

'Respect, admiration'
for Morocco: Lloris

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2022

Email: muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om To subscribe, call toll free no: 80076000 www.muscatdaily.com

► NEWS BRIEF

FIRM FINED RO1,000
FOR SELLING
COUNTERFEIT
GOODS IN DHAHIRAH

Muscat - An administrative fine of RO1,000 was imposed on a commercial establishment for selling counterfeit goods in Dhahirah governorate, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has informed.

A team from the Consumer Protection Department in Dhahirah raided the commercial establishment during a periodic inspection and found the establishment selling counterfeit goods, CPA said in a statement.

Judicial control officers carry out periodic inspections in various markets, shops and commercial centres to follow up the implementation of the Consumer Protection Law and its executive regulations and the decisions issued in this regard.

EU parliament VP charged
in Qatar bribery probeCricket still in denial:
Azeem Rafiq

Govt services fees to be slashed in Q1 2023

Ministry of Finance announces fees of 288 services will be reduced, cancelled or combined

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an aim to support economic development and financial stability, the Ministry of Finance has announced that 288 government service fees will be reduced, cancelled or combined with effect from the first quarter of 2023.

At a press conference held on Tuesday, Rouf al Hinai, Head of Government Services Fees Department in the Ministry of Finance, said, "The results of a study of government services fees in the second phase of the implementation of the Government Services Pricing Guide included fees of the Supreme Judicial Council, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Environment Authority, the municipal councils, and the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority."

According to Hinai, the revised fee structure aims to raise the quality of services provided by the government and offer a competitive edge to the sultanate when it comes to attracting foreign investments. The integrated pricing structure will see fees decreased, increased,



The revised fee structure aims to raise the quality of services provided by the government and offer a competitive edge to the sultanate

ROUF AL HINAI

RO50 refundable security deposit to instal car shades

Muscat - Following Royal directives and in line with efforts to review government services fees, Muscat Municipality has amended its service procedures, cancelled 24 fees and reduced or combined 31 which will come into force during the first quarter of 2023.

A statement issued by Muscat Municipality said, 'The municipality will cancel the fees for permits to instal car shades in front of residences in lieu of a refundable security de-

posit of RO50. This will come into effect in the first quarter of next year.'

Additionally, Muscat Municipality will reduce four fees for commercial signages, transferring the service to the Invest Easy Portal, while cancelling the annual renewal of commercial signs, starting from Q1 2023. It will cancel the service fee for issuing health cards for workers (workers' list) to be regulated by the competent authority.

combined or cancelled for services offered by the government

A total of 903 service fees have been revised, of which 557

fees were either reduced or cancelled in the first phase. In the second phase, 739 fees were reviewed, of which 288 fees will be

reduced, and 37 new services will be added for a fee.

The Supreme Judicial Council has stated 15 service fees have been reduced, cancelled or combined. Agency fees related to heir have been combined to one amounting to RO1 for each client who proves their heir.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion stated that 127 service fees, including intellectual property services and patent registration services for companies and individuals have been reduced, cancelled or combined. Ibtisam al Shamsiya, from Muscat Municipality, said, "A total of 104 services related to the municipality sector have been reduced or cancelled. All fees on paper forms have been cancelled and replaced with digital forms."

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority informed that five service fees were reduced and seven others were cancelled in the second phase.

The Environment Authority reduced or cancelled 30 service fees.

The Ministry of Finance has indicated that the implementation of the third phase of the Government Services Pricing Guide will include reviewing fees of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in addition to completing the review of the service fees of the Supreme Judicial Council.



MoI launches app for civic polls

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) has launched an app named 'Intakhib' (Elect) to be used by voters for electing members who will represent them in municipal councils (third term) in all wilayats of Oman. The app provides ease of access and accuracy.

H E Sayyid Hamoud Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, who presided over the app's launch ceremony, stressed the ministry's constant strive to introduce the latest technologies in every electoral term to keep pace with developments in the technical world. The app is a step forward, informed the minister, who commended the departments that joined hands in launching it.

On his part, H E Dr Ali Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Chairman of the Technical Committee for Elections of Municipal Council Members for the third term, said that the app constitutes a digital transformation in the electoral process and

The app operates in NFC-enhanced smart phones for individuals with a valid identity card included in the voters' list of the Electoral Register

ABDULRAHMAN AL HINAI

will save time and effort.

According to Intakhib project manager Abdulrahman Ali al Hinai, it was designed on par with security standards, with all precautions in place to ensure secrecy. The app operates in NFC-enhanced smart phones for individuals with a valid identity card for voters listed in the Electoral Register.

Hinai said the steps to vote via Intakhib begin with voters downloading the app from the e-store of IOS or Android smart phones. Next, the voter clicks a photo of his/her ID card, both front and back, and saves it to the desired location.

The date for voting for those residing outside the sultanate will be December 18 while voters in Oman can cast their ballot on December 25.'

Hotel revenues surge 96.6% till October

Muscat - Revenues of 3-5 star hotels surged by 96.6 per cent this year till the end of October compared to the corresponding period in 2021 to RO138,205,000, according to the monthly statistical bulletin of tourism indicators issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The number of 3-5 star hotels' guests increased 32.5 per cent till the end of October 2022 com-



pared to the same period in 2021, while occupancy rate grew by 19.1 per cent.

The number of guests from GCC states during this period registered an increase of 521.6 per cent to 129,150 compared to 20,778 guests during the corresponding period in 2021. European guests followed by recording an increase of 446.8 per cent.

ONA

'Stammering' can be treated with encouragement'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Esmani - a non-profit organisation - has launched an initiative to spread awareness on stammering in view of the fact that there are no centres to help those suffering from this speech problem and the lack of information on the number of those affected by the condition in Oman.

With the help of its 130 volunteers, Esmani has launched an initiative called 'Listen to me', which according to Yaqoub Nasser Mohammed al Numani, head of Esmani, aims to spread awareness on stammering in society and motivate young people to participate in volunteer work.

"The team also holds workshops in schools and universities to educate students about the importance of helping those



Yaqoub Mohammed al Numani

who stammer because they are part of society and need help to integrate easily in communities. We have also started spreading awareness through social media," said Numani.

Also called childhood-onset fluency disorder - stammering is a speech disorder that involves frequent and significant problems with normal fluency and flow of speech.

Numani informed that the team works under the umbrella

of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and was started in 2019. "It is dedicated to give hope and empower children and adults who stammer, their families and professionals engaged in helping those who stammer through support, education, advocacy and research."

Talking about the challenges, Numani said financial support is hard to come by.

"The latest global statistics confirm that there are more than 70mn people around the world who stammer. We have not found any information or statistics on stammering in the sultanate or centres that offer workshops on this speech disorder."

Numani and his colleague Helal al Dhahli travelled to a few countries to take courses on stammering to become qualified trainers and to spread awareness of the importance of

helping those who suffer from this speech disorder.

"Unfortunately, there are some parents who are ashamed of their children who stammer. We have prepared an integrated programme to help those who stammer, and cooperated with the Ministry of Education to conduct workshops in several schools of the sultanate."

Of Esmani's future plans, he said, "We want to establish a centre to present courses on stammering and to continue distributing leaflets that include information on the speech defect spreading awareness among community members to help this group. We thank the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for its support."

Numani urged parents to help their children who suffer from stammering and not be ashamed of them.

Subscribe Muscat Daily and get a chance to win Domino's coupons



RO24
1 YEAR
(Actual price: RO52)
RO15
6 MONTHS

Toll free no: **80076000**
E-mail: customercare@apexmedia.co.om
Call Ramu Sutram: **99853450**

an **apex** media PUBLICATION **القبعة**
www.apexmedia.co.om

دومينوز
Domino's
طبايع بيتزا

MUSCAT DAILY
www.muscatdaily.com



Even though the Moroccan coach was raised in France, he loves Morocco more

DOUNIA BOUFERNANE



How can I not cheer for France? But Morocco is representing all of us Arabs now

RAMEZ AL TURK



I drove to Qatar to encourage the Moroccan team. They have surprised the world

MOATH AL SAEEDI



I am hopeful that they will be in the same form or even better in the semi final and the final

WALEED SULAIMAN

THIS TIME FOR ARABIA, AFRICA

Hopes are high among Arabs and Africans of Morocco reaching the final

Shaddad al Musalmay
Muscat

As trailblazer Morocco prepares to take on France in the second semi final of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 on Wednesday, expectations are higher than ever in both the Arab world and Africa following the jubilant scenes witnessed around the world after the Atlas Lions beat Portugal on Saturday.

Morocco, which now carries the hopes of both continents and shoulders the weight of history - it being the only Arab and African nation to make it this far in a World Cup - has captured the hearts and imagination of people who believe such a performance from a regional team was long over due. But France poses a major challenge to Morocco before they can reach where they want to be - the finals and eventually take home the cup.

With their heroic upsets so far



uniting a continent in their support, a Morocco win over France will be wildly celebrated once again across the Arab world and by the Moroccan diaspora in Muscat. But just as importantly, it will deepen the respect for the team globally, as the outsiders who made their mark.

Moath al Saeedi, a Moroccan fan from Khabourah who went to

attend World Cup matches in Qatar, said, "I drove to Qatar to encourage the Moroccan team. They have surprised the world with their abilities and determination to win. They dazzled the world with their outstanding play and victory in the penalty shootout."

Saeedi described Morocco's victory as victory for all Arabs. "I

am confident that Morocco will beat France."

Muscat-based Moroccan resident Idrissi Nada said, "The semi final will be very difficult. France has strong strikers, such as (Olivier) Giroud, who has scored 30 goals, and (Antoine) Griezmann - 35 goals - among others. But we hope to win because Morocco also has professional play-

ers such as (Achraf) Hakimi and (Sofiane) Boufal."

Morocco, who reached the Round of 16 in the 1986 World Cup, is the only team from outside Europe and South America to make it to this stage.

"Even though the Moroccan coach was raised in France, he loves Morocco more. So, he will do everything he can for Mo-

rocco to win," said Dounia Boufernane, another Moroccan fan in Oman.

Morocco reached the semi finals after beating Spain and Portugal in the knockout stage and has conceded only one goal in the tournament and the French are aware that the Moroccans are more than a strictly defensive team as they prepare for their unexpected World Cup semi final clash on Wednesday.

Hopes are high not just among Arabs but Africans too. Having now reached their first FIFA World Cup semi final, 1976 African Cup of Nations champions have eclipsed the achievements of Cameroon in 1990, Senegal in 2002 and Ghana in 2010.

Drake Rukundo, an avid Ugandan football enthusiast, said regardless of the result of Wednesday's match, Morocco has made history this World Cup. "This reminds us of Pele's prediction that an African country could win the World Cup by 2000. He made the prediction after Zaire was beaten by Yugoslavia 9-0 in 1974. It's 2022 but that hope has come alive," he said.

"That prediction gave Cameroon confidence to beat the Mighty (Diego) Maradona's Ar-

gentina in the opening match of the 1990 World Cup. That made Senegal beat France in South Korea in 2002. It's what saw Morocco beat (Cristiano) Ronaldo and Portugal in Qatar. Whatever happens, an African team will go all the way. Pele will pass on that dream to all Africans and keep it alive," Rukundo he added.

Like Rukundo, Waleed Sulaiman, a football analyst with a local radio station based in Tanzania, said, "Yes indeed, I am supporting Morocco as we are Africans and I hope Morocco gets the chance to reach the final. I am very hopeful that they will be in the same form or even better in the semi final and eventually the final."

However, some Arab fans are caught up in between. "I have been cheering for France since I was young. It is my team of choice when it comes to video games as well! I was extremely happy when France won the previous World Cup," said Ramez al Turk, a senior media relations consultant from Jordan who is based in Qatar.

"So, how can I not cheer for France? But Morocco is representing all of us Arabs now. They need our support, especially in their match against a very strong team like France! I expect a tie!"

Tender Announcement

مدائن
madayn

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
7/2022/PEIE/HQ-7	Green Buffer Plantation at Sur Industrial City	22-12-2022	12-01-2023	Afforestation, horticulture and garden services	ALL GRADES	70

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

1

Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2

eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200 Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

@madaynoman

madayn.om

OMAN'S 1st EXCHANGE

PURSHOTTAM KANJI EXCHANGE

شركة برشوتم كانجي للمرافعة

Bring Home your Exchange

Download our App Today!

Available on the Google Play | Download on the App Store

99101314, 99849289 | customersupport@pkexchange.net

www.pkexchange.com | [pkexch](#) | [@pkexchange1](#)

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

Rain lashes Al Wusta; cloudy weather in Muscat

Muscat - Moderate rains lashed Al Wusta from the wee hours of Tuesday along its coasts, while the rest of the country witnessed cloudy weather and a drop in temperatures.

A meteorological department official said, "This is normal in this part of the year; there are occasional rains in the coastal areas. There are chances of late night to early morning low level clouds or fog patches over parts of the governorates of South Sharqiyah and Al Wusta."

He ruled out any chance of a cyclone in the coastal areas. However, northwesterly light to moderate winds are expected over parts of the Sea of Oman and the coast of Musandam.

Waves of 2m will be witnessed on the western coasts of Musandam and South Sharqiyah.

انتخابات أعضاء المجالس البلدية
الفترة الثالثة ٢٠٢٢
Municipal Elections
Third term - 2022

BUY 1 GET 1 FREE

VALID ON LARGE AND MEDIUM PIZZA

FROM 10TH DECEMBER TO 26TH DECEMBER 2022

PAPAJOHNS

Better Ingredients. Better Pizza.

FOR ORDERS, CALL

24826400

Vendors of women's market in Ibra seek extension of business hours

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Women traders at the Souq al Harim (also called Souq al Arbah) in Ibra are seeking extension of their business hours from the current five hours on every Wednesday.

The market in Ibra functions from 6am to 11am on every Wednesday exclusively for women who come to the souq to sell their home-made products including ornaments, ointments, cosmetics, abaya fringes, lotion, spices and bukhur among other things. Many traders sell food products including dry fruits, clothes and home accessories.

"It will be nice if we can have a few more hours extra," said Balquees Maskari, a trader. "These days many tourists are coming to Oman and it will be our chance to showcase our local stuff and have some extra businesses too," she added.



Balquees has been selling henna for hair and body, rose water and other home-made cosmetics for the last six years in the souq.

Her friend Maryam Balushi lamented that due to the pandemic, things are not same as before and it is taking time to get

back. "There are hundreds of Omani women who work here; this is an excellent opportunity and sign of true women empowerment. However, this five-hour duration is very short and we wish the timing to be extended until the evening prayers," Maryam said.

With now tourism opening up, she pointed out that Ibra is seeing an influx of European tourists. "We have seen how much interest do foreigners take in our home-made products mainly bukhur, spices and ointments. It will be an excellent op-

portunity for us to sell our products more if we have longer hours of activities."

Many women come from far-flung areas such as Nizwa, Bidiya and Bidbid. Some of them come one day before and stay with their relatives in Ibra. The market is not only for selling goods but also for socialising. Many women come to meet their friends and relatives who work in the market.

Many share long bonds some are as old as of 50 years. Souq al Harim is also a place for displaying one's creativity as most of the merchandises are made at homes with ingredients found in wadis, deserts and seas.

