

62 pacts signed to boost agri, industrial sectors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP), in collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, signed 62 usufruct contracts with a combined investment value of over RO12.5mn on Wednesday. These contracts aim to bolster both the agricultural and industrial sectors.

The pacts were signed by H E Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Undersecretary for Housing in MHUP, in the presence of H E Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Fisheries in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

Among the agreements are seven usufruct contracts for agricultural ventures, with an investment value of over RO1.5mn and spanning over 320 acres in Dakhliyah, Dhofar and South Batinah. These projects are focused on fortifying food security and fostering growth in the agricultural sector.

The agreements include five usufruct contracts for agricultural projects worth over RO2.6mn and covering over 700 acres in Buraimi, Dhofar and



RO12.5mn

to bolster agricultural and industrial sectors

12 pacts

specifically for agricultural ventures worth RO4.1mn

28 pacts

focused on wheat cultivation worth RO5.6mn

6 pacts

for agricultural and industrial projects worth RO1.7mn

Dhahirah facilitated through the Tatweer platform.

MHUP has finalised four agreements for a total area exceeding 168,000sqm aimed at establishing branches of Oman Agricultural Society in South Sharqiyah, North Sharqiyah, Buraimi and Dhahirah.

Twenty-eight usufruct contracts were signed for agricultural projects focused on wheat cultivation in the Al Najd area of Dhofar. These contracts are for

an area exceeding 6,400 acres and worth RO5.6mn.

Twelve contracts worth RO998,000 were signed with SMEs in South Batinah and Dakhliyah spanning over 6,000sqm for industrial and commercial projects.

Additionally, six usufruct contracts were signed for various investment and development projects in agricultural and industrial sectors, totalling an investment value of over RO1.7mn and

spread over 533,000sqm. These projects are distributed across South Batinah, Dakhliyah, North Sharqiyah and Dhofar.

Ahmed bin Saud al Kamyani, Director General of Land at MHUP, emphasised the fact that these agreements align with the ministry's strategy to optimise returns on government land, enhance financial sustainability and create an attractive investment environment for investors. Additionally, they contribute to the

These agreements align with the ministry's strategy to optimise returns on government land, enhance financial sustainability and create an attractive investment environment for investors

AHMED AL KAMYANI

development programmes of governorates by providing essential land and increasing job opportunities for citizens.

Kamyani informed that 45 of these projects emerged from the Food Security Laboratory. These include projects aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in wheat production, alongside various other agricultural activities and the provision of land for agricultural associations.

Regarding contract implementation oversight, Kamyani stated that investors have provided investment plans for all projects. Agricultural projects, in particular, are monitored in collaboration with MAFWR through joint teams and work committees established between the two ministries to evaluate project implementation during the initial two years of the contract.

H M sends condolences to Sheikh Mohamed

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has extended condolences to Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, following the demise of Sheikh Tahnoon bin Mohammed al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi Ruler's Representative in Al Ain. His Majesty Sultan

Haitham conveyed his deepest sympathies in a cable to Sheikh Mohamed, the bereaved family and the people of the UAE, praying for the deceased to be bestowed with divine mercy and eternal peace, and for his family to find comfort and strength during this difficult time. ONA

Heavy rains expected today; schools to hold online classes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With heavy rains forecast in several areas of the sultanate, Ministry of Education has directed public, private and international schools in all governorates - except Al Wusta - to conduct online classes on Thursday. Normal classes will resume on Sunday, May 5.

Analysis of the National Multi Hazard Early Warning System shows the peak impact of the weather depression will begin at

noon on Thursday.

Civil Aviation Authority stated that the effect will be concentrated on the governorates of Buraimi, Dhahirah, South Batinah, Dakhliyah, Muscat and North Sharqiyah, with rains ranging between 20mm and 80mm.

The National Committee for Emergency Management activated the National Centre for Emergency Situations Management and related sectors in Muscat, Dhofar, Dakhliyah, North Sharqiyah, South Batinah and Dhahirah.



03
Dakhliyah girls triumph in Arab art contest on marine environment



13
Khalid al Anqoodi and Nabil al Riyami atop Mt Kosciuszko in Australia

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Muscat Municipality cautions against housing bachelors in residential areas

Our Correspondent Muscat

Muscat Municipality has issued a statement addressing the challenges of housing migrant bachelor workers in residential areas. The municipality expressed concerns over several issues, including privacy violations, potential increase in crime, economic impacts, threats to family safety, environmental degradation, and the propagation of unhealthy habits among the youth. According to the statement, the municipality is committed to enforcing local order 23/92, which prohibits the establishment of housing complexes for single expatriate workers in residential areas. This regulation is aimed at maintaining the social and aesthetic integrity of neighbourhoods. Violations of this order may

result in severe penalties. 'Individuals found housing expatriate bachelors in family neighbourhoods could face fines ranging from RO25 to RO50, with daily fines between RO5 and RO10, and could even face imprisonment for up to six months depending on the severity of the violation,' the Municipality warned. The civic body urged residents to report any infractions, ensuring swift legal action against rule-breakers. It also noted that tenants who house single expatriates without the homeowner's consent are liable for any violations incurred. This move by Muscat Municipality underscores its determination to safeguard community standards and ensure the well-being of all residents by strictly regulating residential arrangements for migrant workers.

National Museum showcases Mughal-era manuscript on hajj

Our Correspondent Muscat

The National Museum unveiled the manuscript *Anis al Hujaj*, a 17th-century literary treasure, on loan from the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Museum in Mumbai on Wednesday. This Persian manuscript, authored by Safi bin Vali Qazvin, a Mughal court official, provides a vivid description of the hajj pilgrimage, illustrating various ports during the Mughal period along with detailed scenes from the pilgrimage itself. During the unveiling ceremony, Jamal Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, highlighted the manuscript's significance. "*Anis al Hujaj* enhances awareness of Oman's historical role as a cultural and commercial hub. It sheds light on the era of the Mughal Empire in India, featuring



Anis al Hujaj enhances awareness of Oman's historical role as a cultural and commercial hub

28 detailed illustrations that document the pilgrim fleet in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Oman, the types of wooden boats used, and the attire of the travellers," he stated. The manuscript, penned by Qazvin following his 1676 pil-



grimage to Mecca, will remain on display for four months in the 'Oman and the World Gallery' at the National Museum. The exhibition aims to develop a deeper understanding of the historical connections between Oman and India during the Mughal period.

H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, commented on the cultural exchange facilitated by this loan. "India and Oman have deep-rooted bilateral and historical relations. The arrival of the *Anis al Hujaj* manuscript is a testament to the

excellent cooperation between the museums and institutions of art and heritage of both countries," he said. Dr Buddha Rashmi Mani, Director-General, National Museum in New Delhi, described the manuscript as a paragon of medieval Mughal literature. "It elucidates various facets of that era, including the significance of the holy pilgrim sites of hajj and umrah, and provides insights into the preparations required for such a pilgrimage, recommended sea routes connecting India to the Gulf, and descriptions of sea vessels. It also covers medicinal details, and moral guidance provided to pilgrims," Dr Mani elaborated. The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Museum, previously known as the Prince of Wales Museum, stands as one of India's premier art and history museums, rich with cultural artifacts of various eras.

SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES IRAN AMBASSADOR

H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Al Murtafaa Garrison on Wednesday Mousa Farhang, Ambassador of Iran to Oman. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged cordial conversations on a set of matters of mutual interest. They also reviewed bilateral relations between Oman and Iran.



N Sharqiyah launches initiative to boost tourism, employment



Our Correspondent Muscat

In a move to boost tourism and provide employment opportunities, the North Sharqiyah governorate has taken a new initiative to involve jobseekers in the management and operation of parks and recreational areas in Wadi Bani Khalid. According to a statement issued on Tuesday, this initiative seeks to leverage the natural appeal of Wadi Bani Khalid, a famous tourist destination located 203km from Muscat, which is celebrated for its perennial flow and scenic beauty. According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), 25,447 visitors turned out at Wadi Bani Khalid during the Eid holiday, underscoring the area's popularity and potential for tourism-driven economic growth. The announcement was made during a meeting chaired by Mahmoud bin Yahya al Zuhaili, Governor of North Sharqiyah. The meeting also addressed various issues including the management of the recent

inclement weather caused by a low-pressure system, and reviewed development and service-related matters across the governorate. Furthermore, the effectiveness of ongoing government projects was discussed to ensure proper monitoring and implementation. Environmental concerns also found priority during the deliberations. The council discussed the adverse effects of animal pens along wadi paths. The issue of animals straying onto roads, posing risks and disruptions, was identified as an important area needing immediate resolution. Additionally, updates on the development programme were provided by walis and government entities, reflecting on previous meetings. The council also examined the minutes and annual plans of permanent committees to ensure alignment with the governorate's strategic goals. The meeting concluded with the finalisation of recommendations and forwarding pertinent topics to relevant authorities for further evaluation and action.

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Maryam Ali al Riyamiyah (L) and Nasiba Nasser al Shamakhi of Aisha al Riyamiyah School in Dakhliyah (Supplied photos)

Omani girls triumph in Arab art contest on marine environment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Two students from Dakhliyah have clinched top honours in the Environmental Graphics competition of Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME). Held on April 24 in Kuwait, the event coincided with Regional Environment Day celebrations and focused on 'the effects of coral reef degradation on marine life and beaches'.

Maryam Ali al Riyamiyah from Aisha al Riyamiyah School secured first place with her painting depicting the harmful impact of pesticides on marine environments. "The idea for this submission stemmed from the detrimental impact of pesticides on the seabed and its inhabitants," Maryam informed.



She won third place in the same competition last year. "That motivated me to strive for first place this year and elevate the reputation of Oman in this international competition."

Nasiba Nasser al Shamakhi, also from Aisha Al Riyamiyah School, received ROPME's Executive Secretary Award. Her 30cm x 40cm painting was completed in seven days under the supervision of the school's fine arts teachers. "I dedicated a full week to perfect my artwork, ensuring precision in colour usage and alignment with the competition's theme," Nasiba said.

Both girls are thankful for the support they received, which contributed to their success, and hope to continue competing and excelling in future environmental competitions both domestically and internationally.

COMEX to feature over 100 emerging Omani firms

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), in association with Arabian Research Bureau, will host COMEX Global Technology Show from May 27 to 30 at Oman Exhibition and Convention Centre. The 33rd edition of the event is set to highlight the sultanate's advancements in digital technology and economy.

