

Oman Across Ages Museum opens

First ticket of museum issued to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, presented as gift to the museum to be added to its collection

Manah - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over the official opening of the Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah, Dakhliyah, on Monday.

Upon His Majesty the Sultan's arrival at the museum, he was received by Nasr Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of Royal Court Affairs, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the museum and Chairman of the Main Committee of the museum project, members of the Main Committee and director general of the museum.

Then, His Majesty headed to the museum's memorial plaque, where he switched on the light of the plaque, marking the official opening of the museum.

His Majesty the Sultan viewed a display of the foundation stone of Oman Across Ages Museum, passing by a vehicle that was used by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said when the latter laid the foundation stone of the museum.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan visited the Reception area, where the first entry ticket to the museum was issued to His Majesty the Sultan, who presented the ticket as a gift to the museum to be added to the museum's collection.

His Majesty passed through the Arts Corridor to the National

Day screen, the dimensions of which - 18m by 11m - symbolise the glorious National Day (November 18).

There, His Majesty the Sultan heard a speech delivered on behalf of the Main Committee of the museum project by Al Yaqdhan Abdullah al Harthi, Director General of the Museum.

Harthi said that the museum uses the latest technologies in its presentations and displays.

In his speech, Harthi said that the design of the museum's building was inspired by the grandeur of the Al Hajar Mountains. He observed that the edifice is associated with the Omani environment through the type of materials used in its construction.

Harthi voiced the committee's gratitude to His Majesty the Sultan for his constant support towards the accomplishment of this monument.

Then, His Majesty watched a familiarisation film about the Oman Across Ages Museum. The informative film outlined the architectural aspects of the museum and the use of modern interactive technologies employed in presenting ancient civilisations in a chronological sequence.

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(ONA)



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The First Mazoon Fund

P.O. Box 1137, PC 111 - CPO, Sultanate of Oman, CR No. 1279406, Tel: +968 24949001, Fax: +968 24949099, Email: fmf@u-capital.net, Web: www.u-capital.net

Invitation for Annual General Meeting

The First Mazoon Fund takes the pleasure in inviting all the unitholders to attend the Annual General Meeting which will be held on Tuesday March 28, 2023, at 3 pm via the electronic platform to hold general meeting which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om). If the quorum to convene the annual General Meeting is not complete the second general meeting will be held on Wednesday March 29, 2023, at 3 pm via the electronic platform to hold general meeting which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om), to decide on the following:

Agenda of Annual General Meeting (AGM):

1) To consider and approve of the Fund Management's Report for the year ended 31st December 2022.

2) To consider and approve the auditor's report on the fund's audited financial statements for the financial year ending on 31 December 2022.

3) To consider and approve the fund's management body sitting fees for the financial year ended 31 December 2022 and fix the sitting fees for the year 2023.

4) To consider and approve the related party transactions entered into by the fund during the year ended 31 December 2022.

5) To consider and approve the proposed related party transactions entered into by the Fund during the financial Year ending 31 December 2023.

6) To appoint auditors for the financial year 2023 and fix their fees.

According to the Fund Article of Association, and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

a. A 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 MCDC.

b. Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than 3 days before the date of the general meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meetings. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the general meeting.

For any inquiries please contact on telephone No 24949061

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

Defence Ministry, National Guard of US State of Arizona sign partnership programme

Muscat - The Ministry of Defence and the Arizona National Guard of the United States of America signed a State Partnership Programme in Muscat on Monday.

The National Guard State Partnership Programme (SPP) is designed to establish long-term relationships in which US States and their partnered nations share best practices and expertise.

The SPP is a US Department of Defence joint security cooperation programme administered by the National Guard Bureau that links a state's National Guard with the armed forces of a partner country to build long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with US allies around the world.

The partnership programme was signed by Vice-Admiral Abdullah Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), and Maj Gen Kerry Muehlenbeck, Adjutant General of Arizona National Guard, in the presence of Katie Hobbs, Governor of Arizona.

During the signing ceremony, the two sides issued a joint press statement reading as follows: 'The Sultanate of Oman has a robust and historical strategic relationship with the United States of America. The signing of the partnership programme between Oman's Ministry of Defence and the Arizona National Guard of the United States of America today



embodies this strong and advanced relationship and enhances joint cooperation in military, security and a range of strategic fields. Through this new partnership, the Sultanate of Oman and the United States of America reaffirmed historical ties between the two countries and mutual commitments to achieve shared goals and common interests.'

On the occasion, Vice-Admiral Raisi said, "The official signing ceremony of the State Partnership Programme culminates the efforts of both countries' leader-

ships to enhance the long existing bilateral cooperation and strategic partnership between the two countries. It reaffirms the importance of strengthening the joint military and security efforts to reinforce common strategic and national interests of both friendly countries and paves the way for more cooperation in the field of joint defence and security in pursuance common interests and objectives."

On his part, Maj Gen Muehlenbeck said, "This is a unique and exciting time for the State of Arizona and the Arizona

National Guard. Year 2023 marks the 30th anniversary of one of the oldest State Partnership Programmes between Arizona and the Republic of Kazakhstan. With today's signing, Arizona now also welcomes the newest State Partnership with the Sultanate of Oman. The talents and dedication of our service members make the Arizona National Guard the right choice. Together our capabilities will grow and strengthen our forces, communities and the countries we serve."

ONA



VOLVO RECALL CAMPAIGN





Date of the campaign: Starting 14 March 2023

Campaign section: (Fuel related)

The number of affected vehicles: 48

Campaign type: Electrical

Product description: Cars

Production Year: 2019

Vehicle Model	VIN Numbers
S90	LVY10APS1KP066965 LVY10APS3KP067079 LVY10APS5KP066869 LVY10APS5KP066967 LVY10APS8KP066865 LVY10APS9KP067135 LVY10APS9KP067250
XC60	YV110AUZ1K1344320 YV110AUZ3K1339376 YV110AUZ4K1309657 YV110AUZ4K1334929 YV110AUZ5K1333546 YV110AUZ5K1334924 YV110AUZ5K1339377 YV110AUZ8K1334870 YV110AUZ9K1333565 YV110AUZ9K1333582 YV110AUZXK1339388 YV110AUZXK1342954
XC90	YV1A2ALF1K1477872 YV1A2ALF5K1475767 YV1A2ALF5K1486283 YV1A2ALF6K1486311 YV1A2ALF7K1475768 YV1A2ALF7K1480324 YV1A2ALF7K1486317 YV1A2ALF9K1475755 YV1A2ALFXK1475764

Production Year: 2020

Vehicle Model	VIN Numbers
S60	7JR10AZS5LG040344 7JRALAZS0LG039593 7JRALAZS2LG039952 7JRALAZS4LG039614 7JRALAZS7LG039512 7JRALAZS7LG039543 7JRALAZS7LG039851 7JRALAZS9LG039754
S90	LVY10APS7LP078040 LVY10APS8LP078158
XC60	YV110AUZ3L1494320 YV110AUZ7L1494319 YV110AUZXL1494282
XC90	YV1A2ALF0L1534239 YV1A2ALF1L1534248 YV1A2ALF2L1540575 YV1A2ALF5L1540571 YV1A2ALF7L1534240 YV1A2ALF7L1540572 YV1A2ALF9L1534241

Description of defect:

The blown low-pressure fuse (15A amps) will prevent the engine from operating, causing higher risks of accidents.

Procedure:

Volvo owners will be contacted and replace their concerning vehicles with (20A) fuse instead of (15A).

For more information:

Call us on +968 91380937 to book an appointment for the recall repair.

Housing Ministry signs 22 usufruct agreements worth over RO4.5mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) signed 22 usufruct agreements of a total investment value of over RO4.5mn in several governorates on Monday.

H E Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, MHUP Undersecretary, signed the agreements with representatives of the investment projects.

Of the 22 agreements, four are for industrial projects and one commercial-cum-residential project in Muscat; two industrial, five commercial and four commercial-cum-residential projects in Dakhliyah; three industrial projects in South Batinah; one industrial project in North Sharqiyah; one industrial project in Al Wusta; and a residential commercial project in Dhofar.

MHUP offered 161 plots of land via public auction to boost investments in the sultanate in 2022. The 161 land plots offered for investments were provided with all services and located in areas with large population density.

The ministry signed 500 contracts and received fees of more than RO7.5mn for these.

The ministry is currently offering 41 plots of land, between 150sqm to 2,000sqm, and 15 investment sites, between 3,113sqm and 108,000sqm, via public auction in several governorates to develop the real estate sector and stimulate investments.

This is with the aim of supporting growth of the GDP and supporting the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040.

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- Residential Commercial Land (measuring 790 SQM)
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Interested buyers can register their interest by contacting us at the following address for further details.

Email:info@tibiaan.com

Last day to accept offers is 7 working days from the date of the advertisement.

Weeklong activities kick off to drive sustainable change



Muscat - Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) commenced at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday with the aim of promoting sustainability as a crucial element in supporting comprehensive development, in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The event is being attended by senior government officials, ambassadors accredited to Oman, as well as several specialists, experts and technicians engaged in the fields of energy, environment and water.

The event will continue until March 16 with wide local and international participation.

Hosted by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in partnership with Petroleum Development Oman, OSW is seeking to raise awareness on the importance of sustainable practices and preserving the environment while safeguarding natural resources.

The event aims to advance sustainability in the fields of en-

ergy and water, reflecting Oman's commitment to creating a more sustainable future. With extensive participation from a range of stakeholders, including officials, experts and specialists from various sectors, the event is expected to attract over 7,000 attendees, more than 150 distinguished speakers and over 80 exhibiting companies.

The weeklong programme features a variety of activities, including conferences, workshops, summits, interactive sessions, awards and site visits focused on promoting dialogue and collaboration around sustainability-related topics.

Commenting on the launch of OSW activities, H E Mohsin bin Hamad bin Saif al Hadhrami, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, said, "In light of the rapid developments and transformations the world is witnessing, sustainability and practices aimed at preserving the environment and resources have

become increasingly important. Today, everyone, including institutions, individuals and specialists, is working to adopt the latest practices and technologies that promote and support sustainable principles.

"Undoubtedly, OSW will create momentum around sustainability issues by raising awareness and promoting concepts related to hydrogen and renewable energy technologies, while emphasising the importance of reducing carbon emissions and preserving natural resources, water and energy."

He added that OSW serves as a national platform that showcases Oman's unwavering commitment to achieving leadership in sustainability, whilst also providing an opportunity for knowledge and experience exchange.

"It features the latest technologies, solutions and initiatives from around the globe, making it a model for enabling sustainability efforts through innovative

strategies in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals."

OSW has a diverse range of activities scheduled, including the International Conference on Sustainability Resources and Technology on March 13 and 14, organised by Oman Environmental Services Holding Company - be'ah - and programmed by the Economist Impact, and the Gaia thought leadership conference on industry, sustainability and future of energy, conducted by the Society of Petroleum Engineers.

The event will also feature Shell Oman's 'Shell NXplorer' programme, which encourages entrepreneurs and university students to develop solutions for clean energy and showcases ten innovative projects created by students from ten schools in the sultanate. In addition, the week will include the 'Nawafidh' programme also by Shell Oman and field visits that aim to highlight sustainability projects.

Announcement

The Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of taxpayers who are subject to Income Tax and their fiscal year ended on December 31, 2022 to submit their tax returns and pay the tax due, according to the forms prepared for this purpose through Tax Authority's Portal: www.taxoman.gov.om not later than **April 30, 2023**

We hope everyone will abide and commit to the deadline of sumbitting the return.

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

Datamount is close to launching Al Bandar Center, one of the largest data centers in the Sultanate

Al Bander, the third data center with more than 700 racks in an area of 8400 square meters, with a future expansion plan



Abdulmonem Al Futaisi

During this year, Datamount, the company that specializes in data centers and cloud services owned by several government pension funds and other investors is preparing to lunch the Al-Bandar data center, which is the third and the largest data center for the company after the Muscat and the Al Jabal Akhdar Data Center.

On this occasion, Dr. Tahir Al Kindi, Chairman of the Board of Directors, said, "in line with the future vision of the Sultanate, we are getting close to inaugurating one of the largest data centers in

the Sultanate, which represents a qualitative step that reflects the global position of the Sultanate in this field. The center will contribute to advancing digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and cloud services in the government and private sector in the Sultanate of Oman to keep abreast of the fourth industrial revolution's developments and ensure the digital economy's continuity and growth. The center was designed with international specifications and the latest technologies, where our customers can obtain greater flexibility in managing their data operations with high protection from any potential dangers that may arise from cyber threats. In addition, our various services and products and our experience in managing data centers will ensure the integration of digital solutions for our customers and simplify their business operations under one umbrella smoothly and at competitive prices. The locations of Datamount's three data centers were chosen with high accu-

A great addition to the data centers and cloud sector in the Sultanate and the Middle East region.

racy. In distinct locations, the sites were comprehensively studied regarding the availability of safety, closeness to customers, and essential services such as electricity, water, and fiber net. The future expansion plans for all centers were also considered in terms of land area availability.

In a statement, Abdulmonem Al Futaisi, CEO, said, "The technologies of the digital age require that Datamount provide

مركز بيانات الجبل الأخضر
Jebel Akhdar Data Centre SAOC

high-level services to its customers and provide the necessary environment according to the latest technologies, with a high level of efficiency and information security. We are approaching the operation of the third and largest data centers of the company, which is a great addition to the data centers and cloud services sector in the Sultanate and the Middle East; the center is built at Tier 3 level with the latest international specifications on the area of 8400 square meters with a total building area of 5400 square meters. The center will provide services with the latest technologies of the Internet of Things, cyber security, digital twin technology, artificial intelligence, and managed services while maintaining the highest levels of security, and a highly qualified specialized team will manage it. Data Mount is an accredited Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology provider to provide cloud services, video conferencing, and meeting systems. It holds a certificate from the American Up-

time Institute that evaluates global data centers. It is granted to centers that provide electronic systems and infrastructure components with high quality, safety, and reliability. The company has obtained all the ISO certificates that are granted to data center companies, such as Information Technology Service Management, Business Continuity Management, Information Security Management, and Quality Management. Our services and competitive prices will ensure that customers achieve integration in digital solutions smoothly."

Eng. Said Al Hosni, project manager, said: "Datamount is about to inaugurate one of the largest data centers in the Sultanate of Oman, designed according to the latest specifications. Upon completion of its three phases, the Al Bandar data center will accommodate more than 700 racks; Suitable location has been chosen for the center nearby all services and customers, and the standard specifications required to meet the requirements of Tier 3 (Up-

time Tier 3) and (TIA 942 Rated 3) were taken into account. The data center is fully equipped with double electric lines, double backup generators, double data transmission lines, and double electrical rooms and cooling systems with iced water in cooperation with Tabreed Oman. The center has also provided an internal cooling device with iced water (Chiller) as an additional supplement.

Al Bandar data center provides the latest security and monitoring systems, such as advanced surveillance cameras, access control systems, and internal environment monitoring systems. It's also equipped with safety systems such as firefighting systems that operate on environmentally friendly gas (Novec 1230). The company has also given great attention to the security of customer data, whether physical security or logical security, as accessing servers goes through strict procedures with multiple security levels by providing the system with network firewalls, access control, and data encryption."

His Majesty opens Oman Across Ages Museum



Continued from Page 01

It displays antiques from each era and chronicles the diverse facilities housed by the museum.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan toured the corridors of the museum. He heard a summary of the most prominent pavilions in the Gallery of History, the Gallery of the Blessed Renaissance and the Gallery of the Future.

His Majesty Sultan also visited the lecture hall and the 'Ideas and Innovation Labs' at the Knowledge Centre. There, he heard briefings on a number of innovations and student projects from schools of Dakhliyah governorate.



At the conclusion of the opening ceremony, His Majesty the Sultan received a commemorative gift from Oman Across Ages Museum. The gift - a scale model

of the museum - was presented to His Majesty the Sultan by Secretary-General Kindi.

In a symbolic gesture, His Majesty the Sultan offered his

own personal cane as a gift to the museum to be added to its collection.

