shafique, who has spent eight months in Hong Kong before taking up the assignment in Oman, said: "Our close relationship with Hong Kong Cricket has made it possible to convince them to visit Oman for the series."

The Oman U19 coach said that "plans and talks are in place to have an annual bilateral series in Oman and Hong Kong for the youth team."

Aditya Gurumukhi has been named the skipper of Oman squad with Tanuj Sivakumar appointed his deputy for the series.

Shafique said: "The boys have been active and have been playing in the league as our current season is going on since September 2022. They have also been playing for their respective schools. They have had a lot of

game time which is excellent for preparation. Besides that we have been in camp since the end of November and had a mix of fitness sessions along with practice matches and skills sessions."

The coach added that 'the boys have been in the middle of exams as most of them are in 12th class.'

He said: "We have been able to find a good balance for the boys to study which is important, and at the same time, practice and play so that they are in good touch."



Italian Diego Ulissi Of UAE Team Emirates celebrates after winning the fourth stage of the Tour of Oman, from Izki to Yitti Hills, on Tuesday

Ulissi wins penultimate stage of Tour of Oman

Muscat,- After he came close to victory in Qurayyat and Al Hamra, Diego Ulissi (UAE Team Emirates) ended the longest stage of this year's Tour of Oman with his arms aloft in triumph.

Stage 4, a 204.9km climb from Izki through Muscat to Yitti Hills, had an explosive finale in store for the peloton with a series of ascents in the last 10km. Pascal Ackermann, Ulissi's teammate with UAE Team Emirates, went on the move on the up and down sections before he was caught with 2km to go when Ivan Cobo (Kern Pharma) launched a counter attack on the final ascent but was caught right at the summit with less than 1km remaining.

It was then time for the Italian Ulissi to show his power in the final sprint and take victory ahead of Axel Zingle (Cofidis) and Ide Schelling (BORA-

Hansgrohe), while Matteo Jorgenson (Movistar Team) retained the leader's red jersey.

After a week of racing, the final challenge awaits the riders

Ulissi claimed the 'Individual Points' award for his stage victory. Dversnes said, "We have a good fight today, and I knew it would be a hard day to take the

My goal for this Tour was to go for a win, and I decided to go for it a bit earlier today. We will try to defend the jersey tomorrow and aim for the sprints

FREDRIK DVERSNES

on Wednesday: a mighty climb up Jabal Al Akhdhar, where the overall winner of the Tour of Oman will be crowned.

Norway's Fredrik Dversnes (Uno-X Pro Cycling) won 'Most Active Rider' on Tuesday, breaking Jeroen Meijers' domination of the category. Matteo Jorgenson won 'Best Young Rider' for the day after maintaining his overall lead of the Tour of Oman, while Diego

Red Jersey but with help from my teammates I was able to.

"It was a hard stage and a long stage, the longest of the Tour of Oman, but it was a stage I was looking forward to," he said.

"My goal for this Tour was to go for a win, and I decided to go for it a bit earlier today. We will try to defend the jersey tomorrow and aim for the sprints."

Oman result a 'massive momentum shift' for Henson ahead of International Series Qatar

Doha, Qatar - Berry Henson said he had to manage a week of mishits and three putts in order to finish joint second in last week's International Series Oman, while also trying to recover from a challenging off season.

The American finished four shots behind the champion, Takumi Kanaya from Japan, for one of the finest performances of his 20-year professional career, which also saw him earn his biggest ever cheque, US\$173,000. The end result though disguised a testing tournament and build up that required him to draw upon all his experience and patience.

"I posted something on social media on Saturday, about kind of falling in love with the process," the 43 year old said ahead of this week's International Series Qatar at Doha Golf Club, which features an eye-catching field that includes former Masters champion Charl Schwartzel from South Africa, reigning Asian Tour number one Sihwan Kim from the United States, and Sadom



Berry Henson of the USA in action at the International Series Oman

Kaewkanjana from Thailand, who tied with Henson in Oman.

"I knew my game wasn't sharp and I know if I can control the controllables, which is getting into my process and my routine, then I can still play a high level of golf and that's kind of what I did."

