

His Majesty issues Royal Decree

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 7/2023 on Monday ratifying the sultanate's joining of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia.

The treaty was first signed in Denpasar, Bali on February 24, 1976, amended in Manila on December 15, 1987, and then again in Manila on July 25, 1998, and in Vietnam on July 23, 2010.

Article 1 ratifies Oman's joining of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and its aforesaid amendment protocols in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article 2 instructs the departments concerned to deposit the document of Oman joining the above-mentioned convention in accordance with its provisions.

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

MANY-HUED ATTRACTIONS OF MUSCAT NIGHTS



A glimpse of one of the main attractions of the ongoing Muscat Nights at Qurum Park. Lakeside activities have been a hit with visitors of all ages (Full report on Page 02)

1,500m zip line in Musandam completed

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A zip line project in Khasab, Musandam, has been completed, according to Mohammed al Busaidi, Chairman of Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group).

It is Oman's longest zip line and one of the most significant adventure-related activities in Musandam aiming to attract and stimulate tourism.

Starting at a height of 220m atop Jabal Fitt, it spans a distance of 1,500m, and is a key element of the Adventure Centre project coming up in the governorate.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Busaidi said, "The zip line is ready. We are just awaiting completion of necessary security and safety tests for the project."

Work on the project started in 2022 with contractors ensuring that all components were built and installed in accordance with international safety standards and procedures, including an advanced braking system, and helmets, safety harnesses and jackets for riders.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) is currently overseeing a host of other tourism and development projects in Musandam.

A visitor centre is in the plans at the archaeological site of Dibba with funding from OQ company. The project will also include a museum.

There are proposals to establish sites for environmental camps in several areas of the governorate, including Najd, Shamm, Al Hablain, Ghab Ali and Sahah.

According to MHT, Musandam attracted 200,000 tourists annually before the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of visitors to Musandam's castles crossed 50,000 annually, while the number of cruise passengers was 129,453 in 2019. Since a Royal Directive issued in 2021

to make Musandam an attractive tourism and investment destination, there has been a push to develop the governorate further.

Following the directive, the Council of Ministers issued a set of decisions to set up a branch of University of Technology and Applied Sciences, establish a reservoir to achieve security in food and medicinal drug stocks, convert the Port of Khasab into a logistics hub, set up specialised economic and tourism zones, and declare Mahas an economic zone with the objective of establishing light and medium industries.

Oman signs ten-year gas supply deal with Turkey

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman LNG has signed a long-term agreement with Turkey's BOTAS Petroleum Pipeline Corporation to supply 1mn metric tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) every year for ten years.

As per the binding term-sheet agreement signed with BOTAS, Oman LNG will start supplying gas to Turkey in 2025.

The agreement helps strengthen its partnerships with international firms in the energy and LNG industry, Oman LNG said in a press statement issued on Monday.

The agreement was signed by Hamed al Naamany, CEO of Oman LNG, and Burhan Ozcan, chairman of BOTAS, in Muscat in the presence of H E Salim al Auli, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Speaking after the signing ceremony, Naamany said, "Signing this term-sheet agreement with BOTAS supports our efforts to



(Supplied photo)

further develop our position in the global energy and LNG industry and explore new markets with key industry partners. This step complements our commitment to add value to the local economy through growth and collaborations with international partners such as BOTAS."

Quoting Turkey's Energy and Natural Resources Minister Fatih Donmez, Turkey's official Anadolu Agency on Monday reported that the country will receive 1.4bn m3 of gas from

Signing this agreement supports our efforts to further develop our position in the global energy and LNG industry

HAMED AL NAAMANY

Oman annually under the new ten-year contract.

"The new gas purchase agree-

ment with Oman also includes an opportunity to be extended further if needed," Donmez said in his opening speech at the Summit of Century of Turkey in Energy organised for the first time in Istanbul.

"At a time when the world, especially Europe, is suffering from gas supply problems, Turkey is taking all steps to become a gas trade centre," he added.

Recently, several international energy firms signed long-term agreements with Oman LNG to

import LNG from the sultanate.

On January 18, 2023, Oman LNG signed two binding term-sheet agreements with Thailand's PTT Global LNG and French energy giant TotalEnergies to supply a total of 1.6mn metric tonnes of LNG annually starting 2025.

These agreements will see Oman LNG supplying PTT Global LNG with a total volume of 0.8mn metric tonnes of LNG per annum for a nine-year period, starting 2026, and 0.8mn metric tonnes per annum to TotalEnergies for a total duration of ten years starting from 2025.

On December 27, 2022, three Japanese companies signed long-term agreements with Oman LNG to import 2.35mn tonnes of LNG annually from the sultanate. The agreements with Oman LNG were signed by Japan's biggest power generation company JERA Co and trading firms Mitsui & Co and Itochu Corporation for the production and delivery of LNG starting from 2025.

Three years on, COVID-19 still global emergency: WHO

Geneva, Switzerland - Three years to the day after the World Health Organization sounded the highest level of global alert over COVID-19, it said on Monday the pandemic remains an international emergency.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus reached that conclusion following the recommendations of the United Nations health agency's emergency committee, which on Friday held its 14th meeting since the start of the crisis.

The WHO first declared a so-called public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) - its highest possible level of global alert - on January 30, 2020, over what was then called the novel coronavirus.

When it sounded the alarm, fewer than 100 cases and no deaths had been detected out-



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

side China.

Since then, more than 752mn confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported to the WHO, including more than 6.8mn deaths, though the true numbers are thought to be far higher.

Addressing the WHO's executive board in Geneva on Monday, Tedros acknowledged that "as we enter the fourth year of the pandemic, there is no doubt we are in a far better situation

now than we were a year ago, when the Omicron wave was at its peak".

But, he added, "since the beginning of December, weekly reported deaths have been rising".

"In the past eight weeks, more than 170,000 people have lost their lives to COVID-19."

Transition point

Weekly death rates had dropped from more than 70,000 per week at the start of 2022 to below 10,000 in October.

But these began swiftly rising again in early December, driven especially by a dramatic outbreak in China, after Beijing lifted its tight COVID restrictions.

In mid-January, almost 40,000 COVID-19 weekly deaths were reported - more than half of them in China.

AFF

21% increase in blood donations in 2022

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Collections at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher increased 21 per cent in 2022 compared to 2021.

Statistics released by the Blood Donation Services Department show that a majority (97 per cent) of the blood collected was through voluntary efforts, and 77 per cent of the donors were Omanis. Of the total donors, 49 per cent were first timers.

The blood bank collected 39,712 units of blood and 2,381 units of blood components in 2022.

Dr Zainab al Arimi, Director of Blood Bank Services, praised the role of the blood donors and the cooperation of various authorities

and donors with the Central Blood Bank. She added that the increase in the number of blood donations is due to community awareness of its importance, as well as media's role in conveying this humanitarian message.

Zainab informed that the daily demand for blood units and components is steadily rising. "The Central Blood Bank receives 140 to 160 blood units every day. The bank experienced a reduction in stocks of some blood groups and components due to fewer donations on certain days of 2022."

She stressed on the need to continue donating blood and blood components to maintain a safe stock of units in order to meet growing needs with the expansion of health services in Oman.

04

Value of awarded projects in GCC drops 18% in 2022

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Antony Blinken in Israel to calm flaring conflict

97% collection through voluntary efforts

Fairies enchant Muscat Nights visitors



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Now in its second week, more and more people are flocking to Muscat Nights to witness the wide variety of activities being held at the four venues, including Qurum Park. While visitors are excited about the games, cinema screenings and food courts, the lakeside activities at Qurum Park have been a big hit. An array of colourful presentations starts at the lake from

The lakeside drone shows and fairies are my daughter's favourite. It's the first time she has seen something like this and is very excited

ABDULLAH AL AMR

8pm, including fountains and drone shows. Drones light up the night sky with gigantic shapes of turtles, camels, ships and the Muscat Nights logo. The drones are choreographed to form shapes for a few scintillating moments before quickly changing colours and formation. The fountain shows are another spectacle in which water

jets through the air in various patterns with graceful movements, sometimes swaying and still in the next moment. The fountains are choreographed to opera music. Salim Khalfan, an Amerat resident who works as business head of a company, said, "I have seen the Dubai Mall fountain show. Though the one at Muscat Nights is much smaller, I loved

the various shapes it formed. The Dubai Mall fountain show is too loud at times." One of the best attractions of Muscat Nights takes place in the lake, where colourful fairies and princesses sail in small boats. The lakeside lights are dimmed as five artists dressed like fairies sail in boats of various shapes in scenes out of the Disney fantasy Blue Fairy. Speaking about the show, Abdullah al Amri, who visited with his daughter on Saturday evening, said, "The lakeside drone shows and fairies are my daughter's favourite. It's the first time she has seen something like this and is very excited."

Oman Bride Show from Feb 1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The countdown to the fourth edition of Oman Bride Show, being held under the umbrella of Muscat Nights, has begun. Starting on February 1 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, the three-day event is the leading annual wedding industry expo presented in Mus-

cat. It is a platform for wedding dress suppliers, product exporters and service providers. 'As part of its efforts to present a wide variety of activities, Muscat Municipality is hosting the Oman Bride Show as one of the most important specialised exhibitions included in the agenda of Muscat Nights activities,' the civic authority stated. A large number of fashion de-

signers from several countries are participating in the show this year, besides the most prominent Omani designers and entrepreneurs in the field. 'Around a hundred companies - local and international - will showcase their products, wedding dresses and haute couture in the show,' the municipality stated. 'The exhibition will provide a unique platform to all exhibitors in the

wedding industry.' According to its organisers East Expo, the aim is to bring the entire wedding industry together under one roof to promote new luxury products, trends and services to would-be-brides and visitors. The exhibition will be open to visitors from 11am to 10pm, while entry to fashion shows will be limited to those who have pre-booked tickets.



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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

More women representation needed in municipal councils

I am extremely disappointed with the Municipal Council Election results, as only one woman emerged victorious among 727 candidates, including 27 women. The election was to choose 126 representatives for municipal councils across the sultanate. The Omani community needs to learn from these election results. The third session of Municipal Council has begun and many challenges await the elected members. Unfortunately, only one woman won this year. If five or more female contestants had emerged victorious, there would surely have been more awareness about the democratic process in the community. Now, we will have to wait for four years for things to change and to ensure that more women contestants win the municipal council polls.

Sami Amer al Battashi
Via email

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First nationwide marathon to kick off in Nizwa

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The first nationwide marathon will kick off on Friday in Nizwa, Dakhliyah.

Organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MCSY), in partnership with Oman Broadband, SABCO Sports and Qatari Aspire Zone Foundation, the marathons will be held in all governorates of the sultanate, except Muscat, and include 10km, 6km and 2km races for all age groups.

Saud Ambusaidy, Assistant Director General of Sports Activities at MCSY, said, "This event aims to develop sports activities



(Supplied photo)

This event aims to develop sports activities in Oman and create a suitable environment for runners of all ages

SAUD AMBUSAIIDY

in Oman and create a suitable environment for runners of all ages. We expect the marathon to attract a large number of participants. Organisation of the marathon is in line with Oman

Vision 2040, which aims to build a healthy society and ensure 'Health is everyone's responsibility'."

Following Nizwa, the marathon will take place in Mudhaibi, North Sharqiyah on February 18, followed by Sohar, North Batinah on February 25, Buraimi on March 11 and Rustaq, South Batinah on March 18.

The marathon will continue in Salalah, Dhofar on August 5, Ibri, Dhahirah on October 21, Sur, South Sharqiyah on November 4 and Duqm, Al Wusta on November 17.

The last leg of the marathon will be held on December 30 in Khasab, Musandam.

Pact signed to support SMEs in e-commerce



(Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) and DHL Express signed a cooperation programme to support SMEs and craftsmen on Monday.

The agreement was signed by Abdulaziz bin Saeed al Raisi,

Vice-President of ASMED, and Moustafa Osman, General Manager of DHL Express Oman, at the authority's headquarters.

The agreement will enhance cooperation between the two sides to provide services, training programmes and business opportunities for SMEs, including procurement, contracts and tenders for SMEs registered with the

authority.

Under the agreement, a package of consultations and training programmes will be provided in the field of logistics and e-commerce. It will also help reduce freight rate inside and outside the sultanate by around 30 per cent, and provide storage space for SMEs and craftsmen.

150 researchers take part in Arab forum

Muscat - More than 150 female researchers are participating in the ninth session of the Arab Forum on Research and Sustainable Development, which began in Muscat on Monday.

Titled 'Arab female researchers in sustainable development', the two-day forum is being hosted by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Ministry of Education in conjunction with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO).

The forum seeks to enhance the contribution of institutions,



Dr Mohammed Sanad Abu Darwish

authorities, universities, research centres, researchers and innovators in Arab development affairs. It includes eight sessions in which 39 working papers will be presented.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in the presence of H E Dr Madiha Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education and Chairperson of the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science.

Amna Salim al Balushi, Secretary of Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, in a speech said that the forum is a fertile ground for assembling Arab experts, researchers, specialists, institutions

and companies alongside their regional and international counterparts.

Dr Mohammed Sanad Abu Darwish, Director of Science and Scholarly Research at ALECSO, commended the efforts made by Oman in serving education, science and culture, not only locally, but also in the Arab world and the world at large.

He stressed that the forum, launched by ALECSO in 2013, constitutes a mechanism of response to demands of upgrading the sectors of science and research in the Arab world.



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-17/2023	Expansion of South Mabeal Health Center at Muscat Governorate	16/February/2023	08/March/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The First Grade	R.O 27.500 Per set
MOH/HQ-22/2023	Consultancy Engineering Services (Design and Supervision) to Rehabilitate Al-Rustaq Hospital at South Al Batinah Governorate				R.O 25.000 Per set

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

85% of Wadi al Hawasna road damaged by cyclone complete

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) is working to repair roads in all governorates which were damaged during Cyclone Shaheen.

In a statement, MTCIT said, 'The ministry is continuing to repair roads damaged by climatic conditions, including the Wadi al Hawasna road in Khabourah, North Batinah. Eighty-five per cent of the project was complete at the end of December 2022.'

The project includes repair of 20 sites along the road, besides paving of 60km of the shoulder, nine wadi crossings and box culverts at five sites, the ministry stated.

'The project aims to provide



(Supplied photo)

a safe road network for motorists, and to ensure the sustainability of roads in all governorates. This is in addition to providing services compatible with urban and community development.'

The ministry's statistics indicate that the total length of

roads executed in 2019 was 929km - 514km of single carriage roads, 64km dual carriage roads and 351km graded roads.

According to the Global Competitive Index of the World Economic Forum, Oman's road network was ranked 14th in 2018 and tenth in 2019.



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*Rates as on January 30

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Ukraine grain harvest set to fall further this year

Ukraine's harvest of grains and oilseeds will see further declines this year as Russia's invasion drags on, an industry official warned, putting further pressure on global prices for essential foodstuffs.

Planting acreage will again shrink and the total harvest is forecast at 53mn tonnes for 2023 after 65mn tonnes last year, said Nikolay Gorbachov, president of the Ukrainian Grain Association.

Ukraine's farmers had produced a record 106mn tonnes in 2021, making it the world's fourth-largest exporter of corn and on track to be the third-largest exporter of wheat before Moscow launched its invasion one year ago.

"We are at war. We are still producing grain but the harvest will be down," Gorbachov told a Paris conference organised by Argus Media. The fighting has resulted in fuel shortages and the destruction of agriculture equipment and storage facilities, and a one-fourth reduction in planting acreage, according to the UGA.

Russian forces had also blocked grain exports from Ukraine's Black Sea ports, sparking a surge in prices that has especially hurt developing countries.

"For farmers it became unprofitable to produce the grain and that's why they cut the planted area," Gorbachov said.