H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology at MTCIT, emphasised the exhibition's role as a digital investment hub. "The ministry aims for the exhibition to further the objectives of the National Digital Economy Programme," he stated.

The show will feature over 100 emerging Omani companies specialising in technical products, solutions and digital services. These participants are supported by various entities including the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), Omanel, ITHCA Group, and Central Bank of Oman.

Alongside the technology show, MTCIT will also hold the Second Digital Government Forum, which will serve as a venue to share best practices in digital transformation and facilitate the exchange of digital experiences and modern technologies on both regional and global levels.



COMEX not only showcases the latest electronic services and digital products but also offers a venue for marketing and investment opportunities, where commercial partnerships can be established

H E DR ALI BIN AMER AL SHIDHANI

H E Shidhani noted that COMEX is a comprehensive platform, bringing together government entities, private sector firms and technology enthusiasts. "The exhibition not only showcases the latest electronic services and digital products but also offers a venue for marketing and investment opportunities, where commercial partnerships can be established," he explained.

He underscored ongoing efforts to enhance the digital economy by developing legislative and regulatory frameworks, promot-

ing digital investments and supporting technological innovation.

H E Shidhani also highlighted recent developments in attracting foreign investment into Oman's technology sector, with initiatives spanning data centres, artificial intelligence, space technology and semiconductor manufacturing.

These advancements, including successful testing of the sultanate's first electronic chips - Oman 1 and Oman 2 - are significant strides in Oman's commitment to establishing a robust digital economy.

Pacts worth RO5mn to enhance public services in Dakhliyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sheikh Hilal bin Saeed al Hajri, Governor of Dakhliyah, has announced that 20 agreements worth RO5mn were inked on Wednesday to boost services and development projects across wilayats in the governorate.

These projects, aimed at enhancing both infrastructure and community facilities, include the design and construction of 58km of internal roads in Nizwa, Bahla, Adam and Al Hamra.

Among the key development projects is the reconfiguration of parking facilities and entry points at Nizwa Market to improve vehicular flow, an initiative which is part of the Governorates Development Programme.

Additional projects include establishment and upgrade of several parks - Hassas Park in Samail, Al Aqil in Izki, Al Haditha in Adam and Al Khatm in Manah - and installation of a



modern irrigation system for afforestation at the entrance of Manah.

The agreements also cover several consultancy studies for future projects, including the design of a new park in the Al Sih al Ahmar area of Bidbid and development of the Al Khatmain falaj in Birkat al Mouz. Enhancement of Adam Public Park facilities are also planned.

Sheikh Hajri emphasised the fact that these projects are tailored to meet the needs of both citizens and residents, prioritising sectors crucial for advancing

development across the governorate.

Sulaiman bin Hamad al Sunaidi, Director General of Dakhliyah Municipality, noted that these agreements mark a significant step towards enhancing infrastructure, including improvements to roads, lighting and park facilities.

Installation of lighting poles along various internal roads in the governorate is among the projects signed, underlining a steadfast commitment to fortifying infrastructure and improving community well-being.

OCCI hosts forum for tourism sector growth

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a strategic move to bolster the tourism sector, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), together with Oman Tourism College and Rima Events and Conference Planning Company, hosted a forum called Tourism Pioneers on Monday.

Held under the patronage of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Governor of Muscat, the event took place at the chamber's premises, attended by key stakeholders from the tourism industry.

The forum was designed to empower stakeholders in the

tourism sector and sustain its growth by facilitating exchange of experiences and enhancing direct communication among emerging tourism companies. The interaction aimed to promote their services, special offers and packages more effectively.

The forum was held alongside Oman Tourism Exhibition, which featured various youth-led tourism projects. The exhibition provided a vital platform for participating companies to showcase their services and products, improving their visibility to potential customers and investors.

The forum began with a welcome speech that outlined its objectives, followed by

presentations of seven tourism ventures. These presentations not only introduced the services offered but also shed light on the challenges these fledgling enterprises face within the sector.

The forum concluded with several insightful working papers focusing on the significant impact of tourism on economic development, strategies for nurturing new tourism projects for the international market, and the principles of corporate governance within the industry. These discussions underscored the critical role of tourism in Oman's economic landscape and the continued efforts to prepare these ventures for greater success.

 شركة الأسماك العمانية ش.م.ع.و. Oman Fisheries CO.S.A.O.G P.O. Box 2900, PC 112 - Sultanate of Oman, CR No. 1288920, Tel: 24509500 Fax: 24597804, Email: info@omanfisheries.net, Web: www.omanfisheries.com			
Directors Report For The Quarter Ended 31st March 2024			
Dear Shareholders, I am pleased to present on behalf of the Board of Directors the company's unaudited results for the three months ending 31st March 2024.			
Our key results are annexed below:			
Key Financial Figures			
Results on 31 March 2024 (RO)	2024 Jan - Mar	2023 Jan - Mar	Change %
Revenue	2,530,987	1,679,562	51%
Total Expenses	2,963,860	2,611,726	-13%
Net Loss	(432,873)	(932,164)	54%
Cashflow from Operating Activities	(23,922)	(1,589,550)	98%
As of 31 March 2024, your company achieved a total turnover of RO 2,530,987, with an increase of 51% compared to RO 1,679,562 as of 31 March 2023. Thanks to good monitoring of the fixed costs, expenses increased less than proportionally to the sales by 13%, enabling the company to reduce net losses on 31 March 2024 down to RO 432,873 compared to the net loss of RO 932,164 on 31 March 2023, showing an improvement of 54% in reducing the losses this year. The cash flow from Operating Activities as of 31 March 2024 is slightly negative at RO 23,922, substantially improving from the negative result of RO 1,589,550 on 31 March 2023.			
Following are the critical operational & financial highlights:			
- Deplete aged inventory, reducing the inventory level from 3,184,371 KGs on 31 December 2023 to 1,798,195 KG on 31 March 2024, resulting in a 44% reduction in inventory. - Recovery of RO 96.7k from one of the customers from Egypt, which was overdue for a long time. - Reduce the general & admin expenses from RO 470,941 in the first three months of last year to RO 395,489 in the same period of this year, showing a 16% reduction. - The company sold its shares held in International Sea Food Company for RO 110k, which were held at a book value of RO 98k, resulting in a gain of RO 12k.			
Good progress has been achieved in the following areas.			
- Cost optimization, including logistics. - Restructuring the commercial team to improve supply/demand matching. - Improve our fish landing and commercial fishing share. - Expand market reach to new regions, including the USA and China. - Introducing Value Added Products to maximize the value per unit and profit margins. - Upgrading all quality management systems resulted in HACCP international certification of all company branches.			
Key Challenges			
- Freight costs have significantly increased due to general political instability worldwide, impacting sales to the African and European continents. - The seasonal volatility of our supply and low landing at coastal areas.			
Acknowledgement			
In conclusion, I am honored to express, on behalf of the Board of Directors, our deepest gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said — may Allah protect him — and to his wise government for their substantial efforts in supporting the stability of the national economy and the significant encouragement they provide to the private sector.			
Additionally, on this occasion, I would like to convey the Board of Directors' thanks and appreciation to our esteemed shareholders for their continuous efforts to support the company and their dedication to its growth and prosperity. I also extend profound thanks to our suppliers, banks, clients, and company employees for their ongoing efforts, wishing them every success in the upcoming financial years. We hope for the continuation of this success and assure you of our commitment to continuous innovation and development.			
Dr. Shahid Mahmood Haider Al Bulushi Chairman			
Condensed interim statement of financial position as at 31 March 2024 (Expressed in Omani Rial)			
	31 March 2024 (unaudited)	31 December 2023 (audited)	
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	1,879,636	1,986,452	
Right-of-use assets	1,038,181	1,095,680	
Deferred tax asset	433,894	433,894	
Total non-current assets	3,351,711	3,516,026	
Current assets			
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	1,050	104,026	
Inventories	1,626,851	2,059,731	
Trade and other receivables	3,280,039	3,286,512	
Other financial assets at amortised cost	2,100,000	2,100,000	
Cash and bank balances	71,221	74,654	
Total current assets	7,079,161	7,624,923	
Total assets	10,430,872	11,140,949	
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	16,307,700	16,307,700	
Legal reserve	3,314,319	3,314,319	
Capital reserve	29,269	29,269	
Accumulated losses	(16,942,015)	(16,509,142)	
Total capital and reserves	2,709,273	3,142,146	
Non-current liabilities			
Employees' benefit liabilities	40,058	47,289	
Term loan - non-current portion	503,462	532,693	
Lease liabilities - non-current portion	607,864	679,704	
Total non-current liabilities	1,151,384	1,259,686	
Current liabilities			
Trade and other payables	2,621,129	2,792,151	
Term loan - current portion	117,221	108,396	
Bank borrowings	3,520,496	3,475,521	
Due to a related party	-	51,680	
Lease liabilities - current portion	311,369	311,369	
Total current liabilities	6,570,215	6,739,117	
Total liabilities	7,721,599	7,998,803	
Total equity and liabilities	10,430,872	11,140,949	
Net assets per share	0.015	0.017	
Condensed interim statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the three-month period ended 31 March 2024 (Expressed in Omani Rial)			
	Three-month period ended 31 March 2024 (unaudited)	Three-month period ended 31 March 2023 (unaudited)	
Revenue	2,530,987	1,679,562	
Direct costs	(2,199,287)	(1,915,168)	
Gross profit / (loss)	331,700	(235,606)	
Other income	124,830	12,623	
Selling and distribution expenses	(444,551)	(236,409)	
General and administrative expenses	(395,489)	(470,941)	
	(715,210)	(694,727)	
Operating loss for the year	(383,510)	(930,333)	
Change in fair value of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	-	1,571	
Finance costs	(77,945)	(62,524)	
Finance income	28,582	59,122	
Net loss before tax for the period	(432,873)	(932,164)	
Income tax expense	-	-	
Net loss after tax and total comprehensive loss for the period	(432,873)	(932,164)	
Loss per share - basic and diluted	(0.0024)	(0.0051)	

MARKET WATCH

MSX304,767.22

Sensex74,482.78

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

India	217.09
Pakistan	723.88
Bangladesh	285.37
Philippines	150.31
Sri Lanka	775.30

*Rates as on May 01

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Oil prices fall amid Middle East ceasefire hopes

Oil prices fell on Wednesday over growing hopes for a cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas and rising crude inventories in the US, the world's biggest oil consumer.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$85.28 per barrel in morning trade in London, down 1.22% from the closing price of \$86.33 per barrel in the previous trading session.