A 60-plus year old woman, who didn't wish to be named, said, "Most of the products here cater to women irrespective of their nationality or age."

"They are all natural products," she asserted.



'Made in Oman' campaign launched in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion on Tuesday launched a campaign for Omani products in Dhofar governorate under the auspices of Governor H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said.

The 'Made in Oman' campaign has been organised in co-operation with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madaayn) and the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED).

A corner for Omani products was opened at Lulu Hypermar-

ket, in Salalah, the main city in Dhofar governorate, to mark the launch of the campaign.

Jamal bin Abdullah al Hinai, Director of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Department in Dhofar governorate, said that the campaign aims to promote Omani products at the local and foreign levels.

"The campaign also aims to enhance business environment, support and encouragement for Omani manufacturers and service providers who own small and medium enterprises. It seeks to support the Omani industry by introducing and promoting Omani products and encouraging local consumers to buy our products," Hinai added.

SAYYID ASAAD BIDS TURKISH AMBASSADOR FAREWELL



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Asaad bin Turki al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received Turkish Ambassador Ayse Sozen Usluer to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty in the sultanate (ONA)

Tender Announcement

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tenders

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
RFQ MEDC/ 2022/090-2	Purchase of Cable Test Devices	19/12/2022	25/12/2022	DCRP Approved Consultant Type 1 & 2	26.25

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure , please visit MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com or call 24588600 – Ext: 8577 – 8726
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com , one week before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in clause 20.0 in Prime Document and to the supplier guideline available MEDC Website/Vendor/E-Tendering, www.medcoman.com
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY S.A.O.C. - The bid bond should be included in the commercial proposal only as sof copy. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - After the commercial opening , the qualified bidders will be notified to submit the original (hard copy) of bid bond to MEDC office. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - MEDC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - Muscat Electricity Distribution Company gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - For projects whose value is less than OMR 10K, the priority to award will be given to registered companies that hold a valid certificate Of Reyadah. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.



Driver arrested for drifting on Muscat road

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has arrested the driver of a vehicle for endangering his life and the lives of others by doing drifting on a public road in Muscat.

A statement issued by ROP said, 'After a video clip was circulated on social media of a vehicle driver endangering his life and the lives of others, Muscat Governorate Police Command arrested the motorist in Muscat.

'Legal procedures are being completed against him by the Directorate General of Traffic,' it added.

The ROP calls on everyone to adhere to traffic rules and regulations and to make all roads safe for users.



80070008
www.medcoman.com

MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,898.86
Sensex	62,533.30
FOREX RATES	
(RO1 equals)	
Indian	215.10
Pakistan	584.03
Bangladesh	269.45
Philippines	144.53
Sri Lanka	954.28
*Rates as on December 13 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

United Airlines announces huge Boeing 787 order

Betting on robust demand for international travel, United Airlines on Tuesday unveiled an order of 100 new Boeing 787 Dreamliners with options for an additional 100 jets.

The huge order, the largest by an American carrier for this class of aircraft, marks a victory for Boeing, which has targeted mid-decade as the period it expects to return to its pre-pandemic financial health after 737 MAX scandal and other woes. United expects deliveries of the jets to take place between 2024 and 2032, aiming the new aircraft as a replacement for the 767 fleet that will be removed from service by 2030.

The Dreamliner saves 25 per cent of the carbon emission compared with the jets being retired. United executives did not offer an estimate as to the total potential cost of the contracts, but projected that capital spending would rise to US\$9bn in 2023 and US\$11bn in 2024.

Bank Muscat Money Market Fund's assets reach R075mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat Money Market Fund, Oman's first and only money market fund, has crossed a significant milestone with its assets under management (AUM) crossing R075mn mark and recording asset growth of almost 70 per cent during 2022.

The fund has become the largest open-ended fund in Oman and one of the largest funds in the GCC. This growth in the fund's assets demonstrates the growing popularity of the fund among investors, supported by its return profile and excellent service standards, Bank Muscat said in a press statement.

Bank Muscat Money Market Fund offers an opportunity for investors to invest their short-term cash surpluses at attractive rates of return. For reference, the rates of return offered by the fund has been in the range of 3.5 - 4.0 per cent per annum over the last two years (net of expenses). Thus the investors could benefit from an additional tool of liquidity management and earn attractive rates of return by investing in Bank Muscat Money Market Fund.

The fund offers daily liquidity



with no minimum or maximum holding period. Investors can subscribe to the fund with a minimum subscription amount as low as R0500 per investor including individuals and institutions. Further, the fund does not charge any entry or exit fee to investors and has a proven track record of performance for more than 10 years.

Bank Muscat Money Market Fund predominately invests in short to medium term deposits and fixed-income instruments of (NAV) being published on a daily basis on the Bank Muscat website as well as the Muscat Stock Exchange website so that investors can track the value of their investments on a regular basis.

Bank Muscat's asset management business has a proven track record of successful operations for almost 29 years and is today the largest asset manager in Oman and one of the leading asset managers in the GCC region, with approximately US\$2.5bn of AUM. It offers tailored investment solutions across asset classes including equity, fixed income, real estate and private equity investments.

The rates of return offered by Bank Muscat Money Market Fund has been in the range of 3.5 - 4.0 per cent per annum over the last two years

Maha Energy gets approval to sell 35% stake in Oman's Block 70

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Maha Energy - a Swedish international upstream oil and gas company - announced that its sale of a participating interest in Oman's Block 70 has been approved by the Omani authorities.

'Maha Energy is pleased to announce that its sale of a 35 per cent participating interest in Oman's Block 70 to Mafrag Energy has been approved by the Omani authorities, following the issuance of Royal Decree 74/2022,' the company said in a statement.

Earlier in August, Maha Energy, through its wholly-owned subsidiary Maha Energy (Oman) Ltd, entered into a farmout agreement with Omani firm Mafrag Energy for Block 70 in Oman.

Following the completion of the transaction, Maha Energy will retain 65 per cent participating interest and will remain the operator of Block 70.

Block 70, which covers an area of 639 sqkm, is an onshore block that includes the shallow undeveloped Mafrag heavy oil field. The block is located in the middle of the oil producing



Ghaba Salt Basin in the central part of Oman.

Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals had awarded the exploration and development rights for the concession Block 70 to Maha Energy in October 2020.

Earlier this year, the company signed an agreement with Gulf Drilling Company for the drilling of a minimum of six wells in Block 70.

Maha Energy's business activities include exploration, development and production of crude oil and natural gas. The company's strategy is to target and develop underperforming hydrocarbon assets on global basis. Apart from its Oman operations, Maha Energy operates four oil fields: Tartaruga and Tie in Brazil, Powder River (LAK Ranch) and Illinois Basin in the United States.



CBO issues R011mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A tender of the government treasury bills, issue number 572, was issued this week by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to R010.9mn, for a maturity period of 91 days, from December 14, 2022 until March 15, 2023. The average accepted price reached R098.951 for every R0100 bill, and the minimum accepted price arrived at R098.890.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.2084 per cent and 4.2531 per cent, respectively. The interest rate on the repo operations with CBO is 4.50 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with CBO is 5.00 per cent.

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

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

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates.

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

Marafiq invests \$600mn in SEZAD projects

Duqm - Marafiq, a specialised company in delivering various industrial services in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZD), has implemented a number of strategic projects in the zone.

Eng Abdullah Mohammed al Hashimi, CEO of Marafiq, said that Marafiq, which was established in 2013, aims to provide centralised utilities to SEZAD. The company is a joint venture owned by OQ Group and Gulf Energy Development Corporation.

Hashimi added that Marafiq has spent almost US\$600mn to set up a comprehensive electricity and water plant, as well as to provide electricity and drinking water services to industrial, commercial and residential facilities in SEZAD.

Hashemi pointed out that Marafiq plays an important role in providing basic public services for major investments at the SEZAD in a bid to ensure growth



and prosperity for the region as a global trade centre.

He also said that the water transmission and distribution project has been awarded to the fish industries zone at SEZAD. The total cost of the project is US\$6.5mn and it is expected to be finished by the end of 2023.

Marafiq manages and oper-

ates a number of projects at SEZAD, including the integrated power and water plant, a gas turbine power plant and a project to produce, transport and distribute potable water at SEZAD.

Further, Marafiq's objectives include meeting the growing demand for energy at Duqm, se-

cure a more reliable and efficient source of energy, reduce the cost of power production and the cost of government subsidies for the sector. It also targets reducing annual carbon dioxide emissions by 90,000 tonnes, equivalent to the emissions of around 20,000 cars.

ONA

Energy crisis driving climate-friendly power savings: IEA

Paris, France - Russia's invasion of Ukraine has driven countries across the world to boost energy efficiency, creating "huge potential" to tackle high prices, security and climate change, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has said.

Governments have scaled up fossil fuel subsidies to cushion the impact of rising energy costs on households in the wake of the Ukraine conflict, which has disrupted gas supplies and stoked prices.

But a new report from the IEA found that it had also prompted policymakers and consumers to shrink their power use, causing record investment in energy efficiency measures, like building renovations, and infrastructure for public transport and electric cars.

IEA executive director Fatih Birol said after the oil shocks of

the 1970s, governments pushed "substantial improvements" in energy efficiency, particularly in cars, appliances and buildings.

"Amid today's energy crisis, we are seeing signs that energy efficiency is once again being prioritised," he said.

"Energy efficiency is essential for dealing with today's crisis, with its huge potential to help tackle the challenges of energy affordability, energy security and climate change."

According to the IEA research, governments, industry and households invested a record US\$560bn this year in energy efficiency measures.

Preliminary IEA data for 2022 also suggests that the global economy used energy two per cent more efficiently than it did in 2021, almost double the rate of the past five years.



IEA executive director Fatih Birol

Annual improvements would need to rise to four per cent to meet decarbonisation goals by mid-century, the IEA said.

But it said if current trends continue to improve, 2022

"could mark a vital turning point" for efficiency, adding that developments this year have "changed the dynamics of energy markets for decades to come".

Recent government initia-

tives to boost efficiency in buildings, cars and industry have included legislation in Europe, Japan and the United States that add up to hundreds of billions of dollars in spending.

'Hyper-efficient and climate-friendly'

The IEA said that one in every eight cars sold globally is now electric.

Building codes are also being updated across the world, it said, while there is growing energy efficiency awareness among consumers.

In Southeast Asia, all governments were developing policies for efficient cooling, which the IEA said was "vital for a region with one of the fastest rates of growth in electricity demand".

Meanwhile, global sales of heat pumps are expected to hit record levels in 2022, driven by surging demand in Europe, where almost three million are expected to be sold this year - up from 1.5mn in 2019.

"Heat pumps are an indispensable part of any plan to cut emissions and natural gas

use, and an urgent priority in the European Union today," said Birol in a press statement this week.

If governments meet all their energy and climate targets, the IEA said "hyper-efficient and climate-friendly" heat pumps could meet nearly a fifth of global heating needs in buildings by 2030, up from a tenth in 2021.

Its first special report on the future of heat pumps, released Wednesday, said the technology, if powered by low-emissions electricity, was "central" to the global transition to sustainable heating.

The report estimated that heat pumps have the potential to reduce global carbon dioxide emissions by at least 500 million tonnes in 2030 - equal to annual CO2 pollution from the cars in Europe today.

AFP

US commits \$55bn to African nations over next three years

Washington, US - The United States on Tuesday rolled out the red carpet to leaders across Africa with plans to unveil US\$55bn in support as part of a renewed bid to win back influence in the continent.

Nearly 50 African heads of state or government have descended on Washington in the midst of a pre-Christmas cold snap for three days of courtship by President Joe Biden after years of inroads in the continent by China and Russia.

Previewing the summit, Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, said the administration would seek US\$55bn for Africa over the next three years "across a wide range of sectors to tackle the core challenges of our time."

He said the blueprint would be the African Union's own Agenda 2063, its plan for sustainable development.

"We are lifting up African voices and African priorities in what we are doing in this summit," Sullivan told reporters.

The Biden administration, which has identified China as its top global competitor, hopes to show a subtle contrast from Beijing during the summit rather than hammering home criticism.

"This is going to be about what we can offer. It's going to be a positive proposition about the United States, its partnership with Africa," Sullivan said.

"We are bringing the re-



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during the US-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, DC (AFP)

sources to the table in significant numbers," he added.

Welcoming African entrepreneurs for a reception Monday evening, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States was guided by the principle of partnership.

"We can't solve any of the really big challenges we face if we don't work together. So it's about what we can do with African nations and people, not for them," Blinken said.

Biden during the summit will outline US support for the African Union to gain a formal berth in the Group of 20 club of major economies, months after he threw support behind a permanent African seat on the UN Security Council.

Unlike China, which holds summits every three years with Africa, the United States plans to promote democratic values.

Sullivan said Biden will meet with African leaders facing election in 2023.

"We would like to do everything we can to support those elections being free, fair and credible," Sullivan said.

Successive US presidents have pursued signature initiatives for Africa, with George W Bush launching a major push to fight HIV/AIDS that he considers among his top legacies and Barack Obama spearheading a drive to bring electricity, which US officials say has brought power for the first time to 165mn people. Obama's successor Don-

ald Trump, by contrast, made no secret of his lack of interest in Africa, and Biden's summit with the region's leaders will be the first by a US president since Obama's landmark first edition in 2014. In the eight ensuing years, China's investment in Africa has consistently outpaced that of the United States, with countries brushing aside US warnings that Beijing's billions in infrastructure spending could put them in long-term arrears.

Ahead of the summit, China's ambassador to Washington, Qin Gang, said that his country was "sincere" in Africa "and that its investment "is not a trap."

"We believe that Africa should be a place for international cooperation, not for major

powers' competition for geopolitical gains," he told an event of the news site Semafor.

"We welcome all other members of the international community, including the United States, to join us in the global efforts to help Africa."

The United States has also been alarmed by a rising presence of Russia, whose Wagner mercenary group has become involved in several hotspots and which has sought to convince African nations that Western sanctions, not its invasion in Ukraine, are responsible for a spike in global food prices.

Biden will highlight food security during an event with African leaders on Thursday, officials said.

The summit will also feature events connecting the African diaspora, hoping to stress cultural familiarity.

New York Mayor Eric Adams said that the success of African Americans showed the need for Africans to "walk differently."

"You have been denied, ignored and exploited on the continent of Africa for too long," Adams, the second Black person to lead America's largest city, told African visitors at the State Department.

"You're the largest producer of cocoa and others have made the chocolate out of it. Now you make the chocolate out of your cocoa!"

AFP

Europe can do without Russian gas, IEA says

Paris, France - Europe faces a major shortfall of natural gas in 2023 if Russia completely cuts off deliveries but has measures it could take to avoid shortages, the International Energy Agency said Monday.

The Paris-based IEA, which advises energy-consuming nations on policy, estimated that Europe faces a potential shortfall of 23bn cubic metres of natural gas if Russia completely halts deliveries and China's imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) rebound to 2021 levels.

That amounts to around 6.5 per cent of the EU's 2021 gas consumption.

"The European Union has made significant progress in reducing reliance on Russian natural gas supplies, but it is not out of the danger zone yet," the IEA's executive director, Fatih Birol, was quoted as saying in a statement.

