

► NEWS BRIEF

6.1-MAGNITUDE QUAKE SHAKES HOKKAIDO IN NORTHERN JAPAN

Tokyo, Japan - A 6.1-magnitude earthquake struck off Hokkaido in northern Japan on Saturday night, the US Geological Survey and the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

No tsunami warning was issued after the offshore quake, which shook the coastal cities of Kushiro and Nemuro.

Major Japanese media outlets carried no immediate reports of damage or injuries.

04



Abraj joins hands with Chevron, Kuwait Gulf Oil

Oman, US sign \$500mn MoU

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) valued at RO192mn (US\$500mn) with Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM) on Thursday. The MoU will explore options of utilising EXIM financing and promoting trade and investment in strategic sectors of Oman's economy, ranging from renewable energy to manufacturing.

Bilateral trade between Oman and the United States totalled US\$4.22bn in 2022, the highest ever and up 30 per cent from US\$3.25bn in 2021. The United States is Oman's largest market for non-oil exports, providing options for the long-term partnership to create jobs and mutual prosperity in both countries.

The MoU was signed on the sidelines of the first Oman-US Strategic Dialogue by H E Abdullah Salim al Harthy, Undersecretary



(2L) Undersecretary H E Sheikh Khalifa al Harthy, (3L) Reta Jo Lewis, (C) US Undersecretary Jose W Fernandez and (2R) H E Abdullah Salim al Harthy

tary in the Ministry of Finance, and Reta Jo Lewis, President and Chair of the Board of Directors of EXIM.

H E Harthy said that the MoU

will open the way for more partnerships and cooperation between the two countries. It will also open new vistas to invest, especially in the promising sectors

in Oman, such as mining, technology and clean energy, he added.

He explained that the MoU establishes cooperation between

Oman and US through working teams that will be formed for the sectors covered by the memorandum.

"Opportunities will be explored through which EXIM can support trade and investment opportunities in Oman."

On her turn, Reta of EXIM, confirmed that the bank seeks to play a pivotal role in supporting bilateral relations and partnership between the two sides. "This includes provision of various kinds of support to financial and commercial institutions in Oman and the business community, in general, in a bid to make optimal use of the capabilities that Oman possesses in many sectors."

Reta added that the bank introduces the American business community to the investment opportunities available in Oman and pointed out that the MoU signed between the two sides will contribute to strengthening bilateral relations and pushing them towards broader horizons in many spheres through the exchange of experiences and visions in the investment, trade and research sectors for the benefit of the two countries and their friendly peoples.



Oman establishes diplomatic ties with the Vatican

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman and the Holy See - the government of the Roman Catholic Church in the Vatican City, have officially established diplomatic relations.

The two sides signed a joint statement on the establishment of diplomatic relations based on the relations of cooperation and friendship in New York on Thursday.

The statement was signed by H E Dr Muhammad bin Awad al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the sultanate to the United Nations, and Archbishop

Gabriele Caccia, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Following the signing, H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, tweeted, "We are delighted to announce the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican. We look forward to working together for peace and many other humanitarian causes."

The statement added that both sides agreed to establish, on the basis of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of April 18, 1961, full diplomatic relations at the level of an Apostolic Nunciature to Oman and of an Embassy to the Holy See.

Oman, Russia discuss peaceful settlement of Ukraine conflict

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received Mikhail Bogdanov, Deputy Foreign Minister and Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for the Middle East and Africa, on Thursday.

The two reviewed areas of mutual cooperation. They also exchanged views on various regional and international developments of common interest.

"Met Deputy Foreign Minister and Presidential Envoy of Russia Mikhail Bogdanov. We discussed the urgent need for dialogue and peaceful settlement of the Ukraine conflict. We also discussed various possibilities for bilateral cooperation for the common good," tweeted H E Sayyid Badr.



H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi receives Mikhail Bogdanov

A session of political talks was also held between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation on Thursday.

The Omani side was headed by H E Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, while the Russian side was headed by Bogdanov.

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SEASON 2022-2023



1,800m dual zip line opens in Musandam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) has announced the soft opening of a 1,800m dual zip line project in Khasab, Musandam. The project is part of an integrated adventure centre designed to offer tourists unique experiences that combine adventure and exploration.

The zip line project is the first activity offered by the Oman Adventure Centre, which is being developed as part of a comprehensive development plan for the region. Through this plan, the Governorate of Musandam will be able to diversify its tourism market by providing a wide variety of quality products and experiences. This will enable it to draw out its potential and highlight its position as a prominent tourist destination in the region, a press

We are confident that the zip line project will encourage businesses to develop more tourism-related services

MUBARAK AL RAHBI

release stated.

The Oman Adventure Centre was designed to accommodate a broad range of facilities, providing visitors with an integrated tourism experience. It has a waiting area, besides several facilities. The zip line project will be managed and operated by LEOS, a specialist operator that runs adventure and entertainment projects in the region and other parts of the world.

On the occasion of the soft opening, Mubarak bin Ali al Rahbi, head of the Musandam Governor's Office, said, "The governorate has a wealth of tourism offerings that can be utilised to develop a wide range of tourism projects. This project illustrates our ongoing efforts to utilise these elements for tourism development."

He added, "We are confident that the zip line project will encourage businesses within and outside the governorate to develop more tourism-related services. In doing so, they will contribute to the sector's growth, aligning with our vision to place Musandam on the local and regional map of the most prominent tourist destinations, especially in the areas of exploration and adventure."

According to Said Hareb al Obaidani, Director General of

Tourism Development in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the ministry is working to stimulate development and investment in key tourist destinations in Oman, especially Musandam.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has allocated the necessary land and budget for the zip line project, which has been implemented by Omran in partnership with Musandam Governor's Office.

The project has also generated social benefits and added value to the local communities that surround it. A prominent example is the development of 3.5km of Jebel Fitt Street, which leads up to Oman Adventure Centre and the villages beyond. The development of this road has contributed significantly to ease movement to and from the villages.

The adventure centre is open from 9am to 4pm all days.

Oman, US committed to enhance trade, economic relations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Jose W Fernandez, US Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, has described the free trade agreement (FTA) between Oman and the US as the focal point for supporting trade and economic relations and augmenting the volume of trade exchange between the two countries to a level that meets common aspirations.

Speaking on the sidelines of the first Oman-US Strategic Dialogue in Muscat on Thursday, Fernandez said, "The volume of trade exchange between Oman and the United States has witnessed remarkable growth over the past years, which is a good indicator in the midst of the many changes the world has witnessed that affected several aspects of life."

He informed that through the strategic dialogue, the US hopes to deepen cooperation with Oman, especially in the fields of clean energy and green hydrogen.

"I commend the efforts of Oman in the field of green hydrogen. The United States, through private sector institutions, would like to be a strategic partner of Oman in the field of hydrogen, in



I commend the efforts of Oman in the field of green hydrogen. The US would like to be a strategic partner of Oman in the field of hydrogen

JOSE W FERNANDEZ

a manner that serves the interests of the two friendly countries and peoples. The energy sector has become the talk of the hour in the whole world, and the shift towards clean energy has become a global trend, so the sultanate will witness a promising future in the green hydrogen sector," he said.

The two countries will explore opportunities to collaborate on clean energy solutions such as carbon removal, clean hydrogen, industrial decarbonisation, as well as a clean energy policy, in-

cluding Oman's net-zero 2050 roadmap, methane emissions reduction and other short-lived climate pollutants, and Oman's plans for COP28.

H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, asserted that Oman and the United States enjoy distinguished relations and both sides seek to accord greater attention to the economic field through the strategic dialogue.

"The strategic dialogue is divided into three working groups, namely renewable energy, investment and trade, education and culture," H E Harthy said.

He explained that among the major objectives of the strategic dialogue is to maximise benefits from the FTA signed between the two sides in 2009. "Both sides seek, through the three groups of the strategic dialogue, to identify specific fields and sectors, and then raise it to the officials concerned of both sides to develop mechanisms for their utilisation in the future."

Both sides welcomed cooperation on education, culture, and science, and discussed a mechanism for resuming the Fulbright programme for Omani students and scholars and developing programmes in key areas discussed by both countries.

Programme to facilitate space sector SMEs on March 5

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an aim to train national cadres and involve small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the space sector, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) will launch a training programme called 'Earth observation from space'.

An official at MTCIT said, "The programme will be held at Sultan Qaboos University from March 5 to 9. It will include several courses, such as Earth observation through satellites, monitoring weather, air and soil by using satellite applications, and remote sensing and its ap-

plications."

According to the official, the programme aims to train and provide participants with scientific skills to analyse and process satellite images and to facilitate SMEs operating in the space sector. "This will help enhance the programme participants' skills with modern technologies in the field of satellites and their applications."

The ministry confirmed that the estimated economic contribution of space services and applications in the sultanate in 2021 did not exceed 0.03 per cent, while the number of workers in the sector was around 150 at various professional and supervisory levels.

In January, MTCIT organised a symposium on the space sector, titled 'Future trends and investment opportunities'.

The symposium aimed to achieve the objectives of the Digital Economy Programme and Oman Vision 2040, and to raise awareness on the importance of the space sector and its technologies, in addition to identifying current and future opportunities for cooperation and partnerships in the sector.

During the symposium, two agreements were signed - one for Etlaq's use for launches, and the other for establishing a special corner for space science and technology at Children's Museum in Muscat.



**EMBASSY OF THE FEDERATIVE
REPUBLIC OF BRAZIL IN MUSCAT**

**BIDDING ANNOUNCEMENT
VEHICLE SALE**

The Embassy of Brazil in Muscat, located at Way 1521, Villa 1424, Madinat Al Ilam, will sell a BMW 525i vehicle, year 2009/2010, black, 4 doors, being driven 98,874 km. Rules and regulations of this bidding, to take place at 2 pm on March 9, 2023, are available at

<https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/embaxada-mascate/noticias-e-anuncios/BiddingNotice.pdf>

Oman's airspace opens to all carriers, including Israeli

Muscat - The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has announced that the sultanate's airspace is open for all carriers that meet the requirements of the authority.

With the announcement, Oman's airspace is now open to Israeli aircraft, a move hailed by Israel and the United States.

Praising the announcement, Israel's Foreign Minister Eli Cohen said, "Another great step towards regional integration. Is-

raeli flights can now pass over Omani airspace, saving fuel and many hours.

"Thank you to the Sultanate of Oman for promoting the move and accompanying it all the way to its success. This is definitely a day of celebration for Israel."

Flights from Israel to Asian destinations such as Thailand and India will be shortened by at least two hours following CAA's announcement.

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9 in 10 engineering firms struggling to recruit

IET survey finds employers must work closer with educators to realise Oman Vision 2040

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The engineering sector must work closer with academia if Oman has to inspire and enable the next generation to become world-class innovators, a fundamental component of Oman Vision 2040, a new report has revealed.

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), a 152-year-old global organisation with 154,000 members in 148 countries, has released findings from its Oman Skills Survey that lays bare the skills gap currently facing the Omani engineering industry, as well as the skills prospects for the next decade that will be vital in maximising the country's engineering potential and diversifying the economy.

Having conducted skills surveys for the past 18 years, IET joined forces with market researchers YouGov and inter-

viewed individuals in Oman with management responsibilities in companies that employ engineers.

The findings cast a positive light on the expansion of industry, with two thirds (66 per cent) reporting an increase in staff numbers over the past year. However, in the last 12 months almost all (97 per cent or nine out of ten) struggled to recruit with problems centred on applicants' lack of skills, experience or qualifications.

But skills aren't the only barrier, with over a third (37 per cent) of respondents reporting a lack of diversity within their workforce as a current challenge – something they still expect to be prevalent in the next three years (32 per cent).

Over the next two decades, the sultanate has put education and learning as key priorities of Oman Vision 2040, with targets to move Omani universities up the global rankings index (into



(2L) Sir Julian Young (Supplied photo)

the top 300) and to move into the top 20 countries in the Global Talent Competitiveness Index. A large share of organisations that employ university graduates believe they have the skills to address the challenges their organisation faces (88 per cent).

However, there are still barriers to encourage young Omanis into choosing engineering as a

career with half thinking young people lack knowledge about different career options within engineering (49 per cent) and the absence of available job opportunities (47 per cent).

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning are considered an important area of skills growth over the next five years, although a third of firms (33 per cent) don't have or don't know if they

have the right skills in this area.

Sir Julian Young, IET's immediate past president, said, "Oman has clear long-term ambitions that support an economic diversification away from oil dependence. With priorities including modernising the education system and building capabilities at a local level, it is clear from our research that there needs to be a re-focus on upskilling, including

better collaboration between higher education institutions and industry to provide real-world applications to learning and ensure engineering education is aligned to current and future industry needs."

He noted that for Oman to continue building home-grown engineering talent to meet its future requirements, industry and the government will need to work with schools to ensure children from a young age experience more hands-on practical learning of STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects to encourage creativity, imagination and problem solving. "This should be a continual dialogue and can be supported by collaborative projects and student work experience schemes as young people progress through the education system."

The survey also uncovered the rise in prominence of IT and communications as the most important industry in Oman over

the next three years (55 per cent) and longer term (51 per cent).

This has helped identified a clear training priority over the next five years, although most employers are confident, they can address the skills gap as their businesses diversify into new areas. There is a high degree of certainty that organisations, which identified a need, will be able to access the training required (94 per cent), with the majority looking to professional training bodies (60 per cent).

The research shows that the top ways for Omani engineers to increase their credibility are by completing additional qualifications (43 per cent of those surveyed agreed) and by completing an accredited apprenticeship programme (41 per cent). Registration with a national body (36 per cent) and membership of an international professional body (34 per cent) help too.

Forum empowers rural women, promotes their products

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A forum to empower rural women and promote their products started in Muscat on Thursday. The forum, which runs till Monday, will highlight methods of production and safety and quality of food produced by rural businesses.

The forum also showcases success stories in fields related to agriculture, livestock and fisheries.

In addition, events in the forum target marketing products



(Supplied photo)

of rural women in an effort to increase demand and production.

The event is being held under the patronage of H E Ahmed

Nasser al Bakri, Undersecretary for Agriculture in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Cardiac catheter unit opens in Sohar Hospital

Sohar - Sohar Hospital started a cardiac catheter unit on Thursday. A specialised team from The Royal Hospital and Sohar Hospital performed the first two catheter procedures on the day.

H E Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, attended the opening of the unit along with H E Dr Said Harib al Lamki, Undersecretary for Health Affairs in the Ministry of Health.

H E Dr Sabti was briefed on the progress of work in expanding Sohar Hospital in preparation of new services catering to the people of North Batinah and nearby governorates.

Dr Najib al Rawahi, Director of National Heart Centre at The Royal Hospital, noted that opening of the cardiac catheter unit in Sohar Hospital is an important milestone.

Dr Rawahi added that the Ministry of Health is focused on improving therapeutic services in all governorates and that it is striving to introduce services currently available in Muscat,



(Supplied photo)

Dhofar and North Batinah to other governorates.

In this regard, Dr Talib al Maqbali, Director of Sohar Hospital, informed that these services will shorten waiting lists and referral procedures in the Muscat governorate.