American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at \$80.83 per barrel at the same time, a 1.34% fall from the previous session, which closed at \$81.93 per barrel.

Global calls for a cease-fire have been growing as the war in the Gaza Strip has entered its seventh month.

Muscat Stock Exchange emerges as top performing market in GCC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) emerged as the top-performing equity market in the GCC region in April. MSX was the only market in the GCC region that recorded gains during April, while all other GCC markets reported declines.

The MSX30 Index registered 3.2% monthly gains during April, closing the month at 4,784.2 points. The index witnessed consistent gains during the first half of the month followed by a marginal decline during the third week, according to a research report published by Kuwait-based Kamco Investment.

The report stated that the gains of 1.9% during the last five trading sessions added to the overall growth in the Omani index during April.

In terms of sectoral performance, two out of the three sector indices on the exchange recorded gains during the month. The Financial Index recorded a 5.5% increase during April, the biggest gain among the indices, mainly driven by gains in shares of several companies in the sec-



Almost all equity markets in the GCC witnessed declines during April, barring Muscat Stock Exchange, which witnessed growth for the second consecutive month

tor such as Sohar International Bank (+22.7%) and Global Investment Holding Company (+18.0%). In comparison, the Industrial Index registered a 3.5%

topped the gainers' list with a share price gain of 92.3%, followed by Voltamp Energy and Muscat Thread Mills with 152.9% and 130.4% monthly share gains, respectively.

On the decliners' side, National Mineral Water Company led the chart with an 18.2% share price fall, followed by Sharqiyah Desalination Company and Musandam Power Company, which witnessed share price drops of 15.4% and 10.3%, respectively.

Trading activity on the Muscat Stock Exchange witnessed a moderate decline during the last month. The total volume of shares traded on the exchange increased by 6.6% to 696.3mn shares during April, compared to 653.4mn shares traded in March.

Similarly, the total value traded on the exchange increased by 43.9% to RO116.2mn, against RO80.7mn in March. Ahli Bank topped the monthly value traded chart with trades at RO27.7mn, followed by Sohar International Bank and Bank Muscat with total values traded at RO12.1mn and RO11.7mn, respectively.

Global downturn weighs on GCC markets

The GCC Index witnessed a decline for the second consecutive month in April after a broad-based decline in most global indices during the month affected the performance of regional markets.

Almost all markets in the GCC witnessed declines during the month, barring Oman, which witnessed growth for the second

consecutive month, according to Kamco Investment.

The global decline mainly reflected sticky inflation numbers, especially in the US, in addition to profit-taking and continued geopolitical issues. The elevated inflation level has also impacted talks of rate cuts, with consensus now seeing one or at most two cuts later this year.

The MSCI GCC index declined by 2.1% during the month, reflecting low single-digit declines across markets, while Oman's MSX 30 Index witnessed growth of 3.2%. Kuwait's All-Share index witnessed the biggest decline during the month, at 3.8%.

Dubai and Abu Dhabi benchmarks also witnessed declines of around 2%, while Saudi's TASI dropped marginally following partial recovery towards the end of the month.

With the decline in April, the year-to-date performance for the MSCI GCC index now stands at 2.0% in the red. In terms of individual markets, Qatar and Abu Dhabi indices reported steep declines for year-to-date, while the rest of the GCC markets showed gains.

Fitch affirms OETC's rating at 'BB+', keeps outlook stable

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings has affirmed Oman Electricity Transmission Company's (OETC) long-term issuer default ratings (IDR) and senior unsecured rating at 'BB+'. The outlook on the IDR is stable.

OETC's standalone credit profile (SCP) of 'bb+' reflects its position as the natural monopoly national transmission system operator in Oman within a supportive regulatory framework, and fully regulated EBITDA, Fitch said in a statement.

'These factors are offset by forecast deeply negative free cash flow (FCF) over the next four years due to large expansion capex, leading to average funds from operations (FFO) net leverage of 6.4x in 2024-2026. From 2026, our forecast shows no leverage headroom to the negative sensitivity of 6.7x,' Fitch said.

Fitch views the sultanate's regulatory framework as supportive, especially compared with most 'semerging-market peers'.

It said Oman has an independent, consultative and transparent system with a revenue-cap



methodology largely based on prior regulatory standards in the UK. Revenue generated by OETC is subject to price controls, which are set by the Authority for Public Services Regulation.

According to Fitch, OETC has an ambitious capex programme of RO358mn over 2024-2026. It added, 'The majority of capex is for expansion, with less than 3% related to maintenance. The main project is the second phase of the North-South Interconnector project costing RO158mn. The project is viewed as strategic by the government.'

With Fitch-calculated EBITDA of RO128mn in 2023, OETC underperformed around 5% versus its business plan in 2023. This was due to a revenue shortfall resulting from lower-than-ex-

pected connection charges and variance in costs due to some unbudgeted expenses, the rating agency said.

With regards to OETC's refinancing needs, Fitch said that OETC's senior unsecured bond of \$1bn matures in May 2025. Given its history of accessing capital markets and its firm banking relationships, Fitch expects OETC will be able to refinance the debt.

Under the new GRE criteria, Fitch assesses decision-making and oversight as 'strong' as the Omani government controls 51% of OETC through Nama Holding and has sufficient control over OETC through involvement in and influence over its strategic, operational and financial activities.

FORESIGHT



SYED ADIL ABBAS

Abbas, an MBA graduate from Cardiff Metropolitan University (UK), is currently based in Muscat, and has over 20 years of international experience working with the public and private sectors in the Middle East, Far East, Africa and India.

In a world grappling with climate change and food insecurity, a groundbreaking solution has emerged: converting carbon dioxide (CO2) into food. This innovative approach is revolutionising sustenance production, offering hope for a sustainable future.

Researchers and entrepreneurs worldwide are pioneering inventive ways to utilise CO2 as a raw material for food production. For instance, scientists at the University of California, Berkeley, have developed a method to convert CO2 into a form of flour that can be used to make bread, pasta, and other staple foods.

This breakthrough technology provides a sustainable alternative to traditional wheat flour, reducing the environmental impact of food production.

Similarly, companies like Algama in France and Triton Algae Innovations in the US are using algae to create various sustainable foods, including protein-rich snacks and plant-based burgers. This method capitalises on algae's ability to absorb CO2 and convert it into biomass, providing nutritious and environmentally friendly options.

Climeworks, a Swiss company, has pioneered the development of carbon-neutral

beverages by capturing CO2 from the air and using it to produce drinks such as water and soda. This innovation not only reduces carbon emissions but also offers consumers a sustainable choice.

Finnish company Solar Foods and Austria's Arkeen Bio are exploring innovative methods to produce food from CO2 and renewable energy sources, promising solutions to global food security challenges.

In the US, companies like Eat Just and Memphis Meats are producing lab-grown meat using CO2 as a key ingredient. This

CARBON CUISINE: FROM FARM TO FORK

method eliminates the need for traditional livestock farming, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation.

Organisations such as NASA, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Novo Nordisk Foundation are investing in research and development to advance CO2-based food technologies, focusing on improving nutrition, promoting environmental sustainability, and combating climate change.

Oman, with its arid climate and limited agricultural resources, could benefit signif-

icantly from embracing CO2-based food technologies. By diversifying food sources, reducing imports, and boosting self-sufficiency, Oman can address food security challenges.

Furthermore, investing in CO2-based food production can contribute to global efforts to combat climate change while meeting Oman's own food needs. This shift also presents economic opportunities, including research and development, manufacturing, and exportation of sustainable food products, stimulating economic growth and creating employment opportunities.

Integrating CO2-based food technologies into Oman's agricultural sector can modernise farming practices, increase productivity, and overcome environmental limitations. Solutions like algae cultivation and vertical farming offer promising strategies for sustainable food production.

In conclusion, the transformation of CO2 into food offers a promising pathway toward a more sustainable and prosperous future for Oman and the world. By harnessing the potential of CO2-based food technologies, we can create a food system that is not only environmentally friendly but also nutritious, resilient, and equitable.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing

Asyad Group showcases innovative sustainability initiatives at OSW

Muscat - Asyad Group, Oman's premier integrated logistics provider, showcased its unwavering commitment to sustainability and innovation at the Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) 2024. As a strategic partner, Asyad Group reinforced its role spearheading Oman's sustainable logistics sector inline with national priorities.

Asyad's participation was marked by signing a collaboration programme with the wave energy technology pioneer

HAVKRAFT to harness Oman's unique marine landscapes for wave power.

Committed to integrating renewable energy solutions into Asyad's operations, HAVKRAFT's nearshore wave power plants, designed for harsh marine conditions, will provide a sustainable and reliable source of power for a greener Oman.

Advorio Terminals Company also joined the Sohar Port and Freezone Net Zero Alliance (SNZA), a groundbreaking initia-



tive dedicated to accelerating Oman's transition towards carbon neutrality by 2050. The al-

liance perfectly aligns with the Government of Oman's ambitious goal of achieving '2050 Net Zero Commitment'.

Since its launch in November 2023, the alliance has served as a platform for collaboration, innovation, and collective action, demonstrating our shared commitment to building a more sustainable future.

During OSW, Asyad highlighted its significant sustainability projects, including the National Green Hydrogen Refueling Station Pilot Project and the Green Fuel Bunkering Hub. These initiatives aim to revolu-

tionise the logistics and energy sectors, driving sustainable development and environmental stewardship.

In addition, Mohsin Alrustom, Group Chief Financial Officer at Asyad Group, participated in a panel discussion titled 'The Trifecta: Green Finance, Responsible Investment and Transition' during which he addressed the role of governments in strengthening capital markets and developing standard and transparent reporting mechanisms. Alrustom

also shed light on the new instruments that can aid to further advance sustainability efforts in light of Asyad Group's experience and mandate.

On the participation, Essam al Sheibany, Sustainability Vice President, at Asyad Group, said, "OSW was instrumental in showcasing our leadership in sustainability, highlighting our innovations and cutting-edge technologies to reduce carbon emissions and greenhouse gasses.

