

40 projects in pipeline to boost adventure tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) is working on more than 40 projects to develop the adventure tourism sector in Oman.

An official at MHT informed that the ministry launched an executive plan to stimulate adventure tourism in 2022. The plan will continue beyond 2025.

“Work is currently underway on developing a cable car project in the Botanical Garden, and construction of zip lines in different locations in Dhofar, including Wadi Darbat for the khareef season, and a suspension bridge in Wadi Shab in South Sharqiyah,” he said, adding that a zip line in Musandam is complete and was opened last week.

According to the official, the ministry will also develop several mountain trails. These are planned in Hawar village in Wadi Bani Khalid and in Wadi Al Arbreen, which is famous for its gushing perennial springs. “These trails help adventure enthusiasts and visitors enjoy the beauty of mountainous areas and wadis.”

He further informed that the ministry is currently also working on paving a road to Al Sogara, an isolated mountainside village in Jabal Akhdar inhabited for more than 500 years. “The village has a heritage inn and attracts many tourists. There is also a plan to take advantage of the land near the mountain trails in Jabal Shams and transform these into camping sites.”

The ministry is also studying the prospect of setting up service facilities on the mountain tracks in Wadi Bani Awf. “Plans are



being finalised for construction of changing rooms, camping sites, a café and a restaurant. Construction is scheduled to begin in the second half of this year. These facilities will be offered to SMEs to operate, which will provide good returns to the local community.”

The ministry has agreed to pave 15 mountain trails in all, most of which are in the Hajar Mountains, including Jabal Shams, Jabal Akhdar and Wadi Bani Awf.

According to the official, youth teams who discovered 37 new mountain trails have been allowed to engage in adventure activities. There are 53 approved mountain trails in the sultanate.

On the scope of caving, the official said Oman boasts of several spectacular caves and that establishment of recreational facilities in caves requires detailed studies and technical consultations, besides significant amount of funding.

Twenty tourism companies have applied for licences to organise adventure activities. “Work is underway to complete all procedures related to security and risk management to conduct adventure activities at various sites and projects, and training tour guides in cooperation with the Ministry of Defence, in addition to evaluating some sites for their suitability for adventure tourism,” the official said.

BILARAB AWARD FOR ARCHITECTURE WINNERS ANNOUNCED



H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said presided over the awards ceremony of the second edition of the Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design held at German University of Technology on Tuesday. Mohammed bin Salah al Balushi won the first place for his design of the Oman Maritime Museum in Sur. Al Moataz bin Abdullah al Nabri won the second place, while the team of Ammar bin Salah al Saleh, Muhammad al Balushi and Rawnaq al Ismailia was placed third. Additionally, Bayan bint Musallam al Ramadan, Ammar al Kiyumi and Naira bint Khamis al Hinaï won the award for designing Oman’s pavilion at Expo 2025 Japan (Supplied photo)

Omani athletes win gold, silver medals at international jiu-jitsu championship

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Akrama al Oraiimi, 26, and Abdullah bin Khamis al Farsi, 30, from Sur, South Sharqiyah have won gold and bronze medals in the AJP NO-GI Abu Dhabi International Jiu-Jitsu Championship held from February 19 to 22.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Farsi said, “The 2023 edition of the championship saw participation of 1,000 players from 32 countries, including Britain, France, Russia, China, Iran, Singapore, Kazakhstan and Colombia, in addition to the Gulf countries. The competition was open for all nationalities and included categories for children, amateurs, professionals and masters.”



Akrama al Oraiimi

Oraiimi won the first place in the 77kg (blue belt) amateur category, while Farsi came third in the 69kg (brown belt) professional category.

“Reaching the finals required immense concentration and de-



Abdullah al Farsi

termination,” Oraiimi informed, adding that he prepared for the championship by training five hours daily.

He is keen to continue representing the sultanate at international meets and raising the

Omani flag in different countries.

Talking about the challenges for jiu-jitsu athletes, Farsi said he and others are eager to establish an official committee to support the sport in the sultanate. “Oman is the only country that doesn’t have a committee or federation for the sport. Private companies that help us financially will benefit because we will promote them in countries where we go to compete.”

He further informed that currently there are eight academies for jiu-jitsu in Oman and many athletes, including a few who engage in it professionally.

“We thank everyone who supported us and we hope to receive financial aid to continue participating in international events.”

NEWS BRIEF

MAJLIS A'SHURA DISCUSSES DRAFT LABOUR LAW

Muscat - Majlis A'Shura discussed the Draft Labour Law referred by the government on Tuesday.

The shura's eight regular session held under the chairmanship of H E Khalid Hilal al Ma'awali also reviewed a report on the Draft Labour Law that included opinion of the Youth and Human Resources Committee, as well as views of the Legislative and Legal Committee of the shura.

The draft law has 144 articles, divided into ten chapters detailed in 14 sections, which include definitions and general provisions, organisation of work and work contracts.



Nigeria ruling party candidate takes poll lead

Oman Golf Trophy to provide fillip to golf diplomacy

Muscat - The grand finale of the Oman Golf Trophy, a unique golf diplomacy initiative, is set to be held at Al Mouj Golf in Muscat from March 3 to 7.

The initiative is characterised by a robust public-private partnership to promote investment and tourism opportunities in Oman in line with Oman Vision 2040, with the sultanate aiming to leverage golf as an ambassador to highlight the natural beauty of the country for travellers and strengthen diplomatic ties between Oman and Italy.

Created during conversation over a game of golf between H E Francisco Palau Grieg, Honorary Consul of Oman in Milan, Italy, and Ali Daud, CEO of Daud Group, as they discussed how golf could be a vehicle to bring Oman to Italy and Italy to Oman, the Oman Golf Trophy was launched as a joint initiative with the blessing of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The Italian leg of the tournament was played at seven of the most prestigious courses in Italy between September and November 2022, with as many as 14 players from over 800 participants qualifying for the grand finale in Muscat. This will provide local golfers the unique experience of playing alongside Italian golfers.

In addition to competitive golf



at Al Mouj Golf, participants will also have the opportunity to explore many of the key experiences that make Oman one of the region's top tourist destinations.

The Oman Golf Trophy is stewarded by Oman Golf Association, under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth with technical as well as financial support of the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of

Heritage and Tourism, and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, besides sponsorship of some of the most well-known groups in the country, including Daud Group, Oman Air, OHL, The Zubair Corporation, Al Mouj Muscat and Kempinski Hotel Muscat.

Speaking ahead of the grand finale, H E Basil al Rawas, Undersecretary for Sports and Youth in the Ministry of Culture, Sports

and Youth, said, “The Oman Golf Trophy is the first-ever Omani tournament to be hosted overseas. The grand finale will provide a great opportunity to continue promoting the sultanate utilising golf, as it is one of the most popular elite sports in the world. Having hosted seven events in Italy, it is amazing to be closing the tournament in the sultanate as there are many benefits to be achieved at all levels,

particularly for promoting sports tourism and boosting the economy.

“After successfully hosting the grand finale, we look forward to rolling out similar events through different sports, in order to promote the sultanate, alongside our international partners and supported by the public and private sectors.”

Highlighting the benefits of strengthening diplomatic rela-

tions with Italy through this initiative, H E Grieg said, “We were thrilled to host the Oman Golf Trophy, particularly the last course in Rapallo where H H Sayyid Nazar al Said, Ambassador of Oman to Italy, was able to participate. The seven tournaments have opened a magnificent view on a beautiful country many Italians hadn’t known anything about, let alone visited! Thanks to the superb work done by the sponsors, professionally coordinated by the Foreign Ministry and Oman Golf Association.”

He added that superb videos and images were showcased during the event, which created great interest among club members and their family and friends, as a result of which many decided to visit Oman over the Christmas and New Year holidays.

“I’m looking forward to arriving in Muscat for the Grand Finale with the 14 winners and leaders of industry, representing multiple sectors - Pirelli Group, the world leader in tyres; bankers; Hirsch Private Equity; FINSEA, one of the leading logistics companies in Italy; real estate; and water treatment, among others - all discovering Oman and its tourism and investment potential while doing what they love - playing golf - at one of the top 100 best golf courses in the world.”

Tourism experts highlight Oman's potential

Our Correspondent
Muscat

International tourism experts called upon Oman to take maximum advantage of its potential for making the sector one of the major contributors in the country's economy.

The experts were giving their views at a forum on hotel, travel and leisure conducted by Crowe Oman, under the umbrella of Horwath HTL, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Muscat on Tuesday.

The meeting - held with an aim to boost prospects of tourism and hotel industry in the country - was presided over by Faisal al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industries (OCCI).

Horwath HTL - a member firm of Crowe Global - is a global leader, offering unparalleled experience and expertise exclusively across hotels, tourism and leisure spectrum.

The contribution of the tourism and hospitality sector to Oman's GDP is only 2.4 per cent. We should know our strength and our available resources and leverage the strength by technology

DAVIS KALLUKARAN

"The contribution of the tourism and hospitality sector to Oman's GDP is only 2.4 per cent as against the world average of around ten per cent," pointed out Davis Kallukaran, Managing Partner at Crowe Oman.

"Oman is so unique and blessed with a diversified topog-



raphy from Salalah to Muscat and every nook and corner of the sultanate is rich in heritage and culture. We should know our strength and our available re-

sources and leverage the strength by technology," Kallukaran asserted.

According to him, Oman's tourism sector is expected to

grow up to five per cent of the GDP by 2030 and ten per cent by 2040.

"Oman Vision 2040 is expected to invest RO10bn in the

tourism sector till 2040 targeting to generate RO9bn from tourism alone," the Crowe Managing Partner said. Underlining unemployment as Oman's biggest challenge, he said, "And tourism is the solution."

With the right attitude, Kallukaran said, the youths of Oman can engage in tourism related activities, which do not need high technical skills. "Every youth in Oman can be self employed in the tourism sector."

James Chappell, the Global Director at Horwath HTL, highlighted their experiences in this burgeoning sector and scope of services which they can offer to their clients - "from the concept stage through opening and on-going operations".

"Horwath HTL's Outdoor Hospitality provides a full range of hospitality consulting services designed to address the unique operating, investment and environmental issues found in the

nature-based outdoor sector of the hospitality industry," Chappell went on explaining.

"From initial location and site analysis, preliminary market research and feasibility work to operator selection, our team has the expertise to assist in new developments and repositioning of existing assets."

The forum was attended by several hoteliers, investors, financiers and business owners from Oman apart from the officials from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion of Oman.

Siniša Topalovi, Global Head of Tourism Advisory, talked about the developments in the region and presented the case studies about the developments in other GCC countries. He commented that Oman has unique advantages in the tourism area and is yet to take full advantage of its huge potential.

5th edition of French Weeks gets underway

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To showcase the culture and gastronomical delights along with business and investment opportunities, the Embassy of France in Oman on Tuesday started month-long celebrations branded as 'French Weeks'.

The series of events - that will take place in various venues including the embassy premises, hotels and schools - will end on March 21.

Addressing a press conference at the embassy, French Ambassador H E Véronique Aulagnon said, "This is the fifth edition of the French Weeks and we are delighted to present to Oman the various cultural, sports, business delights of France to Oman."

The flagship annual event, she said, aims at promoting France in Oman and at enhancing French-Omani cooperation.

"It consists in a series of events, covering all the fields: Business, tourism, gastronomy, culture, education, sports. All these events are free of charge, and many of them open to everyone."

Unlike previous ones, the Am-



The flagship annual event aims at promoting France in Oman and at enhancing French-Omani cooperation. Unlike previous ones, the 2023 edition is longer, wider and more intense

H E VÉRONIQUE AULAGNON

bassador pointed out that the 2023 edition is longer, wider and more intense.

"Longer: Instead of one week, the French Weeks will last for almost a month. This length reflects the scaling up of French-Omani cooperation after the pandemics, building on a strong legacy build over cen-

turies. Wider: New areas will be covered this year, such as tourism, sports and higher education, in addition to our regular cultural, business and gastronomy components."

The celebration began at 7pm on Tuesday with the opening of a photo exhibition 'Walioreja' by the French documentarist

photographer and videographer Ania Gruca at Bait Muzna Gallery, under the auspices of H E Mohammed bin Nasser al Wahaibi, Undersecretary for Administration and Financial Affairs in the Foreign Ministry.

Ania Gruca's work on human ties between the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar will be displayed at Bait Muzna until March 21, the embassy said.

On March 5, 'Salon France-Oman' - a thematic discussion around the theme 'Women in arts' will be held in connection with the International Women's Day which falls on March 8.

The embassy will jointly host

a business conference together with the Omani French Friendship Association at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Muscat on March 6.

An event named 'Marhaba France-Spain' will be held on March 7 and 8, to promote France as the Number One destination in the world to the GCC audience.

The Residency of the France will host a festive evening entitled 'Goût de France/Taste of France' on March 9, while on March 12, giant frescoes performer Saype will deliver a conference at the French-Omani Centre.

The embassy will be part of the operation 'Relay around the world' on March 14, to celebrate the D-500 before the opening ceremony of Paris Olympic Games 2024.

'Night of francophonie' will be held on March 20, at 7pm at the French-Omani Centre to screen a collection of short films from Francophone countries.

The month-long celebrations will culminate on March 21 with a thrilling concert that will mingle the cultural inspirations of the Breton wooden flute player Erwan Hamon and the Palestinian oud and percussions lover Youssef Zayed.



ROHM to present concerts with Hussain al Jassmi

Muscat - The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) has announced two nights in concert with one of Arabia's giants in the music world, Hussain al Jassmi.

Renowned throughout the world for his heart-warming anthems and charismatic personality, Jassmi will perform on March 2 and 3, both of which have been sold out.

After releasing some of his greatest hits recently, Jassmi is coming to the opera house for the second time, bringing his message of peace and stability, to share with audiences from around the world.

Jassmi sings in a mixture of Arabic, Moroccan and English

capturing the hearts of fans from across countries and across generations.

His career launching singles include *Bawada'ak*, *Wallah Mayiswa* and *Bassbour Al Fourgakom*.

In 2008, Jassmi received the Murex d'Or award, under the category of 'Best Arabic Male Singer'.

His most popular song is an Egyptian Shaabi song, called *Boshret Kheir*, written and composed by Amr Mostafa as a pro-elections campaign in Egypt.

Jassmi has performed all around the world including once in the Vatican's annual Christmas concert, becoming the first Arab to do so.

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08 March 2023	07 March 2023	28 March 2023

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For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>

Real estate forum to kick off on March 13: MHUP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to attract foreign investment and stimulate the real estate sector, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) will hold its annual real estate forum from March 13 to 15.

"More than 32 international and local experts will participate in the forum," an official at the ministry said. "There will be ten discussion sessions and



seven workshops as well," he informed.

The forum will also witness signing of various agreements that will contribute to the development of the real estate sector in the sultanate.

The forum aims to develop the real estate sector and support its industry. It seeks to enhance cooperation and partnership with the private sector, support digital transformation in real estate services provided within the sultanate,

and encourage foreign investment, the official added.

The real estate sector in Oman is improving constantly. The value of total transactions in the sector increased six per cent to RO2.706bn in 2022, compared to RO2.552bn in 2021, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) data.

The ministry offered 161 plots of land via public auction to boost investments in the sultanate in 2022.

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Private museum, heritage house opens in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism opened 'Communication of Different Generations', a private museum in Dhofar on Tuesday.

Khalid bin Abdullah al Abri, Director General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, said, "This is the first licensed private museum and the first heritage hostel in Dhofar. The museum will help highlight cultural heritage and promote historical tourism in the governorate. The ministry grants licences to individuals wishing to invest in such activities after ensuring they follow the special requirements for the establishment of new tourist facilities."

Abri informed that the new tourist hostel is called 'Koofan Heritage House'. "The house was converted into a heritage hostel following several renovations. Guests will be able to learn about the traditional way of life and history, and explore Omani architecture in the old neighbourhood in the wilayat of Taqah."

Faisal Salim Koofan, supervisor of Koofan Heritage House, informed that it has rooms with traditional décor and high ceilings made of local wood, a garden, a terrace and free parking. "It also has a sharing kitchen, room service and a currency exchange for guests."

The house is close to 150



(Supplied photos)



Guests will be able to learn about the traditional way of life and history, and explore Omani architecture in the old neighbourhood in Taqah

KHALID BIN ABDULLAH AL ABRI



years old and considered one of the most beautiful traditional houses in the wilayat.

