

## 400,000sqm national cultural centre project in Muscat revived

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Oman Cultural Complex, a project envisaged as the national cultural centre, has been revived and a tender floated for its construction.

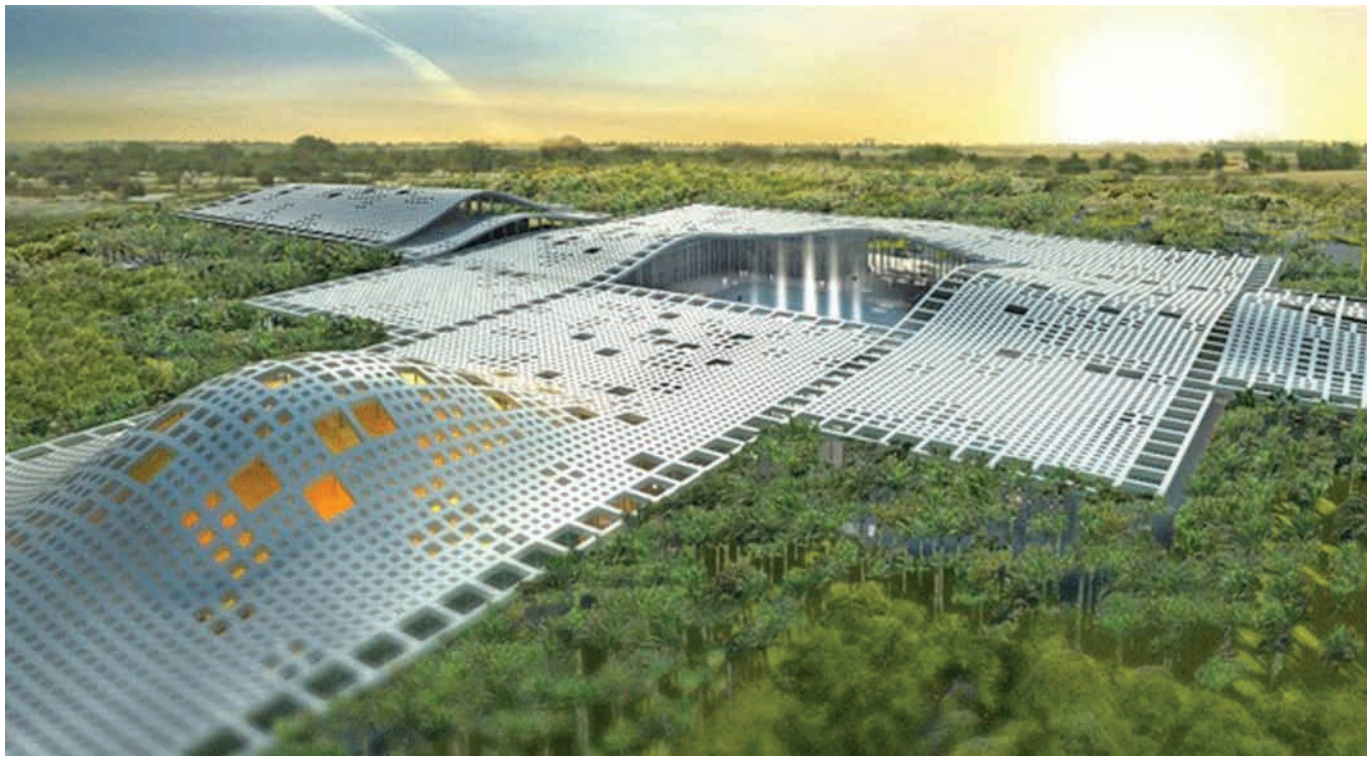
The complex, spread over an area of 400,000sqm opposite Muscat International Airport, will include the National Theatre, National Library and National Archives housed in three separate buildings.

The National Theatre will have a 1,000-seat capacity main auditorium, besides an additional hall for 250 people. The National Library will be a 20,000sqm five-storey building, while the National Archives, partially open to the public, will include nearly 20km of shelf display.

The Oman Cultural Complex (OCC) project, which was first tendered in 2014 but put on hold, is being given a new life under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The ministry is inviting selected contractors who will be required to carry out the specialist design, material procurement and construction of OCC.

According to the tender document brief on the project, this new development by the ministry 'aims to establish a national



cultural centre in Muscat as part of its strategy to preserve history and tradition, provide knowledge and competency, and promote cultural and artistic innovations'.

The ministry added that OCC is a long-deliberated vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to create a landmark for art and culture of an international scale, dedicated to collect, preserve and exhibit Oman's past and present. It is envisaged as a vibrant space to present live con-

temporary art and culture and as a link to local and international knowledge and cultural industries.

Additionally, OCC will provide an inspiring environment for the capital Muscat, the nation, and the region.

'This classic archetype ensemble, with buildings of exceptional contemporary architecture, will have a build-up area of 73,000sqm and be embedded in an oasis like walled

garden with parking and recreational areas.'

The whole complex will be set in landscaped gardens with parking, water features and an open cultural plaza. The central square will be covered with colonnades carrying a canopy and encompassing a main water feature in the middle. It will be framed by four smaller L-shaped facility buildings which will have, among other facilities, a cinema, an arts club with an exhibition gallery, a

children's library and food and beverage outlets.

'These four buildings framing the central square will lead the visitor like gateways to the three main prominent buildings of national importance.'

The deadline for bid submission is November 21. Companies which have already bought the tender document include Etqan Design Investment, National Technology Group, Mohsin Haider Darwish and Alkan East.

## Cybersecurity week begins today; 45 countries expected

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Four hundred specialists from 45 countries will participate in the 10th Regional Cybersecurity Week that kicks off on Sunday and runs till Wednesday in Muscat.

Organised by International Telecommunication Union - Arab Regional Cybersecurity Centre (ITU-ARCC), this year's proceedings will be hosted by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology through Oman National CERT (OCERT).

The week is themed 'Cybersecurity Innovation and Industry Development'. The agenda includes the 10th Regional Cyber Drill (November 6-7), the 10th Regional Cybersecurity Summit, ITU-ARCC Regional Symposium for Africa and Arab Regions, and the 14th Annual Conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation-CERT on November 8-9.

The event will feature a stellar line-up of speakers in panel discussions, engaging discussions, making unique presentations providing access to a wealth of industry related knowledge, sharing insights, best practices and experiences, and spotlighting trends, outlooks and case studies.

'Cybersecurity tops the list of



*'Cybersecurity tops the list of priorities in Oman, as businesses and the government sector align with the directions of Oman Vision 2040'*

priorities in Oman, as businesses and the government sector align with the directions of Oman Vision 2040,' OCERT said.

Muscat was named Arab Digital Capital for 2022. The sultanate's candidacy was filed under the slogan 'A digital future that creates opportunities', which focused on three important areas - cybersecurity, digital innovation and digital capabilities.

'The 10th Regional Cybersecurity Week aims to develop digital talent and skills in the Arab world, enhance cooperation in cybersecurity and encourage investment in the digital economy,' OCERT stated.

### GEARING UP FOR NATIONAL DAY



Muscat begins to wear a festive look with Muscat Municipality working in earnest in preparation of the 52nd National Day (VK Shafeer)

## Oman, Turkey sign pact to boost mutual trade

Ankara, Turkey - Oman and Turkey signed a cooperation protocol, which is set to increase mutual trade and ties in various fields, on Thursday.

Nureddin Nebati, Turkish Treasury and Finance Minister, tweeted that the protocol was signed following the 11th Turkey-Oman Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting as the Turkish minister hosted H E Qais Mohammed al Youssef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and investment Promotion.

Referring to the agreement, Nebati said, "Considering the need to increase trade volume and mutual investments between the two countries, we agreed to strengthen bilateral relations by increasing cooperation in many fields from education to agriculture, industry and tourism."

The sectors which the two



Turkish Minister Nureddin Nebati (R) and H E Qais Mohammed al Youssef during the protocol signing ceremony in Ankara on Thursday

countries aim to develop cooperation in include finance, energy, construction, science and technology, industry, standardisation, transportation, education, health, environment, agriculture and forestry, as well as tourism and culture.

Addressing the meeting, Nebati also emphasised the significance of holding JEC meetings

on a regular basis and meticulously following the results.

"I hope all this agreement contributes greatly to the relations between our countries," he said.

H E Youssef, on his part, said during the meeting that Oman is ready and looks forward to the continuation of bilateral economic cooperation by increasing momentum of trade activities.

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CBO hikes repo rate again by 75 bps after Fed's move

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Avenues of Wonders at Art & Soul Gallery

## World on 'delicate precipice', says Pope at inter-faith talks in Bahrain

Riffa, Bahrain - About 30,000 flag-waving worshippers joined an open-air mass held by Pope Francis in Bahrain on Saturday, the highlight of his outreach mission to the Gulf.

Some of the congregation had tears in their eyes as they waited to see the 85-year-old at Bahrain National Stadium, the kingdom's biggest venue.

Francis, who uses a wheelchair and walking stick due to knee problems, smiled and waved to the crowds from an open-sided popemobile where he was seated, flanked by more than a dozen suited security guards and attendants.

As a 100-strong, multinational choir sang in multiple languages, the Argentine stood to kiss children lifted up to greet

him in the specially adapted vehicle, which drove slowly towards a white stage backdropped by a giant gold cross.

"This very land is a living image of coexistence in diversity and indeed an image of our world, increasingly marked by the constant migration of peoples and by a pluralism of ideas, customs and traditions," he said in an address.

The pope, who has made outreach to Islam a pillar of his papacy, is on his second visit to the Gulf region.

During his 2019 trip to the United Arab Emirates, he led a mass for 170,000 people and signed a Christian-Muslim manifesto for peace.

He has spent much of his



Pope Francis arrives to celebrate mass at Bahrain National Stadium in Riffa, near the capital Manama, on Saturday (AFP)

four-day Bahrain trip meeting top officials and religious figures, but for Catholics in the tiny island nation, including many migrant workers, Saturday's mass was

the high point.

On Friday, Pope Francis warned the world is on the edge of a "delicate precipice" and buffeted by "winds of war" as he

held inter-faith talks with one of Sunni Islam's top leaders.

He decried the "opposing blocs" of East and West, a veiled reference to the standoff over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in a speech to religious leaders.

"We continue to find ourselves on the brink of a delicate precipice and we do not want to fall," he told an audience including Bahrain's king and Sheikh Ahmed al Tayeb, the grand imam of Cairo's prestigious Al Azhar mosque.

"We appear to be witnessing a dramatic and childlike scenario: in the garden of humanity, instead of cultivating our surroundings, we are playing instead with fire, missiles and bombs," the pope said.

AFP

### Oman, Vatican to establish diplomatic relations

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, held a telephonic conversation with Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States at the Vatican City, on Thursday.

"Shared a call with Archbishop Paul Gallagher this evening. We agreed to establish diplomatic relations and affirmed our mutual commitment to dialogue, the rule of law, and the UN Charter," H E Sayyid Badr tweeted.



# Halima takes chequered flag in male bastion



(Supplied photos)

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

Breaking a stereotype, rally driver Halima al Balushi is creating a name for herself in a male dominated sport that demands endurance and machismo.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Halima revealed that her first love was equestrian sports. "During childhood, I loved riding horses but soon realised I wanted to be a rally driver."

Halima attributed the combination of her undying passion, and relentless support from family, friends and the Oman Automobile Association (OAA) that motivates her to train hard. "Now my dream is to make Oman proud with my skills as a rally driver."

Halima has participated in numerous local competitions, besides making a mark in the 2022 Middle East Rally Championship.

"In September, I won the first place in the Gymkhana Challenge at OAA. I was placed second in the same contest held in Ramadan this year."

According to Halima, OAA brought back the Gymkhana Challenge in April 2022 after a gap of six years. In it, two cars compete against each other on OAA's obstacle course.



*I strive to participate in international competitions to raise Oman's flag, thereby spreading this sport among Omani girls*

**HALIMA AL BALUSHI**

"I participated in Saudi Arabia's Rally Jameel, a Middle East Rally Championship, in March

2022 as navigator with Sanaa al Shekaili. We claimed ninth place. The championship saw stiff competition among 68 women rally drivers from 34 countries."

Encouraging other women to take up the sport, she said many women are now showing interest in motor sports in the sultanate. "There is great enthusiasm to participate in the events hosted by OAA. I strive to participate in international competitions to raise the sultanate's flag, thereby spreading this sport among Omani girls."

## Over 50,000 financial phishing attacks detected in H1 2022

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

A total of 54,806 financial phishing attacks aimed at organisations were detected and blocked by Kaspersky solutions in Oman in the first half of 2022.

More than half of these (51 per cent) targeted online shopping outlets, while 30 per cent were for payment systems such as PayPal, ApplePay and others, and 19 per cent were against banks in the country.

According to Kaspersky's Financial Cyberthreats report, attacks are becoming increasingly corporate rather than consumer focused. As seen from the Kaspersky Security Network, financial threat detections targeting businesses grew in the Middle East in Q2 2022. Financial phishing aimed at organisations also stay high.

Business-related financial threat detections increased nearly fourfold in the Middle East in Q2 - by 286 per cent - compared to the previous quarter. These detections are specific to banking trojans, malware commonly used to steal data stored or processed through online banking systems, e-payment systems and plastic card sys-



*Financial threat is one challenge which is becoming more advanced in exploiting human behaviour and will only continue to grow*

**EMAD HAFFAR**

tems. This growth was mostly due to an upward trajectory in financial threat detections in Egypt, UAE, Kuwait and Oman, while Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar witnessed a decrease in these types of threats.

Financial phishing is another deceptive way of stealing information, and is gaining momentum in the region. Phishing is a type of online fraud where the scammer sends fake alerts from

banks, e-pay systems and other organisations to trick consumers into sharing their financial details. The alerts sent by the scammer can be related to loss of data, update credentials or system breakdown, which results in theft of passwords, credit card numbers, bank account details and other confidential information.

"A life without Internet is strange to us. So much so, that

our financial life is now digital. This is the magic of digitisation. But we also need to be aware of an unprecedented wave of challenges. Financial threat is one such challenge which is becoming more advanced in exploiting human behaviour and will only continue to grow. Businesses trying to stay ahead of such evolving, complex cyber attacks should make fraud prevention a focal point to control fraud transactions, eventually reduce fraud risk in the future and avoid reputation damage," said Emad Haffar, head of technical experts at Kaspersky.

To help businesses stay ahead of financial threats and phishing attacks, Kaspersky recommends educating employees as they are considered the first line of cyber defence, make it a continuous learning experience and teach them about the red flags they need to keep an eye out for.

Kaspersky also recommends extending the dos and don'ts of cyber security to customers so that they protect themselves against phishing fraud using the Kaspersky Fraud Prevention solution, which proactively analyses and detects whether a customer's device is infected with malware in real-time.

## OCCI finalises candidate list

Muscat - The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) Elections Committee has announced the initial list of voters and candidates for the OCCI board of directors and boards of its branches for the tenure 2022-2026 on its website [www.omanchamber.om](http://www.omanchamber.om)

OCCI said that concerned parties can object to the initial voters lists to the Appeals Committee from Sunday to Tuesday, and against the lists of candidates till Thursday.

The Appeals Committee will decide on all appeals within three working days from the date of submission. The committee's decision will be final.

All appeals should be sent to [elections@chamberoman.om](mailto:elections@chamberoman.om), addressing the subject of the appeal, and include supporting documents, a copy of the voter's or candidate's certificate as well as a copy of their ID card.