US national debt reaches new record, climbs above \$34.5tn

Washington, US – The US national debt is climbing at a rapid pace and has shown no signs of slowing down, despite the growing criticism of massive levels of government spending.

According to a Fox Business report, the national debt – which measures what the US owes its creditors – rose to the record level of \$34.562tn as of Monday afternoon. That is up about \$4.3bn from the \$34,558bn figure reported the previous day, according to the latest numbers published by the Treasury Department.

By comparison, just four decades ago, the national debt hovered around \$907bn. The outlook for the federal debt level is bleak, with economists increasingly sounding the alarm over the torrid pace of spending by Congress and the White House.

The latest findings from the Congressional Budget Office indicate that the national debt will grow to an astonishing \$54tn in the next decade, the result of an aging population and fishing federal health care costs. Higher interest rates are also compounding the pain of higher debt.

Should that debt materialise, it could risk America's economic standing in the world, the report mentioned.

"America's fiscal outlook is more dangerous and daunting than ever, threatening our econ-



A US flag flies in front of the Capitol in Washington, DC

Latest findings from the Congressional Budget Office indicate that the US national debt will grow to \$54tn in the next decade, the result of an aging population and fishing health care costs

omy and the next generation," said Michael Peterson, the CEO of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation that advocates for reducing the federal deficit. "This is not the future any of us want, and it's no way to run a great nation like ours," he added as reported by Fox Business.

The unrelenting increase is what prompted Fitch Ratings to issue a surprise downgrade of the nation's long-term credit score in mid-2023. The agency cut the US debt by one notch, snatching away its pristine AAA rating in exchange for an AA+ grade. In making the decision,

Fitch cited alarm over the country's deteriorating finances and expressed concerns over the government's ability to address the ballooning debt burden amid sharp political divisions.

"This is a warning shot across the US government's bow that it needs to right its fiscal ship," Sean Snaithe, an economist at the University of Central Florida, told FOX Business. "You can't just spend trillions of dollars more than you have in revenue every year and expect no ill consequences."

The spike in the national debt

follows a burst of spending by President Joe Biden and Democratic lawmakers.

As of September 2022, Biden had already approved roughly \$4.8tn in borrowing, including \$1.85tn for a COVID relief measure dubbed the American Rescue Plan and \$370bn for the bipartisan infrastructure bill, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB), as reported by Fox Business.

While that is about half of the \$7.5yn that former President Donald Trump added to the deficit while he was in office, it's far more than the \$2.5tn Trump had approved at that same point during his term.

Biden has repeatedly defended the spending by his administration and boasted about cutting the deficit by \$1.7tn.

"I might note parenthetically: In my first two years, I reduced the debt by \$1.7tn. No President has ever done that," Biden said recently.

However, that figure refers to a reduction in the national deficit between fiscal years 2020 and 2022; while the deficit did shrink during that time period, that is largely because emergency measures put into place during the COVID-19 pandemic expired.

The White House has also tried to blame Republicans for the astronomical rise in debt in recent years.



India's IndiGo orders 30 Airbus wide-body planes

New Delhi, India – IndiGo, India's leading airline by market share, has confirmed a firm order for 30 Airbus A350-900 wide-body aircraft. The airline's CEO, Pieter Elbers, announced that deliveries of these aircraft are slated to commence in 2027.

IndiGo's order for the A350-900 comes with the flexibility to determine the exact configuration of the aircraft at a later stage. Deliveries are expected to begin in 2027, marking a significant milestone for the airline's expansion plans.

Additionally, IndiGo holds Purchase Rights for an additional 70 Airbus A350 family aircraft, providing the airline with the option to meet future needs under certain conditions.

The Airbus A350-900 is equipped with the capability to operate long-haul routes, making it an ideal choice for expanding into markets like Europe and the USA.

When ANI questioned IndiGo about its plans for entering these lucrative markets, CEO Pieter Elbers commented, "We have yet to finalize the routes, but A350 aircraft possess the capabilities to fly directly to the said destinations."

With a fleet of over 350 aircraft, IndiGo has been a dominant player in the domestic market and is now aggressively pursuing international expansion.

The decision to invest in wide-body Airbus A350 planes signals IndiGo's intention to compete not only within India but also on the global stage.

ANI



Masdar, Bapco to develop up to 2GW of wind projects in Bahrain

Abu Dhabi, UAE – Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company – Masdar, the UAE's clean energy powerhouse, has signed an agreement with Bapco Energies, the integrated energy company leading the energy transition in Bahrain, to jointly explore the development and investment in wind projects in Bahrain with a capacity of up to 2 gigawatts (GW).

Marking a strategic entry into the Bahrain market for the UAE's clean energy champion, the agreement for near-shore and offshore wind farms is Masdar's first in the kingdom and will be the first project of its kind in the region and the Middle East.

At up to 2GW, this clean energy collaboration will support Bahrain to accelerate the decarbonisation of critical industrial sectors and open avenues to develop new market sectors. Bahrain aims to reduce emissions by 30% by 2035 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2060, as outlined in its National Energy Strategy.

Masdar Chief Executive Officer Mohamed Jameel al

Agreement for near-shore and offshore wind farms is Masdar's first in Bahrain and will be the first project of its kind in the Middle East

Ramahi said, "As a global clean energy pioneer, Masdar will utilise its well-established expertise and track record in delivering wind energy projects globally, both onshore and offshore. It is a privilege to be supporting the Kingdom of Bahrain to achieve its net zero ambitions and power a more sustainable future."

Bapco Energies Group Chief Executive Officer Mark Thomas said, "Our partnership with Masdar demonstrates our commitment towards diversifying Bahrain's energy mix to include cleaner energy sources, underscoring our role as leaders in renewable energy development. This strategic

collaboration signifies a bold step towards realising the ambitions outlined in Bahrain's National Energy Strategy, propelling us closer to our net-zero goals. Together, we will pave the way for a more sustainable and resilient future for generations to come."

Masdar has developed several landmark wind projects worldwide, including the 400MW Dumat Al Jandal wind farm, the largest in the Middle East and the first in Saudi Arabia, the 630MW London Array offshore wind project in the United Kingdom, which powers half a million British homes, and the 103.5MW UAE Wind Program, which uses innovative technology to capture low wind speeds at utility scale.

Masdar is aiming for a renewable energy portfolio capacity of 100GW by 2030, as well as supporting the target set out in The UAE Consensus to triple global renewables capacity by the end of this decade, and aims to be a leading producer of green hydrogen.

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Al Maha Ceramics SAOG

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DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,
I am pleased to present the first quarter financial results of Al Maha Ceramics SAOG for the period ending March 31st, 2024.

Company Performance:
Despite facing challenges in the form of intense competition from low-cost tile imports, particularly from India and China, Al Maha Ceramics SAOG has demonstrated resilience and adaptability. We remain committed to delivering value and quality to our shareholders and customers. While we have observed a decrease in revenue, primarily due to the sluggishness in the market caused by a dearth of new construction projects, there are signs of improvement.

Revenue for the quarter amounted to RO 1,296,730, reflecting a decrease of 36% compared to the same period last year when the revenue was RO 2,020,330. However, there is a growth of 28% in revenue as compared with Q4, 2023

The company recorded an operational loss before tax of RO 116,553 for the first quarter, compared to previous year's first quarter profit before tax of RO 522,582. The net loss after tax for the first quarter amounted to RO 549,590 compared to the previous year's first quarter profit of RO 109,567. The decrease in profitability can be attributed to several factors, including fierce competition from imported tiles and increased logistics costs due to geopolitical tensions in the region.

Despite these challenges, Al Maha Ceramics remains optimistic about the future. We anticipate a positive development regarding duty exemptions in KSA, which will facilitate the resumption of business activities in the region. Additionally, the commencement of production at our newly acquired associate, Al Hael Ceramics LLC, is scheduled to begin soon post the commissioning of enhanced capabilities which got delayed due to logistics impediments and is currently underway. Although Al Maha Ceramics recorded a share of loss amounting to RO 433,057 during the quarter from Al Hael Ceramics, primarily due to delays in the commencement of production of porcelain tiles, we expect the commencement of phased production at Al Hael in the 2nd quarter and we anticipate it to attain continuity in the coming quarters, thereby stabilizing the economic performance of Al Hael and arresting its negative impact on Al Maha.

Outlook for the Future:
Looking ahead, we foresee an improvement in economic activity, supported by stable oil prices. As construction activity picks up and the economic environment stabilizes, we expect demand to improve.

Corporate Social Responsibility:
At Al Maha Ceramics, we remain dedicated to our corporate social responsibility initiatives, focusing on healthcare, education, and social welfare programs to contribute positively to the community.

Thanks, and Appreciation:
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to our honorable shareholders, customers, banks, and suppliers for their continued support. I would also like to express gratitude to the executive management and all employees of the company for their sincere efforts. We look forward to achieving better results in the ensuing quarters.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and employees, we offer our prayers to Almighty Allah, wishing His Majesty long life, health, and success in pursuing the march of goodness and development for the prosperity of Oman and its people.