Koofan informed that the property is a fine example of an old Dhofari house and has clothes, furniture and kitchen ware that "document the life of the people of the wilayat of Taqah in the old days".

The three-floor house was a

family residence and a shelter for many others who sought refuge in it during crises and difficult climatic conditions and also had shops.

The house has numerous antiques, including pottery, copper and metal ware, tools for dairy production, kitchen utensils, handicrafts, jewellery and perfume.

Over 52,000 invasive birds eliminated in Dhofar: EA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) has eliminated 52,248 invasive birds in Dhofar.

A statement issued by EA said, 'A team participating in the National Campaign on Combating Invasive Birds removed 52,248 invasive birds between December 13, 2022 and February 25, 2023.'

The statement further elaborated that of the birds eliminated, 36,509 were mynas and 15,739 house crows in the wilayats of Salalah, Taqah, Mirbat and Sadah.

The national campaign was launched in Dhofar and will continue for several months covering other governorates, including Muscat and North Batinah.

Talib Ali al Abri, Assistant Director of Directorate General of Environment in Dhofar and head of the sub-committee for National Campaign on Combating Invasive Birds, said, "These birds are concentrated in the coastal areas in the governorates of



eases, like bird flu, and destroy agricultural crops, fruits and orchards."

Muscat Municipality is also considering action on invasive birds. 'Among the proposed methods to combat these are installing cages and poisonous bait at sites where these birds feed and nest,' the civic authority has stated.

It further added that the municipality relies on the community to eliminate these birds by shutting garbage containers, whether in residential neighbourhoods, beaches or parks, and not littering and throwing leftovers in open spaces.

'These birds have caused a clear disruption to the ecosystem, and have serious health and economic effects due to their aggressive nature when competing for food and nesting. They also damage agricultural crop and attack poultry. These birds transmit diseases such as avian influenza, and spread salmonella bacteria and skin rash in humans, besides damaging public property.'

North Batinah, South Batinah and Muscat."

The birds of invasive species are being eliminated with air guns and trapping cages in sites of high prevalence.

"Invasive birds impact the ecosystem in a negative way. They cause biological imbalance by disrupting the natural food chain. They also transmit dis-

ASMED announces training programme in Buraimi

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has announced a new training programme to support SMEs.

An official at ASMED said, "The programme will be held at Buraimi College from March 12 to 16. The five-day programme aims to support owners of small and medium enterprises, develop their skills in the field of management, introduce participants to the concepts of project

management and provide them necessary knowledge and skills. It also aims to prepare practical strategies and provide them the tools of creative thinking."

The deadline for registration is March 7 and can be done via <https://bit.ly/3IUzNQ4>

The number of SMEs registered with ASMED rose by 46.8 per cent to 81,460 at the end of July 2022 compared to 55,491 in the same period in 2021, according to statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.



Call for Ordinary Annual General Meeting (AGM)&(EGM) ((Super International SAOC))

The Board of Directors of Super International S.A.O.C. inviting Its Shareholders to attend the AGM&EGM Meeting at the given date time and venue. The Agenda and terms of the meeting are attached to the Shareholder reports. The shareholder has the right to appoint any other person on his behalf to attend the meeting and vote on his behalf on the decisions taken by the Board. You are requested to be at least half an hour ahead of time in the meeting. Any enquiry on the agenda can be answered by Mr. Younis Al Namani GSM # 92949673

Meeting Date: 15TH March 2023.
Time: 01:00 Noon.
Venue: Super Plaza - 2nd Floor.
Way No. 4805 - Al Azaaba
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*Rates as on February 28 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

Moody's cuts Pakistan's rating to 'Caa3'

Moody's Investors Service on Tuesday downgraded the Government of Pakistan's local and foreign currency issuer and senior unsecured debt ratings to Caa3 from Caa1.

Moody's has also downgraded the rating for the senior unsecured MTN programme to (P)Caa3 from (P)Caa1. Concurrently, Moody's has also changed the outlook to stable from negative.

The decision to downgrade the ratings is driven by Moody's assessment that Pakistan's increasingly fragile liquidity and external position significantly raises default risks to a level consistent with a Caa3 rating.

In particular, the country's foreign exchange reserves have fallen to extremely low levels, far lower than necessary to cover its imports needs and external debt obligations over the immediate and medium term. The stable outlook reflects Moody's assessment that the pressures that Pakistan faces are consistent with a Caa3 rating level, with broadly balanced risks.

GCC countries invest to accelerate deployment of renewable energy: S&P

Our Correspondent
Muscat

GCC countries are focusing on climate-related efforts and increasingly investing to accelerate deployment of renewable energy, S&P Global Ratings said on Tuesday.

The global credit rating agency believes that the plans to establish a renewables sector could help GCC countries in their efforts to achieve their climate goals. It said Saudi Arabia and the UAE have led climate-related efforts in the region and their governments intend to continue investing in decarbonising the power sector.

Despite their dependence on the oil and gas industry, the Gulf nations have all announced new targets or renewed their commitment to the Paris Agreement in the past two years, S&P noted.

'As one of the largest source of emissions, the power sector looms large in most national plans for decarbonisation. We expect the region to invest significantly in renewables as the decade progresses,' the rating agency said.

'Decarbonising the power sector by making significant investments in renewables is part of the national objective for



achieving net zero targets in both the UAE and Saudi Arabia,' it added.

Solar power well-suited

In S&P's view, solar photovoltaic (PV) power is particularly well-suited to the Gulf region, but installed capacity remains low relative to many other regions.

'We consider solar PV plants to be more predictable and simpler to operate and maintain than other power-generating assets,' the rating agency said.

S&P said GCC countries have used solar generation more than any other renewable technology. As of 2021, 97 per cent of in-

stalled capacity for renewables in the GCC was related to solar power.

Although solar is the dominant form of renewable energy generation in most of the GCC, some countries - Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia - had also incorporated wind farms into their energy mix by the end of 2021.

The rating agency said that subsidising electricity for consumer use is common in the GCC region, but the rising cost of such subsidies is putting pressure on budgets.

'Solar PV plants produce electricity more cheaply than thermal power plants, especially since

Ooredoo appoints Bassam al Ibrahim as new CEO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani .Qatari Telecommunications Company (Ooredoo Oman) has announced the appointment of Bassam al Ibrahim as the new chief executive officer effective from March 1, 2023.

Ibrahim succeeds Ooredoo Oman's former CEO Noor al Sulaiti, due to non-renewal of her employment contract, the company said in a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Noor, who has been working with Ooredoo Group since 2004, was appointed as CEO of Ooredoo Oman in May 2021.

According to the company's disclosure, Ibrahim resigned from his position as the board member of Ooredoo Oman effective from February 22, 2023. The vacant board member position will be filled during the company's annual general meeting scheduled to take place on March 13, 2023.

Ibrahim moves to Ooredoo Oman from his most recent role as CEO of Ooredoo Algeria, bringing to his new position over 20 years of experience in the telecom industry and in several leadership roles within Ooredoo Group. He has also held several senior positions in the areas of telecom, information technology, project management and procurement at Ooredoo Group and



other multi-national organisations.

Ibrahim holds a master's degree in digital transformation from HEC, Paris and a bachelor's degree in telecommunications engineering from the University of Essex, UK.

In a press statement, Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo, managing director and group CEO at Ooredoo Group, said, "Since joining Ooredoo in 2013, Bassam al Ibrahim has been responsible for several notable achievements in his many senior roles. His stellar career experience stands him in good stead to lead Ooredoo Oman's future achievements, and I wish him the best in his new role. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to Noor for her unwavering dedication, hard work and commitment for excellence, which have been instrumental in driving Ooredoo Oman's success over the past two years."



WB estimates Turkey quake damage at \$34bn

Washington, US - The devastating February 6 earthquake and aftershocks that hit southern Turkey have caused damage worth more than US\$34bn in the country, the World Bank said.

The amount is equivalent to four per cent of Turkey's GDP in 2021, the Washington-based institution said, adding that the estimate does not account for the costs of reconstruction that were "potentially twice as large," a statement said.

The estimate also does not take into account the damage caused in northern Syria, also particularly affected by the earthquakes, with a World Bank estimate of the costs there to be

released on Tuesday.

The World Bank warned that the continuing aftershocks are likely to increase the total amount of damage caused by the disaster.

"This disaster serves as a reminder of Turkey's high risk to earthquakes and of the need to enhance resilience in public and private infrastructure," said Humberto Lopez, the World Bank Country Director for Turkey.

The World Bank also estimates that 1.25mn people have been made temporarily homeless due to damage to residential buildings.

AFP

Oman's special economic zones, free zones take centre stage in new analysis

Muscat - A new focus report, produced by global research and advisory firm Oxford Business Group (OBG) in partnership with Oman's Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and Centralized Utilities Company (Marafiq), shines a spotlight on investment opportunities opening up in industry, logistics and energy as efforts to diversify the economy intensify.

The analysis explores the developments taking place at the sultanate's special economic zones and free zones in an easy-to-navigate and accessible format, supported by key data and infographics. The report provides detailed coverage of the way in which fiscal incentives, infrastructure projects and robust connectivity to external markets are combining to attract businesses to OPAZ-affiliated zones.

The rollout of advanced transport infrastructure is a particular



focal point. In this section, the report considers the part that new facilities and services, such as digitalised logistics infrastructure, have played in boosting Oman's trade capacity and enabling companies to efficiently transport goods, both internally and farther afield.

Oman's drive to encourage value-added production and

a net-zero economy by 2050.

It also shines a spotlight on OPAZ's growth story, tracking the milestones reached and their close alignment with the objectives laid out in Oman's Vision 2040 roadmap for economic diversification and sustainable development.

The report includes a wide-ranging interview with H E Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, chairman of OPAZ, in which he explained how Oman's strengths, including its geographical position, are supporting efforts to attract foreign direct investment and drive industrial growth.

"As a link between east and west, Oman's strategic location in the global supply chain is beneficial for investors, thanks in part to its proximity to shipping lanes that are home to the majority of the world's commercial maritime traffic," he said. "OPAZ aims to eliminate barriers to investment and boost the effi-

ciency of industrial zones."

Jana Treeck, OBG's managing director for the Middle East, said a combination of rising energy prices, far-reaching structural reforms and higher oil and gas production had put Oman on track for a strong post-pandemic recovery, with the non-oil sector well placed to increase its contribution to growth.

"Industrial expansion is at the heart of Oman's efforts to diversify its economy, as is evident from the business-friendly policies being introduced and the many projects under way aimed at expanding industrial capacity," Treeck said.

"Special economic zones and free zones have an important role to play in attracting foreign investment, boosting exports and creating jobs, all of which will produce ripple effects through the economy and help the sultanate to achieve its long-term objectives."

One billion active users, but bans mount up for TikTok

Paris, France - TikTok's breakneck rise from niche video-sharing app to global social media behemoth has brought plenty of scrutiny, particularly over its links to China.

The European Commission is the latest organisation to ban the app from its equipment, following similar moves in the United States.

So is TikTok a spying tool for Beijing, a fun app, or both?

Under pressure

Global action against TikTok, owned by Chinese firm ByteDance, kicked off in earnest in India in 2020.

It was among the Chinese

apps barred after deadly clashes on the border between the two countries, with New Delhi saying it was defending its sovereignty.

The same year, US President Donald Trump threatened a ban and accused TikTok of spying for China - an idea that has gained ground in Washington.

TikTok was forced to admit ByteDance employees in China had accessed Americans' data but it has always denied turning over data to the Chinese authorities.

The company has moved to soothe US fears, announcing in June 2022 that it would store all data on American users on US-based servers.



However, in January US federal employees were banned from downloading the app, with the European Commission following suit on Thursday to "protect the institution's data", it said.

One billion users

Bans have not halted TikTok's growth.

With more than one billion active users it is the sixth most used social platform in the world,

according to the We Are Social marketing agency.

Although it lags behind the likes of Meta's long-dominant trio of Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, its growth among young people far outstrips its competitors.

Almost a third of TikTok users are between 10 and 19 years old, according to the Wallaroo agency. Its rapid rise saw it grab more than US\$11bn in advertising revenue last year, a threefold increase in a single year.

TikTok's competitors quickly copied its short video format and continuous scrolling, but to little avail.

TikTok's editing features and

powerful algorithm have kept it ahead of the game, attracting an army of creators and influencers as well as creating many of its own. But the algorithm is opaque and often accused of leading users into digital content silos.

TikTok and ByteDance employees also manually increase the number of views on certain content, according to a recent report in Forbes.

TikTok has said manual promotion only affects a tiny fraction of recommended videos.

'Disinformation'

The app is regularly accused of spreading disinformation, putting users in danger with haz-

ardous "challenge" videos, and allowing pornography, even though it is supposed to prohibit nudity.

French news site Numerama reported a TikTok "trend" recently that involved publishing photographs of penises.

Several children have also reportedly died while trying to replicate the so-called blackout challenge, which involves users holding their breath until they pass out. And around one-fifth of videos on topical issues such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine were found to be fake or misleading in a study by misinformation group NewsGuard.

AFP

India's quarterly GDP growth slows to 4.4%

Mumbai, India – India's quarterly economic growth slowed to 4.4 per cent in the last three months of 2022, official estimates showed Tuesday, as weaker global demand and high inflation weigh on the world's fifth-largest economy.

Quarterly data showed GDP growth down from 6.3 per cent in the September quarter after consumption weakened following India's festive season. But the National Statistics Of-

fice's full-year forecast for the year ending March 31 remained unchanged at 7.0 per cent, ranking India's economic outlook above every other major country. "GDP at 4.4 per cent is very much on the expected lines," said Nish Bhatt, founder and CEO at investment consulting firm Millwood Kane International. "The growth rate has slowed down due to higher inflation and lower consumption," he added.



India bounced back strongly from the coronavirus pandemic but is still grappling with the same headwinds buffeting the global economy. The country of 1.4bn people

imports more than 80 per cent of its crude oil needs and rising petrol costs since Russia's invasion of Ukraine have had a ripple effect on prices. The Reserve Bank of India has hiked rates by 2.50 percentage points since May last year in an aggressive response to rising consumer inflation, which hit a three-month high of 6.52 per cent in January. "Growth indicators have started to show signs of reaccel-

eration in early 2023" after "losing some steam" in late 2022, Morgan Stanley said in a report Tuesday. "Healthy household balance sheets and a pickup in private and public capex (capital expenditure) will sustain gains in employment – which will allow consumption growth to stay strong in the coming quarters," it added. The current year's growth estimate exceeds the IMF forecast

of 6.1 per cent and is significantly higher than every other major economy. In its January economic outlook, the International Monetary Fund projected India's GDP growth will rebound to 6.8 per cent in 2024, supported by "resilient domestic demand despite external headwinds". India's benchmark Sensex closed 0.55 per cent lower ahead of the GDP data release. AFP



Gas markets remain tight due to Russian supply cuts: IEA

Paris, France – Global natural gas markets are expected to remain tight in 2023, with demand remaining broadly flat as uncertainty surrounds China's LNG demand and with the possibility of further gas supply cuts by Russia, according to a new report released on Tuesday by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Despite an estimated drop in gas consumption of 1.6 per cent in 2022, natural gas markets worldwide continue to tighten. Natural gas demand in Europe contracted by 13 per cent last year, its steepest drop in recorded history, led by unprecedented price increases, the IEA said.

Emergency policies instigated due to the energy crisis and lower supplies, diminished industrial production and lower consumer demand, along with milder winter weather conditions, drove the drop in gas demand.

Asia's natural gas demand fell by 2 per cent as a result of high LNG prices.

'China's gas consumption decreased by 1 per cent in 2022 as a result of lower growth in economic and especially industrial activity, COVID-related restrictions and high prices,' the IEA said in the report.

Gas consumption in North America last year saw a growth of 4.4 per cent. The increase in gas consumption in US power generation, as well as growth in Canadian consumption by power generators and industrial consumers, drove up regional demand.

LNG became a more dynamic supply source as piped gas supplies tightened due to lower Russian supplies.

The value of global LNG trade hit an all-time high, doubling to

US\$450bn despite the 6 per cent growth in traded volumes compared to 2021.

Europe was the primary driver behind the rise in LNG demand, with a 63 per cent growth in LNG cargoes to Europe last year.

Japan remained the world's largest LNG importer, despite a drop of 3 per cent in LNG inflows in 2022.