Value of awarded projects in GCC drops 18% in 2022

Our Correspondent Muscat

Total value of awarded projects in the GCC countries declined by 18.7 per cent during 2022 to US\$93.6bn as compared to US\$115.2bn in awards during 2021, according to a new report.

'This was the lowest project awards since 2005, barring the pandemic induced decline in 2020. All GCC countries, barring Saudi Arabia, witnessed a year-on-year decline in their aggregate 2022 value of projects awarded,' Kuwait-based Kamco Investment said in its GCC Projects Market report released on Monday.

In addition, total value of project awards was above the US\$100bn mark every year for the last decade with the exception of the pandemic year (2020) and 2022, the report noted.

Saudi Arabia remained the largest projects market in the GCC during 2022 recording a

Value of projects awarded in Oman dropped by 27.1 per cent year-on-year to reach \$2.2bn in 2022 as compared to the previous year

total of US\$54.2bn worth of contracts awarded as compared to US\$53.9bn in the previous year. The UAE ranked second recording total contract awards of US\$19.2bn vs US\$25.9bn during 2021.

Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar accounted for a combined 93.6 per cent of the total value of contracts awarded in the GCC during the year.

Total projects awarded in Kuwait during 2022 reached US\$2.8bn against US\$5.2bn in 2021. Similarly, Oman witnessed new projects awards drop of 27.1 per cent year-on-year to reach US\$2.2bn while the aggregate value of contracts awarded in Bahrain reached US\$996bn in 2022 as com-

pared to US\$2.7bn during 2021.

In terms of sector classification, the construction sector witnessed the biggest increase in the value of projects awarded during the year recording US\$3.2bn year-on-year increase in new contract awards to reach a total of US\$34.3bn during 2022, the report said.

It noted that the growth in the GCC construction sector was mainly driven by the jump in total value of contracts awards in Saudi Arabia's construction sector.

The Saudi construction sector comprised 59.2 per cent of the total value of projects awarded in the construction sector in the GCC during the year.

Marsa Al Duqm Investment and Marafiq sign a MoU

Muscat - Marsa Al Duqm Investment Company signed with the Centralized Utilities Company (Marafiq) a memorandum of understanding (MOU) about the provision of power, water, and sewage management services to Duqm Fishery Port.

The MoU was signed by Eng Nabil bin Salim al Bimani, chairman of Marsa Al Duqm Investments, and Eng Abdullah bin Mohamed al Hashimi, Marafiq's managing director.

"The MoU signing between the two parties is considering the possibility of the provision of services to Duqm Fishery Port, the sultanate's biggest fishing port, which is the focal point of fisheries support business and all fishing activities as well as a great attraction for investment which develops the supporting sectors," Bimani said in a press release.

Bimani absolutely trusted that such MoU would have economic and environmental benefits achieving the sultanate's planned sustainable development goals, most importantly environmental



sustainability.

"We are pleased to cooperate with Marsa Al Duqm Investment Company. Specialised in the provision of industrial services of all types, Marafiq endeavors to provide Duqm Fishery Port with highly reliable, efficient services, maintain high quality standards in all of our operations and adopt environmentally friendly practices for Duqm is the cornerstone for Oman Vision 2040 that achieves the future development goals," Hashimi said.

"We trust that our capabilities and resources can bring long-term, sustainable benefits for all of our stakeholders across the

various supporting sectors and industries as well as all supply chain activities," he added.

Marafiq is the exclusive provider of a range of centralized utilities in Duqm Special Economic Zone under a 25-year franchise from the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.

Having a 25-year license, Marafiq was awarded the franchise of potable water supply to Duqm Special Economic Zone. It is responsible for the potable water supply inside Duqm, including production, transmission, distribution, customer service, billing, and collection.

Bank Muscat wins two awards for excellence in fund transfers

Muscat - Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, was recently honoured with two elite awards by the New York headquartered JP Morgan, a global leader in financial services offering solutions to the world's most important corporations, governments and institutions.

The awards were received by Saleh Nasser al Habsi, deputy general manager - enterprise growth and capital market operations, Bank Muscat, in the presence of senior bank officials. The bank won the 2022 US Dollar Clearing Elite Quality Recognition Award for outstanding

achievement of best-in-class MT103 with straight-through processing rate of 98.77 per cent.

The bank also won the 2022 US Dollar Clearing Elite Quality Recognition Award for outstanding achievement of best-in-class MT202 with straight-through processing of 99.90 per cent. The twin awards for operational excellence in the field of SWIFT-based dollar payments processing in both commercial and treasury payments, highlights Bank Muscat's commitment to the highest quality standards in fund transfers.

On this occasion, Zuwana

Abdullah al Sharji, assistant general manager - central operations and change management, Bank Muscat, said, "We are delighted to win this award once again and thank JP Morgan for recognising Bank Muscat's ongoing and continuous commitment to the highest standards in straight-through processing. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the operational teams at the bank for this achievement by consistently maintaining exceptional quality in both commercial payments and transfers, thereby ensuring the highest standards for processing throughout the payment chain."

BOARD OF DIRECTORS – INDIAN SCHOOLS
ONLINE REGISTRATION FOR ADMISSIONS IN
INDIAN SCHOOLS IN THE CAPITAL AREA (2023-2024)

On line registration for admissions to classes KG I to Class IX in Indian Schools in the capital area for the academic year 2023-2024 will start from 1st February 2023 for the children of Indian nationals.

SL.N.	SCHOOL	CLASSES
1	Indian School Muscat	KG I – IX
2	Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir	KG I – IX
3	Indian School Darsait	KG I – IX
4	Indian School Al Ghubra	KG I – IX
5	Indian School Bousher	KG I – IX
6	Indian School Al Seeb	KG I – IX
7	Indian School Al Maabela	KG I – IX

For the online application form and for more details about the admission process, please visit www.indianschoolsoman.com

A non-refundable processing fee of OMR 15/- will be payable on each application. The closing date of online registration for admissions will be Thursday, 28th February 2023.

Children of other nationalities who are seeking admissions in Indian Schools may write to admissions2023@indianschoolsoman.com with an attachment of the duly filled 'Application for Unique Number'; their online registrations will commence in the first week of March 2023 subject to availability of seats.

Admissions for children with special needs are open at Care and Special Education (CSE) which is located on the Indian School Muscat premises. Parents can approach the CSE administration directly for admission (www.cseoman.com)

Admissions are purely subject to availability of seats in the respective schools.

Adani group's market loss rises to \$68bn

Mumbai, India - Gautam Adani's vast Indian business empire lost billions more dollars in value on Monday after its rejection of claims of widespread fraud failed to reassure investors.

The slump was sparked by a report by US investment group Hindenburg Research that last week alleged a "brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud scheme over the course of decades".

The three-day selloff has now erased a total of about US\$68bn in the conglomerate's market value, according to Bloomberg News.

Adani Total Gas and Adani Green Energy both plunged another 20 per cent on Monday and saw trading halted, after suffering the same fate Friday.

Adani Transmission ended 14.91 per cent lower, although the group's flagship Adani Enterprises was 4.21 percent higher.

The fire sale has seen school-dropout-turned-tycoon Adani, who is viewed as close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, tumble from third on the Forbes real-time rich list.

On Monday the 60-year-old was eighth in the ranking, which put his wealth at US\$88.2bn, down from almost US\$130bn before the allegations.

He maintained his crown as Asia's richest man, although volatile trading earlier in the day saw him briefly overtaken by fellow Indian tycoon Mukesh Ambani.



Adani Total Gas and Adani Green Energy both plunged another 20% on Monday and saw trading halted. Adani Transmission ended 14.9% lower, although the group's flagship Adani Enterprises was 4.2% higher

'Madoffs of Manhattan'

Adani's conglomerate said it was the victim of a "maliciously mischievous" reputational attack and on Sunday issued a 413-page statement that it said rebutted Hindenburg's claims.

Dubbing Hindenburg the "Madoffs of Manhattan" - a reference to crooked financier Bernie Madoff - the statement said the researchers' allegations

were "nothing but a lie".

"This is not merely an unwarranted attack on any specific company but a calculated attack on India, the independence, integrity and quality of Indian institutions, and the growth story and ambition of India," it said.

But the response failed to stem intense selling pressure across most of Adani's listed companies, while Hindenburg accused the group of "systemat-

ically looting the nation".

The allegations came as Adani seeks to raise an ambitious US\$2.5bn via a stock sale, and despite Monday's rise Adani Enterprises shares remained well below the 3,112-3,276 rupees price range set for the offer - making them cheaper to buy in the market.

Investors had subscribed for only three per cent of the follow-on public offer (FPO), which is due to close on Tuesday, at the end of its second day of bidding on Monday.

But Abu Dhabi-based International Holding Company (IHC) gave the group a vote of confidence, saying it would buy one-sixth of the shares on offer, paying US\$400mn to do so.

Hindenburg said in response to Adani's statement that "India's future is being held back by the Adani Group, which has draped itself in the Indian flag while systematically looting the nation".

"In terms of substance, Adani's '413-page' response only included about 30 pages focused on issues related to our report," it said.

"The remainder of the response consisted of 330 pages of court records, along with 53 pages of high-level financials, general information, and details on irrelevant corporate initiatives, such as how it encourages female entrepreneurship and the production of safe vegetables." AFP

ECB to hike rates again, but outlook brightens

Frankfurt, Germany – The European Central Bank is expected to push on with its inflation fight Thursday with a fresh rate hike, even as signs grow the eurozone might have passed the worst of an economic shock.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent energy and food costs soaring across the single currency area, the ECB embarked on the most aggressive cycle of monetary policy tightening in its history.

Since July, it has lifted interest rates by 2.5 percentage points to tame consumer price growth - which peaked at 10.6 per cent in October, over five times the bank's target.

While still high, inflation has started slowing, fuelling hopes that the Frankfurt-based institution's efforts are bearing fruit.

A flurry of recent data, including a key survey showing Europe's economy has started growing again, have even raised hopes that the eurozone will avoid a sharp downturn.

But ECB president Christine Lagarde has repeatedly stressed rates will continue to rise at a steady pace, and the bank is expected to agree on a 50-basis point hike Thursday.

That would be the same as the increase when the governing council last met in December, but below two massive hikes of 75 basis points at its two prior meetings.

"The reason for a 50 (basis point) rate hike is clear: the ECB's job is far from done," said ING



European Central Bank headquarters in Frankfurt, Germany

economist Carsten Brzeski.

Less gloom and doom

Still, recent, less gloomy data has given cause for hope that Russia's efforts to strangle crucial gas supplies to Europe may not trigger the economic shock once feared.

As Moscow slashed deliveries following its invasion of Ukraine, European governments rolled out relief measures to cushion consumers and businesses from surging prices, and rushed to fill up storage facilities.

Wholesale gas prices have been easing while relatively mild winter weather has meant supplies have not been used up as quickly as expected.

The closely watched S&P Global Flash Eurozone purchasing managers' index (PMI) rose

above 50 in January.

That reading indicates growth, and fuelled optimism that slowing inflation and easing supply chain problems, as well as the reopening of China's economy, may offset the fallout from Ukraine.

And in its latest forecast last week, the German government predicted Europe's biggest economy would narrowly avoid a recession in 2023, revising an earlier estimate from October that there would be a shallow contraction.

After months of doom and gloom, officials are striking a more positive note about the outlook in the 20-nation club.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos earlier this month, Lagarde said the eurozone economy will fare "a lot

better" than initially feared, with the news "much more positive in the last few weeks".

Look to the future

In the United States, the Federal Reserve is also expected to hike rates again at the end of its meeting this week.

Like the ECB, it has been slowing its hikes as the outlook brightens, and there are expectations it may downshift again, from a 50- to a 25-basis-point increase.

While the ECB has stressed it will "stay the course" to bring inflation back to target, policymakers are walking a fine line - seeking to tighten enough but not so much that it dramatically deepens economic pain across Europe.

AFP

Renault to reduce stake in Nissan, rebalancing alliance

Tokyo, Japan - French automaker Renault will slash its stake in Japanese partner Nissan as part of a deal rebalancing the rocky alliance between the two companies, the firms said Monday.

The deal will also see Nissan take a stake in Renault's new electric vehicle venture Ampere, though the size of the investment was not immediately announced.

The agreement comes after months of painstaking negotiations, and repeated delays, as the two firms sought to reset their decades-old alliance after years of tensions.

The automakers called Monday's announcement "an important milestone" in "discussions on defining new foundations for their partnership".

The agreement is intended to "strengthen the ties of the alliance and maximise value creation", the statement issued simultaneously by both companies said.

Renault will reduce its stake from 43.4 per cent to 15 per cent, the same size as Nissan's stake in its French counterpart, in what the firms said would produce "a balanced governance".

Nissan will also invest in Ampere, "aiming to become a strategic partner", the firms said, without specifying how large the Japanese automaker's stake would be.

In November, Renault announced that it would split its operations in two - Ampere, and



This combination of file photos taken on January 17 shows the logos of Nissan Motor and Renault displayed at their showroom in Tokyo (AFP)

a separate subsidiary for petrol, diesel and hybrid cars that will pair up with China's Geely.

But concerns at Nissan about future technology transfers to the Chinese carmaker, as well as details over the sharing of electric vehicle intellectual property, complicated the negotiations.

Shaky union

The agreement is expected to be signed next week following board approval from both sides.

The international auto alliance began in 1999, when Renault rescued Nissan from bankruptcy.

They were joined by Mitsubishi Motors in 2016, when Nissan took a 34 per cent stake in its struggling Japanese rival.

But the union was destabilised by the 2018 arrest of Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn, who claimed the charges against him were intended to prevent him from bringing the Japanese and French automakers closer together.

Discussions have been held behind closed doors and the an-

nouncement was repeatedly pre-vented but then postponed.

Still, analysts have described the rebalancing of the deal as a way to build confidence between Nissan and Renault, particularly after the fallout from the Ghosn scandal.

There is also scope for the firms to cooperate on electric vehicles, given Nissan's existing technologies and Renault's greater access to the European market.

After the deal is signed, the French automaker will not immediately sell the outstanding 28.4 per cent of its Nissan shares because the current market value is lower than that registered in Renault's accounts.

Instead, the shares will be placed in a trust for sale when prices improve, with no time limit placed on the process. Its voting rights will be "neutralised" for most decisions, the companies said, but it will retain rights to dividends and shares' sale proceeds until it sells.

AFP



Pipe systems are seen at the industrial plant of the Nord Stream 1 Baltic Sea pipeline, Lubmin, Germany (AFP)

German economy contracts, fuelling recession fears

Frankfurt, Germany – Germany's economy unexpectedly shrank at the end of 2022 due to the fallout from the war in Ukraine, official data showed Monday, adding to worries it could be on the brink of recession.

Europe's top economy contracted 0.2 per cent in the October to December period compared to the previous quarter, according to preliminary figures from statistics authority Destatis.

Analysts from financial data firm Factset had been expecting zero growth, while Destatis said earlier this month the economy stagnated in the fourth quarter.

For the whole of 2022, the German economy grew 1.8 per cent, the data showed, a revision from an earlier figure of 1.9 per cent.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and subsequent move to slash crucial gas supplies, triggered an energy crisis in industrial powerhouse Germany, and sent food and electricity costs soaring.

But after massive government interventions, signs had improved recently and expectations grew that the German economy might avoid a recession after all.

Monday's disappointing data, however, dented those hopes.

"Recession fears are back," said ING economist Carsten Brzeski.

"The warmer winter weather, along with implemented and announced government fiscal stimulus packages, have prevented the economy from falling off a cliff, but a technical recession is still a likely outcome."

A technical recession is defined as two consecutive quarters of contraction.

Franziska Palmas, senior Europe economist at Capital Economics, said the data "pours cold water on the recent optimism about the prospects for the eurozone and suggests that a technical recession in both Germany and the eurozone as a whole is more likely than not after all".

Germany was, however, likely to avoid a "deep downturn," she said.