For Al Maha Ceramics SAOG,
Masoud Humaid Malik Al Harthy
Chairman

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

At 31st March

	2024 RO	2023 RO	Audited Dec 2023 RO
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	4,885,856	5,525,557	5,018,783
Investment property	225,000	225,000	225,000
Investment in associate	464,598	2,178,385	897,655
Right-of-use asset	573,019	677,191	599,062
	<u>6,148,473</u>	<u>8,606,133</u>	<u>6,740,500</u>
Current assets			
Inventories	1,620,819	1,705,900	1,835,957
Trade and other receivables	2,556,502	3,030,618	2,440,291
Cash and bank balances	790,333	2,908,783	647,768
	<u>4,967,654</u>	<u>7,645,301</u>	<u>4,924,016</u>
	<u>11,116,127</u>	<u>16,251,434</u>	<u>11,664,516</u>
TOTAL ASSETS			
EQUITY			
Share capital	5,500,000	5,500,000	5,500,000
Share premium	88,199	88,199	88,199
Statutory reserve	1,833,333	1,833,333	1,833,333
Retained earnings	1,669,880	4,549,630	2,219,470
	<u>9,091,412</u>	<u>11,971,162</u>	<u>9,641,002</u>
LIABILITIES			
Non-current liabilities			
End of service benefits	323,673	271,678	323,673
Deferred tax liability	172,074	225,498	172,074
Non-current portion of lease liabilities	518,870	644,497	543,995
	<u>1,014,617</u>	<u>1,141,673</u>	<u>1,039,742</u>
Current liabilities			
Bank borrowings	-	-	-
Trade and other payables	909,596	2,470,170	742,413
Current portion of lease liabilities	100,502	72,078	100,502
Income tax payable	-	596,351	180,857
	<u>1,010,098</u>	<u>3,138,599</u>	<u>983,772</u>
	<u>2,024,715</u>	<u>4,280,272</u>	<u>2,023,514</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES	<u>11,116,127</u>	<u>16,251,434</u>	<u>11,664,516</u>
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	<u>11,116,127</u>	<u>16,251,434</u>	<u>11,664,516</u>
Net assets per share	<u>0.165</u>	<u>0.218</u>	<u>0.175</u>

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

	3 months ended 31 March 2024 RO	3 months ended 31 March 2023 RO
Revenue	1,296,730	2,020,330
Cost of sales	(1,180,512)	(1,296,642)
Gross profit	116,218	723,688
Administrative and general expenses	(114,746)	(148,094)
Selling and distribution expenses	(122,819)	(110,078)
Other Income/(expenses)	13,798	68,873
Profit from operations	(107,549)	534,389
Finance charges	(8,984)	(11,807)
Profit before tax	(116,533)	522,582
Income tax	-	(78,387)
Profit after tax	(116,533)	444,195
Share of profit/(Loss) of associate for the period	(433,057)	(334,628)
Comprehensive income and net profit for the period	(549,590)	109,567
Basic earnings per share (Annualised)	(0.010)	0.008

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

ASAAS becomes part of Sultan Haitham City

ASAAS, a leading investment and development company in Oman, has announced the signing of a development agreement with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) to develop neighbourhood number 8 within the highly anticipated Sultan Haitham City.

This strategic collaboration marks a significant step forward in developing this landmark project, envisioned to be a vibrant and sustainable urban centre in the heart of Oman.

"This collaboration with ASAAS underlines our commitment to working with leading developers to bring the vision of Sultan Haitham City to life," said H E Dr Khalfan bin Saeed al Shuali, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

"We are confident that ASAAS's expertise and track record will be instrumental in creating a vibrant and thriving phase that contributes to the project's overall success."

"We are honoured to partner with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on this transformative project," said Ahmed al Busaidi, Chairman of ASAAS.

"Sultan Haitham City repre-



sents a unique opportunity to create a modern, sustainable, and inclusive community that caters to the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors alike. ASAAS is committed to leverag-

ing our expertise and experience to deliver a world-class development that aligns with Oman's 2040 vision and contributes to the overall growth and prosperity of Oman."

The development will prioritise sustainability, adhering to the highest standards and incorporating innovative green building practices to promote energy efficiency. This commitment

aligns with ASAAS's vision for fostering a progressive and environmentally responsible Oman.

The development of Sultan Haitham City is expected to create significant job opportunities

and contribute to the diversification of the Omani economy. The project is also expected to attract new residents and businesses to the Sultanate, further boosting economic growth and develop-

ment. Established in 2014, ASAAS is a leading investment and development company in Oman with a proven track record of delivering high-quality, innovative projects. The company is committed to creating sustainable communities that enrich the lives of residents and contribute to the overall development of the country.

Building on a legacy of success, ASAAS has a proven track record of delivering impactful projects that contribute to Oman's economic diversification and social development. These include Souq Shati Al Hafa (opened in 2023), demonstrating their dedication to revitalizing traditional marketplaces, and the A'Raya Complex, showcasing their ability to deliver modern and acclaimed developments. ASAAS is also a proud founder of SalamAir, Oman's first budget airline, contributing to economic diversification and travel & tourism. Their commitment extends to various sectors, exemplified by the Crew Reporting Building developed for Transom, and a focus on hospitality and community spaces with the Al Khuwair Hotel and Public Park.



Minister of Education receives Kenyan Ambassador Abdullah

H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, received on Wednesday, Amina Abdullah, Ambassador of the Republic of Kenya accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, and the delegation she headed, in the presence of a number of officials.

During the meeting, aspects of joint cooperation in education and good relations were reviewed, in addition to reviewing the joint bilateral relations between Oman and Kenya in the fields of education and teaching. The two sides confirmed consol-

idating relations between the two countries in the educational field, and ensuring the strengthening of the circle of cooperation in what serves the common goals and objectives.

On her part, the Ambassador expressed her sincere gratitude and appreciation of the Ministry of Education for the great support and interest extended to the members of the Kenyan community which contributed to providing pioneering educational services to them, wishing Oman more progress and prosperity.

Fencing add 2 gold, silver at GCC Youth Game, swimming snatch 2 bronze

Oman fencing team added three medals, two gold and one silver, on Tuesday at Zayed Sports Complex in Fujairah, to conclude the competitions with 11 medals, which is part of first edition of GCC Youth Game, held in UAE from April 16 to May 2.

Oman's medal tally rose to 58 medals. Oman athletes were able to collect 18 gold, 13 silver and 27 bronze medals from 15 sports.

Oman national fencing team was able to snatch the gold medal in the men's épée, a silver medal in men's foil, and gold in women's épée.

The list of men included Ahmed bin Anwar Kaskas, Saeed bin Khaled al Shuaibi, Ali bin Hamad al Busaidi, Ammar bin Mohammed al Azizi.

The women's team were Jana bint Mohammed al Sharjiyah, Salma bint Saeed al Daghistiyah and Ghazal bint Youssef al Fali-tiyah. Israa bint Saif al Siyabiyah.

As Oman fencing claimed 8 medals on Monday, Ahmed Kaskas snatched gold, while Saeed al Shuaibi claimed bronze in Men's Épée. Ahmed Kaskas



claimed silver in Men's Foil, and Saeed al Shuaibi and Ali al Busaidi ranked bronze for each. Jana al Sharji won Gold in women's Épée, and Salma al Daghistiyah won bronze. Israa al Siyabiyah grabbed silver in women's Foil.

Omani swimmer Moath Khamis snatched the bronze medal in the 50m freestyle race. Husain Tariq won bronze medal in 200m breaststroke, Mohammed Abdulrahman finished

sixth in 200m medley race, Mishal Salim finished fifth in 50m freestyle, and the swimming men team finished fourth 4*100 freestyle.

Oman fencing player Saeed al Shuaibi expressed her happiness after the win, "I am happy to obtain two bronze medals on the first day, and two medals as a team on the second day, we sought to win gold, but the competition was strong, and we did well. We prepared for this partic-

ipation by internal camps and we benefited, we hope to record more achievements in the coming participation."

Ahmed bin Anwar Kaskas, who won gold and silver medals on the first day of the competitions, and two gold medals in team category, said that "The results were good on the first day, as we succeeded in winning a large number of medals. We expected to win more medals, but the game system, they held more

than one game at the same time, was an obstacle for us to participate in more than two games. We thank the technical staff and oman olympic committee for their great work".

Israa al Siyabi, who won silver medal in foil weapon on the first day, and gold medal within a team on second day said that "I am satisfied with what we achieved, we aspired to win gold but we were unlucky at the last moment. We benefited a lot."

Amouage brings Omani women thought leaders to share secrets to success

Inspired by the redesigned Secret Garden Collection and its latest addition, Love Delight, Amouage recently brought together the crème de la crème of Omani women thought leaders for a fascinating panel discussion.

The event focused on the individual stories behind the success, both professionally and personally, of four female panel members representing different sectors, as well as distinct and unique personalities.

While reflecting the diverse femininity of the collection, the voices of these influential and empowered Omani women were provided an inspirational platform by the House to converse intellectually and openly about their life journeys, including their perspectives, passions, and the challenges they overcame.

The panel discussion was

hosted by Nihad al Kindi, Media Presenter and Self-Marketing Trainer. Beside her sat Sayyida Basma al Said, Specialist in Mental Health, PTSD Trainer, and Founder of the Whispers of Serenity Clinic and Abeer Sultan, Executive Manager at Towell Group, Board Member at the Oman-India Friendship Association and Oman-British Society.

The other two panel members were Reem al Zadjali, Lawyer, Arbitrator and Legal Translator; and Alia al Farsi, Founder of Alia Gallery who has held solo exhibitions in Tokyo, Seoul, Paris, and Brussels while Alia is also the curator of the Omani Pavilion at Venice Arte Biennale 2024 in which Amouage participates.

The conversations among the women spanned from their personal and professional stories, insightful advice for other women, to diversity and em-



powerment. Each panel member also chose which fragrance from the Secret Garden Collection, Lilac Love, Blossom Love, Love Tuberose, and Love De-

light, resonated with them in terms of notes and personality type.

The fragrance Lilac Love, a melodious symphony of flowers

and balsams, explores the idea of classical femininity in today's world, while Blossom Love with its gentle delicacy and sensual impertinence represents the no-

tion of Romanticism.

Love Tuberose is a fragrance that reminds one of tropical blossom, sun-drenched skin and sugary rays of sunlight, and

stands for women who are adventurous.

Love Delight, on the other hand, is the latest addition to the Secret Garden Collection and represents an interplay of delicate florals and irresistible treats, leaving behind the scent of a hedonistic woman.

The 'Successful Omani Women Panel Discussion' took place at the Alia Gallery, a renowned art gallery in Muscat, which provided the perfect setting for the event. Selected artworks housed at the Alia Gallery were paired with the perfumes from the Secret Garden Collection as the pieces could have been inspired by each beautiful fragrance from the collection.

As the world increasingly explores the intersection between art and fragrance, this added another dimension to the olfactory experience created during the event.

WHO concerned over possible Rafah invasion

Washington,D.C./Gaza City - World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus expressed concern on Tuesday over a possible Israeli ground invasion of the southern Gaza city of Rafah, which is home to more than one million Palestinians seeking refuge from the Israel-Hamas war.

"A full-scale invasion on Rafah would be a humanitarian catastrophe. We appeal to Israel not to

proceed," Tedros said on X.

"We urge all parties to work for a ceasefire and lasting peace."

His remarks came after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed on Tuesday to invade Rafah, despite reports of a possible ceasefire deal with Hamas. Netanyahu said the Israeli army would enter Rafah to destroy Hamas' battalions there 'with or without a deal'.