Sohar Hospital referred about 300 patients annually to The Royal Hospital for cardiac catheter procedures. "Due to its population density, cases from North Batinah represent around

20 per cent of patients referred to Muscat."

The cardiac catheter unit is part of the expansion project and services development in Sohar Hospital. The unit consists of two rooms equipped with the latest equipment and technologies for cardiovascular procedures. An admission ward with 22 beds has been developed for post-cardiac catheter procedures, as well as a cardiac care unit equipped with 12 beds.



صندوق مزون الأول The First Mazoon Fund

THE FIRST MAZOOON FUND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE PERIOD ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2022

The Chairman's Report
For 31 December 2022

The primary objective of the fund is to achieve capital appreciation through a diversified portfolio of equity and bond investments in public companies listed at GCC Markets and MENA region. A summary of financial results is as follows:

Figure 1:	For the period ended December 31, 2022	For the period ended December 31, 2021
	(OMR)	(OMR)
Total Income	(193,249)	2,498,846
Total Expenses	321,042	(447,144)
Profit (Loss) for the Period	(514,291)	2,051,702
Profit (Loss) per Unit	(0.068)	0.274
NAV per Unit	1.065	1.282

Fund Performance:
For the period ended December 31, 2022, the performance of The First Mazoon Fund is as follows:

Figure 2:	December 31, 2022	December 31, 2021
Net Asset Value (OMR)	8,114,229	9,686,416
Number of Outstanding Units	7,615,857	7,555,023
Net Asset Value per Unit*	1.065	1.282
FMF Fund Performance for the period	-5.27	26.79%
Benchmark Performance for the period	-7.16	31.45%

The First Mazoon Fund's NAV decreased by 5.27% (net of all expenses) to reach RO 1.065 per unit for the year ended 31 December 2022. This compares with a decrease in the benchmark Index S&P GCC Composite index of 7.16% resulting in an outperformance of 1.89%.

Market Performance:
After a strong start to the GCC markets in the first half of 2022, the second half of the markets saw correction as the impact of geo-politics and monetary tightening continued to weigh in. While Saudi and Qatar markets finished negative with a return of -7.12% and -8.13% respectively for full year 2022, other GCC markets managed to stay positive. The benchmark S&P GCC index finished a volatile year with losses of 7.16%, with the bulk of decline coming in Q4 of around -6.3%. On the global front, the MSCI World index ended the year with losses of 19.5%, reflecting double digit declines in most markets globally. The Russia-Ukraine war, in addition to the Chinese lockdowns, impacted the global supply chain. This accelerated the inflationary trends for the better part of 2022, forcing central banks to have a fast-paced rate hikes trajectory causing pressure on global financial markets.

Figure A: Index Returns

Index	YTD (December 31, 2022)
Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange	20.30%
Muscat Stock Exchange	17.63%
Bahrain Bourse	5.45%
Dubai Financial Market	4.39%
Boursa Kuwait	3.53%
Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul)	-7.12%
S&P GCC Index	-7.16%
Qatar Exchange	-8.13%

Economy and Markets
This first time, the institution now expects growth to be at 2.9%, which is 20 bps higher than its earlier forecast in Oct, 2022. Major contributor to this upgrade was on account of Chinese growth which is expected to grow from 3% to 5.2% in 2023, owing to re-opening up of its economy. However, some market institutions anticipate that the Chinese re-opening could much more front loaded and could boost the global GDP by more than 1% in 2023. Both headline and core inflation, the real cause of global monetary tightening, are expected to fall appreciably as well.
In the region, Saudi Arabia real economic growth is expected to slowdown appreciably from 8.5% to around 3.5%. However, this is on account of lower oil production which is to be kept in-line with OPEC+ agreement. However, the non-oil growth is expected to stay robust on account of diversification initiatives taken by the government. Notably, GCC economies posted twin surpluses in 2022, thereby rendering more spending capacity with the governments, they are expected to post sizeable twin surpluses in 2023 also.
The regional consumer sector is likely to provide earnings potential in 2023 as spending stays robust post full re-opening of the economies. Consumer product price hikes seen in 2022, citing higher inflation, may be not reversed and passed on in 2023, thereby resulting in higher margins. Discretionary mobility/travel sector, out of home dining sector, may also get supported by a re-opening theme. Given ongoing mega projects in KSA sector, cement sector in the region will likely remain a sector to watch if the capacity utilisation starts to increase from its present 60% levels. With record property sales in the UAE, both rents and prices have firmed up – bodes well for this sector and select banks. Post pandemic, the number of visitors to hospitals have been increasing as the fear of catching infection has diminished – a positive for the healthcare sector. Key drivers for bank earnings in the KSA are likely to be Vision 2030 related projects and mortgage growth.
Liquidity in the region had tightened considerably in Q4, 2022 on account of higher interest rates. With moderation seen in the pace of rate hikes, liquidity conditions are likely to get better as oil prices remain robust on

an average, notwithstanding short-term volatility. Both KSA and UAE might see some upward adjustment in their MSCI weights in 2023, supportive of regional stock markets in a measured manner, post strong correction in 2H 2022. Consequently, we are constantly re-evaluating our positions to reflect such a view as we seek better risk adjusted returns.

Acknowledgements
On behalf of the Fund Management Body, we seize this opportunity to thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq bin Tammur and his government for their persistence support to the private sector and the financial services sector. I also take this opportunity to thank the CMA, MSX & MCD for their support and cooperation, members of the Fund Management Body for their valuable time and guidance, our valued unitholder, for your continued support and trust and the fund manager and service providers for their efforts.

Chairman
The First Mazoon Fund
October 22nd, 2022

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income For 31 December 2022

	31 December 2022 RO	31 December 2021 RO
INCOME		
Dividend income	237,358	258,990
Interest income	370	196
Net realised gain on investments at fair value through profit or loss	247,586	1,847,119
Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss	(678,563)	392,138
Other income	-	403
Total income	(193,249)	2,498,846
Expenses		
Brokerage expenses	133,686	94,420
Management fees	129,262	126,368
General and administration	33,836	33,438
Custodian and administrator service fees	13,849	13,103
Fund Management Body fee	8,989	30,000
Foreign exchange loss (net)	1,420	7,320
Performance fees	-	142,495
Total Expenses	321,042	447,144
Net profit and total comprehensive income for the year	(514,291)	2,051,702
Net profit per unit	(0.068)	0.274

Statement of financial position
As 31 December 2022

	31 December 2022 RO	31 December 2021 RO
ASSETS		
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	7,228,483	8,472,469
Cash and cash equivalents	924,344	1,436,257
Dividend and other receivables	5,313	-
Total assets	8,158,140	9,908,726
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Accruals and other payables	43,911	222,310
Total liabilities	43,911	222,310
Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders	8,114,229	9,686,416
Net asset value per unit	1.065	1.282

For more information please contact:
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MOH No. 44/2023

Abraj joins hands with Chevron, Kuwait Gulf Oil for regional expansion

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Abraj Energy Services, Oman's leading oilfield services provider which opened its initial public offering (IPO) on February 20, has signed a strategic partnership deal with Saudi Arabian Chevron and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company in the field of drilling and oil extraction to expand its regional presence.

Abraj said its strategic partnership with Saudi Arabian Chevron and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company is aimed at enhancing opportunities between the two parties through drilling and oil extraction for a period of five years.

Global oil giant Chevron is a major player in Saudi Arabia's energy market having a continuous upstream presence in the kingdom for more than seven decades. Kuwait Gulf Oil Company, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation for upstream oil and gas operations, represents the interest of the State of Kuwait in the Partitioned Zone (PZ) which lies alongside the border between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

The partnership agreement will see Abraj build three drilling platforms and provide other related services for the Wafra oil field project located within the onshore Partitioned Neutral Zone (PZ) in the southern part of Kuwait, Abraj said in a press statement on Saturday.

"This agreement leverages Abraj's competitive advantage of being a leading service provider in Oman with a depth of experience and expertise. The collabora-



tion envisages an opportunity to expand its portfolio of services, exchange experiences and adopt best practices in the field of drilling, sustainability and technology in the sector," Abraj said.

Commenting on the importance of this partnership, Saif al Hamhami, Abraj Energy Services CEO, said, "We are pleased to announce our strategic partnership with Saudi Arabian Chevron and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company, emphasising our commitment to expand our footprint in the Middle East and North Africa."

Hamhami noted that Abraj is "pre-qualified to provide various services in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Algeria, where the company's advanced rigging fleet is linked to long-term contracts with leading national and international oil companies".

"Abraj is uniquely poised for this opportunity as it owns the most modern and advanced drilling fleets in the Middle East and North Africa region. Consisting of 25 drilling rigs and five well

maintenance rigs that operate with the latest technology, it offers a competitive advantage to its clients particularly in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Algeria," he added.

In line with its growth strategy, Abraj recently announced its IPO and plans for listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange. The Abraj IPO is part of Oman Investment Authority's (OIA) divestment plan to exit some government investments to provide opportunities for Omani and foreign investors to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Abraj is an indirectly wholly-owned subsidiary of Oman's global integrated energy group OQ. OQ (the selling shareholder) has offered up to 377,398,000 shares, equivalent to 49 per cent of the total issued share capital of Abraj, in the IPO.

The IPO is offered in a parallel offering for Category I (large and institutional investors) and Category II (retail investors).

The subscription for Category I runs from February 20 until

March 2, 2023, whereas the subscription for the Category II runs from February 20 until March 1, 2023.

The Category I subscription price range for the offering has been set at between 242bz and 249bz per share. The Category II subscription price is the discounted maximum price of 224bz per share, calculated as the maximum price of 249bz per share less a discount of 10 per cent.

OQ has brought in Saudi Omani Investment Company and global energy services giant Schlumberger as anchor investors for the Abraj IPO. In aggregate, the anchor investors have committed RO37.58mn to the IPO, representing 40 per cent of the offer size.

Abraj's initial public offering is the biggest IPO in Oman since 2010, when Nawras (Omani Qatari Telecommunications Company) - now known as Ooredoo Oman - raised around RO182mn via a book-building process IPO.



‘Oman’s 2023 inflation to remain lowest in GCC’

Our Correspondent
Muscat

After witnessing one of the lowest inflation rates among the GCC countries during 2022, Oman is expected to record the lowest average inflation rate in 2023, according to a new report.

The year 2022 was a turbulent year for the global economy with runaway inflation and the cost-of-living crisis being dominant issues facing the bulk of the countries globally. However, households in Oman and other GCC countries remained relatively insulated from rising global inflation due to government measures that capped prices of fuel and essential commodities and diversified food import sources.

According to estimates from Kuwait-based Kamco Investment, Oman's annual inflation is expected to average at 1.9 per cent during 2023, the lowest average inflation in the GCC region.

"Proactive policies by the gov-

ernments in the region and subsidies on food and energy items helped to keep inflation in the GCC at relatively low levels. Inflation in the GCC averaged at around the 4 per cent mark and showed a downward trend for most countries during second half of 2022," Kamco Investment said in a research note.

The inflation rate in Oman stood at 1.8 per cent during January 2023, the lowest monthly growth since August 2021.

"The sultanate witnessed one of the lowest inflation rates among the GCC countries during 2022 with price growth peaking at 4.4 per cent in January 2022. The Omani government has underlined that the low and acceptable levels of inflation was due to the government's proactive handling of the global inflation crisis such as tackling the supply chain crisis related to foodstuffs," Kamco Investment noted.

It said that inflation in the GCC region is expected to diminish in 2023 led by higher interest

rates and slowing global growth. According to PWC, inflation in the region is expected to average of 2.7 per cent in 2023.

The GCC region is also expected to gain from its relative stability in its financial covers thanks to higher oil prices and higher energy exports in 2022.

"This would allow countries in the GCC region to invest in critical sectors in order to protect from future fluctuations in key food and component prices," Kamco Investment said.

According to the IMF, global inflation is expected to stabilise at 6.6 per cent in 2023 and then drop to 4.3 per cent in 2024 as compared to 8.8 per cent in 2022. The forecast is based on expected drop in energy prices, improving global supply chains and stabilization in prices of essential commodities.

However, factors such as faster economic growth in China and a rise in energy prices can push global inflationary pressures upwards.



شركة التغليف المحدودة (ش.م.ع.ع)
Packaging Co Ltd. (SAOG)

INVITATION TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of PACKAGING COMPANY LIMITED SAOG (the Company) has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Monday at 05:00 PM on 27/03/2023, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) and will be held in this location (through www.mcd.gov.om). If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting shall be held on Wednesday at 03:00 PM on 29/03/2023, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) and will be held in this location (through www.mcd.gov.om) to discuss the following agenda:

- 1- To consider and approve the Board of Director's Report for the financial year ended 31st December 2022
- 2- To consider and approve the company's organization and management report for the financial year ending December 31, 2022.
- 3- To consider and approve the Auditor's report, Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss account for the financial year ended 31st December 2022.
- 4- To Inform the association of the related party transaction during the financial ended 31st December 2022.(as per attached).
- 5- To consider and ratify the Board of Directors sitting fees paid during the preceding year and to determine the board sitting fees for the upcoming financial year. (as per attachment).
- 6- To elect a new Board of Directors for the Company from amongst Shareholders or non-shareholders. Any person who wishes to be nominated to the Board of Directors of the Company is required to fill in a Director's Nomination Form. Such a form can be obtained from the Company. The completed Form should be delivered to the Company at least five (5) days prior to the date of the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Company (no later than the end of the business hours on Tuesday 21 March 2023). The candidate must satisfy the company's board membership requirements.
- 7- To appoint an independent entity to measure the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year that will end 31 December 2023 and determine its fees.
- 8- To appoint the auditors for the financial year ending 31st December 2023 and to approve their remuneration.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

1. Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCD.
2. In voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on telephone No 99434183 or email: jasim@packoman.com

Chairman

Legal adviser

External Auditor

US nominates ex-Mastercard CEO Ajay Banga to lead World Bank

Washington, US - The United States' candidate to lead the World Bank, Ajay Banga, has helmed large institutions and "helped bring 500mn unbanked people into the digital economy," according to US authorities.

And those who have worked with him describe him as a straight-talking leader who is able to work with people of different cultures.

Banga, 63, has walked an unusual path to potential leadership of the development lender.

Born in Pune, near Mumbai, his father was an Indian army officer and he moved around regularly in his childhood.

Banga, who is Sikh, wears a turban and has a full beard, started out at Nestle in India taking on sales and marketing assignments before moving to PepsiCo and eventually joining Citigroup in 1996.

There, he worked his way up to chief executive officer of the Asia-Pacific region before joining



Ajay Banga

Mastercard in 2009 as chief operating officer and being named its chief executive a year later.

In 2021, he joined private equity firm General Atlantic.

While he was born and raised in India, spending a part of his career there, the Indian-American leader has also been described as an Americanized baseball lover who "owns practically every Elvis Presley album that you could think of," according to a Financial Times interview.

Kazakhstan proposes pipeline linking Russia, China

Moscow, Russia - Kazakhstan on Friday said it had discussed building a gas pipeline linking Russia and China as Moscow pivots to Asia amid conflict with the West.