Before leaving the premises of the museum, His Majesty was briefed about an ancient limestone rock from Wadi Lahjaj in Dhofar governorate that figured among the displays. The rock bears a set of primitive drawings.

The official opening ceremony was attended by Royal Family members, chairmen of State Council and Majlis A'Shura, ministers, heads of security and military units, and other officials and dignitaries.



Al Omaniya Financial Services (SAOG)

Values stronger than money

P.O. Box 1087, Jibroo, PC 114, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24724700, Fax: 24813258

NOTICE OF INVITATION TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Al Omaniya Financial Services (SAOG) takes pleasure to invite all Shareholders to attend the Annual General meeting of the company, which will be held on Wednesday, 29th March 2023 at 5.00 pm at Crowne Plaza Muscat, Al Mandaloon Hall and virtual attendance through website (www.mcd.gov.om) for AGM Meeting. In the event that the quorum requirement is not met, a second meeting of the Annual General Meeting shall be held on Wednesday, 05th April 2023 at 5.00 pm at Crowne Plaza Muscat, Al Mandaloon Hall and virtual attendance through website to discuss the following:-

Agenda:

1. Review and approval of the Board of Directors Report for the year ended 31st December 2022.
2. To consider and approve the Board of Directors performance report for the financial year ended 31st December 2022 (as per attachment).
3. Review and approval of the Corporate Governance Report for the year ended 31st December 2022.
4. Review and approval of Auditor's report and the audited annual financial statements for the year 2022.
5. Approval of the Board recommendation to distribute cash dividend of 7.25 baisas per share of paid up capital as of the AGM date.
6. Approval of the Board recommendation to distribute (5 bonds for every 100 shares) compulsorily convertible bonus stock bonds to shareholders as on AGM date, a total of 15,160,682 bonds (value 100 baisas per bond) to be paid from Retained Earnings (as per the attached explanatory note).
7. Approval of the proposed directors' remuneration of RO. 300,000/-
8. To ratify the sitting fees that has been paid to the Board and it's sub-committees during last year and to determine the sitting fees for the current year (as per attachment).
9. Inform the Annual general meeting on the Related Party Transactions that took place during the financial year 2022 (as per attachment).
10. To appoint the External Auditors for the financial year 2023 and agree their fees.

As per the Article of Association of the company and the rules to use of the new electronic means, to inform you with the following:

- a. Only natural person can authorize any person (except board members) to attend the meetings and vote on his / her behalf through the electronic portal. The natural person must have an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCD).
- b. The voting on any of the agenda items shall start (3) days prior to the meetings and finish at the day of the meeting. Any changes to the holding shares (plus/minus) the voting shall be cancelled and need to re vote on the day of the meeting.

For further information, please contact **Mr. Braik Al Amri** on phone No.24724777 / 24724700 Fax No.24813258.

LEGAL ADVISOR

EXTERNAL AUDITOR

CHAIRMAN TO THE BOARD

WHO, experts discuss respiratory infections, pandemic preparedness



Our Correspondent Muscat

The third Scientific Conference and the sixth meeting of the Eastern Mediterranean Acute Respiratory Infection Surveillance (EMARIS) network kicked off on Monday in Muscat, to deliberate on the region's preparedness for any influenza pandemic.

The three-day conference is being organised by the World Health Organization (WHO) together with partner organisations and hosted by the Ministry of Health in the Sultanate of Oman. The theme of this year's conference - 'Better preparedness, early detection, and rapid response for respiratory diseases' - reflects the recommendations from the previous EMARIS meeting and Scientific Conference for the member states, WHO, and partners to enhance their pandemic influenza preparedness plans.

Three days of intense discussions among more than 200 speakers and participants of ministries of health, regional and

global experts, including WHO and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will shape the upcoming plans of 'Acute Respiratory Infections in the Region'.

In his inaugural speech, Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, highlighted that this year's EMARIS Conference is taking place at a critical time as the region is facing multiple large-scale emergencies caused by conflict, major natural disasters, food insecurity, and numerous outbreaks.

Dr Mandhari stressed the importance of constantly strengthening disease surveillance and early warning systems for early detection of respiratory disease outbreaks - especially in complex emergencies such as those faced by several countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Dr Mike Ryan, Executive Director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, commended the EMARIS 2023 calling it a true reflection of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean

Region Vision 2023, where early preparedness - especially amidst a context of evolving emergencies - is at its core.

H E Dr Said Harib al Lamki, Undersecretary for Health Affairs in the Ministry of Health, Oman, affirmed that EMARIS 2023 conference and meeting is an opportunity to showcase unity against the persistent threat of the respiratory disease of epidemic and pandemic potential leveraging lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Lamki said that some devastating setbacks were experienced by all of us during the pandemic, "but the crisis has prompted us to invest more in prevention strategies and to be more vigilant about other respiratory viruses that could potentially cause pandemics".

Dr David E Wentworth, Chief, Virology Surveillance and Diagnosis, Influenza Division, CDC, highlighted that "the global response to SARS-CoV-2 was unprecedented. It challenged us as a global network to quickly adapt to an emerging disease."

Low pressure to bring rains

Muscat - Heavy rains - starting Monday night - will lash the sultanate even on Tuesday, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

In a statement, CAA said, 'Oman will be affected by a low pressure trough on Monday night and Tuesday. The governorates of Muscat, Musandam, North Batinah and South Batinah will be affected by thunderstorms of varying intensity accompanied by active downwind with chances of cumulus clouds forming on Al Hajar Mountains.'

CAA advised all to be cautious during rains and to keep away from over flowing wadis.

No new licences for bottom trawlers

Muscat - In efforts to preserve fish stocks, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) announced on Monday that it has suspended issuing new licences for coastal fishing using bottom-trawling nets.

'The ministry stopped issuing licences for coastal fishing using bottom trawling method from today until further notice,' to help preserve and develop fish wealth, MAFWR stated.

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MOH No: 558/2023

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Oman's government recorded a budget surplus of RO145mn in January this year as compared to a surplus of RO18mn in the same period of last year, the Ministry of Finance announced on Monday.

The sharp increase in January surplus was mainly due to a 22 per cent rise in total revenues which came at RO982mn as against RO804mn in the same month a year ago.

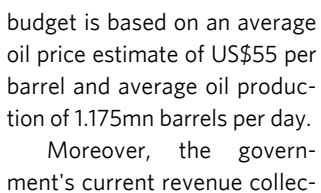
Higher revenues was mainly a result of increase in oil and gas income, which accounted for about 88 per cent of Oman's total public revenues, according to Fiscal Performance Bulletin issued by the Ministry of Finance.

With increased output and higher prices, net oil revenues grew by nine per cent to RO602mn in January this year as compared to RO554mn in January 2022, while gas revenues increased by 18 per cent year-on-year to RO258mn.

The sultanate's daily oil production increased by 5.2 per cent to 1.063mn barrels per day in January 2023 in comparison with 1.01mn barrels per day recorded in the same period of the previous year.

Average price at which Oman sold its crude oil during January increased nearly 11 per cent to US\$91 per barrel from US\$82 per barrel recorded in January 2022.

The sultanate's 2023



Moreover, the government's current revenue collec-

Oman's government repaid RO511mn worth of loans during January 2023, reducing the country's total debt to RO17.2bn

tion surged nearly four times to RO122mn in January this year from RO31mn recorded in the same months of last year.

Oman's government repaid RO511mn worth of loans during January 2023, reducing the country's total debt to RO17.2bn, the Ministry of Finance announced.

'During the month of January 2023, total repaid loans amounted to RO511mn which

primarily constituted of RO480mn maturing international bonds. This has contributed towards reducing the total government debt to RO17.2bn at the end of January,'

to repaid
loans during
closing the
to R017.2bn

the ministry said in its Fiscal Performance Bulletin.

Public spending up 7%

Oman's total public spending during January 2023 was recorded at RO837mn, which is RO51mn or seven per cent higher compared to the same period a year ago.

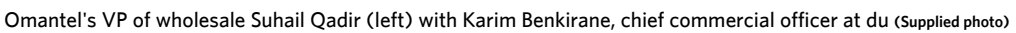
The sultanate's current expenditure slightly increased to RO299mn in January this year

when compared with RO296mn of the same period a year ago.

Development expenditure of the ministries and government units amounted to RO1mn, which represents just 0.1 per cent of total RO900mn allocated for developmental spending for the full year 2023.

Expenditure for contributions and other expenses category (which also include government subsidies) was raised by 19.3 per cent to RO37mn during January this year as compared to RO31mn recorded in January 2022. Oil product subsidy amounted to RO4mn in January, while an amount of RO33mn was transferred to future debt obligations budget-item.

The Ministry of Finance in its monthly bulletin also highlighted the International Monetary Fund's forecasts that indicates Oman's GDP growth at 4.1 per cent for 2023.



Our Correspondent

Muscat

Omantel and UAE's du, from Emirates Integrated Telecommunications Company (EITC), have come together to link Oman and the UAE through a newly activated 275km international fibre optic submarine cable named the Oman Emirates Gateway (OEG).

The OEG project will meet the evolving market demands, scale up speed, expand connectivity, deliver enhanced customer experience and provide wider commercial offerings, Omantel said in a press statement.

Oman and the UAE are currently connected through terrestrial and submarine routes. The new cable system of OEG will serve as an express connection between both countries and the partnership will reiterate OmanTel's and du's position as leading wholesale players supporting the region to evolve into the new promising global communication hub.

Talal al Mamari, CEO of

Omantel said, "I am glad to announce this partnership with du. This direct and dedicated corridor will synergise the goals of Omantel as the global wholesale hub and of du as the regional data hub, bringing huge benefits to our wholesale and enterprise customers. Both companies will also be able to further expand their networks with higher efficiency and improved connectivity which will result in a significant positive impact in terms of services quality and product variety."

"The importance of this partnership is reflected by the fact that it is the first of its kind regional fibre optic submarine cable which connects two international data centres – Equinix MC1 in Barka, Oman and datacentre DX1 in Dubai, UAE. This link will act as a major facilitator for hyperscalers, content providers and international carriers that are currently hosted in these data centres to avail improved connectivity services and higher capacities and will be able

to directly link their Point of Presence (POPs) in the region. Increased connectivity between the two data centres will also attract more global players to the region, improve the quality of connectivity, which will in turn, boost customer experience," Mamari added.

Fahad al Hassawi, CEO of du, said, "We are excited to enter into this partnership with Oman-tel. The agreement comes from a common vision for a new strategic direction that will help both companies optimise their assets and positions in the local, regional and global markets."

"OEG will trigger more investments to the region and boost the performance of our wholesale and enterprise customers, which will be passed further down the line to the society by bringing largescale transformation. We share the same vision with Omantel of transforming the region to a global telecom hub and have always strived to introduce cutting-edge solutions to our customers."

HORIZONS PREMIER FUND

Horizons Capital Markets Office 51, 5th Floor, Way 357, Al Maha St., Al Khuwair Muscat , Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: +968 24826000 Fax: +968 24826099

Fund's Management Body Report for the year ended 31st December, 2022.

On behalf of the Fund's Management Body, it gives me great pleasure to present the financial statements for the year ended 31st December 2022.

GCC financial Markets have remained volatile during the year 2022, and the gains witnessed in the first half were more than offset by declines registered in the second half of the year. The year has been characterized by the opening up of economic activities after the COVID-19 pandemic related restrictions, and also Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Increased geopolitical risk and high energy prices have been stoking inflation and increasing unpredictability regarding growth in the global economy. Therefore, world's central banks had adopted a tighter monetary policy stance aimed to bring down the inflation even though uncertainty in the global financial markets has increased.

GCC regional economies attained strong GDP growth during the year, largely driven by double-digit growth in oil production across the region as well as the broader economic recovery witnessed. Particularly in the UAE, Expo 2020 contributed to strong growth and FIFA World Cup tournament in Qatar has supported the boom. Regional governments fiscal situation has also improved significantly this year on the back of higher oil production and prices. Financial markets in Abu Dhabi (20.3%), Oman (17.6%), Kuwait (6.2%) and Dubai (4.4%) recorded gains during the year 2022. On the other hand, Qatar and Saudi Arabia closed the year with a declines of -8.1% and -7.1%, respectively. Horizons Premier Fund has delivered top quartile performance among the peers and closed the year 2022 with a positive gain of 1.2 percent to achieve a NAV of RO 1.13385 (after the distribution of cash dividend of 100 Biazas per unit) compared with RO 1.21941 on 31st December, 2021. The fund posted annualized return of 11.4 percent in the last 3 years and 31.3 percent on cumulative basis. Your fund returns are mainly supported by returns from its large overweighting in Real Estate and Healthcare sectors, and this performance was also supported by select Oman equities. On the geographical allocation, the fund remains heavyweight in UAE and Saudi Arabian stocks, which account for around 27% and 26% of the AUM in Dec'22 as compared to 25% and 33% in Dec'21, respectively.

We remain optimistic as regional governments continue to invest in strategic sectors for economic diversification and the buzzing IPO market appears a clear signal of strength. Meanwhile, the tightening in monetary policy will continue to weigh on global economic growth in 2023, as central banks focus on bringing inflation down.

Declaration of cash dividend for the year 2022

The Fund Management Body of Horizons Premier Fund on 15th February 2023 has approved the distribution of cash dividend of 50 Bz (Fifty Biazas only) per unit for the financial year ended 31st December 2022 to the registered unitholders as on 30th March 2023.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

	2022 RO	2021 RO
Assets		
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	1,545,657	1,915,729
Cash and cash equivalents	366,719	383,379
Other receivables	-	1,563
Total assets	1,912,376	2,300,671
Liabilities		
Accruals and other payables	11,461	32,374
Net assets attributable to the unitholders	1,900,915	2,268,297
Total liabilities and net assets attributable to the unitholders	1,912,376	2,300,671
Net assets value per unit attributable to the unitholders	1.13385	1.21941

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

	2022 RO	2021 RO
Income		
Dividend income	68,329	59,761
Interest income	400	521
Foreign exchange gain	-	1,783
Other income	1,160	-
Total income	69,889	62,065
Net realised gain on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	4,648	80,520
Net unrealised gain on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	11,117	309,542
Net investment income	85,654	452,127
Expenses		
Management fees	(21,090)	(21,955)
Transaction costs	(2,617)	(2,226)
Foreign exchange loss	(7,769)	-
Custodian and administration fees	(7,151)	(7,204)
Performance fees	-	(21,743)
General and administrative expenses	(9,403)	(5,243)
Total expenses	(48,030)	(58,371)
Profit and total comprehensive income and increase in net assets attributable to the unitholders for the year	37,624	393,756
Profit per unit	0.022	0.212

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om



OIA to sell its majority stake in Oman Cement to Huaxin

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Investment Authority (OIA) on Monday announced that it has started the process for exiting investment in Oman Cement Company. OIA, which owns a majority stake in Oman Cement, will sell its entire stake to China-based Huaxin Cement Company.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Ibrahim bin Said al Eisari, director general of private ownership at OIA, said, "This exit comes in accordance with a plan pursued by OIA aimed at achieving a number of goals, including attracting foreign investment to the sultanate. This will contribute to achieving economic diversifi-

cation and transfer of modern technology to the targeted sectors."

He pointed out that Huaxin Cement Company is among the 10 largest cement manufacturers in the world. Huaxin is listed on the Shanghai and Hong Kong stock exchanges and relies on modern technologies for its work.

"This will contribute to the development of operations at Oman Cement, increase its efficiency in production lines, and enhance its competitiveness locally and regionally, in addition to enhancing the positive image of the Omani industrial sector in general," Eisari added.

In a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange, Oman Cement

confirmed that it received intimation from its major shareholder Investment Authority SPC (IA), a wholly-owned subsidiary of OIA.

As per the disclosure, IA has entered into a sale purchase agreement with Huaxin (Hong Kong) International Holdings Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Huaxin Cement Company, for the sale of IA's entire shareholding in Oman cement to Huaxin, comprising 59.58 per cent of the issued capital of Oman Cement.