He said that circumstances would unlikely be as favourable in 2023 for European nations to fill up their gas reserves, which together with stepped-up purchases of LNG supplies appears to have staved off the risk of shortages for this winter despite Russia halting most gas deliveries.

But it is unclear whether Russia will continue its low level of deliveries of gas in 2023, while China's relaxation

of its zero-Covid policy could lead to an economic rebound and increased LNG imports.

"The IEA's new analysis shows that a stronger push on energy efficiency, renewables, heat pumps and simple energy saving actions is vital to head off the risk of shortages and further vicious price spikes next year," Birol said at an event launching the agency's

EU has made significant progress in reducing reliance on Russian natural gas supplies, but it is not out of the danger zone yet, IEA says

latest analyses.

Those analyses concluded that the potential supply gap can be closed by the EU taking those additional measures.

"Russia's blackmail has failed," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said at the event.

She urged EU member states to quickly approve additional measures to boost energy preparedness, and called for joint purchases of energy.

AFP

EU seeks compromise on gas price cap

Brussels, Belgium - EU ministers meeting in Brussels on Tuesday struggled to bridge differences over a proposed cap on natural gas prices, a challenge stymying other measures designed to mitigate Europe's energy crunch.

The continent has entered a bitterly cold winter with fewer energy options because Russia has reduced gas supplies in retaliation for EU sanctions imposed over its war in Ukraine.

Gas prices are high, albeit lower than during the middle of the year, spurring worries that European homes and businesses could face blackouts or unpayable bills, if not this winter than in the next.

Several energy ministers going into the talks doubted a compromise could be reached. They said discussions could roll over to another meeting scheduled for next Monday.

"I'm viewing this meeting today with a bit of scepticism because there has been too little



movement in the last days," Austrian Energy Minister Leonore Gewessler said.

She said two other measures, joint gas purchases and speeded-up authorisations for renewable energy sources, could find agreement but they were "being held hostage" by countries intent on securing a gas price cap.

Several EU countries, including France, Poland and Spain, want a price cap lower than the

one proposed by the European Commission, with fewer conditions attached.

The commission has suggested a price ceiling of 275 euros per megawatt hour, but only if the price remains above that level for at least two weeks, and then only if the price for liquefied natural gas (LNG) goes above 58 euros for 10 days within that same two-week period.

Some EU countries including

Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, view a too-rigid price cap as a threat to supplies, computing the risk that deliveries could be diverted from Europe to more lucrative markets in Asia.

"The time for consultation has run out," the Italian minister for European affairs, Raffaele Fitto, said.

"European citizens are in agony, European businesses are closing... All of us must heed to our responsibilities and agree without delay on the market correction mechanism and energy solidarity."

Czech Industry Minister Jozef Sikela, who was chairing the meeting under his country's EU presidency, said he understood the concerns of both camps but believed a "feasible proposal" was on the table.

"The citizens and businesses of Europe, they expect from us that we will come up with a clear solution," he said.

AFP

UK to test 'shadow banking' after markets chaos

London, UK - The Bank of England (BoE) will test so-called shadow banking institutions such as pension funds, that played a key role in recent UK bond market chaos, it said Tuesday. The BoE was forced to buy UK debt in September in an emergency intervention to avert financial catastrophe, after a controversial tax-slashing budget by the government caused bond yields to soar and sparked panic.

The crisis, which sparked the downfall of former Conservative prime minister Liz Truss, threw the spotlight on non-banking financial institutions (NBFIs) and their risk to stability, the BoE noted Tuesday.

"There is a need to develop stress-testing approaches to understand better the resilience of NBFIs to shocks" and their links with commercial lenders and markets, it added in a report.



"The bank will run, for the first time, an exploratory scenario exercise focused on NBFI risks, to inform understanding of these risks and future policy approaches," it revealed.

September's turmoil, centred on the exposure of pension funds to UK debt market volatility, highlighted a "material risk" to stability, the BoE warned.

Some pension funds use Liability Driven Investments (LDIs), which are linked to financial derivatives and intended to help ensure that the income generated

by the assets covers their long-term commitments.

However, the chaos caused the value of assets, notably government bonds, to tumble.

That forced pension funds to sell the bonds, known as gilts, to swiftly access liquidity, sending yields rocketing. "The rapid and unprecedented increase in yields exposed vulnerabilities associated with LDI funds, in which many defined benefit pension schemes invest," the BoE said.

"This led to a vicious spiral of collateral calls and forced gilt sales that risked leading to further market dysfunction, creating a material risk to UK financial stability." The BoE itself does not regulate LDIs, but wants pension fund watchdogs to ensure institutions have sufficient collateral in LDI funds to withstand further shocks.

AFP

US charges disgraced crypto tycoon with defrauding investors

Washington, US - The US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) charged disgraced cryptocurrency tycoon Sam Bankman-Fried on Tuesday with defrauding customers of billions of dollars, a day after he was arrested in the Bahamas at the request of the United States.

Bankman-Fried had "built a house of cards on a foundation of deception" in his dealings with investors in his FTX crypto firm, the SEC said.

"Today we are holding Bankman-Fried responsible for fraudulently raising billions of dollars from investors in FTX and misusing funds belonging to FTX's trading customers."

The charge comes a day after Bankman-Fried was arrested in the Bahamas on the eve of his scheduled appearance at a US

congressional hearing in which he was to testify under oath about the crypto exchange's overnight demise.

The SEC said investigations "as to other securities law violations and into other entities and persons relating to the alleged misconduct are ongoing."

The 30-year-old had in recent weeks defied legal advice and made multiple media appearances offering his version of his company's sudden failure, usually by video link from the Bahamas, where his company is headquartered.

According to a press release from the attorney general's office in the Bahamas, Bankman-Fried was to be held in custody before an expected request for his extradition by the United States.

The Bahamian prime minis-



A file photo shows the logo of cryptocurrency FTX, reflected in an image of former chief executive Samuel Bankman-Fried (AFP)

ter's office shared news of the arrest, as well as a police statement saying Bankman-Fried was arrested in the early evening at his apartment complex in the

capital Nassau.

He was taken into custody without incident, the statement said, and was to appear in court in Nassau on Tuesday.

As much as anyone, Bankman-Fried had embodied the apparent emergence of cryptocurrency as an above-board investment rather than a frowned-upon get-rich-quick scheme shunned by the banking establishment.

His FTX platform was plugged by celebrities in advertising campaigns and the cyber whiz kid became a regular presence in Washington, where he donated tens of millions of dollars in political contributions.

But after reaching a valuation of US\$32bn, FTX's implosion was swift following a November 2 report on ties between FTX and Alameda, a trading company also controlled by Bankman-Fried.

The report exposed that Alameda's balance sheet was

heavily built on the FTT currency - a token created by FTX with no independent value.

The price of FTT plunged in early November, roiling both Alameda and FTX, where Alameda had large trading positions.

Reeling from customer withdrawals and short some US\$8bn, FTX and around 100 related entities filed for bankruptcy protection on November 11, inviting scrutiny from regulators, prosecutors and furious clients.

Among the revelations, FTX is suspected of fraud for propping up Alameda with billions of dollars in customer funds that are now likely lost forever.

Questions also linger over whether Bankman-Fried engaged in market manipulation, or illegally provided inside informa-

tion to Alameda.

"If convicted he could be facing the rest of his life in prison, given the dollar amount of the fraud," Jacob S. Frenkel, a former federal criminal prosecutor at Dickinson Wright, told AFP.

"We would not see an indictment if prosecutors were not absolutely convinced that they will win a conviction," he added.

In his media interviews, Bankman-Fried has admitted to mistakes, but has denied intent to defraud his customers.

FTX CEO John Ray, who came to the company after the debacle, was to tell Congress on Tuesday that the problems arose because control was "in the hands of a very small group of grossly inexperienced and unopsticated individuals."

AFP

Hon Lujaina named ‘Change Maker of the Year’

MHD-ITICS declared ‘Most Valuable Company of the Year’

In recognition of her extensive contributions and the critical role she continues to play in empowering the women of Oman, Honourable Lujaina Mohsin Darwish, Chairperson of the Infrastructure, Technology, Industrial and Consumer Solutions cluster of Mohsin Haider Darwish LLC (MHD-ITICS), received the ‘Change Maker of the Year’ title and ‘TAS Icon’ award at a gala event on December 5.

The event was held under the auspices of H H Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, the Secretary-General of Oman’s General Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers as guest of honour, at Intercity Hotel in Muscat, a press release said.

Aimed at advancing achieving growth, progress and innovation in Oman, MHD-ITICS supported the TAS Conclave as the presenting partner. As representatives of MHD-ITICS, Hon



Lujaina Mohsin Darwish, Jayaprakash Menon, Chief Executive Officer, Mohammed Abdallah al Kharusi, Chief Information Officer, Mohsin Talal al Bahrani, Director and Talal Bahrani, Senior General Manager, Office Products Division attended the conclave.

Hon Lujaina has been ranked first on TAS Icon list of ten most influential and inspiring people in Oman. As a further accomplishment, MHD-ITICS was named the ‘Most Valuable Company of the Year’, the award ceremony.

“It is an honour for me to have won these two prestigious

awards,” said Hon Lujaina. “As a woman, I strongly believe in empowering women. Consequently, I have always been passionate about supporting and curating initiatives aimed at addressing women’s education and economic empowerment.”

“My work aims to ensure that

change.”

“Recognition of our diligent work as an organisation is also very encouraging,” she further said on her company’s achievement. “As the ‘Most Valuable Company of the Year’, receiving this award affirms our direction and encourages MHD-ITICS to keep striving despite the challenges we face every day.

“Our success stems from the diverse skills and capabilities we employ across a wide range of disciplines, all under one roof. With this award, we are affirming that we remain committed to our mission of developing and providing high-quality products and services to meet the changing demands of an ever-growing market. With the innovative use of technology, we will continue to enhance the lives of people,” Hon Lujaina added.

During the session, Mohammed Abdallah al Kharusi participated in a panel discussion entitled ‘Road to 2040’. In addition to discussing government, economy, health, infrastructure, technology and several other elements of the country’s future, the panelists

explored the way forward for the Sultanate of Oman.

Jayaprakash Menon gave an overview of the company’s journey and the milestones it has achieved over the years. Furthermore, the corporate video of MHD-ITICS, which featured its Brand Ambassador and in-person attendee Ahmad al Harthy, was also unveiled during the event.

MHD-ITICS, under the guidance of Hon Lujaina, has achieved commendable growth in recent years. Moreover, the company has been at the forefront of setting new benchmarks in the industry and supporting local talents.

The core management team has devised a three-pronged business strategy that includes growing existing businesses, expanding into adjacencies and similar domains and diversifying into new business areas.

The diversification and expansion strategy focuses on both domestic and overseas markets, especially in the areas of technology and digital enterprise, through acquisitions and investments.



Desire Logistics opens Oman’s first office in Muttrah Souq

Desire Logistics, a renowned name in logistics across the region, Asia, and beyond, opened its first office in Oman on Sunday.

Located near the Oman Arab Bank in Muttrah Souq, the sophisticated office was opened by Abdul Latheef Uppala, the first expatriate member of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and MD of Badr al Samaa Group.

“It is great to note that the bilateral investor relations between the Sultanate of Oman and India are on the rise and newer Indian companies are considering Oman as their next destination,” said Abdul Latheef, adding that these new ventures

are the reflection of the investor-friendly steps of the country.

Desire Logistics offers a gamut of services and goods movement between the two countries and export and import facilitation, air and sea shipments, documentation, and clearance are some of its services.

“The new office of logistics will be a landmark in the goods movement between the two countries and the services can positively impact the trade and business relations,” said Abdul Yasir Khalfan al Battashi and Saleh Obaid Humai al Rashdi of Desire.

Murtaza Abdullah of Desire

Logistics hoped that the unique services provided by Desire will make the organisation the most sought-after one and a perfect blend of unparalleled services will make it a brand to reckon with.

“What makes us different from the rest is the variety of services and quality of delivering them over our competitors. Desire logistics provides services like payments to Indian suppliers, documentation, customs clearance, and door delivery in Oman,” said Murthasa.

Other patrons, Ahzam Shaqueefulla, Bikash Biswas, and Abdul Khader were also present at the opening ceremony.

ODP gets data management award

Oman Data Park (ODP), the sultanate’s first IT-managed and cloud services provider, has received the Data Management Award in Oman’s second Big Data & Analytics Meet 2022, held recently at Crown Plaza Hotel in Muscat.

The two-day event from December 5 by COMEX Series - in partnership with the Oman Information Technology Society - was supported by Ministry of Transport, Communications, & Information Technology.

Oman Data Park was honoured with this award among the best companies which were awarded in this year’s forum for its exceptional practices and achievements in hosting big data and analytics services, as well as for its distinction in promoting the digital transformation process in Oman.

ODP deserve the award as it is leading data management and hosting company in the sultanate, where, it provides various cloud services, data storage services, cyber security services and data hosting inboard the country to ensure its protection and security, and enhancing the optimal use of information technologies in the country.

Oman Data Park took part in this year’s Big Data & Analytics Meet as a platinum sponsor, where it’s the event, as its partic-



ipation in the event included a highlighting of a number of new innovative services provided by the company in its fields of specialisation.

In addition, a session entitled ‘Roadmap for Cloud Empowering Data Analysis & AI’ was held by Hassan Abdul al Ali, GM of Business Development, Service of Oman Data Park.

Commenting on this event, Oman Data Park CEO Maqbool al Wahaibi said, “Our support for Oman’s 2nd Big Data & Analytics Meet 2022 as a platinum sponsor, comes within our firm conviction, hosting big data and providing the infrastructure for

Artificial Intelligence into the Sultanate of Oman are at the professionalism core of Oman Data Park team.”

Wahaibi added, “The wining of the Data Management Award bis a testament to our pioneering achievements in this field, since ODP has made huge strides of successes in all its services, where it operates the only virtual data centre - Nebula - in Oman, as well as it is the sole provider of such service, while it owns a specialised cyber security centre, which known as Cyber Security Park that run by highly qualified Omani staff who are providing secure operations and services

around the clock.”

A number of specialised sessions were hold during the two days of the event by professional experts in their fields, included highlighting of the Lessons Learned in Implementing Advanced AI, Environmental, Social and Institutional Governance in the areas of Big Data, Machine Learning for Business Processes re-engineering based on lean Six Sigma Principles, Delivering Value by Bridging Research in Data Analytics and Industry, Explainable Artificial Intelligence for Modern Financial Technology and the Roadmap for Cloud Empowering Data Analysis & AI.

Hassan Abdul al Ali said, “Cloud systems play a vital role in enhancing the hosting of big data, while Oman Data Park has made a quantum leap in the areas of artificial intelligence infrastructure, which helps to achieve qualitative shifts in digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman.”

ODP, the sultanate’s first managed cyber security and cloud services provider, plays an integral role in supporting the digital transformation of Oman, through their offering of an all-in-one solution of cloud computing, hosting and network security services. ODP also offers the sultanate’s first Artificial Intelligence ready cloud infrastructure - Nebula AI powered by Nvidia.

Muscat airport receives 1st flight of Air Vistara from India

Muscat International Airport, one of the fasted growing airports in the region, received on Monday the first flight of India’s Air Vistara, launching the airline’s weekly once direct flight between Mumbai and Muscat.