The IEA warns that although natural gas prices have fallen in recent months after skyrocketing last year, the falling price trend could change this year as demand for LNG picks up in Asia, particularly in China.

'Last year was extraordinary for global gas markets. Prices are returning to manageable levels, particularly in Europe, where a mild winter and demand destruction have helped to cool markets,' said Keisuke Sadamori, the IEA's director of energy markets and security, as quoted in the report.

'China is the great unknown in 2023. If global LNG demand returns to pre-crisis levels, that will only intensify competition on global markets and inevitably push prices up again.'

According to the report, China's LNG demand could rise by 10 per cent this year with the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions.

The IEA, on the other hand, stated that current forecasts are highly uncertain, and that China's renewed demand growth could be as high as 35% if prices continue to fall and general economic activity recovers swiftly.

'This would spark fierce competition in international markets and could see prices return to the unsustainable levels seen last summer, representing a concern for European buyers in particular,' the report said.

Agencies



The National Detergent Co. S.A.O.G.

P.O.Box 3104, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman

DIRECTORS' REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors and management, I am pleased to welcome you to the 43rd Annual General Meeting of The National Detergent Co. SAOG and to present the Annual Report along with the Auditor's Report for the year 2022.

The Highlights of 2022

Overall Company

During the year your company has achieved revenue of RO 19.6 million (2021: RO 17.8 million) and registered a growth of 10% in revenue over last year. The company has reported a loss before tax RO 495,967 (2021: RO 61,783). The major reasons for the loss include higher input costs and logistic costs due to global geo-political situation and higher crude oil prices in first half of the year. With the strong efforts of the management, the company was able to take effective measures to reduce various costs and overheads. Despite of above challenges, the company generated a positive cash flow from operations of RO 520,213 over last year.

The Consumer Products Division

The Consumer Products Division registered over RO 18 million in sales in the year 2022, a growth verses last year's sales of RO. 16 million. Higher sales and demand for detergent powders during the current year have returned to the normal level, however, liquid products sales were under pressure. Overall sales realization during the year 2022 has improved during the year.

The flagship BAHAR brand maintained its market share overall, and it is well accepted by the consumers in Oman.

The Sulphonation Division

The Sulphonation Division has done well during the year and despite disruption like materials prices and logistic issues, this division has reported a profit before tax.

The Industrial & Institutional Division

The division has improved its sales in the construction chemicals and trading businesses. However, the overall business was not in line with the expectations as no new contracts were received in Oil & Gas business. On long term basis we anticipate the outlook to be positive for this division..

Omanization

The Company has maintained the **Omanization rate at 47%**, well over statutory requirement including at senior management. The Company is making determined efforts to improve the Omanization at various levels of the organization including the senior and middle levels, with adequate training inputs, continued during this period.

Dividend

The Board of Directors has not recommended cash dividend for the year. The details of the past dividends are below:

Year	Dividend
2021 (Bonus shares)	17.56%
2020	Bzs. 50
2019	Bzs. 45
2018	Bzs. 50

Compliance with Internal Regulations and Control Systems

Your Company has put into place internal control systems commensurate with best practice and the size and ever more complex nature of the business. M/s. Moore Stephens LLP, an audit firm, was appointed to conduct an independent review of the internal control systems and the Board / Audit Committee efficiently oversees the process at regular intervals. The most reviews during 2022 confirm the Company is running in full compliance.

Future Outlook

NDC is focusing on revenue growth, controlling costs and better margins. NDC has plans of introducing new products that closely meet consumers' needs. Further efforts are being made for cost efficient sourcing and strengthening human resources.

We are seeing a gradual growth of sales volume in the near future, with softening of the cost of raw materials and packaging, which is a positive sign for the company's profitability. During the year 2022 high materials prices have impacted margins however, the future looks positive due to softening of input cost and registering good margins. The Company will continue its efforts to control its cost and maintain a better profitability.

The Company has plan for introducing few new products in coming period to expand its products' base and also making efforts to enter new markets.

Oman Social Responsibility Initiative

The Company is a socially responsible corporate citizen and as such is supporting various social initiatives to enhance the Omani Society. Well known programs like "Bahar Clean Oman School" restarted during the last year which was discontinued in earlier years due to pandemic.

Future Social Responsibility

The Company is very proudly Omani and will continue to participate in social and educational programs run by various government departments and will contribute time, money and effort for the betterment of Oman.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Senior Management, all of the employees of the Company and myself, I thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said for his support and encouragement to the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

Also, I would like to express our gratitude to all the Ministries and the Muscat Municipality for their support. In addition, would also like to thank all the employees of the Company and our customers for their patronage. Finally, and importantly, I would like to thank the shareholders for their confidence in our company and its leadership.

Anand Budhia
Vice-Chairman, Board of Directors

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2022

	2022 RO	2021 RO
Assets		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant, and equipment	17,473,713	17,989,648
Advance for capital purchases	31,396	11,418
Right-of-use assets	1,168,104	1,278,417
Total non-current assets	18,673,213	19,279,483
Current assets		
Inventories	4,265,986	4,040,670
Other current assets	365,931	304,328
Trade receivables	6,012,816	5,580,420
Other receivables	37,228	37,238
Cash and cash equivalents	672,207	523,380
Total current assets	11,354,168	10,486,036
Total assets	30,027,381	29,765,519
Equity and liabilities		
Equity		
Share capital	2,000,000	1,701,250
Share premium	364,263	364,263
Legal reserve	567,083	567,083
Revaluation reserve	10,892,250	10,892,250
Retained earnings	2,232,686	2,971,770
Total equity	16,056,282	16,496,616
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Provision for employees' end of services benefits	786,770	765,383
Deferred tax liabilities	2,102,480	2,182,419
Lease liabilities	1,082,362	1,096,715
Total non-current liabilities	3,971,612	4,044,517
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	5,842,083	5,077,941
Current tax liabilities	24,306	18,396
Lease liabilities	133,098	128,049
Short term loans	4,000,000	4,000,000
Total current liabilities	9,999,487	9,224,386
Total liabilities	13,971,099	13,268,903
Total equity and liabilities	30,027,381	29,765,519
Net assets per share	Bz 803	Bz 970

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2022

	2022 RO	2021 RO
Revenue	19,641,345	17,768,828
Cost of sales	(15,112,982)	(13,209,698)
Gross profit	4,528,363	4,559,130
Selling and distribution expenses	(3,516,431)	(3,147,737)
Administrative and general expenses	(1,149,304)	(1,162,180)
Expected credit loss allowance	(144,289)	(102,999)
Finance costs	(321,867)	(297,123)
Other income	105,290	89,107
Foreign exchange gains	2,271	19
Loss before income tax	(495,967)	(61,783)
Income tax credit	55,633	3,880
Loss for the year	(440,334)	(57,903)
Other comprehensive income		
<i>Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss</i>		
Gain on property revaluation	-	3,500,000
Deferred taxation impact on property revaluation	-	(525,000)
Other comprehensive income for the year,		
net of income tax	-	2,975,000
Total comprehensive (loss) / income for the year	(440,334)	2,917,097
Basic and Diluted loss per share	BZ (22)	BZ (3)

Note:

- The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder on request either in Arabic or English within 7 days of receipt of the request.
- Shareholders and investors are advised to read the full financial statements.
- Certain comparative figures have been reclassified in order to conform to the presentation for the current period.

NOTICE

It is hereby announced that the Annual General Body Meeting of Indian Social Club, Sohar for the year 2022 followed by Election 2023/2024 will take place on Friday 17th March 2023 from 6 P.M. to 8 P.M. at ISC Sohar Premises. Details are available on the website (www.iscsohar.com) as well as the Club Notice Board. For further information, please contact the undersigned.

Mrs. Sonali Khare
General Secretary
GSM: 95163932, Email: sskhare07@gmail.com

OETC provides sterilisation devices to Ibra Hospital

The Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) recently provided sterilisation devices for the surgical department at Ibra Hospital in Sharqiyah governorate.

The company, in a statement, said that the support was extended keeping in line with the vision and goals of OETC towards the engagement and contribution for sustainable development to the economic, social development of society.

The sterilisation devices serve a wide range of citizens' needs and other several neighbouring provinces. In addition, it helps improve the service level provided by the hospital by helping speed up the sterilization process, increase number of surgical operations performed per day and reducing the waiting time for patients.

The inauguration ceremony took place last week in the presence of a number of officials from both parties. The inaugura-



tion included a visual explanatory presentation of the operation mechanism of the devices and the benefits of which the patients will receive.

At the end of the ceremony, the hospital management team presented a memorial trophy to the company as a gesture and a token of appreciation for the ef-

forts and continuous support provided by OETC.

"The company strives and ensures towards adopting sustainable initiatives that serve the largest segment of society. These particular sterilisation devices will definitely improve, accelerate and have a positive effect with the process of scheduling appointments and operations," said Samira Salim al Mughairi, OETC's communication and sustainability manager.

"We are currently working on

another initiative relying on renewable energy, clean and environmentally friendly energy sources that will serves the tourism sector in the country by providing solar panels to illuminate touristic areas that are a destination for many visitors and tourists locally and internationally," Mughairi added.

It is worth mentioning that OETC, a member of Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity in the sultanate's network, where electricity is transferred from production stations to distributed load centres in all governorates of the sultanate.

The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above, so as to cover most part of Oman, whether in the north or in the south. In addition, OETC manages the interconnection lines between the sultanate and the Gulf interconnection network with a voltage of 220kV.



AVOD products receive great response at Gulfood 2023

Areej Vegetable Oils and Derivatives (AVOD) - Oman's Most Trusted Brand - received a rousing response from visitors and trade partners at Gulfood 2023 held in Dubai from February 20 to 24.

Gulfood is the region's largest annual food and beverage exhibition that hosts more than 5000 exhibitors from across 125 countries, making it the ideal platform to explore new business opportunities and increase brand visibility.

AVOD - as part of its transformative growth strategy - has been a part of Gulfood and has continued to extend its portfolio and introduce new and innovative product offerings with each passing year.

This year, apart from its existing stellar and popular lineup of high-quality Trans Fat Free Cooking oils, Non-Hydrogenated Margarines, Vegetable Ghee, Fats and Mayonnaise, AVOD is showcasing its newly launched Minara Canola oil and Minara corn oil. Minara is AVOD's flagship range includes successful sunflower oil, and olive oil line up in its fold.

As is true of each product from the AVOD portfolio, both Minara Canola oil and Minara Corn oil come loaded with natural goodness, and health that is underpinned by the heritage brand's cornerstone 'Eat Right, Live Well' philosophy.

AVOD is also showcasing non-hydrogenated specialty fats and sheet margarine, which are ideal for use in baked goods and confectionery products. These products were developed to meet the specific needs of bakers and chefs, and they offer excellent consistency, texture, and taste.

Pradel Jacques - President East of Kraft Heinz, along with other KH senior officials from the company visited AVOD's stand at the Omani Pavilion and lauded the brand for being at the forefront of transformation through innovation in the regional and food and beverage sector.

They were impressed by AVOD's commitment to innovation and quality, and they praised the company's efforts to develop healthier and more sustainable products.

"As proud partners of AVOD, it always gives us great pleasure to support and appreciate the company's commitment to innovation and quality and more importantly its growth strategy that puts consumers and their wellbeing ahead of everything else," Jacques said.

The company's CEO Salem bin Nasser al Bortmany, who was also present to receive the guests at AVOD's stand, said, "We are humbled and honoured to have received such a tremendous response from our partners and visitors alike.

"Platforms such as Gulfood are the perfect avenue for AVOD to not just increase our visibility and trade, but also to showcase our standing as a leading Omani brand that offers innovative, sustainable, and healthy products."

He added, "Our success as a heritage brand with over thirty years of expertise and experience is fuelled by our unwavering commitment to transforming along with our consumers."

India-Oman Strategic Consultative Group meeting held in Muscat

Secretary (Overseas Indian Affairs) of India's Ministry of External Affairs, Dr Ausaf Sayeed, concluded a successful visit to Oman on Monday for the India-Oman Strategic Consultative Group (IOSCG) meeting.

The 12th round of the IOSCG was co-chaired by Dr Sayeed and H E Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, a release said.

The meeting reviewed bilateral ties between India and Oman in different domains and identified new areas of cooperation.

The India-Oman Strategic Consultative Group meeting is an important forum for both countries enabling regular review



and appreciated their contributions to the development of both Oman and India. He assured them of the Indian government's commitment to their welfare and well-being.

The visit by Dr Sayeed reflects the strong bilateral relationship between India and Oman, the importance of the Sultanate of Oman as a key partner for India in the Gulf and highlights India's commitment to strengthening its strategic partnership with Oman.

The two sides expressed confidence that the outcomes of the 12th round of consultations will contribute to further enhancing the bilateral relationship and promoting greater cooperation in various fields.

of bilateral relations. The discussions were focused on exploring avenues of cooperation in key sectors including energy, trade and investment, health, education, defence, and cultural exchanges.

On the sidelines of the meeting, Dr Sayeed interacted with the Indian community in Oman

Sri Lanka to mark first 'World Seagrass Day'

On May 23 last year, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution submitted by Sri Lanka declaring March 1 as the 'World Seagrass Day'. The landmark resolution was co-sponsored by 24 other member countries. Accordingly, on Wednesday, the entire world will be marking the first ever 'World Seagrass Day'.

Seagrasses are one of the most valuable marine ecosystems on earth covering around 300,000sqkm in 159 countries and six continents. They provide a range of critical environmental, economic and social benefits, a statement from the Sri Lankan Embassy said.

The most significant benefit being the enormous carbon sequestration potential of seagrasses, storing up to 18 per cent of the world's oceanic carbon, which is greater than that of rainforests which makes protection and restoration of seagrasses a vital tool in efforts to adapt and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.

The vital functions of seagrasses also include its role in stabilising the sea bottom and providing ecosystem support via food and shelter for a number of marine creatures, including commercial and recreational fish species, as well as endangered and charismatic species such as turtles, dugongs and manatees.

However, seagrass ecosystems are being destroyed as a result of human activity.

The United Nations Environment Programme Publication 'Out of the Blue: The value of seagrasses to the environment and to people' states that 'Seven per cent of seagrass marine habitat is being lost worldwide per year, which is equivalent to a football field of seagrass lost every 30 minutes'.

The UNGA resolution has attracted global interest.



ROHM to host stunning classical ballet Giselle by Teatro dell'Opera di Roma

The Royal Opera House Muscat is delighted to announce three nights of Teatro dell'Opera di Roma's production of Giselle, one of the most loved ballet's of the classical repertoire. *Giselle* will take place over two nights on March 9 and 10, with a matinee performance on March 11 at the Royal Opera House Muscat.

The tale behind the ballet is a cautionary one, witnessing the devastation of betrayal and deception on young love, but it is also a celebratory story of the power of love over destiny. Giselle is a young country girl, full of joy and noted for her exceptional dancing. She is loved by a boy in her village, but is swept off her feet by a stranger, who disguises his real identity as a Prince to capture her heart. Giselle's childhood sweetheart exposes the deception with tragic results, as Giselle is heartbroken and dies. The prince is now destined to be destroyed by Giselle, as she resides in a half life along with all the spirits of other girls who have died of heartbreak. Giselle refuses to let this destiny destroy her love and instead saves the prince from his fate.

Teatro dell'Opera di Roma Ballet presents this glorious production in memory of Carla Fracci (1936-2021), their artistic director, and the ballerina who danced Giselle to great acclaim.

The ballet is accompanied by the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sergey Smbatyan.



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Jindal Shadeed CEO speaks of ‘Green Steel’

As a key player in one of the priority sectors identified by the Oman Vision 2040, Jindal Shadeed has been at the forefront of advocating sustainable development in the local manufacturing industry.

Keeping in line with the same, the company's Chief Executive Officer, Harssha Shetty, under whose guidance Jindal Shadeed has been consistently achieving new milestones, recently participated as a panelist in the popular Tejarah Talks session.

The event was held recently at the Zain Auditorium in the Omantel Head Office with the central theme ‘Sustainable Manufacturing: Smart Manufacturing’.

The discussions were moderated by H H Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Managing Partner at The Firm.

Organised by Oman Business Forum in association with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Tejarah Talks is a platform that promotes positive interaction and facilitates the exchange of ideas through a series of informal, interactive evening discussions with prominent thought leaders from across the market.