'Pursuant to the share purchase agreement, the initial consideration payable at completion shall be US\$193.1mn which corresponds to 59.58 per cent of the equity value of the company as

of December 31, 2022,' Oman Cement said.

'Following completion, the final consideration will be calculated based on the actual equity value of Oman Cement as of the completion date (taking into consideration cash, debt, and working capital movements as of the completion date) as well as the dividends for 2022 that will be approved at the next annual general meeting of the company,' the company added.

Oman Cement said that the completion of the transaction is subject to certain conditions, including regulatory approvals and filing in Oman and China, adding that the longstop date for completion of the transaction is June 1, 2023.

Bank Muscat Oryx Fund proposes highest ever dividend for 2022



Muscat - The fund management body of Bank Muscat Oryx Fund has proposed a dividend distribution of 68bz per unit to be paid to the unitholders for the financial year 2022.

The proposed dividend is subject to requisite approvals from the unitholders and other competent authorities.

Accordingly, the fund has maintained its track record of consistently growing dividend distributions despite a challenging market environment, a press release said.

In addition to the regular income distributions through dividends, the fund has also been rewarding its investors with at-

tractive capital appreciation since its inception in 1994. Oryx Fund delivered an average return of 12.7 per cent per annum to investors over the last ten years which translates into an aggregate return of 230.5 per cent over this period.

The return delivered by Oryx Fund over the last 10 years is significantly higher than average returns offered by alternatives over the same period like the MSX30 Index 3.4 per cent per annum, S&P GCC Index 3.9 per cent per annum, MSCI Emerging Markets Index 1.8 per cent per annum, gold negative 1.9 per cent per annum, and term deposits with commercial banks in Oman gen-

erally offering varied average interest rates up to 4 to 5 per cent per annum. As such, Oryx Fund clearly stands out as an attractive investment choice for prospective investors with a medium to long term view.

Furthermore, Oryx Fund has delivered positive performance of 5.8 per cent for the one-year period ended December 31, 2022 against negative return of 7.1 per cent in its benchmark i.e. S&P GCC Index.

Backed by this strong performance, Oryx Fund has once again been recognised as the best performing MENA equity fund by the reputed Citywire rankings for the year 2022.

UAE's ADNOC Gas shares surge 19% in \$2.5bn IPO

Dubai, UAE - Shares in the United Arab Emirates' ADNOC Gas rose 19 per cent in their first day of trading on Monday in a US\$2.5bn initial public offering that aims to tap into growing demand for the fuel.

ADNOC Gas, a subsidiary of state-owned energy giant Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), closed at 2.82 dirhams (US\$0.77) after opening at 2.37 and briefly hitting 2.96 on the Abu Dhabi stock exchange.

ADNOC Gas, which only became operational at the start of this year, is the bourse's biggest flotation yet. The overall market was down 0.6 per cent at 9,767.63.

At more than 50 times oversubscribed, it was the biggest demand ever seen for an initial public offering in the Middle East and North Africa, outstripping oil firm Saudi Aramco's world-record US\$29.4bn listing just over three years ago.

The final offer price of 2.37 dirhams, near the top of its range, implied a market capitalisation of around US\$50bn for the new company.

"Demand for the stock was expected to remain strong after listing with the favourable pricing," Monica Malik, chief economist at UAE bank ADCB, told AFP.



The rapidly organised IPO follows last year's scramble for alternative gas resources after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and comes as countries search for cleaner fuels to mitigate global warming.

ADNOC, the United Arab Emirates' key revenue-earner, retains a 90 per cent stake in the subsidiary formed from its former gas processing, LNG and industrial gas units.

Gas is being touted as cleaner than other fossil fuels as countries around the world strive to reduce their emissions.

Energy consultant Roudi Baroudi, who heads the Qatar-based Energy and Environment Holding firm, said Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) was "the most

important transition fuel" in the move away from more polluting hydrocarbons.

"As global efforts to battle climate change gain pace, the role of natural gas in general... is widely expected to grow," Baroudi said.

"ADNOC enjoys a solid reputation, so it was to be expected that the ADNOC Gas IPO would attract strong interest."

ADNOC Gas could be the first in a series of share offerings in Abu Dhabi this year.

At least eight companies are expected to follow, Bloomberg said, citing Sameh Al Qubaisi, director general of economic affairs at Abu Dhabi's Department of Economic Development.

AFP



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Al Maha Ceramics SAOG

P.O. Box 482, Postal Code 322, Falaj Al Qabail, Sohar, Oman. Tel: 26752322/23
Fax: 26752177, Email: info@almahaceramics.com, web: www.almahaceramics.com

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the results of Al Maha Ceramics SAOG for the financial year ended 31st December 2022.

Company's Performance:
Your company has effectively managed the multi-dimensional challenges, shown resilience and ingenuity in delivering a good set of results by registering an organic growth in sales volume and profitability in challenging circumstances.

Your company has achieved a revenue of RO 9.977 million in this year over the previous year's revenue of RO 9.822 million, an increase of 1.59 % Profit before tax for the year is RO 3.542 million as compared to RO 2.926 million in the previous year, an increase of 21%.

Net profit after tax for the year is RO 3.124 million as compared to RO 2.453 million in the previous year, an increase of 27 %. The profits of the company increased mainly due to interest income on fixed deposits and savings in administrative expenses. Further, for the first time, the company recorded its' Share of Profit from its newly acquired associate, amounting to RO 0.388 million.

Although, the associate, Al Hael Ceramics LLC, made operational losses, during the post-acquisition period of four months, amounting to RO 1.493 million, Al Hael has earned non-recurring income due to restructuring of its liabilities amounting to RO 2.409 million, which has resulted into profit during post-acquisition period of four months. Shareholders are cautioned to take note of the fact that non-recurring income of Al Hael Ceramics would not accrue in future, therefore, any juxtaposition of such income for future years would not be a correct estimate.

Your Company complies with the Omanisation requirements and invests in continuous training and improvement programs to enhance the skills of our human resources.

The Board would like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Ajay Ganti as the CEO and Mr. Sanjay Kumar Tiwari as the CFO of the company and wish them all the success in their endeavors at Al Maha Ceramics SAOG. In reference to the disclosure, which was made on August 24, 2022, concerning the acquisition of a 45% stake in Al Hael Ceramic Co. LLC by Al Maha Ceramics SAOG, we are pleased to inform that we have initiated the operations of the first line in Al Hael Ceramics and commenced commercial production in line with our mandate to manage and operate the Al Hael Ceramics. Further we have planned to commission one more line by the end of first half of 2023 and subsequently start commercial production of Porcelain tiles product portfolio.

Dividend:
The Board of Directors is pleased to inform that an Interim cash dividend of 20 Bz per Share (OMR 1,100,000) was distributed during November 2022. The Board of Directors is pleased to further recommend an additional cash dividend of 20 Bz per Share (OMR 1,100,000). With this final cash dividend, the total cash dividend declared for the year ending on 31st December 2022 would total up to 40 Bz per share for the year 2022 (2021: 30 Bz per Share), subject to approval of shareholders at the Annual General Meeting.

Future Outlook:
The performance clearly shows that the economic environment is improving post the pandemic and geopolitical disruptions in the region. The business confidence also is gradually stabilizing and, as a result, the economic activity is showing signs of recovery.

However, the industry is facing certain risks and challenges such as rising utility costs, logistics cost upsurge, constant pressure on raw material costs, continuation of cheap imports which impacts the overall margins. Market situation is expected to be challenging in Oman as well as in the region. Your company will continue to explore opportunities for value-based technology and business synergies.

There is continuous endeavor to explore new and untapped markets regionally and globally. Your company has maintained the Saudi Arabian Standards Organization (SASO) and ISO accreditations and is exploring newer opportunities to expand its footprint in various geographies.

It gives us immense pleasure to inform that your company has been conferred with five awards in last two years:
1- HM Sultan Award for Industrial Excellence
2- SUPERBRANDS Award from UAE
3- DER Award for Excellence in Manufacturing
4- AINVA Awards 2021 and 2022 for Best Performing Company
5- Oman's Most Trusted Brands awards 2021 (OMTB)

Provided that global economic situation does not deteriorate, we remain optimistic about our business trend in 2023. We feel that the tile industry will continue to show healthy growth for next couple of years and we are committed to progress ahead.

Corporate Social Responsibility
The Company believes in supporting the community and has a policy to contribute. Over the years our company has contributed significantly towards the welfare of the society through various social activities. Under the CSR policy the company mainly emphasis on healthcare, education and society.

Thanks, and Appreciation
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to our honorable shareholders, customers, banks and suppliers for their support during the year. Also, thankful to the executive management and all employees of the company for their sincere efforts, and we look forward for achieving better results in the years to come.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and employees, we pray to Almighty Allah to bless His Majesty with long life, health and grant him success to pursue the march of goodness and development for the prosperity of Oman and its people.

For Al Maha Ceramics SAOG
Masoud Humaid Malik Al Harthy
Chairman

Note: The complete accounts of Al Maha Ceramics SAOG will be delivered to any shareholder or the interested party, who request them at the above address, in either Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of such request.

Statement of Financial Position
AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

	2022 RO	2021 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	5,699,606	6,172,616
Investment property	225,000	225,000
Investment in associate	2,513,013	-
Right-of-use assets	518,084	597,812
	<u>8,955,703</u>	<u>6,995,428</u>
Current assets		
Inventories	1,637,318	1,513,853
Trade and other receivables	3,190,999	2,706,339
Cash and bank balances	2,841,251	3,389,624
	<u>7,669,568</u>	<u>7,609,816</u>
Total assets	<u>16,625,271</u>	<u>14,605,244</u>
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	5,500,000	5,500,000
Share premium	88,199	88,199
Legal reserve	1,833,333	1,833,333
Retained earnings	4,440,063	4,066,445
Total equity	<u>11,861,595</u>	<u>11,487,977</u>
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Non-current portion of lease liabilities	483,374	555,591
Employees' end of service benefits	266,075	259,603
Deferred tax liability	225,498	283,596
	<u>974,947</u>	<u>1,098,790</u>
Current liabilities		
Current portion of lease liabilities	72,078	72,072
Bank borrowings	600,000	-
Trade and other payables	2,598,687	1,437,403
Income tax payable	517,964	509,002
	<u>3,788,729</u>	<u>2,018,477</u>
Total liabilities	<u>4,763,676</u>	<u>3,117,267</u>
Total equity and liabilities	<u>16,625,271</u>	<u>14,605,244</u>
Net assets per share	<u>0.216</u>	<u>0.209</u>

Statement of Comprehensive Income
for the year ended 31 December 2022

	2022 RO	2021 RO
Revenue	9,977,477	9,821,837
Cost of sales	(5,962,395)	(5,727,225)
Gross profit	<u>4,015,082</u>	<u>4,094,612</u>
Administrative and general expenses	(441,474)	(610,738)
Selling and distribution expenses	(574,783)	(572,286)
Other Income / (expenses)	194,602	53,303
Profit from operations	<u>3,193,427</u>	<u>2,964,891</u>
Share of profit of associate for the period	388,061	-
Finance charges	(39,633)	(38,659)
Profit before tax	<u>3,541,855</u>	<u>2,926,232</u>
Income tax	(418,237)	(473,192)
Total comprehensive income and net profit for the period	<u>3,123,618</u>	<u>2,453,040</u>
Basic earnings per share	<u>0.057</u>	<u>0.045</u>

REQUIRED URGENTLY

CONSTRUCTION COMPANY BASED IN THE CAPITAL AREA
HAVE OPENINGS FOR THE FOLLOWING POSITION

1) Planning engineer with at least 2 years of work experience and proficiency in Primavera P6. Freshers can apply as well but must have complete knowledge of Primavera P6.

2) Civil/Project Engineer with a minimum of 15 years of work experience in the Sultanate of Oman".

3) Project Manager with work experience in constructing of roads and buildings and a minimum of 10 years experience in the Sultanate of Oman.

Interested parties are requested to send their CV's to hr.azatlrc@gmail.com

HSBC buys failed SVB's UK arm for £1

The UK arm of failed US lender Silicon Valley Bank has been sold to HSBC for a nominal £1 (US\$1.2) in a rescue deal, the government and HSBC announced Monday.

The deal, overseen by the Bank of England and the Treasury, comes after SVB collapsed Friday sparking panic in Britain over its customers in the technology and life science sectors.

AFP

be'ah awards ‘Outstanding Sustainability Initiatives’

In recognition of exceptional sustainability efforts, Omani Holding Company for Environmental Services - be'ah - awarded top-performing companies at the Oman Sustainability Week Awards, held in conjunction with the Oman Sustainability Week 2023 in Muscat.

The event took place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) under the patronage of H E Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aui, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and was attended by a number of ministers, undersecretaries, CEOs of companies and stakeholders in the field of sustainability.

These awards serve as a commendation to top-performing companies in implementing sustainable practices pertaining to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors, which align with Oman Vision 2040 objectives. The framework, which is



based on the internationally recognized GRI standard, was developed in collaboration with the Center for Sustainability and Excellence based in Chicago, Illinois.

The Oman Sustainability Week Awards serve as the launchpad for a week-long initiative that encompasses a vast exhibition, a conference, and diverse field visits. These awards aim to raise awareness about

sustainability issues and encourage companies and institutions to incorporate responsible and sustainable practices into their corporate strategies.

Additionally, they underscore the significance of dedicating oneself to social and environmental issues to achieve long-term economic growth.

The Oman Sustainability index have been meticulously

categorised into various sections, highlighting the country efforts towards sustainable practices in environmental, social, governance and human resources domains. The assessment was based on key performance indicators such as the governance criteria, encompassing the organisation vision, anti-corruption policies, sustainability goals, stakeholder engagement and

sustainability reporting.

The social practices criteria focus on evaluating the organization social impact, contribution to local communities and effective supply chain management. The environmental criteria examine the efficiency of the organisation environmental management system, energy consumption, waste management, and emission reduction.

Additionally, the human resources criteria assess the organization performance in ensuring employees' health, safety, training and education and providing job opportunities for the community.

In this edition of the Oman Sustainability Week Awards, new categories have been added, including government, academia, small businesses in addition to

the medium-large businesses - involving 19 organisations.

An increase of more than 50 per cent from last iteration participation. These organisations have benefited from detailed reports prepared by specialised and experienced assessors in the field of sustainability. The reports provided a thorough evaluation of each participating organisation, along with results and grades.



شركة عمان والإمارات للاستثمار والقابضة (ش.م.ع.)
OMAN & EMIRATES INVESTMENT HOLDING CO. SAOG

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Board of Directors’ Report - 2022

Honorable Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman & Emirates Investment Holding Company (O&E), I present the Annual Report for 2022 containing the audited financial statements for the year ended 31st December 2022. An overview is provided below on the macroeconomic and business environment the Company faced during the year, the challenges encountered, the mitigating actions taken and the overall financial performance.

Business Environment in Retrospect

The regional economies had a stellar performance last year, growing at the fastest pace in almost ten years on the back of an increase in oil production and growth of the non-oil sector. The Gulf region is expected to outperform many developed economies in 2023 despite a slowdown in growth amidst a slower expansion of the energy sector and a weaker external environment.

Oman's Gross Domestic Product recorded its first surplus in over ten years. Its credit rating has been upgraded and outlook revised upward as a result of the prudent measures undertaken by the Government. Oman's 2023 budget estimates total revenues of RO 10.05 billion and total expenditure of RO 11.35 billion based on an estimated oil price of USD 55/bbl. The projected deficit of RO 1.3 billion reflects an uncertain global economy combined with the persisting financial and economic challenges of higher interest rates, inflation and the threat of looming global recession.

During 2022, all three-indexes showed growth: MSM Index recorded a growth of 17.6%, ADX a growth of 20.3% and DFM grew by 4.4% by end 2022 compared to 2021 during which MSM, ADX and DFM indices grew by 13%, 68% and 28% respectively. The stock market is viewed as an indicator of the economic growth, a vital part in monetary policy and its stability or volatility is monitored as a development indicator.

Financial Strategy during 2021 and 2022

Management continued the budgeted reduction of the Company's total risk profile as a priority financial strategy and, by end 2022, massive amounts of bank borrowings and government soft loans were settled.

