

# Decree fixes official holidays

## His Majesty the Sultan’s Accession Day declared a holiday

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued two Royal Decrees on Wednesday, reading as follows:

Royal Decree No 88/2022 fixes official holidays.

Article 1 states that official holidays for units of the state's Administrative Apparatus, public legal entities and establishments of the private sector - with regard to Eids and other occasions listed below - will be fixed as follows:

- Hijri New Year Day on Muharram 1
- Prophet's Birthday on Rabe' al Awwal 12
- Al Isra'a Wal Miraj on Rajab 27
- National Day on November 18 and 19



- His Majesty the Sultan's Accession Day

If any of the days of the weekly off coincide with the abovementioned holidays, it will be compensated by a single day. The dates of the above-mentioned holidays may be amended if public interest so dictates.

- Eid al Fitr will from the 29th day of the month of Ramadan and continue till the third day of the month of Shawwal.
- Eid al Adha will start on Dhul-Hijjah 9 and continue till the 12th of the same month.

Friday will be compensated if it coincides with the first day of any of the abovementioned Eids.

Article 2 cancels Royal Decree No 56/2020 and all that

contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article 3 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the date of its issue.

Royal Decree No 89/ 2022 ratifies an agreement of cooperation between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Kingdom of Bahrain in the field of security signed in Manama on October 24, 2022.

Article 1 ratifies the aforesaid agreement as per the version attached to this decree.

Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

ONA

### H H SAYYID THEYAZIN PRESIDES OVER OMAN EQUESTRIAN FESTIVAL



H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, presided over the Oman Equestrian Festival at Al Rahba Racecourse in Barka on Wednesday. The event was held in the context of H H Sayyid Theyazin's interest in equestrian sports, to raise its level in Oman and develop it further. The festival included five races, including three for purebred Arabian horses (ONA)

### Sayyid Fahd to lead Oman's delegation to 43rd GCC Summit in Saudi Arabia

Muscat - On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, will lead the sultanate's delegation to the 43rd GCC Summit, the GCC-Chinese Summit and the Arab-Chinese Summit for Cooperation and Development on Thursday.

Oman is pressing ahead, alongside GCC states, to consolidate ties with friendly countries.



It seeks to realise the common interests of all, besides find ways to address the latest regional and international developments.

ONA

## Japanese chain Okura to open hotel in Muscat in 2027

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Japanese chain Okura Hotels & Resorts will open a property for the first time in the Middle East. The Okura Resort Muscat luxury hotel will open in 2027 in Muscat, according to the Embassy of Oman in Tokyo.

Okura Hotels & Resorts has extensive expertise in the hospitality world, including asset

ownership and hotel development, as well as hotel management, the restaurant business and chain operations through its subsidiaries and other group companies.

A statement issued by the Omani embassy in Tokyo said that Japanese media have announced Okura Resort Muscat will open in 2027. This will be the first Okura branded property and the first Japanese-branded hotel

in Oman and in the Middle East. 'The hotel is in line with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to diversify the economy, including the tourism industry,' it stated.

According to a report published by Business Wire, the company has contracted with Saud Bahwan Group to manage the new property. The hotel will offer a total of 150 guest rooms, each with a standard area of ap-

proximately 50sqm.

The rooms will feature breathtaking views of the vast golf course of Al Mouj Golf, a world-renowned European Tour venue, and the Gulf of Oman.

The design of the lobby and other public spaces will be a fusion of Omani and Japanese styles and traditions. A variety of dining options will be available, including all-day dining, teppanyaki and other Japanese cui-

sine, besides western fine dining.

Hotel Okura Co, founded in 1958, opened its flagship Hotel Okura Tokyo in 1962 as a first-class hotel that quickly became renowned worldwide for blending traditional Japanese beauty with the very best in accommodation, cuisine and service. It closed its doors in August 2015, and after four years of renovations, reopened as The Okura Tokyo in September 2019.

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21mX6m door in Ibra sets Guinness record



Our Correspondent  
Muscat

A 21m tall and 6m wide door made in Ibra with palm trees and plastic waste was officially listed by Guinness World Records as the largest door made from recycled materials on November 29. Created by Al Aaqil al Ahliya

Enterprises (Oman PVC), the handmade door is studded with 52 decorative bolts. The door was displayed to officials of Guinness World Records on November 29 coinciding with the 52nd National Day. Speaking to Muscat Daily, Khalid Mohammed al Khalifeen,

We started handcrafting the door six months ago and contacted the Guinness World Records who were excited with the idea

KHALID MOHAMMED AL KHALIFEEN

owner of Oman PVC, said, "We started handcrafting the door six months ago and contacted the Guinness World Records who were excited with the idea." Khalifeen described the

process of making the door with plastic waste and palm fronds as very challenging. "However, teamwork helped. Plastic waste and palm fronds were collected from Muscat, Barka, Amerat, and some wilayats of North Sharqiyah. The making process was also very time consuming, requiring a lot of patience."

According to Khalifeen, the objective behind making the door is to spread awareness on the dangers of plastic waste and the need to recycle palm tree waste to increase national income. "With this door project we hope to spread the culture of recycling among young people,

while urging people to throw waste in designated places and use reusable bags for shopping." Sponsored by North Sharqiyah Governor's Office and completed with the help of 45 volunteers, the door is likely to be placed at the entrance of the governorate, Khalifeen informed.

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MUSCAT DAILY PRESENTS

2022  
OMAN'S  
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BRAND AWARDS

EA planting 15,500 mangrove seedlings in Al Wusta

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

In ongoing efforts to plant 10mn wild trees, the Environment Authority (EA) is conducting a campaign to plant 15,500 mangrove seedlings in Al Wusta. The mangrove plantation campaign was conducted in Khor Ghawi in the wilayat of Al Jaser, an official of the Environment Department in Al Wusta informed. "The campaign started on December 5 and will end on December 8."

EA has planted 4.75mn seeds of indigenous species in different parts of the sultanate, in cooperation with relevant authorities, with the help of volunteers as well as drones, as part of its ongoing efforts to plant 10mn wild trees. EA has also planted 480,000 wild trees, so far, including 70,600 mangrove trees. In January 2020, EA, in cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman, launched the initiative to plant 10mn wild trees in the next ten years. The wild tree species include ghaf, sumr, sidr, shue, tiq, talh, mitan, sarh and alalan.



(Supplied photo)



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# Ministerial meet prepares for 43rd GCC Summit



Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, presided over the 154th session of the Ministerial Council in preparation to the 43rd GCC Summit. The session was held at the headquarters of the GCC Secretariat General in Riyadh on Wednesday in the

presence of GCC foreign ministers and the GCC Secretary-General. In his speech, H E Sayyid Badr affirmed that the Gulf Cooperation Council is pressing ahead at a steady pace as outlined by the wise visions and directives of the GCC leaders, in a manner that

realises the aspirations of the people of the GCC states in all fields of cooperation. The preparatory ministerial session for the GCC Summit reviewed several files of joint Gulf cooperation, which will be submitted at the meeting of the GCC Supreme Council in its 43rd ses-

sion. The primary aim of the summit is to enhance the blessed march of the GCC Council in a manner that achieves further progress and development for its countries and consolidates the foundations of security and stability in the region. ONA



## Omani delegation takes part in parliamentary forum in Marrakech

Our Correspondent  
Marrakech

The first constitutional session of the Parliamentary Economic Forum of the Euro-Mediterranean and Gulf region, initiated by the House of Councilors of the Kingdom of Morocco and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, opened on Wednesday in Marrakech. The high-level meeting, attended by parliamentarians from more than 30 countries as well as government officials, senior private sector executives, academics, experts, businessmen and representatives of civil society, is intended to be an opportunity to strengthen cooperation

between the two geographical areas and to intensify efforts to meet common challenges together, the most important of which is economic growth and the preservation of peace and security in the region. Oman was represented by State Council members, including Hon Saleh Zakwani and Hon Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Amri, and international relations specialist Yarub Mohammed. The forum also sets the objective of promoting integrated economic and financial zones, while ensuring the implementation of more sustainable practices and a transition to green energy in keeping with global efforts to reduce the effects of

climate change while decreasing dependence on carbon-based fuels. It aims to also propose tangible solutions to challenges pertaining to food, fuel and fertilisers, among others, to better prepare the countries of the region to face possible future shocks, including financial and health crises. On the sidelines of the forum, the members of State Council met Speaker of the Moroccan House of Advisors Enaam Maryara. During their meeting, they exchanged views on matters of common interest. The members also met Pedro Roque, President of the Mediterranean Parliament.

## MoC inked for localisation in energy sector

Muscat - The National Employment Programme (NEP), Mazoon Electricity Company and Industrial Innovation Academy signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) on Wednesday to implement an initiative titled 'Augmenting local content in the energy sector'. The MoC seeks to enhance cooperation among the three parties to fulfil the requirement of local manpower in the energy sector and empower Omani

small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in the sector. Through the MoC, several services required in the energy sector will be provided to the SMEs, along with support and follow-up from the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR). The signing ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Dr Mansoor Talib al Hinai, Chairman of APSR and General Supervisor of the NEP.

The agreement was signed by Azhar Ahmed al Kindi, Technical Director of NEP, Salim Said al Kamyani, CEO of Mazoon Electricity Company, and Dr Ayman Abdullah al Fudhaili, CEO of Industrial Innovation Academy. The MoC will achieve several objectives. It will contribute to enhancing the participation of the private sector in the national economy by providing training and employment opportunities for Omanis, initiating training

programmes for Omani job-seekers, improving their readiness to engage in the labour market, and boosting self-employment opportunities in the sultanate. The MoC will also help localise certain energy-related specialised jobs, besides supporting SMEs and enhancing their contribution to the national economy, in accordance with the objectives and priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

## Citizen arrested for woman's murder: ROP

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

A citizen has been arrested on charges of murdering a woman with a white weapon in the

wilayat of Seeb on Wednesday. A statement issued by Royal Oman Police (ROP) said, 'Muscat Governorate Police Command arrested a citizen

on charges of committing the murder of an Omani woman with a white weapon, as a result of a family dispute between them. The case is under investigation.'



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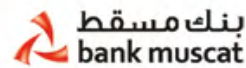
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| Indian       | 213.85    |
| Pakistan     | 583.35    |
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| Philippines  | 144.11    |
| Sri Lanka    | 954.40    |

\*Rates as on December 07  
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

DP World opens new container freight station

Dubai's DP World Logistics recently opened a new 6,000 square metre high-end warehouse at Container Freight Station 2 (CFS 2), offering new storage solutions for customers at the Jebel Ali Free Zone (Jafza). The company's CFS 2 warehouse offers a total of 12,500 pallet positions using Very Narrow Aisle (VNA) racking systems, storing cargo up to 18 metres high. On a combined plot size of 60,000 square metres, CFS 2 can handle up to 6,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) per month.

OQ acquires Exolum's stake in OQ Logistics

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman's global integrated energy company OQ Group, represented by its subsidiary OQ Refineries and Petrochemical Industries, has acquired Spanish firm Exolum Corporation's 40 per cent shareholding in OQ Logistics.

Through this acquisition, OQ Refineries and Petrochemical Industries now holds 100 per cent shareholding in OQ Logistics, according to a press statement issued by OQ Group.

The logistics sector in Oman is one of the most promising sectors that contributes to diversifying the national economy. The acquisition of Exolum's stake in OQ Logistics is part of OQ Group's strategy to integrate the logistics infrastructure that would support growth and bankability of the logistics portfolio with a clearer and predictable commercial and regulatory framework.

OQ Refineries and Petroleum



Industries (formerly Orpic) established OQ Logistics in 2014, in partnership with Exolum (formerly Logistica De Hidrocarburos Compania) which owned 40 per cent stake. OQ Logistics was formed to build and operate a pipeline to transport multiple oil products in both directions linking the two OQ refineries in Mus-

cat and Sohar and linking them to a major storage facility in Al Jifnain area.

OQ Logistics owns Al Jifnain terminals in Muscat governorate, which is the largest terminal for storing and distributing refined petroleum products in Oman, with a storage capacity of 170,000 cubic meters of oil de-

rivatives, along with pipelines connecting Muscat-Sohar, Mina Al Fahal to Jifnain and Jifnain to Muscat Airport to transport refined petroleum fuel products.

Hilal al Kharusi, chief executive - commercial and downstream at OQ, said, "We would like to take this opportunity to thank our partner Exolum on their

contribution in jointly developing OQ Logistics and we are confident of Exolum's future growth and prospects. OQ intends to integrate its portfolio of refined petroleum business while also developing a strategic fuel reserve on behalf of the government to ensure continuous and sustainable delivery to the customers."

"With this acquisition, OQ now works to meet its strategic objective to consolidate and integrate OQ Logistics with other OQ logistics assets, creating a larger platform for logistics infrastructure business in Oman followed by establishing a contractual and commercial framework to then monetize the consolidated entity through an initial public offering (IPO). This would create an opportunity for a logistic infrastructure asset in Oman to list on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX)," he said.

Jorge Lanza, chief executive officer of Exolum, said, "It has been an honour for Exolum to

participate in this project, which was also our first foray into international markets. This joint venture with OQ opened the door to new business opportunities outside Spain and, partly thanks to it, Exolum is now present in the UK, Netherlands, Germany, Ireland, Panama, Ecuador and Peru."