"That's thanks to generous government energy support, the recent fall in gas prices, and backlogs of orders supporting activity in some industrial sectors," Palmas said.

After Russia invaded Ukraine,

Berlin raced to find new energy sources, and unveiled a 200-billion-euro (US\$218bn) support package to cushion consumers and businesses, including a cap on electricity and gas prices.

Destatis said that a fall in consumer spending, which supported the economy in the first three quarters of 2022, had hit GDP in the final months of the year.

This suggests the energy crisis was starting to hit household incomes, Palmas said.

The government has nevertheless struck a more optimistic tone lately, with an official forecast last week predicting that Germany would dodge a recession with growth of 0.2 per cent for 2023 as a whole.

A few months earlier, they had predicated it would contract by 0.4 per cent.

Earlier this month, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Germany would avoid a painful recession this year.

Lower energy prices have also helped bring down inflation from a peak of 10.4 per cent in October, with officials expecting the trend to continue.

AFP



NATIONAL BISCUIT INDUSTRIES LTD. SAOG

DIRECTORS REPORT

Company performance from 1st July, 2022 to 31st December, 2022

Despite being another challenging period globally with a very competitive business environment for FMCG sector with continuous inflationary pressure and unprecedented supply chain constraints, the Company delivered strong 41% growth in gross sales versus previous period. The Company has recorded gross sales of RO 7,872,824 for the 6 months period ending December 31, 2022 as compared to RO 5,590,218 in the corresponding period of last year.

Company continues to benefit from the effective implementation of cost control, efficiency enhancements, process autonomous and development of cost effective and healthy recipe which were instrumental in delivering the net profit of RO 1,168 for the period from July to December 2022 in spite of above external challenging factors. Net profit for the corresponding period of last year was of RO 91,273.

Future Outlook

The Company is taking corrective actions in terms of improving the product portfolio and strengthening the brand presence in all markets to grow the revenue and profits in the long run.

Nooh Bin Mohammed Al Zidjaly
Chairman
26th January, 2023

UNAUDITED BALANCE SHEET AS ON 31ST DEC 2022			
	31-Dec-22 RO	31-Dec-21 RO	
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	6,424,139	5,257,440	
Intangible Assets	117,407	137,921	
Right of Use assets	272,908	312,548	
Advance for Capital Goods	96,205	275,037	
Wakala deposits	755,260	0	
Total non-current assets	7,665,919	5,982,946	
Current assets			
Inventories	2,492,322	1,847,917	
Trade and other receivables	4,525,274	3,452,310	
Wakala deposits	0	1,332,879	
Bank balances and cash	121,868	499,515	
Total current assets	7,139,464	7,132,621	
Total assets	14,805,383	13,115,567	
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Equity attributable to equity holders of the Company			
Share capital	1,000,000	1,000,000	
Legal reserve	333,333	333,333	
Retained earnings	5,992,431	6,098,509	
Total Shareholders' equity	7,325,764	7,431,842	
Non-current liabilities			
End of Service Benefits	432,852	425,626	
Deferred tax liability	45,909	51,511	
Lease Liabilities	305,354	320,523	
Total non-current liabilities	784,115	797,660	
Current liabilities			
Trade and other payables	5,821,734	4,837,010	
Provision for Income tax	10,441	31,714	
Current Portion of Lease Liabilities	15,891	17,341	
Short term Loans	126,100	0	
Bank Overdraft	721,338	0	
Total current liabilities	6,695,504	4,886,065	
Total liabilities	7,479,619	5,683,725	
Total equity and liabilities	14,805,383	13,115,567	
Net assets per share	7.326	7.432	
UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31ST DEC 2022			
	6 Months 31-Dec-22 RO	6 Months 31-Dec-21 RO	
INCOME			
Sales	7,872,823	5,590,218	
Cost of sales	(6,932,076)	(4,768,706)	
Gross profit	940,747	821,511	
Other income	40,193	71,789	
EXPENSES	980,940	893,300	
Selling and distribution	(608,045)	(439,066)	
General and administration	(336,860)	(320,712)	
Directors' meeting attendance fees	(7,400)	(9,300)	
Finance costs	(27,267)	(16,830)	
	(979,572)	(785,908)	
Profit before tax	1,368	107,393	
Income Tax	(200)	(16,120)	
Profit for the Period	1,168	91,273	
Attributable to:			
Equity shareholders of the Company	1,168	91,273	
Earnings per share	0.001	0.091	

MHD ACERE brings Chelsea Truck Company

MHD ACERE, one of the country's leading automotive distributors and among the leading business houses, brings another unique offering to Oman, by adding The Chelsea Truck Company services under its AutoExpert business vertical.

The Chelsea Truck Company was founded in 2010 by Afzal Kahn, an acclaimed British designer and passionate car connoisseur. The bespoke vehicle manufacturer provides the most discerning motorists, who want something different, with the opportunity to design their own vehicle from the ground up.

The company designs and handcrafts each vehicle, earning it a reputation for unrivalled quality and craftsmanship.

The care and attention to detail far exceed anything mass-produced with each car designed to be an extension of the owner's personality.

As the name suggests, The Chelsea Truck Company does not just deal with any cars; its expert craftsmen focus their efforts exclusively on three SUV models - Land Rover Defender, Mercedes G-Class and Jeep



Wrangler.

The decision to limit the company's scope allows them to concentrate on just three models thus making them the experts in their field. This has elevated them to becoming the firm of choice for those looking for a bespoke edition of these cars.

"Oman's automotive connoisseurs, who choose the services of The Chelsea Truck Company, won't just be driving a car, rather they will be driving an object of fashion," said Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO MHD ACERE.

"We don't see The Chelsea Truck Company, as just a de-

signer of personalised cars, but as an automotive fashion house - one that will offer our discerning customers something very special and unique that has not been offered in Oman before."

AutoExpert was launched to fulfill the desire of customers who wanted more from their ve-



hicles. Their extensive range of products is designed to improve the look and performance and their offerings include: Off-road accessories; performance enhancement products; car care; state-of-the-art workshops; window tinting and paint protection solutions. The addition of The

Chelsea Truck Company will now make AutoExpert stand head and shoulders above the competition.

MHD ACERE (Automotive, Construction Equipment and Renewable Energy) is one of the largest and most successful privately owned business conglomerates in the Sultanate of Oman and the Gulf region.

It boasts of a diversified portfolio of products and services and brand partnerships from across the continents and is the exclusive distributor of some of the finest automotive brands in the world.

Al Ahlia Insurance reigns supreme

Al Ahlia Insurance, one of the leading insurers in the sultanate has landed its tenth award by winning the 'Oman Insurer' award at MENA Insurance Awards 2023.

The ceremony was held in Dubai on January 25, marking this its sixth consecutive win of the award since 2018.

Over the past 12 months, Al Ahlia has delivered a stand-out overall performance in Oman. Despite a challenging period of post-COVID-19 adjustments, many innovative projects have been delivered to enhance the customer journey.

Some of these propositions were a chatbot that collects all the documents using automated responses, guided by artificial intelligence, to assist customers in their policy purchase and claims registrations.

Other propositions also included enhancements to the services available on the website, which include the ability to transfer your policy online and a 'one step policy renewal' portal.

These customer centric solutions have been a part of why the insurer has been constantly recognised at prestigious awards such as the International Business Magazine, where it won 'Most Innovative Insurer - Oman'.

"We are honoured to have been selected as 'Oman Insurer 2023'. Winning this prestigious award ten times is testimony that we are consistently challenging ourselves to enhance our customer experience and utilise the best talents and technologies to enable that goal. of course, this would not have been possible without the dedication of our employees and the loyalty and trust of our customers," said Hanaa al



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Named 'Oman Insurer of the Year' at 2023 Middle East Insurance Review Awards

Hinai, CEO - Al Ahlia Insurance.

With over three decades of expertise, Al Ahlia insurance has established itself as Oman's trustworthy Insurer. It has launched several industry-first

initiatives and is committed to improving the overall customer experience by tapping into insights and investing in technology to provide customers with unmatched service support.

The MENA Insurance Review Award winners are selected by an independent panel of industry experts in the region. The panel independently reviews and rewards insurers, who showcase a strong business model, wide-reaching network and superior marketing initiatives.

Avani Muscat Hotel & Suites celebrates first anniversary

Avani Muscat Hotel & Suites - 'the freshest hotel in Seeb' - celebrated its first anniversary this month, calling it 'a year of vacations, occasions, and celebrations'.

"Our first year has seen Avani Muscat become a family favourite in Oman. Contemporary rooms, suites, and fully-equipped apartments create the ideal city home for every group", the management said.

'Avani-versary' - as the management christened the event that was held on January 17 - gave the hotel team an occasion to not only celebrate for being 'a little older and a little wiser', but also to look to the future.

Avani Muscat Hotel & Suites stated that the sustainability strategy adopted for 2023 brought innovations including e-registration and smart key entry.

"The first steps of many to ensure birthday celebrations and warm welcomes continue at our 10th Avani-versary, and even our 100th", it added.

"It is with a huge amount of pride that our team will celebrate the first year of Avani Muscat



Hotel & Suites. Over 12 amazing months, we have enjoyed the company of guests from across the world and are thrilled to have become such a great part of their Omani experience. Seeing the smiles on the faces of every adult and child, whether visiting for the first time or the third, has been the ultimate reward. We can't wait to do it all again in 2023, and beyond!" said Ismail al Tobi, the hotel's new general manager.

While welcoming their new general manager, the hotel referred to Tobi as 'an energetic

and dynamic business leader who has achieved remarkable success across several industries including construction, hospitality, and tourism'.

While celebrating 'a year of poolside lounging under the Arabian sun... a year of family fun and memories made... a year of complete comfort in the heart of Oman', Avani Muscat Hotel & Suites pointed out that their three-bedroom apartments with modern kitchens and living spaces brought 'families together in complete convenience'.

AVOD's transformation strategy puts health at forefront, says CEO

'Areej Vegetable Oils and Derivatives SAOC (AVOD) is constantly encouraging consumers to adopt healthier lifestyles for themselves and their families, while maintaining its consistency in delivery of products that have an ideal balance of nutrition, health and wellness and taste', the company said.

AVOD's transformation strategy has always put health and customers' wellbeing at the forefront, and this has gained it the distinction of being Oman's Most Trusted Brand year after year, the company said.

"Every product that comes out of the AVOD stable is a testament to its commitment to offer consumers the best of health and value," said Salem Bortmany, CEO - AVOD.

'Eat Right, Live Well' philosophy is the epicentre of the company's product development process and has made AVOD a trustworthy specialist in refining, processing, packaging and distribution of high-quality Trans Fat



Free Cooking oils, Non-Hydrogenated Margarines, Vegetable Ghee, Fats and Mayonnaise.

"AVOD is the first company in Oman to fortify and enrich its top-quality cooking oils with vitamins A & D, making them healthier choices in this category while Khafeef is the lightest frying oil, the first of its kind in the

sultanate," the CEO informed.

"After thorough research on the health risks that hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils pose to the physical well-being, which is trans-fats is converted into saturated fat. AVOD decided to invest in technology to ensure that all its products are non-hydrogenated

and free from harmful trans-fats. All products go through a heart-friendly process which is recognized and recommended by WHO."

The company's continuous transformation takes a multi-pronged approach to create health-focused products. The state-of-the-art modern factory

is constantly upgraded to meet stringent quality controls.

Packing materials such as tins, cans, plastic bottles, etc are manufactured in-house and filled immediately using automatic packing machines to ensure highest standards of hygiene.

The company's commitment

to safeguarding health and safety has earned it the ISO 9001 certificate for Quality Management System, ISO 14001 certificate for Environmental Management System and ISO 22000 certificates for Food Safety Management."

"Our own transformation journey has mirrored that of our

valued consumers. We are committed to building healthier and happier communities to ensure that our nation-building process is fortified further," Bortmany added.

With more than three decades of successful operations in Oman, AVOD has built a product portfolio that prides itself on being both high on quality and taste. The Company's leading brands Minara, Sohara, Khafeef, Jabal Akhdar and Muscat Margarine are on every Omani kitchen.

A heritage brand and a market leader in delivering high quality and innovative products, AVOD is amongst the 20 largest public limited companies in the country and enjoys a substantial market share in Oman and its current exports are more than 75 per cent of its total business.

All the products are marketed in the GCC as well as other 30 export countries through experienced dedicated distribution chains.

Changan CS85 coupe sporty crossover 2023 model arrives

Changan CS85 2023, the luxurious crossover coupe combines the dynamic handling of a SUV with the sporty aesthetics of a coupe to give owners the best of both worlds.

Redefining the definition of smoothness, CS85 coupe SUV is outfitted with turbocharged direct injection engine that produces 224HP and a maximal torque of 360Nm, partied with an 8-speed automatic transmission, while accelerating from zero to 100km per hour in just 7.5 seconds and four driving modes.

Changan CS85 premium coupe SUV, stands out from its counterparts through its lustrous appearance, focus on high quality and application of latest technology with radar features.

A spokesperson for Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE) said, "CHANGAN CS85 Coupe sporty crossover is designed to reflect one's personality. It is about elegant design and characteristic dexterity. Luxury, style and fashion will be the new constant in your life once you own this sporty coupe. Blue Core Powertrain Technology based on the principles of power, clean and quiet provides highly efficient and energy saving performance."

With all the vehicles' key parts originating from the world's leading suppliers, the CS85 Coupe offers top grade enjoyment from every angle - visual, tactile, audi-



tory and safety - coming together to create the perfect driving experience.

With its wide body and muscular shoulders accentuated by horizontal contours that sweeps through the sides, the Changan CS85 makes a sporty style statement.

The sleek exterior styling is matched by a luxurious interior crafted using high-quality materials and supported by high-tech features.

Equipped with innovative driving technologies and radar based features, the Changan CS85 keeps owners at ease with everything under control when on the road. It has features including 360° HD Camera, blind area monitoring, forward collision warning, adaptive cruise

control, lane departure warning.

Nineteen-inch (19") Alloy Wheels, LED headlamps with LED DRLs, auto headlamps, Follow me Home function, Matrix fog lamps, roof rails, Quad exhaust pipes in chrome, panoramic sunroof, electrically adjustable, folding ORVMs with heating and memory.

The overall interior style of Changan's CS85 coupe is dynamic, elegant, and luxurious. The interior decoration of the car applies double real stitching lines. It has sport seats in leather, 8-way and 4-way electrically adjustable driver and co-driver seat, seat heating and ventilation, lumbar support, seat courtesy function, 64 colour ambient lighting, illuminated door sills, parking simulation display, drive

select mode (sports, economy, snow) and rear AC vents.

Changan CS85 has advanced safety features include ESP (ABS +TCS) + EBD, hill hold assist, electronic parking brake hill descent control, front, side and curtain airbags, front and rear sensors with screen and IC display, adaptive cruise control, lane departure warning, 360° HD camera, forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking, blind area monitoring, lane change assist, reverse lateral warning and TPMs.

A host of infotainment attributes includes 10.25" LCD instrument cluster, 12.3" infotainment touch screen, navigation, Bluetooth, front and rear USB, mirror link, radio, eight speakers, multi screen interaction and memory

card slot, cruise control, keyless entry, electric tailgate opening, vehicle control (forward and reverse) with remote control, one touch up-down movement for all four windows are some of significant features of the vehicle.

Engine: 2.0L Turbo GDI, Power: 224hp 224, Torque: 360Nm, Transmission: 8 Speed AT, Drive Type: 2WD, Dimensions: 4720x1845x1665mm (LxWxH), Wheelbase: 2705mm, Fuel Tank - 58 litres.

The premium automotive brand Changan has received overwhelming response among the Oman customers.

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment has set up a spacious and state-of-the-art showroom in Qurum and service centre in Ghala, Muscat.