Financial Performance

The results of the Company's investments are outlined in greater detail in the body of this Annual Report. A snapshot of the Group's financial statements for 2022, consolidating the results of the Parent Company, its Subsidiary and Associates, reflects the sustained efforts in handling business challenges under the prevailing economic environment. The performance highlights during 2022 are summarized as follows:

- The Group recorded a **Net Profit of RO 2,084,274 during 2022** attributable to owners of the Parent Company compared to a Net Profit of RO 1,521,782 during 2021. The Parent Company achieved a **Net Profit of RO 2,276,986 during 2022** compared to a Net Profit of RO 1,663,715 during 2021.
- The Shareholders Equity increased to **RO 23,157 Million as at 31.12.2022** from RO 21.073 Million as at 31.12.2021, against Share Capital of RO 12,187,500, registering an increase in **equity by 9.89%**.
- The aggregate value of the Group's investments decreased to **RO 32.540 Million** as at **31.12.2022** from RO 38.691 Million as at 31.12.2021.
- The Parent Company's total borrowings reduced from RO 17.463 Million as at 31.12.2021 to **RO 9.634 Million as at 31.12.2022**, consisting of RO 7.5 Million Government Soft Loan, bank loans for operations amounting to **RO 0.812 Million** and the Head Office Building Loan of **RO 1.322 Million**.
- Against the Net Equity of **RO 24.220 Million** of the Parent Company, the **Debt Equity Ratio stood at 0.40 at end 2022**, down from 0.79 in 2021.

Despite the massive impact of very challenging prevailing environment over the past years, the Company's overall financial structure is now better balanced to face future sustained income uncertainties.

Results of the Group at a Glance

The following table provides the Company's financial development snapshot showing the highest earning per share and lowest gearing ratio over the past five years:

RO in Million					
Particulars	2018 (Restated)	2019 (Restated)	2020	2021	2022
Equity Share Capital	12.187	12.187	12.187	12.187	12.187
Net Equity	20.905	21.197	19.551	21.073	23.157
Investments	49.807	46.842	43.771	38.690	32.540
Net Profit / (Loss) Before Tax	0.019	0.292	(1.931)	2.168	1.774
Book value per share – RO	0.172	0.174	0.160	0.173	0.190
Earnings per share – RO	0.0002	0.0024	(0.014)	0.013	0.017
Debt/ Equity Ratio	1.43	1.34	1.26	0.79	0.40

Dividend

For 2022, the Board of Directors proposed a special dividend of 7.5% in the form of cash and is planning to formulate a policy for dividend payout for the future. The shareholders would receive a cash dividend of RO 0.0075 per ordinary share aggregating to RO 914,062 on the Company's existing share capital. The proposed cash dividend is subject to the formal approval of the forthcoming Annual General Meeting of the shareholders.

Head Office building

New tenants were attracted to the Head Office building during 2022 which is now occupied by reputed tenants on long-term tenancy agreements. Only a few vacant units remain.

New Investments

No greenfield investment was budgeted during the year until resumption of normality in the business environment. However, preparatory revisions will be carried out during this year on projects suspended from previous years.

Corporate Governance

Management continues to uphold the sound corporate culture established in the Company as manifested by shared values and transparent governing policies. Our Company's governance system has been fully integrated with ethical business practices, which meet the high standards expected by the Authorities.

Internal Control Systems and their adequacy

The Company has a robust internal audit system and strict adherence is monitored to ensure compliance with the procedures and operating systems. There was no breach of internal controls during 2022.

Future Outlook

The global economy will face another period of uncertainty in 2023 with anticipated recession in countries and continued inflation which will put pressure on both government and household budgets. But the GCC appears set to buck the trends of the forecasted global recession in 2023 (IMF). Also, with Gulf states being much more fiscally disciplined during the current oil boom, credit rating agencies are now raising their assessments of Gulf sovereigns after years of downgrades.

World and regional outlooks are described in the Management Discussion & Analysis chapter of this Annual Report. The banks will continue their tight credit policies and interest rates. The Company's strategy over the past three years to drastically reduce commercial borrowings was opportune and exposure to financial risks has been mitigated. Going forward, Management will continue to repay the Government Soft Loan tranches when due and pursue some further commercial debt reduction depending on continuing uncertainties in the business environment.

People:

The past three and half years were defined by new working conditions, a different way of corporate life and the Company embraced a working environment that ensured the health and safety of its employees and sustainability for the future. On behalf of the Board, I express appreciation to the dedication and the transformational results delivered by the Executive Management and all employees of the Company during these difficult times the world experienced.

Acknowledgment:

On behalf of the Board, I express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq, Sultan of Oman, and His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, for their support. May God's grace be bestowed on them towards having a good health and long life to achieve greater success in all their endeavours.

I also take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt gratitude to the Governments of the Sultanate of Oman and United Arab Emirates, to the Capital Market Authorities and banks for their support, and to Shareholders for their continued involvement with the Company.

Mohamed Darwish Al Khoori
Chairman
8th March 2023

CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

	2022 Group RO	2021 Group RO	2022 Parent RO	2021 Parent RO
ASSETS				
Cash and bank balances	2,588,582	1,919,812	964,158	113,040
Trade and other receivables	1,487,530	1,075,767	206,666	40,850
Inventories	456,254	434,392	-	-
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss (FVTPL)	14,641,548	20,481,259	10,883,176	16,651,253
Investment in equity accounted investees	15,798,771	16,100,249	14,231,630	14,110,383
Investment in subsidiaries	-	-	3,596,035	3,873,243
Financial assets at amortised cost	2,099,271	2,109,961	2,099,271	2,109,961
Property, plant and equipment	2,257,421	2,531,702	414,810	515,016
Investment properties	2,950,650	3,074,850	2,680,650	2,804,850
Right-of-use asset	385,565	43,577	-	-
Deferred tax asset	78,367	78,496	-	-
Total assets	42,743,959	47,850,065	35,076,396	40,218,596
EQUITY				
Share capital	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500	12,187,500
Legal reserve	4,991,892	4,991,892	4,062,500	4,062,500
Retained earnings	5,977,493	3,893,219	7,969,803	5,692,817
Equity attributable to owners of the Parent Company	23,156,885	21,072,611	24,219,803	21,942,817
Non-controlling interest	3,175,730	3,485,638	-	-
Total equity	26,332,615	24,558,249	24,219,803	21,942,817
LIABILITIES				
Bank overdrafts	79,890	630,360	11,582	562,017
Trade and other payables	2,656,906	2,054,192	1,223,178	812,952
Lease liability	399,715	53,454	-	-
Term loans	2,121,833	3,100,810	2,121,833	3,100,810
Loans from Governments	10,461,120	16,136,924	6,808,120	12,483,924
Deferred Government grants	691,880	1,316,076	691,880	1,316,076
Total liabilities	16,411,344	23,291,816	10,856,593	18,275,779
Total equity and liabilities	42,743,959	47,850,065	35,076,396	40,218,596
Net assets per share	0.190	0.173	0.199	0.180

CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

	2022 Group RO	2021 Group RO	2022 Parent RO	2021 Parent RO
Income				
Interest income	10,984	-	10,984	-
Rental income	124,025	55,119	124,025	55,119
Brokerage commission income	158,129	102,883	-	-
Dividends income	753,691	878,252	631,506	770,134
Net income from financial assets at FVTPL	2,645,480	2,556,010	2,863,990	1,803,141
Gross profit on sale of food products	198,011	191,319	-	-
Share of (loss)/profit from Associates	(65,291)	415,612	272,533	75,672
Share of (loss)/profit from Subsidiaries	-	-	(277,208)	375,307
Asset management fees	120,140	244,494	-	-
Other income	110,180	84,466	41,010	18,481
Total income	4,055,349	4,528,155	3,666,840	3,097,854
Expenses				
Staff costs	(810,030)	(835,523)	(359,597)	(373,005)
Administrative expenses	(723,472)	(741,922)	(385,283)	(383,789)
Investments related expenses	(11,141)	(10,690)	(21,978)	(20,847)
Directors' remuneration	(75,000)	(50,000)	(75,000)	(50,000)
Provision for court settlement for former CEO	(292,870)	-	(292,870)	-
Total expenses	(1,912,513)	(1,638,135)	(1,134,728)	(827,641)
Net income/(loss)	2,142,836	2,890,020	2,532,112	2,270,213
Finance costs	(519,749)	(691,534)	(386,001)	(606,498)
Impairment loss on non-financial assets:				
- Investment properties	-	(30,000)	-	-
Impairment reversal on financial instruments – net	151,408	-	130,875	-
	(368,341)	(721,534)	(255,126)	(606,498)
Profit before tax	1,774,495	2,168,486	2,276,986	1,663,715
Income tax	(129)	(322,609)	-	-
Profit after tax for the year	1,774,366	1,845,877	2,276,986	1,663,715
Attributable to:				
Owners of the Parent Company	2,084,274	1,521,782	2,276,986	1,663,715
Non-controlling interest	(309,908)	324,095	-	-
	1,774,366	1,845,877	2,276,986	1,663,715
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.0171	0.0125	0.0187	0.0137

CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

	2022 Group RO	2021 Group RO	2022 Parent RO	2021 Parent RO
Profit/(loss) for the year	1,774,366	1,845,877	2,276,986	1,663,715
Other comprehensive income				
Other comprehensive income	-	-	-	-
Total comprehensive income/(loss) for the year	1,774,366	1,845,877	2,276,986	1,663,715
Total comprehensive income/(loss) attributable to:				
- Owners of the Parent Company	2,084,274	1,521,782	2,276,986	1,663,715
- Non controlling interest	(309,908)	324,095	-	-
	1,774,366	1,845,877	2,276,986	1,663,715

Note: The complete Financial Statements of the Company in Arabic or English will be made available to any shareholder on request.

OMAN'S MOST TRUSTED BRAND



Minara 'most trusted' in Food Products category

In a rousing testament to its steadfastness as a worthy companion in every kitchen in Oman, Minara, the flagship brand of Areej Vegetable Oils & Derivatives (AVOD) has won Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award 2022. This is the third time that the brand has won the seal of approval from its loyal consumers in Oman.

The ultimate recognition was conferred to AVOD at a gala event held under the auspices of H E Eng Said bin Hamoud bin Said al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, at



Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, last week. It was attended by their Highnesses, Excellencies and senior officials from 50 winning companies along with Oman's crème de la crème from the corporate and media sector.

Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards is the sultanate's first trust-based brand awards that act as top recognition and validation of public trust in a brand. The winners are selected through a carefully vetted voting process that reaches out to the consumers to choose from among the best they trust.

Eng Salem bin Nasser al

Bortmany, CEO - Areej Vegetable Oils & Derivatives - expressed his happiness at the momentous win and said, "Consumer trust is always paramount. It is easy to fall short of expectations, especially during turbulent times. To have won the Oman's Most Trusted Brand award for the third time, especially in times such as these, not only underlines the significance of consumer trust, but it also acts as timely validation that AVOD has continued to do right for its end users and contributed to enriching their lives and of those around them."

MG Motors Oman wins in Sedan/4WD category



MG Motors Oman, the renowned automotive brand, has been crowned with the prestigious title of 'Oman's Most Trusted Brand - 2022' in the Sedan and 4WD category.

The award is a testament to the trust and loyalty that MG Oman has earned from its customers over the years. More than 900,000 people participated in a month-long survey to determine the most trusted brands in Oman, and MG Oman emerged as the winner.

The award recognises MG Oman's commitment to providing high-quality vehicles and services that customers can trust. The company has built its reputation on great cars, fantas-

tic technology, excellent and competitive pricing, exceptional customer service, and great network coverage.

MG Oman has seen an impressive sales growth over the past three years, making it the second-largest automotive brand in Oman today.

"This recognition means everything to us. At the end of the day, the consumer is our key target, so by receiving this award through a consumer vote makes it invaluable," said Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO, MHD ACERE.

"It just reinforces our vision of becoming the most preferred auto brand in being realised. We are very buoyant about the year

ahead with new product launches in the pipeline and believe that our customers' trust is well placed."

Tom Lee, Managing Director of MG Motor's Middle East operations, commented, "As one of our biggest markets in the Middle East, it is extremely gratifying to see how much customers in Oman love and admire the MG brand. This award gives us the momentum to keep ascending greater heights.

"I expect us to maintain this momentum based on MG's extremely appealing combination of competitive pricing, fantastic product, great styling, amazing technology, and a fantastic dealer support team."



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Al Maha Ceramics SAOG

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Fax: 26752177, Email: info@almahaceramics.com, web: www.almahaceramics.com

Invitation for the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders

The Board of Directors of Al Maha Ceramics S.A.O.G (the "Company") is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the Ordinary Annual General Meeting to be held at 7:00 pm on Thursday, 30th of March 2023, via the electronic platform for general meetings which may be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository's website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum to convene the Annual General Meeting is not complete, the second general meeting will be convened at 5:00 pm on Tuesday, 4th April, 2023, to discuss the following agenda:-

- 1- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the activities of the Company and its financial status for the financial year ended on 31 December 2022.
- 2- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the organization and management of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2022.
- 3- To consider the Auditor's Report on the financial statements of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2022.
- 4- To consider and approve the proposal to distribute cash dividends (by the date of AGM) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2022 at the rate of 20 % of the share capital (20 Baizas for each share).
- 5- To approve the sitting fees paid to the Board of Directors and Board Sub-Committees for the financial year ended on 31 December 2022 and to determine their sitting fees for the next financial year.
- 6- To consider and approve the proposal to distribute remuneration fees of an amount of RO94,000.(Omani Rial Ninety Four Thousand) for the year ended on 31 December 2022.
- 7- To notify the general assembly of the related party transactions entered into by the Company during the financial year ended on 31 December 2022.
- 8- To consider and approve the related party transactions which will be entered into by the Company during the financial year ending on 31 December 2023.
- 9- To brief the general assembly of the contributions made to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2022.
- 10- To consider and approve the proposal to allocate RO 15,000 (Omani Rial Fifteen Thousand) to support community services for the financial year ending on 31 December 2023.
- 11- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors Performance for the Financial Year ended on 31 December 2022.
- 12- Appointment of statutory auditors for the company for the financial year ending 31 December 2023 and specify their fees.

Pursuant to the Articles of Association of the Company and the Rules for Convening General Meetings of Public Joint Stock Companies via Electronic Means issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to bring your attention to the following:

- a) Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- b) Voting on any of the items on the agenda shall commence no more than three days before the date of the general meeting and until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting. If a shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder must cast his vote again on the day of the general meeting.

If you have any queries, please call (Mr. Mohamed Juma Al Balushi) on Phone No. 2675 2322

ahlibank hosts 'Exclusiv Banking Clients' in its new head office

ahlibank hosted selected 'Exclusiv Banking and Wealth Management' clients, who have been a part of its impressive growth in the local and regional banking sector, in its new state-of-the-art headquarters at Wattaya in Muscat.

The upscale construction, reflecting its innovative approach to banking, was welcomed by 'Exclusiv' customers at a special meet-and-greet event organised by ahlibank.

The new ahlibank building embodies ethos as a customer-centric institution, received overwhelming appreciation from the gathering of Exclusiv account holders of the bank. The architectural strengths of the building, its aesthetic interiors, and designated lounge facilities, in addition to the wealth management department design in a modern and distinctive style, all aim to ensure our customers' comfort and privacy while conducting their transactions, which is a prime example of the bank's commitment to enhancing the experiences of our customers.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, Najla Murtadha al Lawati, AGM - Head of Private Banking & Wealth Management, ahlibank, said, "We are proud of our glorious 15-year journey that has led us to this momentous occasion and are grateful to all our elite customers who have stood



by us over the years. Their presence at this informal gathering, to witness our success from close quarters, reaffirms their trust in our capabilities and redefines our dedication to cater to our clients who are active partners in the government's Vision 2040."

Explaining further, she added, "Since the inception of ahlibank, we have committed to a customer-centric approach, to meet our customer's expectations and provide a distinctive banking experience.