The inaugural flight landed at Muscat International Airport at 9.35pm. It was received with a water salute its debut arrival, a press release said.

To welcome the flight, there was Samer Ahmed al Nanhani, the CCO of Oman Airports, who expressed his pleasure for having Air Vistara launching its new route between Muscat and Mumbai in the light of the growing economic and tourism relationships between the Sultanate of Oman and the friendly Republic of India.

Nabhani mentioned the importance of this Asian route which comes in the context of in-



creasing passengers of Indian nationality to Oman, a prime tourism destination in the region for its historical and civilizational richness, natural attractions and diverse landscapes besides its modern shopping centres and luxurious auditoriums to host fat Indian weddings.

“At Oman Airports, we are

working to attract more airlines to operate their direct flights either to Muscat or other airports in Oman to provide seamless direct flights to the passengers eager to discover Oman’s history and unique treasures that are overarched with its security and stability and spreading peace among the world peoples.

Vinod Kannan, CEO of Vistara, said, “We are pleased to launch this route between Muscat and Mumbai as we are keen to enhance our presence in Oman within our international network. This will make business, trade and tourism flourish constantly between the two countries. We are confident that

passengers will appreciate choosing to travel between Muscat and India through the best airline in South Asia.”

Tourism and economic sectors between Oman and India is rapidly growing besides the social bonds with India strengthening with the presence of a big Indian community. All these will play a role in the success of operating various routes between the two countries to give passengers better travel options.

Worth noting that Air Vistara is an Indian full-service airline, with its hub at Indira Gandhi International Airport. It commenced operations in 2015 with its inaugural flight between Delhi and Mumbai. The carrier is a joint venture between Tata Sons and Singapore Airlines.

Air Vistara is India’s highest-rated airline on Skytrax and TripAdvisor.

ahlibank’s ‘Tamkeen’ links SMEs and investors

In line with its long-standing commitment to garner support for local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and encouraging economic diversification, ahlbank continues its series of introductory sessions to explore ‘Tamkeen’ crowdfunding initiative closely.

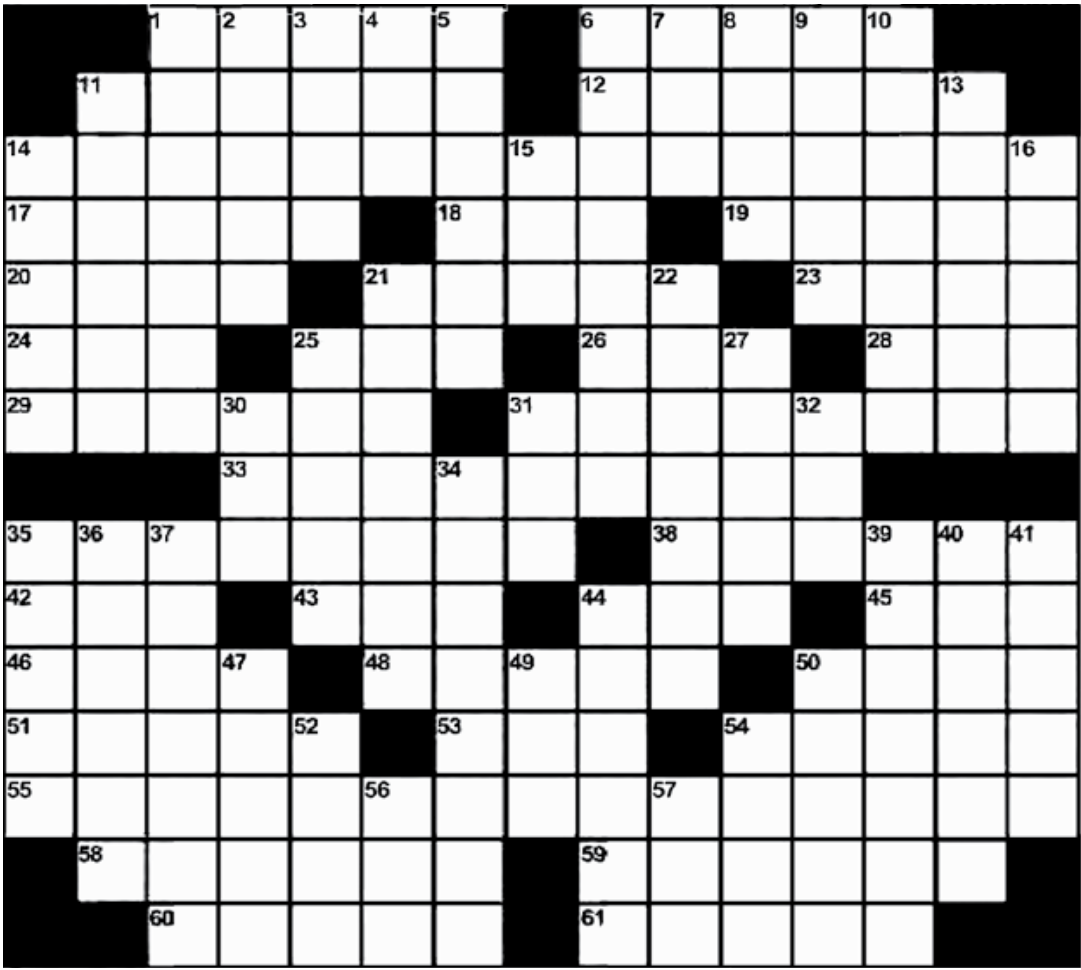
Signed as an agreement between ahlbank and Beehive, the continuation of the ‘Tamkeen’ introductory sessions comes in line with the bank’s work to launch a unique platform which offers financial lending solutions specifically tailored for SMEs. Such solutions allow for a sustainable entrepreneurial environment, expose SMEs to a wider investor pool, and further con-

tribute to the country’s economic diversification.

Hassan Maqbool al Lawati, AGM- Head of SMEs said, “This initiative aims to garner support for local SMEs across the board. There has always been this gap in knowledge and awareness between SMEs and potential investors and ‘Tamkeen’ is here to bridge that gap.

“Our ‘Tamkeen’ platform provides financial solutions, as well as it connects potential investors with the various registered SMEs. Through the ‘Tamkeen’ initiative, ahlbank hopes to contribute directly to nurture an inclusive ecosystem for SMEs to flourish,” he added.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Sun block?
- 6) Bender at the bar
- 11) Like foamy seas
- 12) Insurable events
- 14) Coach's admonish-ment
- 17) Port in a storm
- 18) Quick on the uptake
- 19) Control device in mo-tors
- 20) Blows it
- 21) Indian state
- 23) Use a harvester
- 24) Before-long link
- 25) It's boring when it works
- 26) Call to Bo Peep
- 28) Mature
- 29) Like some check-ups
- 31) Doomed
- 33) Track cry (with "and")
- 35) Get real?
- 38) Agitated state
- 42) Blood classification letters
- 43) Note on the music scale

- 44) Exchange blows
 - 45) Eggs, to some
 - 46) Gym set
 - 48) Not even once
 - 50) Knocked off, in a way
 - 51) More than passing
 - 53) Surface one can drive on
 - 54) Public row
 - 55) Part of a famous Churchill quote
 - 58) Saw or spotted
 - 59) Join forces
 - 60) Hide-covered dwelling
 - 61) Cousin of a clog
- DOWN**
- 1) Sergeant's insignia
 - 2) Oral traditions
 - 3) Accepting customers
 - 4) Downs' partners
 - 5) Hereditary ruler
 - 6) Ready for making emends?
 - 7) Hula hoop?
 - 8) Prohibits
 - 9) Riverbank critter
 - 10) Word of legalese

- 11) Styx ferryman
- 13) Brute
- 14) Eighth letter of the Greek alphabet
- 15) Harvest goddess
- 16) Bicycle with juice
- 21) Part of a plane's wing
- 22) Stench
- 25) Thai bills
- 27) Attach, as a sticker
- 30) Offroad vehicle, casu-ally
- 31) Embitterment
- 32) Away from the bow
- 34) Christmas season
- 35) Diamond measure
- 36) Large West African tree
- 37) Most glum
- 39) Finish putting
- 40) Tie, as a score
- 41) Less experienced
- 44) Artists' toppers, stereotypically
- 47) Marsh bird
- 49) Delivery vehicle, often
- 50) Bonehead

NOTE PAD

A	B	A	C	I	H	A	S	P	S	O	O	H
L	O	G	A	N	O	S	T	I	A	U	S	E
I	N	A	N	U	T	S	H	E	L	L	T	I
F	R	I	T	M	O	T	O	E	R			
A	M	O	U	N	T	S	T	I	R	F	R	Y
S	O	U	L	I	R	A	S	E	E	E	P	
O	R	T	S	A	I	R	S	S	L	O	S	H
N	O	S	I	N	O	R	O	U	T	C	P	A
E	N	T	E	R	T	O	R	R	O	K	A	Y
A	M	O	S	W	E	B	R	E	T	E		
U	N	T	U	N	E	D	A	R	E	T	E	S
T	A	I	S	I	R	S	N	U	G			
E	G	O	I	N	A	L	I	E	N	A	B	L
R	A	N	D	E	M	I	T	O	N	A	I	R
I	T	S	E	R	A	S	E	N	O	T	E	S

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
It's all about strutting your stuff right now. Your strength is greater than ever and growing! Make sure nobody ignores you today. Put on your boldest outfit, laugh your loudest laugh, and flash your brightest smile. Do whatever it takes to stand out from the crowd and make a jaw-dropping impact. People are looking in your direction and wondering who you are and what you're all about. Keep them guessing and you'll keep getting noticed.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
One of your friends sees you as a trusted ally, and today you could be called on to step up and warn them of a potential problem that's brewing. Don't worry about meddling in the affairs of others. This realization will make it crystal clear that you need to get involved. You'll know what to say and how to say it. You might need to keep some of this information to yourself, though. Use your insight with moderation or you'll create more drama than the situation warrants.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
There's a time to move forward and a time to stay back and just watch the world go by. Today is a day when you should stay back. Sure, you might want to get going on a fun project or play with a new toy, but you should think twice about it. Patience will come to you right when you're at the end of your rope, so don't worry about getting caught off guard. Just wait for everyone else to take their turn, and then you'll know how to take yours.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
You can lose the earplugs. Today is a very quiet day when little (if anything) will get your goat. Peace and tranquility may not dominate every single minute of your day, but you'll get a big enough dose to keep you happy for most of the time. Soft music will set the mood for a very relaxing evening. Set aside some time tonight to fawn over your favorite person, whether that title belongs to a romantic partner, family member, or yourself!

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Like a flashing red light, the problems you need to deal with will suddenly be incredibly obvious. They'll also be as easy to handle as turning off that light would be. Get rid of the obstacles lying in your path by utilizing your excellent sense of humor. Telling a well-phrased joke will be more effective (and diplomatic) than a blunt declaration. You'll clear your way without ruffling any feathers.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
There's a lot of pressure on you today, but the one who's pushing the hardest is you! You've been way too hard on yourself lately, and you should stop and realize that you're doing your thing in your own way and that's good enough. Part of this stress might be due to the changes that have been happening in your life, so address that issue. If you just give yourself time to get used to the newness around you, you'll start to relax again.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
There's simply nothing you can't do if you're armed with patience and perseverance. Other folks have found success by pressing hard, but you don't need to do that to get what you want right now. Instead, sit back and wait for things to come to you. If they're taking too long, get out and ask around. Find out what promises might speed things up. But avoid confrontation or pressure tactics. After all, it's like the old saying goes: you can catch more flies with honey than vinegar.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
One of your biggest strengths is your ability to be objective and see things from everyone else's point of view. This asset has made you an invaluable ally, a dearly loved friend, and a successful person. Today, this facet of your personality will be invaluable when you come to the aid of a casual acquaintance or coworker. Share your concerns and criticisms in your trademark diplomatic way and you'll be able to communicate something that will really help another person grow.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Getting near the finish line doesn't count. You need to put all your effort into completion. Finish everything you do today, from workplace conversations to DIY projects. Don't leave things undone or unsaid, and check everything off your list. This is a great lesson in not biting off more than you can chew. You'll get a great sense of your capacity and be surprised by how efficient you can be. This effectiveness will figure prominently in your career future.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Everyone sees you as someone who's ready for anything, which is a wonderful reputation to have. But deep down, do you fear that you may someday come across something that intimidates and paralyzes you? Today, you may feel like you've met your match, but all you need to do is take a deep breath, roll up your sleeves, and dive right in! It's known as the "fake it till you make it" maneuver, and it's a darn good way to introduce new things into your life and boost your confidence.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
It's flattering that people want to spend time with you, but when you're honest with yourself, isn't it a bit annoying sometimes? After all, everyone needs time to themselves, and it's not fun to feel smothered. Don't feel guilty if you have to refuse an invitation simply because you'd prefer a quiet night at home. Just because you don't have plans doesn't mean you have to make some. Avoid people who are pushing to spend more time with you than you want. They'll get the hint.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
The plans you've been working on take a giant leap forward today. Whether you're building a new health regimen, work project, or romantic relationship, things are really starting to gel right now. The traction that's starting to build is going to launch you into a whole new way of looking at something you've known for a very long time. How you think and the positions you take are starting to make more sense to a lot of people.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Nicotine is named after the tobacco plant Nicotiana tabacum. Who did the plant get its name from?
A. Saint Nicholas
B. Jean Nicot de Villemain
C. Nico (Christa Päffgen)
D. Tsar Nicholas I
Correct Answer: Jean Nicot de Villemain

02. The second studio album of which band or artist was certified triple platinum by the RIAA in 2003, 7 years after it was released?
A. Fugees
B. Tupac Shakur
C. Tool
D. Beck
Correct Answer: Tool

03. What is the largest country by land area in Central America?
A. Nicaragua
B. Guatemala
C. Panama
D. Honduras
Correct Answer: Nicaragua

Answers: 1.B 2.C 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

I	G	I	T
U	E	A	F
C	R	S	S
I	N	S	O

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Rail strikes hit UK travellers

London, UK - UK rail workers on Tuesday began a two-day national strike, kicking off a month of walkouts involving nurses to passport control workers that could spell Christmas misery for millions.

Rush hour commuters faced a battle to get to work, while many opted to stay at home, as thousands of members of the country's biggest rail union the RMT launched their latest stoppage over a below-inflation pay offer.

Braving the ice and snow that has already hit travellers, picketers appeared at major railway stations early on Tuesday, as train services wound down and people were advised only to travel if essential.

Trains were only running from 7:30am (0730 GMT) to 6:30pm on strike days, with just one in five services expected to run.

At London's Kings Cross station, Allan Smith, a 28-year-old web developer, said he had sympathy with the strikers, despite struggling to get to Heathrow airport. "I totally get it. It's hard for the people at the moment," he told AFP. Former firefighter Chris McBride, 74, blamed 'incompetent government' for the chaos, with more stoppages planned between now and into the New Year.

Festive misery

The UK is experiencing a wave of industrial action on a scale not seen since the 1980s, with inflation in double digits pushing up the cost of living and energy costs soaring due to the war in Ukraine. Postal workers are stag-



Commuters wait for an extremely delayed Central Line train at Stratford station in London on Tuesday (AFP)

Rush hour commuters faced a battle to get to work, while many opted to stay at home, as thousands of rail union members launched their stoppage

they will be joined by bus drivers, highway workers and airport baggage handlers.