"From the outset, we were confident that this project would be innovative, contributing significantly to the country's prosperity, and that it would bring significant improvements to the petroleum products industry thanks to the experience and extensive track record of our almost 100 year old company," he added.

Exolum is Europe's leading logistics company for liquid products and one of the largest in the world. Its core business is the transport and storage of a wide range of bulk liquid products, particularly refined and chemical products and biofuels, in a sustainable and efficient manner.

GDP growth in GCC may slow in 2023 on weaker global demand: ICAEW

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

A new economic insight report for the Middle East, commissioned by ICAEW and compiled by Oxford Economics, has revealed that despite the region's resilience to global challenges, its 2023 GDP growth forecast has been lowered.

With a global recession expected for early next year, oil production cuts and rising borrowing costs, the 2023 GDP growth forecast for the Middle East has been revised down to 2.7 per cent by Oxford Economics and ICAEW. However, regional growth is still expected to perform at over twice the pace of the world economy.

According to the report, the downgrade reflects more muted projections for activity in the GCC economies, where growth is set to moderate to 2.5 per cent in 2023, as oil production stagnates. While this represents a significant slowdown, it will remain above the average pace in the five years preceding the pandemic.

The Middle East has so far withstood global challenges, mainly due to GCC countries' ongoing gains from trade. However, against a worsening global back-



drop - inflation squeezing household real incomes, borrowing costs soaring, winter threatening Europe's energy supply, and China's growth engines stuttering - demand is slowing.

As a result, forecasts for both oil and commodity prices have also been lowered. Oil price projection has been adjusted down to US\$102 per barrel (from US\$103.8), with Brent forecast expected to average US\$92.1 per barrel in 2023 against a forecast of US\$96.1 three months ago.

'Oil prices are in constant fluctuation, balancing ongoing fears over the impact of China's zero Covid policy on demand with concerns over supply after OPEC+ cut production by 2mn barrels per day in November, the largest cut since 2020. However, tight supply will continue to support prices despite recession across many advanced

economies,' the report said. Regional Purchasing Managers Indices (PMIs) for October indicate GCC economies are off to a good start this quarter and domestic economic conditions across the Gulf should remain strong heading into 2023, helped by rising new orders and easing price pressures. This should support business sentiment and further improvement in the labour markets, the report noted.

Mark Billington, ICAEW's managing director, international, said, "While the region has so far been able to withstand the pressures of the global economy, we expect the recent slowdown to have an impact on GDP growth. Continuing to increase investment in the non-oil sectors will help the GCC to remain resilient as we enter 2023."

Scott Livermore, ICAEW economic advisor and chief econo-

mist and managing director of Oxford Economics Middle East, said, "Despite the forecast lowering, the pace of growth is still projected to be higher than the world economy for 2023. Saudi Arabia will likely be one of the world's fastest-growing economies this year as the economy benefits from higher oil prices. We are also seeing a demand for tourism across the region, supporting growth in the non-oil sector."

Recent inflation figures for several of GCC's economies show price pressures have peaked in the region and inflation is beginning to come down. As per ICAEW report, GCC inflation is forecast at 3.5 per cent this year, up 0.2 percentage point on three months ago, before it slows to 2.6 per cent in 2023 and stabilises around 2 per cent in the medium term.

'Although inflationary pressures are easing, central banks across the GCC will want to protect the currency pegs to the US dollar. While the pace of tightening will likely slow from December, rates will likely be lifted higher than initially thought. This is a factor behind the expectation of non-oil GDP growth in the GCC slowing to 3.6 per cent next year from 5 per cent in 2022,' the report added.



Oman's first crypto-mining data center inaugurated in Mirbat

Muscat - H E Eng Saeed bin Hamood al Mawaali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and the CEO of Green Data City, Eng Olivier Ohnheiser, inaugurated the first crypto-mining data center recently in Mirbat.

Green Data City LLC is the company that operates the first license for sustainable crypto-mining in Oman, in the cooler climate of Salalah. International mining companies can register and operate within the Green Data City development.

On the occasion, H E Mawali said, "The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology seeks to build cooperative partnerships with leading local and international private sector entities in the var-

ious types of digital technologies, as the ministry works to attract foreign investments in this ever-developing industry."

Ohnheiser noted that the south of Oman is strategically positioned on the network routes and has unique advantages to establish successful and sustainable hyper-scale data centers.

He said that Green Data City will develop in two phases. "Phase one will immediately start with 200MW dedicated to crypto-mining, and phase two will add renewable energy and patented deep-sea water cooling with minimum 400MW capacity that will optimise hyper-scale data centers."

"Large scale mining companies and data center owners can

now register directly under the Green Data City license and operate in the development. The capacities will be allocated in the coming weeks," Ohnheiser added.

An official government delegation visited Green Data City's new offices and seen the first bitcoin officially mined in Oman, while the technical team presented the immersion cooling technology, used to reduce electricity consumption, which will be coupled with patented water-cooling innovation and renewable energy in the next phase.

Ohnheiser expressed his appreciation of the government leadership to support this long term development and make the country now open for crypto-mining.

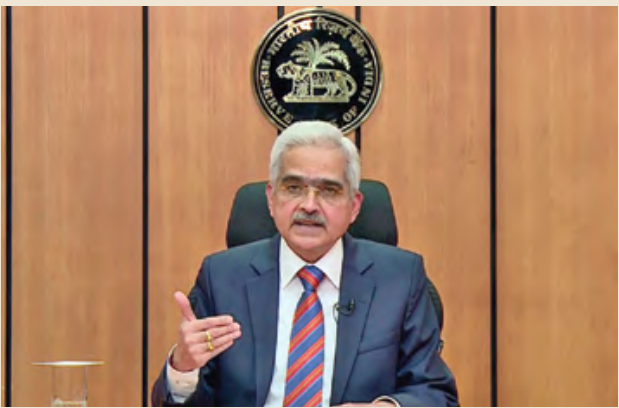
India hikes interest rate but at slower pace

Mumbai, India - India's central bank on Wednesday raised its main interest rate for the fifth time this year, but by a smaller margin as inflation eases and other countries look to slow the pace of hikes.

The move by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) comes after US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell signalled last week that officials would begin to take their foot off the pedal.

"GDP growth in India remains resilient and inflation is expected to moderate," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said in a webcast. However, he added, "But the battle against inflation is not over. Pressure points from high and sticky core inflation, and exposure of food inflation to international factors and weather-related events, do remain."

Das said the benchmark re-



Shaktikanta Das

purchase rate would rise 35 basis points to 6.25 per cent, following three straight rises of half a percentage point since June and one of 40 points in May.

The move was in line with market expectations.

Consumer inflation has this year hovered above the RBI's upper band of six percent, hitting a high of 7.79 per cent in

April, though it eased to 6.77 per cent in October.

The bank retained its inflation forecast of 6.7 per cent for the fiscal year to March but trimmed its economic growth projection to 6.8 per cent from 7.0 per cent.

India imports more than 80 per cent of its crude oil needs and rising petrol costs - caused by Russia's invasion of

Ukraine - have had a ripple effect on prices for the country's 1.4bn people.

Elevated commodity prices and a falling rupee have left India struggling with a deteriorating trade balance, with net imports in the September quarter nearly doubling year-on-year.

The Indian rupee hit record low against the dollar in October as the US unit was boosted by sharp rate hikes by the Fed. However it has recovered slightly since then, thanks to interventions by the RBI.

Data last week showed Indian economic growth slowed to 6.3 per cent on-year in July-September. That was well down from 13.5 per cent recorded in the previous three months, which was boosted by the recovery from the depths of the pandemic in 2021.

AFP

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| Joinery Draftsman         | - Diploma in same field.<br>- Min. 5 years experience in Oman in same field.<br>Experience in preparation of detailed joinery drawings.                                        |

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# World economy faces more pain in 2023 after a gloomy year

Paris, France - This was supposed to be the comeback year for the world economy following the Covid pandemic.

Instead, 2022 was marked by a new war, record inflation and climate-linked disasters. It was a "polycrisis" year, a term popularised by historian Adam Tooze.

Get ready for more gloom in 2023.

"The number of crises has increased since the start of the century," said Roel Beetsma, professor of macroeconomics at the University of Amsterdam

"Since World War Two we have never seen such a complicated situation," he told AFP.

After the Covid-induced economic crisis of 2020, consumer prices began to rise in 2021 as countries emerged from lockdowns or other restrictions.

Central bankers insisted that high inflation would only be temporary as economies returned to normal. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February sent energy and food prices soaring.

Many countries are now grappling with cost-of-living crises because wages are not keeping up with inflation, forcing households to make difficult choices in their spending.



This photo shows trucks queueing at a port in Lianyungang in China's eastern Jiangsu province (AFP)

"Everything has become more expensive, from cream to wine and electricity," said Nicole Eisermann from her stand at the Frankfurt Christmas market.

Central banks played catch-up. They started to raise interest rates this year in an effort to tame galloping inflation - at the risk of tipping countries into deep recessions, since higher borrowing costs mean slower economic activity.

Inflation has finally started to slow down in the United States and the eurozone.

**Careful spending**

Consumer prices in the Group of 20 developed and emerging nations are expected to reach eight per cent in the fourth quarter before falling to 5.5 per cent next year, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The OECD encourages governments to provide aid to bring relief to households.

In the 27-nation European Union, 674bn euros (US\$704bn) have been earmarked so far to shield consumers from high en-

ergy prices, according to the Bruegel think tank.

Germany, Europe's biggest economy and the most dependent on Russia energy supplies, accounts for 264bn euros of that total.

One in two Germans say they now only spend on essential items, according to a survey by EY consultancy.

"I am very careful but I have a lot of children and grandchildren," said Guenther Blum, a shopper at the Frankfurt Christmas market.

Rising interest rates have also hurt consumers and businesses, though US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell signalled last week that the pace of hikes could ease "as soon as" December.

He warned, however, that policy will probably have to remain tight for some time to restore price stability.

For her part, European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde sent a clear signal that the ECB would maintain its tightening policy, saying that eurozone inflation had yet to peak.

Economists expect Germany and another major eurozone economy, Italy, to fall into recession. Britain's economy is already shrinking. Rating agency S&P Global foresees stagnation for the eurozone in 2023.

But the International Monetary Fund still expects the world economy to expand in 2023, with growth of 2.7 per cent. The OECD is forecasting 2.2-per cent growth.

The coronavirus pandemic, meanwhile, remains a wildcard for the global economy.

China's zero-Covid policy restrained growth in the world's second biggest economy, but the authorities have started to relax

restrictions following nationwide protests.

**Climate costs**

But for Beetsma, the biggest crisis is climate change, which is "happening in slow motion".

Natural and man-made catastrophes have caused US\$268bn in economic losses so far in 2022, according to reinsurance giant Swiss Re. Hurricane Ian alone cost an estimated insured loss of US\$50-65bn.

Floods in Pakistan resulted in US\$30bn in damage and economic loss this year.

Governments agreed at United Nations climate talks (COP27) in Egypt in November to create a fund to cover the losses suffered by vulnerable developing countries devastated by natural disasters.

But the COP27 summit ended without new commitments to phase out the use of fossil fuels, despite the need to cut greenhouse gas emissions and slow global warming.

"It is not an acute crisis but a very long-term crisis, protracted," Beetsma said. "If we don't do enough this will hit us in unprecedented scale."

AFP

## China's trade volumes plunge due to Covid rules

Beijing, China - China's imports and exports plunged in November to levels not seen since early 2020, official figures showed Wednesday, as severe Covid restrictions hit the economy hard.

The last major economy still wedded to a zero-tolerance virus policy, Beijing's snap lockdowns, travel curbs and mass testing have stifled business activity, disrupted supply chains and dampened consumption.

Imports in November fell 10.6 per cent year-on-year, the biggest drop since May 2020, according to the General Administration of Customs. Meanwhile, exports fell 8.7 per cent over the same period - the steepest decline since February 2020, when the country was mired in the early stages of the pandemic.

"Weakening domestic and foreign demand, Covid disruptions and a rising comparison base lead to a perfect but well-expected storm to China's exports and imports," Bruce Pang, chief economist at Jones Lang LaSalle, told Bloomberg News.

The figures are the latest in a string of gloomy economic indicators as the world's number two economy charts a faltering path out of zero-Covid.

AFP

## Joe Biden celebrates US manufacturing comeback

Phoenix, US - President Joe Biden declared the comeback of US manufacturing Tuesday at the site of a mammoth expansion to a Taiwanese-owned semiconductor plant aimed at breaking risky US dependency on foreign-based producers for the vital component.

"American manufacturing is back, folks. American manufacturing is back," Biden said at the plant in Phoenix, Arizona, accompanied by senior political allies and titans of the corporate world, including Apple CEO Tim Cook and Micron CEO Sanjay Mehrotra.

The project by TSMC, the world's biggest maker of leading-edge chips, would go a long way to meeting the US goal of ending reliance on foreign-located factories - particularly in Taiwan, which is under constant threat of being absorbed or even invaded by China.

TSMC, or Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, announced it is building a second Phoenix plant by 2026, ballooning its investment in Arizona from US\$12bn to US\$40bn, with a target of producing some 600,000 microchips a year.

About 10,000 high-tech jobs will be created once both plants are working, the company said.