The appeal fee will be RO100 and should be transferred to Oman Arab Bank Account No 3101067170503. A copy of the deposit slip should be attached to the email.

### PRAYER TIMINGS

|         |         |
|---------|---------|
| Fajr    | 4.58am  |
| Sunrise | 6.15am  |
| Duhr    | 11.55am |
| Asr     | 3.07pm  |
| Maghrib | 5.31pm  |
| Isha    | 6.43pm  |



(Supplied photo)

## Pact signed to support school students to excel in sports

**Our Correspondent**  
Muscat

In a bid to redouble efforts in supporting sports across schools in Oman, the Omani School Sports Association signed a partnership and cooperation agreement with Oman Telecommunications Company - Omantel, last week.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary for Education in the Ministry of Education and chairman of the association, and Talal bin Saeed al Maamari, CEO, Omantel.

The agreement will contribute to improving and activating various activities and programmes of the association during the 2022/2023 academic year, enhancing efforts in supporting school sports, and providing an exceptional experience for school

students in the sultanate.

"This partnership will also enhance raising the standards of sports sponsorship experiences for the association to achieve the aspirations of students and the school community," a press release stated.

Through the partnership, the two parties seek to contribute to the preparation of a healthy generation that participates in the development of society through the implementation of programmes for physical health.

"The agreement also aims to refine students' talents and skills and opening areas of cooperation with clubs and federations to strengthen national teams. This partnership will have a major role as well in promoting the concept of sport as a way of life and contributing to raising the quality of life for the community."

On the occasion, H E Dr Ambosaidi said, "This partnership with the Omantel is necessary to implement the agenda of the Omani School Sports Association as it will support activities carried out by the association in relation to promoting school sports. The activities of the Omani School Sports Association are diverse and numerous, and are in need of such support. I call on other institutions to contribute to the promotion of school sports."

On his turn, Maamari emphasised the importance of the partnership as it is part of a group of activities supported by Omantel. "There is no doubt that the education sector is one of the most important aspects of the company's social responsibility, as the school sports sector also supports youth and Omani sports in general."

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# CBO hikes repo rate again by 75 bps after Fed's move

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Thursday further raised its repo rate for local banks by 75 basis points (bps) to 4.50 per cent, moving with US Federal Reserve as Oman's currency is pegged to the US dollar.

However, the CBO has again cautioned local banks not to increase lending rates for consumers as there is sufficient liquidity available in Oman's financial system.

Oman's rate hike decision was made after the US Fed on Wednesday increased its key interest rate by another 75 basis points. The sultanate follows a fixed exchange-rate regime, and consequently its interest rate is closely aligned with US rates. As a result, the CBO's repo rate generally moves in tandem with the Fed's policy rate.

Repo rate is the policy rate that allows commercial banks to borrow short-term liquidity from the CBO as the lender of last resort.

'After the US Fed's recent announcement to raise its key policy rate, the Central Bank of Oman has increased its repo rate for local banks at the similar rate of 75 basis points to 4.50 per cent,' CBO said in a statement.

The US central bank on Wednesday raised the bench-



mark lending rate by 0.75 percentage point - the fourth straight increase of that size and the sixth hike this year - in its all-out battle to tame inflation not seen since the 1980s. The Fed's latest 75 basis points in-

nature of the Omani economy, it said.

'There are a number of advantages for Oman that are derived from this policy, namely ensuring the stability of the Omani rial, mitigating capital

year.

The global economy is witnessing rising and sustained inflationary pressure and central banks around the world are attempting to address this pressure by hiking interest rates.

'While higher interest rates are expected to lead to lower inflation, in some cases, as related to consumers in high-income brackets, they could result in higher savings,' the CBO said.

## GCC central banks raise interest rates

As most Gulf states keep their currencies pegged to the US dollar, other GCC central banks also lifted their policy rates by mostly 75 basis points on Thursday.

Similar to Oman, Saudi Central Bank, also known as SAMA, raised its repo rate by 75 basis

points to 4.50 per cent and its reverse repo rate by 75 basis points to 4.0 per cent. The move to hike rates is 'in line with the Saudi Central Bank's objective of maintaining monetary and financial stability', SAMA said on its website.

The Central Bank of the UAE (CBUAE) decided to raise its base rate applicable to the overnight deposit facility by 75 basis points to 3.90 per cent from 3.15 per cent, effective from Thursday. The CBUAE also decided to maintain the rate applicable to borrowing short-term liquidity from the CBUAE through all standing credit facilities at 50 basis points above the base rate.

Moreover, Qatar Central Bank raised its repo rate by 75 basis points to 4.75 per cent. It also raised central bank deposit rate by 75 basis points to 4.50 per cent and its lending rate by equal margin to 5.0 per cent.

Bahrain's central bank raised its policy rate on one-week deposit facility by 75 basis points to 4.75 per cent.

However, Kuwait - which keeps its currency pegged to a basket of currencies - kept its key policy rate unchanged amid a decline in inflation. Consumer price inflation in Kuwait slowed down to reach 3.19 per cent in September 2022 after soaring to an all-time peak of 4.71 per cent in April 2022, the Central Bank of Kuwait said on its website.



# G7 calls on oil-rich countries to up production

Münster, Germany - The Group of Seven club of rich countries on Friday called on oil-producing states to increase production to help bring down prices, a month after OPEC+ decided to drastically reduce its output.

Increasing production should help "decrease volatility in energy markets" caused by the war in Ukraine, G7 foreign ministers said in a statement after talks in Germany.

The 13-nation OPEC cartel and its 10 allies headed by Moscow said in October it would cut production by two million barrels a day from November, raising fears oil prices could soar.

The G7 also said it intends to finalise "in the coming weeks" the implementation of a Russian oil price cap mechanism.

Rising prices for energy in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have driven a global surge in inflation and weighed on economic activity.

G7 countries have long planned the implementation of a Russian oil price cap aimed at depriving Moscow of a key source of cash for its war in Ukraine as well as cooling energy prices.

*G7 also said it intends to finalise 'in the coming weeks' the implementation of a Russian oil price cap mechanism*

Australia recently joined the G7 and the European Union in backing the move.

But work toward imposing a cap has dragged on for months as Western allies have struggled to build a broader coalition of support. While the United States has already imposed an embargo on Russian oil and the EU will ban most imports from December, other countries have maintained economic ties with Moscow.

Western officials have said the price for Russian oil would remain above the cost of production so that Moscow would still have an incentive to supply importing countries.

But Moscow has warned it would cut off oil supplies to countries that impose such a cap.

AFP

## MARKET ANALYSIS - OMAN

# MSX posts marginal gain amid volatile trading

The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) posted a marginal gain during last week amid continuing volatility in trading on the bourse.

MSX30 Index ended the week up by 0.01 per cent. Among sub-indices, Industrial Index recorded the highest gain of 0.54 per cent for the week followed by Financial Index which ended 0.34 per cent higher. However, Services Index ended the week lower by 0.67 per cent. MSX Shariah Index was up by 0.87 per cent.

## Local news

►Oman Fisheries Company announced that it has signed a sales agreement with Saudi Fisheries Company. The agreement shall enter into force from the date of its signing for a period of three years. The agreement aims to export 1,200 metric tonnes of fish as a first stage, with revenues of not less than one million Omani riyals annually.

►Omantel and Chinese technology giant Huawei inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to collaborate on cloud business. As part of their strategic cooperation, Omantel and Huawei will come together to conduct market insight analysis of cloud business in Oman. The two companies will also join hands to identify cutting-edge services that can boost cloud technology adoption of organisations and develop the cloud business market in the country.

►Total number of guests in

hotel properties of the 3 to 5-star category in the sultanate increased 31.6 per cent to 1.118mn total (end September 2022), compared to 0.850mn guests for the same period of 2021. The occupancy rate increased to 42.7 per cent, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) compared to 35 per cent last year. Total revenues of these hotels rose doubled to RO120.167mn in the first nine months of 2022 compared to RO60.059mn during the same period of the previous year.

►The real estate sector in Oman is witnessing some emerging signs of market stability despite headwinds, according to a new report. "Oman's economy has recovered well from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and weak oil prices," said Swapnil Pillai, associate director, Middle East research at global real estate consultancy and broker Savills in the Middle East.

"The government's financial position is much stronger now than it has been for several years, despite the pandemic, due to a prudent fiscal approach. Recent months have also witnessed an acceleration in government investment projects," he added. Savills latest research analysing Oman's real estate market performance provides a comprehensive snapshot of the sultanate's macroeconomic environment whilst focusing on the residen-



tial and commercial real estate sectors.

►The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) signed a memorandum of cooperation with Vale, in partnership with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and Oman's National Program for Investment & Export Development (Nazdaher). In the memorandum, the parties agreed to conduct a feasibility study to explore the prospects of developing an integrated industrial complex (mega hub) in Oman that will contribute to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, in line with international priorities set forth in the Paris Climate Agreement.

## GCC markets

The GCC countries will see their economic recovery continuing into the next year, according to the IMF's regional director. Oil producers among the GCC

states will see the momentum of their economic recovery carrying over into next year, according to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) regional director.

Speaking at a press conference in Dubai on Monday, Jihad Azour said oil producers in the region had seen fast recovery since COVID-19, while oil importers had already seen gradual slowdown, and this is expected to continue as the global outlook remains negative over the next 12-18 months. Azour, director Middle East and Central Asia, said of the region's oil producers: "The drive, in terms of the recovery of the non-oil sector, is continuing this year and next. When it comes to the oil, it definitely depends on demand and price and the level of export."

Saudi banks are likely to require further central bank liquidity injections from the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA). In a re-

cent report, Fitch said this is likely to be driven by lending growth that continues to outpace deposit growth. Sector loans increased by 12.5 per cent in the first nine months of 2022, compared with 8 per cent for deposits, which led the loans-to-deposits ratio (LDR) for Saudi banks collectively to rise to 102.2 per cent, the highest level in at least 15 years. Without liquidity support, lending growth could be muted in the fourth quarter of 2022, which lowers Fitch's 2023 loan growth forecast of 12 per cent, while banks' cost of funding will continue to increase.

Kuwait will use an expected budget surplus for fiscal year ending March 31, 2023 to replenish its General Reserve Fund (GRF), its finance minister said, after running down the GRF during the COVID-19 pandemic when oil prices dropped. The oil-producing Gulf state's parliament on Tuesday ap-

proved the 2022-2023 government budget after a delay caused by a political standoff that led to a dissolution of the previous assembly and an early election held in September. The budget set spending at KD23.5bn (US\$75.9bn) and revenues at KD23.4bn, according to a parliamentary committee report seen by Reuters. It is based on an oil price of US\$80 per barrel.

Business conditions in Saudi Arabia's non-oil private sector expanded at a faster rate in October supported by strong demand and rising new work inflows, a survey showed on Wednesday. The companies surveyed reported improving domestic economic conditions and softening inflationary pressures, which led to the most optimistic outlook for future output since the beginning of 2021. The seasonally adjusted Riyadh Bank Saudi Arabia Purchasing Managers' Index rose to 57.2 in October from 56.6 in September. Readings above 50.0 indicate expansion in activity. The October reading was also the second-highest in a year, recording only slightly below August's recent high.

Saudi Arabia posted revenue of over SAR950.2bn and expenditure of SAR800.7bn in the first nine months of 2022, with a surplus of almost SAR149.5bn, the Ministry of Finance announced. In the third quarter, revenue stood at SAR301.87bn, while expenditure reached SAR287.73bn. The actual budget surplus reached

SAR14.14bn. Actual revenue hit SAR950.2bn in the first nine months of 2022, a rise of 36 per cent year-on-year.

Saudi Arabia's oil revenue came in at SAR663.09bn in the nine-month period, while non-oil revenue stood at SAR287.11bn. Actual expenditure jumped 14 per cent to SAR800.65bn in the first nine months of the year. The kingdom's public debt increased 4 per cent to SAR971.8bn in nine months of 2022, from SAR938bn by the end of 2021.

## Global news

The Federal Reserve lifted, November 2, interest rates by 75 basis points (bps) in line with its efforts to control inflation in the US. The Fed raised target interest rate to a range of 3.75-4.00 per cent, from 3.00 - 3.25 per cent. The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) anticipates that ongoing increases in the target range will be appropriate in order to attain a stance of monetary policy that is sufficiently restrictive to return inflation to 2 per cent over time.

The Committee's assessments will take into account a wide range of information, including readings on public health, labour market conditions, inflation pressures and inflation expectations, and financial and international developments. It will also take into account the cumulative tightening of monetary policy, the lags with which monetary policy affects economic activity and inflation, and economic and financial developments.

# Twitter sacks half of staff as Elon Musk launches overhaul

San Francisco, US - Twitter sacked half of its 7,500-strong staff on Friday as new owner Elon Musk launched his major overhaul of the troubled company just a week after his blockbuster takeover.

An internal document seen by AFP said "roughly 50 per cent" of employees were impacted and would be denied access to company computers and email on an immediate basis.

Workers around the world were shown the door and took to Twitter to vent their frustration or disbelief and say goodbye to one of Silicon Valley's most iconic companies.

"Woke up to the news that my time working at Twitter has come to an end. I am heartbroken. I am in denial," said Michele Austin, Twitter's director of public policy for the United States and Canada.

"Regarding Twitter's reduction in force, unfortunately there is no choice when the company is losing over US\$4mn per day," Musk tweeted Friday evening in his first comment on the subject, 24 hours after the company's initial email notifying employees of forthcoming layoffs.

Ahead of the layoffs, Twitter closed access to its offices worldwide, asking employees to stay at home to await news of their fate through an email.

"It's a pretty inhumane way to treat people. It seems like a mer-



Twitter Headquarters in San Francisco, California on November 4, 2022 (AFP)

cenary effort, they're trying to save money at all cost," said one dismissed employee who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The cull is part of Musk's push to find ways to pay for the mammoth US\$44bn deal for which he took on billions of dollars in debt and sold US\$15.5bn worth of shares in Tesla, his electric car company. Company sources said that Musk's teams were imposing a furious pace on the remaining employees, bringing in Tesla developers to oversee the work of "Tweeps," the inhouse name for Twitter workers.

Musk, the Tesla and SpaceX chief, is said to owe US\$1bn in annual interest alone to pay for a deal he tried to wiggle out from almost as soon as he made it in April.

Musk has been scrambling to find new ways for Twitter to make money after his mammoth buyout, including an idea to charge users US\$8 a month for verified accounts.

The moves would help overcome the potential loss of advertisers, Twitter's main source of revenue, with many of the world's top brands putting their ad buys on hold, spooked by Musk's well-known disdain for content controls.

The mercurial tycoon on Friday complained on Twitter of a "massive drop in revenue" that he blamed on "activist groups" that were pressuring advertisers.

"We did everything we could to appease the activists. Extremely messed up! They're trying to destroy free speech in

America," he added.

This appeared to refer to Musk's recent meeting with civil rights groups in which he heard concerns that Twitter would open the floodgates to hate speech a week before midterm election in the United States.

In an effort to soothe nerves, Musk had vowed that Twitter will not become a "free-for-all hellscape," but since taking over the company he also has shared a tweet relaying a conspiracy theory about an assault on the husband of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

"We are witnessing the real time destruction of one of the world's most powerful communication systems. Elon Musk is an erratic billionaire who is dangerously unqualified to run this

platform," said Nicole Gill, executive director of Accountable Tech.