Border Force staff checking passports at major airports including Heathrow and Gatwick will strike over Christmas.

RMT members on Monday rejected an 11th hour pay offer from Network Rail, which owns the UK's railway infrastructure, leading its staff, along with workers from 14 train companies, to walk out.

Network Rail had offered its workers a pay rise of five per cent backdated for this year and a further four per cent at the start of 2023. RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said: "This is a huge rejection of Network Rail's sub-

standard offer." He said the pay offer was tied to 'thousands of job losses' as well as an increase in unsocial hours.

Government plea

Network Rail boss Andrew Haines was pessimistic over chances of a breakthrough, as the government urged the RMT to call off the strikes.

"Where I stand today, I'd have to say that with the level of disruption the RMT are imposing, the way forward isn't obvious," he told BBC television.

Transport minister Mark Harper wrote in right-wing broadsheet *The Daily Telegraph* on Monday that the government 'has worked hard to ensure there

is a fair two-year pay deal on the table'.

The minister said the proposed deal was more generous than in the private sector and would unlock 'essential reforms'.

The rail strikes will hinder people's travel plans for Christmas.

The government on Monday urged unions to call off planned strikes that will hit healthcare and mail delivery over the Christmas period. Cabinet Office minister Oliver Dowden said: "I don't think most people think it's fair and reasonable to undertake these strikes. So my message to them would be even now please call them off."

AFP



Japanese, US and South Korea officials meet during the trilateral about North Korea issues at the US embassy in Jakarta on Tuesday (AFP)

US, allies vow all options on table against North Korea

Jakarta, Indonesia - The United States, South Korea and Japan vowed on Tuesday to consider all options against North Korea, including counterstrikes, in the wake of an unprecedented blitz of missile tests by Pyongyang that has sent regional tensions spiralling.

The flurry of North Korean launches include last month's test of its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile and a missile that flew across the de facto maritime border and landed near South Korean waters for the first time since the Korean War. US special representative for North Korea Sung Kim held talks with South Korean counterpart Kim Gunn and senior Japanese foreign ministry official Takehiro Funakoshi in Indonesia's capital Jakarta, where they warned of Pyongyang's threat to regional security.

"We will examine all options, including counterstrike capabilities," said Funakoshi, of the

Japanese foreign ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs bureau.

The talks, which follow meetings in Tokyo and Seoul this year, were held at the US embassy in Jakarta, where Sung Kim also serves as ambassador to Indonesia. The envoys' pledge comes after their nations slapped sanctions on North Korean officials and groups this month to punish Kim Jong Un's regime for the wave of weapons tests.

Gunn said Pyongyang had become more aggressive in threatening nuclear action and that the three allies would harmonise sanctions despite Chinese and Russian vetoes of a US-led bid to tighten them at the UN earlier this year. "North Korea is becoming more aggressive and blatant in its nuclear threat," said the South's envoy.

"North Korea's further provocation will be met with a firm and united response from the international community."

AFP

Six dead in shootout in rural Australia

Sydney, Australia - Six people died, including two police officers in their twenties, when a routine missing persons investigation turned into an hours-long siege at a remote Australian property, police said on Tuesday.

Four officers arrived at a tree-lined property near the small town of Wileambilla late on Monday afternoon.

"As soon as they entered the property, they were inundated with gunfire," said Queensland Police Union president Ian Leavers. "They never had a chance. Two police officers were executed in cold blood," he said.

The deceased were identified as 26-year-old Rachel McCrow and 29-year-old Matthew Arnold. Both joined the force in the last two years and were still constables.

"Those officers paid the ultimate sacrifice to keep our community safe," said Queensland Police Commander Katarina Carroll, holding back tears as she briefed the public on the 'extraordinarily distressing' events.

A 58-year-old neighbour believed to have heard the commotion and investigated the scene was also shot and 'declared deceased at the location', according to police.

scene showed an unremarkable zinc-roofed bungalow, a burned-out vehicle and smoke still lingering around the property. After an initial clatter of gunshots, a specialist team of more than a dozen officers with air support was rushed to the scene.

By 10:30pm local time, following an hours-long siege, two male suspects and one female suspect were dead.

Police did not reveal the suspects' identities, but officers were believed to have been searching for a former primary school principal who went missing late last year.

Local media reported the

As soon as they (police) entered the property, they were inundated with gunfire. They never had a chance

IAN LEAVERS

A 'heartbreaking' day

Two other officers survived the attack and were taken to hospital with minor injuries.

One of the survivors was Constable Keeley Brough, who sent frantic messages to loved ones as suspects tried to smoke her out of surrounding bushland where she hid, local media reported. She has been a police officer for just eight weeks, officials said.

Aerial images from the

New Zealand stubs out smoking, passing tobacco ban

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand will phase in a near-total tobacco ban from next year, prohibiting anyone born after 2008 from ever purchasing cigarettes and reducing the amount of nicotine in products sold in the meantime.

Under legislation passed by parliament on Tuesday, cigarettes will be much weaker, more difficult to buy and permanently unavailable to anyone currently under 14 years old.

The legislation effectively raises the smoking age every year, and is designed to almost immediately reduce the number of people using tobacco products.



NZ Minister for Research, Science and Innovation Ayesha Verrall speaks about the smokefree legislation at Parliament in Wellington on Tuesday (AFP)

The new rules are a step 'towards a smokefree future', according to cabinet minister Ayesha Verrall, who was the driving force behind the legislation. "Thousands of people will live longer, healthier lives and the health system will be

NZ\$5bn (US\$3.2bn) better off from not needing to treat the illnesses caused by smoking, such as numerous types of cancer, heart attacks, strokes, amputations," she said in a statement.

The number of adults smoking in New Zealand is already relatively low at just eight per cent.

However, the 'Smokefree Environments' bill passed on Tuesday is designed to reduce that number to less than five per cent by 2025.

As well as a steadily increasing age limit, the new law will slash the number of retailers able to sell tobacco products to

a maximum of just 600 nationwide, a massive drop from the current figure of 6,000.

It will also reduce the amount of nicotine in tobacco products.

"It means nicotine will be reduced to non-addictive levels and communities will be free from the proliferation and clustering of retailers who target and sell tobacco products in certain areas," Verrall said.

Critics have warned that New Zealand's strict policy could fuel an unregulated illegal market in tobacco items.

The new laws do not ban vape products.

AFP

Ukraine urges for €800mn aid to survive winter

Paris, France - President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday said Ukraine needed emergency aid for its energy sector totalling around €800mn to help his country survive Russia's bombing of its civilian infrastructure.

Failing to make an impact on the battlefield in its invasion, Moscow has switched tactics since October when it began airstrikes targeting Ukraine's energy network, plunging millions into cold and darkness at the onset of winter.

The alarm over Ukraine's ability to cope comes nine months into the Russian assault against its neighbour, which has seen Moscow make only slight territorial gains in the face of fierce Ukrainian resistance.

Zelensky made the request for €800mn at international conference which was held in Paris designed to raise material and money to repair Ukraine's damaged infrastructure.

It is hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron with whom he has sometimes had testy ties.

"Of course it is a very high



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is pictured on a screen as he attends via video-link the 'Solidarity with Ukrainian people' conference, at the French Foreign Affairs ministry, in Paris, on Tuesday (AFP)

amount, but the cost is less than the cost of a potential blackout," Zelensky told the gathering in Paris via video link.

"I hope that decisions will be made accordingly."

Zelensky said that Ukraine needed transformers, equipment to repair damaged high-voltage power lines, as well as generators and gas turbines.

"Because of the destruction of

our power plants by terror attacks we will need to use more gas this winter than expected," added Zelensky, whose wife Olena attended the conference in person.

Zelensky urged G7 nations on Monday to provide 'about two billion cubic metres' of additional gas to get through the winter as well as more tanks and missiles to fight the invasion.

Russia wants 'darkness'

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal also appealed for help from the 70 states and international agencies gathered in Paris for the 'Standing with the Ukrainian People' conference.

"They (Russians) want to put us into darkness and it will fail, thanks to our partners all over the world," he added.

Shmygal also said on Tuesday that the UN nuclear watchdog IAEA had agreed to dispatch permanent teams to the country's nuclear plants, including the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia plant, a hotspot of fighting.

The prime minister said after a meeting with IAEA chief Rafael Grossi that teams would deploy to plants at Zaporizhzhia, Rivne, Khmelnytskyi, Pivdennoukrainska and Chernobyl without specifying a timeframe.

Ukrainian Energy Minister German Galushchenko told AFP ahead of the conference that Russia's war against Ukraine 'completely changes our understanding of nuclear security'.

Macron said the focus in Paris was on providing short-term assistance given Russia's attempts to 'sow terror' in Ukraine by 'cowardly' bombing the country's infrastructure.

"Very concretely, these are commitments to deliver generators, help repair infrastructure, deliver LEDs (light-emitting diodes) for lighting," he said.

AFP

7 dead as Peru's leader fails to quell protests

Seven people, including three teenagers, have now died since Castillo was impeached and arrested

Lima, Peru - Five more protesters died in Peru on Monday as violent demonstrations over the ousting of the former president showed no sign of calming, despite his successor's efforts to quell the unrest.

Seven people, including three teenagers, have now died in escalating protests since the leftist Pedro Castillo was accused of an attempted coup, impeached and arrested last week.

New President Dina Boluarte tried to ease tensions on Sunday, announcing she would seek to hold elections two years early and declaring a state of emergency in flashpoint areas.

But that had little effect as protesters continued to demand her resignation, blocking roads in several cities around the country with logs, rocks and burning tires.

Some 2,000 protesters smashed runway lighting, burned security booths and forced the closure of the airport in Peru's second-largest city Arequipa for several hours on Monday before police dispersed them with tear gas. Around 100 Castillo supporters were camped out in front of the police facility in Lima where he is being held, demanding he be released and returned to office. "We have been sleep-



Supporters of former President Pedro Castillo launch firecrackers at riot police during a protest near the Congress in Lima on Monday (AFP)

ing here for four nights and we will continue until we get the president back to the (presidential) palace," protester Ana Karina Ramos told AFP, with tears in her eyes.

Also on Monday in Apurimac, demonstrators torched the public prosecutor's office and a police station.

In Arequipa, protesters occupied one of the largest factories

in the country, owned by the dairy company Gloria.

Train services between Cusco and Machu Picchu, Peru's best known tourist site, will be suspended from Tuesday to ensure passenger safety ahead of a national strike called for by Castillo supporters, the rail operator said.

Cusco's international airport was also closed after protesters attempted to 'violently enter' it on

Monday, aviation authorities said. Seven people have been killed since Sunday, a source from the public defender's office told AFP on condition of anonymity.

UN Human Rights Office spokeswoman Marta Hurtado warned that 'the situation may escalate further' and urged 'all involved to exercise restraint.'

Hurtado also called on authorities to 'allow people to exer-

cise their rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of opinion and expression'.

'Political prisoner'

Castillo has been in detention since last Wednesday, and is facing charges of rebellion and conspiracy after he dissolved Congress and vowed to rule by decree.

The former president met

with his lawyers in Lima ahead of a hearing on Tuesday in which he will seek his immediate release.

Meanwhile, the leftist governments of Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and Bolivia released a joint statement in support of Castillo, saying he had been 'the victim of antidemocratic harassment' since his election.

Castillo's 17-month rule was overshadowed by six investigations against him and his family,

dress saying she would seek 'to reach an agreement' with Congress to bring forward elections from July 2026 to April 2024.

The country's right-leaning Congress convened an emergency session on Sunday afternoon to discuss the crisis, but it had to be suspended after fighting broke out. On Monday, the government fired the 26 regional prefects who had been appointed by Castillo, accusing them of 'inciting protests.'

With his background as a rural teacher and union leader, and with little contact among the nation's elites, Castillo has always drawn his strongest support from Andean regions, while struggling to find backing in coastal Lima.

Rural unions and organisations representing Indigenous peoples have called for an 'indefinite strike' beginning on Tuesday in support of Castillo, himself the son of a peasant family.

They demanded the suspension of Congress, early elections and a new constitution, as well as Castillo's immediate release, according to a statement from the Agrarian and Rural Front of Peru, which groups about a dozen organisations. AFP

We have been sleeping here for four nights and we will continue until we get the president back to the palace

ANA KARINA RAMOS

mass protests demanding his removal, and a power struggle with the opposition-controlled Congress.

Boluarte, a former prosecutor who had served as Castillo's vice president, was quickly sworn in to replace him following his impeachment and arrest.

On Sunday, she tried to appease citizens in a televised ad-

EU parliament sacks vice president Kaili charged in Qatar bribe probe

Strasbourg, France - The European Parliament on Tuesday sacked one of its own vice presidents amid corruption accusations allegedly linked to World Cup host Qatar, as the institution tries to contain the scandal.

The assembly's MEPs voted 625 to one to strip Greek socialist MEP Eva Kaili of her vice presidential role, despite her lawyer declaring that she was innocent and 'has nothing to do with Qatar's bribes'.

As the 44-year-old former TV news presenter sat in a Brussels jail cell, her colleagues in the Strasbourg parliament are scrambling to distance themselves from the taint of scandal.

The parliament's president, Maltese conservative Roberta Metsola, called the vote after reaching agreement with the leaders of the parliament's political groupings, amid fears the scandal will spread.

On Wednesday, a Belgian judge will decide whether to



Greek politician and European Parliament vice-president Eva Kaili (AFP)

maintain Kaili and three co-accused in custody pending trial.

She was arrested last week during a series of raids by Belgian graft investigators on the homes and offices of several MEPs and their assistants or associates.

Bags of cash

Belgian prosecutors said €600,000 (US\$630,000) were found at the home of one suspect, €150,000 at the flat of an MEP and several hundred thou-

sand euros in a suitcase in a hotel room. Some of these 'bags of cash' were found in Kaili's home, a judicial source said, leading a judge to conclude that, as she had apparently been caught red-handed, her parliamentary immunity from prosecution would not apply.

A Belgian judicial source told AFP that investigators believe that figures representing Gulf monarchy Qatar had been paying off European politicians to

burnish the country's image.

Qatar is a key energy supplier to Europe, and plays an important intermediary role in several diplomatic tangles, but it has also been criticised for the alleged mistreatment of migrant workers, most notoriously those who built the World Cup stadiums.

Kaili visited Qatar just before the competition and called it a 'front-runner in labour rights', to the consternation of activists and some of her colleagues. She has also defended Qatar's quest to win EU visa waivers for its citizens. Qatar has denied any involvement in European corruption. 'Any claims of misconduct by the State of Qatar are gravely misinformed,' an official told AFP.

Kaili's lawyer Michalis Dimitrakopoulos told private Greek television channel Open TV: "Her position is she is innocent. She has nothing to do with Qatar's bribes."

AFP

Netanyahu ally chosen as new Israel parliament speaker

Jerusalem - Israel's parliament elected a close ally of prime minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu as its new speaker on Tuesday to oversee the passage of legislation that will help his formation of a government.

Yariv Levin, a senior member of Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, was chosen as speaker to replace Mickey Levy from outgoing Prime Minister Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid party.