White House National Economic Council Director Brian Deese said the "major milestone" is one of the largest foreign direct investments in US history, while TSMC chairman Mark Liu heralded "a giant step forward to help build a vibrant semiconductor ecosystem in the United States."

Biden clearly hoped to get political credit for the investment influx, pointing to the effect of his signature CHIPS Act, which sets aside almost US\$53bn for subsidies and research in the semiconductors sector.

It's a message he'll want to spread in Arizona, which was long a Republican-dominated state but has turned into a battleground where the president's Democrats do increasingly well.



US President Joe Biden delivers remarks on his economic plan at TSMC Semiconductor Manufacturing Facility in Phoenix, Arizona (AFP)

**Size matters**

Most of the current US supply of microchips comes from overseas. Although the companies are largely based in reliable US allies in Asia, the sheer distance and, especially, the geopolitical tensions around Taiwan, have the US government and companies like Apple nervous.

"Virtually every large tech firm, including automotive firms and any company that uses technology is sweating bullets that something's going to happen between Taiwan and China. And so there's a massive rush to shift manufacturing out of both countries," technology analyst Rob Enderle said.

The miniscule, hard-to-make gadgets are at the heart of almost every modern appliance, vehicle and advanced weapon.

While sheer quantity matters, quality - sophistication and small size - is also increasingly important. Even typical smartphones require the higher-end semiconductors.

The new TSMC plant will produce state-of-the-art 3-nanometer chips, while the existing facility will start reducing the size of its current 5-nanometer chips to a more sophisticated 4 nanometers.

The twin plants "could meet the entire US demand for advanced chips when they're completed. That's the definition of supply chain resilience," Ronnie

Chatterji, National Economic Council deputy director for industrial policy, told reporters.

Biden framed the TSMC investment in a broader context of revitalizing US-based manufacturing - one of his presidency's key themes.

"Over 30 years ago, America had more than 30 per cent of the global chip production. Then something happened," he said.

"American manufacturing, the backbone of our economy, began to get hollowed out. Companies moved jobs overseas. Today we're down to producing only around 10 per cent of the world's chips, despite leading the world in research and design."

Deese, one of Biden's most senior advisors, said Biden's signature public investment policies - the CHIPS Act and the giant Inflation Reduction Act - are revolutionizing the way the government works with private companies.

For almost four decades, the idea was "trickle down," where government would "get out the way" and cut taxes for big companies to attract investment, he said.

Now the goal is to use the public money to kickstart activity and "crowd in" investors.

The goal is not to exclude private companies, but in fact, encouraging private investment at historic scale," Deese said.

AFP

## Stock markets fall as recession fears overshadow China reopening hope

London, UK - Major stock markets suffered more selling Wednesday on growing fears that Federal Reserve monetary tightening will tip the US economy into recession.

The drop followed more steep losses on Wall Street Tuesday after the heads of leading US banks warned of tough times ahead in 2023.

JPMorgan Chase chief Jamie Dimon tipped a "mild to hard recession" and Goldman Sachs' David Solomon said jobs and pay would be hit, while Morgan Stanley and Bank of America were also uneasy about the outlook.

The comments added to the downbeat mood that has coursed through trading floors at the start of the week, after forecast-beating reports on jobs and the giant US services sector fanned worries the Fed would have to push interest rates higher than hoped.

Markets had been rising healthily after a weaker-than-expected inflation reading for October suggested the almost year-long tightening campaign was finally affecting prices.

"Any hopes that the Fed would turn more dovish in the



months ahead have been dashed significantly as the vast US services industry is where sticky inflation hangs out," said SPI Asset Management's Stephen Innes.

He added that the latest readings suggest rates would go above five per cent before the Fed stops hiking, while several observers have suggested they will not be reduced until 2024.

**China easing on Covid**

The sombre outlook overshadowed China's moves to wind back some of its harsh Covid rules that traders hope will kickstart the world's number two economy, which has been battered this year by months of lockdowns and other containment measures.

In a sign of the impact the zero-Covid strategy has had, data Wednesday showed that imports and exports plunged far more than expected in November.

On Wednesday, officials announced for the first time a nationwide loosening of restrictions, including a reduction in mandatory PCR tests and allowing some positive cases to quarantine at home.

But while the country edges back to normality, Zhiwei Zhang, of Pinpoint Asset Management, warned that it would take time.

"The zero-Covid policy has been loosened, but mobility has not recovered much on the national level," he said. "I expect ex-

ports will stay weak in the next few months as China goes through a bumpy reopening process.

"As global demand weakens in 2023, China will have to rely more on domestic demand."

Other observers said the recent rally fuelled by the reopening may have gone too far and traders were now taking a step back as they contemplate a likely spike in infections in the country.

Oil prices remained stuck at lows not seen for around a year as demand expectations tumble.

Brent on Tuesday sank below US\$80 for the first time since January, while WTI struck its lowest since December, having plunged from the 14-year highs of around US\$140 touched in March after Russia invaded Ukraine.

"The crude demand outlook is getting crushed as we are in a slowdown basically across all the major economies," said OANDA's Edward Moya.

"Supplies seem plentiful over the near term and that has everyone hesitating on what was one of the easiest trades of the year."

AFP

## Russian oil giant Rosneft reports \$889mn loss from assets 'transfer' in Germany

Moscow, Russia - Russia's oil giant Rosneft said Wednesday its profit over the past nine months had been badly hit by the seizure of its German-based refineries by Berlin.

"In 3Q 2022, the most significant negative impact on income came from the transfer of the company's assets in Germany... which resulted in the recognition of an additional loss of 56bn rubles (around US\$889mn)," Rosneft said in a statement.

Between July and September, the company "continued to be negatively affected by external factors and illegal restrictions", including the transfer of assets



in Germany, Rosneft chief executive Igor Sechin said in the statement.

Berlin in September took control of Rosneft's German subsidiaries, which account for about 12 per cent of oil refining

capacity in the country, and placed them under the trusteeship of the Federal Network Agency.

Germany has also pledged to end Russian oil imports by the end of the year as Europe seeks

to wean itself off Russian energy supplies since the start of the Ukraine offensive.

But Rosneft said it had increased its deliveries to Asia by a third and "fully compensated for the decline in supplies to European buyers".

Despite the heavy loss, Rosneft's ruble revenue in the first nine months of 2022 increased by 15.7 per cent year-on-year to the equivalent of US\$102.3bn.

The net profit between January and September was at 591bn rubles, down from 696bn rubles over the same period last year.

AFP

# ICAI to hold international seminar in Muscat

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) Muscat Chapter (under the sponsorship of the College of Banking and Financial Studies) will be holding a two-day international seminar at Crowne Plaza Muscat from Friday.

ICAI's 12th Annual International Seminar, entitled 'CA - Success through Synergy', will be presided over by H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation; and H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Zahran al Salti, Dean of the College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS); CA (Dr) Debashish Mitra, President of ICAI; and CA Aniket Sunil Talati, Vice President of ICAI will be the guests of honour, the group said in a press statement.

The two-day seminar will highlight the correlation between success and synergy as these two ingredients have the right potential to lead economies, societies and corporate entities towards sustainable and inclusive development.

In an informative discussion on 'Oman Vision 2040', the presence of Oman Cements



H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah will preside over the seminar along with H E Amit Narang

CFO Fatik al Balushi as the moderator will be a value-addition. The chosen panelists are Muneer al Mughairy, Chief Audit Officer, Ominvest; Abdul Razak al Bulushi, CFO, Ooredoo; Dr Rashid al Ghailani, CEO, Oman National Engineering and Investment Company SAOC; Jayaprakash Menon, CEO,

Mohsin Haider Darwish LLC (ITICS); and Mubeen Khan, former Chairman, ICAI Muscat Chapter.

Comprehensive presentations on various topics will be made by eminent speakers such as, CA (Dr) T P Anand, Chief Strategist, Leap Business Excellence Advisory FZE; CA Nihar

Jambusaria, former president of ICAI; Leen Kumar Sugumaran, Chief Risk Officer, Bank Dhofar; Dr Ashminder Singh Bahal, Dean-Centre of Excellence, ICAI; CA (Dr) K Rama Subramaniam, Cyber Criminologist, Information Security and Digital Forensic Consultant; CA Sangeeta Shankaran Sumesh, author and



H E Amit Narang



Dr Debashish Mitra



Dr Zahran al Salti



Aniket Sunil Talati

seminar that will equip participants to focus on sustainable economic development, the crucial role of sound accounting policies and practices in businesses, the prevailing trends in the domestic and global markets."

Established under the sponsorship of College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) in 2008, the prime objective of ICAI Muscat Chapter has been the development of accounting profession in Oman and sharing of knowledge and skills, and creating greater synergies.

Over the last two decades, the Chapter has achieved an outstanding track record in organising high-level discussions on various issues pertaining to business and economic development and the role of accounting practices in sound governance. It has been organising professional learning events such as seminars and conferences for all nationalities.

All events of ICAI Muscat Chapter are open to CEOs, CFOs, internal auditors, finance and accounts managers of various private and public sector organisations. The Muscat Chapter has won 'Best Chapter Award' in its applicable category from ICAI for several years.

## Mabela branch of Alizz Islamic Bank shifted to industrial area

Alizz Islamic Bank transferred operations from its branch near the Bin Rashid Markets in Mabela, to its new branch in Mabela's industrial area, said a press release. The new branch has already started providing its services to all customers, it added.

It is possible to access the location of the new branch through the road network, whether via the highway or through Sultan Qaboos Street.

One can access the Alizz Islamic Bank website to know all details related to the branch such as the phone number and working times, or can use Google Maps for the best route and direction, including the nearest landmarks to reach the branch.

Commenting on the transfer of operations from the Al-Maaballah branch to its new location in the industrial area, Mohammed al Ghassani, AGM, Head of Customer Consumer, said, "We chose a prime location for the branch to provide convenient services to customers. The selection of the location focused on the objective of bringing the bank's services closer to the largest number of customers.



"Several factors were taken into consideration while choosing the location of the branch, including proximity, ease of access, population density, and availability of services. The new branch of Alizz Islamic Bank in the industrial area includes many commercial services in order to facilitate real estate and car financing services and other financing products."

Ghassani informed that the bank is "proceeding according to the strategy we have set to add more branches in different governorates", while assuring that the bank "will continue to remain

committed to developing innovative ways to bring Islamic financing facilities even closer to each and every one of our loyal customers".

"Alizz Islamic Bank continues to extend its top-quality services and products to all customers, and the bank has been able to reformulate its banking services for institutions by reviewing its business strategy, which resulted in the growth of high quality banking facilities.

"During the past year, the bank introduced many new products including the Corporate Credit Card. It has also launched

new wholesale banking services related to financial advisory, investment banking business services, corporate transaction banking and other initiatives," he added.

The branch will remain open from Sunday to Thursday, from 8am to 2pm. The bank said it is witnessing a continuous growth, as its branches are currently distributed in CBD, Wattayah, Athaibah, Al-Khoudh, Mabela, Barka, Falaj Al-Qabayil, Sohar, Buraimi, Nizwa, Ibra, Salalah, and Suwaiq branch to offer an integrated set of sharia'a compliant banking products and services.

## Muscat Speedway to hold Rotax Max Challenge between Oman and UAE

Oman Automobile Association will be carrying out the Oman-UAE Rotax Max Challenge at Muscat Speedway this weekend, featuring local and UAE kart drivers.

Kart races are conducted as a practice for the drivers to see how they perform before they compete amongst international professional racers in the upcoming MENA Championship series.

The two-day event to be held from Friday has been divided into categories such as, Micro Max, Mini Max, Junior Max, Max, DD2, DD2 M, among which the 84 participating drivers will be distributed.

The Oman-UAE Rotax Max Challenge series has been taking place at OAA's Muscat Speedway Circuit in the last eight years. This year, with an

increase in registrations, the association is excited to see how far the drivers will go to challenge themselves and be amongst the best in an international scale.

The reception at OAA is open every day for inquiries and issuing international licences. Karting facilities at Muscat Speedway are open from 8am to 11pm, from Monday to Saturday.

## Kaldi 850 Coffee ushers in winter season with more flavours

Kaldi 850 Coffee in Oman is getting ready to welcome the winter season this year by offering three delicious drinks, namely, Marshmallow Mocha, Iced Marshmallow Mocha and Marshmallow Mocha Frappe.

Hot Marshmallow Mocha is the perfect winter drink, thanks to its unique taste of espresso with a rich chocolate flavour, topped with a layer of delicious cream and charming marshmallow pieces.



As for the Iced Marshmallow Mocha drink, it is distinguished by the rich coffee flavour mixed with chocolate and milk, topped with a layer of cream and marshmallows.

The Marshmallow Mocha Frappe drink is one of the favourite drinks in the winter season, for it having a mixture of roasted kaldi coffee and rich chocolate with a layer of cream of happiness and marshmallow pieces.

## OCS wins META Partner Excellence Award in Netapp Summit this year

Oman Computer Services LLC (OCS Infotech), a subsidiary of the Zubair Corporation specialised in the telecommunications and information technology sector, has won the 2022 Partner Excellence Award for the Middle East, Turkey and Africa (META) region by NetApp, a leading hybrid cloud data services and data management company.

NetApp recently organised a ceremony to honour its partners in the Middle East, Turkey and Africa region. OCS Infotech, the Sultanate's leading provider of digital solutions, won the award in recognition of the increased revenue and business growth it has achieved due to its commitment to its customers. Furthermore, it was recognised for introducing NetApp products to the Omani market and for its



outstanding service and performance.