"To achieve this, the bank has launched many advanced banking solutions and innovative electronic and digital platforms for individuals, companies, Exclusiv customers, and high-net-worth customers. We also believe that the country's economy has benefited greatly from ahlibank's financial and business advisory services."

AlizzOne offers upgraded banking experience for salaried customers

To offer an upgraded banking experience and provide customers with the best services and products that comply with the principles of sharia'a, Alizz Islamic Bank has launched AlizzOne a value proposition for those who wish to transfer their salaries to the bank.

The bank's commitment to meeting the diverse financial needs of society is demonstrated through the tailor-made programme AlizzOne that encompasses financing, accounts, and savings plans. This all-inclusive package aims to provide innovative services that offer flexible financing rates and a variety of account and financing product options

to customers.

Furthermore, the package is designed to enhance the customer experience for those who aspire to invest via their savings.

The banking products package offered under AlizzOne includes a current account that facilitates various customer transactions and offers optional cheque book issuance.

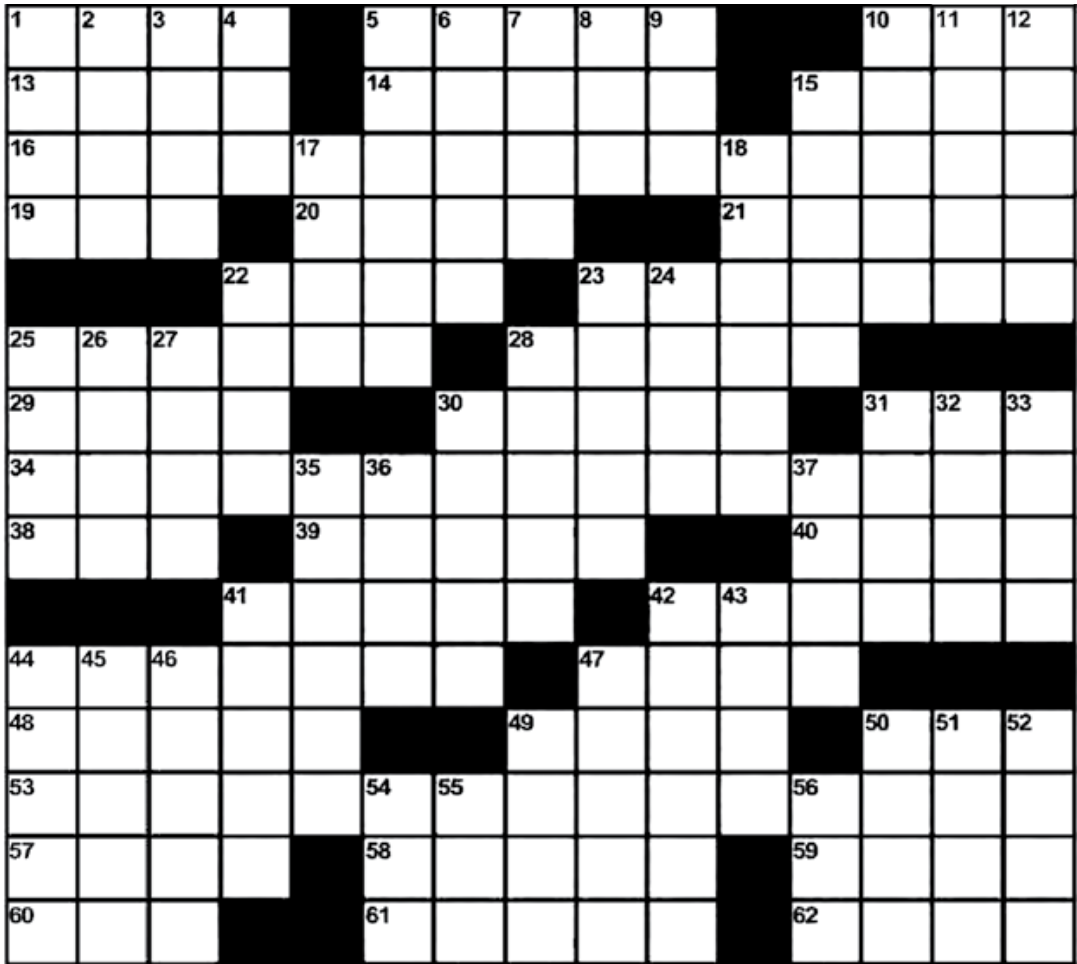
Additionally, there is a long-term savings plan account that is designed to enable customers to save towards specific goals while earning monthly profits. Customers can also link a savings account to a current account and a separate savings account as a

sweep functionality.

There is also a fixed investment deposit wakalah or murabaha account, which are investment accounts that includes deposits for profit generation purposes.

The AlizzOne package offered by Alizz Islamic Bank provides a wide range of financing options, including home finance, auto finance, and personal finance and has been designed to offer attractive benefits to customers who choose to transfer their salaries to Alizz Islamic Bank. These benefits include a full year exemption from credit card fees if the customer applies for a card.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Word hyphenated with "ran"

5) Sudden gush

10) Liquid in a trunk

13) Within striking distance

14) Relieves, as pain

15) Pimples, collectively

16) What tourists do

19) Anger or fury

20) Like some futures or cheeks

21) Celebrity bit part

22) British Conservative

23) Three-legged stands

25) Ages, as cheese

28) Brief period of time

29) A god of war

30) Showy adornment

31) Capturing-of-thought-waves skill

34) Gives an exaggerated reaction

38) They loop the Loop

39) Hospital employee

40) Appliance with a door

41) It can show you the world

42) Calculating

44) In an abrasive manner

47) One of "Wrath" in a "Star Trek" sequel

48) Conscious

49) Torque wrench, e.g.

50) In vitro items

53) "I promise you"

57) Pilot and flight attendants, collectively

58) With hearing organs

59) Nevada's second-largest city

60) Men and boys

61) Orderly grouping

62) Cannon's sound

DOWN

1) One who hasn't turned pro?

2) Jet-set jet

3) "For heaven's..."

4) Valuable mine rock

5) Spanish gents

6) Legendary country singer Cline

7) Like a post-eruption landscape

8) Ball elevator

9) Laser center?

10) Schmendrick

11) Wanted in on a poker hand

12) Mexican currency

15) Open-mouthed in shock

17) Monopoly board circler, once

18) It's formed in mid-drip

22) Some wallet bills

23) Comanche group

24) Mini stream

25) _ into the sunset

26) Statue that's sacred to some

27) Slapstick staples

28) Supporting beam

30) Quick, sudden attack

31) Place for 18-Down

32) Alter

33) Remain undecided

35) "O Canada" is one

36) Hardly thrilling

37) Having trouble deciding

41) In a crooked position

42) Rundown

43) Time for a marching band

44) Be egged no longer?

45) Cognizant

46) Tends to the fall fall

47) Divided Asian country

49) Unit of pressure

50) Common cookie

51) Italian wine

52) Molecule member

54) Thumbs-up vote

55) Failed negotiation result

56) Sphere

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

If you're in the midst of a heated fight or squabble with a loved one, you can expect the temperature to get even hotter today. It's not exactly enjoyable, but it is progress. This is going to be the worst of it, and once the two of you go through the fire, you'll both be better off and your relationship will be even stronger. Honesty is important in any healthy relationship, although it isn't always easy to give (or take). Telling them what they want to hear is a waste of time.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

A lot of warmth is going to be coming your way today, and it's all coming from your friends. You know, the people who you choose to have in your life. This is a wonderful day. You'll be reminded just how loved you are by your favorite people and how much you love them right back! Their importance in your life is paramount, so make time today to just hang out with them. Enjoy the private jokes and silliness you all share together so well.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Foreign cultures, food, music, dance, and even politics will hold special interest for you right now. You're getting more eager to push beyond what you know of the world. You want unusual stimulation, and this is an important sign that you're about to go through a growth phase. Expose yourself to different cultures and immerse yourself in them as much as you can. The world is a big place and you know so little of it. Isn't it time for you to go out and start learning more?

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Succumbing to peer pressure isn't a good idea for you. It sends the wrong message about who you are and only causes you to do things you don't really want to do with people you don't really respect. Be brave enough today to go your own way when push comes to shove. If you have to go it alone, at least you'll be in good company. Your high-quality allies understand that you're just doing what is right for you, so they will only wish you well.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Action is required when it comes to a serious project. But you'll manage to have a great deal of fun with it! There's a lot of joy around you now, although it might feel difficult for you to tap in to it. Not to worry. Chip away a little bit at a time and eventually you'll break through and start getting in on the good times. An old friend has a new interest, and they're going to try to get you into it as well. Give it a serious try, and be honest if it's just not your thing.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Do you have a friend or coworker who has been making some bad decisions that could be hurting their future? Step in and do what you can to help them figure things out today. It might sound like a harsh tactic, but you should paint a picture of the worst-case scenario for them. That will help them see that where they're headed might not be a good place to go. Sometimes scare tactics are the best way to help people avoid failure and regret.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Motivation is lacking in your life right now. What you really need is someone or something to light a fire under you! Go out and seek some stimulation. Find a mentor, someone who has reached the goal that you want to reach. Find out if they can help you get there too. Their ego will definitely be stroked by your attention, and the chances are good that they'll be receptive to the idea of taking you under their wing. Everyone needs some guidance to get to where they want to go.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

There is a born leader deep inside of you, and it's about time you let them out to play! The hierarchy in a group you're a member of is getting confusing, and someone with clarity needs to step up and help everyone get more organized. That someone should be you today! People enjoy the unique perspective you bring to every meeting, and they'll react well to your new ideas. In your home life, you're gaining more and more control over an issue you feared would overwhelm you.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Just like children need structure in their lives to excel, adults need structure too. The big question is if you have enough. If you don't have a schedule or at least a loose plan, you could veer off course and get little if anything done. There's too much disarray in your life right now, and it's going to be very easy to get distracted if you don't have your priorities set. Take time today to sort through the details. Put things in the right order.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

The more extravagantly you spend right now, the less money you'll have later. Your finances are finite, you know. If you want to keep dipping into the money well, then you need to keep putting more in there! Saving your money isn't supposed to be fun, and right now it could hurt just a little bit. But by tightening your belt now, you'll be able to loosen up later. You need to learn that delayed gratification can be much sweeter than the immediate kind.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Put some more effort into your career today. It might be necessary in order to avoid a crisis. Don't panic. Just take care of business the right way and you'll be fine. What's the problem? You thought you had everything totally under control, but there is one tiny thing you forgot about. Figure out what it is and then touch base with your boss. Show them that you take an interest in the bigger picture, not just your own situation. You'll come out on top!

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Pinpoint something about yourself that you want to improve today and get started on fixing it! You're in a great frame of mind to tackle that bad habit and get on track for a better health regimen. You have so much power over your body and your state of mind, and it's time you started wielding it. A positive change is well within your grasp. All it takes is a little bit more time than you were hoping it would take. You're on the launch pad to a better life. Get ready to take off!



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Where is the Viedma Glacier which empties into the western end of Lake Viedma?

- A. Iceland
- B. Norway
- C. New Zealand
- D. Argentina

02. Who is the writer for the TV series "Absolutely Fabulous"?

- A. Tracey Ullman
- B. Hugh Laurie
- C. Ruby Wax
- D. Jennifer Saunders

03. The New York Stock Exchange, established under that name in 1865, deals in what?

- A. Stock cars
- B. Cattle and sheep
- C. Shares and derivatives
- D. Soup bases

Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

B	U	H	F
F	A	A	G
E	R	A	E
T	S	E	R

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

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

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

North Korea launches missiles as US, S Korea kick off major drills

Nuclear-armed Pyongyang test-fired two strategic cruise missiles from a submarine

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea said on Monday it had test-fired two strategic cruise missiles from a submarine, as South Korea and the United States kicked off their largest joint military exercises in five years.

Nuclear-armed Pyongyang said the test verified its 'nuclear war deterrence means in different spaces' as it slammed the drills - known as Freedom Shield - which will run for 10 days from Monday as part of the allies' drive to counter North Korea's growing threats.

"The two strategic cruise missiles precisely hit the preset target on the East Sea of Korea," the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

North Korea is not technically banned from firing cruise missiles under current UN sanctions - although tests relating to its nuclear arsenal are not allowed.

The KCNA report said the test was linked to the United States and South Korea 'getting evermore undisguised in their anti-DPRK military manoeuvres',



US soldiers walk past military vehicles at a military training field in the border city of Yeoncheon on Monday (AFP)

referring to the North by its official name.

The South Korean military said it had detected the launch of at least one unidentified missile from a North Korean submarine on Sunday morning.

Photos and video released by North Korean state media showed the submarine, the '8.24 Yongung', and a missile flying into the sky from the water, trailing white smoke and flames.

Analysts said 'huge doubts' remain about how advanced the North's submarine programme

is. Park Won-gon, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said the state media images suggested the missile was fired from above the water.

"Then there is no point in shooting from a submarine because there is no stealth," Park told AFP.

"North Korea says the weapons are deployed, but whether we believe it with credibility is another matter."

Defensive drill

The Freedom Shield drills 'in-

volve wartime procedures to repel potential North Korean attacks and conduct a stabilisation campaign in the North', the South Korean military has said.

It emphasised that the exercise was a 'defensive one based on a combined operational plan'.

But North Korea views all such exercises as rehearsals for invasion and has repeatedly warned it would take 'overwhelming' action in response.

"North Korea has been speaking in missiles against joint drills," said Go Myong-hyun, a re-

searcher at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul.

"It wants to emphasise that the reason for developing missiles is for self-defence purposes," he said.

The foreign ministry in Pyongyang also released a statement on Monday slamming the United States over what it called 'the US vicious 'human rights' racket', after Washington said it would hold a UN meeting this week on abuses in North Korea.

AFP

30 migrants missing after boat capsizes off Libya, says Italy

Rome, Italy - About 30 migrants were missing and presumed drowned after the overcrowded boat they were on capsized during a rescue attempt by a cargo ship off Libya, Italy's coastguard said on Sunday.

Seventeen migrants were saved and a search was underway for the missing after the early-morning attempted rescue in Libya's search-and-rescue zone, the coastguard said.

"During the rescue operations... the boat capsized during the transfer of the migrants: 17 people were rescued and recovered by the (cargo) vessel while approximately 30 migrants were missing," said the coastguard.

The latest disaster in the Mediterranean comes exactly two weeks after a shipwreck off Italy's southern coast of Calabria that killed at least 76 migrants, with bodies continuing to wash ashore nearly daily.

That shipwreck has put Italy's right-wing government led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on the defensive as it tries to fend off sharp criticism that it failed to intervene in time to save the migrants. Sunday's botched rescue is sure to increase finger-pointing over who is to blame for deaths even as an increasing number of migrants embark on the perilous Central Mediterranean crossing headed for Italy's shores.

Italy's coastguard said the boat in distress was in Libya's search-and-rescue zone, and that the deadly episode laid bare 'the inactivity' of other countries in the Mediterranean.

Rome has long complained to its EU partners that it bears the brunt of the tens of thousands of migrants seeking to reach Europe by boat each year.

First to be alerted to the boat in distress some 100 miles (160km) northwest of Benghazi was Alarm Phone, a charity that monitors migrant boats. It said it then alerted Italian authorities at 0118 GMT on Saturday morning.

A surveillance plane of German NGO SeaWatch also spotted the boat and reported it was 'dangerously overcrowded and in frightening waves'.

In a statement, Italy's coastguard confirmed that Alarm Phone had notified Rome's rescue coordination centre, as well as Maltese and Libyan authorities,



Italy's PM Giorgia Meloni (AFP)

A recent shipwreck had put Italy's right-wing government led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on the defensive as it tried to fend off sharp criticism that it failed to intervene in time to save the migrants

ties, about the boat.

A merchant vessel that had headed towards the boat after the alert by SeaWatch reported difficulty in rescuing the boat due to bad weather, the coastguard said.

Boat overturned

Authorities in Libya - which the coastguard said was responsible for search and rescue efforts in that zone - reported 'a lack of availability of naval assets' and requested the support of Rome, which dispatched three additional nearby merchant ships to the area, according to the statement. SeaWatch also had tweeted on Saturday that Tripoli said it was 'unable to send a patrol boat'.