The pipeline could also supply regions in the expansive central Asian republic, which suffers from frequent power shortages

despite its vast resources.

"Kazakhstan proposed that Gazprom consider new transit routes for Russian gas to China, taking into account gas supply to the domestic market," a spokesperson for the national gas company QazaqGaz told AFP.

No other details were pro-

vided.

Since the West imposed a flurry of sanctions on Russia over its assault on Ukraine, Moscow has sought to accentuate its pivot towards Asia's huge energy market.

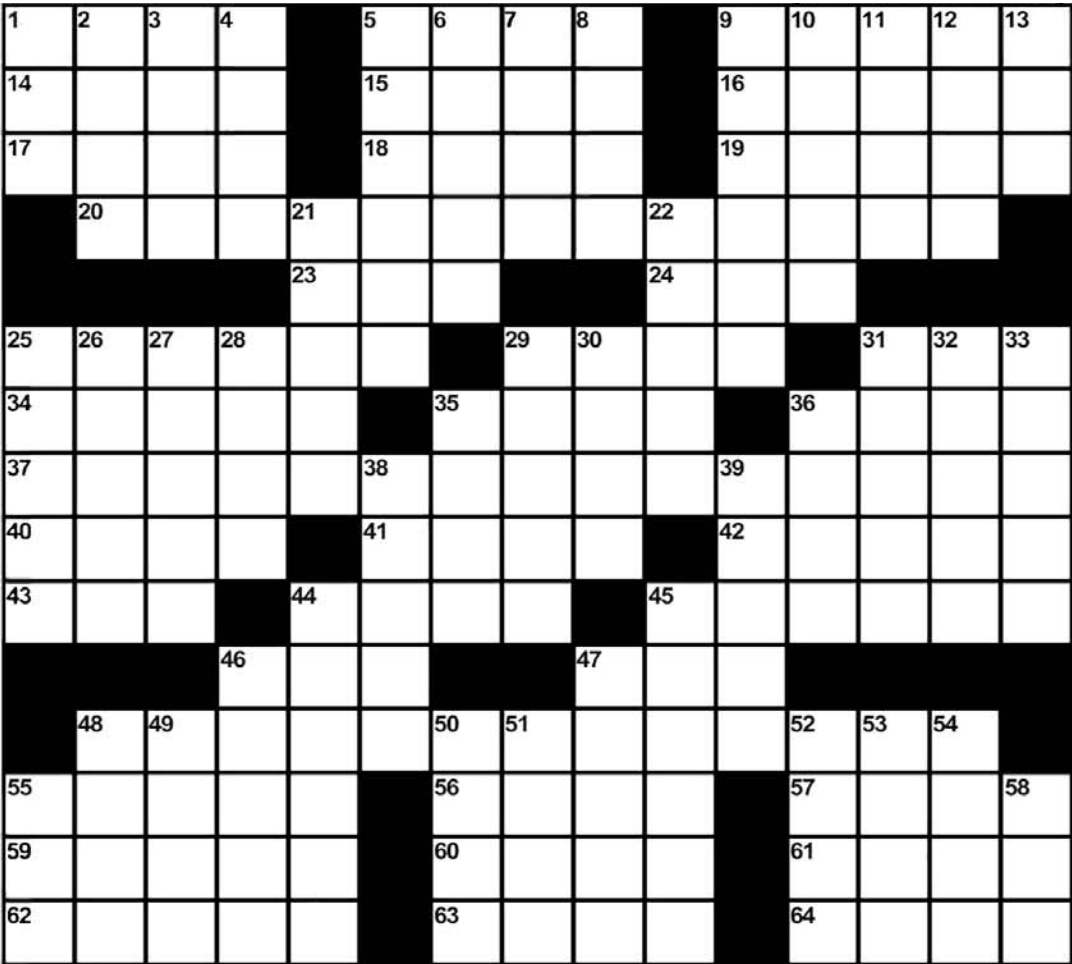
Russian gas exports plummeted by 25 per cent in 2022, but the amount of gas sent

through the "Power of Siberia" pipeline to China hit record highs.

In 2024, Gazprom is planning to start building the "Power of Siberia-2" gas pipeline after the Nord Stream 2 gas link to Europe was abandoned amid the Ukraine conflict.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) They get hailed
5) Arithmetic sign
9) Took the challenge
14) Vicinity
15) Pete who's not in the Baseball Hall of Fame
16) Barcelona buddy
17) Neeson of films
18) S-curve molding
19) Mantel
20) "The Wedding Singer" star?
23) Stimpý's cartoon pal
24) Rhine tributary (Var.)
25) Theorized
29) Rock hardness scale
31) Insane
34) Heredity units
35) "You leave_ choice"
36) Foot part
37) What unintelligent people fathom?
40) Nights, in classifieds
41) Waters, in France
42) Italian tourist center
43) Soak hemp
44) Type of appeal
45) Oleo alternative

46) Ocelot, e.g.
47) Half a Teletubby's name
48) "Utopia" essayist?
55) Conspicuous success
56) Lighter than red
57) Burrito's cousin
59) Bangor's home
60) Add a fringe to
61) "The Good Earth" heroine
62) Look of scorn
63) Daily fare of nourishment
64) Moniker

DOWN

1) Ripken of baseball
2) Bone-dry
3) Wall Street pessimist
4) Word before "time" and "place"
5) Delved into
6) Boston's airport
7) _friendly
8) Nostradamus, supposedly
9) Texas city
10) One spelling for a Bahrain bigwig

11) Unburdens
12) Souffle ingredients
13) Anonymous John
21) Seize forcibly
22) Country bumpkin
25) People watcher
26) Rub the wrong way
27) Mini-map
28) Top Untouchable
29) Diner cards
30) Banded chalcidony
31) "Haystacks" painter
32) In solitary
33) Flask type
35) Goat bleats
36) Comic sketch
38) Scottish moor
39) Customary
44) Make a difference
45) Bread container
46) Whooping bird
47) "Blue Sky" Oscar winner Jessica
48) Check for blips
49) "Would_ to You?" (Eurythmics hit)
50) Newspaper opinion page, briefly
51) Skirt type

52) Bond's alma mater
53) Room in a casa
54) Con man's job

55) Common pair?
58) "_ more time!"

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

There are a few highfalutin folks around you right now. These individuals really like to live beyond their means. Be careful of them. Spend too much time with them (especially socially), and you'll start to feel like you're missing out if you're not constantly spending. All of this luxury can be tempting, but it's not something you can comfortably afford right now. Step back and try and stay grounded. Remember that debt isn't a sign of success, nor is it sexy.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

No matter where you go or who you talk to today, you're sure to make a very good impression on all the right people. This is a great time to move your social life into more exotic and stimulating territory. Are you ready to meet some fabulous new people? Sure, you might be perfectly happy with the people in your life right now, but a stranger on the scene has some interesting skills to teach you. You should definitely let them share what they know.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

An unexpected invitation might be too good to pass up, so don't let the potential price tag associated with it keep you from saying yes. Just because you might be pinching your pennies right now doesn't mean that you can't afford to splurge a little bit, especially in this situation. Go for it and commit fully. Don't try to slide by on the cheap either. You'll only annoy others and deprive yourself of the whole experience. Go with an "in for a penny, in for a pound" attitude.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Even astronauts have to come back down to this planet in order to live a normal life, so what are you doing with your head still up in the clouds? It's good to have lofty ambitions, and it's wonderful to daydream every once in a while, but it's time that you rejoined the reality-based community. Right now, being grounded is the only thing that will really enable you to connect with other people. And that's what it will take to build that new relationship you want so badly.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The best thing for your ego right now is honest, old-fashioned hard work. Roll up your sleeves and get started doing something that enables you to see real progress by the end of the day. Create something concrete, and challenge yourself to finish it by the end of the day. Whether you bake a batch of chocolate chip cookies or paint the living room, completing a project will make your self-esteem skyrocket. You'll feel like a rock star.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Some days fly by in what feels like ten minutes while others drag on in a seemingly endless test of your stamina. Which category will today end up falling into? Well, it could certainly prove to be a bit of an endurance test. Luckily, you'll have plenty to keep you busy. You won't be watching the clock and wondering when quitting time is. Consider yourself lucky that you'll be able to stay active and engaged. That's not the case for everyone.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Sometimes it's hard for you to hear the truth. Then again, sometimes (like today), it's even harder for you to tell someone else the truth! But honesty is essential, especially in this relationship. So buck up and do what needs to be done. Whenever a difficult conversation needs to happen, a face-to-face conversation is required. You can't deliver bad news electronically. It will only add salt to whatever wound your words could inflict.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

When other people are unsure about how to proceed with a challenging task today, you will know exactly what to do. The only real challenge for you will be to get people to listen to what you have to say! It's time to stop speaking in hushed tones and start barking like the big dog you are. Watch out for people who are trying to quiet you down. They're just afraid that you'll show them up. Don't let their insecurity stop you from making a major power play.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Are you trying to make a decision? If it's taking too long for your liking, or if other people are pushing you to hurry up already, then you have to do what it takes to figure things out today. First, stop trying to see things so completely. Narrow your focus! You can't explore all ways of doing something. You have to pick just a few possibilities and flesh them out in your mind. Give up on the idea that the perfect answer is out there, because it isn't. Close enough is good enough.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

A friend or coworker has been acting out of character lately, swinging from one emotional extreme to another. Their unpredictable behavior is causing some waves in your placid life, and you can expect the waves to just get bigger today. It's in your best interest to speak up and let them know that while you understand things might be hard for them right now, they can't expect you to suffer too. Let them know that you will meet them halfway but that things need to change soon.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If you have an ambitious project lined up, today is the perfect day to get started on it. Right now, even the toughest tasks will be as easy as pie for you. An early success will buoy you to keep going through the tougher times that might be coming down the line. Despite all the hard work and sacrifice that you will need to put into this thing, you should have confidence about what's in store. This will be a good thing for you and the people you love.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Everyone and their brother has a tip for you today! Coworkers who've been there before, friends in high places, family members who worry about you, even strangers who are just busybodies all think that they know what you should do with your life. The only trouble is you haven't asked any of them for their advice. Try to see their meddlesome ways as a sign that you matter in other people's lives. They want you to be happy, which should be more flattering than annoying.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. "Solitaire" is known as a card game in many countries; what is used to play another game known as "Solitaire" in the UK?
- A. Board with 64 squares & 8 red & 8 black counters
B. Board with pegs and holes
C. Round ball and 1 hoop
D. Rings made of rope
02. What is the name of a Japanese dish consisting of noodles and broth?
- A. Sashimi
B. Ramen
C. Nori
D. Sushi
03. Which of these was famous as a maker of pianos?
- A. Henry Steinway
B. Antonio Stradivari
C. Carl Zeiss
D. Humphrey Upright
- Answers: 1. B 2. B 3. A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

S	C	X	A
L	I	D	E
D	E	M	E
E	P	A	H

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Iran still seeking to kill Trump, says general

Tehran, Iran - An Iranian general warned his country is still seeking to kill former US president Donald Trump and his secretary of state Mike Pompeo in revenge for assassinating top commander Qasem Soleimani.

Tehran has repeatedly vowed to avenge the killing of Soleimani, the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' foreign operations, in a US drone strike on Baghdad airport in January 2020.

"We hope we can kill Trump, Pompeo, (former US general Kenneth) McKenzie and the military commanders who gave the order" to kill Soleimani, General Amirali Hajizadeh, the Guards' aerospace unit commander, said on television late on Friday.

Trump had ordered the strike in response to a number of attacks on US interests in Iraq that his administration blamed on Iran.

Days later, Iran retaliated by firing missiles at a US airbase in Iraq that housed US troops.

None were killed, but Washington said dozens suf-

fered traumatic brain damage. The United States and its allies have repeatedly expressed concerns about Iran's ballistic missile programme as well as its 'destabilising' role in the Middle East.

In his televised remarks, Hajizadeh said Iran was 'now able to hit American ships at a distance of 2,000km (1,243 miles)'.

"We have set this limit of 2,000km out of respect for the Europeans and we hope that the Europeans show themselves worthy of this respect," the Iranian general said.

On Saturday, Iranian state television aired video of what it said was a newly unveiled "Paveh cruise missile with a range of 1,650km (1,025 miles)" developed by the Guards.

The official broadcaster reported on Friday that Iran was likely to provide Syria with the 15-Khordad surface-to-air missile system to 'reinforce' its defensive capabilities.

AFP

Nigerians vote for new president in tight race with 3 frontrunners

Lagos, Nigeria - Nigerians voted on Saturday for a successor to President Muhammadu Buhari in a tight race with three frontrunners competing for the first time in the country's modern history.

Nearly 90mn people are eligible to vote, with many Nigerians saying they hoped the new leader of Africa's most populous democracy would tackle a security crisis, the sluggish economy and widening poverty.

For the first time since the end of military rule in 1999, a third serious candidate has emerged to challenge the dominance of Buhari's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and main opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

"Nigeria is in a big mess. We need the right leaders," said Pastor John Fashugba, 76, voting in Lagos. "This election will be a great opportunity for us."

Polling stations were meant to open at 0730 GMT, but election officials or materials arrived late in numerous centres visited by AFP in Lagos, southern Port Harcourt, and the northwest.

Buhari, a former army commander, steps down after two



A voter looks on as another gets her information checked in the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) by an Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) official at a polling station in Agege, Lagos, on Saturday (AFP)

terms in office, with many critics saying he failed in his promises to make Nigeria a safer and less corrupt country.

Wearing a blue robe, APC's Bola Tinubu, 70, a former Lagos governor and political kingmaker, voted in his stronghold in the city accompanied by tight security.

Known as the 'Godfather of

Lagos' for his influence, he says 'it's my turn' for the presidency and can count on APC's structure and his own political network. He faces a familiar rival - PDP candidate and former vice president Atiku Abubakar, 76, who is on his sixth bid for the top job and touts his business experience to fix the economy.

"This is more credible than the previous elections," Abubakar said, voting in his hometown in Yola, northeast Adamawa State.

But both are old guard figures who have fought off corruption accusations in the past.

The emergence of a surprise third candidate appealing to young voters, Labour Party's

Peter Obi, 61, has thrown the race open with his campaign for change.

"I want Nigeria to move forward. We've been moving backward for years," said Chibueze Otueh, voting in southeast Anambra State.

"We need someone different than these old politicians. We've seen their faces for so long."

Cash shortages

The success of Saturday's election will be closely watched after West Africa's democratic credentials took a knock from coups in Burkina Faso and Mali.

Megacity Lagos may have put Nigeria on the global entertainment map today for its Nollywood film industry and global Afrobeats stars like Burna Boy, but the new leader of Africa's largest economy inherits a complex set of security and financial risks.

Cash and fuel shortages in the run-up to the election have also left many Nigerians angry and struggling more than usual in a country already hit by more than 20 per cent inflation.

AFP

Palestinian nurse spots own father among dying casualties

Nablus, Palestinian Territories - When Israel conducted its deadliest raid in the occupied West Bank in almost two decades this week, a young Palestinian nurse rushed to help.