Speaking on this achievement,

Qais bin Youssef al Bahrani, director of Sales of Technical Enterprise Solutions at

OCS, said, "It is a pleasure and an honour to receive the NetApp 2022 META Partner Excellence

Award. We aim to further strengthen our relationship with NetApp, a company that pro-

vides industry-leading solutions for hybrid cloud storage, encryption, and management.

"In addition to providing the best global solutions in the field of cloud data and other digital solutions to our public sector and private sector partners in the Sultanate, OCS Infotech is also committed to staying current with the most recent developments in an increasingly technologically advanced world."

Maya Zakhour, director Channel Sales - Eastern Europe, META, Iberia and Latin America for NetApp, congratulated OCS Infotech on winning the excellence reward this year. "It was presented to them in recognition of their outstanding performance over the past year, which has strengthened our relationship with our customers in the Sultanate. We have also had a

successful relationship with OCS Infotech for several years, which has contributed significantly towards the growth of our market share in Oman."

OCS Infotech was established in 1981. The company is considered to be one of the first Omani technology companies. It offers a wide range of IT solutions, including data storage, virtual network simulations, cybersecurity, and data centre and infrastructure management services.

In addition, it provides disaster recovery solutions for data infrastructure, maintenance services, after-sales technical support services, future technologies, and more. Moreover, customers have direct access to industry experts who provide integrated solutions ranging from consulting and planning to managing technology solutions.

# Germany busts far-right cell plotting to ‘overthrow state’

Frankfurt, Germany - German police staged nationwide raids on Wednesday and arrested 25 people suspected of belonging to a far-right ‘terror cell’ plotting to overthrow the government and attack parliament.

Around 3,000 officers including elite anti-terror units took part in the early morning raids and searched more than 130 properties, in what German media described as one of the country’s largest police actions ever against extremists.

The raids targeted alleged members of the ‘Citizens of the Reich’ (Reichsbuerger) movement suspected of ‘having made concrete preparations to violently force their way into the German parliament with a small armed group’, federal prosecutors said in a statement.

Those arrested are accused of having formed ‘a terrorist group by the end of November 2021 at the latest, which had set itself the goal of overcoming the existing state order in Germany and replacing it with their own kind of state’, they said.

Two of the 25 arrests were made abroad, in Austria and Italy.

The prosecutors in Karlsruhe said they had identified a further 27 people as suspected members or supporters of the terror network.

The Reichsbuerger movement includes neo-Nazis, conspiracy theorists and gun enthusiasts



German special police forces patrol and search the area in Bad Lobenstein, Thuringia, eastern Germany, on Wednesday, as part of nationwide raids against members of a far-right ‘terror group’ (AFP)

who reject the legitimacy of the modern German republic.

Long dismissed as malcontents and oddballs, the Reichsbuerger have become increasingly radicalised in recent years and are seen as a growing security threat.

Former soldiers are believed to be among the members of the recently established terror group, federal prosecutors said.

“The accused are united by a deep rejection of state institutions and the free, democratic basic order of the Federal Repub-

lic of Germany,” they said.

The suspects were aware that their plan ‘could only be realised by using military means and violence against state representatives’, they added.

Justice Minister Marco Buschmann praised the dismantling of the ‘suspected terror cell’ on Twitter, saying it showed that Germany was able to defend its democracy.

## Russian contacts

Reichsbuerger followers generally believe in the continued ex-

istence of the pre-war German Reich, or empire, as it stood under the Nazis, and several groups have declared their own states. They typically deny the authority of police and other state institutions.

According to prosecutors, the terror cell suspects believe in Reichsbuerger and QAnon conspiracy theories and are ‘strongly convinced’ that Germany is run by a ‘deep state’ that needs to be toppled.

They allegedly planned to appoint one of the arrested sus-

pects, Heinrich XIII P.R., as Germany’s new leader after the coup. He had already sought to make contact with Russian officials to discuss Germany’s ‘new state order’ after the coup, prosecutors said.

There was however ‘no indication that the contact persons responded positively to his request’.

A Russian woman named as Vitalia B, who was among those arrested on Wednesday, is suspected of having facilitated those contacts, prosecutors added.

As part of the preparations for the coup, members of the alleged terror cell acquired weapons, organised shooting practice and tried to recruit new followers, particularly among the military and police, according to prosecutors. Germany’s domestic intelligence service estimates that the Reichsbuerger scene consists of around 20,000 people.

Of those, more than 2,000 are deemed potentially violent.

Germany considers far-right terrorism the biggest threat to its security following a spate of attacks in recent years.

In April, police foiled a plot by a far-right group to kidnap the health minister.

The group was affiliated with the Reichsbuerger movement and the so-called ‘Querdenker’ (Lateral Thinkers) group that opposed the government’s coronavirus-related shutdowns.

AFP



Supporters of Georgia Republican Senate candidate Herschel Walker react to the election results in Atlanta on Tuesday (AFP)

# Democrats capture Senate seat in Georgia runoff poll

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden celebrated the strengthening of his party’s majority in the Senate on Tuesday after Democrat Raphael Warnock was declared the winner of a runoff election in Georgia.

The incumbent senator defeated Republican Herschel Walker, a former football star and protege of former president Donald Trump, according to projections by television networks.

Warnock’s win confirms the very slim Democratic majority - 51 to 49 - in the upper house of Congress. “Tonight Georgia voters stood up for our democracy, rejected Ultra MAGAism, and most importantly: sent a good man back to the Senate. Here’s to six more years,” Biden tweeted. The party’s electoral triumph does not change the balance of power in the Senate, of which Democrats had already secured control on November 8.

But the win by Warnock, a pastor at the Atlanta church where civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr once preached, hands Democrats greater control in committees and curbs the power of any individual Democratic senator to sink Biden initiatives.

“After a hard-fought campaign - or should I say campaigns - it is my honor to utter the four most powerful words ever spoken in a democracy: The people have spoken,” Warnock said in a victory speech.

“I often say that a vote is a kind of prayer for the world we desire for ourselves and for our children,” he told a packed Atlanta ballroom. “You have put in the hard

work and here we are standing together.”

The Republicans took back the House last month but with a much smaller majority than expected.

Warnock, 53, and Walker, 60, both African American, faced voters after neither earned more than 50 per cent in the November 8 midterm vote.

Democrats retained control of the Senate in that vote with 50 seats, Vice President Kamala Harris’s tie-breaking vote giving them the edge in the 100-seat chamber.

Warnock’s win significantly curbs the power of centrist Democratic Senator Joe Manchin, who has already blocked several major Biden initiatives in the first two years of the president’s term.

With 700 days to go before the 2024 presidential election, Republicans hope to stymie Biden’s momentum after his party performed much better than expected in November.

## Obama to the rescue

Determined to win the race, Democrats called on their top gun: charismatic former president Barack Obama, who campaigned alongside Warnock in Atlanta last week. And in yet another sign of how high the stakes were, US\$400mn was spent on the Georgia race to make it the most expensive campaign of the midterms.

Some 1.9mn people voted early, many of them likely Democratic voters, while Republicans were expected to turn out in force on Tuesday.

AFP

# Climate activists hurl paint at La Scala entrance

Milan, Italy - Environmental activists hurled paint at the entrance of Milan’s prestigious La Scala opera house on Wednesday, part of a series of recent protests across Europe to focus attention on climate change.

The early morning protest came ahead of the gala opening of the new season on Wednesday night, with a scheduled performance of ‘Boris Godunov’.

Five climate activists from the Last Generation group threw buckets of paint onto the facade of the building and inside the portico shortly after 7:30am (0630 GMT), according to an AFP photographer at



Environmental activist from the ‘Last Generation’ group smear with paint the facade of the La Scala theatre in Milan on Wednesday (AFP)

the scene. Two people unfurled banners reading ‘Last Generation - No Gas and No Carbon’.

“We decided to stain La Scala with paint to ask the politicians who will attend the

performance tonight to pull their heads out of the sand and intervene to save the population,” wrote Last Generation in a statement.

Police quickly arrived on the scene - where bright pink, electric blue and turquoise paint had splattered onto the sidewalk - and the activists were detained and taken away in police cars.

A team of cleaners from La Scala then began hosing off the building and the non-permanent paint appeared to have been entirely removed. Last Generation called on Italy to invest more in renewable energy

and reduce carbon emissions.

“In order to avert the misery of its own people and safeguard people, homes and businesses, which are at risk from increasingly frequent floods and heat waves, the government must act now,” it said, referring to last month’s landslide caused by torrential rains on the island of Ischia that killed 12 people.

Most recently, climate activists have targeted artworks inside museums throughout Europe in protests they say are designed not to damage the works but to focus attention on environmental disaster.

AFP

# NZ takes custody of sick baby from anti-vax parents

Wellington, New Zealand - A New Zealand court on Wednesday took temporary custody of a sick infant whose parents blocked life-saving heart surgery because potential blood donors may be vaccinated against COVID-19.

The Auckland High Court ordered six-month-old ‘Baby W’ to be placed under partial guardianship - allowing an urgent operation to correct a heart disorder known as pulmonary valve stenosis to go ahead.

The baby’s parents had blocked the procedure on the grounds that any blood transfused could have come from a donor jabbed with an mRNA vaccine.

“The overriding issue is whether the proposed treatment is in (the baby’s) best interests,” the court said in a statement.

The child is now under the medical ‘guardianship of the Court’ until ‘completion of his

surgery’ and recovery, by the end of January at the latest.

The parents will remain custodians ‘for all other purposes’, and will be ‘informed at all reasonable times of the nature and progress of Baby W’s condition and treatment’, the ruling stated.

The case has gripped New Zealand and underscored the potency of vaccine misinformation. Health New Zealand spokesperson Mike Shepherd said it was ‘a difficult situation for all involved’.

“The decision to make an application like this to the court is always made with the best interests of the child in mind.” The baby is being treated at Auckland’s Starship Children’s Hospital.

After the verdict, vocal anti-vaccine campaigner Liz Gunn told a small crowd of supporters to pressure Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to somehow reverse the decision.

AFP

# Argentina’s Kirchner sentenced to six years in jail

Buenos Aires, Argentina - An Argentine court on Tuesday sentenced Vice President Cristina Kirchner to six years in jail for corruption, banning the country’s best-known politician from seeking public office after a trial she dismissed as a political witch hunt.

Adored and reviled in equal measure by millions of Argentinians, the divisive former president was declared guilty of ‘fraudulent administration’ over irregular public works contracts awarded during her time as president between 2007 and 2015.

Kirchner wrote on social media that ‘none of the lies were proven’ and that she had been convicted by a ‘legal mafia’.

‘I won’t be a candidate for anything, not a senator, or a deputy or president of the nation’, in 2023 general elections, she wrote on social media after the ruling.

Analysts say it is unlikely that Kirchner will head to jail anytime soon, as she holds congressional immunity through her current role, and still has several avenues for appeal, but the ruling places a



A supporter of Argentina’s Vice-President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner kisses her image in a huge banner hung outside the Courthouse Comodoro Py in Buenos Aires on Tuesday (AFP)

giant question mark over her future. “The verdict will have a strong political impact,” said political analyst Rosendo Fraga of the University of Buenos Aires, although ‘the chances of her being arrested for the sentence are non-existent’.

Kirchner was charged alongside 12 others for alleged involvement in the illicit attribution of public works contracts in the

southern Santa Cruz province in favour of businessman Lazaro Baez.

The period investigated includes Kirchner’s eight years in office and the preceding four years when her late husband Nestor Kirchner, who died in 2010, was president.

The public prosecutor denounced what he called ‘a system of institutional corruption’

and ‘probably the largest corruption operation’ in the country, with ‘systematic irregularities in 51 calls for tenders’ over 12 years.

Eight of Kirchner’s co-accused were found guilty and sentenced to between three and six and a half years in jail. Three were released and another had their case dismissed as it had passed the statute of limitations.

## Uncertain future

Kirchner said the charges were a lie made up by her political enemies. “This court has been a true firing squad,” the veteran politician said during her final address to the court, accusing prosecutors of having ‘dedicated themselves to disrespecting and insulting me’.

As vice president, Kirchner is head of the country’s Senate and enjoys immunity as a lawmaker, something she would lose if she does not run again.

Fraga said potential appeals could take up to six years or more. All eyes will be on potential protests after the verdict.

When prosecutors announced they were seeking a 12-year jail term in late August, mass daily demonstrations took place outside Kirchner’s apartment building in the upmarket suburb of Recoleta. During one of these protests on September 1, a man shoved a revolver in her face and pulled the trigger - but the gun did not fire. Four people have been charged with involvement in the attack.

AFP

# UN biodiversity talks open, billed as ‘last chance’

Delegates from across the world gathered for the December 7-19 meeting

Montreal, Canada - High-stakes UN biodiversity talks open in Montreal on Wednesday, in what is being billed as the 'last best chance' to save the planet's species and ecosystems from irreversible human destruction.

Delegates from across the world gathered for the December 7-19 meeting to try to hammer out a new deal for nature: a 10-year framework aimed at saving the planet's forests, oceans and species before it's too late.