Levin may not be speaker for long, with some Israeli political pundits forecasting he will be tapped for a prominent cabinet role in Netanyahu's new coalition, which is expected to be the most right-wing in Israeli history.

But before that government can be formed, parliament must first pass a measure allowing one of Netanyahu's most powerful allies, ultra-Orthodox Jewish leader Aryeh Deri, to serve in cabinet despite past convictions for tax evasion. Deri, who heads the Shas party, has been promised



Former Knesset speaker Mickey Levy and the new speaker Yariv Levin stand together at the assembly's Plenum Hall in Jerusalem on Tuesday (AFP)

the interior and health ministries in the incoming Netanyahu government. But the attorney general has ruled that under current law, his convictions bar him from serving in cabinet.

Levin is expected to move quickly to pass legislation removing that barrier. In a general election last month, Netanyahu and his allies won 64 of parlia-

ment's 120 seats, giving them the opportunity to form a majority government after an unprecedented period of political gridlock that forced five elections in less than four years.

But Netanyahu's coalition talks have proved complicated, with controversial far-right leaders demanding sensitive posts. AFP

Beijing 'shocked' by deadly attack on Afghan hotel

Kabul, Afghanistan - Beijing said on Tuesday it was 'shocked' by a deadly attack on a Kabul hotel popular with Chinese business visitors, adding that five of its nationals were wounded.

The Taliban claim to have improved security since storming back to power in August last year but there have been scores of bomb blasts and attacks, many like this one claimed by the local chapter of the Islamic State group.

"This terror attack is abominable and China is deeply shocked," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said. "As far as we know, five Chinese citizens were injured in the terrorist attack, and several Afghan military and police were also killed."

The Taliban's chief spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, however, said on Mon-

day only three attackers were killed in the raid on the Kabul Longan Hotel. Two foreigners were hurt escaping from the building, he said.

Mujahid told AFP on Tuesday 'a few other' injuries may have since been reported.

The Italian non-governmental organisation Emergency NGO, which operates a hospital just one kilometre from the blast site, said on Monday they had received 21 casualties, including three people dead on arrival.

Taliban casualty figures following such incidents are usually lower than those reported by hospitals and other independent sources. On Tuesday, the hotel facade was blackened by fire that erupted during the attack and windows of the 10-storey building had also been blown out.

AFP

COP15: No progress toward peace pact with nature

Montreal, Canada - The world had just eight days to seal a historic deal to stem the destruction of nature.

But half way into the COP15 biodiversity talks, there has been no major progress either on increased funding for conservation in developing nations, or towards a pledge to protect 30 per cent of the world's land and seas.

The general view is that negotiations will get tough on Thursday, when the environment ministers of the 196 members of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will take over from their delegates in Montreal. But the chances of ending on December 19 with agreement for an ambitious 'peace pact with nature' - 20 objectives to stop the destruction of water, forests and living things by the end of the decade - will be undermined if the draft agreement remains as it is now.

Despite long hours put in by the 5,000 delegates since December 3, the text is far behind



Indigenous activists protest in front of the Canada Pavilion against Belo Sun, a Canadian mining company, at United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in Montreal, Quebec, Canada on Monday (AFP)

schedule, weighed down by dozens of points still under negotiation. Only five of the 22 or 23 objectives envisaged have been settled. "Governments are making progress, but not fast enough to prepare a clean text for the arrival of ministers," said Alfred DeGemmis, a senior official at the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

Time is running out: a million species are threatened with extinction, a third of all land is severely degraded, soil fertility and water purity are compromised, and oceans are threatened by pollution and climate change.

"We are still a long way away. But we are seeing flashes of light at the end of the tunnel," said Marco Lambertini, the head of

WWF international, adding that he had observed a 'much more constructive engagement' since the start of the talks. "We see a market emerging where the countries of the South say that they will not agree to commit to strong ambitions without seeing corresponding funding," said Sebastien Treyer, director general of the think tank IDDRI.

Brazil on Saturday reiterated, on behalf of the African continent and 14 other countries including India and Indonesia, their demand for 'financial subsidies of at least US\$100bn per year or one per cent of world GDP until 2030'.

Global Biodiversity Fund

That increase is deemed unrealistic by rich countries, whose aid earmarked for biodiversity in 2020 amounted to US\$10bn.

"If today we are at 10bn, talking about 100bn all of a sudden paralyses the conversation," warned the French envoy to COP15, Sylvie Lemmet, since rich countries have kept to their commitment to double aid development over the previous decade.

The European Union also opposes creation of a new global biodiversity fund, something being called for by several countries at the COP16 in 2024 in Turkey. AFP



Supporters of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) shout slogans during the party's last divisional rally in Dhaka on Saturday (AFP)

Bangladesh: Chief of largest Islamist party arrested

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladeshi police said on Tuesday that they had arrested the chief of the country's largest Islamist party, days after it announced it would join the main opposition in protests to oust Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Counter-terrorism officers arrested Jamaat-e-Islami party emir Shafiqur Rahman in Dhaka, metropolitan police spokesman Faruq Ahmed said, without elaborating on the charges.

A spokesman for Jamaat - the country's third-largest political party, which has been banned from contesting elections since 2012 - condemned the 64-year-old's arrest, saying it was intended to 'scuttle the opposition's anti-government movement'. "This is just another episode of the unjust oppression continuing against the party for the last 15 years," Matur Rah-

man Akand, Jamaat's publicity secretary, told AFP.

For years, Jamaat was a major ally of the right-of-centre main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and their coalition ruled the country between 2001-2006. But after Hasina came to power in 2009, Jamaat's entire leadership was arrested and tried for war crimes dating back to the country's 1971 independence war.

Five of its top leaders were hanged between 2013 and 2016 after they were found guilty by a war crimes court. The party called the trials politically motivated and part of a wider vendetta against its leaders. Hundreds of party activists were shot dead and tens of thousands detained after they staged violent protests against the executions.

AFP

China trying to change status quo on border, accuses India

New Delhi, India - India's defence minister on Tuesday accused China of trying to 'unilaterally change the status quo' on their disputed Himalayan border last week when clashes left troops on both sides injured.

The incident is thought to be the most serious on the nuclear-armed Asian giants' disputed frontier since 2020, when 20 Indian troops and four Chinese soldiers died in brawling.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh confirmed in parliament that Indian and Chinese troops engaged in the fresh confrontation on December 9 in the north-eastern Indian state Arunachal Pradesh.

China and India fought a full-scale war in 1962 over control of Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing claims in its entirety and considers part of Tibet.

"On 09 December 2022, PLA troops attempted to unilaterally change the status quo by encroaching on the Line of Actual Control, in the Yangtse area of Tawang sector," Singh said, referring to China's People's Liberation Army and the de-facto border.

The face-off, which followed recent joint US-India military exercises near the border that angered Beijing, led to 'injuries to



India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh delivers a statement in Lok Sabha on the India-China Line of Actual Control (LAC) clash, during the Winter Session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Tuesday (ANI)

On 09 December 2022, PLA troops attempted to unilaterally change the status quo by encroaching on the Line of Actual Control

RAJNATH SINGH

soldiers on both sides', Singh added.

"A scuffle ensued in this face-off. The Indian Army bravely prevented the PLA from encroaching on our territory, and forced them to withdraw to their

posts. Some soldiers from both sides were injured in the skirmish."

A military source told AFP that at least six Indian soldiers were injured.

In Beijing, PLA Western The-

atre Command spokesman Long Shaohua claimed Indian troops had 'illegally crossed the Line (of Actual Control)' and 'obstructed' Chinese border patrol troops.

"Our response measures were professional, standard and forceful, and stabilised the situation on the ground. At present, China and India have disengaged," said Long, according to a post on the PLA's official WeChat account.

"We ask the Indian side to strictly control and restrain front-

line troops, and work with China to maintain peace and tranquility on the border," he added.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said earlier on Tuesday that the situation was 'stable overall', but gave no details of what happened or whether Chinese troops were injured.

He added that the two sides 'maintained unobstructed dialogue on the border issue through diplomatic and military channels'.

'Face-off'

Singh added that local commanders from both sides held a flag meeting on December 11 and the incident was discussed.

Singh added that in the latest incident 'none of our soldiers have died, nor has anyone been seriously injured'.

The military source said that there was another 'face-off' between Indian and Chinese troops in the last week of November in the Demchok region of Ladakh, to the northwest, near where the June 2020 incident took place.

It was unclear if there were any injuries resulting from that incident, which was the most serious since September 2020.

AFP

Brazil's Lula breaks down in tears after getting ratified as next president

Brasilia, Brazil - Brazilian president-elect Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva broke down in tears on Monday at a ceremony ratifying his election win, which cemented the veteran leftist's comeback for a third presidential term.

Speaking after receiving the official 'diploma' declaring him the winner of Brazil's October 30 presidential runoff, the 77-year-old ex-metalworker was overcome with emotion as he praised 'the boldness of the Brazilian

people in handing this document to someone who's been attacked so many times for not having a university diploma'.

Lula, who is set to be inaugurated on January 1, defeated far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro in the runoff.

It was a remarkable turnaround for the former president (2003-2010), who left office as the most popular leader in Brazil's modern history, only to be jailed for more than 18



Brazil's President-elect Luiz Inacio da Silva cries during the certification ceremony at the TSE headquarters in Brasilia, on Monday (AFP)

months on controversial charges stemming from a massive corruption investigation centered on state-run oil company Petrobras.

Lula, who denies wrongdoing, was released in November 2019.

He was cleared to run in this year's elections when the Supreme Court annulled his convictions, finding bias by the lead judge in the case, Sergio Moro - who went on to become Bolsonaro's justice minister.

Lula described Monday's cer-

emony as a victory for democracy, after Bolsonaro baselessly attacked Brazil's electoral system as fraud-ridden and encouraged what he called 'legitimate protests' against the result.

Thousands of Bolsonaro protesters blocked roads and rallied outside army bases after his loss, calling for a military intervention to keep him in power. "This is a celebration of true democracy," Lula said in his speech at the Superior Electoral Tribunal (TSE).

"Seldom in our country's recent history has democracy been so threatened, seldom has the will of the people been so tested and had to overcome so many obstacles to make itself heard."

The head of the TSE, Judge Alexandre de Moraes, praised the electoral authority for 'guaranteeing democratic stability and fending off criminal attacks on the pillars of constitutional government.'

AFP

CLASSIFIEDS

FREE CLASSIFIED LISTING

Muscat Daily now offers free classified listings for individuals in the following categories:
Situations Wanted/
Accommodation Wanted or Available/
Sale of Household Items/
Car for Sale or Wanted/
Matrimonial Alliances (Word limit is 35)
Please email your listing to
dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call 99104346

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684

Sohar 9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325

www.orbit-oman.com

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease



FOR RENT

Available 2100 sq meter best in class Warehouse cum office Space, fully furnished ready to use, Located at Prime area of Ghala in the heart of the city having easy access to airport & express Way.

Contact: Girish Sewani - 93893596

SITUATION WANTED

Lady media professional with PG Diploma in Journalism and Photography and experience in digital marketing and content writing, currently on visit visa, requires suitable placement. Email: joysyoj@gmail.com, mobile: 99654604

Am an IT fresh graduate in Oman. Trying to find a job anywhere in Oman. If there is any job vacancy in your knowledge, please call on the mobile number given below. Mobile: 94524072

AUDIT, ACCOUNTING, VAT, TAXATION

Contact: 97239696/95355638

Gulf Center Consultancy & Audit
Muscat, Sohar, Salalah, Sur
Kumar@gccaoman.com

Are you looking for Professional Accounting, Book-Keeping & VAT Services?

We provide:
Accounting, Book-Keeping & VAT Services.
Backlog Accounting
VAT Consultation & Return Filing
Accounting Software / ERP Solutions
Periodic visits to the Clients office



Contact Us Placement 1st Accounting Outsourcing Solutions
Call / WhatsApp - 97971205 / 97971057



Email - accounts@placement1st.com

Send your request for Birthday/
Anniversary wishes to
wish@apexmedia.co.om
with your resident card copy
(It's free of cost)

FOR RENT

- State of the Art warehouse and office in Misfah
- Centrally located with ease of access to Muscat-Nizwa-Sohar

Office

650 sq mts of office space, centralized air conditioning ready to use.

Warehouse

□ 6000++ pallets space available on monthly/per pallet rental bases.

- 13 loading/unloading bays, with state of the art racking and centrally air conditioning @21 degree

Cold room and Chiller room

- 600 pallets space available on monthly/per pallet rental bases.
- 02 loading/unloading bays, with 10 mts high state of racking.
- Temp zone 05 Degree, -25 Degree Frozen.

for more details call: 95616835

LOW PROFILE FASHION

THE HOT TREND PICKING UP GLOBALLY IS A FOCUS ON LOW-PROFILE FASHION DESIGNERS

The days of gigantic personalities like John Galiano, Jean-Paul Gaultier and Karl Lagerfeld stomping their way around the fashion world are over. Today's stars might still be extraordinary individuals, but it is discretion that sells.

The recent difficulties at Balenciaga - over ads with suggestions of child abuse and its ties to rapper Kanye West - have highlighted the risks of having a provocative figurehead.

Creative director Demna (who has dropped his last name Gvasalia) has made Balenciaga arguably the hottest brand of the moment, but his edgy approach and celebrity friends suddenly look like a liability. Many other brands are moving away from the whole idea of the big-name



French fashion designer Nadege Vanhee-Cybulski acknowledges the audience at the end of the Hermes Fall-Winter 2022-2023 collection fashion show during the Paris Womenswear Fashion Week



French fashion designer Veronique Nichanian acknowledges the public at the end of the Hermes show during men's Fashion Week for the Fall-Winter 2020/21 collection in Paris

When Lagerfeld passed away in 2019, his mantle passed to his right-hand man, who has quietly continued his work. Nadege Vanhee-Cybulski and Veronique Nichanian at Hermes, or Virginie Viard at Chanel, are little-known outside the trade.

Demna now looks like an outlier. The 41-year-old Georgian has been listed in Time's 100 most influential people, and has a long-time muse in Kim Kardashian. But he is a constant provocateur - his US\$1,800 garbage bags seemed particularly ill-suited to a show in March that was dedicated to Ukrainian refugees.

Besides, his ties to Kanye, who featured in Balenciaga's September show in Paris, are damaging, even if Demna moved quickly to sever ties after the rapper's recent anti-Semitic outbursts.

"It is difficult to imagine that this does not break the brand's momentum, which was going very strongly," said Cadart.

A little madness

The beginning of the end of big-name designers is often traced to Galiano's removal from Dior in 2011 after he was filmed making his own anti-Semitic outburst in a restaurant.

DESIGNER discretion

designer.

Louis Vuitton has yet to replace Virgil Abloh since his tragically early death last year, with work now handled by his studio. That will also be the case at Gucci until further notice, following the departure last month of flamboyant designer Alessandro Michele, whose revamp of the Italian brand was a huge success -- until it wasn't.

Other hot houses - Hermes, Chanel, Dior - are happy to go with designers who keep away from the limelight.

"The situations are different, but they reveal a trend: it's the golden age of low profiles," said Arnaud Cadart, of asset management company Flornoy Ferri.

Interpreters

The shift reflects the fact that many brands are now established and don't need a star.