As critical case after critical case succumbed to their wounds, Elias al-Ashqar, 25, let out a blood-curdling roar.

"My father! My father," he screamed, as he realised his dad was among the 11 people killed in the raid on the flashpoint city of Nablus.

"I was on my regular shift in the hospital on Wednesday morning. I was busy with a group of medical students from An-Najah University," Ashqar told AFP. It was then that the emergency department alarm bell sounded, warning of multiple incoming casualties, an increasingly frequent occurrence amid the growing violence of recent months.

As he entered, he saw two



Elias al-Ashqar carries a poster bearing an obituary for his father

people on opposite beds. "The doctors were trying to resuscitate them," he told AFP, tears welling in his eyes.

"I helped the doctors with the first patient. He was young but soon died, so I tried to help save the life of the second man without looking at his face.

"The doctors were trying to resuscitate him, so I left them to

help other cases... but I had a strange feeling the second wounded man belonged to me.

"I ran back and asked about him, and they told me that he had been martyred, so I subconsciously pulled back the curtain, and discovered that the martyr was my father."

Ashqar said his father Abdel Aziz, 65, had been returning from prayers in the Old City when he was caught up in the Israeli incursion. He said his father was unarmed.

Recent clashes in Nablus are at least partly the result of the emergence of a new group in the city dubbed the Lions' Den, that claims to rise above traditional factional loyalties and has been blamed for a number of attacks on Israeli targets.

Israel said Wednesday's raid targeted two Lions' Den members, as well as a member of the Islamic Jihad group.

AFP

Peru recalls ambassador to Mexico over diplomatic row

Lima, Peru - Peruvian President Dina Boluarte announced on Friday the 'definitive recall' of her ambassador to Mexico, citing the continued support that the North American country has given to deposed president Pedro Castillo.

Peru's leftist former president Castillo was impeached and arrested for attempting to dissolve parliament and rule by decree in December, and Boluarte has since seen weeks of anti-government protests across the Andean nation calling for her removal.

Castillo's ouster was criticised by leftist Latin American allies, including Mexico, which has sparked a diplomatic row.

On Friday Boluarte denounced the 'unacceptable' interference in the 'internal affairs' of Peru by Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

"I have ordered the definitive recall of our ambassador to Mexico," Boluarte said in a televised address.



Peru's President Dina Boluarte (AFP)

"In this way, diplomatic relations between Peru and Mexico are formally reduced to the level of charge d'affaires."

Her announcement comes the same day Lopez Obrador reiterated that 'Mexico will continue to support (Castillo) who was unjustly and illegally removed from office'.

"I strongly reject the remarks made today by the president of Mexico on Peru's internal affairs and his repeated unacceptable questioning of the constitutional and democratic origins of my government," Boluarte said.

She added that Lopez Obrador has 'decided to support the coup d'etat carried out by the now former president Pedro Castillo on December 7, 2022'. Lopez Obrador has been one of Castillo's most fervent foreign supporters, along with the fellow leftist leaders of Bolivia, Argentina and Colombia.

Peru had already expelled the Mexican ambassador at the end of December, after Mexico granted political asylum to Castillo's wife and two sons.

At least 48 people have died in clashes between security forces and protesters since unrest broke out on December 7, following his impeachment and arrest.

The demonstrations are driven by poor southern, Indigenous Peruvians who perceive Castillo - who is also from humble origins and has Indigenous roots - as an ally in their fight against poverty, racism and inequality.

AFP

Gulf Mushroom Products Co. (S.A.O.G.)

Board of Directors Report

Dear Shareholders

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the twenty fifth annual report of Gulf Mushroom Products Co. (SAOG) for the financial year ended 31 December 2022.

The Board of directors, executive management and staff of Gulf Mushroom thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for leading the country on the path of sustainable long-term economic development through its Vision 2040 and robust fiscal and economic policies and support for the private sector.

Regional focus

Increased GDP on the back of high oil prices, increased government spending on development works and a rebound in travel and tourism post the pandemic is driving consumption and demand significantly. As the largest producer of fresh mushrooms in the region your Company is the regional market leader and is focused on meeting the market demand for fresh mushrooms with best quality fresh mushrooms at competitive prices.

Preview of Results

Your Company achieved an all-time high in revenues and profits during the year through strategic management of its resources, challenges and opportunities.

The revenues of the company for the year ended 31 December 2022 were RO 9,813 million compared to RO 7,869 million in 2021, an increase of 25%. Earnings before depreciation and finance costs in 2022 was RO 2,751 million compared to RO 1,833 million in 2021, an increase of 50%.

Net profit after tax for the year ended 31 December 2022 was RO 1,558 Million compared to RO 0,765 Million in 2021, an increase of 104%.

The net assets of the company (including land revaluation reserve) as at 31 December 2022 were RO 9,172 million compared to RO 7,905 million as at 31 December 2021.

During the year your Company achieved a total production of 6,055 metric tons of different varieties of fresh mushrooms compared to 5,005 metric tons in the previous year, an increase of 21%.

Exports during the year 2022 were RO 8,713 million (89% of total sales) compared to RO 6,820 million (88% of total sales) during 2021.

Economic diversification and export revenues

With about 90% exports and by employing large amount of Omani youth, Company is proud of its contribution to Oman's economic diversification and social development policies.

Capacity Expansion

Mushroom production is a hi-tech capital-intensive industry. Company has adopted a policy of increasing its production capacity in stages for most efficient utilization of capacity and maintaining its market share. It is presently expanding its mushroom production capacity for the second time which is expected to be commissioned by 30 June 2023.

Technical Expertise

Production of compost and cultivation of mushrooms is carried out in a controlled environment involving hi-tech climate control systems and micro-biological processes. Your Company has a dedicated and highly experienced technical team and also continuously engages with international consultants to stay up-to-date with technical developments in the mushroom industry.

Quality and safety certifications

Company is strictly following a standard food safety management program and is holding HACCP and Global GAP certifications issued by reputed bodies. Company's operations are regularly subjected to external surveillance and audits by quality auditors.

Dividends Policy

Company uses its cash reserves to re-invest in growth and to provide regular returns to its shareholders. For the year ended 31 December 2022 the board of directors is pleased to propose cash dividend at 10% of paid-up share capital and bonus shares at 10 % of company's paid-up share capital subject to approval from appropriate authorities and shareholders. Share price and dividend history for the last ten years is shown in the table below--

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Share price at year end (RO)	0.430	0.426	0.386	0.336	0.306	0.306	0.306	0.306	0.263	0.238
Cash Dividend	-	-	-	-	-	5%	5%	-	7%	10%*
Bonus shares	20%	10%	15%	10%	-	-	-	10%	-	10%*

* subject to approval from appropriate authorities and shareholders.

Corporate Governance

Company strictly adheres to the corporate governance regulations issued by the Capital Market Authority and exercises strong governance through its board of directors, well documented policies and procedures and sound internal control systems. During the year there were 19 meetings of the board of directors, audit committee and nomination & remuneration committee. Reference may be made to the Management Discussion and Analysis Report and Report on Corporate Governance which are enclosed.

Board performance appraisal

The appraisal of the Board was conducted during the year by Baker Tilly MKM Oman LLC, the independent consultants appointed at the AGM held on 15 March 2022. The appraisal was conducted based on the criteria approved at the AGM dated 15 March 2022. The performance appraisal report has been received by the Board and it gave a "Very satisfactory" score for the year 2022.

Human resources

Company is proud of its skilled and motivated employees which includes 147 Omani citizens representing 38.28% of total employees. Besides hiring Omani workers, Company has employed Omani commerce and technical graduates across all business functions and in different levels. Company follows best industry practices for improving employee motivation, performance and growth through periodic performance appraisals, incentives and rewards and training programs.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Company has a CSR policy and contributes to social causes within the CSR budget approved by the shareholders every year.

Outlook

Opening up of the countries around the world after the pandemic and reduction in global inflationary conditions will have a positive effect on supply chain, travel and tourism and global trade in the near future despite the ongoing war in

Europe. The long-term sustainable economic development plans and policies in Oman and the surrounding region with their mega development works are expected to continue to drive consumption and demand significantly and further boost mushroom demand. Your company is the leading producer of fresh mushrooms in the entire middle-east region and is committed to maintain its leadership position and sustain its growth in revenues and profits in the future.

Thanks and Gratitude

We express our gratitude and loyalty to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik May God protect him and guide him for the benefit of Oman and its people.

We express our gratitude and thanks to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and all officials for their guidance and support extended to the company.

We thank the shareholders for their constant support to the company. We also thank the management team and staff of the company for their dedication and sincere efforts towards achieving the goals of the company.

Chairman of the Board of Directors

Statement Of Financial Position As At 31 December 2022		
	2022 RO	2021 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	12,579,229	12,488,624
Right-of-use asset	21,291	29,046
	12,600,520	12,517,670
Current assets		
Inventories	2,187,593	1,214,459
Trade and other receivables	1,600,816	1,486,220
Cash and bank balances	752,858	468,176
	4,541,267	3,168,855
Total assets	17,141,787	15,686,525
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	4,160,527	4,160,527
Legal reserve	1,036,548	880,744
Special reserve	12,405	12,405
Revaluation reserve	1,379,890	1,379,890
Retained earnings	2,582,667	1,471,669
	9,172,037	7,905,235
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Government soft loan	589,417	441,939
Deferred Government grant	46,313	30,196
Commercial loan	3,105,921	3,952,319
Lease liability	8,575	16,744
Deferred tax liability	590,993	564,720
Employees' end of service benefits	411,316	359,517
	4,752,535	5,365,435
Current liabilities		
Government soft loan	149,117	152,865
Commercial loan	1,071,766	691,179
Lease liability	8,168	7,778
Short term borrowings	250,000	-
Trade and other payables	1,489,635	1,456,142
Income tax payable	248,529	107,891
	3,217,215	2,415,855
Total liabilities	7,969,750	7,781,290
Total equity and liabilities	17,141,787	15,686,525
Net assets per share	0.220	0.190

Statement Of Comprehensive Income for the year ended 31 December 2022		
	2022 RO	2021 RO
Income from operations	9,812,998	7,868,663
Cost of operations	(5,104,326)	(4,382,429)
Gross profit	4,708,672	3,486,234
Selling and distribution expenses	(724,480)	(615,881)
Administrative expenses	(1,260,494)	(1,071,564)
Other income	27,259	33,814
Depreciation on property, plant and equipment	(624,435)	(620,132)
Depreciation on right-of-use asset	(7,755)	(7,755)
Finance costs	(286,707)	(305,506)
Profit before income tax	1,832,060	899,210
Income tax	(274,021)	(134,368)
Total comprehensive income for the year	1,558,039	764,842
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	0.037	0.018

The complete accounts of Gulf Mushroom Products Co. SAOG will be delivered to any shareholder or other interested party who requests them, in either Arabic or English, as requested, within 7 days of receipt of written request.

M/s Gulf Mushroom Products Co. SAOG
P.O. Box: 383, Postal Code: 320, Barka, Sultanate of Oman, Fax: 00968 26883955, Email: info@gulfmushroom.com

ominvest: A 40-Year

"ominvest has come a long way in 40 years by investing in high-quality, sustainable businesses that generate healthy cash flows. We transform businesses in a way that contributes to their growth and impact on communities, bringing innovative transactions to the market. Our ambition has no limits as we look to outgrow our current areas of interest to become a bigger regional player with global reach, with leading ambitions on Environment, Social, and Governance standards. With a clear vision and determination to succeed, we are building platforms, diversifying our revenue sources, and preparing for the ominvest of tomorrow."

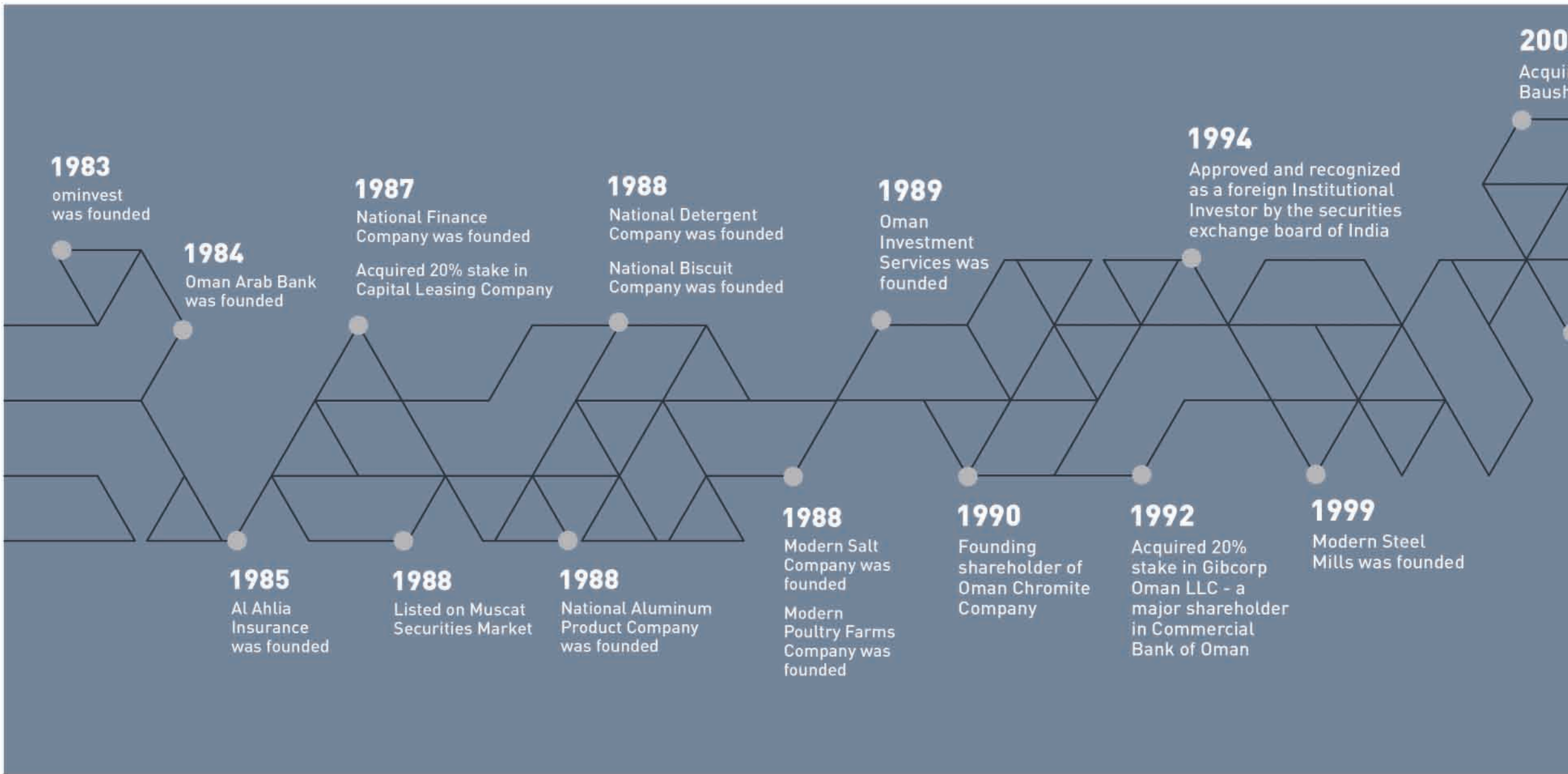


Khalid Muhammad Al Zubair,
Chairman of ominvest

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Introducing The New Identity

As part of its 40th Anniversary celebrations, ominvest proudly unveiled its new identity to all stakeholders. The new identity retains the name to build on its four decades of success, symbolising the organisation's constant drive for growth and forward-thinking. The new logo, where dark blue signifies leadership, and light blue symbolises trust and integrity, reflects four decades of hard work and achievements. ominvest's success and relentless commitment to "Transforming Businesses to Enrich Societies."



Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (ominvest) celebrated its 40th Anniversary on Thursday, 23 February 2023. The celebration was held at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah under the patronage of Mohammad Al Zubair, one of the founders and first chairman of ominvest. The event was attended by Government and International Dignitaries, prominent business leaders, and VIPs from Oman and overseas. The event not only commemorates 40 years of ominvest but also recognises the collective efforts of the Board and the entire ominvest team that have contributed to the Group's success. This would not have been possible without ominvest's elementary guiding principles and unique investment philosophy, which the organisation has tenaciously followed since day one. To understand the true scope of its growth and the inspiring scale with which ominvest has multiplied success over the last four decades, we must look back at the Group's fulfilling and humbling journey.



The First Chapter of a 40-Year Legacy

ominvest's story began in 1983 when Mohammad Al Zubair and his visionary friends laid the foundation for ominvest. Their vision and values have been the guiding principles for the Group ever since and continue to drive its success to this day. Over the past four decades, the company has been led by progressive boards and capable management teams dedicated to enhancing value for all stakeholders and positively impacting local communities. The past forty years have been not only full of challenges and risks but also tremendous opportunities for growth. By closely monitoring upcoming trends, advanced planning, adapting quickly to change, and implementing sound business strategies, ominvest made significant progress. As a matter of fact, in the four decades since its inception, ominvest has maintained an outstanding record of uninterrupted dividend payments to its shareholders. Its investment philosophy involved investing in high-quality, sustainable businesses with a robust governance framework that can withstand economic downturns. It maintains a high level of valuation discipline and has successfully diversified its investments across companies, sectors, and geographies, focusing on the financial services sector. It also has a clear and focused business model – build and manage a balanced investment portfolio with the right mix of strategic investments, private equity, and global capital markets. The Group exclusively invests in companies with exceptional management teams that demonstrate high levels of competence and integrity. ominvest provides strategic direction to its portfolio companies, along with full autonomy and flexibility to their management teams and supports them in achieving their full potential. ominvest has always supported its strategic investments to enable its growth and success. Its strong financial position and discipline have allowed it to take advantage of opportunities during market downturns and exit at the right time with attractive valuations.

Four Decades of Creating Value

The company's core competencies are its ability to invest prudently in a well-balanced portfolio and innovation-led value creation. Its positive and inclusive culture fosters high levels of performance, integrity, and fairness and encourages challenging the status quo. It approaches unique and unprecedented transactions with a positive mindset and strives to find ways to execute them reasonably and efficiently. It proactively engages with regulators and seeks their guidance, always striving for transparency in its plans. In fact, the company's diverse, multitiered, and hands-on team of fewer than 50 members have successfully managed consolidated assets of USD 3.4 billion, generating superior returns.

Our Legacy of Success

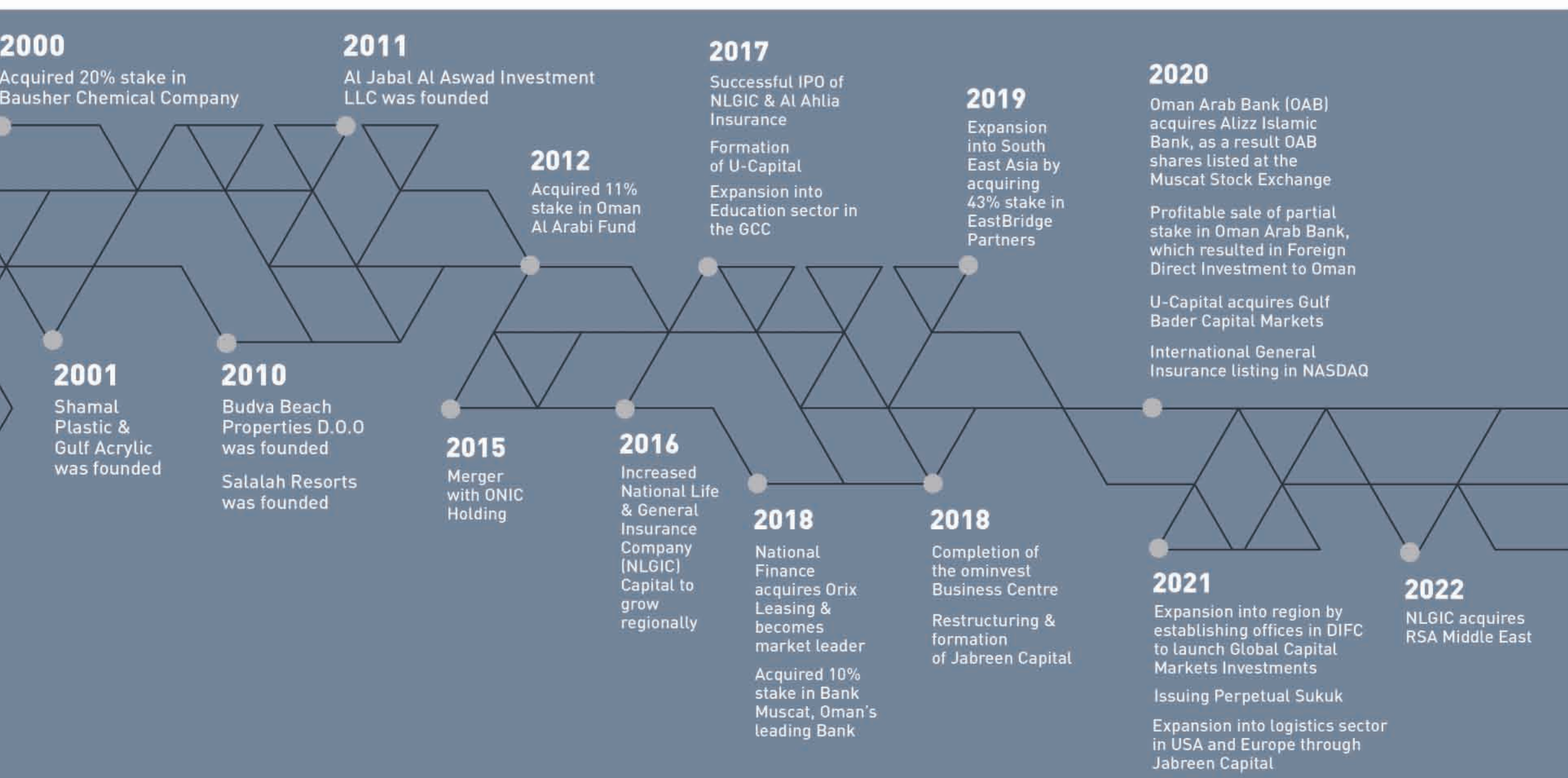
invest

led its new identity, reflecting its ambition, strength, and the trust of its decades-long legacy. The logo features a simple arrow pointing upwards, re-thinking. The elegant, modern and bold design incorporates hues of blue, and loyalty. The name's lowercase lettering exudes confidence gained over countless vision will continue to drive it towards its corporate living purpose of



Abdulaziz Al Balushi,
Group CEO of ominvest

"Over the last four decades, our purpose-driven organisation has embedded social impact and good corporate citizenship at the heart of our vision, mission, culture, and values. By Transforming Businesses to Enrich Societies, we have made a real impact on the lives of everyone we have had the privilege of working with. This record of stability and success is a testament to the vision of our Board, past and present, and our ability to read and adapt to local, regional, and global trends. We owe our success equally to our close relationships, support, and mutual trust with regulators, partners, shareholders, and employees in all countries where we do business."



An excellent example of how ominvest creates value for its affiliated companies is the landmark merger with ONIC Holding. One of the additions to the Group resulting from this merger was National Life & General Insurance Company (NLG), which had great potential and a strong management team but limited scale. In 2016, ominvest strengthened NLG's financial position by injecting capital and providing strategic direction. NLG quickly achieved a market-leading status in Oman and became a significant player in the UAE. Alongside its growth journey, ominvest also successfully floated the IPO of NLG in 2017. With ominvest's support and strategic direction, during 2022 NLG completed a strategic transaction, which resulted in RSA Middle East becoming a wholly-owned subsidiary of NLG. This transaction aided in transforming the combined entity into a larger, stronger, and more competitive regional multiline insurance player emerging from the Sultanate.

Four Decades of Opportunistic Investments and Growth

Through its offices in Singapore and DIFC, its Private Equity and Investment Banking team is also building assets under management, focusing on generating fee income and creating a valuable platform. Currently, ominvest has assets under management of public and private investments of around USD 2.1 billion, which is a testament to the trust placed in its platform by third-party investors.



Moreover, ominvest has an ambitious growth plan and made a sizeable allocation to global capital markets, intending to build high-quality, multi-asset, multi-strategy portfolios as part of its ongoing diversification and liquidity management strategy. 2022 was another successful year for ominvest, with the organisation reporting its highest profit ever, with a return on shareholders' equity of 22%. With assets in excess of USD 3.4 billion and a strong financial position, ominvest is ready for its next growth phase.

The Way of the Future – Sustainability, Scalability & Diversification

The creation of jobs, nurturing of talent, the building of expertise, fostering of innovation, and regular knowledge transfer are just a few of the tools and methods ominvest uses, not only to support local communities but also to embrace best practices in Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG). ominvest believes integrating ESG best practices will drive long-term value across all operational and investment levels. To date, the organisation's efforts have included a comprehensive ESG capacity-building programme across its group companies and the development of a defined strategy for sustainable operations and responsible investing.



One year after Russia invasion, Zelensky eyes victory for Ukraine

Kyiv, Ukraine - President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed on Friday to do everything to defeat Russia this year, as the first Leopard tanks arrived in Ukraine on the anniversary of the start of Europe's largest conflict since World War II.

Street protests against the Russian invasion were held in many European capitals to mark the anniversary, and fresh Western sanctions targeted Russia's banks, military industry and semiconductor access.

Meanwhile, the Group of Seven industrialised nations threatened embargo busters with 'severe costs'.

Poland sent the German-made Leopard tanks to help Ukraine repel Russian troops and deliver a 'clear and measurable signal of further support', said Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, who was visiting Kyiv.

Poland would send more tanks soon, Morawiecki added, and was also offering to train Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 fighter jets, as Western allies underlined their unwavering support.

Russia, however, remained defiant, with former president Dmitry Medvedev insisting his country was ready to push its offensive 'to the borders of Poland'.

Tensions were also building on Ukraine's border with Moldova, as Moscow claimed Kyiv was plotting to invade the breakaway region of Transnistria and promised to respond.

Moldova denied any threat from Ukraine. Zelensky said he was planning to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping after the release on Friday of Beijing's 12-point position paper on the conflict, which included a call for peace talks and for respecting all territorial sovereignty.

Zelensky noted that Beijing's paper appeared to show 'there is respect for our territorial integrity, security issues'.

Earlier on Friday, he said in a statement that Ukraine would 'do everything to gain victory this year'.



People gather to mark one year since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in Hallandale Beach, Florida on Friday (AFP)

'Spirit is strong'

A year ago on Friday, Russian President Vladimir Putin stunned the world by sending tanks and troops across the border, a move seen as punishment for Kyiv's pivot to the West.

The war has devastated

European buildings were draped or lit up in the blue and yellow colours of Ukraine's flag.

A year ago, Russian troops sought to rapidly install a pro-Moscow regime in Ukraine but failed to conquer Kyiv and subsequently suffered defeats in

She voiced pride in her nation and said 'we will succeed' in repelling the invaders.

'Living hell'

The West, which has imposed increasingly stringent sanctions on Russia and boosted humanitarian aid and arms supplies for Ukraine, unveiled more help on Friday.

The United States announced sweeping sanctions aimed not just at Russia but also 200 individuals and entities across Europe, Asia and the Middle East supporting Moscow's war.

After a video call, G7 allies warned: 'third-countries or other international actors who seek to evade or undermine our measures' must 'cease providing material support to Russia's war, or face severe costs'.

Washington's new aid package came days after President Joe Biden arrived in Kyiv for a historic visit and pledged new arms deliveries.

However, Biden on Friday ruled out providing the F-16 fighter jets Ukraine has requested, at least for the time

being, telling ABC News in an interview that Zelensky 'doesn't need F-16s now'.

"Look, we're sending him what our seasoned military thinks he needs now. He needs tanks, he needs artillery, he needs air defence, including HIMARS," Biden said.

"There are things we're sending him to put him in a position to make gains this spring and summer going into the fall."

The EU also agreed to a fresh round of sanctions, and along with contributions from Sweden and Portugal, Germany said it had managed to assemble a battalion of modern Leopard 2 tanks for Ukraine.

The World Bank separately announced an extra US\$2.5bn for Ukraine to support essential services and core government functions.

On Friday, after a minute's silence at the Security Council, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres denounced Russia's military action, saying it had made life for Ukrainians a 'living hell'.

AFP

Biden says he does not 'anticipate' China providing weapons to Russia

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden said on Friday that he does not 'anticipate a major initiative' from China to provide weapons to Russia in its war against Ukraine.

His comments come days after Secretary of State Antony Blinken told CBS that China was 'considering providing lethal support' to Moscow ranging 'from ammunition to the weapons themselves' - which Beijing denied. In a wide-ranging television interview with ABC News - covering his bid for re-election and the war in Ukraine - that aired on Friday evening, Biden appeared to backtrack on Blinken's comments. "I don't anticipate - we haven't seen it yet - but I don't anticipate a major initiative on the part of China providing weaponry to Russia," he said.

Biden explained that in a conversation he had with Chinese President Xi Jinping last summer, he made clear what the consequences of providing weapons to Russia would be.



US President Joe Biden (AFP)

"Without any government prodding, 600 American corporations left Russia - from McDonald's to Exxon - across the board," he said he told Xi.

"And I said, 'If you are engaged in the same kind of brutality, of supporting the brutality that is going on, you may face the same consequences'."

When pressed on whether China would be 'crossing a line' if Beijing were to provide weapons to Russia, Biden said the United States 'would respond.' "We would impose severe sanctions on anyone who has done it."

AFP

HK model butchered over money dispute, four held

Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong police have made four arrests for the murder and dismemberment of a 28-year-old model after a financial dispute with her ex-husband's family, authorities said Saturday.

The partial remains of influencer Abby Choi, who last week appeared on the digital cover of fashion magazine L'Officiel Monaco, were found in a village house set up as a butchery site, police said.

"We are still looking for the head," superintendent Alan Chung told reporters, after disclosing that a woman's limbs had been discovered in-

side a refrigerator.