"With our bottomless appetite for unchecked and unequal economic growth, humanity has become a weapon

of mass extinction," UN chief Antonio Guterres warned on Tuesday at a ceremony ahead of talks. Before he took the dais, a group of around half a dozen Indigenous protesters interrupted a speech by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, in a sign of the passions inflamed by biodiversity loss among the most impacted communities.

The official opening of the meeting, known as COP15, follows several days of pre-negotiations that saw very little progress on key issues, sparking fears parties may walk away without a good deal.

Observers called for negotiators to urgently unblock sticking points on difficult items like finance and implementation, with only five out of more than 20 targets agreed so far. The summit 'is probably the last best chance for governments to turn things around for nature, and to rescue our precious life support system', Bernadette Fischler Hooper, head of international Advocacy



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres speaks during the opening ceremony of the UN Biodiversity Conference at Plenary Hall of the Palais des congres de Montreal in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, on Tuesday (AFP)

at WWF, told reporters on Tuesday.

**‘Significant resistance’**

Draft targets for the 10-year framework include a cornerstone pledge to protect 30 per cent of the world's land and seas by 2030, eliminating harmful fishing

and agriculture subsidies and tackling invasive species and reducing pesticides.

Finance is among the most divisive issues as developing nations are demanding increased funding for conservation. Earlier this year a coalition of nations called for wealthy countries to provide at least US\$100bn annu-

ally - rising to US\$700bn a year by 2030 - for biodiversity.

Some countries want to set up a separate funding mechanism for biodiversity, which wealthy nations have largely resisted.

The sticky issue of biopiracy is also causing roadblocks, as many mainly African countries demand that wealthy nations share

the benefits of ingredients and formulas used in cosmetics and medicines derived from the Global South. Implementation

*With our bottomless appetite for unchecked and unequal economic growth, humanity has become a weapon of mass extinction*

ANTONIO GUTERRES

has emerged as another sticking point in recent days, with disagreements over how to ensure any final deal is put into practice - unlike its predecessor agreed in 2010.

"There is significant resistance to having the robust monitoring and review mechanisms that we feel is necessary," said a

European source close to negotiations. The meeting, delayed two years because of the COVID pandemic, follows crucial climate change talks in Egypt last month that ended with little headway on reducing emissions and scaling down the use of planet-warming fossil fuels. China is chair, though it is being hosted in Canada because of Beijing's long-standing zero-COVID policy.

But China's President Xi Jinping will be a no-show along with all other world leaders apart from Canada's Trudeau - opting to visit oil-rich Saudi Arabia this week instead. NGOs say the lack of world leaders at COP15 risks dampening momentum at the talks and could scupper an ambitious settlement.

Elizabeth Mrema, the head of the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which oversees the talks, on Tuesday urged 'give and take' among negotiators, calling for 'flexibility, compromise and consensus.'

AFP

## Lebanon arrests of 'Israel spies' surge amid crisis

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon has arrested 185 people suspected of collaborating with enemy state Israel since its economic collapse three years ago left many Lebanese desperate for cash, two security sources told AFP on Wednesday.

That number has jumped significantly from a previous average of four or five arrests a year, one of the sources said.

"This is the first time that so many people have been arrested on charges of collaborating with Israel, and it's because of the crisis," said the other security source. Both were speaking on condition of anonymity. Lebanon has been battered by a severe financial and economic crisis since 2019 that has seen the national currency crash, led banks to freeze deposits and

plunged much of the population into dire poverty.

"This was a boon for the Israelis, who targeted Lebanese on social media with job advertisements for phoney companies," the second source said. A recruiter would then call the applicants, some of whom did not know they had been contacted by an Israeli spy agency.

Out of all those arrested since 2019, only three had been allegedly working with Israel prior to the crisis, one of the sources said. Of the 185, so far 165 had been prosecuted and 25 convicted and sentenced. Lebanon technically remains at war with Israel and forbids citizens from having any contact with Israel or travelling there.

AFP

## Afghan Taliban carry out public execution

Kabul, Afghanistan - An Afghan man convicted of murder was executed in public on Wednesday, the Taliban said, the first confirmation of such a sentence since the hardline Islamists returned to power.

Last month Taliban supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada ordered judges to fully enforce aspects of Islamic law that include public executions, stonings and floggings, and the amputation of limbs from thieves.

They have carried out several public floggings since then, but Wednesday's execution in Farah - capital of the western province of the same name - is the first the Taliban have acknowledged.

"The supreme court was instructed to implement this order of qisas in a public gathering of compatriots," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement, referring to the 'eye for an eye' justice in Islamic law.



Afghan youths walk along a roadside in Kabul on Wednesday (AFP)

The statement named the executed man as Tajmir, son of Ghulam Sarwar, and said he was a resident of Anjil district in

Herat province.

It said Tajmir had murdered a man, and stolen his motorcycle and cell phone.

"Later, this person was recognised by the heirs of the deceased," it said, adding he had admitted his guilt.

It was not made clear how the execution was carried out.

### Severe restrictions

The Taliban regularly carried out punishments in public during their first rule that ended in late 2001, including floggings and executions at the national stadium in Kabul which local Afghans were encouraged to attend.

The hardline Islamists had promised a softer rule this time round, but have introduced increasingly severe restrictions on the lives of Afghans.

Women in particular have been incrementally squeezed out of public life since the Taliban's return. Those in government roles have lost their jobs - or are being paid a pittance to stay at home - while women are also barred from travelling without a

male relative, and must cover up with a burqa or hijab when out of the home.

Schools for teenage girls have also been shuttered across most of the country for over a year.

Mujahid said the case for Wednesday's execution had been thoroughly examined by a series of courts before the supreme leader gave the order.

"This matter was examined very precisely," he said in the statement. "In the end, they gave an order to apply the Shariah law of retribution to the murderer."

Akhundzada, who has not been filmed or photographed in public since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, rules by decree from Kandahar, the movement's birthplace and spiritual heartland. The statement included the names of dozens of court officials as well as other Taliban representatives as being present for the execution.

AFP

# Suicide bombing kills Indonesian police officer, wounds 10

Bandung, Indonesia - A suspected Islamic militant suicide bomber killed a police officer and wounded 10 other people in an attack on a police station in the Indonesian city of Bandung on Wednesday, police said.

Police identified the attacker as 34-year-old Agus Sujatno, who was linked to the pro-Islamic State group Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and had already served four years in a maximum security prison for his involvement in a 2017 bombing.

"The fingerprint test and the facial recognition identified the perpetrator as Agus Sujatno, or Abu Muslim," national police chief Listyo Sigit told a press conference in Bandung, capital of West Java province.

He was released in September 2021 after serving his sentence for a previous bombing in Bandung, Sigit added.

Wednesday's blast occurred at about 8am at the Astana Anyar police office in Bandung.

"When our officers were doing the morning roll call, a man tried to enter the office forcibly and officers tried to stop him," said West Java police chief Suntuana, who like many Indonesians goes by one name.

"The perpetrator insisted on getting closer to our officers while wielding a knife and suddenly an explosion happened," he told reporters.

A witness who was near the police station said he heard a very loud explosion.



Police secure the site of a suicide bombing outside a police station at Astanaanyar in Bandung, West Java province, on Wednesday (AFP)

"I heard a bang, it was so loud. I took a peak inside the police office and I saw thick smoke bill-

owing," Didin Khaerudin, who runs a nearby kiosk, told AFP, adding police ordered shops to

close after the blast.

A second device was later found nearby and safely deto-

nated by the police bomb squad, Suntuana said.

A civilian passerby was among the injured, who were mostly hit by shattered glass and debris, he said.

Police said they had found paper messages attached to the blue motorbike ridden by the attacker.

The messages denounced the Indonesian criminal code as a product of 'infidels' and urged people to wage a war against law enforcers, police said.

Police also found a stack of papers at the scene rejecting a newly passed amendment to the criminal code.

Some Islamist extremists have called for the implementation of sharia law in Indonesia,

which officially recognises five religions in addition to Islam.

Members of JAD have staged other attacks, including a series of suicide bombings in May 2018 against several churches and a police headquarters in Surabaya, Indonesia's second-biggest city.

Those attacks, carried out by families including children, killed a dozen people.

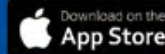
Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation, has long struggled with Islamist militancy.

The Indonesian resort island of Bali was the scene of Southeast Asia's worst militant attack when Al-Qaeda-linked militants detonated bombs at a bar and nightclub that killed more than 200 people in October 2002.

AFP

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## INDIA

# AAP sweeps BJP's citadel in MCD

New Delhi, India - The high-stakes battle for control over the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has ended with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) winning 134 of the total 250 wards in the national capital's civic body polls, uprooting 15-year rule by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

As the Delhi State Election Commission announced the final results today, AAP won 134 wards while BJP came second with 104 wards. Congress managed to get 9 wards while three wards were bagged by Independents. "Thanks to the people of Delhi for this grand victory and many congratulations to all. Now all of us together have to make Delhi clean and beautiful," tweeted AAP national convenor and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Taking to Twitter, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said, "Today, honesty and work defeated the world's biggest party which was ruling MCD for 15 years. The people of Delhi have given us a big responsibility to make Delhi clean and beautiful under the leadership of Arvind Kejriwal. Let us all work together to make Delhi the best city in the country."

"Heartfelt gratitude to the people of Delhi for trusting the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi MCD. By defeating the world's biggest and most negative party, the people of Delhi have made a



AAP workers celebrate MCD poll victory outside Gole Market counting centre, in New Delhi on Wednesday (ANI)

*Thanks to the people of Delhi for this grand victory and many congratulations to all. Now all of us together have to make Delhi clean and beautiful*

ARVIND KEJRIWAL

staunch honest and working Arvind Kejriwal win. For us, this is not just a victory, it is a big responsibility," added Sisodia.

Way earlier than the final results were declared, celebrations started at the Aam Aadmi

Party office in the national capital after the trends showed that the party is set to take over the MCD from the BJP.

The party workers gathered in front of the office and rejoiced, danced and chanted

slogans praising party chief Arvind Kejriwal.

In a fiercely fought battle, the BJP began the day by leading in the initial trends for nearly one and a half hour initially, however, the trends started shifting as the AAP gained the lead and maintained thereafter until the final results were declared. Both the parties held on to hope as the counting began at 8am, with the BJP claiming to win the elections for the fourth time, while the AAP exuded confidence in winning the elections.

"The BJP has got the answer today that the people of Delhi vote for those who work, and not for the ones who defame. The BJP fielded its MPs, Ministers, CBI and ED, but the people of Delhi still voted for the AAP. The people have given a befitting reply to the BJP for the allegations that it levelled against Kejriwal. We will make Delhi the most beautiful city in the world," Raghav Chadha said earlier.

The high-decibel battle which was fought in the election campaign ahead of the polling on December 4, witnessed the claims and counter-claims by both parties (BJP, AAP) of winning the elections, however, it all boiled down to December 7 when the outcome of the election was revealed.

The polls for 250 wards in the national capital were held on December 4 with about 50 per cent voter turnout and a total of 1,349 candidates were in the fray. However, the low voter turnout did not prove to be an indicator of pro-incumbency.

Congress, which is mostly focussing on the success of the Bharat Jodo Yatra, was not predicted (in the exit polls) to be a prominent challenger in the recently conducted polling.

However, the high-stakes civic polls are largely seen as a three-way contest between the BJP, the AAP and the Congress. ANI



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar speaking at Rajya Sabha on the first day of the Winter Session, in New Delhi on Wednesday (ANI)

## 'Attempts to change LAC won't be tolerated'

New Delhi, India - Delivering his remarks in the Parliament on the 'Latest Developments in India's Foreign Policy', External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar on Wednesday said that India won't tolerate China's attempts to unilaterally change the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Jaishankar warned that if China continues to build forces in the border area, it will have serious impact and concerns on the relationship of both countries. "Diplomatically, we're clear with Chinese we won't tolerate attempts to unilaterally change LAC. If they continue to do that and build up forces which constitute serious concerns in border area then our relationship isn't normal and that abnormality is evident in last few years," he said during his address to Rajya Sabha.

Earlier when Jaishankar met the outgoing Chinese envoy to India Sun Weidong in October,

he emphasised that peace and tranquillity in the border areas are essential to maintaining bilateral ties. "Emphasised that the development of India-China relations is guided by the 3 Mutuals. Peace and tranquillity in the border areas are essential," Jaishankar tweeted.

"The normalisation of India-China relations is in the interest of both countries, of Asia and the world at large," he said in another tweet. Sun, who assumed office in July 2019, is leaving at a time when the two sides are trying to manage ties, following the 2020 border clash that has remained the dominant issue between the neighbours.

In his farewell remarks on Tuesday, the Chinese envoy stressed the need to resolve differences between India and China and uphold the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

ANI

## Nepal's ruling coalition loses majority in election

Kathmandu, Nepal - Nepal's ruling coalition has lost its majority in parliament, results from last month's election showed on Wednesday in a rebuke by voters to the Himalayan republic's ageing political elite.

The Nepali Congress of incumbent Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, 76, emerged as the largest party but his five-party ruling alliance fell

short of a majority with 136 seats in the 275-member parliament, according to the Election Commission.

"Our party has emerged as the largest party. Still, it's not the result in line with our expectation. We had expected more," Prakash Sharan Mahat, a spokesperson for the Nepali Congress, told AFP on Wednesday. AFP

## Smog-hit Pakistan city cuts school days to protect pupils

Lahore, Pakistan - Pakistan's smog-hit Lahore will close schools for two days a week to protect children's health, with the city on Wednesday clocking in as the world's most polluted according to a global air quality index.