Heart to Heart: Malabar Gold's new collection

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the sixth largest global jewellery retailer with a strong retail network of over 300 outlets spread across ten countries, has launched a special collection of diamond and 18K gold jewellery named 'Heart to Heart' to celebrate the season of love.

The 'Heart to Heart' jewellery collection showcases exclusive heart-shaped jewellery that will cater to the increasing demand for such jewellery during this period. With over 150 designs symbolizing love in various ways, this unique jewellery collection serves as a perfect gift to express love to dear ones.

'With prices starting from just RO100, there is something to fit everyone's budget', the company said.

Apart from pendants in diamonds and 18k, customers can also choose heart-shaped, beautifully crafted bangles, bracelets and rings to gift their loved ones. Additionally, the brand has also launched heart-shaped solitaire rings, which are available in different centre stone sizes and specifications.

The diamond jewellery featured in the collection includes designs studded predominantly with red and multicoloured stones as well. This offer will be available across all outlets of Malabar Gold & Diamonds until February 14.



"It is the season of love and there is no gift more thoughtful than jewellery to be given to your loved ones as it is the most preferred gift by women and its charm lasts for a lifetime," said Shamlal Ahamed, managing director - International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Additionally, he said, "the special 'Heart to Heart' collection we have launched in diamond and 18k gold jewellery are classic designs that can be used at any point in time, serving as an heirloom that can be passed onto generations and an ideal investment as well".

'Love needs no reason' is the key message of the campaign, with all communication reflecting the concept that although there may be a million reasons to love someone, there needn't be any particular reason to make them feel special.



Global medical conference held

Lama Polyclinic LLC & Muscat Family Physicians' Group in association with Fortis Hospital, Bengaluru and Global Treatment Services held a medical conference on 'Uro-Gyno-Oncology' on Saturday, at Grand Hyatt Hotel as a part of their annual Continuous Medical Education Programme.

Talking about advantage of the latest robotic surgery in radical prostatectomy and partial nephrectomy, Professor (Dr) Mohan K, senior consultant urology and transplant surgeon emphasised on the following points.

►It gives a surgeon ten-times magnification, which helps robot assisted kidney transplant recipient surgery even in difficult clinical situations.

►Multiple arms with 7 degrees of freedom, vastly better than human dexterity. It is like working with two right hands! It provides 3D vision, hence it is immensely superior to conventional surgery.

►It is 'Organ sparing', means removing only a portion affected by cancer on a kidney and not the whole kidney in 'robotic partial nephrectomy'.

►It is 'Function sparing' means sparing/saving 'neuro vascular bundle' in robotic radical prostatectomy for cancer prostate to mitigate debilitating side effects such as Incontinence and impotence.

►It provides 'compartmental enhanced access' reaching areas which are difficult to reach with the human hands in Pelvic surgery especially in the male.

►It gives Enhanced functional outcomes.

►One Can perform 'Day care robot assisted vaginal hysterectomy' minimising hospitalisation.

German Embassy hosts 'energy in transition' exhibition, discussion

The German Embassy, in cooperation with Bait al Zubair, on Sunday hosted a panel discussion on 'Energy Transition in the Mobility Sector', moderated by Dr Ruth Prelicz, Geostrategic Advisor in the German government's hydrogen diplomacy programme.

The event was part of the framework programme for the exhibition 'Energy in Transition - Powering Tomorrow' which is currently being shown at Bait al Zubair.

A panel of experts discussed possibilities of decarbonising the mobility sector in view of international climate policy and Oman's national net zero plan for 2050.

Among the panelists were Eng Faiza al Harthi, head of Energy, Environment, and Natural Resources at the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit; Eng Ibrahim Wali, Director of Oman National Spatial Strategy and Transformation (ONSS) at the Ministry of Housing and



Urban Planning; Eng Sami al Shukaili, QHSSE Manager at Mwasalat/ASYAD Group; and Eng Karim Mousa, Senior Vice President for eMobility Middle East at Siemens.

Chief among the topics raised featured the potential and challenges of a growing public trans-

portation sector: How can it fulfill future mobility needs and how can it be decarbonised? Other prominent issues included the path towards establishing a charging infrastructure for e-vehicles as well as keeping mobility in mind when designing cities through careful urban planning.

Across all areas covered, the experts emphasized the importance of public awareness, which is crucial for the acceptance of new ways of mobility.

Professionals in the field and curious minds alike can visit the exhibition at Bait al Zubair, which will run until Thursday.

Al Mouj Muscat signs agreement with Omani SME Tadweer to recycle e-waste

Al Mouj Muscat has entered into an agreement with an Omani SME Tadweer to remove and recycle e-waste generated by residents as part of the award-winning community's focus on environmental and economic sustainability.

Tadweer operates 'end-to-end' e-waste processing facility in Barka, the first of its kind in the Sultanate and now through the new partnership, the recycling service will now be available to the leading lifestyle destination an initiative that will benefit the environment and local enterprise.

Al Mouj Muscat are leaders in sustainability and its support of SMEs and green initiatives continues to have a demonstrable

impact for Oman. Energy efficiencies have been introduced throughout the community and Tadweer will ensure that residents can safely dispose of household items, supporting the environmental aims of Oman Vision 2040 by recovering value from materials and reducing the amount of waste produced.

Through Tadweer items that have reached the end of their product life, such as fridges, washing machines, printers and computers, will be collected and raw materials including plastic, steel, aluminium and silver, will be used again. The service for residents will also include the collection of domestic batteries and used cooking oil.



Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said, "The agreement with Tadweer is another example of the positive impact that our community continues to demonstrate. This young Omani com-

pany is bringing innovation and skills to tackle environmental challenges and contribute to change.

"Our sustainability strategy ensures that we continually introduce ways to reduce our car-

bon footprint and seek opportunities to partner with SMEs to champion growth, job creation and economic diversification. By working with Tadweer, we will create a simple and efficient way to reduce e-waste and encour-

The new initiative with local waste specialist is the lifestyle destination's latest boost to sustainability

age enterprising solutions to meet the aims of a modern eco-conscious society."

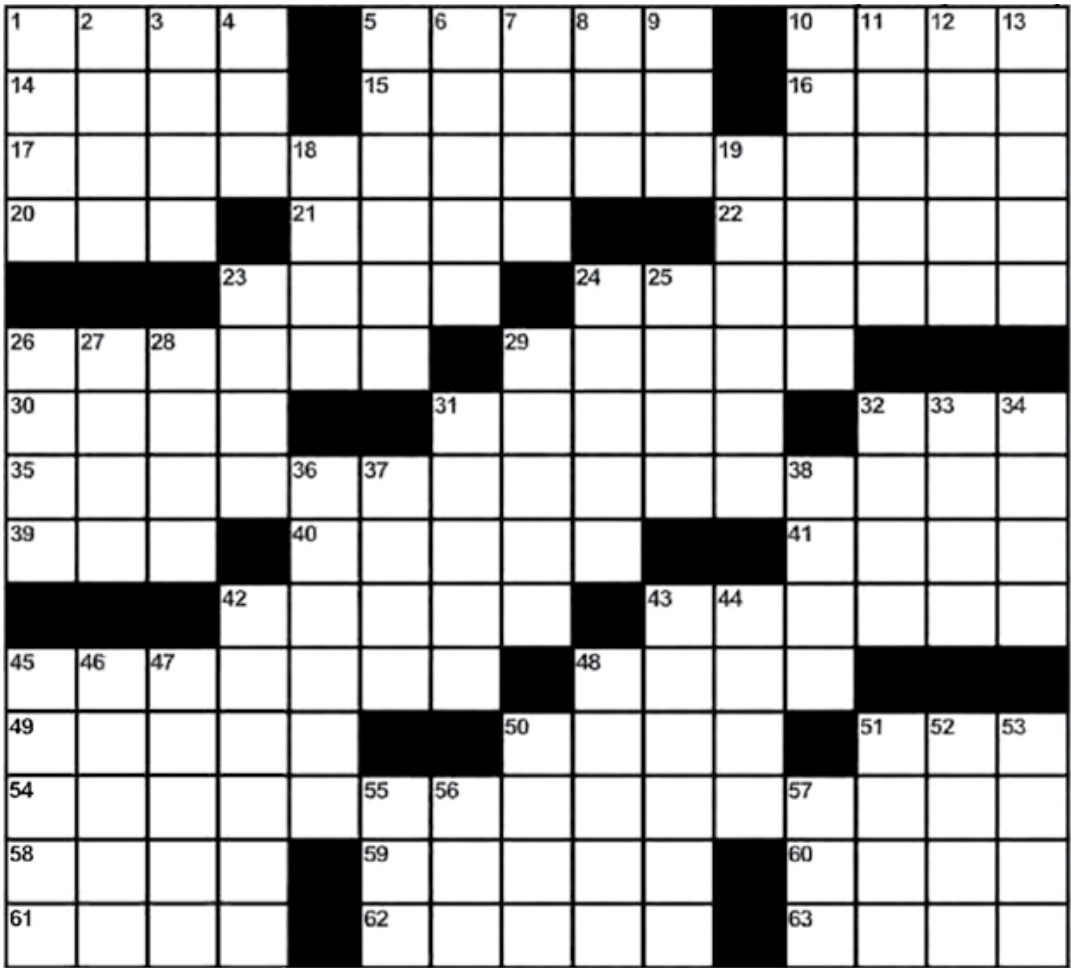
Mazin al Mamari, CEO of Tadweer, expressed delight to have this agreement with Al Mouj Muscat. "By introducing an

easy way for people to safely dispose of e-waste, we can protect our environment and contribute to Oman's circular economy. We are also set to create more job opportunities at our processing facility at Barka and we are confident that our adherence to the highest standards and to intelligent solutions will benefit Al Mouj Muscat and Oman."

Al Mouj Muscat is Oman's leading leisure and lifestyle destination, a joint venture between Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Omran, and Tanmia.

As Oman's first Integrated Tourism Complex, it has delivered significant socio-economic benefits, including growth in the tourism sector.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) It may be rigged
5) Like some humor
10) Three of a kind
14) "May I get you anything ____?"
15) Slow tempo
16) Chicken part
17) Roll the dice
20) Napkin's place
21) Aces, sometimes
22) Follow on the heels of
23) "Idylls of the King" character
24) Wall Street news items
26) Entangling quagmire
29) Confronts
30) Andy's radio partner of old
31) Even if, briefly
32) Vientiane citizen
35) What gamblers hope for
39) Before-time link
40) Carry away, in a way
41) Length x width, for a rectangle
42) Sports figures
43) Inexpensive diner

45) Fingernail polish re-mover ingredient
48) It's behind the altar
49) Harbor structure
50) Much
51) What a wife is called
54) It could be a life-saver
58) Employs
59) Blood-loving worm
60) Biblical birthright seller
61) Microscope component
62) Aquarium structures
63) Chinese secret society

DOWN

1) Unload, as stock
2) "Guilty," e.g.
3) "... and make it fast!"
4) Clerical nickname
5) Some pancakes
6) Judged, as a film
7) Food scraps
8) In times past
9) Grumpy's comrade
10) Jew's-harp sounds
11) Shampoo bottles' final dictum
12) Acquire, as expenses
13) S-shaped moldings

18) Millions of years
19) "... upon receipt..."
23) One way to go
24) Photo choice
25) It has the last word
26) Sudanese Republic, now
27) Don't keep in
28) Decomposes
29) Imitates Tinker Bell
31) Decrease in intensity
32) Fishing bait
33) Slam-bang tennis server
34) "I'll go along with that"
36) Acquit
37) Enthusiastic flair
38) When repeated, like some shows
42) Kind of fracture
43) Particular periods of history
44)_ Spumante
45) More than bad
46) Pursue wild geese?
47) Consumed
48) Smart_ (wise guy)
50) Words before "of thieves"
51) Japanese soup

52) Horse color
53) Like a bug in a rug
55) Final (Abbr.)
56) Somewhat vast grassy area
57) Collector's collection

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Whatever you're trying to accomplish today, you'll do. Don't worry about it! Sure, it might come down to the wire, but you'll get it all done. This is a great day for you to reach goals and check things off your to-do list. One of your friends might be feeling under the weather, so take a little break from all your productivity to send them a silly text or email greeting. It will only take a minute and it will make them smile!

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

If you're leading a group or working with others today, make sure that you listen to the ideas other people bring to the table. By doing so, you'll earn the team's trust and they'll be much more willing to listen to your ideas and suggestions too. Make it clear that everything is still flexible and nothing is set in stone. Even people with the most dogmatic beliefs can adapt to new, different approaches. Set the tone for mature compromise.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Lucky you! Everything about this day will feel sweet and effortless, so enjoy the break from life's drama. From your interactions with strangers to the negotiations you have with an authority figure, you'll always have the right words at the ready. And of course this will make you feel really good about yourself! When you have free time, make yourself available for other people who might not be finding this day as unproblematic as you are.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

There's an entertaining mystery to solve today. Luckily, you'll get some helpful, exciting clues early in the day. Someone you don't usually take very seriously could say something that strikes you as a deep truth. This confuses you a bit. It looks like you'll have to revise your opinion of them! Old dogs can indeed learn new tricks, and that includes you! Give someone a second chance and they'll give you another important clue. Something will suddenly start making sense.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If you're trying to find a new way to organize your stuff or your life, you should consider finding a professional to help you. Whether you need a cleaner house, a better wardrobe, a balanced checkbook, or a more balanced outlook on life, there are people who can help. Going it alone is fine for some things, but expert knowledge is best for certain tasks and goals. Ask around. Seek people you trust and find out if they have anyone that they can recommend.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

There's no such thing as a free lunch, so if someone is promising you easy money or a future of financial security with little or no effort required on your part, they aren't to be trusted. Charming people are all around you. You know deep down which ones are trustworthy and which ones aren't. Trust your inner voice if it tells you to run for the hills when someone offers you an "amazing" opportunity. Turn on your skepticism this morning and keep it running all day long.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Today, your intense and deep thoughts might leave you feeling confused, but that's perfectly understandable. You're dealing with a lot of different requests and invitations, which could leave you feeling at a loss about what to do next. As soon possible, seek out a comforting shoulder to lean on. Spill your thoughts with this generous friend, and you'll feel a lot better. Just saying things out loud can help you determine which things are most important. Focus on these first.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Everyone in their own special way is a bit weird, and that certainly includes you! It's high time for you to admit it. Trying to fit in with whatever you think is "normal" is only a pointless waste of time. What you really need to do is embrace your idiosyncrasies. Don't shy away from feeling odd or out of place, because not being like everyone else is what makes you unique. No one else has your irresistible combination of characteristics. Celebrate it!

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You'll likely be the smartest person in the room today, but your brilliance won't be seen as a threat to anyone. In fact, everyone will be delighted that you seem to have such a good handle on what's going on. This might be a shock to you, because you aren't necessarily feeling like you're as on top of things as everyone else thinks you are! Just go with it and enjoy the confidence they have in you. You're more capable than you think. It's time to realize that.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Just how accurate is your assessment of your finances? It's time to get a very detailed accounting of how much you're worth right now. It's important if you're about to enter any negotiations at work or some other professional context. Your worth is about more than just money, you know. It includes your skills and experience too. You're more than just your paycheck and bank accounts. It's essential to understand just what that means.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Instead of wasting time trying to discover the root of the problem you're having at home, jump right in and start patching up the tension as quickly as you can. Making peace should be your main goal right now, not sorting through all the details and figuring out who said what to whom or who didn't deliver on their promises. Sometimes the blame game is pointless. It doesn't always help bring about peace. Agreeing to disagree can be the perfect solution to the discord.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

It's perfectly acceptable to rely on your network of friends and associates to connect you with the career opportunities you seek, but you can't rely on having friends in high places everywhere and all the time. Be ready to go out on your own and forge new paths. Don't hesitate to go down a road that's unknown to you. Your network is great, but today strike out solo. You'll be surprised and enlightened by just how quickly you grow comfortable in a new environment.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The national coat of arms of Portugal consists basically of a shield in front of a sphere; what is the sphere called?