The house was equipped with an electric saw and a meat grinder that had been used to mince human flesh, Chung said. 'Two pots of stew believed to contain human tissue' were left at the scene.

Choi's ex-husband, a 28-year-old man surnamed Kwong, was arrested for murder on Saturday afternoon as he was attempting to flee the city by boat, Chung said.

The man's father, mother and elder brother had been arrested on the same charge a day earlier.

AFP



Alexander Lukashenko

China's President Xi Jinping

Belarusian President Lukashenko to visit China in coming days

Beijing, China - Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko will visit China on February 28 for a state visit, the Chinese foreign ministry said on Saturday.

Lukashenko is a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and has backed Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, with Belarus dependent on its neighbour both financially and politically.

"At the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko will pay a state visit to China from February 28 to March 2," spokesperson Hua Chunying said.

Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang told his Belarusian counterpart Sergei Aleinik that Beijing is willing to work with Minsk to deepen mutual political trust during a phone conversation on

Friday, the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement.

China will also continue to support Belarus in maintaining its national stability, and will oppose attempts by 'external forces' to interfere in its internal affairs or impose 'illegal' unilateral sanctions on Minsk, Qin told Aleinik.

In September last year, Xi and Lukashenko announced an 'all-weather' strategic partnership, when the two met in the Uzbek city of Samarkand.

Belarus, which shares a border with Ukraine and Russia, allowed Moscow to use its territory to launch its attack on Ukraine last year.

Kyiv has expressed concerns that Belarus could again support Moscow in its war effort.

AFP

Tunisia climate of fear pushes migrants to the exit

Tunis, Tunisia - A steady flow of taxis has rolled up outside the Ivorian embassy in Tunis in recent days, depositing dozens of migrants who say they no longer feel safe amid an officially sanctioned climate of fear.

After a wave of arrests in recent weeks, President Kais Saied gave a speech on Wednesday that critics said was openly racist. Many sub-Saharan Africans in Tunisia are now heading for the exit.

"We want to go home," said Constant, who arrived at the embassy early on Friday in the hope of getting her paperwork in order.

In his speech Saied had ordered officials to take 'urgent measures' to tackle irregular migration, claiming without evidence that 'a criminal plot' was underway 'to change Tunisia's demographic make-up'.

His comments, praised by French far-right former presidential candidate Eric Zemmour, were seen by many as inciting violence against sub-Saharan Africans living in Tunisia legally or illegally.

Aboubacar Dobe, head of a radio station for French-speaking migrants, said it was 'clear that things are different since Saied's speech'.

The head of Radio Libre Francophone said he had received threatening phone calls.

"When it was just the (re-



Ivorians gather in front of the Ivory Coast embassy for their repatriation, in Tunis on Friday (AFP)

The landlords are kicking us out, people beat us up or mistreat us. To be safe... we decided to go home

WILFRID BADIA

cently created far-right) Tunisian Nationalist Party or on social media, people thought the state would protect them," he said.

"Now, they feel abandoned."

The African Union also expressed concern following Saied's remarks on migrants, calling on its member states to 'refrain from racialised hate

speech that could bring people to harm'.

Harassment and intimidation

Outside the Ivorian embassy, one couple arrived after being evicted from their apartment, their worldly belongings in backpacks and suitcases.

Three other young women were dropped off by a smartly dressed Tunisian woman.

"They've been working at my beauty salon for two years," she said. "They're leaving now because they don't feel safe."

Constant, who has been unemployed for six months, said she has set up a WhatsApp group for Ivorians wanting to go home. "I'm here to organise an

exit permit, because I've overstayed by four years and I can't afford to pay the fine' of more than €1,000 (US\$1,055), she said. Other migrants spoke of harassment and intimidation, including fires lit outside their buildings or attempts to break in.

"The landlords are kicking us out; people beat us up or mistreat us," said Wilfrid Badia, 34, who has spent six years in the North African country eking out a living on casual jobs. "To be safe, we decided to come to the embassy to sign up to go home."

Hosni Maati, a lawyer who helps an association for Ivorians in Tunisia, said that 'since the president's speech, (Tunisians) have totally lost it'.

Maati said sub-Saharan

Africans had been living without papers in Tunisia for years as authorities turned a blind eye.

Bureaucratic obstacles prevented many from regularising their status, making them easy targets for exploitation by unscrupulous employers as cheap labour.

'Mob justice'

Authorities began a wave of arrests targeting migrants two weeks ago and have so far detained around 400 people, rights groups say. Most have since been released.

"You can't solve such a complex situation by making a speech and arresting people left, right and centre," Maati said.

Jean Bedel Gnabli, deputy head of an association for sub-Saharan migrants, said the whole community - also including Senegalese, Guineans, Congolese and Comorans - was living in fear. "They feel like they've been handed over to mob justice," he said.

Even sub-Saharan African students at Tunisian universities, who in principle are in the country legally, have been affected.

AESAT, an association that supports them, sent out a message this week urging them 'not to go out, even to go to class, until authorities ensure we are properly protected from these attacks'.

AFP

Germany's Scholz in India to deepen ties

New Delhi, India - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited India on Saturday seeking to deepen business and defence ties between the two major economies and jumpstart progress on an EU trade deal despite differences over Ukraine.

"We want to further strengthen our bilateral relationship with India and our cooperation on global issues, such as mitigating climate change and transforming our economies in a just, green and sustainable way," Scholz told the *Times of India* in an interview.

"There is huge potential for intensified cooperation, in sectors such as renewables, hydrogen, mobility, pharma, digital economy, and many more," Scholz told the paper.

Scholz, accompanied by executives from big German firms like Siemens, met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi and was due to head to Bengaluru to visit German software firms including SAP.

Officials said Scholz would press for progress towards a trade deal between the European Union and India that has long been held up by disagreements on tariffs and access for Indian workers to Europe.



India's PM Narendra Modi walks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz during his ceremonial reception in New Delhi on Saturday (AFP)

A German official in Berlin said the two sides remain 'quite some distance apart'.

"Some people want to complete this by the end of this year. Others say that even summer next year is ambitious," the official said on condition of

anonymity.

Scholz was due to discuss a bid by Germany's Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems to build six submarines in India in a deal worth around US\$5bn, Bloomberg News reported.

"Security and defence cooper-

ation can become an important pillar of our strategic partnership. In this sector, we will continue to work to realise our untapped potential," Modi told reporters.

Ukraine war

The two sides also differ on the

Ukraine war, with India refusing to condemn Russia's invasion and ramping up purchases of oil from its biggest supplier of arms.

"If we want to work together effectively on global challenges, we need a solid, reliable and rules-based international order.

Attacking your neighbour, seizing territory by force, committing terrible war crimes, cannot be tolerated," Scholz said in the interview.

"With India we share the foundation of democracy and the respect of international law. Together, we stand for state sovereignty and peaceful conflict resolution worldwide," he said.

Scholz, 64, also said the Group of 20 nations should not ease up on pressuring Russia during India's current presidency and continue to send a 'strong message'. Delegates at a meet-

using 'clear words' in its discussions with Russia to show that New Delhi is not happy about the conflict.

"Last autumn in a meeting with (Russian) President (Vladimir) Putin, Prime Minister Modi expressed himself in a very pronounced way: '(This is) no time for war'," the official said.

It was unclear whether Scholz would raise concerns about minority and media rights in the world's biggest democracy during his talks with the Hindu nationalist premier.

Last week Indian tax officials

We want to further strengthen our bilateral relationship with India and our cooperation on global issues, such as mitigating climate change and transforming our economies in a just, green and sustainable way

OLAF SCHOLZ

ing of G20 finance ministers in Bengaluru due to wrap up on Saturday said that China was seeking to water down language from a leaders' summit in November condemning the war.

A second German official said that behind the scenes, India was

raided the local offices of the BBC in a move rights groups linked to a documentary by the British broadcaster about Modi's role in deadly sectarian riots in 2002. The Indian government denied the two were linked.

AFP



A Taliban security personnel stand guard as Afghan people wait to cross into Pakistan, at Torkham border crossing on Thursday (AFP)

Afghan border crossing with Pakistan reopens, trade resumes

Jalalabad, Afghanistan - Trucks carrying food and pharmaceuticals crossed through a key border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan after it reopened on Saturday, almost a week after Taliban authorities shut the busiest trading waypoint. Relations between the two nations have soured since the Taliban took power in August 2021, with Islamabad accusing its neighbour of harbouring militant groups that have carried out strikes on its soil - a charge Kabul denies.

There have been frequent flare-ups along the mostly mountainous dividing line splitting the countries - which no Afghan government has ever recognised - including sporadic gunfights and closures.

The Torkham border crossing was reopened as of 6am (0130 GMT) on Saturday, Afghan customs official Muslim Khaksar said at the waypoint in Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province.

"The border is now open from both sides for civilians as well as for traders," he said

"Trucks carrying rice, cement, construction material, medicines and other edibles were sent to Afghanistan," a Pakistani customs official said, adding that lorries loaded with coal, vegetables and fruits had entered Pakistan. Around 1,400 trucks on the Pakistan side were still waiting to cross into

Afghanistan, he added.

The crossing was closed by Afghan authorities late on Sunday, who objected to what they said were new documentation rules restricting attendants of medical patients from entering Pakistan. Pakistani officials never confirmed or denied a rule change.

A gunfight erupted at the crossing between border guards from the two countries on Monday morning, with both sides blaming each other for initiating the violence.

On Saturday, attendants were allowed to enter Pakistan after showing their Afghan identity cards, the Pakistani customs official said.

Both nations are in economic turmoil, with Afghanistan reeling from a drop-off in aid after the fall of the US-backed government, and Pakistan hammered by ballooning energy prices and a foreign exchange crisis.

Since the Taliban's return, Pakistan has witnessed a rise in attacks on its soil, especially in the regions bordering Afghanistan.

But two separate attacks in January and February in the major cities of Peshawar and Karachi killed dozens of people - mostly police - and were linked to the Pakistani Taliban, which has deep ties with its Afghan namesake.

AFP

Brazil: Death toll from storm rises to 54

Sao Paulo, Brazil - The death toll from floods and landslides in southeast Brazil has risen to 54 people, authorities said on Friday, as Pope Francis sent a message of condolences.

"So many of you are missing, so many have suffered... I send you my closeness, the assurance of my prayer. May God bless you," the Argentine pontiff said in a video broadcast by the official portal Vatican News.

According to the Sao Paulo state government, about 30 people are still missing after more than an entire February's worth of rain fell in 24 hours on the picturesque beach resort town of Sao Sebastiao and surrounding areas last weekend.

Authorities said the largest daily rainfall ever registered in Brazil triggered violent floods and landslides that tore through precariously built hillside communities.

"So far 54 deaths have been confirmed," said the Sao Paulo



People remove debris at a flood-affected area in Sao Sebastiao district, Sao Paulo state, Brazil on February 21 (AFP)

state government, including 15 children.

Search and rescue operations are continuing in areas where some 4,000 people were displaced from their

homes. An estimated 9.5mn of Brazil's 215mn people live in areas at high risk of flooding or landslides - mainly poor favela neighbourhoods.

The South American country

has been hit by a series of deadly weather disasters in recent years, which experts say are likely being made worse by climate change.

AFP

Macron to visit China in 'early April'

Paris, France - French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday said he would visit China in early April and called on Beijing to 'help us pressure Russia' to end the war in Ukraine.

Speaking a day after China called for urgent peace talks as it released its plan to end the war in Ukraine, Macron said peace was only possible if 'the Russian aggression was halted, troops withdrawn and territorial sovereignty of Ukraine and its people was respected'. "The fact that China is engaging in peace efforts is a good thing," the French leader said, asking Beijing 'not to supply any arms to Russia'.

AFP

Philippine protesters celebrate ousting of Marcos Sr

Manila, Philippines - Philippine protesters rallied on Saturday to mark the 37th anniversary of the 'People Power' revolution, which ousted President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's dictator father and sent the family into exile.

It was the first commemoration of the uprising since Marcos Jr took office in June 2022. He has praised his father's 20-year regime, which critics describe as a dark period of human rights abuses and corruption that left the country impoverished.

As leftist rock music blared over a loudspeaker, hundreds of protesters, including survivors of the elder Marcos's martial law crackdown that led to the killing, torture and imprisonment of thousands of political foes and critics, marched on the 'People Power' monument in Manila in memory of the brutal era.

Some chanted 'Marcos, Duterte all the same, fascist dictators', in reference to former president Rodrigo Duterte and his successor Marcos Jr, as about 200 police with shields stood by.

Organisers said 'at least 1,500' people attended the rally, but an



Protesters gather during a rally marking the anniversary of 'People Power' revolution, in Quezon City on Saturday (AFP)

AFP reporter at the site estimated around 700 people were there, many seeking relief from the tropical heat in the shade of trees or umbrellas.

Veteran rights activist Sister Mary John Mananzan urged protesters to 'remain vigilant' following the return of the Marcoses to power.

Nearly four decades on from the toppling of Marcos Sr, Julio Montinola, 53, told AFP the chal-

lenge was to keep the 'message and spirit' of the uprising alive.

"Unfortunately, it did not resonate with the next generation," said Montinola. "The bottom line is he (Marcos Jr) was elected by the people." Thirteen-year-old Kyle Navera said he had heard 'bad things happened' to people who opposed Marcos Sr.

"It looks like he (Marcos Jr) is starting (to become like his dad). I hope he does not go down that

path," Navera said, referring to the ongoing deadly drug war started by Marcos Jr's predecessor Rodrigo Duterte.

'Hand of reconciliation'

Marcos Jr sent a large wreath of white flowers to the monument, which is near the city's main thoroughfare where the bloodless uprising against his father had been held.

In a statement, Marcos Jr recalled 'those times of tribulation and how we came out of them united and stronger as a nation'.

"I once again offer my hand of reconciliation to those with different political persuasions to come together as one in forging a better society," Marcos Jr said.

As an ailing Marcos Sr desperately clung to power in 1986, hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets of the capital for four days in a military-backed uprising against his regime.

The clan, including Marcos Jr, fled the presidential palace on February 25 on US military aircraft with bags and boxes stuffed with jewels, gold and cash.

After the patriarch's death in Hawaii in 1989, the family returned to the Philippines to rebuild their political power base and rehabilitate their name.

Their efforts culminated with Marcos Jr's victory in the May 2022 presidential election, following a massive social media misinformation campaign whitewashing the family's history.

AFP

FINAL DESTINATION

Australia aim to spoil South Africa’s World Cup party

Cape Town, South Africa - South Africa's women cricketers will go where none of their male counterparts have gone when they contest their very first World Cup final at Newlands in Cape Town on Sunday.

The hosts reached the final of the women’s T20 World Cup with a thrilling six-run win over England but now they will be up against Australia, a team of proven World Cup winners, who have won five of the previous six T20 finals.

The Aussies also had a tight semi-final when they edged past India by just five runs but they are loaded with experience which their captain Meg Lanning believes will help them in the pressure moments.

“Having been in pressure situations before helps a lot,” said Lanning on Saturday.

“We’re not going to be the team that everyone’s cheering for.