Commenting on Jindal Shadeed's participation at the event, Shetty said, “Embracing sustainability is no longer a



choice, it's a prerequisite for business viability. Whether customers, investors, or stakeholders, the effects of climate change have made society double down on the importance of sustainable operations. Consumers are leaning more toward businesses that uphold strong ESG values. As a progressive, innovative, and community-centric organisation, Jindal Shadeed places keen emphasis on sustainability and en-

sures it is well-integrated into all its operations.”

He added saying, “Through the informative Tejarah Talks session, we were able to highlight the role of innovation in powering productivity across the manufacturing value chain while staying committed to furthering the sustainability agenda. Leading by example, Jindal Shadeed, on the backs of strong data analysis and intelligent edge so-

lutions, has devised breakthrough processes that have led to reduced carbon emissions and minimal negative impact on the environment. It is important for manufacturers to acknowledge that reimagining core processes and driving transformation across business ecosystems with an eye on sustainability also has the potential to significantly enhance energy efficiency, decrease costs, and reduce

wastage of resources while simultaneously boosting brand credibility, image, and perception. As the country's youth grows to be more mindful of such aspects, it becomes even more quintessential to adhere to international best practices and position businesses as environmentally conscious entities.”

With the manufacturing sector in Oman driving socio-economic growth, generating quality

employment opportunities, and bolstering exports, Jindal Shadeed has ensured that it also remains steadfast in taking concerted efforts to embrace technological advancements to inspire innovation across the industry and complement the government's efforts to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. In addition, the company reserves a keen focus on further strengthening the local economy. Fore-

casts show that if only 20 per cent of Jindal Shadeed's steel production in Duqm were to be used in Oman, it could add over US\$1bn to in-country value.

Jindal Shadeed's participation in Tejarah Talks reaffirms its commitment to spearheading development in the manufacturing industry, promoting sustainable practices, and contributing to building a more resilient, and informed nation.



Bank Muscat takes part in Muscat International Book Fair

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the sultanate, has announced its strong support towards the 27th edition of the Muscat International Book Fair, which is being held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre until March 4.

This year's festival which was inaugurated under the patronage of H H Sayyid Hamoud Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, is witnessing an excellent turnout of visitors with the overall number slated to touch as many as 300,000 visitors over the course of the 11-day long fair.

Aimed at enriching Omani culture through a number of events, lectures, literary and cultural seminars, the 27th edition will host an elite selection of intellectuals, publishers, and exhibitors, thereby contributing prominently to Muscat's cultural scene. Over the years, the fair has picked up a dedicated following amongst people in Oman and is also well covered by both local and international media.

Bank Muscat's participation at the book fair comes as part of its strategy to highlight the Sultanate's cultural achievements and introduce prominent and upcoming Omani and Arab works and publications across various fields to a wider audience.

In particular, the fair has a number of cultural halls such as Ahmed Bin Majid Gallery, Al-Farahidi Gallery, Ibn Dureid Gallery and Al-Awtabi Gallery, which is seeing an excellent response from visitors.

It is a matter of pride that this year's fair features well in excess of half a million titles and publications, including as many as

22,950 Omani publications. The fair also includes a Children's Corner where an area has been allocated for family activities, a theatre, reading corners and cultural workshops.

The bank is always keen to strengthen cooperation and partnership with various governmental, private and non-governmental organisations to successfully organise and conduct various events and initiatives that contribute to sustainable development across different sectors in the Sultanate. Bank Muscat's participation in social and cultural activities and events provide it with multiple opportunities to deepen its commitment and partnership for sustainable development.

The bank has in the past extended strong support covering a wide range of sectors like technology, culture and sports etc., to important events like the Al Ahad Al Mashreq Shooting Championship, the Sayyid Abbas Golf Tournament and COMEX.

Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman and provides ATMs and CDMs at various locations across the sultanate including at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. They offer a fast, comfortable and secure banking experience to customers who use them for a wide variety of transactions including real-time bill payments.

Vodafone Oman signs deal with Digital Virgo to offer world-class content

Making waves at this year's MWC Barcelona, Vodafone Oman signed strategic partnership with Digital Virgo that will revolutionise the company's digital services, paving the way for Vodafone Oman to offer even more exclusive content tailored for today's young customer needs and lifestyles.

Capitalising on Digital Virgo global expertise, Vodafone will unlock a myriad of instant trendy, premium value-added content including video streaming, gaming, entertainment and more, all available through its award-winning My Vodafone App.

At the signing ceremony in Barcelona, Bader al Zidi, CEO,



Vodafone Oman, said, “We have gained valuable insight from our customers during our first year

of operations. Most importantly is that the value-add of yesterday is the basic of today and we need to bring a new dimension to the table. Catering to a digital savvy young population, our agreement with Digital Virgo is key to allowing us to offer enhanced, cutting-edge digital services, beyond voice and data and we look forward to seeing the fruit of this agreement come to life in the next few months.”

Guillaume Briche, CEO, Digital Virgo, said, “We are very excited to be partnering with Vodafone, which is one of the most innovative telco operators in the Middle East. Through this agreement, we are keen to deploy our expertise in supporting the company further enhance its digital services in Oman, giving

customers fast easy and secure access to quality content.”

At MWC Barcelona, Vodafone's delegation will also be attending key sessions and meetings, exploring new technologies and partnerships with industry leaders. Since its launch, Vodafone has been committed to building a digital business model, from its fully digital onboarding and eStores; to highly customised digital solutions, fully integrated IT and networks and subscription-based services. Today, Vodafone in Oman is 100 per cent digital with a network that was constructed as fully cloud-based network in the region.

Omantel walks away with two awards at OSHRM 2023

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, won awards in two categories at the prestigious OSHRM 2023 Awards - the 'business/professional' award for bringing e-learning closer to employees and the runner-up award for the best human resources safety initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Omantel, represented by the Human Resources Unit, worked on special initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the safety of employees and encourage them to use their time to upgrade their skills through reputed online learning programmes. This resulted in great benefits as Omantel succeeded in boosting employee satisfaction and job security, while ensuring business continuity and customer satisfaction.

The unprecedented situations triggered by COVID-19 presented the utmost test for HR people around the world. Omantel was able to accept the challenge and move into top gear to limit the spread of the virus among employees and devise ways to keep productivity running through digital tools and remote working. The results were



as reflected in the awards won by Omantel at OSHRM 2023.

The award for online learning recognised Omantel's move to enable employees to join courses from LinkedIn, Coursera and Udemy. In all, Omantel's campaign resulted in 750 users joining LinkedIn Learning, 100 users on Udemy and 250 users in Coursera. Towards the end of the pandemic, Omantel succeeded in covering more than 50 per cent of the organization for technical trainings through digital learning.

The awards were in recognition of Omantel's e-learning drive and human resources safety initiatives during the pandemic

Omantel's HR section excelled itself by launching the 'New Normal' initiative for curbing the number of infections among employees through inhouse free vaccination that covered 98 per cent of the employees. Further, Omantel devised new channels

and introduced smart platforms to manage business digitally, remotely and from home.

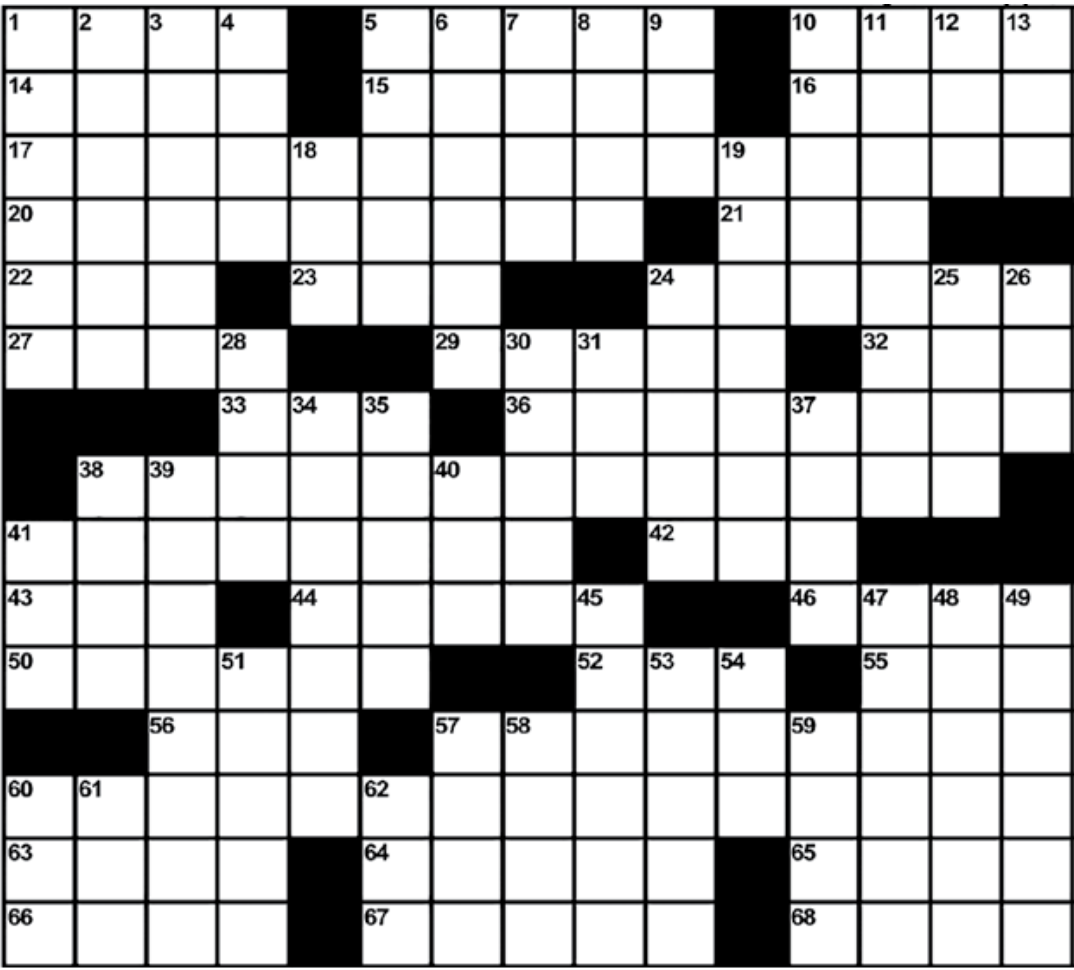
The OSHRM Awards are presented annually by the Omani Society for Human Resource Management (OSHRM) to reward excellence in the field of

Human Resources Management.

Omantel is the sultanate's first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of doing business and delivering a world of information, news, and entertainment.

While striving to ensure an optimum customer satisfaction, Omantel plays a key social role to provide the required support and assistant to all sectors amongst the Omani society.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Be crabby
5) Mississippi formation
10) Arch type
14) A poker stake
15) Like some walls
16) "Guilty," e.g.
17) Jilts
20) Played boisterously
21) Person looking for bombs?
22) Not at all well
23) "The Tell-Tale Heart" author
24) Some cooking herbs
27) Big family
29) Oddly amusing
32) Common deciduous tree
33) Atty's. grp.
36) Asian part of Turkey
38) Shows anger, old-school
41) Manitoba's capital
42) Scandinavian war god
43) Opposite of none
44) Shade of green
46) Potato container
50) Former Soviet leader

Joseph
52) Motel relative
55) Mai_ (cocktail variety)
56) Is able to
57) What the generous make
60) Shows anxiety, in a way
63) "Green Gables" girl
64) Sharp tip
65) One of the two sexes
66) Comedian's stock
67) Showy and pretentious
68) Ran, as colors

DOWN

1) Cloth
2) Ready a sleeping bag
3) "A Streetcar Named Desire" character
4) Close, as an envelope
5) "Saturday Night Fever" genre
6) Brought forth
7) DMV staple
8) Ready for a drive?
9) Infomercials, e.g.
10) Some tournaments
11) Colorful, spiky flowers
12) Bard's "always"
13) "Dig in!"

18) Laotian money
19) Partner of "wealthy" and "wise"
24) Kind of furnace
25) Bear's den
26) Calypso offshoot
28) Indian bread
30) Long-limbed and slender
31) Last word of the year, often
34) Offering money under the table
35) Colorado resort
3 7) Boat movers
38) Pinball infraction
39) Intertwining
40) "... the ramparts ..."
41) Functioned as
45) Department store section
47) Like unkeyed music
48) Blackout necessity
49) Smooched
51) Bowling alley divisions
53) Raw and bitter, as weather
54) Degree in math?
57) It may be in a jamb

58) "I'll get right_, boss!"
59) Two-syllable poetic foot
60) Tongue or tail action
61) Biochemistry abbr.
62) Marienbad, for one

NOTE PAD

AGAGOMAHANOGRES
BETBINALNAIRA
BATSTINTEBELFRY
ERIEAPODAL
SUCCUMBHUGEND
SPASILOTERMER
PEDANTEERS
BIRDINTHEHAND
LAMACARTEL
YUMYUMPENS CFC
EDODAMWASSAIL
LODGESINTO
SNAKEINTHEGRASS
ATTARSIEGEDIE
WHEYSARSONAND

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today, focus all your available energy and free time on making firmer plans for the future of your career. Remember that if you take the time to plan ahead, you won't get left behind! Think about where you want to be in the next five years, and imagine what your daily routine will be like. Are you working in a team or alone? Are you giving orders or taking them? Envisioning where you want to be is the first step toward drawing yourself a map of how to get there.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Some people want everything in life to come to them as easily as possible, but not you! Today, especially, you're in the mood for a unique challenge. And it's a good thing, because you're sure going to get one! An invitation is coming your way, and you shouldn't hesitate to say yes. When a goal is too easy to attain, it isn't very fulfilling. Embrace today's challenge with everything you've got. Sure, it could tire you out by the end of the day, but it will also reward your ego.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

People are totally ready to get on board with your latest plan. They want to be involved from the get-go and hang in there with you for the duration of this exploration! The meeker members in your group will be slow to add their ideas, so you'll have to communicate clearly that you want this thing to be a team endeavor! You're a good leader, which means you know how to give everyone a sense of ownership. This is going to be a great bonding experience. You will strengthen a new relationship.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

After witnessing a couple of nasty power struggles lately, it is only natural for you to see a lot of appeal in the idea of stepping into the background for a while and letting others fight it out. It's going to get cutthroat in a competitive situation, and you should think long and hard about whether you want to get in there and get yourself caught up in all the conflict. Is it worth it to you? You can still affect the situation without being in the middle of it.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

To ensure that you have a fun and adventure-filled day, try to make a change or two in your daily routine. You don't have to fully transform the rhythm of your day. Just make a little alteration here and there. Get up a half hour earlier. Take a different route on your run. Wear clothes or shoes you haven't worn in years. Play around with the small variables of your day and you'll create a ripple effect that creates bigger, more exciting changes down the line.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Be mindful of how involved people are getting in your plans for the day. If you let too many people put in their two cents, it will all add up to chaos, and there will be no forward momentum. These people might all have great ideas, but they aren't your ideas. So who should you listen to first? You should listen to yourself, of course. But just in case someone disregards your polite requests to mind their own business, you should have a backup plan ready.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Today, you could find yourself coveting something that someone else is discarding. Apparently the saying that one person's trash is another's treasure is true! Go ahead and swoop down on this discarded person, project, or thing. Stake your claim. You see possibilities where other people only see disappointment, and you have the know-how to make the most of this rejected treasure. Plus, you're opening yourself up to a new way of thinking. It's healthy and will create powerful results.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Today, an innocent conversation just meant to kill time could plant an idea in your head that takes root. And it could keep growing for quite a while! Your interlocutor has a lot of wisdom to give, and you're going to be the lucky recipient. They'll also share the gift of courage, specifically the courage to try something new! When was the last time you put yourself in a situation where you weren't quite sure what to do next? That kind of adrenaline rush only comes when you step outside of your usual routine.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Just as the brilliance of a diamond is hypnotic, your brilliance will cast a spell over everyone you deal with today. You can win any debate or argument with your intellect and capabilities. There are facts and figures at your disposal that no one can dispute, so bring them out whenever you need to. Be aggressive. Are there people who have been posturing a little bit too much? Call their bluff. They are mostly full of hot air anyway. Don't let them intimidate you.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Group dynamics are tricky right now. There are too many cooks in the kitchen, and no one wants to be stuck peeling the potatoes. In this crowd of egos, the best role for you is observer. Watch for different ideas and help organize them. Keep people focused on the task at hand, and help them avoid going off on tangents. In the end, you'll have made the most valuable contribution by being the person who kept everyone else in check. Important people will take note of everything you did.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You could encounter one or two very intriguing people during the course of your day, in person or online. If you start talking, don't make it all small talk. Go deeper. Ask a few penetrating questions that require more than a yes or no answer, and be prepared to get the same in return. It will be fun to challenge their opinions, and you'll have a ball defending your own.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If you find it hard to focus on the positive side of things today, get some help from a friend or coworker who has an especially sunny outlook on life. This bright-side thinking is contagious, and if you hang around this person long enough, some of it is bound to rub off on you! Avoid being alone for too many hours today. You really need human interaction to keep you feeling good. You have some interesting new ideas, but they could dissolve away unless you share them.