A. Antikythera globe
B. Sextant
C. Armillary sphere
D. Earthapple

02. The composer of the music for "Blue Eyes", "Three Sisters" and "The Cat and the Fiddle" also composed the music for which of these other musicals?

A. Oh, Kay!
B. Showboat
C. A Connecticut Yankee
D. No, No Nanette

03. What is the mathematical result of taking a number, squaring it, multiplying by double the first prime number, quartering the result, dividing by the first number, and then taking away the first number?

A. 10
B. 1
C. The first number
D. 0

Answers: 1.C 2.B 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

R	I	I	P
O	K	O	Y
I	N	L	L
B	A	S	L

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Blinken in Israel to calm flaring conflict

US diplomat arrived in Israel on the second leg of his Middle East tour

Tel Aviv, Israel - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken landed in Tel Aviv on Monday ahead of talks urging a deescalation in violence that has flared in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Washington's top diplomat arrived in Israel on the second leg of his Middle East tour, after meeting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and the country's foreign minister in Cairo.

Israel is reeling from an attack on Friday that killed seven civilians outside a synagogue in annexed east Jerusalem, a day after the deadliest army raid in years in the occupied West Bank claimed 10 Palestinian lives.

"We've seen horrific terrorist attacks in the last couple of days that we condemn and deplore," Blinken earlier told Saudi TV channel Al Arabiya. In a press conference in Cairo on Monday, Blinken urged 'all parties to calm things down and deescalate tensions' while also stressing the 'importance of working for a



Antony Blinken disembarks from his plane upon arrival at Israel's Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv, on Monday (AFP)

two-state solution'.

Since the start of the year, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has claimed the lives of 35 Palestinian adults and children - including attackers, militants and civilians.

Over the same period six Israeli civilians, including a child, and one Ukrainian civilian have been killed. All were shot dead in the attack on Friday outside the synagogue in an east Jerusalem settlement.

Mahmud Abbas.

Abbas met with CIA chief William Burns in Ramallah late on Sunday to discuss the 'dangerous developments', said the official Palestinian news agency Wafa. The US embassy declined to comment to AFP.

Blinken had long planned the visit, but the trip takes on a new urgency amid the spiralling violence. The fatal east Jerusalem shooting was preceded by the deadliest Israeli forces operation in the West Bank in years.

Ten people were killed on Thursday in the densely-populated Jenin refugee camp, in a raid Israel said targeted Islamic Jihad operatives.

The military later hit sites in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip in response to rocket fire from the Palestinian enclave.

Netanyahu's cabinet has vowed a tough response and moved to punish 'the families of terrorists that support terrorism' with home demolitions and other measures.

The government is also planning to rescind the rights to social security benefits of attackers' relatives, and steps to make it easier for Israeli citizens to obtain permits to carry firearms.

'Death spiral'

The latest bloodshed has heightened international concern, with Pope Francis on Sunday deploring the 'death spiral'.

French President Emmanuel Macron urged all parties to avoid feeding a 'spiral of violence' and Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called for 'maximum responsibility' on all sides.

Blinken on Monday met Sisi and then Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry.

Blinken commended Sisi for 'Egypt's important role in promoting stability in the region' and 'discussed ongoing efforts to de-escalate tensions between Israelis and Palestinians', said the State Department.

The diplomats and intelligence services of Egypt - a major recipient of American military aid - are regularly called upon to intercede between Israelis and Palestinians.

Blinken's Israel visit is part of the Biden administration's efforts to engage quickly with Netanyahu, who had tense relations with the previous Democratic administration under Barack Obama.

AFP

In a press conference in Cairo on Monday, Blinken urged all parties to calm things down and deescalate tensions, while also stressing the importance of working for a two-state solution

'Dangerous developments'

The United States has historically taken a lead on Middle East diplomacy, and Egypt, which has relations with Israel, has long served as a mediator in the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Blinken was due to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a veteran leader who returned to power late last year at the helm of the most right-wing government in Israeli history.

The US envoy will also travel to Ramallah in the West Bank for talks with Palestinian leader

Ten dead in series of drone strikes in Syria, says monitor

Beirut, Lebanon - A total of 10 people were killed in a series of drone strikes targeting pro-Iran factions in eastern Syria, including three dead in strikes on Monday, a war monitor said.

A pro-Iran commander was among the three killed in the drone strikes on Monday, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said, adding that they had been inspecting the site of strikes that had killed seven others the previous evening.

"A commander in an Iran-backed group and two of his companions, all of them non-Syrian, were killed this morning after renewed drone strikes," the Observatory said on Monday.

Pro-Iran factions, including Iraqi groups as well as Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah, have a major presence around the Iraq-Syria border, and are heavily deployed south and west of the Euphrates in Syria's Deir Ezzor province.

The commander's pick-up truck was targeted while he was inspecting the site of the Sunday evening strike that destroyed a convoy of six refrigerated trucks transporting Iranian weapons to Syria from Iraq. The convoy was struck in the Albu Kamal border region, said the Observatory, which has a wide network of sources inside Syria.

The seven killed on Sunday were truck drivers and their assistants, all of them non-Syrians, the Observatory said, adding that they were 'killed as a result of unidentified aircraft targeting a convoy of Iran-backed groups'.

The monitor could not verify the identities of the victims.

An Iraqi border official however told AFP that the vehicles targeted in Sunday's attack

were Iraqi trucks.

But the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorised to speak to the press, said that the trucks were not transporting Iraqi goods and had crossed illegally into Syria.

"Iraq does not export anything to Syria," he said on Monday.

No country claimed the assault, but Israel has carried out hundreds of air and missile strikes against Iran-backed and government forces in Syria, where the US military is also active.

A commander in an Iran-backed group and two of his companions, all non-Syrians, were killed this morning

SYRIAN OBSERVATORY

"The trucks were transporting Iranian weapons," Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman had told AFP on Sunday. Tehran provides military support to its ally Damascus in Syria's civil war, including through armed factions.

The strikes hit a convoy of trucks, but also the headquarters of Iran-backed groups in the area, activist Omar Abu Layla, who heads the Deir Ezzor 24 media outlet, told AFP on Monday.

"There was heavy damage in the area that was struck," he said. A pro-Syrian government radio station had reported Sunday that 'unidentified war planes targeted, in a number of raids, six refrigerated trucks', without providing further details.

AFP

Israeli troops kill Palestinian, say officials

Hebron, Palestinian Territories - Israeli troops killed a Palestinian driver in the occupied West Bank on Monday, officials on both sides said, with the army saying the car had hit a soldier's leg before speeding off.

Nassim Naif Salman Abu Fouda, 26, died from 'a bullet wound to the head fired by the occupation (Israeli) soldiers in Hebron this morning', the Palestinian health ministry said.

The Israeli army said that soldiers had 'identified a suspicious vehicle' and 'asked the driver to stop the vehicle in order to inspect it'. "A soldier approached the vehicle and the driver rammed into his leg. The soldiers fired toward the vehicle as it attempted to flee the scene and hits were identified.

"The vehicle continued driv-



Israeli soldiers patrol the centre of Jerusalem on Monday (AFP)

ing and then crashed," the army statement said, adding that the driver was taken from the car by Palestinian medics and 'was later declared dead'. Abu Fouda is the 35th Palestinian killed in

the conflict this month, in the occupied West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem - including militants, civilians and several children - according to an AFP tally based on official sources from both sides.

On Sunday, CIA Director Williams Burns held talks in the West Bank with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas to discuss the 'dangerous developments', the official Palestinian news agency Wafa reported.

Israel is reeling after a Palestinian killed six Israelis including a child and one Ukrainian citizen in a shooting outside a synagogue in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem on Friday.

The attack came a day after Israeli forces killed 10 Palestinians in the Jenin refugee camp, in the deadliest raid by Israeli forces in the West Bank in nearly two decades.

AFP

Finland hopes to join NATO with Sweden

Helsinki, Finland - Finland still hopes to join NATO together with Sweden, Finland's foreign minister said on Monday after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's weekend remarks that Ankara could accept Finland without its Nordic neighbour.

"Our strong desire in Finland has been and still is to join NATO together with Sweden," Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto told reporters in Helsinki, adding: "Our position remains the same."

Ankara has refused to ratify the two countries' NATO membership bids, primarily because of Sweden's refusal to extradite dozens of suspects that Ankara links to outlawed Kurdish fighters and a failed 2016 coup attempt.

Sweden has a bigger Kurdish diaspora than Finland and a more serious dispute with Ankara.

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

AFP

Turkey's opposition vows to crimp powers of president, expand democratic rights

Ankara, Turkey - Turkey's opposition vowed on Monday to crimp the president's powers and broadly expand democratic rights if they seize power in May 14 presidential and parliamentary polls.

The six parties that are united against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also pledged to agree on February 13 to a joint candidate for the crucial vote - widely seen as Turkey's most consequential in generations.

The opposition's long-awaited election programme aims to roll back many of the powers Erdogan has amassed over his two-decade rule.

It limits the president to a seven-year term and makes a powerful new prime minister accountable to parliament.

"We will shift to a strengthened parliamentary system," the programme says.

"We will put an end to the president's power to issue decrees."

Erdogan began his rule in 2003 as prime minister and



Leaders of Turkish opposition alliance - National Alliance - attend a meeting to present their programme, in Ankara, on Monday (AFP)

was elected president - at the time a more ceremonial post - when his mandates ran out in 2014.

He then rammed through constitutional changes in 2017 that eliminated the premiership and created a powerful new executive that allowed the president to effectively rule by decree.

The opposition pledged to change the constitution back to the way things worked throughout most of Turkey's post-Ottoman history.

Constitutional referendum

Constitutional changes can be ratified by 400 votes in the 600-seat parliament.

They can also be put up for a national vote if the opposition gathers the 360 votes needed to trigger a constitutional referendum. The opposition's pledge to rewrite the constitution adds particular importance to the parliamentary vote.

Erdogan briefly lost control of parliament during his second decade in power and now relies

on support from a far-right party that has seen its support slip in the past year. Opinion polls point to a tightly contested election that is too close to call.

The opposition pledged to 'urgently' amend the constitution and 'put an end to the vague and arbitrary restriction of the freedoms of assembly and demonstration'.

"We will strengthen the freedoms of thought, opinion and expression," it added.

Erdogan unleashed sweeping purges after a failed 2016 coup attempt that curbed many of the freedoms enjoyed under his more prosperous and publicly popular first years of rule.

Analysts estimate that 90 per cent of Turkey's media are now under government or its business allies' control.

Thousands of activists - many of them Kurds - are languishing in prison on terror-related charges that rights groups believe Erdogan is using to crack down on political dissent.

AFP

Pakistan mosque blast: Police among 33 dead, 150 wounded

Peshawar, Pakistan - Police officers were among the 33 killed and 150 wounded in a blast at a mosque inside a highly sensitive Pakistani police headquarters on Monday, prompting the government to put the country on high alert.

The attack happened during afternoon worship in the provincial capital of Peshawar, close to former tribal areas that border Afghanistan where militancy has been steadily rising.

A frantic rescue mission was underway at the mosque, which had an entire wall and some of its roof blown out by the force of the blast.

"Many policemen are buried under the rubble," said Peshawar police chief Muhammad Ijaz Khan, who estimated between 300 and 400 officers usually attended prayers at the mosque.

"Efforts are being made to get them out safely," he said.

Bloodied survivors emerged limping from the wreckage, while bodies were ferried away in ambulances as the rescue operation continued.

"It's an emergency situation," Muhammad Asim Khan, a spokesman for the main hospital in Peshawar told AFP, putting the death toll at 33.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa governor Ghulam Ali put the death toll at 28 and 150 wounded, most of them policemen.

The police headquarters in Peshawar is in one of the most tightly controlled areas of the city, housing intelligence and counter-terrorism bureaus, and



Rescue workers carry the remains of the blast victims from the debris of a damaged mosque in Peshawar on Monday (AFP)

is next door to the regional secretariat. The country was put on high alert after the blast, with checkpoints ramped up and extra security forces deployed, while in the capital Islamabad snipers were deployed on buildings and at city entrance points.

"Terrorists want to create fear by targeting those who perform the duty of defending Pakistan," said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in a statement.

"Those fighting against Pakistan will be wiped out from the

face of earth."

'Black smoke rising'

Officers said the blast came from the second row of worshippers, with bomb disposal teams probing the possibility of a suicide attack. Shahid Ali, a policeman who survived, said the explosion took place seconds after the imam started prayers.

"I saw black smoke rising to the sky. I ran out to save my life," the 47-year-old told AFP.

"The screams of the people

are still echoing in my mind," he added. "People were screaming for help."

The drastic security breach came on the day United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan had been due to visit Islamabad, although the trip was cancelled at the last minute due to bad weather.

Pakistan is also preparing to host an International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation on Tuesday as it works towards unlock-

ing a vital bailout loan to prevent a looming default.

The security situation in Pakistan - once plagued by bombings until a major military crackdown that began in 2014 largely restored order - has deteriorated since the return of the Afghan Taliban in Kabul.

Islamabad has accused the new rulers of failing to secure their mountainous border, allowing militants to travel back and forth without being detected.

AFP

WHO urges to invest in neglected tropical diseases

Geneva, Switzerland - The World Health Organization on Monday called for greater investment in combating neglected tropical diseases, which left more than 1.6bn people, often in least-developed countries, requiring treatment in 2021.

NTDs are a diverse group of conditions, found mainly in tropical regions, that include dengue, leprosy and rabies. They are deemed neglected diseases because they are largely overlooked and benefit from only limited funding.

The WHO said NTDs disproportionately affect the poorest, primarily in areas where water safety, sanitation and access to health care are inadequate.

Soce Fall, director of the WHO's NTDs department, said they had been neglected precisely because they did not affect developed countries.

By comparison, he cited the funding plunged into Mpox last year once it began spreading outside Africa. "The level of investment needed - we are far from reaching it," he told a press briefing.

progress report released on World NTD Day.

But 16 countries account for 80 per cent of the global NTD burden. They include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Tanzania.

As of December, 47 countries had eradicated at least one NTD, with eight certified as having eliminated one in 2022 alone.

"Around the world, millions of people have been liberated from the burden of neglected tropical diseases," said WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"We still have a lot of work to do. The good news is, we have the tools and the know-how not just to save lives and prevent suffering, but to free entire communities and countries of these diseases."

NTDs are caused by a variety of pathogens including viruses, bacteria, parasites, fungi and toxins.

They include bilharzia, Chagas disease, dengue, Guinea worm, sleeping sickness, leishmaniasis, leprosy, river blindness, rabies, scabies, snakebite envenoming and trachoma. "These diseases cause devastating health, social and economic consequences, and when they aren't deadly, they very often cause life-long social stigma and consequent economic hardship," the WHO said.

AFP



Members of the Forensic Pathology Services stand near their vehicles on the scene of a mass shooting in Gqeberha, South Africa, on Sunday (AFP)

Gunmen kill eight at birthday party in South Africa: Police

Johannesburg, South Africa - Gunmen opened fire on a group of people celebrating a birthday at the weekend in a township in South Africa, killing eight and wounding three others, police said on Monday.

The birthday celebrant was among those gunned down in the mass shooting in the city of Gqeberha, formerly Port Elizabeth. "The owner of the house was celebrating his birthday when two unknown gunmen entered the yard" on Sunday evening "and

started shooting at the guests', police said in a statement.

The gunmen 'randomly shot at guests', police said, adding 'eight people died while three others are still fighting for their lives in hospital. The home owner is among the deceased'. The motive of the attack is yet unknown.

Nomthetheli Mene, the provincial police chief for the Eastern Cape province, condemned the killings as 'a blatant disregard for human life'.