“We’re expecting South Africa to come out to play to their full strength and they’re riding a wave of emotion as well. I expect an incredible atmosphere and an incredible game at an amazing venue. It’s a World Cup final and there’s nowhere to hide.”

Lanning said there would be pressure on both teams. “It



Australia's captain Meg Lanning (L) and South Africa skipper Sune Luus



We’re expecting South Africa to come out to play to their full strength and they’re riding a wave of emotion as well. I expect an incredible atmosphere and an incredible game at an amazing venue

MEG LANNING, AUSTRALIA CAPTAIN

comes down to holding your nerve under pressure,” she said.

Following South Africa’s dramatic upset of England in Friday’s semi-final, there were queues outside the ground on Saturday as new-found followers of the women’s game sought to buy

tickets.

That win was accompanied by scenes of unbridled joy as 7500 spectators inside the ground cheered them on.

Sunday’s crowd is expected to be considerably bigger with the game marking a watershed moment at an iconic venue that hosted its first men’s Test match in 1889.

No South African team, men or women, had previously gone beyond the semi-finals of either a 50-overs or T20 World Cup.

“We’ve always known we had

the ability to get to a final, I think it was just to get through that semi-final,” said South African captain Sune Luus.

“The Best v The Best”

While Australia stormed through the group stages before being

pushed all the way by India in the semi-finals, South Africa lost two of their first three games.

They looked anything but championship contenders when they lost the tournament opening match against Sri Lanka and they went down by six wickets in a

group match against Australia in Gqeberha.

“We were 20, 30, 40 runs short in that game,” said Luus.

“We know they (Australia) have a very strong batting line-up and they bat extremely deep.

“Whether we bat first or second we know we have to put up a good fight. We know they’re going to keep fighting. We saw that in their semi-final against India.”

Luus said South Africa had a strong pace bowling attack and she expected an “even contest” between her bowlers and the Australia batters.

“It’s going to be the best in the world against the best in the world.”

Luus, 27, said the discussion before the semi-final had been on how to handle the big occasion.

“Everybody was hyped up and excited but we said before the game that the team that is the calmest is going to get over the finish line. I think tomorrow is going to be no different.”

Tazmin Brits, 32, who until the retirement of big-hitting Lizelle Lee last year was not an automatic choice for the team, made herself a national heroine by hitting top score of 68 and holding four catches in a remarkable display of big-match temperament.

She found herself on the front and back pages of Saturday’s newspapers.

“She’s got a lot of self-belief. It’s been years of hard work that finally came together,” said coach Hilton Moreeng.

AFP



South Africa's Tazmin Brits plays a shot during their T20 World Cup semi-final against England on Friday

From dream-shattering accident to T20 World Cup final for SA’s Brits

Cape Town, South Africa - In 2011, Tazmin Brits was involved in a horrific car accident which left her gravely injured and losing the will to live.

Her dream of taking part in the London Olympics as a javelin thrower was also shattered as she lay in a hospital bed for three months.

“I had to teach myself to pull up to put the pan under me to pee, or get off the bed to get onto a commode. I had to teach myself to walk,” she told the BBC in an interview.

The near-fatal crash happened at Potchefstroom, where Brits had been celebrating her qualification for the Games.

A brief lapse in concentration meant she lost control and was flung out of her car.

She suffered a broken pelvis and hip and punctured bladder. She required multiple painful surgeries.

“I thought I wouldn’t be able

to walk again, I wouldn’t be able to do sports again,” she told womenscricket.com in 2019.

She added: “Along with my dream went all my sponsorships and will to live.

“I attempted to end my life on more than one occasion. I felt lost and had no direction.”

A world junior champion in javelin in 2007, Brits was rescued by cricket and on Sunday she will attempt to spark South Africa to victory over hot favourites Australia in the Women’s Twenty20 World Cup final.

Injuries were on her mind again on Friday when Brits took a spectacular flying catch to dismiss England’s Alice Capsey in South Africa’s stunning six-run semi-final win at Newlands.

“When I dived, I thought it was a vein that popped, it stood out. But they pushed it down. We weren’t sure if it was a

bone or not,” the 32-year-old said.

“I said to Mo our physio, please let me go back on the field. The doctor and him just made sure there were no bones broken.”

Brits’s all-round performance on Friday saw her grab four catches after hitting 68 in her team’s total of 164-4.

After her javelin dreams faded, Brits made her international cricket debut in 2018 but missed out on the squad for the 2020 T20 World Cup.

Her form at the 2023 tournament has, however, been on an upward curve, reflecting the team’s changing fortunes.

Scores of 12 and one were followed by 45 against Australia and 50 not out in the final pool game against Bangladesh, which allowed South Africa to sneak into the semi-finals on net run rate.

AFP

Anderson fires England into control of Test against New Zealand

Wellington, New Zealand - James Anderson validated his elevation to top spot in the world Test bowling rankings with a lethal opening spell as England took full control of the second Test against New Zealand on Saturday.

Veteran seamer Anderson snared 3-37, sending the Black Caps crashing to 138-7 when rain forced an early end to day two in Wellington, after England declared their first innings at 435-8.

Spinner Jack Leach also took three scalps, leaving New Zealand staring at a 297-run deficit with three days remaining.

Red-hot England are on course for a sweep of the two-match series, having won the first Test by 267 runs at Mount Maunganui with the same mix of aggressive batting and potent new-ball bowling. Joe Root was unbeaten on 153 when captain Ben Stokes made his assertive declaration, leaving the tourists half an hour to attack the Black Caps top order before lunch.

Anderson answered the call,



England's James Anderson took three wickets for 37 runs to send New Zealand reeling in the second Test

removing Devon Conway (0) and Kane Williamson (4) to have the hosts languishing at 12-2.

The exacting paceman removed Will Young (2) after the break to underscore why he’d been reinstated to No 1 in the ICC player rankings released this week - the oldest player to hold the perch, at 40.

All three batsmen feathered edges to gloveman Ben Foakes, extending the number of Test victims caught by a wicketkeeper off Anderson to 188 - 36 more than any other bowler.

Left-handers Tom Latham (35) and Henry Nicholls (30) launched a rearguard but both fell when attempting to reverse-

sweep Leach (3-45), offering catches to fielders around the bat.

First-Test centurion Tom Blundell head reached 25 not out before play was called off at 5.45 pm (0445 GMT), and his free-wheeling captain Tim Southee was unbeaten on 23 - in an innings featuring two sixes. About 25 overs were lost to the late rain, mirroring the premature finish to day one when the clouds opened.

However, England still have ample time to push for a seventh straight Test win and consign New Zealand to an eighth successive winless Test.

Earlier, England lost five wickets and racked up a further 120 runs in an entertaining opening session after resuming at 315-3.

Harry Brook fell in the third over for 186, having added just two to his overnight score.

His blazing knock formed part of a 302-run stand with Root - the second-highest in England’s Test history against New Zealand - having rescued the tourists from 21-3 early on day one.

Brook’s ‘special gifts’ paying off for England

London, United Kingdom - Harry Brook is rewriting cricket’s record books after an astonishing start to his Test career that lifts him into rarefied company alongside even Australia great Donald Bradman.

The 24-year-old Yorkshireman scored his fourth Test century in just his sixth match on Friday, smashing a commanding 184 not out on day one of the second Test against New Zealand to help England recover from a perilous position. Brook struck 24 fours and five sixes in his unbeaten knock to take his tally to 807 runs in nine innings - more than anybody else in Test



England's Harry Brook celebrates his century on Friday (AFP)

history has managed at that stage of their career.

India great Sunil Gavaskar (912) and Bradman (862) scored more in their first six Tests - but Brook could yet go past them during the current match.

Aside from the sheer weight of runs, it is the style and speed with which Brook has made those scores that has caught the eye.

Alastair Cook, England’s all-time record Test run-scorer, described his innings in Wellington, where Joe Root scored a more sedate century, as “astonishing”.

“I’m expecting him to be able to dominate Test cricket, 50-over

cricket, 20-over cricket, and be one of the all-time great players - without putting too much pressure on him!” he said.

Brook, who currently boasts a staggering Test batting average of over a hundred, may not even have had his chance to shine had Jonny Bairstow not suffered a broken leg in freakish circumstances while walking on a golf course. That injury paved the way for him to make his Test debut against South Africa at the Oval in September, where his 12 runs in one innings did not give an accurate foretaste of the fireworks to come.



Newcastle United coach Eddie Howe (L) and Manchester United's manager Erik ten Hag

READY TO ROCK

Manchester Utd, Newcastle bid to end trophy droughts in League Cup final

London, United Kingdom - Manchester United will aim to end their six-year trophy drought when Erik ten Hag's resurgent side face Newcastle in Sunday's League Cup final, while the Magpies' Saudi-funded revolution could produce the club's first major prize since 1969.

As underachieving members of English football's aristocracy in recent years, United hope the showpiece at Wembley can serve as a long-awaited rebirth.

However, revelling in their role as nouveau riche irritants to the Premier League's established powers, Newcastle believe the final can serve as concrete proof they are now a force to be reckoned with.

United haven't won a major trophy since the 2017 Europa League, a prize they claimed just

weeks after beating Southampton in their most recent League Cup final appearance.

As if their longest trophy drought for 40 years wasn't bad enough, United also suffered the indignity of watching bitter rivals Manchester City surpass them as England's preminent football force.

United, who last won the title in 2013, finished a dismal sixth in the Premier League last term.

But after a decade in the wilderness, they have been revived by Ten Hag since his arrival from Ajax last year.

Crucially, Ten Hag's handling of Cristiano Ronaldo showed he would not be intimidated by player power, bringing an end to the Portugal star's second spell at United.

"He first arrived and the train-

ing sessions we had, he demands 'you do it or you're out'. You don't play," United midfielder Bruno Fernandes said.

"Everyone was a little bit like 'If a big player doesn't do what he wants will he pull him apart or not?' And he did that many times, he did it with Cristiano, with Jadon (Sancho), with Marcus (Rashford)."

There is no more tangible sign of Ten Hag's impact than the blistering form of revitalised United forward Rashford, who is battling to be fit for Wembley after suffering an injury in Thursday's Europa League win against Barcelona.

Ten Hag has tried to temper expectations in his first season but he knows victory this weekend would be a meaningful moment for a club climbing out of the doldrums.

"It's a great opportunity to get the silverware.

"The fans are really waiting for it and so we do everything we can to give them their honour," Ten Hag said.

'Rewrite the story'

Fuelled by the astute management of Eddie Howe and the financial muscle of their Saudi-backed owners, Newcastle are unlikely to be a pushover.

Once regarded as the laughing stock of the Premier League, Newcastle are emerging as a genuine force for the first time since Kevin Keegan's 'entertainers' takeover from unpopular former owner Mike Ashley in late 2021.

Saudi's Public Investment Fund holds an 80 percent stake in the club, but Howe is the public face of Newcastle's renaissance.

Despite a recent dip in form, Newcastle are fifth in the Premier League, just two places behind United. For this weekend, they are focused on winning the club's first major trophy since the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup.

Newcastle's last major domes-

tic prize came in 1955 when they lifted the FA Cup.

For such a football-obsessed city to go decades without a trophy has been cruel punishment for the long-suffering 'Toon Army', who will be watching Newcastle's first domestic final appearance since losing to United in the 1999 FA Cup.

Fittingly for a final offering potential catharsis to both clubs, Newcastle are set to start much-maligned goalkeeper Loris Karius.

Nick Pope's suspension has given Karius a chance at redemption in his first competitive match in almost two years.

Karius is best known for his costly howlers in Liverpool's 2018 Champions League final defeat against Real Madrid.

"It would be a magnificent chance for him to rewrite the story of his career," Howe said.

"That's the beauty of football. We never know what is going to happen. This unpredictability is what makes it such an amazing thing to watch."

AFF

Solomon plays super-sub again to rescue Fulham



Fulham's Manor Solomon celebrates after scoring against Wolves (AFP)

London, United Kingdom - Manor Solomon extended his hot streak as the Fulham forward came off the bench to rescue a 1-1 draw against Wolves in Friday's Premier League clash.

Marco Silva's side trailed to Pablo Sarabia's first goal in five appearances for Wolves since his January move from Paris Saint Germain.

But Israel international Solomon netted after half-time to stretch Fulham's unbeaten run in the league to four matches.

Solomon made a quiet start after joining Fulham on loan from Shakhtar Donetsk last year, but the 23-year-old now has three goals in his last three appearances.

"It's not for sure that he will start next time. He doesn't have 90 minutes in his legs yet," Silva said of Solomon.

"He has been really important but let's hope he continues doing it."

Tipped as relegation candidates at the start of the campaign, sixth-placed Fulham have been one of the season's biggest surprises and they remain firmly in contention to qualify for the Europa League.

"We have to prove our quality on the pitch. Of course I'm proud of my players and our position in the table," Silva said.

Wolves were bottom of the table going into the World Cup break, but have lifted themselves out of the relegation zone.

Julen Lopetegui's 15th-placed side are four points clear of the bottom three.

We have the need to get a lot of points to stay out of relegation. It's going to be a hard task but we have one more (point) today," Lopetegui said.

After a scrappy opening, Wolves took the lead from the first serious chance for either team in the 23rd minute.

Raul Jimenez guided a deft header back to Sarabia and the Spanish midfielder controlled with his left foot before using his right to drive a clinical finish into the far corner from eight yards.

Ruben Neves should have doubled Wolves' lead when the Portugal midfielder headed wide from Matheus Nunes' cross.

Andreas Pereira was inches away from equalising in spectacular style on the stroke of half-time as Jose Sa tipped over the Fulham midfielder's 30-yard free-kick.

Jimenez nodded just wide from Sarabia's cross before Wolves forward Matheus Cunha was stretched off after lengthy treatment following a seemingly innocuous challenge.

AFF

Chelsea boss Potter reveals email threats to family

London, United Kingdom - Under-fire Chelsea manager Graham Potter has received emails threatening him and his family.

Potter revealed on Friday he has been targeted by an anonymous account after Chelsea's dismal season hit a new low with a 1-0 home defeat against Southampton last weekend.

Chelsea are languishing in 10th place and have won only two of their last 14 matches.

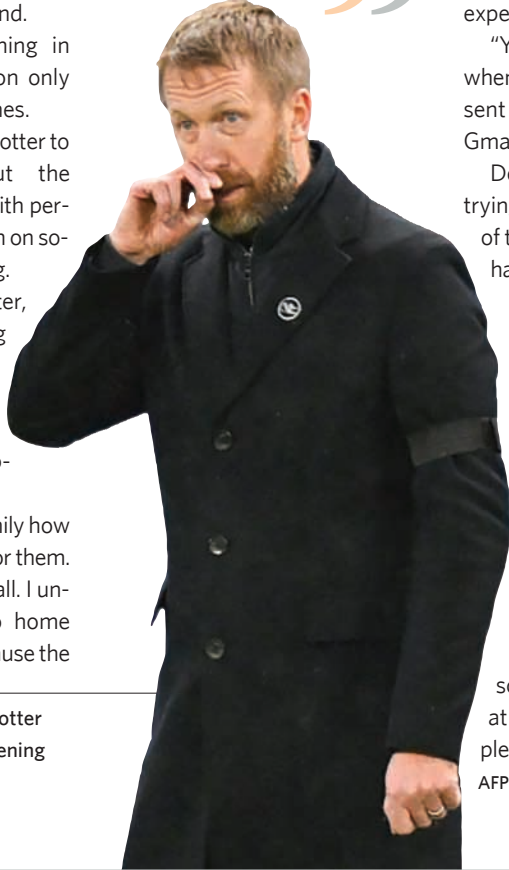
Supporters called for Potter to be sacked throughout the Southampton debacle, with personal attacks towards him on social media also increasing.