His statements came amid reports of a new ceasefire proposal



Rafah is home to more than 1mn seeking refuge from the Israel-Hamas war

being discussed by Hamas and Israel to end the conflict in Gaza.

Meanwhile, several Palestinians were killed and injured on Wednesday in an Israeli airstrike on a house in Gaza City as the Israeli deadly onslaught on the Gaza Strip enters its 208th day.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa quoted local sources saying that several people were killed and injured in the Israeli airstrike on a house in the Al-Jalaa street area.

Efforts to pull people from the rubble of the struck house are ongoing, it added. The Health Ministry is yet to confirm the number of casualties.

More detained in West Bank

The Israeli army on Wednesday detained 20 more Palestinians in military raids across the occupied West Bank, according to prisoners' affairs groups.

The arrests took place in the

cities of Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Tubas and Nablus, the Commission of Detainees' Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoner Society said in a joint statement.

The new arrests brought the number of Palestinians detained by the Israeli army in the West Bank since last October to 8,535, according to Palestinian figures.

Tensions have been running high across the West Bank since Israel launched Gaza offensive. Anadolu Agency

Blinken calls on Hamas to accept ceasefire proposal

Jerusalem - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday urged the Hamas group to accept a ceasefire deal proposal with Israel.

Speaking to families of Israeli hostages held in Gaza following his meeting with Israeli President Isaac Herzog, he said: "There is a very strong proposal on the table right now. Hamas needs to say yes."

He told the families that his administration 'will not rest until everyone is back home'. The Hamas group is yet to comment on Blinken's statement.

He earlier met with Herzog and said the US administration is 'determined' to achieve a ceasefire agreement between Israel and the Hamas group.

Blinken also went on to blame the Hamas group if a ceasefire deal is not achieved.

"And the only reason that that wouldn't be achieved is because of Hamas," Blinken said. The top US diplomat arrived on Tuesday in Israel on his third stop, after Saudi Arabia and Jordan, as part of his regional tour for talks to bring a ceasefire in Gaza.

Blinken, on Wednesday, also reiterated US opposition to an Israeli military operation in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

Blinken held talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the last leg of a regional tour to push for a ceasefire deal in Gaza.

According to Israeli public broadcaster KAN, Blinken told Netanyahu that the US opposes a military operation in Rafah, home to more than 1.4mn displaced Palestinians at the southern tip of the Gaza Strip.

The top US diplomat also called for doing more to allow humanitarian aid into the besieged enclave, KAN said.



Antony Blinken

Matthew Miller, a spokesman for the US State Department, said Blinken 'reiterated the United States' clear position on Rafah'.

Talks between the two sides took up ongoing efforts to reach an immediate ceasefire in Gaza as part of a hostage deal and the importance of accelerating and sustaining an improvement in aid flow into the enclave, he said in a statement.

Blinken spoke with Netanyahu on 'the need to avoid further expansion of the conflict' into the region, Miller said.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration is considering bringing some Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to the US as refugees, CBS News reported on Tuesday.

Senior officials across several federal US agencies have discussed the practicality of different options to resettle Palestinians from Gaza who have immediate family members who are American citizens or permanent residents, the report said, citing internal federal government documents.

According to the report, one of the ideas involves using the United States Refugee Admissions Program to grant refugee status to those who have managed to escape Gaza into Egypt. Anadolu Agency

UK detains migrants for deportation to Rwanda

Birmingham, UK - The UK Home Office announced on Wednesday that the first batch of illegal migrants set to be deported to Rwanda has now been detained, following a series of nationwide operations this week.

"Operational teams within the Home Office have been working at pace to safely and swiftly detain individuals in scope for relocation to Rwanda, with more activity due to be carried out in the coming weeks," a statement by the Home Office read.

The action is a key part of the plan to deliver flights to Rwanda in the next 9 to 11 weeks.

The announcement came after the Rwanda Bill, seeking to send asylum seekers to the East African country, became

law after it received royal assent last week.

Commenting on the detentions, Home Secretary James Cleverly said: "Our dedicated enforcement teams are working at pace to swiftly detain those who have no right to be here so we can get flights off the ground."

Home Office Director of Enforcement Eddy Montgomery said their specialist operational teams are highly trained and fully equipped to carry out the necessary enforcement activity. "It is vital that operational detail is kept to a minimum, to protect colleagues involved and those being detained, as well as ensuring we can deliver this large-scale operation as quickly as possible," he said.

Anadolu Agency



المدينة تكافل
Al Madina Takaful

Everything in harmony

Chairman's Report

Dear Shareholders,

Assalamu alaikum wa rahamatullahi wa Barakatuh!
(May the Peace, Mercy and Blessing of Allah be with you)

On behalf of the Board of Directors, and Management team of Al Madina Insurance Co ("Al Madina"), it gives me great pleasure to present to you the financial results achieved by your company for the period ending on 31st March 2024.

Al Madina's adopted strategies yielded operational efficiencies which have contributed positively to the Company's financial performance. The Company started the year on a positive note with a remarkable 17% growth in its Gross contributions as compared to the previous period. The financial results delivered by your Company reflect its intent to deliver consistent surplus from Insurance operations so that the Policyholder's interest is safeguarded while we continue to reward our shareholders.

Al Madina continues to maintain a healthy and well-balanced portfolio across all lines of business. Your Company is constantly enhancing its customer experience by ongoing process enhancements, efficient claims servicing, and by adopting best international practices in the field of insurance operations.

Operating Environment

The economic environment continues to be challenging where pressure on pricing prevails in the insurance market. Whereas the global insurance & reinsurance markets have also been witnessing rate corrections and insurers operating margins are shrinking. In these tough circumstances your Company achieved a Gross written contribution of RO 9.96 million as of the first quarter of 2024 as against 8.53 million during the same period of 2023. This was due to the application of strict underwriting discipline and a focused sales strategy.

Results from Operations

Your Company continues to deliver stable growth while strengthening the adequacy & sufficiency of its reserves. The Company registered a 24% growth in Net Earned Contributions amounting to RO 4.61 million in the 1st Quarter of 2024 as compared to RO 3.73 million in the corresponding period of 2023. However, the incurred claims have also increased by 30% in the first quarter of 2024. Despite the increase in incurred claims your Company achieved 4% growth in the underwriting surplus from Takaful operations before investment income, mudarib share and Wakala fees, after adjustment for commission expenses.

Investment Income

The investment performance of your company has been encouraging. The investment income grew by 5% during Q1-2024 as compared to Q1-2023. Investment income of RO 459 K was reported for Q1-2024 as against RO 437K for the corresponding period.

Your Company prudently manages all its investments and will continue to look at growing opportunities within the Islamic Finance space for optimizing its Investment Income in line with the Company's risk appetite.

Profitability of the Company

Al Madina achieved another period of successful financial performance despite the increase in incurred claims, the Company reported a 6% increase in profit after tax of RO 492K as compared to RO 465K for the corresponding period.

Risk Management

Your Company constantly evaluates its risks associated with the insurance business as well as its investments and adopts necessary measures to manage these risks.

Company's Outlook & Vision

As we embark into the year 2024, we are extremely optimistic as the Insurance industry in Oman is poised for a period of stable growth where the overall outlook appears to be positive due to continued increase in economic activity, fiscal reforms are expected to maintain fiscal and external balances in comfortable positions over the medium term.

Our emphasis will be on stability and sustainable growth, while keeping the focus on some key drivers such as profitability, superior customer service, launching of new products, technological innovations, and regulatory changes. Much will also depend on how the global reinsurance market responds to the rapid frequency of natural catastrophic events in Oman, subsequently impacting reinsurance pricing in addition to the availability of reinsurance capacities and issues of risk concentrations. Further public spending, foreign investment, market credit issue and cashflow will also be crucial factors for the growth of the Insurance industry.

Our position in the market, combined with strong underwriting fundamentals will enable us to continue our endeavor to provide sustained growth and profitability to all stakeholders in FY2024. We expect to maintain our market position in line with our projection for FY2024 by strengthening the distribution channels and supply chains. Furthermore, mandatory health insurance is expected to be launched soon and it is expected to give a thrust to the Health Insurance market. Al Madina has fulfilled the licensing requirement and awaits further instructions from the Financial Services Authority.

The Company continues to maintain its steady track record of having always been driven by and supportive of national objectives, such as in job creation and Omanization.

Al Madina will continue to invest in technology - driven innovation, IT upgrades, process automation and increased digitalization of insurance processes. The Company, with its well-planned growth strategy and business continuity plan is well positioned to achieve stable growth and Operational Profit in FY2024 through disciplined underwriting, process efficiency, focused sales planning, expense management and superior customer service.

The Company will also keep looking at growing opportunities within the Islamic finance space to generate stable yield on its investment book and to achieve the targeted investment returns for shareholders and policyholders.

Acknowledgements

It gives me immense pleasure to express appreciation on behalf of the Board. We extend our thanks to our customers, business partners, shareholders, Sharia Supervisory committee, and staff members, for their support and contributions. We also thank and appreciate the Financial Services Authority for their support and initiatives oriented towards the Insurance market, with a special emphasis on the development of Takaful Insurance in the country.

On behalf of the Board, I take this opportunity to express our most sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Al Said, for his dynamic and progressive leadership. We are confident that under the leadership of His Majesty, the Sultanate will continue to march toward further progress, development, and prosperity.

May God Bless you all.

Dr. Mohammed Ali Al Barwani
Chairman of the Board.