AFP

Step up military support for Ukraine: NATO asks S Korea

Seoul, South Korea - NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg asked South Korea on Monday to 'step up' military support for Ukraine, suggesting it reconsider its policy of not exporting weapons to countries in conflict.

Stoltenberg is in Seoul on the first leg of his Asia trip, which will also take in Japan, as part of a drive to boost ties with the region's democratic allies in the face of the Ukraine conflict and growing competition from China.

Stoltenberg met top South Korean officials on Sunday, and on Monday urged Seoul to do more to help Kyiv, saying there was an 'urgent need for more ammunition'.

He told AFP that while South Korea and Japan were 'providing significant economic support to Ukraine', regional allies needed to recognise that global 'security is interconnected'.

Were Russian President Vladimir Putin to win the war, it would 'send a very dangerous message to authoritarian leaders all over the world', he said during an interview in Seoul, with 'direct



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg speaks during an interview with AFP at a hotel in Seoul on Monday (AFP)

If we believe in freedom, democracy, if we don't want autocracy and tyranny to win then they need weapons

JENS STOLTENBERG

consequences' for security and stability in Asia. He pointed to North Korea 'providing rockets and missiles to the Wagner group' - something that Pyongyang has angrily denied, with state media saying Monday that Stoltenberg's Asia trip was bringing the region 'close to the extreme security crisis'.

'They need weapons'

South Korea has provided non-

lethal and humanitarian aid to Kyiv, and since the invasion has signed deals to sell hundreds of tanks to European countries, including NATO-member Poland.

But Seoul has long-standing policies against the export of weapons to governments in active conflict, which it has said makes it difficult to provide arms directly to Ukraine.

Stoltenberg said Germany and Norway, among others, had similar policies in place that were revised after Putin invaded Ukraine in February last year.

"If we believe in freedom, democracy, if we don't want autocracy and tyranny to win then they need weapons," he said, speaking at the Chey Institute in Seoul.

South Korea opened its first diplomatic mission to NATO last year.

President Yoon Suk-yeol, who met with Stoltenberg, said the NATO chief had 'expressed appreciation for Korea's continued support' on the Ukraine conflict, according to a readout released by Yoon's office.

"President Yoon wrapped up the meeting by saying that he would continue to play a possible role in cooperation with the international community to help the people of Ukraine," it added.

Stoltenberg told AFP that his visit to Seoul and Tokyo was 'not about expanding NATO into the Asia-Pacific' but it was crucial that democratic allies cooperated more.

"Cyber is a global threat, terrorism has been a global threat for many decades, space is becoming more and more contested, which is truly global," he said.

Regional security issues also affect Europe, he added. "The nuclear programmes of North Korea are also NATO's problem, because stability in this region matters for us."

"And then, of course, China, with heavy investments in new modern nuclear capabilities, long-range missiles, of course behaviour in the South China Sea - all of this matters also for NATO allies.

AFP

Massacres forgotten at California gun fair

Ontario, US - With ammunition, rifles and bullet-proof vests on display, business is brisk at a Los Angeles area gun show - so much so you'd never know a mass shooting unfolded nearby just days ago.

Thousands of people turned out this weekend in the city of Ontario in California to view dozens of stands at the trade fair called the Crossroads of the West Gun Show.

Women pushing baby strollers looked at small pistols while strapping young men examined military-style semi-auto-

matic rifles that can handle several calibers of ammo. The vibe is cheerful. Kids under 12 get in free.

Most people did not want to address the elephant in the room, though, even as the state mourns.

A mass shooting at a dance hall in Monterey Park, a 30-minute drive away, left 11 dead on September 21. Two days later, another shooter killed seven more people at farms in Half Moon Bay, near San Francisco. In both cases the shooters were elderly Asian men.

"Nobody talks about these incidents, but there is a spike in purchases this week," said a vendor at the show, Crystal Markanson. "Every time that the media talks about a mass shooting, people buy guns because they're afraid that they'll get taken away."

The latest chapter in America's relentless gun violence crisis reignited an old debate on firearms control.

Yet again, President Joe Biden called for a federal ban on military-style assault rifles, the kind of gun often used in these mass

killings. But with Republicans in Congress steadfastly opposed, the idea has no chance of becoming law.

"Targeting specific styles of guns is not the right answer," said Brett Reeves, a 34-year-old air conditioning salesman who wore a cowboy hat.

In California, which has some of the country's toughest gun laws, assault rifles have been banned for more than 30 years.

"And yet we keep hearing about mass shootings," Reeves added.

AFP



Men browse as vendors sell firearms and accessories at West Gun Show in Ontario, California, on Friday (AFP)

INDIA

Centre: Chinese intrusion can't be discussed in Parliament

New Delhi, India - The government on Monday said that matters regarding Chinese intrusion can't be discussed in Parliament as it concerns the security of the country.

According to the sources, in the all-party meeting held on Monday, the Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party raised the issue of the Chinese intrusion and asked for a discussion in the Parliament. "To this, the Government responded by saying that some matters can't be discussed on the floor of the house as it concerns security," the source said.

However, while talking to reporters, the Union Parliamentary Affairs minister Pralhad Joshi said that the government is ready to discuss all the issues.

"37 leaders from 27 parties participated in the all-party meeting today. Today's meeting went well. I seek the cooperation of the opposition to run the House well. We are ready to discuss all issues," he added.

Sasmit Patra, BJD MP after the meeting, said: "Women's Reservation Bill is going to be a priority for BJD in this session. We've been pushing for the passage of the Bill. We'll also build consensus with like-minded parties to put pressure on the Government to ensure that the Bill is passed."

Several opposition parties raised critical issues, including the recent stock market matter concerning industrialist Gautam Adani. MPs asked the govern-



Leaders of various political parties attend the all-party meeting on the eve of Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Monday (ANI)

Women's Reservation Bill is going to be a priority for BJD in this session. We've been pushing for the passage of the Bill. We'll also build consensus with like-minded parties

SASMIT PATRA

ment to hold a discussion on the matter as it concerns the economy of the country.

Deputy Leader of the House, Rajnath Singh, Parliament Affairs minister Pralhad Joshi, Leader of the House Piyush Goyal, MoS, Parliamentary Affairs Arjuna Ram Meghwal, and V Muraleedharan were among those present for the meeting

held at the Parliament House Complex. All top leaders from the opposition parties including DMK leader T R Balu, TMC leaders, Sudip Bandyopadhyay and Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, TRS leaders K Keshava Rao and Nama Nageswara Rao were in attendance.

Other party leaders include Vijayasai Reddy from YSR Con-

gress, Farooq Abdullah from the National Conference, Professor Manoj Jha from the RJD and Ram Nath Thakur of JDU. Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray) was represented by Priyanka Chaturvedi.

Congress leaders were absent from the meeting, however, according to government sources both Mallikarjun Kharge and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury held up due to the ongoing Bharat Jodo Yatra that culminated in Srinagar on Monday. The all-party meeting is a customary meeting that takes place ahead, of the start of every session of Parliament. During the meeting, the Gov-

ernment will seek cooperation from all political parties to ensure the smooth functioning of both Houses of Parliament during the Session.

The Budget Session of Parliament will commence on Tuesday with the address by the President of India to a joint sitting of both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in the Central Hall of Parliament.

The Economic Survey will also be tabled in both Houses on the first day of the Session.

The Union Budget 2023-24 will be presented on February 1 by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Lok Sabha. ANI

SC to hear plea against Centre's ban on BBC documentary

New Delhi, India - The Supreme Court on Monday agreed to list on February 6 a Public Interest Litigation against the Centre's decision to ban a BBC documentary on the 2002 Gujarat riots in the country.

A bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud said it would list the matter for hearing on next Monday. Advocate M L Sharma, who has filed the PIL, mentioned the matter for early hearing.

The PIL sought quashing of the January 21 order of the Centre, terming it 'illegal, mala fide, arbitrary and unconstitutional'.

Meanwhile, senior advocate CU Singh also mentioned before the bench on how tweets by senior journalist N Ram and advocate Prashant Bhushan with links of the BBC documentary were deleted using 'emergency powers' and how students from Ajmer were suspended for streaming the documentary.

The PIL filed by advocate Sharma also urged the apex court to call and examine the BBC documentary - both parts I and II - and sought action against persons who were responsible and were involved directly and indirectly with the 2002 Gujarat riots.

PIL has raised a constitutional question and the apex court has to decide whether citizens have the right under Article 19 (1) (2) to see news, facts and reports



on the 2002 Gujarat riots, Sharma said.

"Issue writ of mandamus to the Respondent for quashing of the impugned order dated January 21, 2023 issued under rule 16 of IT rule 2021 being illegal, mala fide and arbitrary unconstitutional and void ab-initio and ultra vires to the Constitution of India to provide complete justice," the PIL stated.

As per the sources, on January 21, the Centre had issued directions for blocking multiple YouTube videos and Twitter posts sharing links to the controversial BBC documentary.

Whether the central government can curtail freedom of press which is a fundamental right as guaranteed under Article 19 (1) (2) of the Constitution, asked the PIL.

It added: "Whether without having an Emergency declared under Article 352 of the Constitution of India by the president, Emergency provisions can be invoked by the central government?" ANI

Odisha Governor, CM pay last respects to Health Minister Naba Das

Bhubaneswar, India - Odisha Governor Ganeshi Lal and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Monday paid their last respects to the state Health Minister Naba Kishore Das at the minister's residence here.

The mortal remains of the senior Biju Janata Dal (BJD) leader were brought to his official residence in the early hours on Monday.

Das succumbed to bullet injuries hours after he was shot at by a policeman at point-blank range in broad daylight in Jharsugud district.

A team of doctors led by Dr



Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik pays last respects to Naba Das, in Bhubaneswar on Monday (ANI)

Debashish Nayak immediately attended to and operated on him. It was found that a single bullet had entered and exited the body, injuring the heart and left lung and causing massive internal bleeding and injury, officials said.

They added that steps were taken to improve the heart pumping and he was provided urgent ICU care. However, despite their best efforts the minister succumbed to his injuries.

Condemning the attack, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik expressed deep shock and distress over the unfortunate

death of the minister. "He was an asset for both the government and the party. His death is a great loss to the State of Odisha," Odisha CMO quoted him as saying.

The chief minister had earlier reached the hospital and enquired about the health of the minister, who was attended by the specialists. The chief minister also directed the Crime Branch to take up the investigation into the matter.

An eyewitness, advocate Ram Mohan Rao, said the policeman fired at the Odisha minister from point-blank range.

"This incident occurred at about 12.30 afternoon at Gandhi chowk when Das was on his way to attend a programme. He sustained bullet injuries to his left chest, leaving him seriously injured," Rao said.

"At a public grievance office opening, Naba Das was the chief guest. When he arrived, the crowd gathered to welcome him. Suddenly, a gunshot was heard. We saw police personnel running away after shooting from close range," he added.

The exact reason behind the firing is still unclear. ANI

Two dead after Japan avalanche

Tokyo, Japan - Two men have been confirmed dead after their bodies were recovered following an avalanche in Japan, police said on Monday, a day after the off-piste accident in the central region of Nagano.

Japanese authorities declined to identify the pair, but US ski magazine Mountain Gazette reported that one of the dead was American professional skier Kyle Smaime.

Two men who were travelling with Smaime posted Instagram updates saying he had been killed in the avalanche.

Emergency rescue teams confirmed the death of the two men, a local police spokesman told AFP.

AFP

Strikes, sleaze, stability: Sunak marks 100 days as UK PM

London, UK - On reaching 100 days in 10 Downing Street this week, Rishi Sunak will double the duration of Liz Truss's brutally short term as British prime minister.

But having stabilised panicky financial markets after the calamitous Truss tenure, the Conservative leader has little to celebrate.

Double-digit inflation is fuelling a winter of misery for many in Sunak's Britain.

On Wednesday, the day before his mini-anniversary, up to half a million workers will escalate a rolling series of strikes to shut down schools, railways and other public sectors.

Opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer has been portraying the wealthy premier as 'weak' and out of touch, as both parties gear up for an election likely next year.

"Is he starting to wonder if this job is just too big for him?" he told the diminutive Sunak in parliament last Wednesday.

The Labour leader was merciless as he ran the rule over Britain's state of permacrisis since Brexit and the COVID pandemic, and 'sleaze' among the Conservatives.

Ambulance drivers have also been striking, joining nurses on their first-ever walkout. But Sunak is adamant that unions' pay demands will only fuel the decades-high inflation.

"Being an effective manager of public money and public services is not a sin," senior minister Michael Gove said, rejecting criticism that Sunak is an uninspiring leader after Boris Johnson, who preceded Truss.

"It is the case that first of all we have to bring the stability - and we have - and now we have set out areas where we are performing," he told Sky News on Sunday.

'Moral bankruptcy'

Sunak faces a mountainous challenge as he bids to emulate Conservative leader John Major's



Rishi Sunak speaks to staff during a visit to University Hospital of North Tees in Stockton-on-Tees on Monday (AFP)

First of all we have to bring stability - and we have - and now we have set out areas where we are performing

MICHAEL GOVE

surprise win over Labour in 1992. Outside Number 10 in October, he promised 'integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level' - in pointed contrast to his two predecessors.

But Sunak has been forced on the defensive by the tax affairs of the Conservative chairman Nadhim Zahawi, who until this week-

end sat in the cabinet.

Starmer on Saturday accused Sunak's Tories of 'moral bankruptcy', as less well-off voters are forced this winter to choose between eating and heating.

Sunak had sought to buy time by launching an internal inquiry into Zahawi, who admitted to being 'careless' with his own

taxes and had to pay a seven-figure sum to the UK's tax agency - when he was finance minister in charge of the same agency.

The inquiry's report was issued on Sunday, making uncomfortable reading for both Zahawi and Sunak, who bowed to the inevitable and fired the Iraqi-born politician.

Sunak, a practising Hindu who at 42 is Britain's youngest leader since 1812, has brought a smooth-talking, technocratic approach to the premiership borne of his lucrative years in private finance.

Opinion polls show he has restored some of the Conservatives' reputation for economic competence after the short-lived 'Trussonomics' experiment.

But Labour retains an average lead of 20 points overall.

Tory right-wingers such as former Brexit minister David Frost accuse Sunak of lacking vision.

AFP

THE GREAT EST?

Novak Djokovic may have settled the debate after winning the Australian Open for his 22nd Grand Slam

Melbourne, Australia - In drawing level with Rafael Nadal's record 22 Grand Slam titles, Novak Djokovic reignited the debate about who is the greatest men's tennis player of all time.

For some, the Serb settled it with his record-extending 10th Australian Open crown.

Certainly, his vanquished opponent on Rod Laver Arena thinks so.

"He's the greatest that has ever held a tennis racquet, for sure," said Stefanos Tsitsipas after losing 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5).

It seems inevitable that Djokovic, who returned to world number one with his dominant victory in Sunday's final, will win more Slams.

At 35 he is a year younger than his great rival Nadal and except for hamstring trouble early on in Melbourne, he appears to be in excellent physical shape.

In contrast, Nadal's battered body broke down again at the Australian Open and he limped out with defeat in the second round, his title defence over and the Spaniard in pain with a hip injury.

Roger Federer, the third of the "Big Three" who have dominated men's tennis for the past 15 years, retired last year with 20 Grand Slam titles.

Federer will always be the "people's champion" in the eyes of many because of the graceful way he played, but it is Djokovic who looks primed to pull away with the record number of men's major crowns.

'Soak it in'

Djokovic seems to thrive on pain and feed off adversity.

Two years ago he won in Australia despite tearing stomach muscles, this year it was a ham-

Federer hails 'incredible again' Djokovic

Paris, France - Roger Federer hailed Novak Djokovic's "incredible effort" in winning a 10th Australian Open and a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam title on Sunday.

"Incredible effort, again! Many congratulations," the retired Federer, who won 20 majors, wrote in a brief message on Instagram.