"Brand identity is no longer about the designer. Designers are interpreters of brand identity," added Julie El Ghouzzi, of fashion consultancy Cultz.



Italian fashion designer Alessandro Michele acknowledges applause following the presentation of Gucci's women Fall-Winter 2020 collection in Milan



French fashion designer Virginie Viard acknowledges the audience at the end of the Chanel's women Fall-Winter 2020-2021 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris

"The bigger the houses, the more luxury becomes a mass market. Now they're looking for more discreet artistic directors," said Benjamin Simmenauer, professor at the French Fashion Institute. It's a delicate balance.

Michele's baroque, offbeat shows for Gucci drew attention, but not so many sales.

"The markets want Gucci to sell black handbags and not pink frills all over the place that normal people wouldn't dare to wear," said Cadart. But that sort of safe - so-called 'timeless' - approach would end up hurting Gucci, which has always had transgression in its DNA.

"The risk is that people get bored. Fashion is supposed to entertain and ask questions," said Simmenauer. "You need some seduction, a little madness."

AFP

Sweet is allowed NOW ..

STEVIANA
steviana sweetener

25 Sachets
100 Sachets

From Stevia Leaves

Distributed by

CATERING SOLUTIONS TRADING LLC

Please contact +968 22060236/237



CELINE DION

Canadian singer Celine Dion performs on the stage of the AccorHotels Arena in Paris in 2017

DEVASTATED DIVA

CELINE DION REVEALS RARE NEUROLOGICAL DISORDER, CANCELS SHOWS

Pop diva Celine Dion on Thursday tearfully revealed that she is suffering from Stiff-Person Syndrome, a rare neurological disorder that is affecting her singing, and said she would have to cancel or postpone a series of European shows.

In a five-minute video posted on Instagram in French and English, a clearly emotional Dion said she has been dealing with health problems for a long time.

"Recently I have been diagnosed with a very rare neurological disorder called Stiff-Person Syndrome which affects something like one in a million people," the Canadian hitmaker said. "It has been causing spasms that affect every aspect of my daily life, sometimes causing difficulties when I walk and not allowing me to use my vocal cords to sing the way I'm used to."

She further said, "It hurts me to tell you today, this means I won't be ready to restart my tour in Europe in February." Dion, who is 54, said she was supported by her children and a team

of doctors working every day to improve her condition, but added, "I have to admit, it's been a struggle."

Titanic fame

Dion rose from small-town Quebec to worldwide fame in the 1990s with hits such as My Heart Will Go On - the theme to James Cameron's Oscar-winning film Titanic - and The Power of Love, and has continued to sell out huge stadiums around the world. That success was parlayed into a regular gig at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, where she had multiple long residencies.

She first mentioned the spasms when she delayed her European tour

earlier this year. Stiff-Person Syndrome (SPS) causes muscle stiffness as well as spasms, normally between the ages of 30 to 60. The symptoms can remain stable in some cases, but get progressively worse in others.

According to the US National Institutes of Health, it affects twice as many women as men. If left untreated, SPS can potentially lead to difficulty walking and significantly impact a person's ability to perform routine daily tasks.

Although the exact cause of this syndrome is unknown, it is believed to be an autoimmune disease and sometimes occurs with other autoimmune diseases.

All I know is singing

"All I know is singing, it's what I've done all my life and it's what I love to do the most," said Dion, breaking into tears. "I miss seeing all of you, being on the stage, performing for you."

Her spring dates in Europe, which were due to begin in the Czech Republic in February, have been postponed

to 2024, while eight of her summer shows have been cancelled entirely. A number of performances between late August and October, in 2023, have, however, not been changed.

The 'Courage World Tour' began in 2019, and Dion had completed 52 shows before the COVID-19 pandemic put the remainder on hold. She later cancelled the North American section of the tour due to her health problems.

It was to be the Grammy winner's first global concert tour in a decade and the first without her husband-manager Rene Angelil, who died from cancer in 2016.

The showbiz community voiced support for Dion on Instagram, with fellow singer Gwen Stefani, fashion designer Donatella Versace and actress Kate Hudson among tens of thousands leaving well wishes.

Dion sounded a note of optimism at the end of her video message. "I have hope that I'm on the road to recovery. This is my focus," she said.

AFP



HEALTH JINX AMONG CANADIAN SINGERS

Celine Dion is not the first to be struck by an autoimmune disease among Canadian artists doing widespread concerts. There are others in the same boat.

In June, Canadian teenage heartthrob singer Justin Bieber told his 241 million social media followers that his face was partially paralysed due to Ramsay Hunt syndrome, a rare disorder caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox and shingles. The Grammy winner cancelled several US concerts to rest and recover.

Bieber pointed out that the right side of his face was unable to move, as he could only smile and blink with his left side.

"For those who are frustrated by my cancellations of the next shows, I'm just physically, obviously, not capable of doing them," he continued. "This is pretty serious, as you can see. I wish this wasn't the case, but, obviously, my body is telling me I gotta slow down."

Bieber went on to say that he would now spend his time resting so he can get back to doing what he was "born to do." He also reassured fans that his face would "go back to normal," and that he's been doing facial exercises during the recovery process.

In March this year, Canadian experimental pop performer Allie X disclosed that she's cancelling her North American tour as a chronic and painful autoimmune illness had left her bedridden, the Canadian Star reported.

The singer-songwriter had turned to her Instagram account to share a message with fans explaining that she's sicker than she's been in two decades and unable to move. She said she had been left with no choice but to cancel more than 20 upcoming concert dates — including stops in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal that were slated for April — and refund tickets.

The 36-year-old performer, born Alexandra Hughes, opened up about the diagnosis she received as a teenager, and how the experience inspired her 2020 album Cape God. She said, sometimes her body stops working and all she can do is "lie still, breathe through the pain and wait the weeks or months it takes to pass until I can work my limp up to a run again."

The singer, whose debut single Catch had reached No 55 on the Billboard Canadian Hot 100, added, "I have always had such big dreams and such visions. I'm not going to be able to give them up, even though I'm far from an idea candidate for a pop singer."



World-class Quality.
UNBELIEVABLE PRICE





FIFA WORLD CUP

Qatar2022



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2022 MUSCAT DAILY 13

OUNAHI SHINES ON

Morocco midfielder Azzedine Ounahi poised for bigger things after World Cup breakout

Doha, Qatar - Azzedine Ounahi has been at the heart of Morocco's run to the World Cup semi-finals, tirelessly stamping his authority on the midfield and emerging as one of the revelations of the tournament.

Yassine Bounou's penalty-saving heroics stole the headlines in the last 16, but it was Ounahi who caught the eye of Spain coach Luis Enrique following his side's shootout loss to Morocco.

"I was surprised by (Ounahi). My goodness, where does that boy come from?" asked Luis Enrique, in awe of the midfielder's "spectacular" display.

"He plays like the Spanish players. He plays really well. I was very surprised. He hasn't stopped running, he must be exhausted."

On Wednesday he will face France, where he has forged his club career.

It was only 18 months ago that Ounahi was toiling away in the French third tier, his slender physique put through the rigours of lower-league football - a vital stepping stone on his journey.

Ounahi is one of four players in the Morocco squad who are a product of the Mohammed VI Academy in Sale, a state-of-the-art facility

opened in 2009 and designed to develop the country's young talent.

Morocco's huge investment in its football infrastructure - after numerous failed bids to host the World Cup - is paying off, as the performance of the Atlas Lions in Qatar has shown.

land in 2018.

'Phone ringing a lot'

He is now with Ligue 1 club Angers, who have made a habit of developing and selling on players such as Nicolas Pepe, Karl Toko Ekambi and current Morocco captain Romain

He plays like the Spanish players. He plays really well. I was very surprised. He hasn't stopped running, he must be exhausted

LUIS ENRIQUE

Moroccan clubs are also the dominant force in African football right now - winners of the men's and women's Champions League titles as well as the Confederation Cup. In addition, the Atlas Lions became the first ever North African team to qualify for the Women's World Cup by virtue of finishing runners-up as hosts of this year's Africa Cup of Nations.

Those successes are reflected by the progress made by the 22-year-old Ounahi, who has come on leaps and bounds since first signing for Strasbourg after leaving his home-

Saiss. They are aware it won't be long before Ounahi departs.

"Is the phone ringing? It's ringing quite a lot," Angers chairman Said Chabane told France's RMC of the interest in Ounahi and countryman Sofiane Boufal, who has also started every game in Qatar.

"You know very well that we can't hold back a player who wants to leave," added Chabane, whose team sit bottom of France's top flight after heading into the World Cup break with seven straight defeats.

AFP



Morocco's Azzedine Ounahi has been a revelation and is expected to play a key role against France on Wednesday (AFP)

MODERN EXCHANGE



TRANSFER MONEY EASILY AROUND THE WORLD

CANADA | EUROPE | UNITED KINGDOM | USA | AUSTRALIA

• NO BACKEND CHARGES • FASTER CREDIT • LESSER CHARGES



www.modernexchange.com

98082709 / 98082705 / 98082703



Morocco wins Africa support in World Cup clash with France

Tunis, Tunisia - His country is in diplomatic crisis with Morocco, but that's not stopping Tunisian Wissam Sultani supporting the first ever Arab or African team to reach a football World Cup semi-final.

"There's no politics on the pitch. Supporting an Arab country, whichever one, is a duty when it gets to this stage of a tournament," said Sultani, a 41-year-old greengrocer in Tunis, capital of the North African nation.

"Football brings people together, but politics divides them."

Morocco's "Lions of the Atlas", who beat Portugal on Saturday to reach the final four, will face former colonial power France on Wednesday.

They will have the backing of many fans across Africa and the Arab world.

Three African teams - Cameroon, Ghana and Senegal - have made it to the quarter-finals since 1990, but Morocco is the first ever to reach the semis.



Displaced Syrians celebrate Morocco's quarter-final win against Portugal inside a large tent in the camp of Barisha, Idlib province, on Saturday (AFP)

Sultani is one of many Tunisians supporting the team - with little regard for a diplomatic stand-off between their two governments over the disputed Western Sahara territory.

Morocco withdrew its ambas-

sador from Tunis in August after Tunisian President Kais Saied welcomed the head of the Polisario Front, which seeks independence for the Western Sahara.

Morocco, which called Saied's act "hostile", sees the mineral-rich

desert region as a sovereign part of its own territory.

"Political problems end when the match starts," said Tunis lemon merchant Hamza Ayari, aged 35. "What's important is to see the Arab team win".

Political problems end when the match starts, What's important is to see the Arab team win

HAMZA AYARI

glowing terms.

"The kingdom of courage has struck again by taking Portugal out after Spain," the La Presse newspaper wrote.

'Stand up to France'

Even in the kingdom's arch-rivals Algeria - who failed to qualify for the tournament - many have celebrated the Moroccan wins.

Official media has remained silent, but the private press has heaped praise on the team.

"The Atlas Lions were able to count on an iron defence to reach the last four. Solidity and efficiency, the ingredients for success," Algeria's Reporters newspaper wrote.

Algiers public servant Salim, 45, said Moroccans and Algerians "ignore political differences" between their governments.

"The Algerians are with the Moroccan team", he said, noting both North African nations were home to the Berber people.

AFP

FIFA WORLD CUP

Qatar2022

CHASING DREAMS

Defiant and witty, Morocco coach wants more history

Doha, Qatar - Never mind the fireworks and deafening pop music that await at Al Bayt stadium - the real pre-match show for the World Cup semi-final between Morocco and France was provided on Tuesday by Walid Regragui.

The 47-year-old coach of the first African and first Arab team to reach the last four of the World Cup took full advantage of the chance to address the world's football press in Doha, the day before the clash with Didier Deschamps' team. The Moroccan exuded pride, optimism, defiance and humour.

But along with the quickfire responses and talking points, there was a defiant refusal to play the role of the satisfied minnow and an evidently burning belief that his team can beat France and then do it again against Argentina or Croatia in the final.

"We want to win the World Cup," he said, "It's not just words, we have to go further, maybe we won't have another opportunity," he said. "We are not the favourites but we are confident - maybe that makes me mad, crazy? A bit of crazy can be good."

Asked whether his team will continue in the same style, which has seen opponents enjoy possession, he was unapologetic about his team's approach.

"We will play to our strengths... this idea of possession, it is amazing how football journalists love these figures about 60-70% possession, but it is no good if there are only two shots on goal," he said, perhaps recalling Spain's 77% possession and one shot on target against his team.

"If France give us possession, we will take it but I don't think they will. So we will try to stop them," he added.



Achraf Hakimi

African giant-killers Morocco reigning champions France

Doha, Qatar - Defending world champions and title favourites France face African history makers Morocco on Wednesday in what is sure to be a high-octane World Cup semi-final at the Al Bayt stadium.

France, who defeated England on Saturday, are looking to become the first team in 60 years to retain the trophy but they can expect fierce resistance from the surprise package of the tournament.

Morocco's giant-killing run to the last four, the first time an African nation has made it this far, has electrified fans at home and delighted the Moroccan diaspora in Europe and beyond.

The Atlas Lions will again be roared on by thousands of passionate supporters in the stadium on the desert outskirts of Doha and can count on local Qatari support too as the first Arab team ever to make it to the last four.

"It's not over yet, our ambition is to go to the final," said former Morocco international Aziz Bouderbala, part of the 1986 World Cup team that reached the last 16.

"We are living a historic moment. We are among the four best teams in the world but it's fabulous, it's delirium."

The game will have added spice given France was Morocco's colonial power and hundreds of thousands of people with Moroccan roots live and work in the country.

Morocco coach Walid Regragui, who was born near Paris and spent



If we can make young people present as positive image of Arab world and our religion

WALID REGRAGUI

most of his playing career in the French league, believes his team have become the neutral's favourite.

"We've become the team people feel positive towards at this World Cup," said Regragui.

"We're showing the world what's possible with less talent, less quality, less money, and what you can achieve with desire, hard work and belief."

France will have fewer fans in the stadium but will be supported in person by President Emmanuel Macron.

On paper Didier Deschamps' team, packed with talent and experience,



Aurelien Tchouameni

TCHOUAMENI EMERGES AS FRANCE'S MIDFIELD LEADER

Doha, Qatar - Aurelien Tchouameni might do most of his work in the shadows, but the France midfielder lit up the World Cup with his brilliant opening goal in Saturday's quarter-final win over England.

The 22-year-old later gave away the first penalty of the game at Al Bayt Stadium which Harry Kane scored to equalise for England, yet France eventually ran out 2-1 winners and Tchouameni's role for the holders has been vital given the problems they faced coming into the tournament.

The outlook for coach Didier Deschamps and his side appeared grim when they were struck by an avalanche of injuries, including to Paul Pogba and N'Golo Kante who were both ruled out.

Deschamps had to completely reconfigure his team, including abandoning his experiment with a back three, but his decision to build a three-man midfield around Tchouameni with Adrien Rabiot and Antoine Griezmann either side of the Real Madrid man has paid off.

Now when his teammates push forward to join the attack, "he is there to cover us, fill in, plug gaps and win the ball back," said Rabiot, who has also impressed on France's run to the semi-finals in Qatar, where they will face Morocco on Wednesday.

Yet Tchouameni has hardly come

from nowhere to start for his country at this World Cup.