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 MARCH 2024										
	Shareholders' fund		Participants' fund						Grand total	
	Unaudited 31 March 2024 RO	Audited 31 December 2023 RO	General takaful		Family takaful		Total participants' fund		Unaudited 31 March 2024 RO	Audited 31 December 2023 RO
			Unaudited 31 March 2024 RO	Audited 31 December 2023 RO	Unaudited 31 March 2024 RO	Audited 31 December 2023 RO	Unaudited 31 March 2024 RO	Audited 31 December 2023 RO		
ASSETS										
Cash and bank balances	1,954,907	3,438,492	8,556,066	6,442,689	396,939	1,423,506	8,953,005	7,866,195	10,907,912	11,304,687
Investments carried at fair value through profit or loss	1,468,989	1,016,796	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,468,989	1,016,796
Takaful balance receivable	-	-	9,856,372	16,675,146	1,470,534	1,254,827	11,326,906	17,929,973	11,326,906	17,929,973
Retakaful / reinsurance balance receivable	-	-	5,537,238	4,339,418	449,619	351,244	5,986,857	4,690,662	5,986,857	4,690,662
Receivable from participants' fund – family takaful	-	-	482,312	937,133	-	-	482,312	937,133	482,312	937,133
Receivable from participants' fund	2,171,328	3,386,009	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,171,328	3,386,009
Due from retakaful / reinsurance companies in connection with takaful liabilities	-	-	46,006,480	51,315,760	1,964,028	2,013,685	47,970,508	53,329,445	47,970,508	53,329,445
Deferred policy acquisition cost	1,052,635	1,029,138	-	3	-	-	-	3	1,052,635	1,029,141
Other receivables and takaful assets	1,104,124	897,716	1,683,320	1,678,323	829,758	785,944	2,513,078	2,464,267	3,617,202	3,361,982
Investments at fair value through equity	1,704,748	1,755,180	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,704,748	1,755,180
Bank deposits	4,300,000	4,300,000	12,866,200	9,175,000	1,475,000	1,475,000	14,341,200	10,650,000	18,641,200	14,950,000
Investments carried at amortised cost	5,071,834	2,569,366	732,627	848,981	100,000	100,000	832,627	948,981	5,904,461	3,518,347
Deferred tax asset	287,146	287,146	-	-	-	-	-	-	287,146	287,146
Investment in real estate	5,170,000	5,170,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,170,000	5,170,000
Property and equipment	544,111	572,233	-	-	-	-	-	-	544,111	572,233
Total assets	24,829,822	24,422,076	85,720,615	91,412,453	6,685,878	7,404,206	92,406,493	98,816,659	117,236,315	123,238,735
LIABILITIES, PARTICIPANTS' FUND AND SHAREHOLDERS' EQUITY										
LIABILITIES										
Takaful liabilities	-	-	60,985,582	65,830,587	2,504,716	2,507,122	63,490,298	68,337,709	63,490,298	68,337,709
Unearned retakaful commission	-	-	-	110,104	-	-	110,104	110,104	110,104	110,104
Retakaful/reinsurance payables	-	-	12,849,023	14,561,206	794,821	683,190	13,643,844	15,244,396	13,643,844	15,244,396
Accounts and other payables	3,410,573	1,968,835	10,514,351	9,489,892	1,709,513	1,303,236	12,223,864	10,793,128	15,634,437	12,761,963
Charity fund payable	6,711	6,711	-	-	-	-	-	6,711	6,711	-
Payable to shareholders	-	-	719,667	1,182,358	1,451,661	2,203,651	2,171,328	3,386,009	2,171,328	3,386,009
Payable to participants' fund – family takaful	-	-	-	-	482,312	937,133	482,312	937,133	482,312	937,133
Employees' end of service benefits	580,375	555,768	-	-	-	-	-	-	580,375	555,768
Total liabilities	3,997,659	2,531,314	85,179,636	91,174,147	6,943,023	7,634,332	92,122,659	98,808,479	96,120,318	101,339,793
PARTICIPANTS' FUND										
Surplus / (deficit) in participants' fund – net	-	-	540,979	238,306	(257,145)	(230,126)	283,834	81,180	283,834	81,180
Total participants' fund	-	-	540,979	238,306	(257,145)	(230,126)	283,834	81,180	283,834	81,180
SHAREHOLDERS' EQUITY										
Capital and reserves	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Share capital	17,500,000	17,500,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	17,500,000	17,500,000
Share premium	1,380,151	1,380,151	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,380,151	1,380,151
Legal reserve	1,423,044	1,401,361	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,423,044	1,401,361
Investment fair value reserve	174,568	(92,809)	-	-	-	-	-	-	174,568	225,000
Retained earnings	354,400	1,384,250	-	-	-	-	-	-	354,400	1,384,250
Total shareholders' equity	20,832,163	21,890,762	-	-	-	-	-	-	20,832,163	21,890,762
Total liabilities, participants' fund and shareholders' equity	24,829,822	24,422,076	85,720,615	91,412,453	6,685,878	7,404,206	92,406,493	98,816,659	117,236,315	123,238,735

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' REVENUE AND EXPENSES FOR THE THREE-MONTH PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2024						
	General takaful		Family takaful		Total	
	(Unaudited) 31 March 2024 RO	(Unaudited) 31 March 2023 RO	(Unaudited) 31 March 2024 RO	(Unaudited) 31 March 2023 RO	(Unaudited) 31 March 2024 RO	(Unaudited) 31 March 2023 RO
Takaful revenue						
Gross contributions	8,983,707	7,944,606	981,018	584,548	9,964,725	8,529,154
Retakaful/reinsurance share	(4,080,143)	(4,600,899)	(680,642)	(397,947)	(4,760,785)	(4,998,846)
Retained contributions	4,903,564	3,343,707	300,376	186,601	5,203,940	3,530,308
Movement in unearned contributions reserve	(495,260)	223,178	(95,436)	(26,508)	(590,696)	196,670
Net earned contributions	4,408,304	3,566,885	204,940	160,093	4,613,244	3,726,978
Income earned from retakaful contracts	28,832	114,429	-	7	28,832	114,436
	<u>4,437,136</u>	<u>3,681,314</u>	<u>204,940</u>	<u>160,100</u>	<u>4,642,076</u>	<u>3,841,414</u>
Takaful expenses						
Gross claims settled	(4,703,586)	(3,143,167)	(838,633)	(517,263)	(5,542,217)	(3,660,430)
Claims recovered from retakaful/reinsurance	2,441,534	942,721	700,822	451,308	3,142,356	1,394,029
Net claims settled	(2,262,052)	(1,200,446)	(137,811)	(65,955)	(2,399,863)	(2,266,401)
Net movement in outstanding claims	30,986	512,144	48,185	(37,872)	79,171	474,272
Net claims incurred	(2,231,066)	(1,688,302)	(89,626)	(103,827)	(2,320,692)	(1,792,129)
Commission expense	(3)	(62)	-	-	(3)	(62)
	<u>(2,231,069)</u>	<u>(1,688,364)</u>	<u>(89,626)</u>	<u>(103,827)</u>	<u>(2,320,695)</u>	<u>(1,792,191)</u>
Surplus from Takaful operations	2,206,067	1,992,950	115,314	56,273	2,321,381	2,049,223
Takaful expense– net	(143,274)	(59,301)	(5,919)	75	(149,193)	(59,226)
Provision for impairment of receivable	(30,000)	(30,000)	-	-	(30,000)	(30,000)
Surplus from takaful operations	2,032,793	1,903,649	109,395	56,348	2,142,188	1,959,997
Investment income – net	148,046	168,743	23,864	21,699	171,910	190,442
Mudharib share	(81,425)	(92,809)	(13,125)	(11,934)	(94,550)	(104,743)
Wakala fees	(1,796,741)	(1,588,921)	(147,153)	(87,682)	(1,943,894)	(1,676,603)
Surplus / (Deficit) from takaful operations	<u>302,673</u>	<u>390,662</u>	<u>(27,019)</u>	<u>(21,569)</u>	<u>275,654</u>	<u>369,093</u>

China launches sea trial of its largest-ever aircraft carrier

Beijing, China - China's new aircraft carrier, the *Fujian* sets out from Shanghai on Wednesday for its first sea trials. It is the most advanced, and largest aircraft carrier in China, according to CNN.

According to Shanghai's Maritime Safety Administration, the naval assessment is expected to take place in the East China Sea.

The assessment of the vessel will take place about 130km (80 miles) from the Jiangnan Shipyard where the carrier has been under construction for over six years.

"The sea trials will primarily test the reliability and stability of the aircraft carrier's propulsion and electrical systems," CNN reported citing Xinhua news agency on Wednesday.

The warship was launched in 2022 and has 'completed its mooring trials, outfitting work and equipment adjustments' working up to the latest sea trials, Xinhua said.

The battleship was launched in 2022 and has 'completed its



mooring trials, outfitting work, and equipment adjustments' leading up to the most recent sea trials.

The *Fujian* is the largest carrier in the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), with a displacement of 80,000 metric tonnes, surpassing the *Shandong* and *Liaoning*, which weigh 66,000 and 60,000 tonnes, respectively, according to CNN.

The main feature of *Fujian* is an electromagnetic catapult technology, which allows it to launch larger and heavier aircraft than the *Shandong* and *Liaoning*, which employ a ski-jump launch mechanism. Only the US Navy operates larger aircraft carriers than *Fujian*.

The *Fujian*'s electromagnetic catapult system puts it on level with the US Navy's newest carrier, the *USS Gerald R Ford*, which is the only active carrier in the world equipped with one.

The US Navy's ten older carriers, known as the Nimitz class, used steam-powered catapults to launch aircraft.