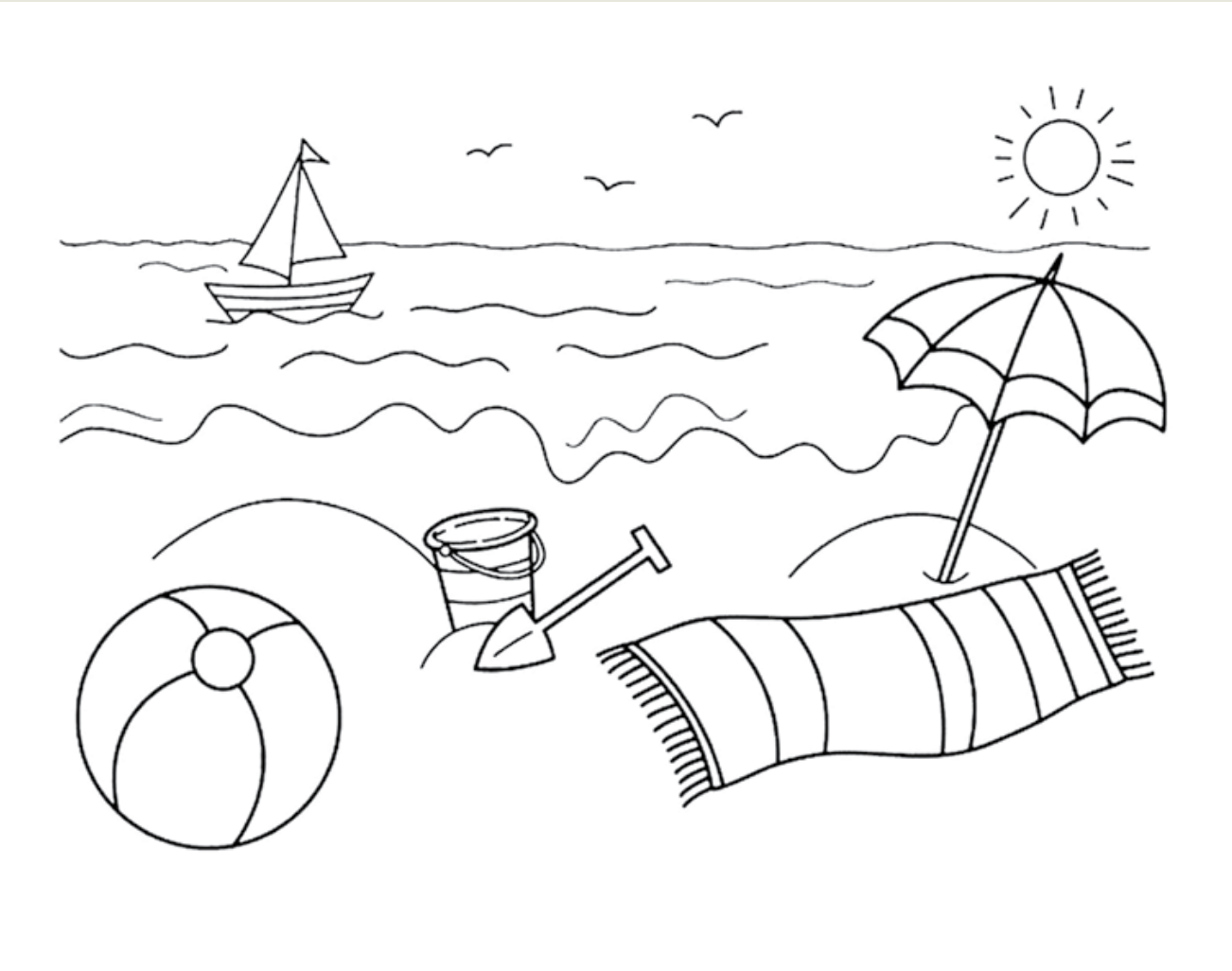


TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. 01. Which of these is an English fashion and portrait photographer, the winner of four Tony and two Academy Awards, whose costume design for the stage version of "My Fair Lady" (1956) led to his work on two film musicals, "Gigi" (1958) and "My Fair Lady" (1964)?
- A. Cecil Beaton
B. David Bailey
C. George Eastman
D. Henri Cartier-Bresson
02. In what month or months does the annual sardine run happen?
- A. August
B. May to July
C. November and December
D. April
03. In a 1545 book Roger Ascham invented a word, "toxophily", meaning what?
- A. Interest in infections
B. Use of poison
C. Love of or expertise in archery
D. Collecting weapons of war

Answers: 1. A 2. B 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

U	I	S	O
D	E	D	E
T	L	N	S
W	K	O	S

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

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

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

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

Nigeria ruling party candidate takes poll lead

Bola Tinubu led the race for Nigeria’s presidency on Tuesday, according to partial official tallies

Lagos, Nigeria - Ruling party candidate Bola Tinubu led the race for Nigeria’s presidency on Tuesday, according to partial official tallies issued after a tight election marred by frustration over long delays, technical hitches and opposition charges that results have been manipulated.

With President Muhammadu Buhari stepping down, many Nigerians hoped Saturday’s vote would open the door to a leader able to tackle insecurity, ease economic malaise and root out poverty in Africa’s most populous country.

Tinubu, 70, a former Lagos governor from the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party faced another veteran from main opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar, 76, making his sixth tilt at the presidency. But a surprise third candidate, Labour Party’s Peter Obi, appealed to younger voters with a message of change.

He has tested the dominance of the APC and PDP for the first time since military rule ended in 1999. Counting continued early on Tuesday, with 14 out of 36 states officially tallied.

The Independent National



A man walks past a taxi stop in Lagos on Tuesday as Nigerians were waiting for the results of their presidential elections (AFP)

Electoral Commission (INEC) said Tinubu had won six states, Abubakar five and Obi three.

Tinubu led with more than four million votes, while Abubakar had three million and Obi 1.6mn, according to national INEC figures.

INEC was expected to resume announcing results at 1300 GMT. The winning candidate has to garner the most votes nationally and score at least 25 per cent in two-thirds of the states - a measure reflecting a country split between a mostly Muslim north

and widely Christian south, and with three main ethnic groups.

Saturday’s election was mostly peaceful, but many polling stations opened late, angering voters, and delays or technical failures slowed uploading of results to an official INEC website

meant to promote transparency. PDP and other party officials stormed out of the counting centre on Monday night claiming tallies were manipulated. They said vote counts were not uploaded or did not match manual counts at local election stations. “This

sham exercise should be cancelled,” Labour party spokeswoman Ndi Kato told Arise News channel.

Nigeria has a long history of vote rigging and ballot buying, although INEC had said new technology would help curtail malpractice.

“Elections in the past have been very discouraging so many

quickly get to grips with Africa’s largest economy and top oil producer, which is beset by problems including a grinding militant war in the northeast and double-digit inflation.

Buhari, a former army general first elected in 2015, will step down after two terms in office. His critics say he failed in his key promises to make Nigeria safer.

For the 2023 election, INEC introduced biometric voter identification technology for the first time at national level and the IReV central database for results to improve transparency.

Votes were tallied by hand at local polling stations, with images of result sheets uploaded online to INEC’s IReV.

But long delays in voting getting underway and the slow pace of uploading state-by-state counting fuelled accusations of manipulation. Some photographs of the result counts on the IReV system were blurry, smudged and illegible. By Tuesday 1100 GMT, IReV had only uploaded results from 81,867 polling stations or less than half the 176,800 nationwide.

AFP

Elections in the past have been very discouraging, so many of us have not been engaged, but this time, we thought it would be different

OSAKI BRIGGS

of us have not been engaged, but this time, we thought it would be different,” said frustrated voter Osaki Briggs in southern Port Harcourt.

Fraud fears

Whoever replaces Buhari must

UN raises \$1.2bn to help millions in war-torn Yemen

Geneva, Switzerland - The United Nations raised around US\$1.2bn on Monday to deliver aid this year to millions of people going hungry in war-ravaged Yemen, amid hopes that a fragile truce could foster a lasting peace.

The figure was far short of the US\$4.3bn sought from donors at a pledging conference in Geneva, but the UN hoped the figure could reach US\$2bn by the end of the week.

It was the seventh donor conference for Yemen in seven years - but the UN hopes the next such gathering could focus on rebuilding the broken country rather than staving off hunger.

“We’ve had 31 pledges announced today and these pledges come to just about US\$1.2bn,” UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said in closing the conference.

“If we can make it US\$2bn by the weekend, that would be great.”

The UN says more than 21.7mn people - two-thirds of Yemen’s population - need humanitarian assistance this year. Its appeal aims to reach the 17.3mn most vulnerable among them. Erin Hutchinson, the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Yemen chief, said the world had ‘abandoned Yemen at this crucial crossroads’ by pledging only a quarter of the amount needed.

“This is woefully inadequate and gives the signal that some humans are less valuable than others,” she said.

Many countries demanded an end to Houthi-imposed rules that force women, including female aid workers, to be accompanied by male guardians, hampering the delivery of aid.

‘Glimmer of hope’

Yemen has been wracked by a devastating war since 2014, pitting Iran-backed Houthi rebels against the internationally recognised government, supported by a Saudi-led military coalition.

Since then, the war has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, both directly and indirectly, and pushed the nation to the brink of famine.



We’ve had 31 pledges announced today (Monday) and these pledges come to just about US\$1.2bn

MARTIN GRIFFITHS

A truce that began on April 2 last year expired on October 2, but many of its provisions have held. “After years of death, displacement, destruction, starvation and suffering, the truce delivered real dividends for people,” UN chief Antonio Guterres told the conference.

“We have a real opportunity this year to change Yemen’s trajectory and move towards peace.”

Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalek Saeed added: “Ending the humanitarian crisis starts with ending the war.”

Last year, the UN raised more than US\$2.2bn to enable aid agencies to reach nearly 11mn people across the country every month.

The humanitarian organisation CARE said the 2023 pledges meant aid agencies ‘will be forced to reduce the number of people reached’ once again.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Yemen’s economy and institutions had been pushed to the brink, as Washington pledged US\$444mn.

“Despite the dire humanitarian conditions, there is a glimmer of hope as Yemen is experiencing the best opportunities for peace in years,” he said in a statement.

AFP

Taliban kill top Islamic State commander in Afghanistan

Kabul, Afghanistan - Taliban forces killed a top Islamic State commander who allegedly planned attacks against diplomatic missions in Afghanistan’s capital, a government official said.

Violence in Afghanistan dramatically dipped after the Taliban seized power in August 2021. But in the past year, security has worsened, with a spate of mass casualty attacks claimed by Islamic State’s regional chapter.

Taliban forces killed Qari Fateh, the regional IS ‘intelligence and operations chief’, during an operation on Sunday night, the Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement on Monday. Fateh ‘directly masterminded recent operations in Kabul, including against diplomatic missions, mosques and other targets’, Mujahid said. One other IS member was

killed in the operation against the cell, which was based in Kabul’s Khair Khana area, according to the statement.

Residents in that neighbourhood had reported loud gunfire on Sunday night.

Taliban officials posted footage on Twitter of two bodies lying in debris.

A United Nations Security Council report in July 2022 described Fateh as a key IS leader, charged with military opera-

tions in an area spanning India, Iran and Central Asia.

IS has emerged as the biggest security challenge to Taliban rule, staging attacks on foreigners, religious minorities and government institutions.

Both groups share an austere Sunni Islamist ideology, but IS is fighting to establish a global ‘caliphate’ whilst the Taliban have a more inward-looking goal of ruling an independent Afghanistan.

Breaking new ground, video game engages with Holocaust

Paris, France - Tackling one of the greatest human tragedies, a new video game has been released in which players adopt roles in a Jewish family torn from their home during the Holocaust and sent to an internment camp. ‘The Light in the Darkness’ claims to be the first video game to accurately portray the Holocaust, which took the lives of some six million Jews during World War II.

Numerous games have World War II themes - including the big-selling ‘Call of Duty’ series - but the fact that the Holocaust is barely mentioned troubled 36-year-old Luc Bernard, creator of the new game.

“It’s a bit like denying that it ever existed,” the Los Angeles-based developer told AFP.

The game is available for play on computers, with versions for consoles to be released soon.

Players follow along with a Jewish family as they endure life under France’s wartime Vichy regime only to be arrested in 1942 during the massive ‘Vel’ d’Hiv roundup in Paris and sent to the Pithiviers internment camp. Thousands of Jews were transported from there to death camps like Auschwitz.

“Video games can tell profound, meaningful and universal stories of tragedy and triumph that are more realistic and gut-wrenchingly impactful,” reads a title description at the online Epic Games store.

“Our mission is to connect



Game creator Luc Bernard holds an Xbox controller, needed for playing his video game, in Los Angeles, California, on February 14 (AFP)

each new generation with the experiences of those who lived during one of the greatest atrocities in the history of the world.”

There have long been fears that creating such games could tend to trivialise or oversimplify the atrocity, Bern University of the Arts game history specialist Eugen Pfister told AFP.

The blockbuster video game franchise ‘Wolfenstein’, which essentially centres on a hero who kills Nazis, has been an exception, but it makes no claims of historical accuracy.

A 2014 edition called ‘Wolfenstein: The New Order’ has its hero breaking into a fictional internment camp in Croatia. But it is set in an alternate universe in which the Nazis won World War II. “You see chimneys, wagons and even the selection of prisoners, but there is never any mention of concentra-

You see chimneys, wagons and even the selection of prisoners, but there is never any mention of concentration camps or even Jews

EUGEN PFISTER

tion camps or even Jews,” Pfister said of the game.

The genocide horror was addressed more explicitly three years later in a sequel titled ‘The New Colossus’.

No way to win

Bernard, who is originally from France, likened his game to an interactive film, but with players having no control over the ulti-

mate storyline as the family heads for a tragic fate.

“I couldn’t make a game where you win at the end,” said Bernard.

“That wasn’t the Shoah, there was no choice,” he added, using the Hebrew word for the Holocaust.

Bernard’s research for the game included consulting the archives of Holocaust museums in Los Angeles and Washington.

He also spoke with Holocaust survivors and plans to have some of them recount their experiences in an update to the game.

Bernard set out to make his first Holocaust title about 15 years ago, inspired by the story of his grandmother having been part of an operation to transport Jewish children to Britain during the war.

He abandoned that project due to lack of funding and attacks by critics, who called the concept ‘disgusting’ and ‘creepy’.

But times have changed, Bernard told AFP.

Pfister compared the shift to the way Hollywood is now seen as being able to make powerful history-based films such as the 1993 hit *Schindler’s List* by Steven Spielberg.

“The consensus today is that Hollywood is capable of making films about the Holocaust,” Pfister said.

“I am optimistic that video games will also find a language to talk about it.”

AFP

US citizen killed in West Bank

Washington, US - An Israeli who was killed in violence in the West Bank city of Jericho on Monday was also a US citizen, State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

“We condemn the horrific killing of two Israeli brothers near Nablus and the killing today of an Israeli near Jericho, who we understand was also an American citizen,” Price told reporters. Price did not identify the victim. But in a tweet US Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides identified the person as male.

“I can confirm that a US citizen was killed in one of the terror attacks in the West Bank tonight. I pray for his family,” Nides wrote.

Price called on Israel to take action against the settlers behind the violence as well as those suspected in the deaths of the Israelis.

He said one Palestinian man was killed and 300 injured in the attack by Israeli settlers, which left dozens of homes and cars torched.

“We also condemn the wide-scale indiscriminate violence by settlers against Palestinian civilians following the killings,” he said. “These actions are completely unacceptable,” Price said.