Djokovic defeated Stefanos Tsitsipas in straight sets earlier Sunday to add another Australian Open trophy to his seven at Wimbledon, three at the US Open and two from the French Open.

His collection of 22 Grand Slam titles takes him level with Rafael Nadal.

Djokovic at 35 is a year younger than Nadal who was the defending champion in Melbourne.

Nadal was knocked out in the second round and is facing up to eight weeks on the sidelines with a hip injury.

Former world number one Federer retired last year at the age of 41 after failing to recover from a knee injury.



string that did not allow him to practise between matches.

If not for Djokovic's vaccine status, which saw him deported from Australia a year ago and prevented him from competing at the US Open, he may well have already been on 23 or 24 Slam wins.

"Haha, I told you. We created a monster... Sat on my couch and enjoyed the entire show. Soak it all in," Nick Kyrgios, beaten by Djokovic in the Wimbledon final last year, tweeted on Sunday.

Nadal, at 36, may be able to recover from his latest injury and even find the will to achieve an-

other triumph on the clay of Roland Garros in May.

But he is a new dad and as the calls grow from family and friends to stop punishing his body, he could bow out sooner rather than later.

There is a theory that he could call it quits at this year's French Open. It is his favourite tournament and a 15th title there would provide a story-book ending.

Polarising

Djokovic only appears to be getting better with age and the "Next Gen" of young talent is still unable to get near him over five

sets.

His coach, Goran Ivanisevic, believes there are a few more years at the top -- and more Slams -- to come.

"Definitely two, three more years," Ivanisevic told reporters after Sunday's final.

"The way he's taking care of his body, the way he approaches everything, the food, it's amazing. It's unbelievable the level."

Some tennis fans will always take convincing to accept Djokovic as the greatest, despite what the number of Grand Slam titles says.

He polarises opinion, whereas Federer and Nadal are universally loved for how they are on and off the court.

There are those who see something too calculating in the intense, brooding Djokovic.

Controversy is never far away

Last year it was his Covid vaccination status. This year it was his father Srdjan posing with a fan holding a Russian flag featuring Vladimir Putin's face.

Before that, Djokovic's infamous default from the US Open in 2020 for petulantly swiping a ball which hit a female line judge laid his character bare, said the critics. But Djokovic supporters say those traits are what have driven him to glory.

Djokovic clearly felt impacted by the controversies this year and talked honestly about them, whereas before he may have just batted questions away.

"It hurts him and me" he said after they decided that his father would not be courtside to see him win the Australian Open. It was one of the reasons an emotional Djokovic called Sunday's title "the biggest victory in my life".

AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates with the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup trophy a day after his victory against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final of the Australian Open in Melbourne (AFP)

Djokovic unsure about hamstring injury and return to action after 'perfect 10'

Melbourne, Australia - New Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic said on Monday he hopes to return to action in a month's time but is "not sure" how quickly his injured hamstring will heal.

The Serb also revealed that he had not had time to properly celebrate winning a record-extending 10th Melbourne title on Sunday.

His 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5) victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas saw Djokovic equal Rafael Nadal's men's record of 22 Grand

As it stands today I am still signed in for the Dubai tournament, which is in a month's time

NOVAK DJOKOVIC



Slam tournament wins and go back to world number one in the rankings.

Djokovic was troubled throughout the competition by his left hamstring, although it improved as the Grand Slam went on.

While the 35-year-old paraded the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup around the gardens of Government House in Melbourne on Monday for a photo

shoot, he was asked by AFP how his leg was and when he might play again.

"I'm not sure, I'm going to do some medical check-ups in the next few days," he replied. "Then I'll be able to talk about it a bit more and understand the situation."

Djokovic pulled his hamstring before the Australian Open, having won a warm-up event in Adelaide, and was badly hampered at

times at Melbourne Park, particularly in the early rounds.

At one point he did not practise between matches.

"As it stands today I am still signed in for the Dubai tournament, which is in a month's time. I hope I'll be able to come back to the courts in several weeks' time," he said Monday.

"Let's see, you know, I'll speak to the medical team and then take it from there," he added.

Djokovic's coach, Goran Ivanisevic, said most players would not have played after a pre-tournament scan showed the extent of the hamstring injury.

"But not him -- he is from outer space," Ivanisevic told reporters. "His brain is working different. He gave everything, 77 therapies a day. Every day was kind of better and better."

Djokovic said there had not been time for any partying on

Sunday night to mark his latest achievement.

Asked how he had celebrated the victory, he smiled: "With the media, and with doping control!"

"It was 3:00 am when I went back to the accommodation and it was a long night, but of course a huge relief. Ending a tournament and the whole journey here to Australia with a Grand Slam win is always incredibly satisfying," he added.

Champ Djokovic reclaims top spot in ATP rankings

Paris, France - Novak Djokovic reclaimed the top spot in the ATP rankings released on Monday after winning his 22nd Grand Slam title at the Australian Open.

The 35-year-old Serbian rose four places to dislodge Spain's Carlos Alcaraz, who missed the tournament through injury and dropped to second.

Djokovic's 10th Australian Open title means he is world number one for the 374th week since July 2011.

Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas, who lost to Djokovic in straight sets in Sunday's final in Melbourne, overtook Norwegian Casper Ruud in third place, matching a career-best ranking he first achieved in August 2021.

Andrey Rublev of Russia, dominated by Djokovic in the quarter-finals, climbed to a career-best position of fifth.

The shock elimination of Djokovic's long-time rival Rafael Nadal in the second round saw the Spaniard drop four places to sixth.

Karen Khachanov's run to the semi-finals in Melbourne propelled the Russian up seven places to 13th.

Tommy Paul of the United States, who also reached the final four, broke into the top 20 for the first time as he soared up the rankings by 16 places to 19th.

Players representing Russia and Belarus are banned from competing under the name or flag of their countries

ATP TOP 10

1.	Novak Djokovic (SRB)	7070 (+4)
2.	Carlos Alcaraz (ESP)	6730 (-1)
3.	Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE)	6195 (+1)
4.	Casper Ruud (NOR)	5765 (-1)
5.	Andrey Rublev	4200 (+1)
6.	Rafael Nadal (ESP)	3815 (-4)
7.	Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN)	3715
8.	Taylor Fritz (USA)	3410 (+1)
9.	Holger Rune (DEN)	3046 (+1)
10.	Hubert Hurkacz (POL)	2995 (+1)



Real Sociedad goalkeeper Alex Remiro (R) was in total control in their Spanish league match against Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium on Sunday (AFP)

SAFE CUSTODIAN

Real Sociedad's Remiro unbeatable in goal as Real Madrid drop points in title race

Madrid, Spain - Real Sociedad goalkeeper Alex Remiro made a string of fine saves to frustrate Real Madrid in a 0-0 draw Sunday, leaving Barcelona five points clear at the top of La Liga. After the Catalans beat Girona on Saturday Madrid needed to win to stay three points behind their rivals in the title race, but Remiro ensured otherwise, keeping third-place La Real on the champions' tail. Vinicius Junior had three good chances repelled by Remiro among other Madrid openings, as Carlo Ancelotti's side sparkled but failed to find the goal their performance deserved.

The draw continues a mixed start to 2023 for Real Madrid, slipping further behind Barcelona in the league and losing against them in the Spanish Super Cup final, but reaching the Copa del

It's true Barca are doing very well, but the season is very long, January is very complicated, but the team have progressed a lot in all areas, in defence, attack, physically

CARLO ANCELOTTI

Rey remis on Thursday with an extra-time win over Atletico Madrid.

"It was one of the best games we've played this season," Ancelotti told reporters.

"It's true Barca are doing very well, but the season is very long, January is very complicated, but the team have progressed a lot in all areas, in defence, attack, physically.

"The players are starting to improve, the injured players (will return), so we are confident for

the coming months, we can get stuck into it in the second half of the season."

Madrid constructed some slick moves in the first half, with Brazilian wingers Vinicius and Rodrygo incessant threats.

The former curled inches wide after a sensational nutmeg on Igor Zubeldia, while the latter teed up Karim Benzema with a backheel, but Remiro saved comfortably.

Ancelotti started with Eduardo Camavinga playing out of posi-

tion at left-back because of injuries elsewhere, and the former Rennes midfielder thrived.

Vinicius should have opened the scoring before the break but his shot was well kept out by Remiro, the visitors' last line of defence.

Remiro made another smart save from the Brazilian winger early in the second half with his leg to keep his team level, while Fede Valverde hammered a shot wide from distance as Madrid flowed forward. Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois was called into serious action for the first time after an hour when Takefusa Kubo broke free on the right, but the Belgian got down well to deny him.

Vinicius was foiled once more by the excellent Remiro, who pushed away the Brazilian's at-

tempted lob after cleverly accelerating into the box.

Remiro was booked for time-wasting in stoppage time as he eked out every second at a goal kick to clinch a hard-fought point for Real Sociedad, still three points behind Madrid.

Earlier Saul Niguez's cool finish made the difference for Atletico Madrid as they held on to fourth place with a narrow 1-0 win at Osasuna. Out of the Champions League and Copa del Rey, and 13 points behind La Liga leaders Barcelona, Champions League qualification is Atletico's key goal in the second half of the season.

The Rojiblancos were left fuming after their quarter-final cup elimination in midweek, unhappy with the refereeing, but had nothing to complain about as they snatched victory at El Sadar.



Napoli's Giovanni Simeone exults after scoring against AS Roma in their Italian Serie A match in Naples on Sunday (AFP)

Super-sub Simeone continues the title march of Napoli

Rome, Italy - Giovanni Simeone ensured Napoli continued their march towards a first Serie A title in over three decades with the decisive goal in a 2-1 win over Roma which pushed his team 13 points clear of the chasing pack.

Substitute Simeone rifled home a wonderful finish at the end of a long passing move with four minutes remaining at the bouncing Stadio Maradona to see off a spirited Roma team who thought they had escaped with a point when Stephan El Shaarawy levelled in the 75th minute.

However Luciano Spalletti's side are now 13 points clear of Inter Milan, the closest challengers after champions AC Milan were humbled 5-2 by Sassuolo to leave their title defence in tatters.

Home fans hoping for an end to their 33-year wait for the Scudetto let out a powerful roar of joy and relief at the final whistle after coming through a hard-fought contest with fierce rivals Roma thanks to Simeone's fifth goal after coming off the bench this season. "I tried to give everything I had. I did the best thing possible today which was get the winner. I am so happy," said Simeone.

Roma can consider themselves unfortunate to leave

Naples with nothing after impressing despite the backroom drama involving want-away star Nicolò Zaniolo poisoning their pre-match preparation.

Jose Mourinho's team sit sixth, a point behind the Champions League positions and Milan who have been dumped down to fifth following their humiliating defeat and Lazio's 1-1 draw with

I did the best thing possible today which was get the winner. I am so happy

GIOVANNI SIMEONE

Fiorentina.

"There are some matches where you lose but come away feeling better about the team. That's my feeling today," said Mourinho to DAZN.

Victor Osimhen was Napoli's other scorer, almost bringing the house down in the 17th minute when he brilliantly chested down Khvicha Kvaratskhelia's cross, took another touch with his thigh before lashing in without the ball touching the floor.

Ten-man PSG held as dogged Reims strike late

Paris, France - On-loan Arsenal striker Folarin Balogun ran through to score a remarkable 96th-minute equaliser as Reims held 10-man Ligue 1 leaders Paris Saint-Germain to a 1-1 draw on Sunday.

It looked like Neymar's strike early in the second half would be enough for PSG to take all three points despite substitute Marco Verratti being sent off shortly after that goal. But an impressive Reims side got the draw they richly deserved when Balogun broke away to fire home right at

the death.

The result sees the club coached by 30-year-old Belgian-born Englishman Will Still extend their unbeaten run to 14 games between league and cup.

They remain in mid-table but have now drawn with the Parisians twice this season, their collective strength allowing a team of hungry young players to hold their own against PSG's superstars.

PSG have now dropped points in three of their four league games in 2023, and while they

remain three points clear of Lens at the top of the table, their form is a concern with the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie against Bayern Munich now little over two weeks away.

"Overall we obviously can't be satisfied with our performance. It is not a question of being worried but we need to get back to winning ways quickly and play much more as a team than we are at the moment," coach Christophe Galtier told broadcaster Amazon Prime.

AFP

Struggling Everton appoint Sean Dyche as new manager

London, United Kingdom - Relegation-threatened Everton announced on Monday they had appointed former Burnley boss Sean Dyche as their new manager to replace the sacked Frank Lampard.

Dyche, who has agreed a two-and-a-half-year contract, has a tough first match - up against Premier League leaders Arsenal at Goodison Park on Saturday.

The 51-year-old said it was an "honour" to take over at the Merseyside club, who have not won any silverware since 1995.

"I know about Everton's passionate fan base and how precious this club is to them," Dyche said in a club statement.

"We're ready to work and ready to give them what they want. That starts with sweat on the shirt, effort and getting back to some of the basic principles of what Everton Football Club has stood for for a long time. "We want to bring back a good feeling. We need the fans, we need unity and we need everyone aligned. That starts with us as staff and players."

Everton chairman Bill Kenwright said: "He quickly convinced me that he has exactly the right attributes to make himself a great Everton manager."



Wrexham's English striker Elliot Lee reacts after their English FA Cup match against Sheffield United

Wrexham denied Hollywood ending in FA Cup thriller

Wrexham, United Kingdom -

Hollywood star Ryan Reynolds watched on in anguish as his Wrexham side conceded deep into stoppage time to draw 3-3 against Championship promotion hopefuls Sheffield United in the FA Cup fourth round on Sunday.

Reynolds and fellow actor Rob McElhenney took over the National League side in 2020.

The American celebrated the Welsh club's three goals wildly in the stands, but they will need to win a replay to reach the last 16 of the FA Cup for the first time

since 1997.

Wrexham could not have got off to a worse start as Oli McBurnie headed the Blades in front after 61 seconds.

Sheffield United look set for a return to the Premier League next season but they were rocked by a pulsating atmosphere inside the Racecourse Ground.

The home side struck twice in 11 minutes early in the second half to turn the tie around as James Jones and Thomas O'Connor scored from set-pieces.

Oli Norwood looked to have

ended the Wrexham dream with a composed finish to equalise.

But a red card for Daniel Jebbison for an off-the-ball incident handed the hosts 20 minutes with an extra man to find the winner.

They seemed set for a Hollywood ending when top scorer Paul Mullin steered home in the 86th minute.

However, there was a final late twist in the plot as John Egan forced home a corner in the 95th minute to force a replay.

AFP



Reims' Folarin Balogun scores the equalising goal against Paris Saint-Germain on Sunday

STAR PARADE

Major winners Garcia, McDowell, Oosthuizen, and Schwartzel leads the star cast in Oman as the International Series kicks-off the 2023 Asian Tour season



Muscat - The International Series returns in 2023, making its Middle Eastern debut at Al Mouj Golf, Muscat, from February 9-12 with the Asian Tour's enhanced tournament series' strongest field to date.

The 132-player field including golfers from 23 countries across six continents is headlined by major winners Sergio Garcia, Graeme McDowell, Louis Oost-

huizen, and Charl Schwartzel.

The all-time Ryder Cup points earner, Garcia, is joined in the field by fellow Spaniards Eugenio Chacarra and David Puig. The all-star field also includes Chile's two top-ranked players Joaquin Niemann and Mito Pereira.

Cho Minn Thant, Asian Tour CEO, said: "Re-introducing the International Series, with heavy-weight stars such as these, in

new markets like the Middle East, provides unimaginable exposure for the game of golf in locations where the potential for growth is enormous."

The International Series will contribute a total of over \$20m to the 2023 Asian Tour prize funds. Comprising of 10 events, an increase from seven in 2022, this investment ensures elevated purses of minimum \$2m per

It's great that The International Series is breaking ground in the Middle East this year

SCOTT VINCENT

tournament. Alongside the numerous global players seeking to capitalise on the increased prize purse are Asian Tour stalwarts, Sihwan Kim - winner of the 2022 Asian Tour Order Of Merit, and Scott Vincent - winner of the 2022 International Series Order Of Merit.