Hospitals have warned of an influx of patients suffering from breathing problems as well as eye and throat irritation as a result of the grey blanket of smog that engulfs the city. Air quality in the city of more than 11mn is consistently among the world's worst, and on Wednesday its



Commuters make their way amid heavy smog conditions in Lahore (AFP)

pollutant levels topped a regularly updated global index run by the Swiss monitoring platform IQAir.

Pollution on Wednesday hit a level of more than 230 on IQAir's scale - approaching the hazardous level of 300 set by the

monitor. Last week Lahore recorded a level of 504, its highest this year. Lahore High Court on Tuesday ruled that schools must close on Fridays and Saturdays, as well as the usual Sunday break, until further notice.

A separate ruling on Wednesday said all public sector staff must work from home on Fridays and Saturdays. The head of the province's teachers' association warned cutting school days was 'not a viable solution'.

"Staying at home is not necessarily going to protect students from the smog any more than

coming to school. At least by coming to school the students will not be affected academically," Rana Liaquat Ali, the secretary general of the Punjab Teachers Union, told AFP.

"Smog, COVID-19 and dengue are all now part of our daily reality. We need to learn to live with them and not isolate ourselves."

Despite court orders over the years instructing officials to come down hard on those responsible for the emissions, Pakistan's authorities are ill-equipped to deal with the mammoth problem. AFP

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# take a break

## IN TOWN

### ITALIAN CUISINE WEEK



The Embassy of Italy in Muscat celebrated the seventh edition of 'Italian Cuisine Week' to highlight the importance of having a healthy lifestyle. Photos - V K Shafeer

### National Day of Romania



The Embassy of Romania hosted a reception to celebrate its National Day. Photos - V K Shafeer

### TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Professor Sprout is a character in which series of books?

- A. Winnie the Pooh
- B. Harry Potter
- C. The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo
- D. Pippi Longstocking

02. The letters "GI", when applied to dietary matters, stand for what?

- A. Glucose Intolerant
- B. Glycemic Index
- C. Genetically Imbalanced
- D. Grossly ignorant

03. Of the 29 letters in the Turkish alphabet, how many are vowels?

- A. 5
- B. 8
- C. 6
- D. 7

Answers: 1.B 2.B 3.B

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

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

BOGGLER

|   |   |    |   |
|---|---|----|---|
| F | T | H  | M |
| G | E | Qu | M |
| E | A | D  | E |
| U | S | I  | A |

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

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

### YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



**ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Where is your pioneering spirit? Today, send out a mental search party to locate it, because you'll need it! An unexpected opportunity might intimidate those folks who like things cushy and predictable (and boring). But for you, this could be just what you need to move past something in your life that has seemed rather stale.



**TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Many forces are pushing you to go at a faster pace than might be wise for you right now. Instead of pushing back and fighting these forces, step aside and let them zoom right by you. There's no reason for you to join the rat race right now. Bow out of other people's high-pressure plans with a good explanation, and be forthright about what you are and aren't willing to do.



**GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

You own your future, so you can't let anyone influence your hopes and wishes or tell you that what you want won't ever happen. This is a time to marshal your inner strength and stand firm for what you want. An excess of energy could cause you to fly off the handle once or twice today, but no one will be offended by your passion.



**CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

You have a few buttons that when pushed cause you to react dramatically, and someone has a finger poised right above one of them today. They might not actually press this hot button, but if it is pushed, try not to react emotionally. This person is counting on that sort of reaction and is trying to psych you out, to doubt yourself.



**LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Learning life's hard lessons isn't usually a whole lot of fun, but today you can expect to really enjoy learning some new things about your life, mostly because these lessons will take the shape of unexpected good news coming your way. No matter how old you get, each day has the opportunity to teach you many new strategies.



**VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A fun, high-spirited conversation you have today could turn into a fiery disagreement if you aren't careful. There is a fine line between debating and arguing, and you will have to be the one who keeps this talk on the right side of that line. The person you're talking to may not be thinking clearly or calmly, and may in fact be itching for a fight.



**LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Whether you're happily single or contentedly coupled, a relationship-obsessed friend will be getting on your last nerve today. It seems that this person bases all of his or her self-respect on having a significant other. Fight your frustration -- your words of encouragement will be helpful. Talk about the advantages of the single life -- and make things clear.



**SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Many of your recent conflicts have been caused by obscure factors, and the conversations you've been having are not bringing clarity. This could end up being a very frustrating day for you if you try too hard to figure out what's going on. Today, just avoid conflict altogether, and don't waste your time trying to get to the bottom of any mysteries.



**SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your inner comedian is in top form today, letting you have fun and create fun wherever you go. Reach out to new people with a joke or two, and you'll be surprised by how effective your sense of humor is at breaking the ice. You have an especially strong ability to connect with children right now.



**CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

After a busy period of many new beginnings, you're faced with a lot of endings in your life. You are dealing with the loss of someone close to you. This person is headed for a better future, so don't worry about what they're going through. Transitions like this are difficult, but you're fortunate to have people in your life you can really count on.



**AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Suddenly, the avant-garde ideas and expressions that you used to roll your eyes at are making sense. This is a sign that you're expanding your intellectual horizons and getting more comfortable with things that are different from what you're used to. Keep expanding your comfort zone today, and stop when things are no longer interesting. Visit an art gallery, explore a new activity like yoga.



**PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Your mind might be in a bit of a haze, but your heart is finally starting to find some much-needed clarity about a confusing situation. Hidden details about someone's past behavior are coming to light, and you will suddenly see a totally different person standing in front of you. Don't turn your back on them just yet. Today, just let this new information sink in. Sleep on it. Everything will be much clearer by tomorrow.

entertainment





**HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW:**  
**AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER**  
**Genre:** Adventure, fantasy  
**Starring:** Zoe Saldanha, Sam Worthington, Kate Winslet



### THREE HOURS OF THRILL

While some lapped up the three hours of thrill and begged for more (Avatar 3?), others have found *Avatar: The Way of Water* to be a never-ending visual spectacle with a more complex plot than the first.

Director James Cameron has been vocal that he needed technology to catch up to his vision for the sequel and is keeping his fingers crossed that the movie descends well with audiences worldwide, while writer Jesse Hawken quipped that the sequel bears just a passing resemblance to the original.

Thought the treatment and 3D effects is far superior in the sequel, the storyline is rather flimsy despite the fact that there are too many characters. Nevertheless, Cameron pulls it together for an extraordinary final act full of emotion and thrilling action.

The story revolves around Jake Sully who lives with his newfound family formed on the planet of Pandora. Once a familiar threat returns to finish what was previously started, Jake must work with Neytiri and the army of the Na'vi race to protect their planet.

Even before this movie was screened for press, it earned a rave first reaction from none other than Guillermo del Toro. The Oscar winner wrote on Twitter that the Avatar sequel is 'a staggering achievement,' adding, 'It's a chock-full of majestic vistas and emotions at an epic, epic scale. A master at the peak of his power. December 16 will unveil its expected fate. A must watch!'

Rating ★★★★★

**COMING SOON**



**PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH**  
Puss in Boots discovers that his passion for adventure has taken its toll: he has burned through eight of his nine lives. Puss sets out on an epic journey to find the mythical Last Wish and restore his nine lives.

**Genre:** Animation  
**Starring:** Salma Hayek, Florence Pugh, Olivia Colman  
**Language:** English

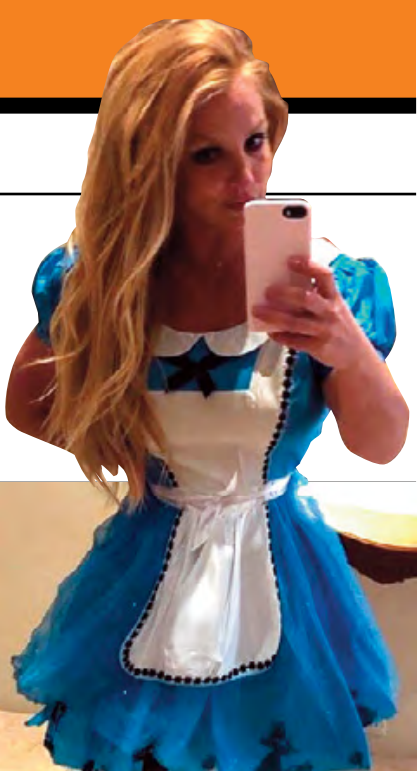
## 'AVATAR 2' GETS WORLD PREMIERE IN LONDON

One of the most delayed sequels in blockbuster history finally hit the big screen on Tuesday as *Avatar: The Way of Water* got its much-anticipated world premiere in London. The 13-year wait for a follow-up to *Avatar*, the biggest-grossing film of all time, cannot come too soon for cinemas around the world still struggling from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The public will get to see James Cameron's three-hour opus next week, with the director hoping it will justify his dream of establishing a franchise on a par with *Star Wars* and the *Marvel* juggernaut. The legendary filmmaker admitted to having some nerves ahead of the premiere. "I've always been nervous every time before we put a movie out into the marketplace and this is a particularly fraught time because, after the pandemic, the market has contracted somewhat," he said. Seen here, US actress Zoe Saldanha poses on the red carpet upon arrival for the world premiere of the film.



### MICHAEL JACKSON'S 'THRILLER' REVOLUTION TURNS 40

Mixing rock, pop and R n B like never before, Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, 40 years old next week, became the most successful album of all time and defined a coming era with its audiovisual ambition. *Thriller* has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide since its release on November 30, 1982. It consecrated Jackson as the 'King of Pop' and remains a musical lodestone.



### BRITNEY ABANDONS INSTAGRAM AGAIN

Pop icon Britney Spears has left social media platform *Instagram* as she has decided that enough is enough, for now at least, and has deactivated her page shortly after sharing a number of gushing statements regarding family members.

The *Baby One More Time* singer confused her millions of fans earlier in the week with her public declaration of love for sister Jamie Lynn Spears, not long after labelling her 'scum', reports *The Mirror*.



### BRENDEN FRASER REFLECTS ON HIS 'COMEBACK'

Brenden Fraser, the 54-year-old actor, is in many ways an extremely familiar face to encounter. The action star of *The Mummy* and *George of the Jungle*, whose warm, earnest disposition has made him beloved, still, many years later, was little seen on the big screen for much of the last decade. He seems to bear some bruises from an up-and-down life.

In Darren Aronofsky's *The Whale*, however, Fraser gives a performance unlike any he's given before. It has been hailed as his comeback - a word he'd rather not choose.

### JENNA ORTEGA TROLLED FOR VIRAL DANCE DURING COVID

Jenna Ortega became an overnight sensation ever since the series 'Wednesday' released on Netflix. Be it the performances of the cast or the iconic storyline of *Wednesday Addams*, Tim Burton's directorial is crossing every bar. However, recently in an interview, Jenna revealed she was having Covid while shooting for the 'viral' *Goo Goo Muck* dance, and since then the actress and the producers are receiving massive backlashes from the audience. The *Goo Goo Muck* dance has been trending on social media pages for long.

This crime thriller is based on the 2021 Malayalam film of the same name, also serving as a sequel to the 2015 film *Drishyam*.

Shot in Goa, Mumbai and Hyderabad, the movie has been drawing full house screenings in some Indian cities while the turnout at screens in other countries, too, is encouraging.

The story takes over from a buried incident (no pun intended) that happened seven years ago. Vijay Salgaokar (AjayDevgn) and his family are now living contentedly in Pondolera, Goa, after he accomplished his dream of opening a movie theatre and still operates a cable company. He aspires to make a film of his own and is in frequent contact with screenwriter Murad Ali to develop the script. On the other hand, Vijay's elder daughter Anju suffers from PTSD after Sam's death.

Jealous of the family, many locals have resorted to spreading false



**BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: DRISHYAM - 2**  
**Genre:** Crime thriller  
**Starring:** Ajay Devgn, Tabu, Akshaye Khanna

## DIGGING UP OLD GRAVES



rumours about Anju being in a relationship with Sam, much to the distress of Nandini (Vijay's wife) who shares her agony with a neighbour Jenny who is shown to be habitually ill-treated by an alcoholic husband Shiv. Nandini spills

the beans to the couple unknowingly and invites more trouble by way of getting the case reopened at the behest of the former IG Meera (Tabu) whose son (Sam) had been murdered. The family is summoned once again for questioning which turns out to be torturous interrogation at the hands of Gaitonde, the merciless cop pursuing the case and much hated in the first film.

Tabu has less of a role in the sequel while the new IG Tarun Ahlawat (Akshaye Khanna) plays what he does best, as a probing intellectual cop - though there wasn't much of an exchange of wit or one-upmanship between him and Vijay in the interrogation cell.

The twist in the tale in favour of the protagonist isn't all that great but it does keep audiences somewhat gripped. Go watch!