She was part of a coalition of 60 rights groups calling on Friday for a boycott by advertisers of the Musk-owned platform.

Derrick Johnson, president of the NAACP, a leading civil rights organization, said it would be "immoral, dangerous, and highly destructive to our democracy for any advertiser to fund a platform that fuels hate speech, election denialism and conspiracy theories."

"Until actions are taken to make this a safe space, we call on companies to pause all advertising on Twitter," he added.

Twitter head of safety and integrity Yoel Roth tried to soothe concerns, saying that about 15 per cent of his department had been let go in comparison to the 50-per cent cuts company-wide.

The site's "core moderation capabilities remain in place," he tweeted.

Though extremely influential with opinion-makers and celebrities, the California company has long struggled to generate profit and has failed to keep pace with Facebook, Instagram and TikTok in gaining new users.

In the sign that matters were not improving, data showed Twitter may have lost more than a million users since Musk took over.

AFP



Photo for illustrative purpose only

## Saudi Arabia launches first electric vehicle company

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia announced the launch of its first brand of electric vehicles, part of a broader push to diversify the economy of the world's biggest oil exporter.

The company, known as Ceer, "will contribute to Saudi Arabia's efforts towards carbon emissions reduction and driving sustainability to address the impact of climate change," the official Saudi Press Agency said.

It is a partnership with Foxconn, China's biggest private sector employer, which "will develop the electrical architecture of the vehicles", SPA said.

Ceer "will design, manufacture and sell a range of vehicles for consumers in Saudi Arabia and the MENA region, including sedans and sports utility vehicles," it said, adding the company was expected to create "30,000 direct and indirect jobs".

Ceer vehicles "are scheduled

to be available in 2025", SPA said.

In April, Saudi Arabia announced a deal with US-based Lucid Motors, which is setting up a factory in the kingdom, to purchase up to 100,000 electric vehicles over the next decade.

Like the Lucid deal, Ceer is backed by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, whose Vision 2030 reform agenda depends on rapid economic diversification.

"Saudi Arabia is not just building a new automotive brand, we are igniting a new industry and an ecosystem that attracts international and local investments, creates job opportunities for local talent, enables the private sector, and contributes to increasing Saudi Arabia's GDP over the next decade," Prince Mohammed said Thursday.

AFP

## US sees strong job gains as wages move higher

Washington, US - US job gains topped expectations in October, according to official data released Friday, as hiring remained resilient and wages moved ever higher, underscoring the challenges in lowering rampant inflation.

The data comes days ahead of critical midterm elections, where decades-high inflation has propelled economic issues to the top of voters' minds and President Joe Biden faces a battle to avoid losing control of both chambers of Congress.

The figures will provide little comfort to the Federal Reserve, which has been battling to cool the economy, as policymakers fear high prices will become entrenched and rising pay will create an upward spiral - inflicting more harm on families and businesses.

American employers added 261,000 workers last month, far more than economists had forecast, though the pace was lower than the 315,000 increase in September, which was revised much higher than originally reported by the Labor Department.

The jobless rate rose two-tenths to 3.7 per cent, according to the closely-watched US employment report.

Biden cheered the data which showed 10mn jobs have been created since he took office in January 2020, but he recognized the hardship Americans face due to higher prices.

"Inflation is our top economic challenge..."

The global inflation that is raging in other countries is hitting us as well," Biden said in a statement on Friday.

He said policymakers will "do what it takes to bring inflation down."

Average hourly earnings for private sector workers jumped another 12 cents or 0.4 per cent



last month, to US\$32.58, the report said.

Wages have increased 4.7 per cent over the last 12 months as firms have had to compete to find and retain workers in the tight labor market.

That pace is slightly slower than in September, which the Fed will welcome, but many employees are pushing for increases to avoid losing ground to elevated consumer costs.

US markets rallied following the latest data, which raised hopes of a soft landing for the economy. Major indices closed higher on Friday, despite the Fed's pledge that interest rates will need to rise further to quell inflation.

"The bottom line here is that the labor market is softening, but has not yet reached the point where the data are screaming at the Fed to stop tightening," said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, in an analysis.

But if employment trends continue, markets will start to push policymakers to "rethink the idea of continued hikes next year," he added.

The data showed notable job gains in health care, professional and technical services, and manufacturing.

The Fed has raised borrowing rates six times this year to cool demand, but there have been few signs it is having an impact on consumer spending or infla-

tion.

The central bank said this week that it would have to continue hiking rates, although that has raised the risk that the world's biggest economy will suffer a downturn.

But Susan Collins, president of the Boston Federal Reserve Bank said she sees a chance to accomplish the task of reining in price increases without completely putting the brakes on growth.

While inflation so far is only slowly drifting down, "I do not believe a significant slowdown is required to accomplish our goal," she said in a speech in Washington on Friday.

But she stressed that the Fed must continue to act as "current levels of inflation are simply too high, and are taking a significant toll on households and firms."

While the policy tightening normally would be expected to lead to job losses, economists say employers are reluctant to shed workers that they struggled to find.

"The data are still showing strong positive momentum in the labor market which is not yet showing much adjustment in response to a rapid tightening of monetary policy," said Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics.

"These data will keep the Fed on track to keep raising rates into restrictive territory," she said in an analysis.

AFP

## Bank of England warns UK may face two-year recession, hikes rate

London, UK - The Bank of England announced its biggest interest rate hike since 1989 to combat sky-high inflation that it warned was pushing Britain into a recession that risks lasting until mid-2024.

Following a regular meeting, the BoE said it was lifting borrowing costs by 0.75 percentage points to three percent - the highest level since the 2008 global financial crisis - to cool UK inflation that it sees shortly peaking at a four-decade high near 11 per cent.

"It is a tough road ahead," BoE governor Andrew Bailey told a press conference.

"The sharp increase in energy prices caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine has made us poorer as a nation."

Minutes of its meeting warned of a "challenging outlook for the UK economy" that was "expected to be in recession for a prolonged period", dealing a blow to Britain's troubled government.

The latest rate increase mirrors aggressive tightening by central banks worldwide as food prices and energy bills soar.

On Wednesday, the US Federal Reserve sprang a fourth con-



BoE Governor Andrew Bailey arrives to address the media on the Monetary Policy Report at the Bank of England, in London, on Thursday (AFP)

secutive hike of 0.75 percentage points - and its boss Jerome Powell suggested they would go higher than expected.

The BoE said British inflation would peak at 10.9 per cent this year, but with the level so high, some analysts said the central bank rate could still hit around five per cent in the coming months.

Such a rate, the BoE said Thursday, could see the UK economy suffer eight quarters of contraction in a row. At the same time, however, it cautioned that it did not expect borrowing costs to climb as high as market expectations.

The BoE said the economy

had shrunk since the third quarter, entering a technical recession that is forecast to last until the first half of 2024.

The pound tumbled two per cent against the dollar on expectations of a long-lasting recession and BoE expectations that its key rate may not rise much further.

"A typical textbook trade is out of the window because currencies usually move higher when a central bank increases rates," noted Naeem Aslam, chief market analyst at Avatrade.

"Tough times are ahead, and we are going to see the economy, markets, and the currency tanking in the coming months."

US interest rates increased

and the dollar strengthened amid growing recessionary concerns on Wednesday. The Fed increased interest rates by 75 basis points for the fourth consecutive time to the highest level in 14 years.

Fed chairman Jerome Powell said it was too early to consider a pause in interest rate hikes and that the final level of interest rates could be higher than expected.

Anadolu Agency

## Oil prices rise over 3% during last week

Ankara, Turkey - Oil prices increased during the week ending November 4, supported by the declining value of the US dollar and fears of tightening supply amid looming EU sanctions on Russian crude set to start on December 5.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$97.61 per barrel on Friday for a 3.36 per cent increase from the opening price on Monday of US\$94.43 a barrel.

American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI), trading at US\$91.35 per barrel at the same time, saw a 3.34 per cent rise compared to Monday's opening at US\$88.39 a barrel.

Investor concerns over tightening supply in advance of the impending EU restrictions on Russian oil shipments helped to support prices.

The forecast for China's economic development deteriorated on Monday from its pandemic

policy, which led to a slow economic recovery and decreased fuel demand.

Tuesday saw prices increase with the much-anticipated US Federal Reserve meeting which led to a weaker US dollar.

The declining value of US dollar encouraged other currency users to purchase more crude oil at lower prices and pushed prices higher towards end of the week.

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Anadolu Agency

OAB felicitates Omani photographers on Youth Day



On the occasion of Omani Youth Day, Oman Arab Bank organised an event to recognise a number of talented Omani photographers. The event was held to celebrate the photographers' contribution to the bank's second eco-friendly desk calendar for 2022, showcasing stunning photographs of Oman's rich wildlife.

Through this initiative, OAB reiterated its commitment to establishing strong partnerships with various segments of society, and further reinforced its objectives as part of its Sustainability Strategy. This event was an opportunity for the photographers to showcase their work and raise awareness around the importance of preserving Oman's wildlife, a press release said.

Leen al Atassi, head of Corporate Communications, said, "We are pleased to host this event on Omani Youth Day, and to have the opportunity to share the powerful images that these talented photographers had captured of Oman's wildlife with the public. Our hope is that their images continue to raise awareness."

Iranian cultural fest on at Grand Millennium Muscat



Grand Millennium Muscat, a luxury five-star hotel located at the heart of Muscat, has teamed up with SalamAir to celebrate and showcase the rich culture of Iran.

For the first time, experienced Iranian Chef Eslam Rachidi and his team will showcase their expertise in authentic Iranian dishes in the Sultanate of Oman. In addition to the intriguing Iranian cuisine, there will be live traditional Iranian musical instruments performed by Amir Hossein Keramat and his band, showcasing the elegance of Iranian music till November 17, a press release said.

The hotel will offer a Grand Iranian Buffet from Thursday to Friday, a la carte dinner from Saturday to Wednesday, and a Business Lunch daily.

Luca Medda, cluster general manager at Grand Millennium Muscat, said, "In every opportunity, we always strive to find ways to create a concept that is new, unique, and fun."

Bank Nizwa's growth shows excellence in Islamic banking

Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic Bank in the sultanate, has recorded a positive trajectory of growth as reflected in its financial results in the third quarter of 2022.

As a testament to its progress, Bank Nizwa has turned in a commendable financial performance by registering an 18 per cent growth in net profit. The bank's total assets also increased by 7 percent, reaching RO1,487mn in September 2022 from RO1,384mn in September 2021. The gross financing portfolio improved by 8 per cent to RO1,217mn whilst the total customer deposit portfolio rose by 13 per cent to RO1,209mn. Also, the increase in financing and deposit portfolios in retail and corporate businesses has provided the bank with the impetus to maintain its growth.



The Sustainable City - Yiti wins two accolades

The Sustainable City - Yiti (TSC - Yiti), Oman's first fully sustainable city and the largest sustainable community in the Middle East, bagged two prestigious awards at the 10th edition of the Dossier Construction Awards & Summit (DCIAS).

The project won both, the 'Best Sustainable Project' and 'Best Sustainable Development', accolades for providing the highest standards of environmental, social, and economic sustainability. This includes clean energy production, recycling, vertical farming, and the adoption of clean and sustainable transportation, as well as other solutions that improve residents' quality of life and reduce their carbon footprint, a press release said.

The project was launched earlier this year, as a joint venture between Diamond Developers, the leading company in developing sustainable communities, and Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group), as phase 1 of the Yiti Integrated

*TSC - Yiti is a pioneering project that can transform the entire global sustainable development paradigm, built on an inclusive and integrated philosophy, bringing the highest sustainability standards and the best quality of life, in alignment with the Oman 2040 vision*

HASHIL BIN OBAID AL MAHROUQI

Tourism Development Masterplan.

Bringing together the leading names across construction, infrastructure, real estate, manufacturing and design and engineering consultancy, the Dossier Construction Awards and Summit is renowned and established as a mark of international excellence.

The award ceremony was held in

Sheraton Oman hotel in the presence of H E Dr Khalfan al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning and leaders across various industry. Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of OMRAN Group, received the awards on behalf of The Sustainable City - Yiti.

Mahrouqi said, "We are honoured to have The Sustainable City - Yiti recognised at this year's Dossier Construction Awards & Summit. This stands as

a testament to our unwavering commitment to reaching our sustainable development goals and creating an eco-conscious community that is harmoniously aligned with the distinct geography of the region. It also underlines our strategy to bringing significant in-country value, by generating employment opportunities, and giving local talents the necessary exposure to international markets, and the opportunity to learn from experts in the field.

"TSC - Yiti is a pioneering project that can transform the entire global sustainable development paradigm, built on an inclusive and integrated philosophy, bringing the highest sustainability standards and the best quality of life, in alignment with the Oman 2040 vision."

Located on the picturesque coastline, overlooking the Gulf of Oman, TSC - Yiti brings together a pioneering vision of sustainability and an unparalleled quality of community living to Oman.

Right time to own Infiniti QX50: SBA

Hope of owning an Infiniti QX50, that delivers the promise of a premium motoring experience, is made easy for you this season by Infiniti Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles. The premium mid-size SUV which boasts of world-first technologies, stand-out design and unrivalled interior space is available on special offer, a press release said.

Customers who purchase Infiniti QX50 during the promotion period are eligible for free registration, periodic vehicle maintenance, manufacturer's warranty, AAA/Road assistance card. The special promotion is valid till November 24.

The scheme is applicable for all the customers purchasing Infiniti QX50 for personal use only. Vehicles purchased with commercial registration will not be eligible for the scheme. Vehicles bought for taxi, driving school, ministries, fleet, and rent-a-car usage will not be eligible for this scheme. The scheme is applicable for retail billing only.

The highly rated Infiniti QX50 has been created to meet the needs of today's premium car buyers and to deliver ultimate levels of comfort, design and technology. Its key features include ample space, engine power and efficiency rolled into one unique vehicle.

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, "Customers can benefit much by making best use of the Infiniti Oman's special offer on Infiniti QX50. The crossover embodies everything the brand stands for - beautiful design, advanced technology, and empowering performance."

All customers purchasing Infiniti QX50 during the scheme period will be eligible for free first year vehicle registration.

Customers purchasing Infiniti QX50 in the scheme period will get free Periodic Vehicle Maintenance of three years or 50,000km (whichever is earlier). This offer excludes battery and wear and tear components. This offer includes only the service intervals of 10,000km.

Infiniti QX50 purchased during the scheme period will have a three year/100,000km manufacturer's warranty.

SBA is largely committed to supporting Infiniti Oman's growth in the Sultanate through major emphasis on customer satisfaction and by providing world-class after-sales services in Oman. With a national network of more than 40 showrooms, service centres and parts outlets, SBA has further built upon its legacy of trust, excellent customer service and providing value for money to each of its customers.



Wizz Air Abu Dhabi now flies to Tashkent

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, the ultra-low-fare national airline of the UAE, has launched its latest route to Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent, the largest city in Central Asia.

This step reaffirms the airline's commitment to provide travellers with the opportunity to explore numerous experiences across many destinations within its network, a press release said.

The flight to Tashkent will commence in January 2023 and will operate on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Tickets are already on sale on wizzair.com and the airline's mobile app.

The largest city in Central Asia and the capital of Uzbekistan, Tashkent is one of the main travel and trade hubs along the Silk Road, attracting tourists and businessmen from

various regions around the world. It is more than 2,200 years old and is architecturally and historically significant due to its transformation during and after the Soviet period.