"I didn't let the bad shots affect me, which I hit a lot, but the mishits worked out ok, I didn't

lose any balls for the week. And I just wasn't very sharp, I had eight three putts."

A four-under-par front-nine score of 32 in the third round played a big part in helping him to find his confidence in Oman.

He adds: "The tournament was a massive momentum shift, I can feel it this week. Everything mentally seems a lot clearer."

England, South Africa ignore auction distractions and gain key wins

Paarl, South Africa - England and South Africa overcame the distractions of a player auction in India and pulled off important wins on the fourth day of the Women's T20 World Cup at Boland Park in Paarl.

England took command of Group Two, beating Ireland by four wickets to notch their second successive win, while South Africa played themselves back into contention in Group One with a 65-run win over New Zealand.

Monday's double-header was played while the auction in India's Women's Premier League was being held in Mumbai, with potential life-changing deals for players from both teams, as well as those from New Zealand.

England captain Heather Knight said her players were able to focus on the cricket. She said they left their hotel in Cape Town while hearing shouts of excitement from Indian players who were the main focus of bidders

from Indian franchises.

"Whatever happens in the IPL doesn't affect the value of the players in our team," she said.

Left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone showed why she was bought by the Uttar Pradesh Warriorz franchise for the equivalent of about US\$220 000 when she sparked an Ireland collapse to 105 all out. Ecclestone took three for 13.

Another WPL target, Alice Capsey, bought by Delhi Capitals for \$91 000, set up an early finish by hitting 51 off 22 balls in England's reply.

Nat Sciver-Brunt, who attracted the joint-highest price for an overseas player, had a quiet day, bowling two overs which cost ten runs and being dismissed for five. She was bought by Mumbai Indians for \$390 000.

"She probably won't like all the attention," said Knight. "She's very humble. She's just very good at cricket."

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NOSTALGIA TOUR

RiRi's pop bangers

RIHANNA PERFORMS HER MUSIC CAREER'S HITS AT THE SUPER BOWL WITH 'A VERY SPECIAL GUEST'

Rihanna made her long-awaited return to the stage at the Super Bowl with a career-spanning medley of pop bangers, but it was her baby bump that dominated the conversation.

The megastar appeared in the stadium midair on a floating stage, donning a clingy, all-red ensemble featuring a moulded bustier - and a belt below what many viewers deduced was another mini RiRi in the making - the unseen 'special guest' on stage.

Representatives for the singer confirmed the speculation to trade magazines *Rolling Stone* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. Rihanna is pregnant with her second child. The 34-year-old had welcomed her first child, a son, with rapper A\$AP Rocky last May.

Musically speaking, fans who hoped for some fresh tracks were disappointed. Rihanna's night on the world's biggest stage offered a nostalgia tour of hits past.

She delivered her club smashes including *Where Have You Been* to *Only Girl (In the World)* and the time-tested *We Found Love*.

Rude Boy, *Bitch Better Have My Money*, *Work* and *All of the Lights* were also on the setlist, as a sea of dancers performed stunning acrobatics. *Wild Thoughts*, *Run This Town* and, of course, *Umbrella* and *Diamonds* rounded out the show.

She did not, as many stars do, bring out any guest artists, commanding the stage all on her own.

The evening marked a reversal after Rihanna had previously turned down the gig in protest of the National Football League's handling of race issues.

But in accepting the coveted slot this

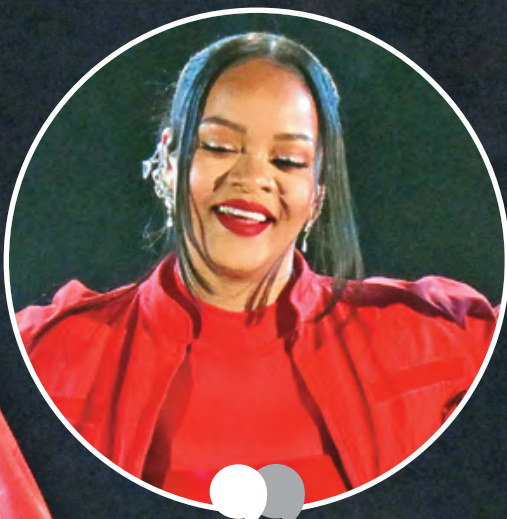
time around, the Barbados-born singer said it was 'important for representation'.