The 30-year-old Zimbabwean who's earned a coveted place in the LIV Golf League under cap-

tain Niemann, said: "With the introduction of The International Series and the clear pathway to the heights of LIV Golf, The Asian Tour is a really exciting place to be playing golf right now. "It's always exciting to visit new places and it's great that The International Series is breaking ground in the Middle East this year."

Representing the region, Othman Ibrahim Almulla, Saud Ab-

dullah Al Sharif and Faisal Mohammed Salhab, from Saudi Arabia plus Jordan's Shergo Al Kurdi, will also showcase their talents in Oman.

Rahul Singh, Head of The International Series said: "Besides the exciting line up we already have confirmed, helping us kick-start the 2023 season, our aim with the series has always been continued growth.



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland with the trophy after winning the final round of the Dubai Desert Classic 2023

McIlroy comes through 'battle' to edge bitter rival Reed in Dubai

Dubai, United Arab Emirates - Rory McIlroy prevailed in a nail-biting finish over Patrick Reed, the man he "prefers not to acknowledge" after a spat between the two, in the rain-delayed Dubai Desert Classic on Monday.

It was the first time McIlroy has won the first start of his new season and is his 15th DP World Tour victory in 231 starts.

His one-stroke victory was also his third Dubai Desert Classic success in 13 appearances.

He will remain world number one, after Spaniard Jon Rahm failed to win the Farmers Insurance Open on the PGA Tour on Saturday.

McIlroy and Reed went into the tournament after a row when Reed reportedly threw a tee towards McIlroy on the practice range in Dubai.

The incident, caught on camera, turned out to be a lot milder than reported but the two have been at odds since McIlroy criticised players, including Reed,

who joined the rival Saudi-backed LIV Golf circuit.

Relations were not helped by McIlroy receiving a subpoena from Reed's lawyer on Christmas Eve to appear as a witness in a case. McIlroy had fallen behind Reed after a bogey on the 15th hole but he made amends with birdies on the 17th and 18th in a round of four-under par 68.

The Northern Irishman finished on 19-under par, while Reed, starting the day four shots behind McIlroy, made a crucial

bogey on the 16th and a par on the drivable par-4 17th hole in his round of 65.

"I think, mentally, today was probably one of the toughest rounds I've ever had to play because it would be really easy to let your emotions get in the way," said McIlroy, who won \$1.53 million for his effort.

"I just had to really concentrate on focusing on myself. I had to forget who was up there on the leaderboard, and I did that really well."

India hockey coach Reid quits after World Cup debacle

New Delhi, India - India hockey coach Graham Reid resigned Monday, the sport's administrators said, a day after a World Cup that the side embarrassingly exited at the group stage.

Once a powerhouse of hockey with eight Olympic golds to their name, India hosted the tournament but went out when they lost to New Zealand in a play-off for a quarter-final place.

Hockey India (HI) said president Dilip Tirkey and secretary Bholanath Singh "met with players and the support staff of the team to understand and analyse the team's performance and



Graham Reid

strategy for the way ahead".

Reid, a former Australia player, coached the Indian team to a

wealth Games in Birmingham.

"It is now time for me to step aside and hand over the reins to the next management," said Reid, who joined the Indian set-up in 2019.

His role had been "an honour and privilege", he said, wishing the team the best for the future.

Analytical coach Greg Clark and scientific adviser Mitchell David Pemberton also quit, the governing body said.

Germany beat Belgium in a shoot-out to win the World Cup after the final ended 3-3 on Sunday.

AFF

Real Madrid, Barcelona to meet in Copa del Rey semis

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid will take on Clasico rivals Barcelona in the Copa del Rey semi-finals while Athletic Bilbao will face Osasuna following Monday's draw.

The reigning Spanish champions will host Barca before visiting the Camp Nou, in the only round of Spain's national knockout competition held over two legs.

Carlo Ancelotti's side reached the last four after overcoming local rivals Atletico Madrid 3-1 in extra time in the

quarter-finals, while Barcelona defeated Real Sociedad 1-0.

"It's a huge game, not only for the Copa del Rey, it's a big game across the world," Barcelona's sporting director Jordi Cruyff said in reaction to the draw held near Madrid.

Cruyff said his players had already moved on from their 3-1 win against Real Madrid in this month's Spanish Super Cup final in Saudi Arabia.

"We start from zero and it will be a wonderful battle," he added.

Athletic Bilbao - who have reached the Copa del Rey semi-finals for four seasons running - gained their place in the final four with a 3-1 victory over Valencia in the last round.

Their opponents Osasuna knocked out Sevilla in the quarter-finals with a 2-1 win after extra time.

Real Madrid's trip to Morocco next week to compete in the FIFA Club World Cup will clash with the usual date for the semi-final first legs and forced a rescheduled calendar.

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Zubair Automotive Group Celebrates 50th Anniversary

- Celebrates 50th Anniversary at exclusive Gala Dinner at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah on 29 January 2023
- Honours its top six customers with a token of appreciation at the event

Muscat, 31 January 2023 | Commemorating five decades of success and growth in the country, the Zubair Automotive Group (ZAG) hosted a grand 50th Anniversary Celebration event at the Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah on 29 January 2023. The event featured a gala dinner and entertainment while also highlighting five decades of achievements and milestones by the Zubair Automotive Group. At the event, a token of appreciation was also presented to each of the Group's top six customers.

In attendance at the event were HE Mohammad Al Zubair, the founder of the Zubair Automotive Group, Rashad Mohammad Al Zubair, the Chairman of The Zubair Corporation, Al Zubair Mohammad Al Zubair, Vice Chairman, Ziyad Mohammad Al Zubair, Board Member, and Mohammad Al Farei, Chief Operating Officer of Zubair Automotive Group, along with representatives from each of the brands the Group represents who travelled to be part of this event and VIP customers from across the country. Several executive management members and personnel from The Zubair Corporation and Zubair Automotive Group companies were also present at the event.

Addressing the attendees at the event, Al Zubair Mohammad Al Zubair, said, "Over the past five decades, the Group has contributed significantly to the development of Oman by providing transport solutions and building and construction equipment to meet the requirements of modern markets and businesses.

"We place great emphasis on staying current with the latest advancements in the market and providing cutting-edge technologies through our strategic partnerships with the best brands in the transportation and equipment industry. We cherish the partnerships we have formed and the unlimited support we have received



over these past fifty years." A token of appreciation was also given to each of the Zubair Automotive Group's top six customers during the 50th Anniversary Celebration. This was meant to show the customers how much their loyalty was appreciated and to thank them for their continued patronage over the years. These included the 'Loyal Customer of the Year' presented to Al Tasnim Group, 'Most Enterprising Customer' presented to Gulf Petrochemical Services & Trading, 'Public Enterprise Customer of the Year' presented to Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company, 'Emerging Customer of the Year' presented to Towell Auto Leasing & Trading, 'Promising Customer of the Year' presented to Galfar Engineering & Contracting, and 'Customer of the Year' presented to Travel & Allied Services (Budget Rent A Car).

"Of all the achievements and accomplishments of our Group over the past five decades, one thing is certain; we would not be where we are today were it not for the loyalty and support of our valued customers," said Mohammad Al Farei. "This is why we re-



main just as committed to their success today as we were when the Group was founded five decades ago. We have always strived to ensure that the quality and performance of the world-class brands we represent are matched by superior customer service and after-sales support, no matter where our customers are in the country. This commitment has always governed and shaped our journey and will continue to do so in the years to come." Five decades after the dawn of the Renaissance and the establishment of the modern Omani state, the automotive sector stands as one of the main contributors to the national economy. The sector owes much of its success to the founder of the Zubair Automotive Group, Mohammad Al Zubair. As with many of the largest corporations we know today, Zubair Automotive Group's roots can be traced back to a small start-up. This was a small business outfit set up by HE Mohammad Al Zubair on the onset of rising economic opportunities triggered by the Renaissance in the late 1960s, specifically 1967, called Muscat Trad-

ing Company. Under his guidance and leadership, the company grew and eventually became Zubair Enterprises in 1973 and commenced operations in the automotive sector by representing its very first automotive franchise - Chrysler, followed soon thereafter by Mitsubishi Motors. This set in motion a business initiative that would ultimately blossom into the highly respected and well-diversified business corporation we know today. Under his leadership, the Zubair Automotive Group has been a trendsetter in the Omani market for the past five decades. Over the years, the Group has continued to grow steadily, responding to market needs by expanding its brand portfolio and incorporating the latest technology and industry best practices. As a result, it is responsible for introducing some of the world's most prominent automotive brands to the country and has continued to set the standard for sales, after-sales and customer service excellence in Oman's Automotive Sector. The Zubair Automotive Group has kept pace with the development of the Sultanate throughout the years and

stands today as one of the country's largest and oldest automotive distributors, partnered with the world's most prestigious brands. Representing them is a diverse range of subsidiaries, including General Automotive Company, International Heavy Equipment (IHE), Dhofar Automotive, Sayarti and Zubair Commercial Trucks and Equipment. Each boasts its own distinct business philosophy, country-wide sales and service network, various brand and product portfolios, and an unwavering focus on customer satisfaction. "We don't consider our 50th Anniversary as an occasion to only reflect on where we have reached; rather, it is part of our very ethos to challenge the norm and lead the way for the future of the Sultanate's Automotive Sector. We intend to achieve this through continued strategic investment in our businesses, staff, technology, and infrastructure," said Rashad Mohammad Al Zubair the Chairman of The Zubair Corporation. Mohammad Al Farei offered his thanks to everyone involved in the success of Zubair Automotive Group over



the past five decades, saying, "I would like to offer special thanks to each of our loyal clients, shareholders, suppliers, strategic partners, principals, and our staff. They have each played a critical part in the success of our organisation. We are also extremely grateful to each of our shareholders for their continued support of our vision. "Under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Oman has entered an era of renewed renaissance, and we will be there to support him and help guide the automotive sector towards a prosperous future." At the event, the Zubair Automotive Group showcased an array of cutting-edge technologies and product offerings from the diverse range of brands it represents, including Mitsubishi Motors, FUSO, Renault Trucks, Volvo Trucks, Liebherr, Bobcat, Putzmeister, Jungheinrich, Montabert, Eicher, F.Illi Ferrari, Cromwell, Hi-Force, and Renato, among others. For more information on the Zubair Automotive Group, please visit the Head Office in Azaiba or call 24500500.





NUTRITION
& YOU



VANDANA CHAWLA

DIET AND IQ



Intelligence Quotient or IQ measures one's reasoning and problem-solving abilities. This, in turn, is related to one's grasping power, concentration, language abilities, memory, and information processing capabilities. Be it a school child, a young adult or an aging individual, these skills play a key role in our day-to day functioning. We are all born with a set IQ, but in the later years, the food choices that we make is one of

the key factors that can help us to enhance our learning, thinking, and reasoning abilities.

How can we boost our IQ through diet?

The main heroes behind our intelligence are vitamins and minerals. These heroes help turn carbs coming from whole grain foods into glucose - the energy that the brain needs. They break proteins coming from animal food, dairy, lentils, beans into

amino acids that, in turn, make the chemical messengers. And finally, they also convert healthy fats coming from fish, eggs into complex fats which are needed for memory and concentration.

To boost IQ in the short and long term, we need to focus on certain important areas:

- Diet during childhood years - We cannot go back and change our diet but we can definitely bring a change in

the diet habits of the kids in the family. Excessive intake of processed foods loaded with sugar, chemicals, unhealthy fats or trans fats, has been linked to lower IQ scores.

- Controlling Blood sugar through healthy lifestyle - Eating meals at regular intervals, going for a low sugar diet with a right balance of healthy fats, proteins, and healthy carbs from foods like sweet potatoes, brown rice, and whole wheat products is an

intelligent way to keep blood sugar levels in check.

- Making every meal, Nutrient-Dense - Foods that are high in nutrients but relatively low in calories are nutrient-dense. Changing our mindset which is purely fixated on calories to looking at options packed with nutrients is a way of getting the brainy heroes.
- Keeping Processed or Junk Food out - Foods that have been processed in a factory by adding loads of sugar, hydrogenated fats, and chemicals mainly to increase the shelf life or to cut down the cost can play havoc with the brain and IQ.

Tips and cautions

- Inculcate healthy eating habits right from childhood years, by cutting down on sugar, fat and including more of home-based fresh foods
- Controlled blood sugar = alert and attentive brain. Do not skip meals and do not overeat
- Hunger-times or in-between meal snacks should include nutrient-dense foods, like, nuts, seeds, fruit-veggies salad, and hummus with bread, instead of donuts/muffins, pizzas/fries
- Avoid fried foods available in the stores. Loaded with trans fats, these foods are shown to lower one's ability to learn or recall information
- Eat your comfort food in moderation, be it a slice of cake, a burger or restaurant food

Eating healthy is like, giving the brain the right fuel to make the right connections. (Vandana Chawla is an Online Nutrition Expert and a Registered Nutritionist-UKVRN)



DR AJANTA SHAIKH
Specialist Dermatologist
Badr al Samaa Polyclinic, Sur

WINTER SKIN CARE

As winter sets in, most of us are excited. We love the cool breeze on our face, the picnics with camp fires, hot coffee which tastes so heavenly now, and the warm sunlight which cuddles us every time we go out.

But what about our dear skin that we are so concerned about? That's a different story. We get up and see our face in the mirror, shocked by the sight of dry, patchy and uneven skin tone. Not to mention the discreet pigmentation which keeps popping up in different places and stubbornly staying there for long, despite of our best efforts to keep it at bay.

Hands get dry, lips are chapped, and our hardworking feet develop fissures and cracks

which peep out from our footwear humiliating us further. Hair, too, starts falling so much that we fear we might end up bald soon.

But, things need not be so petrifying as a few simple steps will go a long way in protecting our skin and hair from damage during the beautiful winter season.

The magic word is 'hydration'. We naturally don't feel so thirsty now in the cold season but we need to consciously drink more water as it keeps our body and skin hydrated from inside.

External hydration is essential, too. We need to use a good moisturiser, preferably non perfumed and apply it multiple times a day. The moisturisers for the face will not be suitable for the body and similarly the ones for the body will not be suitable for the dryness on hands and feet. So, we need to wisely choose separate moisturisers for our face, depending on our skin type and for our body, hands, feet and lips. If our elbows and knees are extremely dry, we need separate intense moisturisers for them, too.

It might seem an ordeal to invest in different moisturisers for different parts of our face and body, but trust me, you will love the glow and feel of your skin when you use them regularly. Moisturisers containing shea butter are excellent, but for extremely dry areas moisturisers with some urea in them work

wonders.

Another crucial aspect of winter skin care is sun protection. We should not think that we can do away with our sunscreens as it is winter. Even if it doesn't feel warm outside, the harmful UV rays of the sun can still penetrate your skin and cause sun damage, photoaging, wrinkles, pigmentation and in some cases skin cancer too. We should use sunblock with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 30, though 50 is ideal and we can use higher spf in exposed parts of our body like face, hands, etc. Lip moisturisers should preferably contain spf.

We need to pay attention to our bathing products too. Face should be washed with mild face washes and we should avoid soaps as the alkaline nature of soaps can damage tender facial skin and make it more dry. We should avoid hot baths and use warm water instead.

Skin care is incomplete if we don't talk about hair care. Again the magic word is hydration. We should regularly oil our hair with nourishing oils like argan, olive or coconut oil. Mild shampoos and a rich conditioner is essential to prevent dry hair and split ends. Heat styling and blow drying should be avoided to prevent hair breakage.

Last but not the least, regular exercise and a balanced diet play a significant role in skin and hair nutrition apart from general well being in winter.

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