Price said the United States appreciates calls by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Isaac Herzog for a halt to ‘vigilante violence’.

AFP

Blinken vows US support for Kazakhstan's independence

Astana, Kazakhstan - Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday vowed US support for Kazakhstan's independence as he sought greater engagement in Central Asia, where traditional alliances with Russia have been rattled by the Ukraine invasion.

Blinken will also visit Uzbekistan and meet foreign ministers of all five former Soviet republics of Central Asia on his first trip to the region where neighbouring China also plays a key role.

"As you know well, the United States strongly supports Kazakhstan's sovereignty, its independence, its territorial integrity," Blinken said in talks at the foreign ministry in Kazakhstan's capital Astana. "Sometimes we just say those words and they actually have no meaning. And of course, in this particular time, they have even more resonance than usual," Blinken said, referring to Russia's assault on Ukraine a year ago. Blinken later headed to the imposing palace in the capital to meet President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev who voiced 'appreciation' for US support for Kazakhstan's sovereignty.

Tokayev said, without explanation before the press, that he had received three personal messages from President Joe Biden.

"We have built very good and reliable long-term partnerships in so many strategically important areas" with the United States, Tokayev said.

Blinken told him that the United States has made 'important strides' for greater ties with



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets with Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev at Ak Orda Presidential Palace in Astana on Tuesday (AFP)

As you know well, the United States strongly supports Kazakhstan's sovereignty, its independence, its territorial integrity... US has made important strides for greater ties

ANTONY BLINKEN

Kazakhstan in recent years and would look for practical ways to do more with Central Asian nations - which also include Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Spotlight on sanctions

The trip is the most senior to Central Asia by an official in the

Biden administration and comes days after the anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has received billions of dollars in Western support.

Central Asian nations have longstanding security and economic relationships with Russia that have come under greater scrutiny since the war.

A recent study by the Euro-

pean Bank for Reconstruction and Development found a spike in EU and British exports to Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan - part of a customs union with Russia - and suggested that the flow was meant to evade the sweeping Western sanctions on Russia.

The United States at the same time has sought to spare Central Asia from actions on Russia. Washington has issued a sanctions exemption for the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, which carries Kazakh oil to the West and goes through Russia.

Unlike fellow former Soviet republic Belarus, Central Asian nations have not rallied behind

Moscow over the war.

All five Central Asian nations abstained or did not vote last week on a UN General Assembly resolution that demanded that Moscow pull out of Ukraine.

President Vladimir Putin's justifications for the war, which included deploring the treatment of Russian speakers in Ukraine, have rattled nerves in Central Asian nations with sizable Russian minorities.

Kazakhstan, which has the longest land border with Russia at 7,644km (4,750 miles), has welcomed Russians fleeing military service and called for a diplomatic resolution to the war that respects international law.

Tokayev recently spoke by telephone with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, although he also visited Putin last year to reaffirm ties.

China, which the United States views as its most significant long-term challenger, has also been seeking to expand influence in the adjacent region. President Xi Jinping last year chose Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for his first foreign trip since the COVID-19 pandemic.

After Central Asia, Blinken will head to New Delhi for a meeting of the Group of 20 foreign ministers. He is expected to avoid Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, whom he has only spoken to by telephone since the war, with the United States believing that Moscow is not sincere about a negotiated solution.

AFP



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Prime Minister Sanna Marin of Finland meet the press in Helsinki, Finland, on Tuesday (AFP)

Finland moves closer to joining NATO leaving Sweden behind

Helsinki, Finland - Finland, which has one of Europe's longest borders with Russia, on Tuesday kicks off a parliamentary debate aimed at accelerating the country's bid to join NATO, increasing the likelihood it will leave neighbour and military partner Sweden behind.

Spooked by Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, Finland and Sweden dropped their decades-long policies of military non-alignment and applied to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in May last year.

But facing fewer diplomatic hurdles than Stockholm, Helsinki appears set to move forward even before Finland's April general elections, as public opinion also supports membership in the transatlantic military alliance.

The two countries have the support of all but two of NATO's 30 members, the holdouts being Hungary and particularly Turkey.

Many Finnish MPs have pushed for legislation affirming that Finland accepts the terms of the NATO treaty to be passed before the elections on April 2.

Finland will debate the bill on Tuesday, coinciding with a visit from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg - who will meet with Prime Minister Sanna Marin and President Sauli Niinisto.

A vote is expected by Wednesday, and having the bill passed means that Finland can act swiftly even if the ratifications come in before a new government has been formed.

Complications?

The legislation is expected to pass without much opposition, as the initial membership bid in May was supported by 188 of the 200 members in parliament.

Helsinki has so far stressed its preference to join the alliance together with Sweden, but some have interpreted the bill as sig-

nalling that Finland is ready to move forward alone.

Turkey has meanwhile blocked the bids, accusing Sweden in particular of providing a safe haven for what it considers 'terrorists', especially members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

In contrast, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said on Monday that Turkey looked favourably on Finland's bid.

"We may separate Sweden and Finland's membership process," he said.

While Sweden sympathises with Finland's position, Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson has said Finland's joining alone could 'complicate' the close military cooperation between the Nordic

Facing fewer diplomatic hurdles than Stockholm, Helsinki appears set to move forward even before April general elections

countries as Sweden is left alone outside of NATO protection.

While passing the bill does not mean that Finland will automatically join NATO after ratification by Turkey and Hungary, it puts in place a deadline for how long it can wait for its neighbour.

The government's chancellor of justice, Tuomas Poysti, said that after the bill is approved by the parliament, the president can wait a maximum of three months to sign it. After the president has signed the law, there is still some time to wait for Sweden, 'a few weeks at most', before depositing the instruments of accession to Washington.

AFP

Macron plans reduction of French troops in Africa

Paris, France - President Emmanuel Macron on Monday announced a 'noticeable reduction' of French troop presence in Africa, where anti-French sentiment is running high in some former colonies.

He was speaking in Paris ahead of a four-nation tour of central African countries from Wednesday, as France seeks to counter growing Chinese and Russian influence in the region.

Macron is to visit Gabon for an environmental summit, followed by Angola, then the Republic of Congo, or Congo-Brazzaville, and finally the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo.

Paris has fallen out with new military authorities in Mali and Burkina Faso, withdrawing its

troops from both former French colonies after years helping the authorities there battle militants.

France still has thousands of troops in the wider Sahel region, including in Niger and Chad, but is seeking to tone down its presence on the ground.

Macron described this as a 're-organisation' of French military presence, rather than a withdrawal. "The change will happen in the coming months with a noticeable reduction of our numbers and a greater presence in these bases of our African partners," he said.

"We will remain but with a reduced footprint," he said.

"We will do more training, more equipping and better accompanying" of local troops ac-



Emmanuel Macron (AFP)

cording to their needs, he said.

Some military bases would become academies, while others would become 'partner' bases, he added.

They would see a 'rise in the presence of their African partners

according to goals defined' by these partners, he added.

'Criminal mercenaries'

Alarm has grown in Paris over the growing role of Russia in French-speaking African countries, alongside a Chinese push for influence that has been apparent for some years.

France and its Western allies accuse Russian mercenary group Wagner, infamous for its activities in Syria and Ukraine, of being active in Mali and the Central African Republic, also ruled by France in the colonial era.

Reports suggest Wagner is seeking to implant itself in Burkina Faso, claims Moscow dismissed last week.

In recent months, Paris has also accused Russia of spreading disinformation to undermine French interests on the continent.

Macron on Monday described Wagner as 'a group of criminal mercenaries... acting as life insurance for failing regimes or those who seized power by force'.

He dismissed the group as only bringing a 'security response' to a country's issues, at the cost of 'preying on mines, raw materials'.

French sources earlier this year said a Wagner delegation had visited mineral-rich Burkina Faso, where a Russian firm already operates several gold mines.

AFP

Vietnam to name new president this week: Sources

Hanoi, Vietnam - Vietnam will name a new president later this week, officials said on Tuesday, after the dramatic resignation of Nguyen Xuan Phuc as part of an anti-corruption drive.

Vo Van Thuong, 52, is expected to be confirmed at an extraordinary meeting of the country's national assembly on Thursday, official political and government sources told AFP on condition of anonymity.

His expected appointment comes during a period of significant political upheaval in Vietnam, where the all-powerful Communist Party's anti-graft purge and factional fighting have seen several ministers fired. Authoritarian Vietnam is run by the party, which is officially led by the general secretary, president

and prime minister.

Thuong is seen as close to Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong, the most powerful man in the party and the architect of the anti-corruption campaign. "The party central committee will meet on Wednesday, while the almost 500-member national assembly will meet at its fourth extraordinary meeting on Thursday," a national assembly source told AFP.

"For sure the national assembly is meeting to vote for the presidency, which is scheduled to be given to Vo Van Thuong," another government source said. Thuong has served as deputy head of the Central Steering Committee on Prevention and Control of Corruption and Negative Phenomena since 2021.

AFP

Panama City, Panama - The world's oceans and the multiple threats they face, from climate change and pollution to overfishing and mining, will be the focus of a global conference in Panama this week.

Some 600 leaders of government, the business sector, green groups and academics will gather in the Central American country on Thursday and Friday to discuss expanding marine protected areas (MPAs), assuring a sustainable ocean-derived 'blue economy', and reducing stressors on an invaluable but at-risk resource.

Covering three-quarters of Earth, the oceans are home to 80 per cent of all life on the planet, and provide nourishment for more than three billion people as well as a crucial avenue for global trade. "We cannot commit to saving our ocean ecosystems without limiting human activities within them," states the website



This file photo shows vultures over garbage, including plastic waste, at the beach of the Costa del Este neighbourhood in Panama City, during the World Oceans Day on June 8, 2020 (AFP)

for the eighth edition of the international Our Ocean conference.

"This vital asset is in danger from global warming, unsustainable practices, illegal fishing, reckless pollution, and the loss of marine habitats," it added.

According to Courtney Farthing, policy director at Global

Fishing Watch, the conference 'is key to maintain political will on ocean action'.

By bringing governments, activists and industry together, 'we are able to increase our collective understanding of the issues our ocean is facing and successful initiatives that could be more

widely adopted', she told AFP.

Observers say the Our Ocean gathering is important as it is the only conference to address all ocean-related issues under a single roof.

It also serves as a public stage for governments, through senior ministers in attendance, to put

on a show of political will.

Fear for sea floor

The conference takes place amid growing concern about multinational companies eyeing minerals on the ocean floor.

These include so-called manganese nodules, settled on the seabed, that contain metals critical in battery production. Environmentalists say harvesting them would be devastating for deep-sea ecosystems.

"There isn't really a big extraction today, but there is a significant advance in technology and machinery to eventually extract minerals, mainly rare minerals," Maximiliano Bello of non-governmental organisation Mission Blue explained.

Conference delegates will not adopt agreements or vote on proposals, but rather announce voluntary 'commitments' to ocean protection.

AFP

INDIA

Jailed Delhi ministers Sisodia, Jain resign

SC refused to entertain Sisodia's plea challenging his arrest in connection with excise policy case

New Delhi, India - Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders and Delhi ministers Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain resigned from their posts in the state cabinet on Tuesday.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal accepted their resignation, which will now be sent to Delhi L-G V K Saxena. The development comes two days after Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Sisodia was arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in connection with the Delhi excise policy case.

Sisodia was arrested on Sunday in an ongoing investigation of a case related to alleged irregularities in the framing and implementation of the excise policy of the Delhi government.

Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to entertain Sisodia's plea challenging his arrest in connection with the case.

The apex court suggested Sisodia to move Delhi High Court. A bench headed by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud said that the court is not inclined to entertain the petition



Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supporters stage a protest outside Thane Collector's office against the Central Government over the arrest of Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia by CBI in an alleged liquor policy scam, in Mumbai on Tuesday (ANI)

at this stage. "It can not interfere in the matter as it may open the gate of people approaching the top court in every such matter,"

the court remarked.

Delhi's Rouse Avenue Court on Monday had sent him to CBI custody for five days.

Meanwhile, the CBI has quizzed Satyendar Jain in Tihar Jail in connection with alleged corruption in the implementa-

tion of the excise policy.

Jain is presently lodged in judicial custody in connection with another money laundering

case registered by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

His name surfaced in the matter along with another cabinet minister of Delhi as well as Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

According to the concerned lawyers, CBI has also quizzed Vijay Nair, who is also lodged in Tihar Jail in connection with the ED case related to the excise policy. Nair was granted bail in a CBI case by the trial court earlier. Recently, CBI and ED have made several arrests for alleged corruption in the implementation of the Delhi excise policy.

The Supreme Court, while hearing Sisodia's plea on Tuesday, remarked that various legal remedies were available for him in different forums including efficacious remedies for quashing FIR and bail plea in Delhi court.

The court remarked just because an incident happens in Delhi does not mean the matter will come to the Supreme Court.

Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi who is representing Sisodia urged the court to grant relief to him, questioning

why there was a need for arrest. The lawyer also said that Sisodia is not a flight risk.

Aam Aadmi Party leaders and workers had staged protests in various states on Monday, crying vendetta behind Sisodia's arrest and calling for his release at the earliest.

The workers were seen sitting on roads and chanting slogans while some staged a foot march wearing handcuffs against the BJP in the national capital. The workers were seen attempting to cross the barricades as the police tried to push them back.

AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj said they came to get arrested, 'as CBI has arrested Sisodia in a false case'. "The Centre wants to arrest every leader, MLA and minister of the AAP. So we, too, have come to PM Modi asking to be arrested. End our party and put us all in jail. The world should know that there is a dictatorship in India and the situation of Emergency is prevailing," he said.

ANI

Galwan martyr's father thrashed, arrested over 'land encroachment'

Vaishali, India - Family members of a jawan, who was among the soldiers who lost their lives in the 2020 Galwan Valley clash with Chinese PLA troops in eastern Ladakh, have alleged that the martyr's father was thrashed and arrested by the police for building a memorial for his son on government land in Jandaha in Bihar's Vaishali.

The jawan whose father was targeted was identified as Jai Kishore Singh. However, the police claimed that the matter is linked to an issue of illegal encroachment, which was in violation of the rights of the landowner.

"On January 23, a case was registered under SC/ST Act over a statue being erected on the land of Hari Nath Ram and on government land in Jandaha. Later,

walls bordering the statue were built. They have not sought any permission. If they wanted, they could have made it in their own land or sought land from the government. There would not have been an issue then. The landowner's rights being violated due to illegal encroachment," the SDPO Mahua said.

However, Nand Kishore, the brother of the martyr Jai Kishore Singh, who himself is in the armed forces, accused the police of thrashing his father and abusing him. "DSP ma'am visited us, asking us to remove the statue within 15 days. I said I will show her the document. Later, the police station in-charge came to our home and beat up my father before arresting him. They also abused my father."

ANI

China's FM Qin Gang to attend G20 meeting

Beijing, China - China on Tuesday confirmed that its Foreign Minister Qin Gang will be participating in the Group of 20 (G20) Foreign Ministers' meeting in India, reported Reuters.

During a press briefing, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said, "The G20 should focus on prominent challenges in the global economy. China stands ready to work with all parties to ensure the G20 foreign ministers' meeting sends a positive signal on multilateralism." The G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting (FMM) is scheduled to take place in physical format from March 1-2, 2023 in New Delhi under India's presidency.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to address the foreign ministers of the member countries of G20 and he will talk about India's growing influence globally.

The March 1-2 meeting of the G20 foreign ministers is being held days after a meeting of finance chiefs of the bloc in

G20 should focus on prominent challenges in the global economy. China stands ready to work with all parties to ensure meeting sends a positive signal on multilateralism

MAO NING

Bengaluru.

The New Delhi meeting will be attended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly. In all, representatives of 40 countries, including non-G20 members invited by India, and multilateral organisations will attend.

Mao also reacted to the White House setting a deadline for removing TikTok from fed-



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar meets Mauritius FM Alan Ganoo on the sidelines of G20 FM's meeting, in New Delhi on Tuesday (ANI)

eral devices.

"US is overstressing concept of national security, abusing state power to suppress

foreign companies, we firmly oppose those wrong actions," she added.

The White House on Mon-

day gave federal agencies 30 days to purge the Chinese-owned app TikTok from all government-issued devices.

The directive comes after congressional legislation passed in December banned the popular video-sharing app from federal government devices and systems, amid concerns TikTok's parent company ByteDance could allow the Chinese Communist Party access to user data, reported New York Post.