The rescue operation began early on Sunday morning after the cargo vessel *Froland* reached the site, during which the migrant boat overturned, the coastguard said.

Two migrants among the 17 pulled safely onboard needed urgent medical care and the ship headed to Malta to disembark them.

Merchant ships were still in the area searching for the missing, along with two Frontex planes, it said.

AFP

Hundreds of migrants try to storm US-Mexico border

Ciudad Juárez, Mexico - Hundreds of people tried to storm the US-Mexico border on Sunday, after a rumor that migrants would be allowed to cross into the United States.

Around noon, a large crowd of mainly Venezuelans began to gather near the entrance of a bridge connecting Mexico's Ciudad Juarez to El Paso, Texas in the southern United States.

Frustrated by delays and difficulties in applying for asylum in the United States after journeys thousands of miles long through Central America and Mexico, some told AFP they thought they would be allowed entry because of a supposed 'day of the migrant' celebration.



Migrants attempt to forcibly cross into the US at the Paso del Norte International Bridge in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, on Sunday (AFP)

Images on social media showed a group that included many women and children running towards the border, shouting 'to the USA.'

They quickly encountered barbed wire, orange barricades and police with shields. US bor-

der guards 'of course' moved to close the bridge, said Enrique Valenzuela, a civil society worker who helps migrants in Juarez.

Jackson Solis, a 23-year-old Venezuelan, was among those who came to the bridge on Sunday to see if the rumor was true. "We all ran and they put a fence with barbed wire around us. They threw tear gas at us," he said.

Solis told AFP he had been waiting six months to try to schedule an appointment to apply for asylum in the United States, where he wants to work.

Appointments must now be booked through a Customs and Border Protection mobile app that was introduced this year as asylum seekers were required to

apply in advance rather than upon arrival. The Biden administration has been hoping to stem the record tide of migrants and asylum seekers undertaking often dangerous journeys organised by human smugglers to get to the United States.

In January, the White House proposed expanding a controversial rule to allow border guards to turn away more would-be migrants if they arrive by land.

"Do not just show up at the border," President Joe Biden said in a speech at the time.

Biden took office vowing to give refuge to asylum seekers and end harsh detention policies for illegal border crossers.

AFP

Nicaragua proposes to cut relations with the Vatican

Managua, Nicaragua - Nicaragua on Sunday said it was considering suspending diplomatic ties with the Vatican, after Pope Francis days earlier called the Central American country's government a 'crude dictatorship.'

"Between the Republic of Nicaragua and the Vatican, we propose a suspension of diplomatic relations," a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, 'given the information that has been divulged by sources apparently close to the Catholic Church'.

The ministry statement did not directly reference Francis' comments in the Friday interview with Argentine news outlet Infobae, during which the pontiff also called Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega 'unbalanced'. The interview came days after the government last week shuttered two universities with ties to the Roman Catholic Church.

The schools, which have campuses in several cities, had their legal status cancelled for alleged contraventions of the law, according to the government. The institutions were ordered to hand over all information on students, professors, study plans and other details to the country's National Council of Universities (CNU), according to an official government register.

The universities' thousands of students will be integrated into other CNU-approved institutions and all university property will be transferred to the state.

That was the latest move in ongoing friction between the Church and Ortega's government, which include the sentencing of Bishop Rolando Alvarez - an outspoken critic of what he called restrictions on religious freedom under Ortega - to 26 years in prison.

AFP

Japan: Retrial for longest-serving death row inmate

Tokyo, Japan - Tokyo's High Court ordered a retrial on Monday for an 87-year-old former boxer, dubbed the world's longest-serving death row inmate, nearly six decades after he was convicted of murder.

Lawyers for Iwao Hakamada left the court after a brief session and unfurled banners reading 'retrial' as supporters shouted 'Free Hakamada now!'

"I was waiting for this day for 57 years and it has come," said Hakamada's sister Hideko, 90, who has campaigned tirelessly on her brother's behalf. "Finally a weight has been lifted from my shoulders," she said.

Hakamada spent nearly five decades on death row, and was certified the world's longest-serving death row inmate, before a lower court ordered a retrial and freed him while his case proceeded.

He was sentenced to death in 1968 for robbing and murdering his boss, the man's wife and their two teenage children.

He initially denied the accusa-



This file photo shows Iwao Hakamada speaking during an interview in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka prefecture on August 28, 2018 (AFP)

Hakamada spent nearly six decades on death row, and was certified the world's longest-serving death row inmate

tions but later confessed after what he subsequently claimed

was a brutal police interrogation that included beatings.

His attempts to retract the confession were in vain and his verdict was confirmed by the Supreme Court in 1980.

After a prolonged battle, a district court in the central city of Shizuoka granted a retrial in 2014, finding investigators could have planted evidence.

But Tokyo's High Court overturned the lower court ruling four years later, and the case was sent

to the Supreme Court on appeal.

There, judges ruled in 2020 that the Tokyo High Court must reconsider its decision.

One key piece of evidence used to convict him was a set of blood-stained clothes that emerged more than a year after the crime.

Supporters say the clothes did not fit him and the bloodstains were too vivid given the time elapsed.

DNA tests found no link between Hakamada, the clothes and the blood but the High Court rejected the testing methods.

National broadcaster NHK said the court's presiding judge Fumio Daizen cast doubt on the credibility of the clothes as evidence. "There is no evidence other than the clothes that could determine Hakamada was the perpetrator, so it is clear that reasonable doubt arises," NHK quoted him as saying.

Japan is the only major industrialised democracy other than the United States to retain capital punishment, which is always car-

ried out by hanging.

The death penalty still enjoys broad public support and debate on the issue is rare.

Supporters say nearly 50 years of detention, mostly in solitary confinement with the ever-present threat of execution, took a heavy toll on Hakamada's mental health.

He told AFP in 2018 he felt he was 'fighting a bout every day'.

His sister Hideko told a news conference later on Monday she does not talk about the trials with him.

"I will only tell him to rest assured, because we got a good result," she said.

"Now, I just need to make sure I can see the retrial begin."

The process for a retrial could take years if a special appeal is filed, however, and lawyers have been protesting against this system. The Japan Federation of Bar Associations welcomed Monday's ruling but said it 'strongly demands prosecutors swiftly start the retrial process.'

AFP

‘Fierce’ fighting rages in centre of Bakhmut as Russia grinds forward

Kyiv, Ukraine - Fierce fighting is raging for control of the centre of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine, the longest-running and bloodiest battle of Moscow's invasion, Russian and Ukrainian forces said on Monday.

Ukraine said that Russia's Wagner mercenary group, which has claimed to be leading Moscow's charge for the industrial city, was pushing forward in the city that has been the epicentre of fighting for months.

"Wagner assault units are advancing from several directions, trying to break through our troops' defensive positions and move to the centre of the city," the Ukrainian military said in a morning briefing.

"In fierce battles, our defenders are inflicting significant losses on the enemy," it added.

Analysts are divided over the strategic significance of Bakhmut as a military prize but the city has gained important political stature, with both sides pouring significant resources into the fight.

Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin also acknowledged that his forces were coming up against determined resistance as they sought to wrest control of the city's centre.

"The situation in Bakhmut is



Ukrainian military personnel receive training on German-made Leopard 2 battle tanks at the Spanish army's training centre in Zaragoza on Monday (AFP)

Wagner assault units are advancing from several directions, trying to break through our troops' defensive positions

UKRAINIAN MILITARY

difficult, very difficult. The enemy is battling for every metre," Prigozhin said in a post on social media.

"The closer we are to the city centre, the more difficult the battles get and the more artillery there is... Ukrainians are throwing endless reserves (at the fight)," Prigozhin said.

Ukraine has said its strategy with the defence of Bakhmut is to

degrade Russia's ability to launch any further offensive in the coming months and buy time to ready its bid to recapture ground.

‘Surge’ in arms demand

Kyiv has cautioned the city's fall would give Russian forces a clear path deeper into the Donetsk region, which the Kremlin claimed to have annexed into Russia last

year.

Russia has reported painstaking gains around Bakhmut in recent weeks, making progress on encircling the city, but it has not made significant territorial gains in months.

The capture of the city would provide the Kremlin with a military win to sell to its domestic audience.

NATO warned last week that

Bakhmut could fall within a matter of days while Ukraine leader Volodymyr Zelensky has vowed to continue to hold the city 'as long as possible'.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, now more than a year old, has seen arms imports into Europe almost double in 2022, driven by massive shipments to Kyiv, which has become the world's third-largest arms destination, researchers said on Monday.

"The invasion has really caused a significant surge in demand for arms in Europe, which will have further effect and most likely will lead to increased arms imports by European states," Pieter Wezeman, a senior researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), told AFP.

Russia's attack has had 'devastating' consequences for children in residential institutions, with thousands transferred to occupied territories or to Russia, Human Rights Watch also said on Monday.

"This brutal war has starkly shown the need to end the perils faced by children who were institutionalised," said Bill Van Esveld, associate children's rights director at the New York-based organisation.

AFP

Iran hopes to restore ties with Bahrain

Tehran, Iran - Iran said on Monday it would welcome restoring ties with Bahrain to end seven years of ruptured relations, following a recent China-brokered deal to heal rifts between Tehran and Riyadh.

"The resumption of political relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia shows the effectiveness and success of the diplomatic solution to resolve misunderstandings," said Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani.

Tehran, pleased by the rapprochement with the Saudis, believes 'relations between Iran and Bahrain are no exception to this rule', Kanani added. Riyadh and Tehran on Friday announced they would reopen embassies and missions within two months and implement security and economic cooperation agreements signed more than 20 years ago.

"With the positive atmosphere that we are witnessing in the region, this positive development can happen in relation to other countries in the region, including Bahrain," Kanani said.

In 2016, Bahrain followed in Riyadh's footsteps when Saudi Arabia cut ties after Iranian protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions following the execution of Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr.

AFP

Thousands of hospital doctors walk out in latest UK strike

London, UK - UK hospital doctors on Monday began a three-day strike over pay at the start of a week that will also see teachers, train staff and civil servants walk out, in the latest wave of industrial action.

The doctors say years of below-inflation pay increases mean they have effectively had a 26 per cent pay cut since 2008.

Ahead of the stoppage, the body that represents them, British Medical Association (BMA), launched an advertising campaign claiming a newly qualified doctor earned less than some coffee shop staff.

"Pret a Manger has announced it will pay up to £14.10 (US\$17.13) per hour," the ad said.

"A junior doctor makes just £14.09. Thanks to this Government you can make more serving coffee than saving patients. This week junior doctors will take strike action so they are

paid what they are worth."

The strike by so-called junior doctors - a category of doctors who are not senior specialists but who can still have decades of experience - is the longest they have ever staged.

Cover will be provided by the senior specialists, known as consultants.

"I thought by being a doctor I would be able to achieve financial independence, but instead I am still completely dependent on others," said Becky Bates, a recently qualified junior doctor in central England.

"With (university) tuition fee loans, credit cards and personal loans, I've left medical school with over £100,000 debt, and now my wages are not even enough to allow me to fix my car when something goes wrong."

On Wednesday, hundreds of thousands of workers are expected to stop work, including

teachers, London Underground train drivers, BBC journalists, and university staff.

Since last year the UK has been plagued by strikes across the economy from nurses and ambulance staff to lawyers and dock workers fuelled by soaring food, fuel and housing costs.

Driving UK-trained staff abroad

They have all clashed with the government, which insists the country cannot afford inflation-busting pay hikes.

Doctors and nurses leaders have repeatedly warned that poor pay and conditions are driving UK-trained medical and nursing staff abroad at a time of record waiting lists exacerbated by a pandemic treatment backlog.

The BMA says junior doctors in England have suffered a 26 per cent real-terms cut to their pay since 2008-09.

AFP

Belarus, Iran ‘boost ties’ amid Ukraine war

Tehran, Iran - The presidents of Iran and Belarus hailed their close ties in talks in Tehran on Monday at a time both countries are sharply at odds with Western powers, including over Russia's war in Ukraine.

Ex-Soviet state Belarus serves as a rear base for Russian troops, and Iran is accused of supplying Moscow with armed drones for use in the invasion - a charge it denies while proclaiming its neutrality in the conflict.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi hailed three decades of close ties with Belarus after talks with his counterpart Alexander Lukashenko, who arrived late on Sunday for a two-day visit.

"Thirty years after the start of relations ... the two countries have the will to strengthen cooperation," Raisi said, praising their 'common strategic vision'.

Lukashenko said he had observed 'with great respect the perseverance with which the (Iranian) people resist external pressures, attempts to impose the will of others on them'.

"And I see that, despite everything, you are developing mod-



A handout picture provided by the Iranian presidency shows Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi welcoming Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko in Tehran on Monday (AFP)

ern technologies and nuclear energy," he added about Iran's contested nuclear programme which has sparked tough international sanctions against the country.

"We could be very helpful to each other if we really put our efforts together," added Lukashenko.

The two presidents, who did not mention the Ukraine war in their statements, signed a roadmap to boost political, eco-

nomical and cultural cooperation.

Lukashenko is an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, while Tehran also maintains close ties with Russia even as it has stressed a neutral diplomatic stance in the Ukraine war.

Washington has accused Iran of supplying suicide drones to Russia, and expressed alarm over a 'dangerous' escalation in military cooperation between Tehran and Moscow.

Iran - which has denied supplying drones to Russia specifically for use in Ukraine - has said it has finalised a contract to buy Russian Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets.

Lukashenko recently made a three-day visit to China, where he voiced support for Beijing's proposal to mediate in efforts to end the Ukraine war. Belarus, has not sent soldiers to fight alongside the Russian army.

AFP

Syrian fortress among quake-hit ancient sites at risk

Al-Haffah, Syria - Zuhair Hassoun examines worrying cracks in a Crusader-era castle in Syria, a UNESCO World Heritage site that survived centuries of conflict only to be badly damaged by last month's deadly earthquake.

Hassoun, the custodian of the Fortress of Saladin, an architectural treasure with Byzantine roots in the 10th century rebuilt by Frankish Crusaders in the 12th century, walked carefully past fissured walls and crumbling arches.

"All of the fortress's towers are in danger," Hassoun said, warning that one had already fallen after the quake.

Other parts 'will inevitably collapse', he said, adding that it was only 'a question of time'.

The hilltop fortress surrounded by forest was among

dozens of cultural heritage sites that officials say were damaged in the devastating 7.8-magnitude quake that hit Turkey and Syria on February 6.

More than 50,000 people were killed in the disaster, almost 6,000 of them in Syria.

Ancient sites damaged included the Syrian city of Aleppo's famed citadel and Old City.

Dozens of sites damaged

The Fortress of Saladin has been on the United Nations' World Heritage List since 2006, and on the list of World Heritage in Danger since 2013, two years after the start of Syria's civil war.

But the castle, in western Syria's mostly government-held province of Latakia, scraped through the conflict unscathed



A section of the external wall and towers of the Saladin Fortress in Syria's Latakia province on March 7 (AFP)

and was still open to the public - until last month's quake.

Hassoun said he feared that aftershocks or even heavy rain could cause further damage to the site, whose main facade is now cracked from top to bottom.

"Every (stone) slab weighs at least a tonne," he said. "Any part of the fortress that falls into the valley can never be retrieved."

The earthquake hit one of the longest continuously inhabited areas on the planet within the so-

called Fertile Crescent home to ancient civilisations including the Sumerians and Phoenicians.

This rich history has left behind a plethora of archaeological sites, many of them thousands of years old.

At the national museum in the capital Damascus, the head of the antiquities and museums department pored over a map of quake-stricken Syrian heritage locations, including in areas outside government control.

"We have identified more than 40 damaged sites," Nazir Awad said, noting that the provinces of Aleppo, Idlib, Latakia and Tartus were badly affected. "The Citadel of Aleppo and the Old City recorded the worst damage," he added.

The day of the quake, AFP photographers saw damage in Aleppo to parts of the citadel, including to a minaret of a mosque at the World Heritage site.