Some of the historical and architectural monuments of Tashkent include Medrese of Barakhan (Madrasah of Barakhan), The Square of Amir Temur, and the Mausoleum of Kaffal-Shashi.

Michael Berlouis, managing director of Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, said, "We look forward to expanding Wizz Air Abu Dhabi operations even further by adding Tashkent to our ever-growing network and the new route will further strengthen the connectivity between Abu Dhabi and Central Asia. Wizz Air Abu Dhabi continues to play a pivotal role in the growth of the UAE's travel sector."

OOA organises Sports Governance course



The Oman Olympic Academy (OOA) last week organised a course on 'Basic Principles of Sports Governance', in light of the directions of Oman's government to implement governance in the unity of the state's administrative apparatus within the Oman 2040 vision.

The course aims to raise awareness of the culture of governance, in general, and governance in the Oman 2040 vision, in particular, besides identifying mechanisms for implementing governance.

The course was presented by Dr Khalifa bin Muhammad al Fatehi, and 33 participants from Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), sports federations and committees, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, sports clubs, and the Military Sports Directorate. It includes practical applications and theoretical lectures in many axes, including the origins and history of governance and its concept, goals, determinants and stages of governance.

SriLankan Airlines bags sustainability award

SriLankan Airlines won the prestigious Best Aviation Sustainability Programme Award, beating 118 other submissions at the recently concluded Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid al Maktoum (SMBR) Global Aviation Awards for its groundbreaking signature upcycle project - 'Mathaka.'



Project Mathaka was SriLankan Airlines' answer to minimising its contribution to landfill waste and ecological footprint by repurposing the airline's scrap material into a variety of lifestyle products, a press release said.

The airline partnered with House of Lonali, a Sri Lankan organisation that designs and manufactures upcycled lifestyle products, to develop the exclusive range of products under the 'Mathaka' brand including travel bags; wallets; books; key tags; and jewellery.

The items, made entirely from disposed airline uniforms, aircraft interior components and other material, will eventually be introduced for sale onboard SriLankan Airlines' flights and through the website and retail partners of House of Lonali. All proceeds from the project will go toward funding the airline's other corporate sustainability initiatives.

ISWK hosts eighth WKMUN

A good delegate gets his/her viewpoint accepted but the best delegate is one who considers everyone's opinion, as the United Nations stands for the holistic development of the entire world.'

This attribute was highlighted at the eighth edition of the Wadi Kabir Model United Nations (WKMUN) held at Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir on October 30-31.

The WKMUN was graced by H E Amit Narang, ambassador of India, as chief guest. He was accompanied by Anoop Bijli, second secretary (Politics and Information), Embassy of India. H E Narang reminded the participants about the impact and power of multilateralism and diplomacy in the world.

He also spoke on the importance of creating newer friendships and being flexible in multilateral diplomacy. His valuable insights on the United Nations as the Lead Negotiator to several pacts and agreements signed by India inspired the student-delegates to imbibe these values in their journey of Model UN.

Renault Koleos blends luxury and efficiency



Renault Koleos effortlessly blends refined luxury with functionality offering business class comfort for everyday adventure.

Owners say it is a vehicle that offers the discerning driver a unique experience that combines innovative technology, unequalled comfort and uncompromising safety to perfectly serve all of their top-end vehicle expectations, a press release said.

The 2022 Renault Koleos SUV is engineered to demand attention and make heads turn. Offering off-road capability with its all-wheel drive transmission, Renault Koleos stands out with its assertive exterior design and enhanced interior comfort.

With its athletic profile, robust front end, roomy seats, taut lines underscored with chrome, Renault Koleos allows owners to take their journey with

confidence. Featuring a powerful and efficient new engine and more on-board technologies Renault Koleos fully embodies the values of the top of the Renault line-up.

The 2022 Renault Koleos also comes with additional features, such as rich acoustics with the BOSE audio system, lighting options, multimedia, navigation, Bluetooth and driving assistance systems in addition to easy park assist.

Renault Koleos has been capturing everyone's attention in Oman with its charismatic, features rich and packed with safety attributes. If you are looking for a spacious SUV with elegant styling and unparalleled four-wheel drive technology, Renault Koleos is the car to buy.

Afrah al Kharusi from Nizwa was fascinated with the brand's easy trunk access and hand-free function. She

said, "The model features powerful, efficient engines, safety attributes and on-board technologies. The SUV is marked for its fuel efficiency and infotainment options too. With a sensor located under the bumper, all you need is a simple gesture with your foot to open the boot with ease. It is very practical when your hands are full when returning from office or shopping. I also like its 8.7inch touchscreen navigation with R-Link2 system and Bose sound, 5 colour ambient lighting."

The model's spacious cabin inspired Taamir al Hinai from Muscat into buying a Renault Koleos. "Renault Koleos has a 2,705 mm wheelbase - for a total vehicle length of 4,673mm - counts amongst the longest in the class and allows Koleos to boast record-breaking interior space to position itself as a D-segment SUV," Taamir said

The model features powerful, efficient engines, safety attributes and on-board technologies. The SUV is marked for its fuel efficiency and infotainment options too.



Zubair EDC announces winners of Brandz+ Interface Design contest

The Zubair Enterprise Development Centre recently announced the winners of the Interface Design Competition for Brandz+, which is one of the platforms supported by the Centre, during a ceremony at The Zubair Corporation in Azaiba.

The ceremony was attended by Said Bin Salim al Sahib, head of Zubair Enterprise Development Centre, Dr Muslim Bin Ali al Mani, dean of Al Zahra College, Salah Bin Said Mahtthori, founder of Brandz+, and several

officials of Zubair EDC, the Zubair EDC's team, as well as academics, administrators, and students from Al Zahra College for Women.

The results of the competition were as follows - Maha bint Mohammed al Hadhrami (first), Al Shifa bint Khalfan al Rashidiya (second), and Amal bint Salem al Hadidyah (third).

Sahib said, "This competition falls within the framework of the Zubair EDC's strategy to support entrepreneur members of the

Centre. Our collaboration with the Al Zahra College for Women is also part of a community-wide partnership with academic institutions in the private sector to serve the community, in order to empower and help college students to demonstrate their skills in drawing and design. Al Zubair EDC seeks to provide many services to its members, whether through consultations, training workshops and monthly experience sessions or through cooperation with the centre's

strategic partners to transform entrepreneurial projects into active projects."

Dr Mahtthori added, "The students of Zahra College for Women demonstrated high levels of skills and competencies, and 10 of the designs presented during the competition qualified for the final sorting, with approximately 25 designs presented in this competition. By presenting their designs, the participants demonstrated a wide range of creativity and ideas."

Bank Muscat offers multiple travel benefits



Bank Muscat continues to offer outstanding benefits to its Asalah Priority Banking customers and Al Jawhar Premier Banking customers, in line with its vision 'To serve you better, everyday' and its continued commitment to customer service excellence.

A number of offers are currently available for customers to enjoy during their travel with family and friends to various local and international destinations, a press release said.

Abdulnasir al Raisi, general manager - Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "We are thrilled with the high level of customer interest in taking advantage of various travel offers, from Asalah Priority Banking and Al

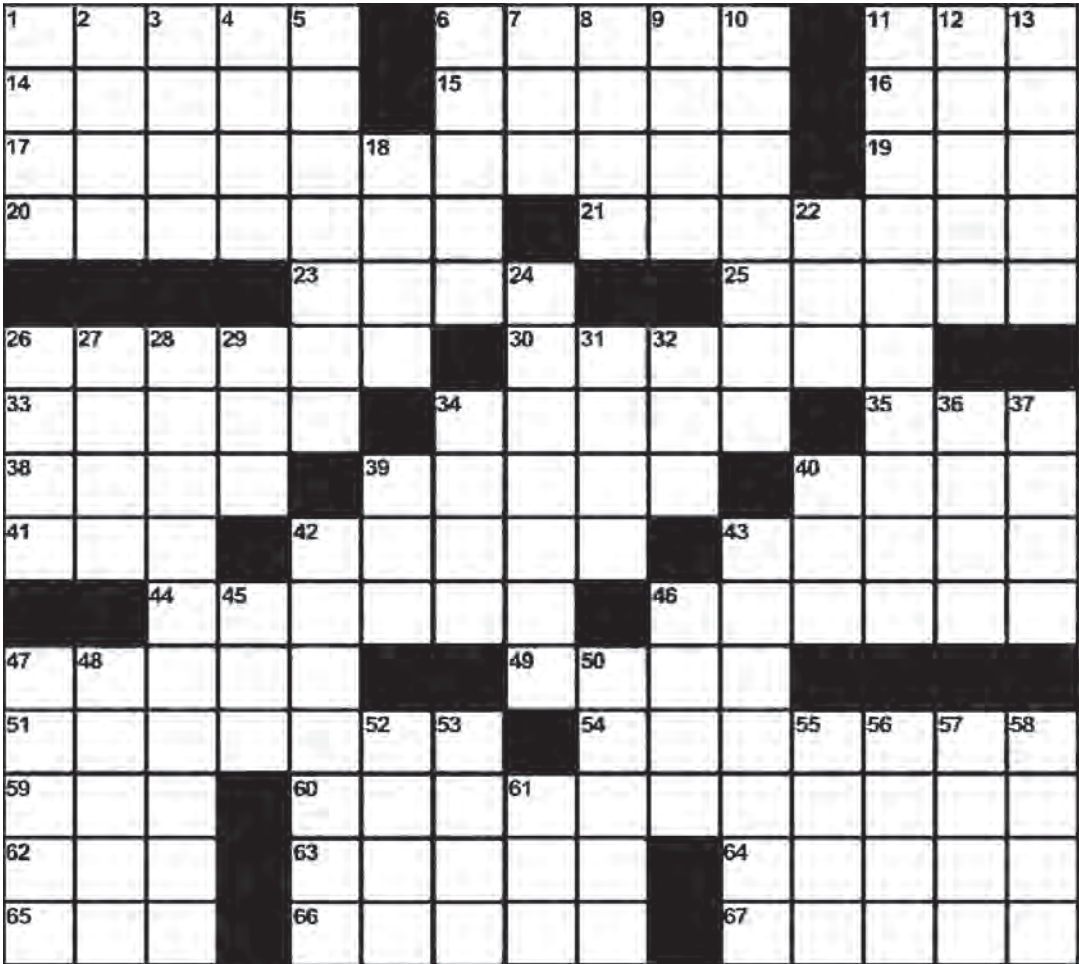
Jawhar Privilege Banking. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all our valued customers for their confidence in Bank Muscat's range of products and services, and urge everyone to take maximum advantage of the value-added benefits currently on offer. Furthermore, we promise our customers that they can look forward to new offers and services that will keep pace with their aspirations and needs in the future."

Exclusive benefits available to Asalah customers include access to more than 50 lounges worldwide including the Prime Class and Majan lounges at Muscat International Airport and the Khareef lounge at Salalah Airport. Asalah customers can also access a range of premium benefits at over 900 prestigious properties from the Visa Luxury Hotel Collection.

Other lifestyle benefits include the complimentary Asalah Entertainer App, which has more than 3,500 'Buy 1, Get 1 Free' offers in Oman and at international destinations as well as rewards of indulgence and merchant discounts across fine dining, entertainment, leisure, and the beauty and wellness segments.

The Asalah Visa Signature Credit Card on the other hand facilitates 12 complimentary visits to over 1,000 airport lounges worldwide including those at Muscat and Salalah. The Credit Card also offers 1% cash back on purchases.

DAILY CROSSWORD



**ACROSS**

1) Streisand, to friends  
5) Sunni or Shia  
9) Stir-fry pan  
12) Throat dangler  
14) Bahrain bigwigs  
16) \$5 bill, slangily  
17) Cocktail often gar-nished with lime  
19) Eggs on sushi  
20) Royal bride of 1981  
21) Candy apple coating  
23) Tolkien tree creature  
24) Bailout key  
26) "... Billie Joe"  
27) Sacred song  
29) Turn on a stool  
32) Baseball's David Ortiz, AKA "Big..."  
35) Drops from the sky  
37) Indirectly insulting  
38) Victorious shout  
39) "Va Va Voom" rap-per Nicki  
41) Grant and Lee: Abbr.  
42) No longer available  
44) Seized vehicle  
45) Aspiring JD's exam  
46) Serengeti scavengers

48) Spread salt on, maybe  
50) Naive sorts  
52) Nestle \_-Caps  
53) McGraw of country  
56) Overlooked  
58) Illinois city  
60) The whole shebang  
61) Short-term bank of-ferings  
64) Wharton deg.  
65) "Rabbit food"  
66) Horse fathers  
67) Reassuring touch

**DOWN**

1) "Taps" instrument  
2) Bird-related  
3) Ring-shaped cake  
4) Leave rolling in the aisles  
5) Match unit  
6) Sub genre of punk rock  
7) \_ de Mayo  
8) Simple chords  
9) "Saving Private Ryan" and "Platoon," e.g.  
10) Bassoon's kin

11) Ship's backbone  
13) Vicunas' range  
15) Hinge fasteners  
18) Render harmless, as a bomb  
22) On pins and needles  
25) "... de Lune" (De-bussy)  
27) Pesto ingredient  
28) Went for gold  
30) "Hairspray" charac-ter\_ Tumblad  
31) "... we forget ..."  
32)\_ helmet (safari wear)  
33) On the road  
34) Setting of a Bret Harte tale  
36) Scruffs  
40) "Let's do this to-gether"  
43) Movers and shakers  
47) Georges of pointil-lism  
49) Puts in the fridge  
51) Subway gate  
53) Bejeweled topper  
54) Word before "child" or "circle"  
55) Hard to clean up  
56) Miner's hat attach-ment  
57) Isle of exile  
59) Pork or beef cut

**NOTE PAD**

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

**ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It might be difficult to understand when and how to be critical today. In a business or professional context, you'll have it a bit easier, though. An early morning conflict could force you to look at things in a harsher (more truthful) light. But in terms of relationships, a family event might be difficult to navigate. Err on the side of caution by being more forgiving and patient than you might otherwise. Loving is more important than being right sometimes.

**LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

When was the last time you spent the day by yourself? It might be time for you to slow down and coast for a while. Take life slowly and peacefully. The hot energy that has been humming around you lately has certainly been exciting, but it could also have a negative influence on your emotional balance. It's time to check out of the whirlwind of activity and give yourself the gift of solitude. Even if you can only manage a few hours alone, it will make a big difference.

**SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Concentration is the key to your success today, so keep your eye on the ball if you want to win! The goal you have in your sights right now is yours to lose, so don't worry about anyone taking the power out of your hands. You should try to avoid flighty people, even in social situations. Their unfocused energy could cause you to lose your focus as well. True friends will give you the space you need, so don't hesitate to ask for it.

**TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Don't be too surprised if your silly side and sophisticated side struggle a lot today. If you can, opt for playing the grown-up. It might sound like it won't be as much fun, but in the long run it will make you a lot more friends. You may think that playing the good-time kid will get you the attention you want, but right now people aren't looking for a court jester. They're looking for someone who can help them stay on a smart track.

**VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Time is a huge factor for you today, and it might throw a wrench into your carefully laid plans. It will have an elastic quality, stretching out to go way too slowly at times, and snapping back unexpectedly to fly by in a flash. Consequently, you're going to have to rely on your flexibility as well as your patience to get through the day without losing your cool. Try to see it as a metaphysical obstacle course and you'll end up having a lot of fun with the unpredictability of it all.

**CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

A person from your past may make a surprise appearance today, and you have no reason not to welcome them with open arms. No matter how things were left between the two of you, right now they're better (although this person may not realize it). Their ideas could push your ambitious plans forward toward action, so listen to what they want to do and try to help make it happen. This might be harder than it sounds, so take your time and move cautiously.

**GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your life has been spinning along like a well-oiled machine lately, but things are probably going to start to slow down today. So if you feel less inspired to take on new projects (or even maintain current ones), don't be surprised. Your body and mind are moving into self-preservation mode. Whether you want to or not, they're forcing you to take things more slowly. If friends are concerned about an increase in apathy, assure them that it's just a phase.

**LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Whatever you do today, whether that's run errands, start a romance, or just work out, do it all the way! There's no going halfway for you right now. If you do, you're cheating yourself out of an amazing opportunity. You owe it to yourself to put 100 percent of your effort into everything right now. Any solid efforts you make today will take things a lot further than you had hoped. Timing is crucial, so don't put things off for another day.

**AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Make a conscious effort to spend some more time with friends of yours who are in a very active phase of their lives. Their energy is something you can feed off, something that can inspire you to investigate a new direction in your life. But before you go down a new, tantalizing path, you have to take care of some important (and possibly boring) housekeeping tasks. If you're free from the details of life, you'll be free to explore new interests and ideas.

**CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

You can express yourself today in any manner you wish, but be sure to let the people you're dealing with know that you mean what you say. It's a good strategy to work on things from several angles, so after you send that email, follow up with a phone call or face-to-face chat. It might take more than one conversation to get things to sink in (that goes for your brain as well as theirs). Don't worry about being redundant. Clarity is what matters.

**SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Your long period of confidence might be going through a bumpy patch in the road. Are you looking for a sign that you're on the right track? It's not the end of the world if you doubt yourself every once in a while, so don't beat yourself up about it. You can poll your friends and relatives and ask them what they think about what you're doing, but ultimately that might confuse you more than help you. Instead, patience is your best bet for peace of mind. Just keep going and trust yourself.

**PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

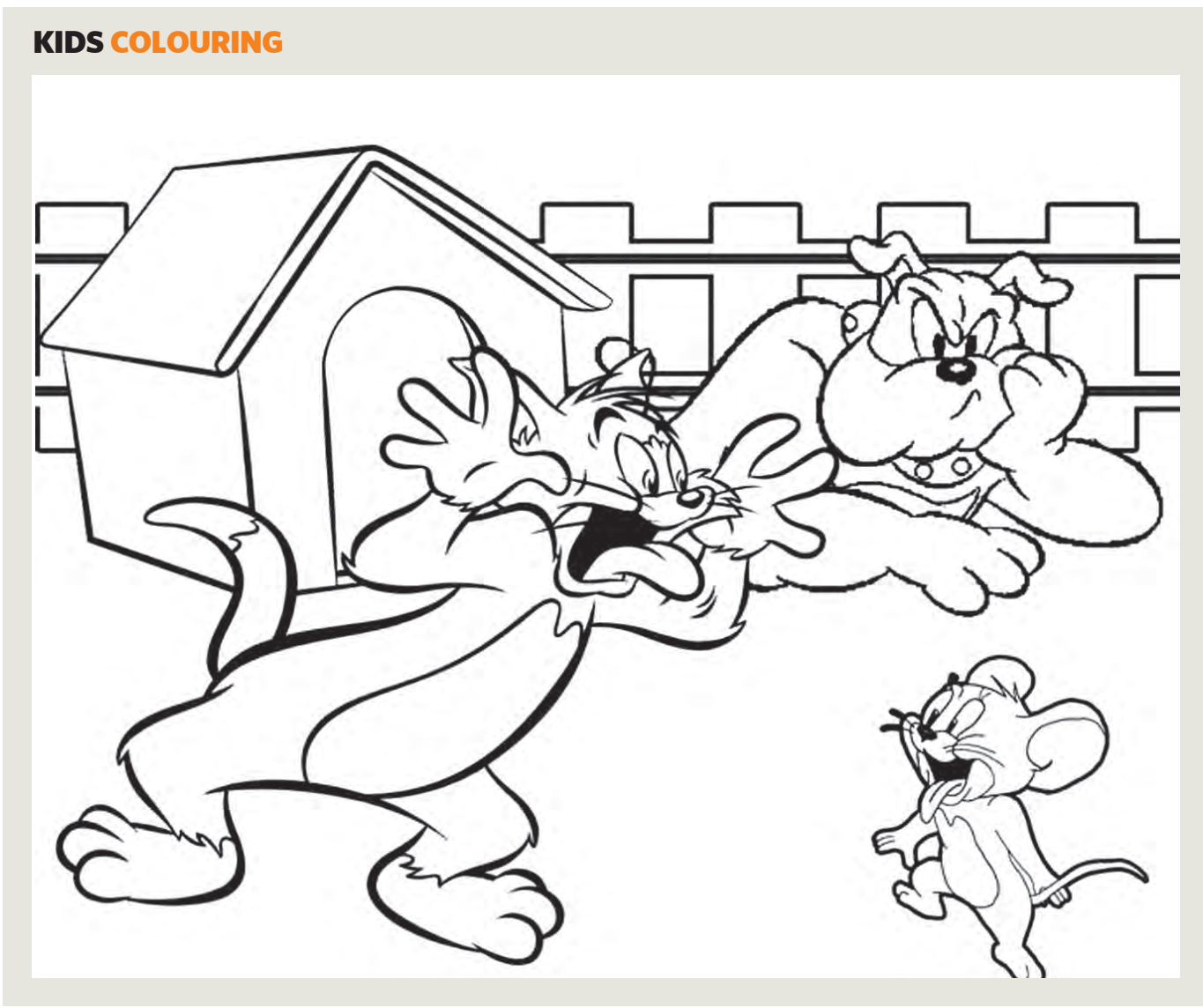
Have you been playing a marathon game of phone tag with a friend? It's time to stop the madness. Do whatever you can to get in touch today. Put as much energy into this task as possible, because reconnecting with this person is more important than you think. While you're reaching out, give a nod or two to a schoolmate or coworker who's been working hard and getting less recognition than they deserve. Make sure everyone knows that this person deserves a round of applause.

**TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

01. In 2004 Sri Lanka deprived what people of the right to have an identity card?  
A. Bhikkhus  
B. Bike couriers  
C. Buddhists  
D. Bhikkhuni

02. When was the first international championship, the World Cup, of One Day International (ODI) cricket held?  
A. 1981  
B. 2021  
C. 1975  
D. 1973

03. In 1660 Robert Hooke de-veloped what?  
A. The law of elasticity  
B. A method to determine the absolute value of pi  
C. A code system that could be used by telegraphy  
D. A 15 note musical scale



**BOGGLER**

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| K | R | E | N |
| V | S | O | S |
| A | O | E | T |
| U | E | Y | T |

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

**Solution** 20-25 words: Very 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

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

**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

**ANSWER**

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

# N Korea launches ballistic missiles as US-S Korea air force drills end

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired four ballistic missiles on Saturday, the South Korean military said, the latest in Pyongyang's testing blitz this week as Washington and Seoul concluded their biggest-ever air force drills.

The flurry of North Korean launches included an intercontinental ballistic missile and one that landed near the South's territorial waters. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol said it was 'effectively a territorial invasion'. The launches came as hundreds of US and South Korean warplanes - including B-1B heavy bombers - participated in the Vigilant Storm exercise, which Pyongyang described as 'aggressive and provocative'.

"The South Korean military detected four short-range ballistic missiles launched by North Korea from Tongrim, North Pyongan Province, to the West Sea at around 11:32am to 11:59am today," South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said in a statement on Saturday, using another name for the Yellow Sea.

Their 'flight distance was detected at about 130km (80 miles), an altitude of about 20km, and a speed of about Mach 5', they added. Mach 5 is equivalent to five times the speed of sound.

The United States and South Korea have warned that these launches could culminate in a nuclear test by North Korea, and extended their air force drills to



This file photo shows a US Air Force B-1B Lancer participating in a 10-hour mission from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, into Japanese airspace and over the Korean Peninsula on July 30, 2017 (AFP)

Saturday in response. Vigilant Storm was originally scheduled to run from Monday to Friday. Pyongyang ramped up missile launches in response to the drills.

Such exercises have long provoked strong reactions from North Korea, which sees them as rehearsals for an invasion.

### 'Significant threat'

Vigilant Storm concluded on Saturday, with the US Air Force deploying two B-1B long-range heavy bombers on the final day in a ramped-up show of force.

This was the first time B-1Bs have flown to the Korean peninsula since December 2017.

The South Korean JCS said it

demonstrated the 'capability and readiness to firmly respond to any provocations from North Korea'.

Pyongyang has especially condemned past deployments of US strategic weapons such as B-1Bs and aircraft carrier strike groups in times of high tension.

While the supersonic B-1B 'Lancer' aircraft no longer carries nuclear weapons, it is described by the US Air Force as 'the backbone of America's long-range bomber force'.

The USAF lists the Lancer's weapons payload as 34 tonnes (75,000 pounds), which can include cruise missiles and laser-guided bombs.

The B-1B's range can be extended by in-air refuelling, giving it the ability to strike anywhere in the world.

Ahn Chan-il, a North Korean studies scholar, told AFP that given the B-1B's status as a strategic US asset, its deployment will be seen as a 'significant threat' by North Korea.

The B-1B deployment came a day after South Korea scrambled fighter jets in response to what it said was the mobilisation of around 180 North Korean warplanes. Experts say Pyongyang is particularly sensitive about these drills because its air force is one of the weakest links in its military, lacking high-tech jets and

*Vigilant Storm concluded on Saturday, with the US Air Force deploying two B-1B long-range heavy bombers in a ramped-up show of force. This was the first time B-1Bs have been flown to Korean peninsula since December 2017*

properly trained pilots. Compared with North Korea's ageing fleet, Vigilant Storm has seen some of the most advanced US and South Korean warplanes in action, including F-35 stealth fighters. At the United Nations Security Council on Friday, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield dismissed criticism of Vigilant Storm as North Korean 'propaganda', saying it posed no threat to other countries. She assailed China and Russia during the emergency session, accusing them of having 'enabled' North Korea. Moscow and Beijing have in turn blamed Washington for the escalation, and the meeting ended without a joint statement from the Security Council. AFP



A miner is carried into a hospital in Andong on Saturday, after being rescued from a collapsed zinc mine in Bonghwa (AFP)

## South Korean miners trapped for nine days walk out alive

Seoul, South Korea - Two South Korean miners who were trapped for more than nine days in a collapsed zinc mine have walked out alive, in a miraculous end to a difficult rescue operation.

The two men were trapped in a vertical shaft about 190 metres (620 feet) underground after the mine collapsed on October 26 in Bonghwa, eastern South Korea.

Dramatic local TV footage showed them emerging from the mine on Friday, assisted by rescue workers.

The survivors, aged 62 and 56, were in stable condition, authorities said.

To keep warm, the miners are believed to have built a fire and a tent out of plastic inside a tunnel, they added.

The survivors 'had instant coffee mix powder with them, and I was told they had that as a meal', said Lim Yoon-sook, a fire department officer. "I've been also told they endured by drinking any water that dropped inside the shaft."

Family members were overjoyed, saying they still cannot believe the good news.

"I just yelled out: father!" a beaming Park Geun-hyeong, the son of one of the survivors, said of the moment

they were reunited. "I told him: you've become a famous figure now."

A woman surnamed Lim, the niece of the other survivor, said her uncle at first kept asking who she was - as he was wearing an eye patch after almost 10 days in the dark. He laughed when he finally recognised her.

"This still feels surreal," she added.

The news came during a period of national mourning in South Korea, after more than 150 people were killed in

*The survivors had instant coffee mix powder with them, and I was told they had that as a meal*

LIM YOON-SOOK

a crowd crush in Seoul last week.

President Yoon Suk-yeol issued a Facebook message on Saturday, calling the men's return 'truly miraculous'.

"Thank you and thank you again for coming back safely from the crossroads of life and death," he wrote, also thanking rescue workers. AFP

## Indigenous people free tourists taken in Peruvian Amazon

Lima, Peru - Members of an Indigenous group on Friday freed more than 100 tourists whom they had abducted in the Peruvian Amazon a day earlier to protest what they called government inaction after an oil spill, officials said.

The group of detained tourists - some 27 from the United States, Spain, France, Britain, Switzerland and 80 from Peru itself - included several children.

"They are already returning to their places of origin," Tourism Minister Roberto Sanchez told reporters in Lima.

Travelling on a river boat, the



Foreign and Peruvian tourists rest in the boat where they have been detained at the Cuninico community in Loreto, north of Peru, on Friday (AFP)

tourists were kidnapped on Thursday by members of the

Cuninico community pressing for government intervention fol-

lowing a September 16 spill of 2,500 tons of crude oil into the Cuninico river.

Community leader Watson Trujillo said on Thursday the community took the 'radical measure' to try to convince the government to send a delegation to assess the environmental damage to a region home to about 2,500 Indigenous people.

On Friday, the office of Peru's human rights ombudsman said negotiations had led to the Cuninico 'accepting our request to release' the tourists.

"They are freeing us all," Angela Ramirez, a Peruvian cyclist who was among the tourists,

later told AFP via WhatsApp.

She added there had been 'a lot of anxiety, much fatigue' as the group awaited news on their fate and slowly started running out of water and food during the 28-hour ordeal.

The September spill was caused by a rupture in the Norperuano oil pipeline owned by state-owned Petroperu to transport crude oil from the Amazon region to the ports of Piura, on the coast.

According to Petroperu, the spill was the result of an intentional 21cm cut in the pipeline pipe.

AFP

## US grapples with spike in trio of respiratory viruses

Washington, US - US hospitals are under pressure as cases of three respiratory viruses - the flu, COVID-19, and RSV - are rising at the same time, and earlier than usual, experts said on Friday.

Children are being hit hard by the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which causes the chest infection bronchiolitis in infants, and has spurred unusually high rates of hospitalisations in several countries around the world this season.

"We suspect that many children are being exposed to some respiratory viruses now for the first time having avoided these viruses during the height of the pandemic," said Jose Romero, director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, at a press conference.

All three of the circulating respiratory viruses have similar symptoms, and even if most patients recover in a week or two, the very young and elderly are at risk of devel-

oping severe illness.

A surveillance system that tracks visits to outpatient medical providers and emergency departments has shown 'high' activity for this time of year. "We're seeing the highest influenza hospitalisation rates going back a decade."

He warned that if a child was struggling to breathe, had bluish lips, muscle pain and dehydration, it was crucial to take them to a doctor.

Experts say it is still difficult to say whether this year's influenza virus was causing worse illness than usual, but it has started circulating particularly early. The US is still recording more than 270,000 cases of COVID-19 per week.

Hospitals in the mid-Atlantic states, New England, and Washington state are 'currently experiencing significant strain,' said Dawn O'Connell, assistant secretary at the US Department of Health and Human Services.

AFP

## Malaysia's nearly century-old Mahathir seeks re-election

Langkawi, Malaysia - Mahathir Mohamad, the nearly 100-year-old elder statesman of Malaysian politics, filed his candidacy on Saturday in what is likely to be his final race, as campaigning for upcoming general elections began.

Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob called for elections 10 months ahead of schedule, with the graft-tainted ruling party of jailed ex-leader Najib Razak seeking to cement its political comeback four years after it was dramatically voted out.

A Guinness World Record holder for being the 'world's oldest current prime minister' when he became premier for a second time in 2018, the 97-year-old Mahathir will stand again to defend his parliamentary seat in the holiday island of Langkawi in the November 19 vote.

Visibly slowed by age but still looking healthy, Mahathir was greeted by dozens of supporters waving flags of his Homeland Fighters' Party as he arrived at a local government office in Kuah, the island's main town, to register his candidacy.

Mahathir told reporters that



Former Malaysia PM Mahathir Mohamad speaks to the press outside the nomination centre in Langkawi Island on Saturday (AFP)

he stood a 'good chance' of winning and laughed off suggestions he should retire.

"I'm still standing around and talking to you, I think making reasonable answers," he said.

He added his party would not form any alliances with parties that are led by 'crooks or jailbirds', an apparent reference to the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO).

Ismail, of the UMNO, and opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim,

of the Pakatan Harapan coalition, have also filed their candidacies elsewhere in the country.

Anwar urged voters to come out in big numbers, as fears circulated that torrential rain during the monsoon season could dampen turnout.

"I am optimistic we will win," he told AFP from his constituency in the northern Perak state.

Meanwhile, in Sabah, in Malaysia's part of Borneo Island,

police fired tear gas to disperse scores of supporters of a minor opposition party who attempted to force their way into a nomination centre in the interior town of Tenom after their leader's candidacy was rejected.

Hazani Ghazali, the internal security police chief, was quoted by The Star news portal as saying that tear gas was fired to disperse the crowd, with no injuries reported.

Serious violence is rare during general elections in Malaysia.

### Corruption a key issue

Nonagenarian Mahathir, who once ruled the Southeast Asian nation with an iron fist from 1981 to 2003, came out of retirement to lead the opposition Pact of Hope alliance in the 2018 general elections.

The reformist alliance won a stunning victory over then-incumbent Najib, who was later convicted of corruption linked to the 1MDB state fund financial scandal and is now serving a 12-year jail sentence.

Mahathir became premier again just two months shy of his

93rd birthday, but his government collapsed in less than two years due to infighting.

He has warned that Najib would be freed if the jailed politician's allies in UMNO win, signalling that corruption will be a key issue at the polls.

He also offered to become prime minister a third time.

"You should see the circumstances of my country ... so much of corruption and so many wrongdoings. It's time to fight, fight, fight!" said Hamidah Ayub, 66, a Mahathir supporter.

While Mahathir is expected to win easily in Langkawi, aiming for the premiership a third time would be tough, an analyst said.

At least four blocs - including the one he leads - are vying for a majority in the 222-seat lower house of Parliament, making it a tight contest. The 21mn voters also include more than six million new registrants, many of them young, who came on board following electoral reforms.

"Mahathir's time has passed," Bridget Welsh of the University of Nottingham Malaysia told AFP.

AFP

# Iranians stage new protests despite crackdown

## Demonstrations that flared in the clerical state over Mahsa Amini’s death have entered eighth week

Paris, France - Iranian students protested and shopkeepers went on strike on Saturday despite a widening crackdown, according to reports on social media, as demonstrations that flared over Mahsa Amini’s death entered an eighth week. The clerical state has been gripped by protests that erupted when Amini, 22, died in custody after her arrest for an alleged breach of Iran’s strict dress code for women.

As the working week got underway, security forces adopted new measures to halt protests at universities in the capital Tehran on Saturday, searching students and forcing them to remove facemasks, activists said.

But students were seen demonstrating and chanting ‘I am a free woman, you are the pervers’ at Islamic Azad University of Mashhad, in northeast Iran, in a video published by BBC Persian. “A student dies, but doesn’t accept humiliation,” sang students at Gilan University in the northern city of Rasht, in footage posted online by an activist. AFP was unable to immediately verify the videos.

In the northwestern city of Qazvin, dozens were heard

chanting similar slogans at a mourning ceremony 40 days after the death of protester Javad Heydari.

The Norway-based Hengaw rights group said people were observing a ‘widespread strike’ in Amini’s home town of Sazez, in Kurdistan province, where shops were shuttered.

“Our weapon is our unity, our weapon is our rage, our weapon is our resistance... You cannot stand against the will of people,” tweeted Hassan Ronaghi, the brother of prominent rights campaigner Hossein.

**‘Massacre’**

Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights said on Wednesday that at least 176 people have been killed by the security forces in the protest crackdown.

It said another 101 people had lost their lives in separate protests since September 30 in Sistan-Baluchistan, a mainly Sunni Muslim province in the southeast of the country.

An official in Kerman province admitted the authorities were having trouble quelling the protests that first broke out after Amini’s death on September 16.



Protesters throwing a small explosive device at a banner depicting the Islamic Republic’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as a large crowd enters the district of Fulaadshahr near the central city of Isfahan on Thursday (AFP)

*As the working week got underway, security forces adopted new measures at universities in Tehran, searching students and forcing them to remove facemasks*

“The restrictions on the internet, the arrest of the leaders of the riots and the presence of the state in the streets always eliminated sedition, but this type of

sedition and its audience are different,” Rahman Jalali, political and security deputy for the province, was quoted as saying by ISNA news agency.

In a flare-up in Sistan-Baluchistan, up to 10 people, including children, were killed on Friday by security forces in the city of Khash, Amnesty International said.

Molavi Abdol Hamid, the cleric who leads Friday prayers in Sistan-Baluchistan’s capital Zahedan, in a statement condemned the incident in Khash as a ‘massacre’ that he said killed 16 people.

A video verified by AFP shows youths running for cover and screaming as bursts of gunfire are heard on a road in Khash.

Ultra-conservative President Ebrahim Raisi on Friday dismissed a pledge by his US counterpart Joe Biden to ‘free Iran’.

Campaigning for mid-term elections, Biden had said: “Don’t worry we’re gonna free Iran. They’re gonna free themselves pretty soon.”

**US downplays Biden remarks**

Raisi retorted that Iran had already been freed by the overthrow of the Western-backed shah in 1979.

“Our young men and young women are determined and we will never allow you to carry out your satanic desires,” he told a gathering commemorating the November 1979 seizure of the US embassy in Tehran by radical students. US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby on Friday played down the American leader’s remarks.

“The president was expressing our solidarity with the protesters as he’s been doing, quite frankly, from the very outset,”

Kirby told reporters.

Asked whether the Biden administration thought the Iranian regime could soon fall, he said: “I don’t believe we have indications of that kind.”

On Friday, the world’s largest cryptocurrency platform, Binance, acknowledged funds belonging to or intended for Iranians had flowed through its service and may have run afoul of US sanctions. ‘Earlier in the week, we discovered that Binance interacted’ with ‘bad actors’ using Iranian cryptocurrency exchanges, said Chagri Poyraz, head of sanctions at Binance.

Some of these users ‘attempted to move crypto through Binance’s exchange,’ he wrote on a blog on the company’s website. “As soon as we discovered this, we moved to freeze transfers (and) block accounts.”

No Iranian cryptocurrency platforms are currently under sanctions. But US-imposed restrictions prohibit a US entity or US national from selling goods and services to Iranian residents, businesses or institutions. The ban includes financial services.

AFP

## ‘Finland, Sweden must take steps before NATO approval’

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey will not formally approve Finland and Sweden’s membership of NATO until the two countries take the necessary ‘steps’, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg on Friday.

Ankara has accused the two Nordic nations of providing a safe haven for outlawed Kurdish militants it deems ‘terrorists’ and held back on ratifying their NATO membership despite an agreement in June. “President Erdogan noted that the steps to be taken by Sweden and Finland would determine how fast the approval process... would go and when it would be concluded,” the Turkish presidency said.

Erdogan and Stoltenberg held a private meeting in Istanbul that was closed to the media.

Finland and Sweden dropped decades of military non-alignment and scrambled to become NATO members in May, after Russia invaded Ukraine. But Erdogan threatened to block their bids and sought concessions, leading to a deal in June between



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left) and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg pose during their meeting in Istanbul on Friday (AFP)

Turkey, Finland and Sweden that included provisions on extraditions and sharing information.

New Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson will visit Ankara on Tuesday to meet with Erdogan in a trip that Stockholm hopes will lead to Turkey’s approval. Stoltenberg ‘welcomed the major, concrete steps already taken by both countries to put

the memorandum into practice, and stressed that their accession will make NATO stronger’, the alliance said in a statement. On Thursday, the NATO secretary general said Finland and Sweden’s accession was important ‘to send a clear message to Russia’ during a press conference with the Turkish foreign minister.

AFP

## Russia detains suspect after bar inferno kills 15

Moscow, Russia - Russian police on Saturday detained a man suspected to have caused a huge fire overnight at a bar in the historic city of Kostroma that killed at least 15 people.

Fire fighters fought through the early hours to extinguish the blaze at the popular Polygon bar in the city, which is around 300km (180 miles) northeast of Moscow.

Russian agencies reported that the fire could have started after a drunk man fired a ‘flare gun’ on the dance floor.

“Police officers identified and detained the suspect (behind) unlawful acts in an entertainment establishment in the city of Kostroma, which resulted in a fire and the death of people,” Russian police said. “He has now been handed over to investigative authorities,” it added, without providing any further details.

Russia’s Investigative Committee opened a criminal case of ‘causing death by negligence’.

It published images from inside the burnt-out building, showing a barely recognisable bar with some visible stickers of beer brands. The bar had a collapsed roof and burnt-out walls,



Police officers and investigators working at a cafe in Kostroma destroyed by a fire on Saturday (AFP)

with near total destruction inside. State television aired night-time images of the bar - housed in a single-storey logistical centre - engulfed in flames.

Authorities said the fire started at around 2am local time (2300 GMT Saturday) and was put out at around 7:30am.

Kostroma regional governor Sergei Sitnikov said 13 people were killed.

**‘Flare gun’**

“Two more bodies were recovered.

This means the number of victims is now 15,’ the TASS news agency later quoted law enforcement sources as saying.

Around 250 people were evacuated from the building when it caught fire, authorities said earlier.

TASS, citing emergency service sources, said a drunk man with a ‘flare gun’ was likely to have caused the fire.

‘He was spending time in the bar with a woman, ordered her flowers, with a flare gun in his

hands,’ the source told the agency.

‘Then he went to the dance floor and fired it.’

Emergency services said the blaze engulfed more than 3,500sqm.

Some local media, quoting witnesses, said there was panic when the fire started as people rushed to an exit, causing a jam. One man forced a closed door open, possibly saving lives, according to reports.

AFP

## Candlelight vigils mourn Halloween victims

Seoul, South Korea - Candlelight vigils and rallies were held in South Korea on Saturday to commemorate the 156 people killed in a Halloween crowd crush, with public anger growing over one of the country’s deadliest peacetime disasters.

The victims, mostly young people, were among the estimated 100,000 that had flocked to the capital Seoul’s popular Itaewon nightlife district to celebrate the first post-pandemic Halloween.

South Korean law enforcement officials have conceded that there was insufficient safety planning for a crowd that large, and opposition politicians have accused President Yoon Suk-yeol’s government of not taking responsibility for the disaster.

Thousands gathered in central Seoul at a candlelight vigil organised by a civic group linked to South Korea’s main opposition party, with many holding signs that said: “Step down, Yoon Suk-yeol.”



Mourners take part in a candlelight vigil to commemorate the 156 people killed in the October 29 Halloween crowd crush, in Seoul on Saturday (AFP)

“I think I will live with the anxiety that one day I may suffer such an accident as well,” said participant Yoo Da-eun, 23.

“In fact, even when I was coming here, I was worried that something would happen because of the large crowds.”

The organisers - who had also held anti-government rallies prior to the disaster - said they

were conducting similar vigils in other cities including Busan and Gwangju.

In Itaewon, at a subway exit near the alley at the centre of the Halloween crush, there was a sea of white floral tributes and notes.

One read: “I will remember you forever.”

Mourners also left chocolates, beer, soju - a Korean alcoholic

beverage - and strawberry milk.

At a candlelight vigil in Jeju, around 100 mourners gathered outside city hall. Some lay flowers to pay tribute to the victims.

**‘Deeply saddened and sorry’**

Reflecting public anger over the tragedy, a woman identified by local media as the mother of one

of the victims was seen ripping apart floral wreaths left by the president and Seoul’s mayor at a memorial on Friday.

“What’s the point of (these flowers) when they couldn’t protect (our children)? Think about it,” she was seen saying in footage broadcast by local TV stations. “What’s the point of standing next to these (wreaths) when you let our babies die?”

Police officers were then seen escorting the woman away from the memorial.

On Friday, President Yoon offered an apology for the disaster, joining other top officials - including the national police chief and the interior minister - in doing so.

“As a president who is responsible for the lives and safety of the people, I am deeply saddened and sorry,” he said.

“I know that our government and I... have a huge responsibility to ensure that such a tragedy never happens again.”

AFP

## Biden insists Democrats can win US midterms

Chicago, US - President Joe Biden insisted on Friday that Democrats will win next week’s US midterm elections, but warned of a difficult two years if polls showing Republican victories prove correct.

The 79-year-old, on a multi-state push in the final days before Tuesday’s ballot, said he was optimistic his Democratic Party could prevail. “Folks, I’m not buying the notion that we’re in trouble,” he told an audience in Chicago. “I think we’re going to win. I really do.”

Polls show Republicans poised for potentially big victories in Tuesday’s congressional election, hoping to win control not only in the House of Representatives but the Senate.

That would turn the last two years of Biden’s first term into a dogfight and set the stage for a tense 2024 presidential election, with questions over whether Biden, who turns

80 this month, will want to run again.

“If we lose the House and Senate it’s going to be a horrible two years,” he said.

“The good news is that I’ll have the veto pen,” he added, referring to his power to block bills from becoming law.

Biden has hit the road as his vanquished 2020 rival has also got back on the campaign trail.

Donald Trump, who has spent much of the last two years fulminating over his loss, and pushing the discredited theory that there was election fraud, used a rally appearance to send the strongest signal so far that he’s planning a comeback bid.

For now, Republicans are confident they can at minimum get the one state they need to move the Senate from 50-50 to their own narrow majority.

AFP

INDIA

# Congress against national security: Modi

Mandi, India - Stepping into the BJP's election campaign in poll-bound Himachal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday attacked the Congress party and stated that the party has not only been 'against national security' but also the development of the country.

Addressing the first election rally in Himachal's Mandi, the Prime Minister raised the issue of defence deals during the Congress regime at the Centre and said that the party always 'wanted a commission' in every deal which led to the delay in the procurement of weapons for the armed forces. "After independence, the first scam of the country was done by the Congress in the defence sector itself. Since then, till the Congress government was in place, it took a lot of brokerage in defence deals. Congress never wanted the country to become self-reliant in terms of defence equipment. It wanted a commission in every defence deal and wanted to fill its own leaders' treasure. This is why the procurement of weapons was delayed," Modi said.