Several government agencies, including the White House, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, and the State Department, had preemptively banned TikTok from government devices before Congress's December vote.

Meanwhile, ByteDance-owned TikTok has said the concerns are fueled by misinformation and has denied using the app to spy on the Americans.

ANI

Ukraine army says situation 'extremely tense' around Bakhmut

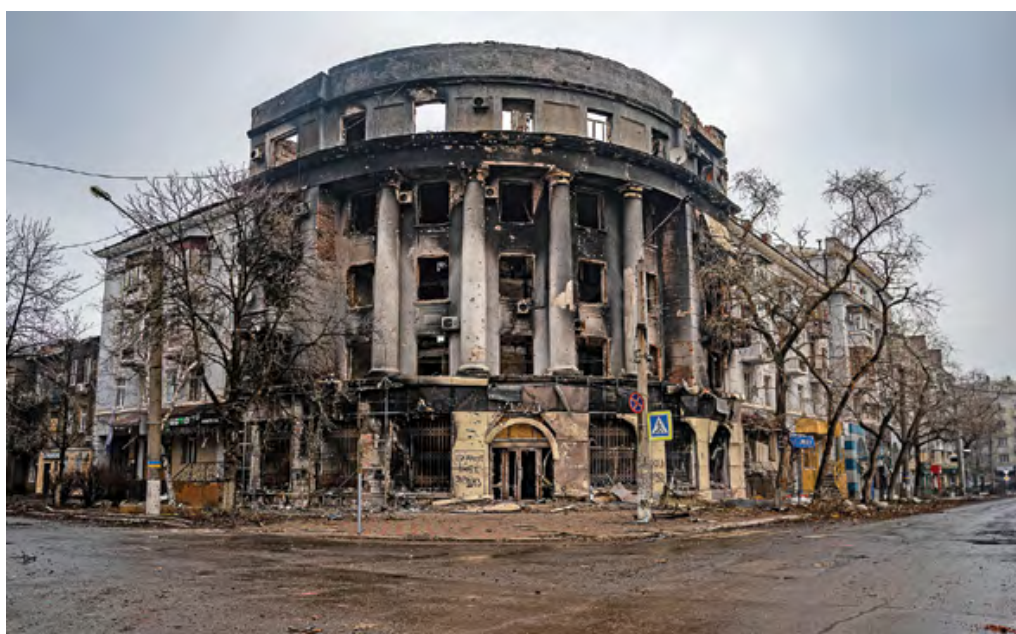
Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine said on Tuesday its troops were under pressure in the near-destroyed frontline city of Bakhmut, where Russian forces were launching heavy assaults after months of fighting.

The former eastern industrial hub has become largely a political objective since the longest battle in Russia's year-long invasion has already reduced it to rubble, causing high casualties on both sides.

As combat raged, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said the priority for Ukraine was to fight off Russia's invasion with allies' backing and that in the 'long-term' the nation would join the alliance.

AFP aerial footage shows almost all of Bakhmut's buildings in ruins and smoke rising over the city once known for its sparkling wine production and salt mines.

The governor of the eastern Donetsk region Pavlo Kyrylenko said mid-February that out of the 70,000 people who lived in the



A damaged and burnt building is seen in Bakhmut on Monday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine (AFP)

city before the war, less than 5,000 civilians including 140 children remained.

"The situation around Bakhmut is extremely tense," the commander of Ukraine's ground forces Oleksandr Syrskyi said on

social media.

"Despite taking significant losses, the enemy has dispatched its best-trained Wagner assault units to try to break through the defences of our troops and surround the city," Syrskyi said, re-

ferring to the Russian paramilitary group.

'Most likely fall'

Ukrainian soldiers in Bakhmut told AFP that Russian soldiers were launching fierce assaults.

"I think Bakhmut will most likely fall," said a Ukrainian soldier with the call sign 'Fox', acknowledging that the opposing forces are making progress.

"They say (Russians soldiers) are idiots, drug addicts," the 40-year-old said. "But they have smart people there, people who know how to fight... They think, they learn, the same way we do."

Ukraine has vowed to hold on, with President Volodymyr Zelensky visiting the devastated city in December. Zelensky has said Ukraine would fight for the fortress city as long as it can, and has for months urged weapons deliveries from allies to help Ukraine take back territory lost in the Donetsk region.

The war is taking place on Ukraine's soil but on Tuesday Russia said its forces downed two Ukrainian drones that targeted civilian infrastructure in the nation's south, the latest in a series of drone incidents inside

Russia that Moscow blamed on Kyiv.

Wagner leading

Ukraine has been faced by Russian troops determined to seize Bakhmut, whose symbolic importance now outstrips its military significance. In particular, the Wagner group, a once-shadowy force founded by Kremlin-linked businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, has taken centre stage in the fight for Bakhmut.

Rivalry between Wagner and the regular Russian army has come to the surface, with Prigozhin last week issuing an unprecedented call to Russians to take his side and urging the defence ministry to share ammunition with his fighters.

Prigozhin has maintained his fighters have been leading the offensive in the area and personally claimed the capture of several villages around Bakhmut in recent days.

AFP

Poisoning: Dozens of Iran girls in hospital

Tehran, Iran - Dozens of schoolgirls in Iran were hospitalised on Tuesday after a mysterious poisoning, an Iranian news agency reported, the latest in a spate of suspected attacks in the Islamic republic.

Hundreds of cases of respiratory distress have been reported in the past three months among Iranian schoolgirls mainly in the holy city of Qom, south of Tehran, with some needing hospitalisation.

A government official said on Sunday that the attacks were believed to be a deliberate attempt to force the closure of girls' schools.

AFP

MIRACLE OF WELLINGTON

New Zealand beat England by one run after following on in ‘crazy’ second Test

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand beat England by just one run in a second-Test thriller on Tuesday to draw the series in the most dramatic fashion in Wellington.

The hosts made a slice of history in becoming only the fourth team in 146 years of Test cricket to win after being asked to follow on.

Neil Wagner took the decisive wicket of James Anderson when New Zealand wicketkeeper Tom Blundell pulled off a diving catch at the Basin Reserve to seal a memorable, nail-biting triumph.

The home side had fought back to set an attacking England a target of 258 runs to win, but the visitors were all out for 256 as a gripping two-Test series finished 1-1.

It was only the second time in Test cricket that a side has won by one run, matching the West Indies team who beat Australia by the same wafer-thin margin at Adelaide in 1993.

“Amazing achievement, hats off to everyone, everyone kept fighting,” said left-arm pace bowler Wagner, who finished with 4-62 including the key wickets of Ben Stokes and Joe Root.

England skipper Stokes was disappointed to have lost, as the



New Zealand's Neil Wagner (C) celebrates taking the final wicket of England's James Anderson in the second Test at the Basin Reserve in Wellington on Tuesday (AFP)

What England have done for Test cricket over the last year has been amazing. I don't know why there always seems to be such close encounters between us, but these games bring out the best in both sides

TIM SOUTHEE

attacking “Bazball” cricket under head coach Brendon McCullum hit the buffers, but happy to have played his part in the drama.

“That game is what Test cricket is about - the emotions we were going through and the Kiwi boys as well,” said Stokes, who was born in New Zealand.

“Everyone’s got their money’s worth today. What a game. After I got out, I went to watch and what unfolded was massively up and down,” added Stokes. “It was crazy.”

It was the first time New Zealand have won after being forced to follow on. England had

managed it twice, against Australia in 1894 and 1981, while India beat Australia in 2001.

Captain Tim Southee praised the visitors’ contribution to a pulsating Test match that will live long in the memory.

“What England have done for Test cricket over the last year or so has been amazing,” said Southee, after New Zealand halted England’s run of six straight wins.

“I don’t know why there always seems to be such close encounters between us, but these games bring out the best in both sides.”

FIVE GREAT TEST MATCH THRILLERS

Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand’s dramatic one-run victory over England at Wellington on Tuesday was only the second time in nearly 2,500 Tests dating back 146 years that a match had been won by such a narrow margin.

Here are five other nail-biting Tests

1993, ADELAIDE
West Indies beat Australia by one run
A great West Indies side that had been the dominant force in Test cricket since the mid 1970s were just starting to show signs of fraying round the edges when they achieved this thrilling success on Australia Day. Curtly Ambrose led the West Indies to victory after Australia had rallied from 74-7. But Ambrose had last man Craig McDermott caught behind with Australia needing just two more runs.

1999, BARBADOS
West Indies beat Australia by one wicket
By now West Indies were no longer Test cricket’s preeminent power. But two months after West Indies were whitewashed 5-0 in South Africa, star batsman Brian Lara produced one of his greatest innings against the strongest team of his era in Australia. West Indies, set 308 to win, collapsed to 105-5 against an attack boasting two all-time greats in Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne.

2005, Edgbaston
England beat Australia by two runs
England had not won an Ashes series since 1986/87 prior to this campaign and were, it seemed, about to go 2-0 down in a five-match contest. All looked well for England as Australia slumped to 137-7 chasing a target of 282. But their tail dragged Australia back into the game until, with England in near despair, Steve Harmison had Michael Kasprovicz caught behind.

2019, Durban
Sri Lanka beat South Africa by one wicket
Sri Lanka were all but beaten at 226-9 chasing 304 only for Kusal Perera to lead the tourists to victory with a sensational 153 not out. He also oversaw an unbroken last-wicket stand of 78 with Vishwa Fernando where the last man made a gutsy six not out off 27 balls faced. Sri Lanka went on to triumph in Port Elizabeth as well to become the first Asian side to win a Test series in South Africa.

2019, Headingley
England beat Australia by one wicket
Six months on from Mendis’ heroics, now England captain Ben Stokes -- on the losing side on Tuesday -- produced a similarly extraordinary innings to snatch a miraculous victory from the jaws of defeat.

Stokes produced what could yet be the best innings of his Test career by making 135 not out as England, reeling at 286-9, reached a target of 359 - their highest run-chase to win a Test.



Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha (R) with Taijul Islam (C) and spin bowling coach Rangana Herath

Bangladesh ready for ODI reality check against England

Dhaka, Bangladesh - New Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha said Tuesday he was bracing for a reality check against England but promised an “aggressive” posture when his team take on the reigning one-day international champions.

The three-match series begins in Dhaka on Wednesday and will test Bangladesh at a time when they have developed into a formidable force in the 50-over format.

They have won 12 of their last 15 ODIs, but England are the only visitors to have won a one-day series in Bangladesh since 2015.

“They are the world champions. They have one team playing somewhere else. They have another team here. They have a mind-blowing depth of talent,” Hathurusingha said, referring to the England Test team’s tour of New Zealand. “We want to see where we are at, and find out the gap that we have to bridge. If we do well in these conditions, it will give us confidence,” he added.

“They have one of the best pace attacks in the world. They have five fast bowlers and three spinners on this tour. The challenge will be to play their fast

bowlers in this series.”

Former Sri Lanka batsman Hathurusingha, 54, returned as Bangladesh coach last week for his second stint at the helm.

During his first tenure he was widely hailed as the architect of some of the national side’s finest moments, including ODI series wins against Pakistan, India and South Africa.

But he was often reported to be at loggerheads with Bangladesh’s senior cricketers, including current captains Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal, while coach from 2014 to 2017.

Golden wicket: Labourer’s daughter, 15, scores India cricket payday

Firozabad, India - Cricketer Sonam Yadav could not afford sports shoes when she was younger but now the 15-year-old is set to play in India’s Women’s Premier League and says the money will transform life for her family.

Sonam was the youngest player drafted for the inaugural edition of the Twenty20 tournament when she joined Mumbai Indians at auction and took home a cheque for one million rupees (\$12,000).

News of her signing sparked celebrations in her village, where blackouts are a daily occurrence and piped water only a recent arrival.

Her contract is dwarfed by the standards of the men’s Indian Premier League, but it is 100 times her father’s monthly wage from shift work at a glass factory.

“It’s very difficult to make ends meet with my father’s salary. We have to face a lot of money problems,” Sonam, the youngest of six siblings, told AFP.

“I have many dreams, I want to take my family out for dinner and give a big car to my father,” the left-arm spinner said.

Her family home on the outskirts of Firozabad, an hour’s drive from the Taj Mahal, sits



Indian cricketer Sonam Yadav gets ready for a net practice in Firozabad in Uttar Pradesh

next to a fetid open sewage drain and battles occasional intrusions from rodents and stray dogs.

The ramshackle home has peeling plaster and constant power cuts, but it is lit up by a row of glittering gold trophies and mementoes won by the household’s star bowler, who started playing cricket aged 10.

“We could not afford expensive cricket gear. She did not even have proper shoes and had to borrow a pair before going to

trials for a tournament,” said father Mukesh Kumar, 53.

“I started working double shifts and my son dropped out of school and took up a private job to support her dreams.”

The WPL begins on Saturday and could transform women’s cricket globally in the same way that the lucrative IPL did the men’s game. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) auctioned off franchise rights for five inaugural teams in January

for \$572.5 million, while media rights for the first five seasons were sold for \$116.7 million.

The two deals made it the second most valuable women’s sporting league after the WNBA basketball in the United States, according to media reports.

“The WPL will change the face of women’s cricket drastically,” said Sonam’s local coach Ravi Yadav, no relation to the young athlete.

AFP

'Rahul's vice-captaincy removal means nothing'

India have not finalised the playing XI for the third Test against Australia, says captain Rohit Sharma

Indore, India - India skipper Rohit Sharma on Tuesday played down KL Rahul's removal from the vice-captaincy but kept the door open for a change in team for the third Test against Australia.

The hosts will look to clinch the series in the match starting on Wednesday in Indore after they took an unbeatable 2-0 lead to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

There have been calls from pundits and former cricketers to bring in 23-year-old opener Shubman Gill in place of Rahul, who has managed 38 runs in three innings of the series.

Rahul, a veteran of 47 Tests, was Rohit's deputy in the first two Tests but had that role taken off him for the final two matches.

"When we talk about players going through a tough time anyone with potential will be given enough time to prove themselves," Rohit told reporters.

Rohit added: "His removal of vice-captaincy doesn't indicate



India captain Rohit Sharma during a training session ahead of their third Test against Australia

anything as far as Gill and KL both are concerned. All 17-18 (in the squad) are in the reckoning. We have not yet finalised on our XI. I prefer to announce it at the toss."

India are one win away from securing their berth in the World Test Championship final, scheduled for The Oval in London in June.

"It will be a great achievement," Rohit said.

"(In) this cycle after the last World Test Championship, the way we played, the way we played in certain conditions, has been remarkable."

Rohit urged his team against complacency against an Australia side which is missing several key players, including captain Pat Cummins, and has been well beaten so far.

He also warned that all batting

sides can collapse on India's turning pitches, as happened to the tourists in the second Test.

"Yes these are our home conditions, but these are challenging conditions that we are playing in," Rohit said. "It is not easy for batsmen to keep scoring consistently. We were put under pressure in the last Test and we can expect the same here."

India's lower-order batting was

key in the first two Tests, with Axar Patel leading the charge with 158 runs in two innings.

Patel, Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Ashwin "are literally top-order batsmen", said the skipper. "They are quality batters. Even if we are four or five down we know we have the quality in our batsmen who can get the runs on board."

AFP



Steve Smith inspects the Indore pitch

Captaincy 'brings the best out of me', says Australia's Smith

Indore, India - Australia's Steve Smith said Tuesday he was frustrated with his performances in India but confident his spell as stand-in skipper can revive the tourists' fortunes after two dismal losses.

Smith will lead Australia in the third Test starting Wednesday in Indore, after regular captain Pat Cummins left to be with his ill mother following the team's second successive defeat.

India have retained the Border-Gavaskar Trophy with a 2-0 lead in the four-Test series.

Smith has managed just 71 runs in four innings this series. He fell lbw for nine in his last outing after a failed sweep shot, triggering an Australian collapse in which eight wickets fell for 28 runs in New Delhi.

"I don't think there's been too many times I've walked off the field and I've gone, 'what the hell am I doing?'" Smith told reporters.

"I was pretty angry. There

hasn't been too many times in my career where I've actually come off and just been bedazzled by what I've done. It wasn't my finest moment."

Smith, 33, was Australia captain between 2014 and 2018 before the "sandpaper-gate" scandal in South Africa ended his tenure.