UNESCO, in a preliminary assessment, cited 'significant damage' to the citadel and said the western tower of the old city wall

had collapsed, while several buildings in the souks had been weakened.

‘Urgent intervention’

Some Syrian heritage sites 'require urgent intervention so we don't lose priceless historical treasures', Awad said.

He called for 'international quake experts' to assess damage across the country, citing reports of 'severe damage' to several sites in rebel-held areas.

An AFP photographer saw heavy damage to the Saint Simeon Stylites monastery - an ancient Christian pilgrimage site named after a famous hermit - in northern Aleppo province, an area controlled by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham militant group.

AFP

HAPPY HUNTING GROUND

Man City star Haaland is here to stay, insists Guardiola

London, United Kingdom - As Erling Haaland was mobbed by his Manchester City team-mates, the Norway star's broad grin gave Pep Guardiola renewed belief that his coveted striker is still happy at the club ahead of Tuesday's decisive Champions League clash with RB Leipzig.

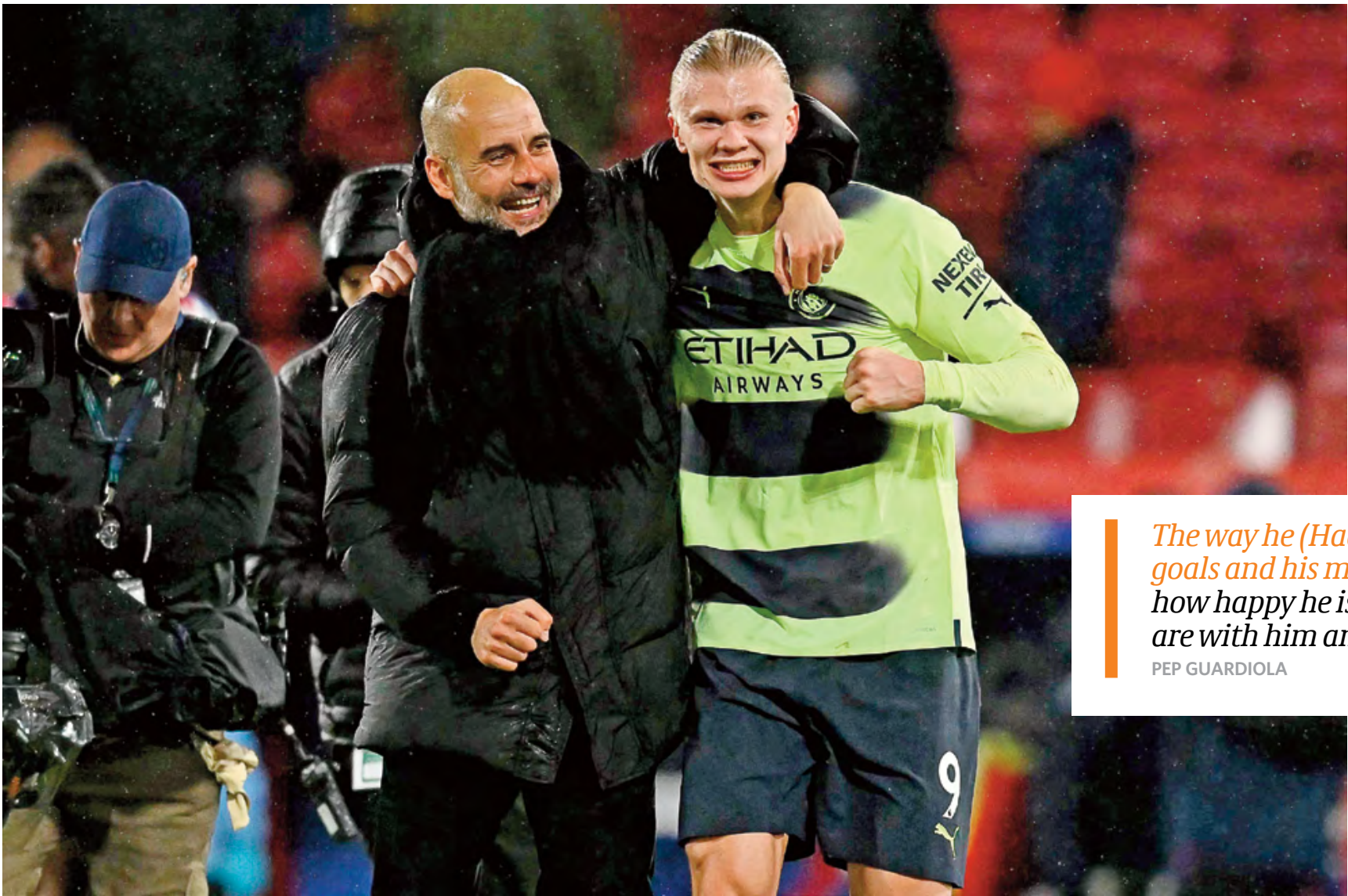
When Haaland scored a late penalty to clinch City's 1-0 win against Crystal Palace in the Premier League on Saturday, he responded with a joyous slide across the rain-soaked Selhurst Park pitch.

Amid reports that Paris Saint-Germain and Real Madrid are plotting audacious bids for Haaland in the close season, the 22-year-old's ecstatic reaction to his winner was a welcome sight for Guardiola.

Haaland has scored 28 times in the Premier League and netted 34 goals in all competitions since arriving from Borussia Dortmund in May.

He remains on course to break the Premier League goal record for a single campaign, jointly held by Alan Shearer and Andy Cole, who netted 34 for Blackburn and Newcastle respectively.

Yet, although the raw numbers suggest all is well with the astonishingly prolific striker and



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola (L) celebrates with Erling Haaland after their English Premier League victory against Crystal Palace on Saturday (AFP)

his team, the eye-test has sometimes painted a different picture.

There have been pointed questions raised about Guardiola's ability to get City to adapt to Haaland's unique talents, and the striker's own issues with coming to terms with the champions' style of play.

At times, Haaland has

ploughed a lone furrow in City's attack, left isolated and surrounded by defenders during his team's long spells of possession.

As a result, City have occasionally seemed more toothless than Haaland's phenomenal record would suggest, with his misses microscopically analysed for evidence he is square peg in a

round hole.

Haaland did miss a sitter before scoring at Palace, while his profligacy in a 1-1 draw at Nottingham Forest in February saw City surrender first place in the Premier League.

With City trailing Arsenal by five points in the title race, the Champions League may offer

their best chance of a memorable end to the season.

'He's thinking positive'

They have never won Europe's elite club competition and must see off Leipzig, who earned a 1-1 draw in the last 16 first leg in Germany, to advance to the quarter-

finals. Guardiola will need Haaland at his predatory best and he insisted there is no reason to doubt the striker's commitment to the City cause.

"The way he celebrates his goals and his mates' goals shows how happy he is here and how we are with him and his personality," Guardiola said.

"This guy doesn't score one or two goals and the people go, oh he's not the same! He is always there so the numbers speak for itself.

"One of the biggest attributes I've discovered knowing him and working together is the fact that he can miss one chance, second, he's not getting depressed, he's not sad.

"He's thinking positive, he knows he will have the chance, he knows he will be there. And this is an incredible attribute as a football player."

However, Guardiola was willing to acknowledge the growing pains experienced since Haa-

The way he (Haaland) celebrates his goals and his mates' goals shows how happy he is here and how we are with him and his personality

PEP GUARDIOLA

land's transfer, adding: "What I would like when I finish our period together is the fact that he could improve the game, with the association with the team.

"Realising how he can be involved in our game, not just putting the ball in the net. Because the net will happen all the time in his life." Haaland is well aware of the pressure to live up to the hype that saw him rated as the best finisher in Europe following his arrival in Manchester.

Showing no signs of wanting to flee to Paris or Madrid, for now at least, Haaland said: "Of course I don't like to miss chances."

AFP

Inzaghi under pressure as Inter take away day blues to Porto

Milan, Italy - Simone Inzaghi is in the firing line as his Inter Milan side travel to Porto trying to make the last eight of the Champions League and turn a depressing tide of bad results away from home.

Friday's 2-1 defeat at relegation-threatened Spezia was the latest poor effort away from the San Siro and left Inter once again 18 points behind champions-elect Napoli.

Inzaghi and his team were booed and insulted by the Inter fans present at the Stadio Picco, who had to watch the son of AC Milan icon Paolo Maldini slot home the opening goal.

Inter have only held on to second place in Italy's top flight thanks to Lazio failing to win at Bologna on Saturday, but their bid to qualify for next season's Champions League is being damaged by their dreadful away form.

Inzaghi said "we won't be able



Simone Inzaghi

to sleep" after Friday's hugely disappointing eighth loss of the Serie A season, which took their tally of goals conceded to 24 in 13 league away matches.

"We're not happy about our results away from the San Siro.

Last year it was a different story," said Inzaghi.

"We have had some great results away, like at Barcelona (a 3-3 draw), and we know that we need to put in a great performance if we're going to reach the

We're not happy about our results away from the San Siro

SIMONE INZAGHI

quarter-finals."

Inter's defensive wobbles were also present in their group stage campaign, with five goals conceded in matches at Barcelona and Bayern Munich.

And elimination on Tuesday would not only mean missing out on a first last-eight tie since 2011, it would also heap more pressure on Inzaghi with fierce rivals Juventus visiting the San Siro on Sunday. One piece of good news is that Milan Skriniar might be ready to return from a spell on the sidelines with lower back pain.

AFP

Ukraine's Tsurenko withdraws from match against Belarusian Sabalenka

Indian Wells, United States - Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus reached the fourth round at Indian Wells by walkover on Sunday as Ukrainian qualifier Lesia Tsurenko pulled out of their scheduled match.

Organizers said Tsurenko cited "personal reasons" for yet another withdrawal.

No further details were given, and there was no indication that the Russian invasion of Ukraine last year -- which has resulted in Russian and Belarussian tennis players from being barred from competing under their national flags -- was a factor.

Indeed, Tsurenko has now lost by retirement or walkover in nine of her 18 tournaments dating back to Indian Wells last year.

She gave up a semi-final walkover at Canberra this year and gave up quarter-final walkovers at Eastbourne and Portoroz, Slovenia, last year.

Sabalenka, whose first Grand Slam title in Melbourne was part



Lesia Tsurenko

of a perfect 13-0 start to the year that ended in the quarter-finals at Dubai, had breezed into the third round with a 6-2, 6-0 victory over Evgeniya Rodina.

She next faces former French Open winner Barbora Krejickova,

who ousted China's Wang Xinyu 6-2, 6-7 (1/7), 6-2.

Krejickova beat the top three players in the world on the way to the title in Dubai last month, climbing 14 places in the WTA rankings to 16th.



Cristian Garin hits a return to Casper Ruud

Qualifier Garin stuns Ruud at Indian Wells, Norrie and Zverev survive

Indian Wells, United States - Qualifier Cristian Garin shocked third-seeded Casper Ruud 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) to reach the fourth round at Indian Wells on Sunday as Daniil Medvedev and Cameron Norrie survived scares.

Garin's attacking game paid off as the 97th-ranked Chilean dispatched world number four Ruud in just under two hours.

"The way I played today I'm so happy," the 26-year-old Garin said. "I was aggressive the whole match."

His 39 winners were too much for Ruud, a two-time

Grand Slam finalist last year who had hoped a quick victory over Diego Schwartzman in his second-round opener would mark a turnaround in a season where he hadn't advanced past the second round in three prior tournaments.

Meanwhile, Medvedev, long frustrated by the slow hard courts in the California desert, managed to push his ATP winning streak to 16 matches with a 6-2, 3-6, 6-1 victory over 85th-ranked Ilya Ivashka.

Medvedev, coming off three straight titles at Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai, said the victory was a

matter of "a few points," but they went his way to keep him on track to improve on his previous best Indian Wells showing - the round of 16 in 2021.

"(It's) tough to make anything during the rallies, so just have to kind of see who puts more balls in court. If you lose a little momentum you lose a set," said Medvedev, who was clearly frustrated at the end of the second set.

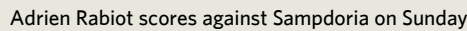
He grumbled to the referee that he would be "as slow as the court" in taking a bathroom break, but pulled himself to-

gether to take a 5-0 lead in the third, serving it out after Ivashka saved three match points to hold in the penultimate game.

"I cannot say I played much better in the third, but (I) managed to be the one not missing after 25 shots," said Medvedev, who next faces former world number two Alexander Zverev.

Zverev, coming back after torn ankle ligaments ended his 2022 campaign at the French Open, said much the same after a 7-5, 1-6, 7-5 victory over Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori.

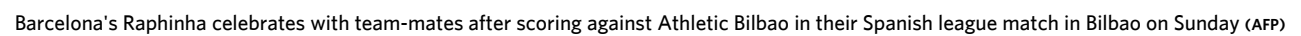
AFP



"We need to concentrate more for the whole match and not get distracted just because

Missing a host of big names, including Paul Pogba who suffered yet another injury during Sunday morning's training session, Juve looked set for a cruise against a similarly depleted Samp when headers from Bremer and Rabiot had them two in front midway through the opening period.

"I have not seen the disallowed goal, but that's why we have VAR. It's a decision (the of-



The visitors put in a backs-to-

"I respect the fans at San Mames, they have always

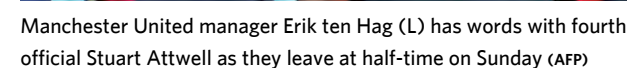
In-form winger Raphinha finished well from Sergio Busquets' clever pass before the break, against the run of play, and top scorer Robert Lewandowski missed two good chances on his return from injury.

"I think that VAR is there to correct big flagrant errors," Valverde told DAZN.

AFP

Davie apologised for the disruption to the service.

United manager ten Hag was furious with the decision to send off Casemiro, who was also dismissed against Crystal Palace in February, and complained about penalty calls that didn't go his



"I think especially the first one was for me clear and obvious

Ten Hag said he had "some questions" about the officiating, with the influential Casemiro now facing a damaging four-match suspension as United look to wrap up their place in the top four. "There is another one inconsistent," Ten Hag said. "The refereeing is coming at the start of the season with a policy 'we are Premier League, we are going strong here, we want intensity'.

AFP

Journal of Management Education 35(1)

A promotional banner for Jack Link's Beef Jerky. On the left, a white starburst graphic contains the text "HIGH PROTEIN SNACKS" in bold black letters. In the center is a bag of Jack Link's Beef Jerky, showing the brand logo and the product name. On the right, the text "Distributed by" is above the Catering Solutions Trading LLC logo, which consists of a stylized yellow and red swoosh. Below the logo, the text "Please contact +968 22060236/237" is displayed.

THANK YOU, NEW ZEALAND

India take series after fourth Test ends in draw, book berth in World Test Championship final thanks to New Zealand's thrilling win over Sri Lanka



India players celebrate with the trophy after winning the series at the end of the fourth Test in Ahmedabad on Monday (AFP)

Ahmedabad, India - India won their fourth series in a row against Australia after a fourth and final Test lit up by an epic 186 by Virat Kohli ended in a draw on Monday in Ahmedabad.

The hosts won the series 2-1 and the world's two top-ranked teams will do battle again on June 7-11 at The Oval in the World Test Championship final.

Even before the players shook hands on day five, India knew they had reached the WTC decider thanks to New Zealand's thrilling last-ball win over Sri Lanka earlier in the day.

It was a really hard-fought series, there were moments where we were put under extreme pressure by a really good cricket team and we responded

RAHUL DRAVID

It will be India's second successive WTC final, having lost the inaugural edition to New Zealand in 2021.

Australia reached 175-2 in their second innings in the final session of play at the world's

biggest cricket stadium when the players of both teams called it a day. "We do understand the importance of this series and the opposition. Lot of hard work has gone into this," India skipper Rohit Sharma said.

Coach Rahul Dravid told broadcaster Star Sports: "It was a really hard-fought series, there were moments where we were put under extreme pressure by a really good cricket team and we responded."