But worryingly for Potter, threats are now being sent directly to the former Brighton boss, who succeeded the sacked Thomas Tuchel in September.

"You could ask my family how life has been for me and for them. It's been not pleasant at all. I understand supporters go home and they're annoyed because the

I've had some not particularly nice emails come through, that want me to die and want my kids to die

GRAHAM POTTER



Chelsea's coach Graham Potter has received emails threatening him and his family

team aren't winning," Potter said.

"I've had some not particularly nice emails come through, that want me to die and want my kids to die.

"That's obviously not pleasant to receive. If you've been asked for four months if you're under pressure, because (the media) need to sell stuff - what do you expect, in the end?"

"You know there's a problem when the email address it's been sent from is 'Potter bastard at Gmail dot com'."

Despite the abuse, Potter is trying to remain positive ahead of the London derby at Tottenham on Sunday.

"I want to succeed here. There's nonsense (being said) that I don't care. Where does that come from? Where's your evidence on that? Ask my family. People have a perception I don't care - what's that based on? How do you know?" he said.

"If you go to work and somebody's swearing abuse at you, it's not going to be pleasant."

AFF



Klopp urges Liverpool to keep pace with rivals' spending

London, United Kingdom - Jurgen Klopp has warned Liverpool's owners that his struggling side must keep pace with their rivals' spending in the summer transfer window.

Klopp's side travel to Crystal Palace in the Premier League on Saturday looking to bounce back from a chastening 5-2 defeat by Real Madrid in the Champions League last 16 first leg at Anfield.

Liverpool are languishing in eighth place in the Premier League and their hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League via a top four finish are hanging by a slender thread.

After nearly winning the quadruple last season, the Reds now look in need of a major overhaul and Klopp acknowledged they have work to do in the next transfer window.

However, the departure of sporting director Julian Ward this summer and the potential loss of Champions League revenue could hinder Klopp's hopes of matching the likes of Chelsea, Newcastle, Manchester City and Manchester United in the race for new recruits.

"It's not helpful (losing out on the Champions League). Money always has an impact. Of course

it is influential but this is a summer where we have to be in the market, definitely," Klopp said.

"I am sorry that we cannot guarantee the Champions League at this moment but it's not done yet, we will fight for it, so we don't have to talk about it as though it is not possible."

He added: "My job is to make it 100 per cent clear what we need from a sports point of view and then other people are responsible for giving us the resources or whatever. I have nothing to do with that.

"We built a stand and a training ground and the club is in a re-

ally good place but around us a few people are speeding up a little bit and you cannot ignore that."

Earlier this week Liverpool's principal owner John W Henry confirmed the club had not been put up for sale by his Fenway Sports Group, who are looking for external investment.

Klopp hopes that means he will get backing in the transfer market. "I am optimistic when he is optimistic because it is his business. I am not involved in the search for investors," added Klopp

AFF

Murray saves five match points to reach final in Qatar

Doha, Qatar - Former world number one Andy Murray was at a loss to explain how he saved five match points Friday to overcome Czech challenger Jiri Lehecka and reach the Qatar Open final.

The 35-year-old launched into a roar of delight after the 6-0, 3-6, 7-6 (8/6) triumph that took him into his first ATP tour final for eight months.

Murray now has to take on Russian world number eight Daniil Medvedev who beat Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-4, 7-6 (9/7) in the second semi-final.

"That was one of the most amazing turnarounds of my career," said Murray, a two-time winner in Qatar. "I don't know how I managed to turn that match around."

Murray saved two match points on his own serve and three as his 21-year-old opponent tried to complete victory with his own big serve.

The British veteran, who had a hip replacement in 2019, has now come back from eight match points in four matches at the Doha tournament.

He has fought two tie-breaks and been taken to three sets in every match this week.

After he took the first set without losing a game in just 32 minutes, Murray had believed this would be an easier encounter -- "and then it turned into something completely different".

Murray had the best of a



Andy Murray

That was one of the most amazing turnarounds of my career

ANDY MURRAY

nervy start by both players. Considered one of the hottest prospects on the tour, Lehecka, who beat top seed Andrey Rublev in the quarter-final, served first, went 15-40 down, had two advantage points and then let Murray take over.

The Czech rediscovered his big serve and powerful returns for the second set when he broke Murray's serve in straight games.

Murray reclaimed two match points on his serve in the deciding set and Lehecka had three more when serving at 5-4. Murray took the game and held his nerve in the tie break.

Jabrane penalty gives African champions vital victory in CAF Champions League

Johannesburg, South Africa - A penalty converted by Morocco international Yahya Jabrane gave CAF Champions League title-holders Wydad Casablanca a crucial 1-0 win over Angolan visitors Petro Luanda on Friday.

Having lost away to JS Kabylie of Algeria in their first Group A match last weekend, three-time African champions Wydad could ill afford another defeat.

A cagey clash in which Wydad had only two goal attempts on target and Petro none was settled after 34 minutes in the Moroccan commercial capital.

Petro full-back Pedro Francisco fouled Mohamed Ounajem and Jabrane sent Hugo Marques the wrong way from the spot kick.

Petro, beaten by Wydad in the semi-finals last season, had more possession than the home side, but a lack of penalty-area sharpness proved costly.

Tiago Azulao, the 2022 Champions League Golden Boot winner and scorer of five goals in the premier African club competition this season, wasted a glorious chance to level late on.

A low cross found the Brazilian unmarked close to the six-yard box and in front of goal, but his rushed shot flew over

Wydad and Petro meet again on March 7 in Luanda, and improved passing and more clinical finishing from the Angolan outfit could see them reverse the Casablanca result.

Two-time African champions Kabylie are away on Saturday to V Club of the Democratic Republic of Congo, who play in neigh-



Wydad Casablanca's Yahya Jabrane (C) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Petro Luanda

bouring Congo because their ground is not up to international standards.

Kabylie and Petro have four points each, Wydad three and V Club, the 1973 African champions, are pointless.

Elsewhere, a 2-1 win for Al Hilal of Sudan over hosts Coton Sport of Cameroon in Garoua

created the possibility that Group B may be more closely contested than originally expected.

Pre-matchday 1 assumptions were that record 10-time Champions League winners Al Ahly of Egypt and 2016 title-holders Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa would dominate the section.

But if Hilal, whose 36 qualifications for the competition is a record, can beat Coton again next month they will become serious contenders for a top-two finish and a quarter-finals place.

Patient Wassou gave Coton a half-time lead before DR Congo-born Makabi Lilepo scored twice

in five minutes, the first direct from an angled free-kick, to earn Hilal maximum points.

A successful day for Sudan was completed when Al Merrikh shaded Chabab Belouizdad of Algeria 1-0 in Group D courtesy of a penalty from Brazilian Paulo Sergio on 32 minutes.

AFP

Defending champ Alcaraz reaches Rio Open semi-finals

Rio De Janeiro, Brazil - World number two Carlos Alcaraz clawed back a break in both sets and dominated the tiebreaker to beat Dusan Lajovic 6-4, 7-6 (7/0) on Friday in the ATP Rio Open quarter-finals.

The 19-year-old Spaniard notched his third win in three matches against 32-year-old Lajovic, including a quarterfinal win over the 80th-ranked Serbian in the quarterfinals at the Argentina Open last week.

Alcaraz went on to win that title to cement his return from a four-month injury layoff that saw him miss the Australian Open.

In semifinals Saturday, Alcaraz will face Chilean Qualifier Nicolas Jarry, who toppled sixth-seeded Sebastian Baez of Argentina 6-3, 7-6 (7/3). Alcaraz is seeking to defend the title that made him the youngest ever winner of an ATP 500 tournament last year.

Second-seeded Briton Cameron Norrie booked his semifinal berth with a 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 victory over Bolivian Hugo Delian. Norrie, trying to reach his



Carlos Alcaraz defeated Dusan Lajovic in the quarter-finals

third final of the year, will face Spain's Bernabe Zapata Miralles, who beat compatriot Albert Ramos Vinolas 6-4, 2-6, 6-4.

Alcaraz improved his perfect record in 2023 to 7-0, but he had to figure some things out along the way.

"It was a very complicated match," Alcaraz said. "Dusan has a great forehand, a great backhand, a great serve, very good shots, and today he has shown it, he has given a recital.

Alcaraz trailed 2-4 in both sets, reeling off the last four

games of the first before finding himself in another battle in the second. He belted 32 winners to Lajovic's 13 and won 16 of 17 points at the net.

But 25 unforced errors contributed to the difficulties that saw him go down an early break in both sets. In the second, he broke back with a stinging backhand winner to level the set at 4-4. He led 40-0 in the 11th game only to surrender his serve and saved a set point on the way to a break in the next game that forced the tiebreaker.

'It feels nice': Zhou edges Verstappen in F1 testing

Sakhir, Bahrain - China's Zhou Guanyu succeeded where many others have failed on Friday by out-pacing Formula 1 world champion Max Verstappen and admitted "it feels nice to see my name up there".

Zhou clocked a best time of 1min 31.610sec off 132 laps in his Alfa Romeo on the second day of pre-season testing on the same Sakhir track which will stage the 2023 championship opener on March 5.

"We are well aware this is testing, of course, and everyone is trying different settings, but it feels nice to see my name and that of the team up there in the timing sheets," said 23-year-old Zhou.

"It's been a positive day overall, we got more mileage in and went through all the targets and tasks we had set for ourselves, so I can say I am happy.

"The car felt reasonably good, both in daytime and night-time conditions, and I felt more confident pushing as the day progressed."

Zhou was 18th in the 2022



Zhou Guanyu

championship, his first season in the sport, scoring six points in total.

Teammate Valtteri Bottas, the vastly-experienced former Mercedes driver, was 10th with 49 points.

"Today was the final day of pre-season testing for me, and I am very much looking forward to the start of the season next week. I feel ready and excited about the new campaign and I can't wait to be racing again," added Zhou.

AFP

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COSMIC MISSION

DARK SECRETS

EUCLID SPACECRAFT SET TO EXPLORE UNIVERSE'S MYSTERIES



Director of research CNRS and coordinator EUCLID Stephanie Escoffier speaks during the Euclid presentation in Cannes, south-eastern France, on February 21 (AFP)

For now, Europe's Euclid spacecraft sits quietly in a sterilised room in the south of France, its golden trim gleaming under the fluorescent light.

But in a few months the space telescope will blast off on history's first mission to search for two of the universe's greatest mysteries: Dark matter and dark energy.

Though together they make up 95 per cent of the universe, almost nothing is known about either - a glaring hole in scientific understanding that Euclid project manager Giuseppe Racca dubbed a 'cosmic embarrassment'.

Aiming to shed light on these dark secrets, the European Space Agency's mission will chart a 3D map of the universe encompassing two billion galaxies across more than a third of the sky.

The third dimension of this map will be time - because Euclid's gaze will stretch out to 10bn light years away, it will offer new insight into how the 13.8bn-year-old universe evolved.

The two-tonne spacecraft, which is 4.7 metres tall and 3.5 metres wide, was unveiled to the media for the first time this week in a clean room of the Thales Alenia Space company in the southeastern French city of Cannes.

Only a few final tests remain before it heads to Cape Canaveral in the United States for a launch scheduled between July 1 and 30 on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.

Euclid was originally planned to get a ride into space on a Russian Soyuz rocket, but last year Moscow withdrew its launchers in response to European sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine, delaying the launch.

Taking a wider view

Euclid will join fellow space telescope James Webb at a stable hovering spot around 1.5mn kilometres from Earth called the second Lagrangian Point,

where it can keep its solar panel-covered back permanently to the Sun.

The first images are expected to roll in quickly once scientific operations start in October, but for larger discoveries it will likely take scientists months or years to sift through the 'unprecedented amount of data', Racca said.

The €1.4bn (US\$1.5bn approx) European mission is planned to last until 2029, though 'if nothing strange happens' it could be extended a couple more years, Racca told a press conference.

How will Euclid, which is named after the ancient Greek founder of the field of geometry, observe something



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GIUSEPPE RACCA

that cannot be seen? By searching for its absence.

The light coming from billions of years in the past is slightly distorted by the mass of visible and dark matter along the way, a phenomenon known as weak gravitational lensing.

"By subtracting the visible matter, we can calculate the presence of the dark matter which is in between," Racca said.

To do this, Euclid has two main instruments, a 1.2-metre diameter telescope and the Near Infrared Spectrometer and Photometer (NISF), which can split infrared wavelengths not visible to the eye.

Partly what sets Euclid apart from

other space telescopes is its field of view, which takes in an area equivalent to 'two full moons', said David Elbaz, an astrophysicist at the French Atomic Energy Commission.

This wide view will enable Euclid to locate massive structures like black holes that the Webb telescope cannot hope to find because its 'field of view is too small', Euclid's project scientist Rene Laureijs told AFP. But Euclid's universe-spanning survey will be able to point Webb in the right direction for closer inspection, said Laureijs, who has been working on the project since the proposal stage in 2007.

The mission comes amid increasing signs that there are some serious in-

consistencies in our understanding of how the universe works.

Two very precise measurements give two significantly different answers for the rate at which the universe is expanding - a problem called the Hubble tension in which dark energy is thought to play a major role.

And just this week, the Webb telescope spotted six galaxies in the early universe that seemingly defy cosmological theory because they are far too massive to have formed so quickly after the Big Bang.

Euclid will be a 'unique tool' in the quest to find answers to such questions, Elbaz said.

AFP

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BIRTHDAY WISHES



AARAV SAGAR
25 February

Officially teen!! You've entered in-between years, a bridge from childhood to adulthood. Happy birthday.

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Opera spotlights Afghan women

It's a reality Sadat is intimately familiar with, having pushed boundaries

It's a theme that courses through *A Thousand Splendid Suns* for Sadat, who

Voices take centre stage in more ways than one in this iteration of Hosseini's

Drawing inspiration from the story's setting as she went to work with librettist Stephen Kitsakos, she wove West-

*Even if the Taliban
torture them, even if
they ban them... they
have their voices*

ROYA SADAT

The opera opens with one of the tradition's foundational drones under intertwined cello and bansuri - an ancient bamboo flute and one of the instruments added to the orchestra that create a sense of place even without sets or costumes.

AFP



Filmmaker Roya Sadat (left) and Composer Sheila Silver



Performers Maureen McKay (left), John Moore and Karin Mushegain during a dress rehearsal for *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in the Marion Oliver McCaw Hall at Seattle Center in Seattle, Washington, on February 22



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