He said that India is running a campaign to become Aatmanirbhar. "Congress put numerous lives in danger due to compromised defence deals. I won't let this injustice happen to the mothers and daughters of



BJP supporters raise slogans during Vijay Sankalp rally at Sunder Nagar, in Mandi on Saturday (ANI)

Himachal. This is why India is running a campaign to become Aatmanirbhar and stressing on manufacturing its own weapons. Congress has not just been against national security, but also the development of the country. I have felt it as the Chief Minister of Gujarat for a number of years," the Prime Minister

said. He said that making 'false promises' and giving 'false guarantees' has been an old trick of Congress while accusing the party of not giving priority to the development of Himachal. "Congress never gave priority to the development of Himachal. Congress did not fulfil a

single promise they mentioned in the 2012 elections manifesto. BJP has fulfilled its promises made to the people. BJP had resolved to scrap Article 370 from J-K, and we fulfilled it. The BJP had resolved to make Ram Mandir. The decision was taken in Palampur in the working committee. Is Ram Mandir being

constructed or not?" Modi said. "We gave free vaccines. If there was a Congress government in Himachal Pradesh, then vaccines would have reached Himachal Pradesh at last. You (public) voted on the right button and that's why so much development happened," he added.

Calling the Assembly elections which are slated to be held in the state on November 12 'important', the Prime Minister said that the vote cast in this poll will decide the 'development journey of the state for the next 25 years. "This time the elections are very important, because the

vote that you will cast on November 12 will not only be for the next five years, but every single vote decides the development journey of Himachal for the next 25 years. A stable government and fast development are necessary in the state during Amrit Kaal. People know that BJP means stability, and priority to development. People of Himachal have decided to form BJP government again," Modi said.

The Prime Minister assured to continue working for the people of the state.

"I have been working for you for the last five years, I want to continue doing it. I promise as the son of this land that I won't lag behind.

"What would happen if you bring such people who do not let the work proceed, then what would happen? No matter how much I exert pressure from Delhi, would there be a stoppage or not?" he said.

Earlier on Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was welcomed in Sundernagar, Mandi upon his arrival. Himachal Pradesh CM Jairam Thakur felicitated PM Modi ahead of his public address.

The polling for the assembly elections will take place on November 12 and the counting of votes will be on December 8. ANI

## HP polls: Congress promises free electricity

Shimla, India - With a promise of free electricity for up to 300 units, Congress released its ten-point electoral manifesto for the upcoming polls in Himachal Pradesh.

The Congress released its manifesto in the presence of its senior observer Bhupesh Baghel on Saturday.

The 10 guarantees of Congress include the implementation of the Old Pension Scheme, 1 lakh government jobs, as many as 5 lakh jobs for youth, Rs 680 crore start-up fund for the youth, Rs 1,500 per month to the women, and free electricity up to 300 units of consumption.

The Himachal Pradesh election manifesto of the Congress also assured the people of the hilly state of four English-medium schools in each assembly, mobile clinics for free treatment in each village, the



Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra addresses Parivartan Pratiyoga Rally at Nagrota Bagwan, in Kangra on Friday (ANI)

cost price of cow dung at Rs 2 per kilogram, purchase of 10 liters of milk from animal keepers, and the farm owners will be given the liberty to decide the price for their farm produce.

Earlier on Tuesday, the party's general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said that if their government comes to power in the Centre, the Congress will cancel the Agnipath scheme.

*We will cancel the Agnipath scheme when our government will be formed at the Centre. We fulfil whatever we promise*

PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA

"We will cancel the Agnipath scheme when our government will be formed at the Centre. We fulfil whatever we promise. In Chhattisgarh also, we promised for the loan waiver of the farmer and it was implemented," Priyanka Gandhi said while addressing a public gathering in Kangra.

In its manifesto, Congress

has made promises to the people of Himachal and asserted that they will bring a change to the lives of farmers here the way they have done in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.

It is pertinent to note that the political parties in the country are making all the possible attempts to register a victory in Himachal Pradesh. For the elections slated to be held next Saturday, Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, and Aam Aadmi Party are in the fray beside the independent candidates.

The BJP, which is yet to release its manifesto, has been conducting regular public address to the poll-bound state.

BJP President JP Nadda on Friday called the upcoming Assembly polls in Himachal Pradesh as the elections of 'protection of rights'.

ANI

## NIA chargesheets Dawood Ibrahim

New Delhi, India - The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday filed a chargesheet against wanted global terrorist Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar, his close aide Chhota Shakeel and three other arrested associates, 'who are running a global terrorist network and a transnational Organised Criminal Syndicate, namely D-Company, which is involved in various terrorist and criminal activities in India'.

Besides Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar alias Shaikh Dawood Hassan and Shakeel Shaikh alias Chhota Shakeel, the chargesheet names three arrested accused Arif Abubakar Shaikh, Shabbir

Abubakar Shaikh and Mohammad Salim Qureshi. NIA said its investigations have established that the accused persons who are members of the D-Company, a terrorist gang and an organised crime syndicate, had conspired to further the criminal activities of the gang by carrying out unlawful activities.

A case was registered by NIA's Mumbai branch on February 3 this year under sections 17, 18, 20 and 21 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and under section 3(1) (ii), 3(2), 3(4) & 3(5) of The Maharashtra Control of Organized Crime Act, 1999.

ANI

## K-pop band's Indonesia concert halted after 30 faint in crush

South Tangerang, Indonesia - K-pop band NCT 127 was forced to end their first concert in Indonesia early after 30 people fainted in a crush, police said.

Indonesia is still reeling after more than 130 people, including over 40 children, died in a stadium stampede last month - one of the deadliest disasters in football history.

Police spokesperson Endra Zulpan said late on Friday that the concert near the capital Jakarta had been going for around two hours when fans started surging forward to get closer to the stage. "Because of it, 30 people fainted. To prevent other incidents, we decided to stop the concert at 9.20pm (1420 GMT)," Zulpan said, adding that the collapsed fans had recovered.

Just before the crush, the boyband had been handing out

freebies to fans, said 19-year-old concertgoer Syifa Aulia.

She said fans in the back had pushed toward the stage until the barricade fences collapsed. "We are disappointed by those fans. We were warned to not push each other, even by the NCT 127 members, but they were so selfish. Just for good footage, they ignored other's safety," she said.

Police have allowed the second day of NCT 127's concert to go ahead on Saturday, but banned distribution of goodies to fans and required stricter measures to separate fans and performers.

"To make amends for (the crush) and give the best experience, we will add more paramedics and security personnel for the Day 2 show," concert organiser Dyandra Global Entertainment said on Instagram.

AFP

## Khan claims Pakistan PM Sharif had role in plot to kill him

Wazirabad, Pakistan - Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan on Friday accused his successor of involvement in a plot to kill him as he recovered in hospital from gunshot wounds following an assassination attempt.

Khan told reporters that Shehbaz Sharif, who replaced him as premier following a vote of no confidence in April, masterminded the attack along with Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah and a senior army commander.

"These three decided to kill me," Khan said in his first public appearance since Thursday's shooting, adding that two gunmen were involved.

The government has denied any part, and blamed the assassination attempt on a lone assailant fueled by religious extremism. The military called his accusations 'baseless and irresponsible'.

The attack on Khan's convoy killed one man and wounded at least 10, significantly raising the stakes in a political crisis that has



Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan talks with media representatives at a hospital in Lahore on Friday (AFP)

gripped the South Asian nation since Khan's ousting.

The 70-year-old former international cricket star had been

leading a campaign convoy of thousands since last week from Lahore to the capital Islamabad. Sitting in a wheelchair - his

right leg in a cast and left leg heavily bandaged - Khan spoke for over an hour, railing against the government and establishment he accuses of unseating him. He said his opponents wanted to accuse him of 'desecrating religion, or desecrating the prophet' and would then blame a religious extremist for killing him.

Khan offered no evidence to support his claims.

Sanaullah had earlier said the attack was 'a very clear case of religious extremism'.

The suspect in police custody, named by Punjab government officials as Naveed Ahmad, said in a video leaked by police to the media that Khan was 'misleading the public'. He added he was angry with Khan's noisy convoy for interrupting the call to prayer that summons Muslims to the mosque five times a day.

Khan was looking out at the crowd when bullets were sprayed at his modified container truck as it slowly inched through

a thick crowd in Wazirabad, around 170km (105 miles) east of Islamabad.

"Bullets hit my leg, and when I was falling there was another burst," Khan told reporters.

"There were two men. Had they synchronised well, I would have not survived.

"One of them was caught and he is being touted as a religious fanatic. He was not a religious fanatic - there was an elaborate plan behind this."

Naveed Ahmad, the man in custody, comes from a poor village near the rally site where Khan was shot. Neighbours told AFP the father was a 'simple boy' with no obvious religious or political leanings.

Pakistan has long grappled with Islamist militancy, with right-wing religious groups having huge sway over the population. Khan has previously been accused of stoking religious sentiments to broaden his support base. AFP

# FRANCE AND FOES

Didier Deschamps-coached France meet familiar rivals in Group D to start World Cup defence

Paris, France - France are hoping to heed a warning from history as they kick off their defence of the World Cup trophy in a group which bears a remarkable resemblance to the section in which they started their road to glory four years ago in Russia.

Like in 2018, Les Bleus begin their World Cup campaign against Australia and they will also take on Denmark in Group D.

The only difference in Qatar is that Tunisia complete the section instead of Peru, who lost an inter-continental qualifying play-off on penalties to the Socceroos.

France come into this World Cup billed as one of the leading contenders to go all the way, but past experience should teach them to be wary.

After all, no nation has successfully defended the trophy since Brazil in 1962, and the last time the French went to the tournament as defending champions, they swiftly returned home with their tails between their legs.

Having won the World Cup on home soil in 1998, four years later they went to South Korea as defending European champions and clear favourites to claim another title.

Hampered by an injury to Zinedine Zidane, they were stunned by Senegal in their opening game and were eliminated in the group stage without even scoring a goal.

A repeat of such a scenario seems improbable for the side coached by Didier Deschamps, who have an attack led by the brilliant Kylian Mbappe and



The presence of Karim Benzema (in the picture) and Kylian Mbappe make France forward line one of the most potent attacks in the World Cup (AFP)

*During our last get-together we were faced with an injury crisis, but there are no doubts in our minds, we know how difficult the World Cup is for everybody*

DIDIER DESCHAMPS



Karim Benzema, the latter fresh from winning the Ballon d'Or.

Throw in Antoine Griezmann, Christopher Nkunku and Ousmane Dembele, and scoring goals should be no issue for Les Bleus, but they have problems elsewhere.

Paul Pogba and N'Golo Kante,

their first-choice midfielders in 2018, are out injured, and several others have been struggling for fitness.

"During our last get-together we were faced with an injury crisis, but there are no doubts in our minds, we know how difficult the World Cup is for everybody,"

coach Deschamps told AFP last month.

"France are still a competitive side, but we know we'll have a lot to do," to retain the trophy, he added.

**Dangerous Danes**

Denmark, who overcame the

traumatic collapse of Christian Eriksen to reach the semi-finals of Euro 2020, have the appearance of dangerous outsiders. They cruised through qualifying with nine wins, and 30 goals scored, in 10 games and defeated France home and away in their recent UEFA Nations League campaign.

"There is a great work ethic and a desire to improve as a collective. We can be really good if we continue to make sacrifices for each other," said coach Kasper Hjulmand, who now has Manchester United midfielder Eriksen back in his squad.

France and Denmark meet in their second game and that could be crucial in determining who tops the section, with the danger being that Argentina could lie in wait in the last 16.

Australia have not made it out of their group since the 2006 World Cup and failed to win a game at either of the last two tournaments. Graham Arnold's side only qualified for Qatar by the skin of their teeth and just winning a game this time would have to rank as a major achievement for a side short on players plying their trade in major European leagues.

Meanwhile Tunisia are dreaming of getting out of their group at a World Cup for the first time at what will be their sixth attempt.

The Carthage Eagles came within seconds of holding England to a draw in 2018 and can draw encouragement from that performance coming into this campaign.

AFP



Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al Khalifa

## Asian football boss urges support, not 'cynicism' for World Cup

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Asia's football chief called for support for the Qatar World Cup on Saturday despite the "deep undercurrents of cynicism" that have marked the build-up to the event.

Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa praised Qatar's "extraordinary efforts" in hosting the tournament, and said a successful World Cup is "the need of the hour... in these challenging times".

"There are deep undercurrents of cynicism due to a combination of factors," the Asian Football Confederation president said in a statement.

"But no other sport has the unique power to bring us all together in a positive spirit of joy, excitement and optimism."

In the countdown to the first World Cup on Arab soil, Qatar has become increasingly frustrated at criticism of its treatment of migrant workers and policies on LGBTQ and women's rights.

Officials point to wide-ranging labour reforms, including a minimum wage and virtual abolition

of the exploitative "kafala" system.

Last month, Qatar's emir said the country was facing an "unprecedented campaign" of criticism.

Sheikh Salman, a member of the royal family in Qatar's neighbour Bahrain, said the AFC "pledges its full support and unwavering commitment" to the host country.

"Now more than ever, it is crucial for all of us to wholeheartedly complement their efforts by offering our full support to the tournament," he said.

*No other sport has the unique power to bring us all together in a positive spirit of joy, excitement and optimism*

SHEIKH SALMAN BIN EBRAHIM AL KHALIFA

## Eriksen brings calm to Denmark squad after remarkable recovery

Copenhagen, Denmark - Denmark's number 10, Christian Eriksen, will be a quiet but inspirational figure for his team during the World Cup, after his sudden cardiac arrest during a Euro 2020 game traumatised a nation.

The Middelfart-born playmaker spent eight months out following his collapse on June 12, 2021. He returned in a Premier League game for Brentford on February 26 this year.

A few weeks later, he was back playing for Denmark in a



Christian Eriksen

game against the Netherlands.

Even though the Danish squad proved their worth without him, reaching the semi-finals of the Euro and easily qualifying for the World Cup, Eriksen's return was warmly welcomed.

"His return to the team less than one year after, it's a little cliché to say but it's a fairytale story which almost seems unreal," Andreas Kraul, a sports commentator for broadcaster DR, told AFP.

"And from the minute he was

back, he has made a difference," Kraul added.

At press conferences, coach Kasper Hjulmand has praised Eriksen's contribution to the team.

"The Danish national football team is better with than without Christian Eriksen, because his calmness is infectious, so the whole team is better able to make the right decisions," Hjulmand said recently.

The small country of 5.9 million people has an intimate relationship with their team, but

things have changed since Eriksen's collapse.

"He's now also a symbol of hope and joy," one supporter, Kasper Thomsen, told AFP.

Most agree that his newfound maturity has benefited the side, of which he is one of the veterans - along with captain Simon Kjaer and goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel.

"We see the signs of a relaxation and ease in Christian's game, which is fantastic," coach Hjulmand noted.

AFP

## South Korea confirm successful Son surgery but World Cup still in balance for Spurs star

Seoul, South Korea - South Korean superstar Son Heung-min has undergone a successful surgery following a facial injury, the country's football federation said Saturday, but declined to say if he will be ready for the World Cup in Qatar.

The Tottenham Hotspur forward sustained the nasty injury - reportedly multiple fractures to his eye socket - during a Champions League win over Marseille this week. Worried South Korean fans have since been waiting nervously for updates on Son's condition, fearing their World Cup would be ruined without the talismanic national captain.

"We've been informed by Spurs that the surgery went well and was successful," a Korea Football Association (KFA) official told AFP.

"We think it's not the time to talk about Son's status for the World Cup. We are not saying it's impossible, we are just saying now is not the time to discuss."



Son Heung-Min

Son's World Cup fate dominated the sports pages of South Korean newspapers on Friday, including one that featured a detailed diagram of a human skull

to show where he was injured.