The recurring fitness worries of Pogba and Kante - two stars of France's triumphant campaign four years ago - allowed the powerful and athletic midfielder to make his debut in a qualifier against Bosnia and Herzegovina in September last year.

Since then he has played in all but one of his country's matches while also seeing his club career take off.

Tchouameni's outstanding performances for Monaco saw him win the Ligue 1 young player of the year prize in 2021 and then earn a move to Madrid in the last close season for a fee of 100 million euros (\$105m) including bonuses.

We are very tired but there is no choice. I wasn't fresh (in the quarter-final) but this is the World Cup and you must give everything you have: run like crazy until the end

SOFIANE AMRABAT
Morocco



MOMENT



RED CORNER: Croatia supporters wait for the start of their semi-final against Argentina at Lusail Stadium on Tuesday (AFP)

5

With five goals from as many matches France's **Kylian Mbappe** leads the scoring charts ahead of team-mate Olivier Giroud and Argentina's Lionel Messi who both have four.



9

Morocco's **Youssef En Nesyri** jumped a whopping 9 feet and 1 inch as he towered above a hapless Ruben Dias and headed home the winner against Portugal in the quarter-final.



AT FULL THROTTLE

Morocco pose tough challenge for France in World Cup semi-final



drawing with 2018 runners-up Croatia.

The have only conceded one goal in the entire competition but it will require another night of heroic defending if they are to keep out a potent France attack.

Mbappe threat

Kylian Mbappe, the tournament's top scorer with five goals, attacks from the left while Olivier Giroud, level with Lionel Messi on four goals, occupies the traditional centre-forward role.

Antoine Griezmann has been outstanding in a deeper, creative role.

France defeated Poland and England in their two knockout games and pre-tournament concerns about their injury losses - Paul Pogba, N'Golo Kante and Karim Benzema - have dissipated.

But the French will also have to be alert themselves to Morocco's swift counter-attacks, with Chelsea winger Hakim Ziyech on the right flank and Sevilla forward Youssef En Nesyri looking to exploit weaknesses in Deschamps' back line.

Morocco's willingness to run with the ball and then harry to retrieve should make for a high-energy game.

"Obviously we know they are having an exceptional World Cup and have beaten some big nations, so it is a match we will be taking seriously," said France right-back Jules Kounde.

"They are no longer a surprise package, they deserve to be here. We hope to make things difficult for them and qualify."



Kylian Mbappe

France have 'respect and admiration' for Morocco: Lloris

Doha, Qatar - France captain **Hugo Lloris** praised Morocco for their remarkable World Cup run and warned that the holders will face "formidable" opponents in Wednesday's semi-final showdown.

Morocco are the first African and Arab team ever to make the semi-finals at a World Cup having beaten Spain on penalties and then Portugal in the knockout stage after topping their group ahead of Croatia and Belgium.

"We can only have respect and admiration for what they have done, but nothing happens by chance at this level," said Lloris, who won a French record 143rd cap in their quarter-final win over England, at Tuesday's pre-game press conference.

"When a team is capable of beating Belgium, Spain and Portugal, and finish top of their group, it is because they have lots of quality on the field and undoubtedly off it too, in terms of cohesion and team spirit."

"They will be formidable opponents, and on top of that there will be a hostile atmosphere in the stadium."

Walid Regragui's side have had partisan crowds behind them at all their matches in Qatar and 30 flights are being put on to fly supporters in from Morocco for the semi-final at Al Bayt Stadium.

For France the atmosphere will be reminiscent of the atmosphere when they played Tunisia in their final group game and lost 1-0, albeit with a second-string team and with their place in the knockout phase already secured.

"I don't like the term hostile but there is a popular fervour behind them. It will be very noisy and my players have been warned about that. They know what to expect," said France coach Didier Deschamps.



ing people dream and
mage of Africa, the
religion that is great



should progress with some comfort.

But if the France coach, a World Cup winner as a player in 1998, is worried about complacency undoing his team, he need only remind his players how Morocco got to this stage.

In the round of 16, playing aggressive, hard-running football, Regragui's team knocked out 2010 winners Spain on penalties before eliminating highly rated Portugal, leaving Cristiano Ronaldo in tears.

Morocco had earlier served notice of their intent by topping Group F, beating Belgium and Canada and



If I need to calm the game down, I can do that. If I feel the team needs me, I can do it. What is important is that everybody in the group is ready.

RAPHAEL VARANE
France



IT IN TIME



BLUE CORNER: Argentina fans are in high spirits ahead of their semi-final against Croatia at Lusail Stadium on Tuesday (AFP)



Brazil's Ronaldo celebrates their 2-0 victory against Germany in the 2002 World Cup final in Yokohama, Japan (AFP)

BRAZIL'S RONALDO BACKING FRANCE FOR WORLD CUP

Doha, Qatar - Former Brazil star Ronaldo says he cannot get behind his country's great sporting rivals Argentina at the World Cup, and backs France as "big favourites" to retain their title.

Lionel Messi likely has one final chance to lift the only major trophy missing from his collection, but Ronaldo will not be rooting for the South Americans in Tuesday's semi-final against Croatia.

"I'm not going to be a hypocrite and say I'll be happy for Argentina" if they win the World Cup, said Ronaldo. "But I see football as a romantic. And I will appreciate any champion."

"Since the beginning, my predic-

tion has always been Brazil and France in the final," the two-time World Cup winner told media including AFP at a roundtable in Doha.

"Brazil are no longer there. But France, match after match, are backing up their status as favourites and I still see them as the big favourites."

Ronaldo, who scored both goals in the 2002 World Cup final against Germany, expects France to see off surprise semi-finalists Morocco on Wednesday.

"I would really like (Morocco to win) but I don't think they will. I think France have a very solid team, whether it's in defence, attack or midfield," said the twice former Bal-

lon d'Or winner. Ronaldo has in particular been impressed by Kylian Mbappe, the tournament's leading scorer in Qatar with five goals.

"He knows how to use his skills, how to go faster than the others. And he uses them to give assists or to score," said Ronaldo, who expects the 23-year-old Mbappe to shatter numerous records.

"He has the time, the skills, he's thirsty and he has the talent to conquer it all, that's for sure."

Ronaldo paid tribute to Morocco's performances after the Atlas Lions became the first African side to reach a World Cup semi-final and the first Arab team to do so.

AFP

'Cricket still in denial'

Karachi-born former Yorkshire spinner Azeem Rafiq forced to leave England after racism scandal

London, United Kingdom - Azeem Rafiq claims cricket is still "in denial" over the racism scandal that forced the former Yorkshire spinner to leave England after he lifted the lid on abuse in the domestic game.

Rafiq appeared before the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport select committee on Tuesday for the first time since November 2021 when he gave harrowing evidence about the racism he faced during his time at Yorkshire.

The 31-year-old used his latest appearance in front of the committee to highlight the abuse he and his family have endured since he blew the whistle.

"If I was to look at 13 months on from me opening my heart out, all that's changed really is that me and my family have been driven out of the country. And that's a sad element of it," he said.

Karachi-born Rafiq, who moved with his immediate family to Pakistan last month, recounted incidents of abuse to the committee, including a man defecating outside his parents' house.

"I would love to come here and tell you how much cricket has changed, but unfortunately what it feels like is that cricket is very much in denial," he said.

"There are still a group of people out there who feel like cricket is the victim in this.

"The way I've been attacked and abused, why would you speak out? I've got a little hope in the new (ECB) leadership, but it's very little at the minute."

'Nothing was done'

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) charged a number of individuals in relation to Rafiq's allegations of abuse in June,



Azeem Rafiq

The way I've been attacked and abused, why would you speak out? I've got a little hope in the new (ECB) leadership, but it's very little at the minute

AZEEM RAFIQ

along with Yorkshire for the county's handling of those allegations.

However, the Cricket Discipline Commission has yet to hear the case after a dispute over whether it should take place in

public or private.

Earlier in the DCMS hearing, Yorkshire chair Kamlesh Patel accused the former ECB leadership of failing to support him when he faced criticism over the reforms he led at the county.

Patel took over at Yorkshire in November 2021 after the county had been stripped of hosting rights for international matches over their handling of Rafiq's allegations.

Patel was tasked by the ECB with implementing governance reforms at Headingley in order to get the county back on track, but faced criticism from the club's former leadership.

"If I was attacked in the press or if cricket leaders or previous cricket leaders made unsubstantiated statements, nothing was done," Patel said.

"I have email after email, letter after letter, saying 'you asked me to do this, I've done this, please support me' and I have no response to any of those letters and emails. So it was very distressing.

"I'm looking forward to the new leadership of Richard Thompson. The few meetings I've had with him have been positive and it feels like it's going forward, but these last 12 months, the answer (to the question of whether he has felt supported by the ECB) has to be 'no'."

AFF



Pakistan's Abdullah Shafique celebrates after scoring a century in the first Test against England in Rawalpindi earlier this month (AFP)

Rawalpindi stadium penalised for being 'below average' pitch

Rawalpindi, Pakistan - Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium's pitch received a second successive demerit point after the lifeless track yielded 1,786 runs across four innings of the first Test between Pakistan and England last week.

If a venue accumulates five demerits in five years it is suspended from hosting international cricket for 12 months.

"I found the pitch to be 'below average' as per the ICC guidelines," match referee Andy Pycroft was quoted as saying in an International Cricket Council statement released Tuesday.

"It was a very flat pitch which gave almost no assistance to any type of bowler. That was the main reason why batters scored very fast and both sides posted huge totals."

The pitch was given a demerit point in March during the previous Test played at the venue when some 1,187 runs were scored for the loss of just 14 wickets as Pakistan and Australia

meandered to a tame draw.

In the first Pakistan-England Test that ended last Monday, the visitors piled up 657 runs in the first innings - including a world record opening day score of 506-4.

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Ramiz Raja called the pitch "embarrassing", adding it was not a good advert for Test cricket.

Four England batters scored centuries on the opening day, another record, while Pakistan responded with three of their own in a 579-run reply.

Despite the flat pitch, a bold England declaration produced a thrilling finale with the visitors winning by 74 runs after dismissing the last Pakistan batter with just minutes left in the five-day match. England, playing a Test series in Pakistan for the first time since 2005, lead the three-match series 2-0.

They also won the second Test in Multan by 26 runs on Monday, while the last Test begins in Karachi on Saturday.

French MotoGP star Quartararo injured in motocross accident

Paris, France - French MotoGP star Fabio Quartararo announced on Monday he has broken his left hand in a motocross training accident.

"Yesterday (Sunday) I had a crash during my motocross training and I suffered a little fracture on my left hand," the 2021 world champion announced on social media with a photo of himself with a cast up to the elbow.

"No surgery needed, time to recover," Quartararo, 23, added.

The accident comes less than two months after the French rider broke a finger during a fall in the last free practice session before the Malaysian Grand Prix.

The Yamaha rider lost his world title last season after finishing second to Italian Francesco Bagnaia of Ducati.

The 2023 MotoGP season gets underway on March 26 with the Portuguese Grand Prix in Portimao, a race Quartararo has won the last two seasons.

Before that, the drivers are due to complete pre-season testing in Sepang, Malaysia.

Neymar cleared of corruption over Barcelona transfer

Barcelona, Spain - Brazilian football superstar Neymar was cleared of corruption charges on Tuesday related to his transfer to Barcelona from Santos in 2013.

A court in Spain acquitted all nine defendants in the trial.

In addition to Neymar, this included his parents, FC Barcelona and former club presidents Josep Maria Bartomeu and Sandro Rosell, Santos FC and former president Odilio Rodrigues Filho, and N&N - the company founded by Neymar's parents to manage his career.

Brazilian company DIS had argued they lost out financially on Neymar's transfer because they owned 40 percent of Neymar's sporting rights at Santos and believed the true value of the deal had been obscured by those involved.

"According to the court it has not been proved there was a false contract or that DIS was intended to be harmed," said the court in a statement.



Neymar

Neymar's high-profile trial got underway in mid-October in Barcelona, just a month before the start of the World Cup in Qatar. The 30-year-old - who now plays for French champions

Paris Saint-Germain - and Brazil crashed out after a penalty shootout against Croatia in the quarter-finals.

Prosecutors had initially sought a two-year jail term and a

10-million-euro (\$10.5 million) fine for Neymar but in a surprise move they dropped corruption and fraud charges against all the accused at the end of October.

Brazilian sports investment

firm DIS filed a lawsuit in 2015 alleging it had been defrauded during the player's transfer to Barcelona.

It claimed Neymar, Barcelona and the Brazilian club colluded to mask the true cost of his transfer thereby cheating it of its proper share of the player's transfer.

DIS also argued that it was not informed of the existence of an exclusivity contract in 2011 between Neymar and Barcelona.

But Spanish prosecutors, which initially shared DIS' view, later said the firm's allegations were not based on "evidence".

They concluded the case was a matter for civil rather than criminal justice.

DIS indictment

Even though prosecutors dropped their charges the case continued because the court was also considering a separate indictment filed by DIS as it is allowed by Spanish law. DIS was seeking to recover 35 million

euros it claims it was cheated of.

Barca said the transfer cost 57.1 million euros, with 40 million euros paid to N&N and 17.1 million to Santos, of which 6.8 million was given to DIS.

Spanish prosecutors initially said they believed the actual value was at least 83 million euros.

During the trial Neymar said he didn't remember if he took part in the transfer negotiations, saying he only signed documents presented to him by his father.

All of the other defendants, including former Barcelona presidents Bartomeu and Rosell, denied any wrongdoing.

DIS initially asked for a five-year prison sentence for Neymar and his father who is also the player's agent. But at the end of the trial it called for a revised prison sentence of two and a half years for Neymar and four years for Neymar's father, but the defendants were acquitted.

AFF

Reyna hits back over US World Cup bust-up

New York, United States - Gio Reyna has hit back at US coach Gregg Berhalter over comments regarding the Borussia Dortmund forward's behaviour during the World Cup.

Reyna, widely regarded as one of the most talented young players in US soccer, was hardly used by Berhalter in Qatar, where the Americans reached the last 16.

The 20-year-old's limited involvement was the source of intense speculation, with Berhalter suggesting Reyna was not fully fit

- a claim contradicted by the player.

Recent US media reports have lifted the lid on tensions between Reyna and Berhalter, revealing that the player was almost sent home because of his attitude during training sessions.

Reyna was allowed to stay in the squad after being forced to apologise in front of his teammates, the reports said.

Without naming Reyna directly, Berhalter appeared to confirm the reports at a recent conference on "moral leader-

ship" in New York.

Berhalter told the conference the US team staff had "a player that was clearly not meeting expectations on and off the field".

He added: "We were ready to book a plane ticket home, that's how extreme it was."

In a statement posted on Instagram, Reyna acknowledged that he had reacted badly after being informed by Berhalter shortly before the World Cup that he would have a "very limited" role at the tournament.

"I fully acknowledge that I let my emotions get the best of me and affect my training and behaviour for a few days," Reyna said.

"I am disappointed that there is continuing coverage of this matter... and extremely surprised that anyone on the US men's team staff would contribute to it."

Reyna said Berhalter had always stated that issues within the team would remain "in-house".

AFF



Giovanni Reyna of the US is in tears after their defeat to the Netherlands in the World Cup round of 16 in Doha earlier this month (AFP)