Rating ★★★★★



FIFA WORLD CUP

# Qatar2022



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 08, 2022 | MUSCAT DAILY | 13

QUARTER FINAL-1  
FRIDAY DEC 09



**CROATIA**  
VS  
**BRAZIL**  
7 PM

QUARTER FINAL-2  
FRIDAY DEC 09



**NETHERLANDS**  
VS  
**ARGENTINA**  
11 PM

## QUARTER-FINALS

QUARTER FINAL-3  
SATURDAY DEC 10



**MOROCCO**  
VS  
**PORTUGAL**  
7 PM

QUARTER FINAL-4  
SATURDAY DEC 10



**ENGLAND**  
VS  
**FRANCE**  
11 PM

# PORTUGOAL!

## Goncalo Ramos bags hat-trick as Portugal crush Switzerland to reach World Cup quarter-finals

Doha, Qatar - Goncalo Ramos justified the shock decision to drop Cristiano Ronaldo by scoring a hat-trick on his full debut as Portugal demolished Switzerland 6-1 on Tuesday to power into the World Cup quarter-finals.

The 21-year-old Ramos, who started instead of Ronaldo, became the youngest player to strike three times in a World Cup knockout match since Pele in 1958.

Pepe, Raphael Guerreiro and Rafael Leao were also on target for a rampant Portugal, who booked a showdown with Morocco on Saturday for a place in the last four in Qatar.

"I think not even in my wildest dreams had I thought about being part of the starting XI for the knock-out phase," said Ramos, who only made his Portugal debut in a pre-tournament friendly last month.

Switzerland, who had been hop-

ing to reach a first quarter-final since hosting the 1954 World Cup, exited in the last 16 for the third time in a row.

"Defeat is painful. We are sad about how we played, about the result. We wanted to make our country happy but we didn't manage to

| ROUND OF 16 |                    |   |
|-------------|--------------------|---|
|             | <b>PORTUGAL</b>    | 6 |
|             | <b>SWITZERLAND</b> | 1 |

achieve that," said Switzerland coach Murat Yakin.

Ronaldo, 37 and now without a club after his departure from Manchester United, has hogged the headlines during the tournament while looking a shadow of his former self. The only man to score at five World Cups, Ronaldo was left

out by coach Fernando Santos against the Swiss following his angry response to being substituted in the last group game.

It was a bold call to omit a player with a record 118 international goals in favour of giving a first start to Ramos, the Benfica striker who had played just 33 minutes across three previous appearances.

But it took just 17 minutes for Ramos to reward Santos' faith, and to achieve something Ronaldo has never done - score in a World Cup knockout game.

Joao Felix clipped delicately into the feet of Ramos, who quickly swivelled past Fabian Schaer and rifled into the roof of the net past a stunned Yann Sommer.

After Pepe towered above the Swiss defence to powerfully head home a corner, Ramos turned in his second from close range six minutes into the second half.



Goncalo Ramos celebrates after scoring Portugal's first goal in their round-of-16 match against Switzerland on Tuesday

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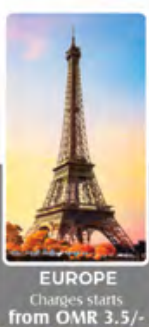
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Portugal coach Fernando Santos during a training session on Wednesday (AFP)

## Dropping Ronaldo purely strategic, says Santos

Doha, Qatar - Portugal coach Fernando Santos said his decision to leave Cristiano Ronaldo out of his team for Tuesday's 6-1 triumph over Switzerland in the World Cup last 16 had been "strategic and nothing more."

Santos had expressed his unhappiness with Ronaldo's reaction to being suspended in the final group stage game against South Korea but he said that matter had no impact.

"I said that it was closed and it was closed. Cristiano Ronaldo is one of the best players in the world playing professionally and as a captain ... so we have to just think about this team collectively," he said.

Asked whether it was the most difficult decision of his career to leave out Ronaldo, Santos said: "I have a very close relationship I always have, known him since he was 19 at Sporting, and then for years here in the national squad," he said.

"Ronaldo and I never confuse the human and personal aspect with the coach and player relationship. He is a very important player to have in the team," he said.

Santos said he expected a "very difficult" game against Morocco in the quarter-finals but said his team were clearly in good form.

"If we can continue like this and improve some things then that is a good path," he added.

## Ronaldo a bystander as Portugal find magic touch at World Cup

Doha, Qatar - Cristiano Ronaldo first found himself unloved and unwanted by Manchester United. Now the unthinkable has happened - he has been dumped by Portugal.

The superstar forward was largely a spectator as the side he has captained for so long threw off the shackles and romped to a 6-1 victory over Switzerland in the World Cup last-16 on Tuesday.

Young striker Goncalo Ramos, brought in for Ronaldo, scored a stunning hat-trick and at least competed with his illustrious teammate for the headlines.

Ronaldo came to the World Cup seeking respite after his troubled spell at Old Trafford where he had become a peripheral figure under new manager Erik ten Hag.

Those frustrations boiled over last month in an explosive TV interview in which he lashed out at the club and the coach, leading to an inevitable parting of the ways.

The 37-year-old landed in Qatar to the usual fanfare, once again the focus of fawning attention from the world's media.

Things even went to script in Portugal's first game, when he scored the opener from the penalty spot in a 3-2 win against Ghana,



Cristiano Ronaldo comes on as a substitute against Switzerland on Tuesday

becoming the first man to score goals at five World Cups.

But things went downhill from there. He huffed and puffed through games against Uruguay and South Korea but failed to find the net and Portugal were less than the sum of their considerable parts.

Portugal coach Fernando Santos, who masterminded the side's triumph at Euro 2016, finally took

the decision to leave his star man out against the Swiss and was vindicated in spectacular fashion.

Portugal turned on the style, with Benfica's Ramos, 21, netting three times in a free-flowing attacking performance.

With the match long since won, chants of "Ronaldo" echoed around the cavernous Lusail Stadium in Doha and he was cheered

as he warmed up on the sidelines.

Santos gave the crowd what they wanted with about 15 minutes of normal time to go.

Ronaldo smashed a free-kick into the wall moments after coming on and minutes later had the ball in the net after a fine finish, but was well offside.

He even had to cede the lime-light to fellow substitute Rafael Leao, who scored a stunning goal in stoppage time to complete the rout - another glimpse of the enviable riches at Santos's disposal.

The coach, who has been in charge since 2014, insisted he had complete faith in all his forwards in the afterglow of the win, which sets up a quarter-final against Morocco.

"Andre (Silva) is a great player who plays further forward, Cristiano is more fixed - he stays in a more determined area towards the box," he said. "Goncalo (Ramos) has different characteristics.

"He is very dynamic and that is what he ended up showing us. It is nothing new -- he already came on in two matches but Andre also played in the last match.

"I have three players I fully trust. For each match I will use which player I see best for my strategy." AFP

FIFA WORLD CUP

# Qatar2022

## MOROCCO LET SPAIN HAVE THE BALL, END UP HAVING A BALL!

The plan was to let Spain have the possession, says Morocco coach Walid Regragui

Doha, Qatar - Morocco coach Walid Regragui said his plan was to let Spain have the ball after his side's dramatic penalty shootout win in their World Cup last-16 match on Tuesday.

Victory took the African side into the quarter-finals for the first time in their history, trumping their performance in 1986, when they reached the last 16.

Morocco won 3-0 on penalties following a 0-0 draw after extra-time at Education City Stadium in Qatar.

Spain dominated possession during the match but Morocco's staunch defence largely kept them at bay and limited clear-cut chances.

"We had agreed not to take possession - not out of fear," Regragui said. "We are humble enough to say that we are not yet France, Germany or England, to compete with them in terms of possession.

"Nobody managed to steal the ball from them, so I accepted not having the ball. I'm not a magician."

Regragui said the team worked for four days on their gameplan to reduce the impact of midfield trio Sergio Busquets, Pedri and Gavi.

"Having closed so many passing lines for 120 minutes, we knew we would have chances - we had two, three, four," he said.

"We did not know how to punish them. The gameplan was respected, we got to penalties, and then it's a lottery.

"But when you have such a (great) goalkeeper in goal, you know you have a better chance of succeeding."

Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou denied Carlos Soler and Sergio Busquets from the penalty spot, while Pablo Sarabia hit the post as

more extraordinary," said Regragui. "We've managed to create a family, and we feel that we have a people behind us.

"If you had told me before starting that we would face Croatia, Belgium and Spain without losing a match, I would have signed for it."

Regragui hailed his squad. "Big congratulations to the players, they did something extraordinary, in the frenzy of energy, in the desire not to let go of this match," he said.

AFP

| ROUND OF 16                                                                         |         |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-------|
|  | MOROCCO | 3 (0) |
|  | SPAIN   | 0 (0) |
| Morocco win on penalties                                                            |         |       |

Spain failed to score any of their three penalties.

Achraf Hakimi, born in Madrid, dinked in the Panenka penalty that won the shootout for Morocco, continuing their fairytale run in Qatar.

The North African side topped their group, beating Belgium and Canada, while drawing with Croatia.

They have only conceded one goal in their four matches.

"Since the start of the competition, we've been playing with a team that's not 100 percent, that's why it's even



Right now is a special moment for all Africa, for all the Arab countries, for all the Muslims around this world.

AZZEDINE OUNAH, MOROCCO

### WIN MAKES MOROCCO THE 'PRIDE' OF ARAB FANS

Doha, Qatar - Thousands of Moroccan fans descended on the streets of Doha to celebrate their country becoming the first Arab nation to reach the World Cup quarter-finals on Tuesday.

Despite some minor trouble outside the stadium, the victory over Spain became a celebration of "Arab pride" for supporters from across the region.

Walid Regragui's side won 3-0 in a penalty shootout after the match finished goalless following extra-time.

So many people packed Doha's central Souq Waqif market - a traditional gathering point for World Cup fans - that police sealed it off just before midnight, with thousands waiting in groups at different entrances.

Copying the celebration of Moroccan players inside Doha's Education City Stadium, many fans waved Palestinian flags, stepping up a political show of solidarity that has marked this World Cup.

"This is the first World Cup on

Arab territory and we are carrying the Arab flag in this tournament," said Yussuf Akram, who waved Moroccan and Palestinian emblems in the crowded Souq alleys.

Saudis, Qataris and Egyptians joined the celebrations, waving their countries' flags in the traditional market as police gathered around the edge.

"This is a matter of pride, we are all happy for Morocco," said Aysha Bedawi, who came from Cairo to watch World Cup matches.

"It does not matter which team reached this stage, as long as there is one Arab team there we still have hope."

Arab teams have previously reached the last 16 at a World Cup three times - Morocco (1986), Saudi Arabia (1994) and Algeria (2014).

The idea of playing high-flying Portugal in a quarter-final did not worry supporters who chanted "bring on Ronaldo" outside a TV studio set up in the Souq.

AFP

### MOMENT IN TIME



THE WINNING FEELING: A Morocco supporter waves her national flag on Champs Elysees in Paris to celebrate her team's victory against Spain on Tuesday

126

Eden Hazard, who made his Belgium debut in 2008 at the age of 17, went on to win 126 caps, scoring 33 goals. He also captained the Red Devils 56 times.



## Eden Hazard quits international football

Belgium star Eden Hazard announced his retirement from international football on Wednesday. The Real Madrid forward, 31, made the announcement on social media, saying “a page turns today”. “Thank you for your unparalleled support,” he posted on Instagram.



Morocco players celebrate with coach Walid Regragui after winning the round-of-16 match against Spain in penalties, at the Education City Stadium in Al Rayyan, west of Doha on Tuesday (AFP)



Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou saves a penalty from Spain's Sergio Busquets

## BOUNOU scripts the sweetest thing, says his heroics partly down to ‘luck’

Doha, Qatar - Morocco's Yassine Bounou put his World Cup penalty-saving heroics against Spain on Tuesday down to a mixture of luck and intuition.

The Sevilla stopper saved two of Spain's penalties in the 3-0 shootout triumph as his side reached the World Cup quarter-finals for the first time in their history. The match had finished goalless after extra-time.

“You know penalties, it's a little bit of intuition, a little bit of luck,” Bounou told beIN Sports.

“We won, that's the most important thing. Hats off to the whole team, they did the job, it was incredible.

“It's not easy to stay focused for 120 minutes, against a Spanish team that dominates the ball well, who has possession.

“When you live moments like this, sometimes it's hard to realise it. We will try to avoid the noise around us, stay focused on ourselves, on our job, our recovery.”

Morocco, the last African side and only remaining Arab team left in the tournament, will face Portugal or Switzerland in the quarter-finals in Qatar.

“I'm so happy for the team - they did a great job all through the game,” said Bounou. “We understood (how to play) the game from the start, so I'm so happy for this win.”

Morocco fans packed Education City Stadium and vastly outnumbered Spain supporters, creating an intimidating and impressive atmosphere.

Bounou was also grateful for the support from home.

“We felt the support of our fans in Morocco and elsewhere, and that gave us momentum in the stadium,” the goalkeeper told reporters.

“On behalf of all the players, I want to thank the fans who helped us in this task.

“I congratulate all the players and I offer this gift to all the Moroccan people.”

## HOW DO YOU STOP MBAPPE? ENGLAND WRESTLE WITH CONUNDRUM

Doha, Qatar - England manager Gareth Southgate is wrestling with the biggest dilemma of his reign as he tries to plot a way to stop the “sensational” Kylian Mbappe in Saturday's World Cup quarter-final.

Southgate's hopes of leading England to a third successive semi-final at major tournaments hinge on finding a solution to a problem that has proved impossible for any team to solve in Qatar.

Just how do you subdue a player with Mbappe's lethal combination of electric pace, balletic skill and clinical finishing?