India similarly lifted the Border-Gavaskar Trophy at home in 2017 and then beat the Australians in their own back yard in 2018-19 and 2020-21, each time 2-1. Travis Head (90) and Marcus Labuschagne (63 not out) snuffed out India's push for a victory on the final day with a stand of 139 after nightwatchman

Matthew Kuhnemann fell early for six.

The left-handed Head, capping a successful series after being left out of the first Test, missed out on his century after being bowled by Axar Patel.

Regular opener Usman Khawaja did not bat due to "lower leg soreness" after getting hurt while fielding on day four.

The match in Ahmedabad belatedly thought to Kohli, who hit a masterful knock on day four to end a Test century drought of 1,205 days since his previous ton. AFP



New Zealand's Kane Williamson celebrates after scoring a century on the fifth day of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Christchurch

Williamson leads Kiwis to last-ball win over Sri Lanka

Christchurch, New Zealand - Kane Williamson was hailed as "world class" after New Zealand's record Test run-scorer orchestrated a dramatic last-ball win over Sri Lanka on a rain-disrupted final day in Christchurch on Monday.

The thrilling triumph at the Hagley Oval scuppered Sri Lanka's chances of making the World Test Championship final, handing the spot to India.

In a helter-skelter finish, the only Sri Lankans not guarding the boundary for most of the closing 10 overs were the bowler and wicketkeeper as New Zealand chased down their target of 285.

Having lost eight wickets and on a day limited to 53

errors let his side down, particularly dropping the talisman Williamson on 33.

"We had a good chance to win, unfortunately we are the losing side," he said. "We had misfields a few times that cost us the game."

'Different story'

When rain wiped out the first two sessions on the fifth day, the umpires ruled there would be a minimum of 53 overs played in the evening, which meant New Zealand would have to average 4.85 an over.

After a steady but slow start which saw the hosts at 90-3, Williamson and Mitchell picked up the pace.

They put on 142 in 26 overs for the fourth wicket with the precision of a one-day partnership as Sri Lanka paid a heavy price for Niroshan Dickwella dropping Williamson.

"If we had grabbed that catch it would have been a different story," said skipper Karunaratne.

The 31-year-old Mitchell, a late arrival on the international stage, contributed 81 to lift his average to a phenomenal 59.04 from 26 innings.

In a match of see-sawing fortunes, Sri Lanka had the upper hand on the opening two days before a first-innings century from Mitchell and a swashbuckling 72 from Matt Henry - the last 60 from only 35 deliveries -- swung the game in New Zealand's favour.

Sri Lanka fought their way back into contention on the fourth day with a defiant 115 from Angelo Mathews, who built partnerships of 105 for the fifth wicket with Dinesh Chandimal and then 60 with Dhananjaya de Silva.

When the Sri Lanka second innings folded at 302 it left New Zealand needing 285 to win on a ground where the highest fourth-innings score was 256-8 by New Zealand in a 2018 draw against England.

Seeing how calm he (Williamson) is out in the middle keeps us calm as well

TIM SOUTHEE

overs, skipper Tim Southee paid tribute to his star batsman Williamson. The former captain finished 121 not out and ran a bye off the final delivery of the match in a remarkable conclusion, to go with New Zealand's one-run victory over England a fortnight ago.

"Seeing how calm he is out in the middle keeps us calm as well," Southee said as New Zealand celebrated another famous, nail-biting win.

"The guys were very trusting in what he was going to do and alongside Daryl (Mitchell) for most of the day it was a great partnership that got us in that great position. "He's a world-class player and world-class players are able to perform in different conditions."

Visiting captain Dimuth Karunaratne said that fielding

ISM win Oman Cricket U16 title, MCCC Yellow U13 champs

Muscat, Oman: Indian School Muscat (ISM) Under-16 team beat Sri Lankan School Muscat U16 by 37 runs while Muscat Cricket Coaching Centre (MCCC) Yellow U13 defeated Boshier Sports Centre (BSC) U13 E by nine wickets in the Oman Cricket Junior Domestic League powered by Mazoon Dairy SAOC.

In the U16 final, batting first, ISM U16 made 153 thanks to Devansh Loya's (71 of 49; 9x4) fine innings. For Sri Lankan School, Omindu PM was the key bowler with figures of 5/16. Mohd Rushdaan and Senuka VN picked up two wickets each.

In reply, SLSM batsmen were in trouble against the ISM attack, losing wickets at regular intervals. Omindu PM (38 of 27; 6x4) tried getting SLSM close to the target but their innings ended at 116 in 25.2 overs. Devansh Loya sparked with the ball as well, taking three for 20 and was adjudged the Man of the Match.

In the U13 finals, BSC U13 made 105 for eight in 20 overs.



Indian School Muscat who won the Oman Cricket U16 league title

Aditya Chaudhari (26 of 30; 3x4) and Vihaan Apte (27 of 24; 4x4) made useful contributions.

Arav Pillai, Karnik Mehta and Pranav NS took two wickets each for MCCC Yellow

In reply, Kriv Patel hit a quick fire (64 of 33; 9x4) and was well supported by Siddeshwaran S (29 of 23; 4x4) as MCCC Yellow chased down the target in 10.1 overs. Kriv Patel was adjudged the Man of the Match.

In the prize distribution ceremony for the U13 & U16 Junior Domestic League, Kiran Asher -

Board Member, Oman Cricket and Duleep Mendis - Chief Development Officer, Oman Cricket graced the stage.

In the U16 category, Kriv Patel was awarded the Best Batsman, Aneek Chakraborty was awarded the Consolation Batsman, Omindu PM was awarded the Best Bowler and Jayapranesh Ayyapan was awarded the Best All-Rounder. In the U13 class, Kriv Patel was awarded the Best Batsman and the Best All Rounder and Shravan Sharat Kurup was the Best Bowler.

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OMAN ACROSS AGES MUSEUM

EVOLUTION OF OMAN

Oman Across Ages Museum demonstrates the transition from the past to the present and the future, in an interactive and modern style

The Oman Across Ages Museum at Manor, which was inaugurated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on March 13, seeks to highlight the unique model of the Sultanate of Oman, introduce its prominent features, its ancient history, and its renaissance, which is continuously making progress at the local and international levels under His Majesty the Sultan's wise leadership.

The museum contributes to spreading awareness and consolidating the relationship of Omani youth with their cultural heritage, while at the same time encouraging them to interact in a manner that effectively inspires their participation in building their homeland and shaping its structures.

The museum demonstrates Oman's transition between its past, present and future in an interactive and modern style by audio-visual means, right from the early stages of past glories to its bright present.

In 2015, the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said had laid the foundation stone for the museum project in the Wilayat of Manah, in Dakhliyah Governorate. The project occupies an estimated area of 300,000sqm and its design has been inspired by the Hajar Mountains. It also introduces an architectural wonder that represents the Omani environment, with its unique geographical topography.

Environment friendly structure

The building of Oman Across Ages Museum is an environment-friendly structure. It assumes a low profile on the eastern side, so that it could receive sunlight in the morning and protect the internal spaces from direct sun rays. On the west side, a set of windows are placed on slanted walls that prevent impact of direct sunlight and reduce the volume of energy that the museum needs in lighting.

The design replicates the standards of castles and ancient buildings. Typically, its walls cool down the passing hot air. Since some specifications require that the building



The late Sultan Qaboos bin Said had laid the foundation stone for the museum in 2015

be an environment-friendly structure, high-quality Omani stones from the governorates of Dhahirah and North Batinah were used to coat the walls of the museum, both, from inside and outside.

The museum is distinguished for its glass facades that extend to heights ranging from 9m to 16m, and sometimes rising up to 25m, offering the building clarity and prominence over the horizon.

An insulating layer has been placed between the structure of the museum and the ground to protect it from the impact of earthquakes. In the event of occurrence of an earthquake, the insulation system will diminish the effects on the building and absorb the repercussions - an exceptional feature in such projects.

Two halls

The museum consists of two halls - the 'History Hall' and the 'Renaissance Hall'. Visitors can contemplate the country's past, present and future in an interactive manner through the use of modern technology, with antiques of the museum dating back to pre-historic eras.

The History Hall consists of the Land of Oman pavilion, the Early Settlers pavilion, the Civilisation of Magan pavilion, the Kingdom of Magan pavilion, the Maritime Heritage pavilion, the Aflaj pavilion, the

Embracing Islam pavilion, Al Ya'ariba Dynasty pavilion, and the Al Busaidi Dynasty pavilion. Thus, the visitor can span time and space, right from the country's geological formations, through experiences of the early settlers to the present-day renaissance age.

The exhibits are introduced via digital media to create multi-dimensional environments that enable the visitor to experience the virtual reality of each era. A selection of material evidence gives rise to a measure of realism.

The pavilions of the different ages exhibit various aspects of daily life. These are evident in the settlements of Ras Al Hamra and Ras Al Jiniz and their relationship with seasonal migrations, maritime communication, copper trade, and the construction of the Aflaj system. These comprise a high-definition environment showcasing the contribution of people of Oman to Islam, in addition to different aspects of intellectual, political and social

life and economic life.

The Renaissance Hall consists of the pavilions titled Dawn of the Renaissance, Building A Nation, Our Society, Healthy Environment, the Peace and Stability pavilion, Towards A Sustainable Economy, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Ash Shura, Oman and the World, Inspiration, Creative Expression, Media and Communications.

The hall's entrance is an open space in the centre of gigantic columns which form interactive space for the presentation of the high-resolution audio-visual display system that deals with the first five years of the blessed renaissance. This offers a panoramic view of the hall and consummates the visitor's experience as it explores various aspects of social, economic, industrial, and political transformation experienced by Oman, while at the same time preserving its authentic identity and ancient traditions.

The museum also houses 310 film materials and 1,200 interactive, dual and three dimensional screens, map projection technology, as well as 1,300 antiques, 80 replicas, 500 text panels and drawings, 150

display boxes, 61km of fibre-optic cables and 21km of audio-video cables.

The exhibition includes the jaw of the animal of Omantherium, which belongs to a huge primitive elephant that lived in Oman about 35 million years ago and was found in Dhofar Governorate. It also includes trilobites found in Mahut, in Al Wusta Governorate dating back 250 - 500 million years ago, in addition to inscriptions on the rocks that were discovered in the Wilayat of Madha in Musandam Governorate.

The museum also houses the Magan ship - a replica of the vessels of the Magan Civilisation made of reed bundles, ropes of palm fibres, woven mats, woollen sails and painted with tar. It comprises a message from the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said to his teacher in the month of Rajab 1374 AH, corresponding to February 1955.



A replica of the Majan reed boat

For full story and more photos



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US actor Brendan Fraser (R), winner of the Oscar for 'Best actor in a leading role' for *The Whale*, and Jeanne Moore (L) attend the Vanity Fair 95th Oscars Party at the The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills, California



Shane Boris (L), winner of the 'Best documentary feature film' award for *Navalny*, and Canadian actress Odessa Rae attend the Oscars Party



US costume designer Ruth E Carter holds the Oscar for 'Best costume design' for *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*



Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh (L) winner of the Oscar 'Best actress in a leading role' for *Everything Everywhere All at Once* and British actress Florence Pugh



OSCARS 2023

ASIAN ACCLAIM



US film producer Jonathan Wang (C) accepts the Oscar for Best Picture for *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

'EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE' CONQUERS THE 75TH ACADEMY AWARDS WITH SEVEN WINS WHILE INDIAN TELUGU FILM (RRR) SONG 'NAATU NAATU' BAGS BEST SONG

Surreal sci-fi film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* dominated the Oscars on Sunday, winning seven golden statuettes including best picture, Hollywood's most coveted prize.

The unorthodox but beloved movie - which features multiple universes, sex toys, and hot dog fingers - also won best director, best actress, best original screenplay, best editing, and both, the best supporting actor and actress prizes.

Michelle Yeoh, who is Malaysian, becomes the first ever Asian woman to win best actress, for her portrayal of an exhausted Chinese laundromat owner embroiled in battle with an inter-dimensional supervillain - who happens to be her daughter.

"Thank you to the Academy, this is history in the making!" she said. "Ladies, don't let anybody tell you you are ever past your prime," added the 60-year-old, whose career began decades ago with martial arts films in

Hong Kong.

Brendan Fraser won best actor for playing a morbidly obese teacher in *The Whale*, capping a remarkable career comeback. Fraser was a major action star in the late 1990s with films like *The Mummy*, before largely disappearing from the public view.

"I started in this business 30 years ago, and things - they didn't come easily to me," he said, thanking director Darren Aronofsky for "throwing me a creative lifeline and hauling me aboard the good ship - *The Whale*."

American Dream

Everything Everywhere, comfortably the night's biggest winner, is a word-of-mouth smash hit that has grossed US\$100mn at the global box office.

In a plot that is not easily described, Yeoh's heroine Evelyn must harness the power of her alter egos living in parallel universes, which feature hot dogs as human fingers, talking rocks, and giant dildos used as weapons.

The film, which features a predom-

inantly Asian cast, was directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert - two young filmmakers who were previously best known for an oddball comedy about a talking corpse.

Kwan thanked his immigrant parents, while his counterpart thanked his mother for 'never squashing my creativity', including when he had dressed in drag as a child. "Which is a threat to nobody," he added, to enormous cheers.

Vietnam-born Ke Huy Quan, 51, who was a major child star in the 1980s with *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *The Goonies*, completed a stunning comeback from decades in the Hollywood wilderness by winning best supporting actor.

"My journey started on a boat. I spent a year in a refugee camp. And somehow, I ended up here on Hollywood's biggest stage... this is the American Dream," said Quan.

After the show, he came bounding into the backstage press room, shouting "Wow, wow, wow.... Can you be-

lieve I'm holding one of these?" He shared what *Indiana Jones* director Steven Spielberg had grabbed him and said, "You are now an Oscar winner!"

Best supporting actress Jamie Lee Curtis paid tribute to her parents Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh, both Oscar-nominated actors who never won.

'All Quiet' makes noise

All Quiet on the Western Front, Netflix's German-language World War I, finished the night in second place with four awards. It won best international feature and best cinematography early in Sunday's ceremony.

As the night progressed, it also gathered Oscars for best original score and best production design.

Ultimately, it could not stop the *Everything Everywhere* juggernaut, and lost adapted screenplay to *Women Talking*, and best sound to *Top Gun: Maverick*.

Tom Cruise's *Top Gun* sequel had been seen as another potential best picture contender, having helped

bring audiences back to movie theatres after the pandemic.

While Cruise did not attend Sunday's ceremony, the night began with a thunderous flyover by two US Navy jets, soaring at 345mph over the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood.

Host Jimmy Kimmel was then lowered onto the stage, and he quickly launched into a monologue which laid into Will Smith's infamous attack on Chris Rock at last year's Oscars.

The spectre of 'the slap' has hung over the Oscars since Smith assaulted Rock on stage for cracking a joke about his wife.

Smith was allowed to stay at the gala, and accept Hollywood's top male acting prize soon after, but has since been banned from Academy events for a decade.

"If anyone in this theatre commits an act of violence at any point during the show - you will be awarded the Oscar for best actor, and permitted to give a 19-minute-long speech," joked Kimmel.

'Naatu Naatu'

In the night's other prizes, Guillermo del Toro's *Pinocchio* won best animated film, and *Avatar: The Way of Water* won best visual effects.

Navalny - about the imprisoned Russian dissident Alexei Navalny - won best documentary.

Dozens of dancers brought a colourful, energetic performance of *'Naatu Naatu'*, the showstopper tune from Indian crowd-pleaser *RRR*, which won the Oscar for best original song. The song in Telugu features as *'Nacho Nacho'* (Dance Dance) in the dubbed Hindi version of the film.

Academy bosses hope that Oscars television ratings will pick up from recent years, calling in heavy hitters from the world of music to perform the other nominated songs.

A dressed-down Lady Gaga sang an emotional, heartfelt rendition of her song 'Hold My Hand' from *Top Gun: Maverick*. And Rihanna - draped in diamonds, including over her baby bump - sang 'Lift Me Up' from *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, which won for best costume design.

Lenny Kravitz also performed the annual 'In Memoriam' segment.

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