He was Australia's leading batsman during their last Tests in India with 499 runs including three centuries, but his team went down 2-1 in that hard-fought series.

Despite failing to match that form during this tour, he is hopeful his leadership can deliver a turnaround.

"It normally brings the best out of me," he said of the captaincy. "I'm excited about leading this week in Pat's absence. I know these conditions well. It's kind of like my second home playing over here, I've played a lot in India, I understand the intricacies of the game and what the wickets are likely to do."



South Africa's Aiden Markram plays a shot during his knock of 115 (AFP)

West Indies fight back after Markram century for Proteas

Centurion, South Africa - Aiden Markram hit a century on his return to Test cricket but the West Indies mounted a strong fight-back on the first day of the first Test against South Africa at SuperSport Park on Tuesday.

Markram made 115 in a South Africa total of 314 for eight.

Fast bowler Alzarri Joseph spearheaded the West Indian bowling attack, taking three for 60. South Africa looked set to take full control when they reached 221 for one after new captain Temba Bavuma won the toss and decided to bat.

But they lost seven more wickets before the close while adding another 93 runs, with the West Indian bowlers finding swing, lateral movement and more consistency with the old ball.

An opening partnership of 141 between Markram and former cap-tain Dean Elgar (71) was followed by a stand of 80 between Markram and new cap Tony de Zorzi. The left-handed De Zorzi was looking comfortable before he was run out for 28.

De Zorzi punched a ball from Joseph through the covers and completed a comfortable two runs. Tagenarine Chanderpaul made a good sliding stop and De Zorzi was sent back after setting off for an unlikely third.

Chanderpaul's throw was off target but wicketkeeper Joshua Da Silva cleverly flicked the ball into the stumps.

Bavuma, on his first appearance as South Africa's first Black African captain, was leg before wicket for nought.

'No days off' as Man Utd eye more silverware

London, United Kingdom - Luke Shaw says Manchester United have adopted a "no days off" philosophy as the League Cup winners look to add to their first trophy in six years.

Erik ten Hag's side beat Newcastle 2-0 in the League Cup final on Sunday, signalling the club's return to prominence after a long period of underachievement.

Shaw played a key role in the Wembley triumph, delivering the pin-point free-kick that Casemiro headed home to put United in front. But there has been little time for the United defender and his team-mates to recover from their hard-fought win and the subsequent celebrations.

With an FA Cup fifth round tie against West Ham looming at Old Trafford on Wednesday, Ten Hag's men were back in training just 19 hours after lifting the League Cup.

They flew from Luton back to Manchester, landing at 2330 GMT on Sunday, before training early on Monday afternoon at



Manchester United's Luke Shaw in action against Newcastle United in the English League Cup final (AFP)

their Carrington base.

After enduring United's longest trophy drought for 40 years, Shaw insisted the squad are happy to endure such a hectic schedule because they are relishing their long overdue

success.

"Of course the game is really big on Wednesday. It's a competition that we want to look to win. I think that's why we're in today. There's no days off," Shaw said.

"There weren't really many

celebrations last night, so I think full focus after that was just to make sure that we come in today and prepare for that game.

"Like I said, it's a competition we want to stay involved in."

After finishing a dismal sixth

in the Premier League last season, United have been transformed by Ten Hag, with the potential for further silverware this season.

As well as their FA Cup tie, United face Real Betis in the Europa League last 16 in March and sit third in the Premier League.

Ten Hag and his players were joined in the Wembley dressing room celebrations by co-owner Avram Glazer and the club's legendary former boss Alex Ferguson.

Shaw wants more of that feeling, telling Sky Sports: "In the changing room and stuff it was a nice feeling to get our first one all together.

"I think getting a little bit of a taste of that we want more and that's our aim for the rest of the season. "We all love working under the manager and we all believe in what he wants us to do. We're really enjoying our football at the moment, so hopefully that can continue."

AFP

French prosecutors open rape investigation into PSG's Hakimi

Nanterre, France - French prosecutors on Monday opened an investigation into alleged rape by Paris Saint-Germain full-back Achraf Hakimi, a source close to the case said.

A 24-year-old woman has accused the Moroccan international of raping her at his home in a Paris suburb on February 25.

According to the source, confirming an article in the Parisien newspaper, the woman reported the incident at a police station on Sunday but did not file charges.

The public prosecutor's office handling the case in Nanterre declined to comment, but complained to AFP that "information already made public" in the media "undermined the neces-



Achraf Hakimi

Hakimi was at the FIFA Best awards ceremony in Paris, and was named in the FIFPro men's world team of the year.

sary investigations to find out the truth". Hakimi was part of the Morocco team that finished fourth in the World Cup in Qatar.

And Monday he was at the FIFA Best awards ceremony in Paris, where he was named in the FIFPro world team of the year.

On stage to collect the award he stood alongside another award winner, his PSG teammate and close friend, Kylian Mbappe.

Mbappe's France may have ended Morocco's World Cup adventure but Hakimi had spoken of their friendship before the competition: "We are two young men who have like the same things, we chat about music, video games, we go to restaurants," he told the Parisien.

Born in Madrid, his penalty secured a 3-0 shoot-out win over Spain to steer Morocco into uncharted territory, with the north African side going on to become the first from the Arab world to reach the last four at a World Cup.

STATING THE OBVIOUS

Lionel Messi beats Kylian Mbappe to FIFA Best prize, Alexia Putellas claims women’s award

Paris, France - Lionel Messi won The Best FIFA men’s player prize for 2022 on Monday on the back of his World Cup triumph with Argentina and Spain’s Alexia Putellas retained the women’s award at a ceremony in Paris.

Messi beat his Paris Saint-Germain teammate, and World Cup final rival, Kylian Mbappe to the men’s gong with Ballon d’Or winner Karim Benzema having been the other contender to claim the prize.

It is the second time that Messi has won the honour inaugurated by FIFA in 2016 after football’s world governing body split from Ballon d’Or organisers France Football.

The award, which is voted for by national team coaches and captains, journalists and also fans, recognises a year in which the former Barcelona star crowned his glorious career by leading Argentina to victory at the World Cup.

Messi scored twice in an epic final in Doha as Argentina beat France on penalties despite

Mbappe netting a hat-trick for Les Bleus in a remarkable 3-3 draw.

He also claimed the Golden Ball for the best player at the tournament, although Mbappe was the top scorer with eight goals, one more than Messi.

“This year was just mad for me, to be able to achieve my dream that I had fought so hard for. In the end I got it and it was the most beautiful thing that has happened in my career,” Messi said of his World Cup win as he collected his award.

“It is a dream for every footballer but something that very few can make come true,” added Messi, who was sat in the Paris theatre in between Mbappe and his wife Antonella Rocuzzo.

He took the prize just 24 hours after combining with Mbappe to lead PSG to a 3-0 win against Marseille in Ligue 1.

The 35-year-old, a seven-time Ballon d’Or winner, succeeds Polish star Robert Lewandowski on the FIFA honours list, while Putellas retained the women’s



Argentina and Paris Saint-Germain forward Lionel Messi poses on stage after receiving the Best FIFA Men's Player award in Paris on Monday (AFP)



Spain and Barcelona forward Alexia Putellas with the Best FIFA Women's Player award in Paris on Monday (AFP)

This year was just mad for me, to be able to achieve my dream that I had fought so hard for. In the end I got it and it was the most beautiful thing that has happened in my career

LIONEL MESSI

prize despite spending the second half of last year out injured.

The 29-year-old beat England’s European Championship-winning striker Beth Mead and United States star Alex Morgan to add the FIFA crown to the Ballon d’Or, which she has also won two years running.

Putellas is currently recovering from a serious knee injury suffered last July which ruled her out of the Euro in England with Spain. Prior to that she had scored 11 goals on Barcelona’s run to the Champions League final, which they lost to Lyon.

Putellas has previously said she hopes to return from injury in time to play again this season, but it remains to be seen whether she will feature for Spain at the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand in July and August.

Argentina’s World Cup win in Qatar was also recognised as Lionel Scaloni claimed the men’s coach’s honour and Emiliano Martinez was named the best male goalkeeper.

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Wounded Barca face Madrid in Copa Clasico semi at critical moment

Barcelona, Spain - A wounded Barcelona face Real Madrid in the Copa del Rey semi-final first leg on Thursday hunting for a Clasico win to make coach Xavi Hernandez’s gamble at a critical moment of the season pay off.

Despite missing injured duo Pedri and Ousmane Dembele, Xavi rested other important players in the 1-0 defeat by Almeria on Sunday, prioritising the Clasico cup clash and spurning the chance to stretch their league lead to 10 points on Madrid.

Adding to Barca’s unease ahead of the Clasico, top scorer Robert Lewandowski has suffered a hamstring strain and is set to miss out, although Ansu Fati is poised to return.

Delivering what Xavi described as the “worst performance of the season” at Almeria, Barcelona suffered their second consecutive defeat after they were knocked out of the Europa League by Manchester United at Old Trafford.

A third defeat at the Santiago



Xavi Hernandez

Bernabeu could send the team into a spiral, with their seven-point La Liga lead strong but not unassailable. The Catalans visit the Santiago Bernabeu a day after Osasuna welcome Athletic Bilbao to El Sadar in the other Copa del Rey semi-final first leg.

“We have to change our mind-

to show passion and desire and in the first half we lacked that.”

Anything other than a good result in the capital will raise further questions about the coach’s decision to rest Ronald Araujo, Jules Kounde, Raphinha and Alejandro Balde against Almeria.

Instant results

Xavi has said if his team win La Liga but not the Copa del Rey it would still count as a good season, with the Spanish Super Cup already in the bag.

However, losing this double-header against their arch-rivals would allow further doubts about the project to creep in, fuelling Xavi’s detractors after spending big last summer.

Barcelona brought in several players, including striker Robert Lewandowski from Bayern Munich as well as Kounde and Raphinha, and the outlay they made and the financial manoeuvring they did to get the transfers through demands instant results.

AFP



Lionel Scaloni

Scaloni to stay as Argentina coach till 2026

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Argentina’s World Cup-winning coach Lionel Scaloni has signed a new contract until the 2026 World Cup, the Argentine football federation announced on Monday.

Scaloni, who took over the role in 2018 and guided Lionel Messi’s team to glory in Qatar in December, agreed to the new deal while attending the FIFA Best awards in Paris.

Argentine football chief “Claudio Tapia and Lionel Scaloni met to finalise the extension of his contract until 2026,” a statement from the federation read under the headline “Continuity assured”.

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PARIS FASHION WEEK



A model presents a creation during the presentation of Weinsanto Womenswear Fall-Winter 2023-2024 collection during Paris Fashion Week

TEASERS AND Tributes

A touch of scandal and grief



Paris Fashion Week launched on Monday with touches of scandal and grief, as Balenciaga tries to move past recent controversies while Vivienne Westwood and Paco Rabanne hold their first shows since their founders' deaths. The womenswear week in the French capital caps a hectic February for the fashion world, following on the heels of New York, London and Milan.

All eyes are on Balenciaga - whose hot streak ended abruptly late last year with a spectacularly ill-considered ad campaign that appeared to reference child abuse, featuring children with teddy bear bags that had studs and harnesses surrounded by adult items including wine glasses.

Balenciaga also had to cut ties with Kanye West - who modelled for its last show in Paris in September - after the rapper's controversial comments about Jews.

The scandals hit the bottom line. Coupled with a slump at Gucci, parent company Kering saw fourth-quarter revenues fall by seven per cent.

Profusely apologising in the pages of Vogue, Balenciaga's creative director Demna has vowed to abandon his provocative approach and get back to basics at this week's show on Sunday.

"I have decided to go back to my roots in fashion as well as to the roots of Balenciaga, which is making quality clothes - not making image or buzz," he said.

There is also interest in how Schiaparelli, led by US designer Daniel Roseberry, follows its eye-catching haute couture show in January, when the use of fake animal heads sharply divided audiences.

Posthumous shows

Before then, the opening day focused on young designers, for whom sustainability is now second nature.

"I don't want to enter the vicious cycle of fashion that we're all scared of," said Shanon Poupard, one of 25 students from the French Institute of Fashion taking part in Monday's presentation.

Her knitwear, featuring patterns of bombs, broken hearts and nuclear mushroom clouds, speaks of a generation permanently attuned to the apocalypse - and she wants to join a major fashion house 'to be part of the change'.

The youngsters are followed on Tuesday by big hitters including Christian Dior and Saint Laurent.

Wednesday sees the first show from the house of Paco Rabanne since his death at the age of 88 earlier this month.

And the first Vivienne Westwood show since the dame's death in December will be held on Saturday. Her label's designs have been overseen by her widower, Andreas Kronthaler, for several years.

Pierre Cardin is also returning to the official calendar for the first time in 25 years, following its founder's death in late 2020.

The new collection has been put together by the label's in-house team rather than collaborating with an outside designer, so as not to 'distort Pierre Cardin', director Rodrigo Basilicati-Cardin told AFP.

Fashionistas are also excited to see the first collection from hot young French designer Ludovic de Saint Sernin in his new role at Belgian house Ann Demeulemeester, previously known for its minimalist and monochrome aesthetic.

AFP



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The Women's Fashion Week ended in Milan on Monday. Here are some of the trends that emerged for autumn-winter 2023-2024 - a return to elegance underscored by cut and quality, chic sensuality, and restrained classicism with a smattering of eccentric spice.

Elegant suits

Italian fashion houses have ditched sporty designs and streetwear for elegant, classically cut suits in refined fabrics.

Trousers are long and shoe-covering. Oversized power-shoulder jackets have made way for classic cuts - waisted, belted or gathered at the back.

Dolce & Gabbana showed suits with jackets that are cropped, matador style, or long but structured with wasp waists. Fendi opted for slimline jackets with a single row of buttons, discrete lapel collars and a deconstructed men's waistcoat.

Ferragamo was all cinched-waisted silhouettes, reminiscent of 1950s Hollywood divas. Max Mara's coats are gathered at the back, Tod's jackets waisted or belted, while Moschino went for suits with houndstooth and gold buttons à la Chanel.

Winter lingerie

The effects of climate change made themselves felt on the Milan podiums, where winter collections were diaphanous and revealing, and lingerie much in evidence.

Dolce & Gabbana claimed ownership of this trend, showing a corset bearing a label with its creation date - 1991. Its collection was almost entirely composed of black underwear.

Fendi layered baby dolls over poplin shirts. Roberto Cavalli vamped on the theme, with long hippy versions in silk and velvet. Gucci opted for bijou micro bras and underwear visible through see-through petticoats.

Yeti coats

All-enveloping Yeti-style coats in furry or feathery textiles also took to the podium -- a necessary addition to the



& ECCENTRICITY

skimpy underwear for those keen not to catch their deaths of cold.

Gucci offered up Cruella Deville and blue fake fur. Roberto Cavalli's fake furs are an object lesson in art imitating nature. There were red feathers at Dolce & Gabbana, multicoloured plumes at Moschino. Max Mara's signature teddy bear coats are ultra snugly.

MSGM varied the theme in mauve, lemon and white boucle, with fringes or long fur. Ferragamo's iterations come in pearly grey or flaming red.

Red and black

While black was everywhere, there was still a thread of red to give it up, in all shades from scarlet to bordeaux.

Ferrari, which has launched a ready-to-wear collection, stuck to its iconic red but kept it discreet, in the lining of sombre-hued coats or in black-bordered swatches on dressing gown coats. Dolce & Gabbana went for head-to-toe scarlet - sheer red tights, red patent sandals, red dresses, red bags, red gloves, red lipstick.

Ferragamo added vermillion to minidresses and used it in splashes on black, on bakelite button to light up a black dress and in stitching on a black suit. MSGM selected raspberry red for a dress embracing the rounded contours of a pregnant model.

Prada's leather suit skirts are scarlet, while Fendi demonstrated yet again how well red marries with electric pink.

Uniforms and utility garments

Prada led the way with this trend, transforming the white of nurses' uniforms into long shirts with short trains and the severe, old-fashioned capes of World War Two operators.

The collection's officers' trousers, worn with cravats, are tight-fitted and its slimline slacks high-waisted to give them a feminine touch.

There were aviators' jackets at Tod's and leather officers' belts with little pockets. Fendi's take on utility garments involved adding aprons to trousers or deconstructing blue workman's overalls.

AFP



Models presents a creation of Philipp Plein's Fall-Winter 2023-2024 Women's Collection, on February 25, 2023