South Korea will begin their campaign in Qatar against Uruguay on November 24, also facing Ghana and Portugal in

Group H.

Son, who shared last season's Premier League golden boot with Liverpool's Mohamed Salah, has a huge fan base in South Korea.

He is considered critical to South Korea's chances of making it to the knockout stages at the World Cup, having scored 35 goals in 104 internationals - including nine in his last 14.

**Chilwell to miss World Cup**

Chelsea defender Ben Chilwell will miss England's World Cup campaign after suffering a "significant" hamstring injury.

Chilwell limped off during Chelsea's Champions League group stage victory against Dinamo Zagreb on Wednesday.

The 25-year-old left-back went for scans on his injury and Chelsea confirmed on Saturday that he will not be fit in time for the World Cup, which starts in Qatar on November 20.

"Following the injury sustained in our recent game against Dinamo Zagreb, Ben has undergone a scan on his hamstring," the Chelsea statement said.

AFP

# HAALAND AGAIN TO MAN CITY'S RESCUE

Star striker Haaland's late show sends City top, Leeds win thriller

London, United Kingdom - Erling Haaland fired Manchester City to the top of the Premier League as the champions recovered from Joao Cancelo's dismissal to clinch a last-gasp 2-1 win against Fulham, while Leeds staged a stirring fightback to beat Bournemouth 4-3 on Saturday.

Pep Guardiola's side led through Julian Alvarez's first half goal at the Etihad Stadium.

Fulham equalised before the interval when Andreas Pereira converted a penalty awarded for Cancelo's foul on Harry Wilson, with the City left-back sent off much to Guardiola's visible disgust.

But Haaland was the hero yet again after missing City's last two matches due to illness and a foot problem.

On as a substitute, Haaland scored a stoppage-time penalty to notch his 23rd goal in 16 competitive City appearances since his close-season move from Borussia Dortmund.

City's seventh successive home league win lifted them one point above previous leaders Arsenal, who can go back to the top of the table with a win at London



Manchester City's Phil Foden (L) and Erling Haaland applaud the fans after their victory against Fulham at the Etihad Stadium on Saturday (AFP)

rivals Chelsea on Sunday.

Alvarez opened the scoring after 17 minutes, racing onto a fine through ball from Ilkay Gundogan and firing in a powerful shot off the underside of the crossbar.

But 11 minutes later Cancelo barged Wilson off the ball as the Fulham winger broke through on

goal.

Darren England brandished a red card and Fulham midfielder Pereira, formerly of City's arch rivals Manchester United, sent Ederson the wrong way with his spot-kick.

However, Haaland came on with half an hour left and turned the tide in City's favour.

Antonee Robinson's foul on Kevin De Bruyne in the 90th minute conceded a penalty that Norway striker Haaland fired past Bernd Leno.

Crysencio Summerville starred for Leeds as they came back from 3-1 down at Elland Road.

Summerville was Leeds'

match-winner in last week's shock victory at Liverpool and he followed it up with another crucial strike that clinched successive wins for Jesse Marsch's side.

Bournemouth led 2-1 at the break after James Tavernier and Philip Billing had cancelled out Rodrigo's early penalty.

AFP



Bayern Munich's Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting (R) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Hertha Berlin on Saturday (AFP)

## Choupo-Moting double sends Bayern top of Bundesliga

Berlin, Germany - Two goals in one first-half minute from striker Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting carried Bayern Munich to a narrow 3-2 victory away at Hertha Berlin in the Bundesliga on Saturday.

Bayern, who led 3-0 at one point in the first half, endured a nervy final few minutes in the German capital, with French defender Dayot Upamecano appearing to have handballed in injury time as Hertha pushed for a late equaliser.

Referee Bastian Dankert decided against going to the video, helping Bayern to their eighth straight win in all competitions.

Teenage forward Jamal Musiala had put Bayern in front after just 12 minutes, before the quick-fire double from Choupo-Moting looked to have the visitors in pole position.

Bayern will sit in the familiar top spot on the Bundesliga table for at least 24 hours, with Union

Berlin having a chance to go back in the lead when they take on Leverkusen on Sunday.

Borussia Dortmund's teenage striker Youssouffa Moukoko may have won himself a spot in Germany's World Cup squad with two goals as his side romped to a 3-0 home win over Bochum.

Moukoko, 17, opened the scoring after just eight minutes with a stunning solo goal, winning the ball from Bochum's Ukrainian defender Ivan Ordets before curling in a shot from the penalty arc.

Another teenager, American Gio Reyna scored Dortmund's second, converting his first ever Bundesliga penalty in the 12th minute after Dutch forward Donyell Malen was brought down in the box. Moukoko scored a second in first half injury time, looping the ball over goalkeeper Manuel Reimann and into the back of the net.

AFP



Denmark's Holger Rune plays a forehand return during his semi-final match against Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime at the Paris Masters on Saturday (AFP)

## Dane Rune gets revenge on Auger-Aliassime to enter first Masters final

Paris, France - Danish teenager Holger Rune defeated the in-form Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-4, 6-2 on Saturday to reach the first Masters final of his career in Paris.

Rune avenged his loss to Auger-Aliassime in last weekend's final in Basel. He will take on defending champion Novak Djokovic or Stefanos Tsitsipas for the title in the French capital.

The 19-year-old Rune is through to his fourth successive final. He beat Tsitsipas to lift the trophy in Stockholm last month after finishing as the runner-up in Sofia. A quarter-finalist at this year's French Open, Rune collected his fourth straight victory over a top-10 player this week by ending Auger-Aliassime's 16-match winning run.

The Canadian was attempting

to become the first man to win four tournaments in as many weeks since Ivan Lendl swept five over a five-week span in 1981.

Auger-Aliassime paid the price for a hesitant swinging volley after a gentle looping return from Rune as he conceded the lone break in the third game of the opening set.

Rune then broke the eighth seed twice in succession to start the second set, inflicting a first defeat on Auger-Aliassime since his first-round loss at the Astana Open a month ago.

Having arrived in Paris with just three match wins at the Masters level, Rune began his run to the final this week by beating three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka in the first round.

He then took down Hubert

Hurkacz followed by Andrey Rublev before seeing off Carlos Alcaraz as the world number one retired with injury while trailing by a set Friday.

**Alcaraz out of ATP Finals and Davis Cup**

World number one Carlos Alcaraz said on Saturday he will miss the ATP Finals and Davis Cup Finals with an abdominal tear that forced him to retire from the Paris Masters quarter-finals.

"After my withdrawal yesterday (Friday) and having been evaluated by my medical team... unfortunately this is the result of my injury: an internal oblique muscle tear in the left abdominal wall with an estimated recovery time of six weeks," Alcaraz said on social media.

AFP

## Sabalenka beats Pegula to reach WTA Finals semis, Jabeur eliminated

Fort Worth, United States - Aryna Sabalenka beat Jessica Pegula 6-3, 7-5 on Friday and advanced to the semi-finals of the WTA Finals as second-ranked Tunisian Ons Jabeur was eliminated.

Greece's Maria Sakkari, ranked fifth, beat Jabeur 6-2, 6-3 on Friday night to finish unbeaten in round-robin play.

Her victory assured Sabalenka of second place in the Nancy Richey Group and a berth in the knockout stages.

Seventh-ranked Sabalenka had done her part with the victory over third-ranked Pegula.

With so much on the line, Sabalenka was dialed in from the start. "I'm just happy that I was really focused from the beginning to the end and I was able to finish this match in two sets," she said.

Sabalenka, who improved to 4-1 against Pegula, took charge early and took full advantage of four first-set double faults from Pegula.



Ons Jabeur of Tunisia found the going tough against Maria Sakkari of Greece at the 2022 WTA Finals on Friday (AFP)

Jabeur, a finalist at Wimbledon and the US Open this year, could have still sneaked into the semis with a straight-sets win over Sakkari.

But she didn't get a look in as a "fearless" Sakkari wrapped up a victory in just 69 minutes.

As group winner, Sakkari guaranteed she won't have to take on number one ranked Iga Swiatek in the semi-finals.

Instead she'll face either Caroline Garcia or Daria Kasatkina, who clash on Saturday with second place in the Tracy Austin Group on the line.

"I think I just have to keep doing what I've been doing," Sakkari said in an on-court interview. "I'm trusting myself. I'm just fearless on the court."

Sabalenka will have the unenviable task of taking on Swiatek in the semi-finals. The Polish star, whose eight titles this year include the French Open and US Open, has reigned at number one for 30 weeks.

## Jorge Martin on pole for Valencia MotoGP title-decider, favourite Bagnaia on third row

Valencia, Spain - Jorge Martin took pole for this weekend's season-closing Valencia MotoGP after qualifying on Saturday with title favourite Francesco Bagnaia on the third row.

Ducati rider Bagnaia has one hand on his maiden world championship with a 23-point lead going into the decider from champion Fabio Quartararo.

Quartararo, who at one stage held a 91-point lead over his Italian rival, posted the fourth fastest qualifying time to set off from the second row.



Jorge Martin celebrates his pole position (AFP)

But he has a herculean task ahead of him if he is to retain his crown, not only needing to win but also requiring Bagnaia to finish lower than 14th.

Any other result and the MotoGP title will go to the first Italian rider since the legendary Valentino Rossi 13 years ago.

For Martin this was a third successive pole after Thailand and his track record-breaking exploit in Australia last time out.

Alongside him on the front row will be Marc Marquez, the six-time MotoGP champion who has endured a tough injury-beset season but was ecstatic at his qualifying performance.

AFP



Art experts in the Netherlands unveiled an oil sketch on Thursday by the famous Dutch master Rembrandt after it languished for a century in a forgotten corner of a museum, believed to be an imitation.

'The Raising of the Cross' oil sketch from the 1640s was long thought to have been the work of a follower of the 17th century master, known for his famous works like 'The Night Watch' and 'The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp'.

Now, the Bredius museum in The Hague, where the sketch has been on display since it was bought in 1921, has revealed, thanks to new scientific techniques, it was, in fact, painted by Rembrandt.

"The quality of the details are so well done that I am convinced that this is a Rembrandt," said Johanneke Verhave, who restored the sketch.

She studied the artwork together with Jeroen Giltaij, former chief curator of old paintings at Rotterdam's Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum who first rediscovered it while doing research for a book on Rembrandt about a year ago.

"I looked at this work again and again. At the brush strokes. They are brilliant," Giltaij said. "Just a few broad brush strokes" convinced him the sketch was indeed the genuine article, he said.

The artwork was first bought by the museum's original curator Abraham Bredius in 1921. He too was convinced the sketch was an original Rembrandt. But over the years, art experts dismissed it as a 'crude imitation'.

Giltaij re-examined the sketch for his Big Book of Rembrandt Paintings which features all 684 works by the Dutch master.

"When I was looking at it, I thought Bredius was right. I think this is indeed a Rembrandt," he said.

**Not a copy**

One of the main arguments by art experts for the sketch being an imitation was the seemingly un-detailed brush strokes on the canvas.

"You have to remember, this is an oil sketch. Rembrandt is usually very precise and refined, but this is very rough," Giltaij said. "The reason is the oil sketch is a preparatory sketch for another painting. He wants to show the composition, a rough idea of what the actual painting could look like."

The sketch also harked back to a 1633 Rembrandt painting also entitled 'The Raising of the Cross' which now hangs in the Alte Pinakothek art museum in Munich.

Restorer Verhave said infrared reflectography and X-ray scans were made of the sketch, revealing interesting elements.

"The research shows that the sketch has several changes made by the artist himself while painting, meaning that its composition was a creative process. This means the painter was changing his mind while he was working. He was clearly not copying another painting," she said.

The research also showed the way the painter handled his brush matched that of the great master. The two experts' research was sent to Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, which conducted its own analysis.

"Regarding the use of materials, the researchers at the Rijksmuseum, however, did not find anything to contradict an attribution to Rembrandt," the Bredius museum said.

AFP

REAL REMBRANDT

# MASTER'S Strokes

ARTWORK LONG THOUGHT A COPY REVEALED AS REAL REMBRANDT



The sketch has several changes made by the artist himself while painting, meaning that its composition was a creative process. This means the painter was changing his mind while he was working. He was clearly not copying another painting

JOHANNEKE VERHAVE



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GROUP EXHIBITION



Photos: VK Shafier

# Avenues of WONDERS

A GROUP EXHIBITION BY 32 INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS IN OMAN – AVENUES OF WONDERS – DISPLAYS A VARIETY OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION ON THE CONCEPT OF WONDERS AT THE ART & SOUL GALLERY



Hubert Vaz

A mixed bag of varied styles and expression, with myriad interpretations, is currently on display at the Art & Soul Gallery, at Water Front mall, Shatti Qurm, where two talented Indian artists have curated an international group exhibition to give a new twist to the concept of 'wonders' as seen by artists.

Avenues of Wonders - curated by Rema Sivakumar and Nandana Kouli - showcases the work of 32 international artists in Oman who have experimented with the concept of wonders in their own creative way to draw attention to numerous themes concerning people, events, nature, wildlife, monuments, landmarks, as well as abstract expression on different concepts.

The exhibition, held under the patronage of H H Sayyida Susan al Said (the guest of honour), was inaugurated by H H Janaab Sayyida Mira Majid al Said. The

honoured guests included Abdul Latheef, MD, Badr Al Samaa Group, and Anoop Bijily second secretary (Political) and Reena Jain, first secretary (Culture) - both from Embassy of India. It will be on till Nov 10.

The participant artists include Saleem Sakhi, Sheffy Tattarath, Mina Rezaee, Meharen Badbor, Saad, Javed Bashir, Abdel Wahad, Rema Sivakumar, Nandana kouli, Trupti Bhatkal, Anjana Loomba, Dr Dipti Shrivasta, Latha Guru, Poornima Vijayakumar, Mini Krishna, Parul Razdan, Radha Bachu, Vaishali Thakar, Radhakrishnan, Seema Latha, Veena Thoppil, Gayatri Borpuajri, Chandra Mohan, Sherine Liju, Sarika Talwar, Preeti Tiwari, Kavita Vaddeppali, Sanunathan, Shalina Nazeem and Rajesh Venkateshwaran, besides pottery artist Faisal from Sohar.

Rema said, "The world we live in has been reshaped by so many landmarked wonders, which has changed by so many insights about the present, past and fu-



ture. The avenues of wonders or path of wonders could be colourful streets, beautiful markets, skyscrapers, polar regions, tropical regions, deserts or lush greenery surroundings or any beautifully created art works using different mediums.

"The theme visualises our fascination, adoration or curiosity with day to day experiences in our life and the awe inspiring way that the natural and artificial worlds work. This exhibition features abstract, mixed media, mirror works, realism, semi realism and much more. Most of the work is based on colour compositions, texture, nature, building and monuments, still-life and

pottery works.

"Experiencing curating is both challenging, exciting and a creative part of any art exhibition (virtual or physical). This helps us to rethink the idea in a wider angle and conceptualise the theme for the exhibition. It needs a lot of research on our part to be successful.

Nandana added, "For me curating is both challenging, exciting, and a creative part of any exhibition. The physical exhibition of Avenues of Wonders was a wonderful experience for me. An artist can see and capture many wonders in day to day activities and from his/ her surroundings which could easily be overlooked by the common man. Angels within a cluster of cloud, man-made wonders, landscapes - anything that amazes people can be a 'wonder' for a painter."

A virtual exhibition on the same theme had been held a couple of months ago featuring the works of most the participating artists.