Australia, Denmark and Poland failed to come up with an appropriate answer as Mbappe scored in his three starts on route to the quarter-finals.

Poland defender Matty Cash summed up the conundrum posed by Mbappe after the Paris Saint-Germain forward's brilliant two goals in France's 3-1 last-16 victory on Sunday.

“I didn't know whether to drop off or go tight,” Cash said. “When I went tight he just spun in behind. When he gets the ball, stops and moves, he's the quickest thing I've ever seen.

“He's a different level. Speed, movement, look at his finishing. He's got everything.”

Four years after playing a key role in France's World Cup triumph in Russia, Mbappe is the tournament's most feared player.

The 23-year-old already has five goals in four games in Qatar, while his haul of nine career World Cup goals puts him level with Argentina's Lionel Messi and one ahead of Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo.

Now it is Southgate's turn to sit the daunting Mbappe exam.

*He's a different level. Speed, movement, look at his finishing. He's got everything.”*

MATTY CASH  
Poland defender

“Look, he is a world-class player who is always producing the moments when they are needed. That is what those top players do. That is the challenge we face,” Southgate said.

So what will Southgate do to combat Mbappe's threat?

One answer would be to switch England's 4-3-3 formation to a 3-4-3 or 3-5-2 system, which would allow Kyle Walker to move from right back to supplement the central defence.

Southgate's concern is to avoid a situation in which the pacy Mbappe and Ousmane Dembele can run at defender Harry Maguire and exploit his lack of speed.

Moving Walker would give Maguire help but it would also leave Southgate open to fresh claims he is a negative coach more concerned with stifling the opposition than letting his own stars express themselves.

Southgate was heavily criticised after his return to a 3-4-3 formation in the Euro 2020 final against Italy produced a tepid display that ended in a penalty shoot-out defeat.

Instead of changing his formation, Southgate may take inspiration from Walker's role in Manchester City's Champions League semi-final first-leg win over Mbappe's PSG last year.

City boss Pep Guardiola asked Walker to muzzle Mbappe from right-back and he responded with a disciplined display that kept the star from scoring.

“I can't think of another right-back in the world that I'd want to put up against him,” former England defender Gary Neville said of Walker's chances of subduing Mbappe. “Kyle will go closer to him, he has more pace than the Polish defenders.”

AFP

## Spain's exit on penalties cruel, says Busquets

Doha, Qatar - Sergio Busquets said Spain's 3-0 defeat on penalties by Morocco was a “cruel” way to decide the World Cup last-16 clash on Tuesday, after the teams drew 0-0.

The midfielder's spot-kick was saved by goalkeeper Yassine Bounou as the 2010 World Cup winners failed to score any of their penalties.

“It was a pity. It was decided on penalties in the most cruel way,” said Busquets.

“It was tough, very hard for us. We tried to wear them down, give them the run-around, find spaces. We lacked that little luck for the final ball.”

Spain were also knocked out of Euro 2020 on penalties in the semi-finals by Italy.

Busquets, 34, would not be immediately drawn on whether he would continue playing international football.

“Now the most important thing is the national team and not me. It's a tough night and we have to pick ourselves up and use this as experience for our game. There are some very young players who this will help a lot.”

Spain goalkeeper Unai Simon was the hero in Euro 2020 against Switzerland in a quarter-final shoot-out but on this occasion he could only stop one of Morocco's efforts.



Spain coach Luis Enrique (R) and Morocco's Hakim Ziyech shake hands during their round-of-16 match on Tuesday

## I'd stay Spain coach all my life, but I must think: Luis Enrique

Doha, Qatar - Luis Enrique wants to stay on as Spain coach but said his future was not yet decided after Morocco knocked La Roja out in the World Cup last 16 on Tuesday.

The manager, who led Spain to the Euro 2020 semi-finals, saw his side beaten 3-0 on penalties after a 0-0 draw with the North African side over 120 minutes.

“I can't say, because I don't know,” Luis Enrique told a press conference when asked about his future. “The national team has time. I am very happy with the Spanish FA, the president and with (the sporting director).

“If it was up to me I would stay all my life, but that is not the case.

“I have to think calmly what is the best for me and for the national team. All situations will have an influence.”

The coach was first appointed in 2018 after Spain were eliminated in the last 16 of the Russia World Cup by the hosts.

He stepped away for a short period in 2019 because his late daughter had been diagnosed with bone cancer, before returning and guiding Spain to a strong finish at the Euros last year, where Italy beat them on penalties.

Luis Enrique's side missed all three spot-kicks against Morocco, with Pablo Sarabia hitting the post, while Yassine Bounou saved Carlos Soler and Sergio Busquets's efforts.

“I chose the takers, I thought they were the best on the pitch,” said Luis Enrique.

“I chose the first three and I would do it again. (If I could change something) I would take Bounou away and put another goalkeeper there. “(Penalties) are not a lottery for me. You have to control yourself, to know how to control it. I would choose the same players again.”

AFP



INDIA-BANGLADESH ONE-DAY SERIES

MEHIDY MAKES MERRY, AGAIN

Allrounder's unbeaten century helps Bangladesh beat India in second ODI and win series

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Mehidy Hasan Miraz hit his maiden one-day international century and took two key wickets as Bangladesh prevailed in a five-run win over India that clinched the series on Wednesday.

The all-rounder made an unbeaten 100 and put on 148 runs

India skipper Rohit Sharma batted at number nine with an injured thumb and hit an unbeaten 51 off 28 balls to give Bangladesh a scare as India ended on 266-9 in 50 overs

for the seventh wicket alongside Mahmudullah Riyad to pull Bangladesh out from a precarious 69-6 and post 271-7 in Dhaka.

India skipper Rohit Sharma batted at number nine with an injured thumb and hit an unbeaten 51 off 28 balls to give Bangladesh a scare as India ended on 266-9 in 50 overs.

Bangladesh, who took an unassailable 2-0 lead with the final match on Saturday, won their second successive series against India after they got past them in their previous meeting at home in 2015.

Rohit, who hit five sixes in his



Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan Miraz plays a shot during his unbeaten century in the second ODI against India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka on Wednesday (AFP)

blitz and needed a six to win on the final ball when Mustafizur Rahman held his nerve, had gone for scans after he took a hit while attempting a catch at slip in Bangladesh's innings.

Mehidy, who opened the bowling with his off spin, returned figures of 2-46 as he struck with the wickets of KL Rahul, out lbw

for 14, and Shreyas Iyer, who top-scored with 82.

Fast bowler Ebadot Hossain stood out with three wickets including Virat Kohli bowled for five and later cut short the left-handed Axar Patel's knock on 56.

But Mehidy and former captain Mahmudullah set up victory with the highest seventh-wicket

stand against India by any team in 50-over matches as thwarted an inspired bowling attack.

India's Mohammed Siraj led the attack after he removed the openers and fellow quick Umran Malik, who also took two, soon joined forces to push Bangladesh onto the backfoot.

Mystery spinner Washington

Sundar struck three times in seven deliveries including the key wickets of Shakib Al Hasan (eight) and Mushfiqur Rahim (12).

Mehidy, who starred in his team's opening win by one wicket, hit back and reached his third ODI fifty and soon after Mahmudullah got his 27th half-

century. The duo then shifted gears with regular boundaries.

Umran, a tearaway quick, finally got Mahmudullah caught behind but Mehidy kept up the charge to reach his hundred on the final ball of the innings in an unbeaten stand of 54 with Nasum Ahmed, who made 18.

AFP

India captain Rohit out of final ODI with thumb injury

Dhaka, Bangladesh - India skipper Rohit Sharma will fly back home to seek medical advice for his thumb injury and will miss the final one-day international against Bangladesh, coach Rahul Dravid said Wednesday.

Rohit batted at number nine with stitches in the hand and hit a valiant 51 not out in his team's five-run loss to Bangladesh, who took an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series, in Dhaka.

The captain adds to India's growing injury list with Kuldeep Sen, who missed the match due to stiffness in his back, and fellow quick Deepak Chahar, who bowled just three overs due to a hamstring strain, also ruled out of the series.

"Struggling with a few injuries, which is not ideal, not easy for us," Dravid told reporters after the loss.

"Kuldeep and Deepak are out of the series. Rohit will miss the next game, fly back to Mumbai consult with an expert and see how it is and whether he could come back for the Test matches or not, I am not sure. Too early to say."

AFP

Battered Pakistan seek livelier pitch in the second Test against England in Multan

Multan, Pakistan - Pakistan hope to get more life from the pitch when they take on England in the second Test in Multan starting Friday.

England took full advantage of winning the toss - and their batting depth - to win the first Test by 74 runs Monday on a dead Rawalpindi wicket that offered nothing to the bowlers.

Multan, however, despite not hosting a Test match for 16 years, could provide more spin if recent domestic matches are anything to go by.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam, who scored a century in Pakistan's first innings in Rawalpindi, said he wanted something livelier.

"We wanted a spin pitch (in Rawalpindi)," he told reporters.

"I gave my input ... but unfortunately it was not what we planned."

Rawalpindi yielded 1,768 runs in four innings - the third most in Test history - with seven individ-



Pakistan captain Babar Azam plays a defensive shot in the first Test in Rawalpindi (AFP)

ual centuries and five 50s.

But Multan helped spinners in the last first class match played there, with former Test spinner Yasir Shah taking five wickets in each innings.

Still, leg-spinner Zahid Mahmood - who conceded a whopping 319 runs for his six wickets in the first test - may get the axe from the Pakistan selectors.

Mohammad Nawaz and the

uncapped Abrar Ahmed are vying for his spot.

Fast bowler Hasan Ali will likely fill in for the injured Haris Rauf, himself a replacement for world-class pacer Shaheen Shah

Afridi, who is out of the series.

England will also make an injury change, with wicketkeeper-batter Ben Foakes likely coming in for Liam Livingstone, who is heading home for treatment on his knee. Regardless of the Multan surface, England skipper Ben Stokes has promised no end to "Bazball", the brand of aggressive cricket coined from the nickname of head coach Brendon McCullum.

"We're going to play to win every game," he said after Monday's win - the seventh in eight Tests since the McCullum-Stokes partnership took over in May.

"It's not always going to work, but if you're brave enough and willing enough to go out and play in that way, if you lose a game, it's still going to be entertaining."

The weather could also be a factor. Provincial authorities have issued a fog alert for the next few days, which could eat into playing time.

AFP



Australia's David Warner (R) speaks with assistant coach Michael Di Venuto during a practice session at the Adelaide Oval on Wednesday

Angry Warner abandons bid to overturn Australia leadership ban

Adelaide, Australia - David Warner withdrew a bid to overturn his lifetime Australian leadership ban Wednesday, claiming an independent review panel wanted to "conduct a public lynching" and it would be traumatic for his family.

The dynamic opener and former Test vice-captain was banned from any leadership role over his part in the Cape Town ball tampering affair in 2018.

He was also slapped with a one-year playing suspension, but bounced back to reclaim his place in the national side across all three formats of the game.

Last month, Cricket Australia amended its player code of conduct policy which paved the way for him to request a review of the captaincy ban before an independent panel of three code of conduct commissioners.

But he has seemingly now shut the door with a scathing, and lengthy, statement claiming

the panel had made "offensive and unhelpful" comments about him and wanted "a public trial of me and what occurred during the Third Test at Newlands" in 2018.

"They want to conduct a public spectacle to, in the panel's words, have a 'cleansing'. I am not prepared for my family to be the washing machine for cricket's dirty laundry," he wrote on the eve of the second Test against the West Indies in Adelaide.

He added that it appeared the panel "has given no more than passing consideration to issues of player welfare and the interests of Australian cricket and is instead determined to conduct a public lynching".

"Regrettably, I have no practical alternative at this point in time but to withdraw my application."

Cricket Australia said it respected Warner's decision and had backed his desire for a closed door hearing.

Research finds modern football pulling at hamstrings

London, United Kingdom - The number of hamstring injuries suffered by male professional footballers has doubled in Europe over the last 21 years, a study published on Wednesday has found.

The research at Linkoping University in Sweden, funded by European governing body UEFA and published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, found that the number of matches professional players miss with hamstring problems has also doubled.

Nearly 20 per cent of the

hamstring injuries are recurrences; of which more than two-thirds occur within two months of a player returning to play.

The study collected data from medical teams who reported 2,636 hamstring injuries over 21 seasons. It found that the risk was 10 times higher in games than in training.

Of the total of injuries, and 1,714 (or 66 per cent) occurred in 343,738 hours of match play hours and 922 (34 per cent) in 1,787,823 hours of training.

Hamstring injuries caused an average lay-off of 13 days.



Ben Chillwell lies on the pitch after injuring his hamstring

Over the 21 years, more and more of the injuries suffered by players were to the hamstring. In the first year, they were 12 per cent of all injuries but rose to 24 per cent by the last.

Over the same period, days lost to hamstring injuries doubled from 10 per cent to 20 per cent.

A 25-player squad can expect about eight hamstring in-

juries every season.

The researchers said they did not set out to find causes but suggested that a more physical play, demanding tactics and a crowded fixtures calendar may be to blame.

"The intensity of elite men's football has increased," the researchers told the British Journal of Sports Medicine.

"Professional players now undertake more high-intensity activities per match than they did previously and they also run faster than their predecessors."

AFP



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