"It's important for my son to see this," she said.

Since releasing *Anti* in early 2016, Robyn Rihanna Fenty has taken a break from recording but has, by no means, taken it easy: she's become a billionaire, parlaying her music achievements into successful makeup, lingerie, and high-fashion brands.

Since her last album, Rihanna has performed occasional features and more recently recorded music for the *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* soundtrack. But the album she's been teasing for years remains the stuff of myth, and seemed it would stay so a while longer.

AFP



It's important for my son to see this

RIHANNA

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Models walk the runway for LaQuan Smith during New York Fashion Week at the Rainbow Room in Rockefeller Plaza on February 13



New York Fashion Week got underway last Friday with several big names absent from the runway. But a calendar packed full of young designers and emerging labels was the event's trademark.

Rodarte opened the Fall-Winter 2023 parade, one of the few major brands to return this year. Rodarte, the upscale brand of California sisters Kate and Laura Mulleavy, offered a Gothic and mystical show with models parading in black dresses with flared sleeves and occasionally plunging necklines.

The Collina Strada show was an ode to animals in a menagerie atmosphere. One bewhiskered model 'meowed' in front of the delighted audience, followed by a model with a rhinoceros horn and another with a pig snout.

The street-wear touch of the brand is still there, but the colours were less psychedelic, more sober and elegant.

Those who like theatrical shows will also enjoy the return to New York - with a show on Tuesday - of Thom Browne, who succeeds Tom Ford at the head of the American fashion union (CFDA).

Among the other headliners are regulars Proenza Schouler, Altuzarra, Coach, Sergio Hudson, Carolina Herrera, Gabriela Hearst and Michael Kors. But the programme, which ends Wednesday in the middle of the Big Apple's cold month of February, again has a notable absence of high-profilers such as Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren and previous CFDA lead Tom Ford.

Pop icon Rihanna, who has exhibited her lingerie collection Fenty at New York in the past, instead performed at the much-watched Super Bowl half-time show on Sunday.

"Very few names are brands that are prominent in the US market," said Jacqueline Quinn of the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), confiding that her students are focusing on Paris and Milan instead.

New York Fashion Week

YOUNG BRANDS WERE IN VOGUE AT NEW YORK FASHION WEEK WHILE BIG BRANDS REMAINED CONSPICUOUS BY THEIR ABSENCE

GREEN HORNS SHINE BRIGHT

Instead, the collection of ready-to-wear designs serves up a large helping of young talents and new brands, such as Elena Velez.

The 28-year-old was named 'emerging de-

signer of the year' at the 2022 CFDA awards for her non-traditional creations that merge high fashion with the metal-smith heritage of her hometown Milwaukee.

Era of renaissance

Some 20 designers are under 30 years old, including the Nigeria-born, New York-based Taofeek Abijako and his label 'Head of State', Indian Kanika Goyal (KGL) and Emma Gage (Melke) who uses recycled materials for a more sustainable fashion.

For Velez, the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred an 'era of renaissance'.

"I think there's a renewed lust for life and a reminder of the precariousness of life that inspires young people like myself to embolden ourselves with our passions," she told AFP, determined to enjoy it while it lasts. "If we're being honest, the shelf-life of a startup fashion brand isn't exactly lengthy," she added.

Denmark's Christian Juul Nielsen, the creative director at Herve Leger, already has several years of experience behind him having worked at Dior, Nina Ricci and Oscar de la Renta.

In 2019, he launched his own brand, Aknvas, whose designs focus on drape, flattering silhouettes, innovative knits and an elevated palette, according to its website.

"I try to translate the drama I got from John Galiano and the modernity I got from Raf Simons," he said.

For Nielsen, and others like him, New York presents an opportunity.

"A lot of small brands in Paris, they just don't get on the calendar. In America, there is this excitement of newness (and) I want to be part of making the New York fashion scene exciting," Nielsen added.

AFP



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