ANI

Australia, South Korea discuss AUKUS security partnership

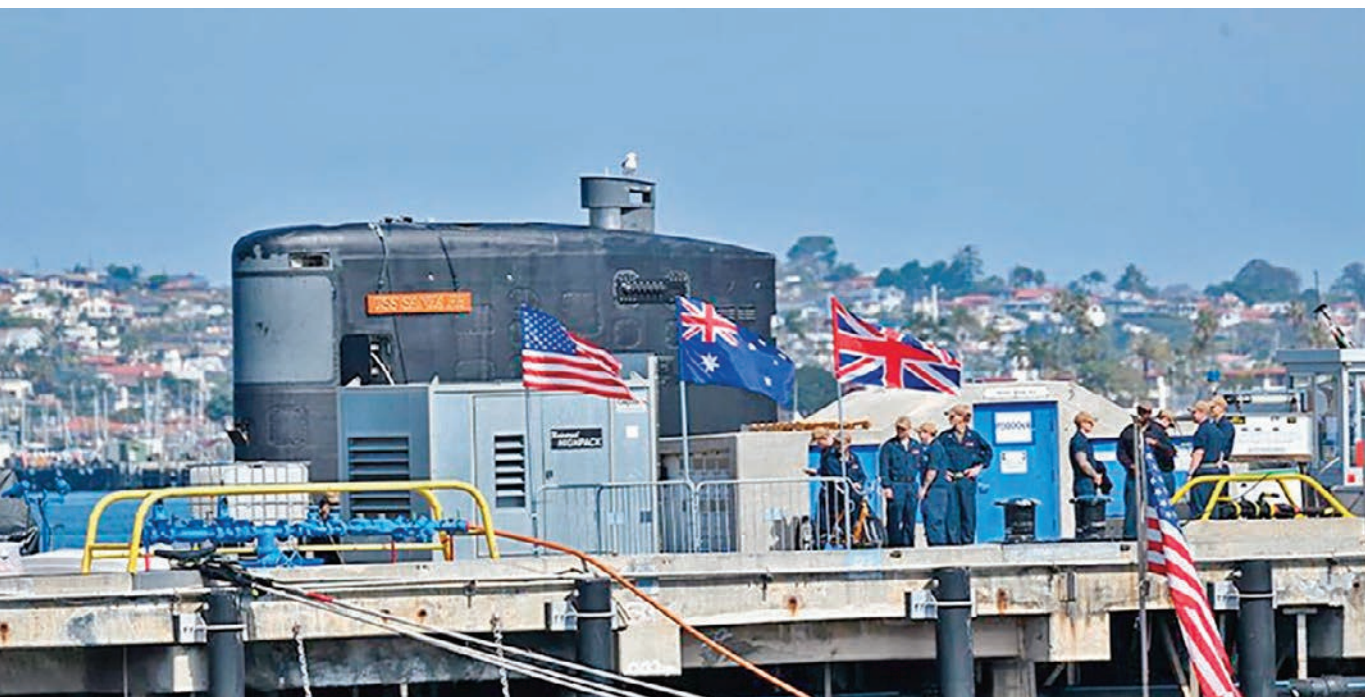
Melbourne, Australia - Australian and South Korean foreign and defence ministers held a 'two plus two' meeting on Wednesday to discuss a myriad of bilateral regional issues ranging from Seoul's potential inclusion in a regional security partnership to security cooperation between Russia and North Korea.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles met with their South Korean counterparts Cho Tae-yul and Shin Won-sik in Melbourne, which marked the first such high-level gathering between the two countries in over two years, Seoul-based Yonhap News reported.

South Korea's potential participation in part of the AUKUS security partnership was among the agenda items the two sides discussed.

South Korean Defence Minister Shin, at a joint press conference after the meeting, said that Seoul's possible participation in minilateral security partnership, comprising Australia, Britain and the US, will contribute to 'regional peace and stability'.

Launched in September 2021, the AUKUS partnership has drawn attention in South Korea and Japan, whose inclusion is under consideration by AUKUS members to cooperate in high-tech areas, known as



The AUKUS partnership has drawn attention in South Korea and Japan, whose inclusion is under consideration by AUKUS members

Seoul's possible participation in minilateral security partnership (comprising Australia, Britain and the United States) will contribute to regional peace and stability

SHIN WON SIK

the Pillar 2, which covers quantum computing, artificial intelligence and hypersonics.

The partnership is largely seen as a group of like-minded countries formed to counter China's growing influence.

Echoing a similar view, Aus-

tralian Defence Minister Marles described Seoul as a 'values-sharing' country with which Canberra has a strategic alignment.

"As AUKUS Pillar 2 develops, I think there will be opportunities in the future," Marles added.

'Evolving military threats'

Citing the mutual participation in last year's multilateral Talisman Sabre exercise and Korea's Freedom Shield exercises, Shin said the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to further developing the bilateral future-oriented relationship, including enhancing the joint military training.

The two countries, he went on to say, also discussed a host of issues of common interest across the board, from expanding cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to the defence industry and efforts to

sternly address North Korea's 'evolving military threats'.

Top South Korean diplomat Cho said the two countries agreed to collaborate in blocking 'North Korea's access to funding for its illicit nuclear and missile development and to thwart illegal activities, such as arms trading between Russia and North Korea'.

"Our Australian counterparts have expressed their steadfast support for enhancing the human rights of North Koreans and for our policies aimed at reunification," he said.

Anadolu Agency



French President Emmanuel Macron

Rwanda urged to withdraw from DR Congo

Paris, France - French President Emmanuel Macron urged Rwanda to withdraw military forces from the Democratic Republic of Congo and stop supporting the March 23 Movement (M23).

He said France 'strongly condemns' the actions of all armed groups, especially the M23, and emphasised the urgency to reduce tensions in the region.

Macron also expressed the sentiment in a telephone call with Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi accused Rwanda of perpetuating the conflict that has displaced more than one million people 'in order to seize mineral resources'.

M23, an ethnic Tutsi-led rebel group that was formed in 2012, is one of multiple rebel groups fighting in eastern Congo.

The group claims to defend

Tutsi interests against ethnic Hutu militias whose leaders are linked to the 1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda.

Tensions between France and some African countries have escalated in recent years.

Last year, Burkina Faso's military leaders ordered France to withdraw hundreds of troops from the West African country months after Mali had done the same. In August 2023, Niger announced it was overturning several military cooperation agreements with France and other Western nations.

In a statement this month, France announced the closure of its embassy in Niger, citing obstacles in its operations. Burkina Faso expelled three French diplomats earlier this month for 'subversive activities', in the latest sign of frosty relations.

Anadolu Agency

WORKER'S DAY OUT



A staff member cleans the body of a bullet train at a train maintenance workshop in Nanning City, south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, on Wednesday. International Workers' Day is observed annually on May 1 (Xinhua)

Ukraine needs 'speed-up' in military aid deliveries: Zelensky

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that his country needs a 'significant speed-up' in military aid deliveries to bolster the capabilities of its soldiers on the frontline with Russia.

"We need a significant speed-up of deliveries to strengthen the capabilities of our soldiers tangibly. It is not Russian air bombs and assault operations that should dominate the frontline, but our Ukrainian initiative," Zelensky said in an evening video address on Tuesday.

Expressing that Ukraine's shortcomings with regard to the delay in military aid deliveries to Kyiv are being solved partially by domestic production, Zelensky said they have achieved 'particular results' concerning drones.

"I am grateful to everyone who works for this cause, who produces drones, who trains operators, who provides everything we need. I thank each of our partners who now are really doing everything they can to strengthen our position," Zelensky further said.

He said Kyiv is counting on the US military aid deliveries, which



Volodymyr Zelensky

he said are deliveries that 'should be felt' by Russia. "In the south of our country. Everywhere where Russia is pushing and where we have to push it back. And also everywhere where new strike threats may arise," he added.

Last week, US President Joe Biden signed a US\$60.8bn aid bill to Ukraine into law as the country continues to fight off Russia's war that began in February 2022.

Meanwhile, Germany completed the delivery of a new military package to Ukraine, involving combat vehicles and ammunition for air defence systems, authorities confirmed on Tuesday.

According to a document pub-

lished on the government's website, German authorities have recently handed over 10 Marder combat vehicles with ammunition and spare parts, an air surveillance radar, and a second Skynex anti-aircraft system to Ukraine.

The government's updated list also included 30,000 rounds of ammunition for Gepard anti-aircraft tanks, an unspecified amount of ammunition for Leopard 2 battle tanks, and IRIS-T air defence systems, as well as 7,500 rounds of 155mm ammunition.

Berlin increased its military support to Ukraine following pressure from the US and other allies, and it is currently the second-largest supplier of weapons to the country.

Since the war began, Germany delivered or earmarked US\$30bn worth of weapons to Ukraine, according to official figures.

The military assistance included advanced weapons and equipment such as Leopard 2 battle tanks, Gepard anti-aircraft tanks, Marder combat vehicles, Patriot and IRIS-T air defence systems.

Anadolu Agency

ALL SQUARE IN MUNICH

Vinicius Junior scores brace to help Real Madrid draw at Bayern

Munich, Germany - Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior scored twice, including a late penalty, to snatch a 2-2 draw at Bayern Munich in an entertaining Champions League semi-final, first leg on Tuesday, leaving the tie wide open.

The Brazilian, who put Real in front after 24 minutes, has now scored in the semi-finals for a third successive season.

Bayern, with only the Champions League title left to fight for, had scored twice in four minutes early in the second half through a Leroy Sane strike and Harry Kane penalty to turn the game around before Vinicius' spot kick.

"We always want to win but we know that this competition is like that, you can't give away balls because teams score the chances they have," Vinicius Jr said.

"We have to keep our heads calm, rest until next week and we know that we and the fans are going to leave everything at the Santiago Bernabeu to qualify."

"Now it's time for a magical night at home to win and secure our place in the final," he added.

Facing each other for a record eighth time at this stage of the competition, it was Bayern who got off to a strong start, racking up half a dozen attempts on goal by the 15th minute with Sane and Kane coming close.

Real needed only one chance to score though, stunning the home crowd against the run of play when Kroos sliced open the Bayern defence with a through ball and Vinicius Jr chased it down to beat goalkeeper Manuel Neuer.

Kroos almost added another himself in the 51st but his curled shot was palmed wide by Neuer. Instead, it was Bayern who scored two minutes later with a solo effort and shot from Sane that eluded goalkeeper Andriy Lunin for a deserved equaliser.



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior celebrates after scoring against Bayern Munich on Tuesday

Their comeback was complete in the 57th when Jamal Musiala was brought down in the area by Lucas Vazquez and Kane sent Lunin the wrong way from the spot to put the home side ahead.

Real, chasing a 15th European Cup, levelled in the 83rd with Vinicius' penalty, after Rodrygo

was felled by a clumsy challenge from Kim Min-jae, to set up a mouth-watering return leg in Madrid next week.

"Everything we're fighting for is in this competition," said Kane.

"We've just got to find a way to get it done. Real Madrid away is going to be tough but we've got to go there with full belief and go

for the win.

"The Champions League is the biggest of them all. If we can somehow get our hands on it, it will be an amazing season - but there's still a long way to go."

The winners will face either Borussia Dortmund or Paris St Germain, who meet in the second semifinal on Wednesday.

Ancelotti: We have to improve for next week

Munich, Germany - Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti was disappointed with his players' attitude, calling them "soft" for defending too deep in their 2-2 draw at Bayern Munich in the Champions League semi-final, first leg on Tuesday.

Ancelotti was critical of his team's commitment after Vinicius Jr's first-half goal gave them the lead as Bayern struck twice in four minutes early in the second half to turn the game around before Vinicius equalised from the penalty spot.

"The result is good but on a level of play we could have done better. Bayern showed their best version and we didn't. We have to improve for next week," an introspective Ancelotti told Movistar Plus+.

"In the first half we defended but with little intensity, in the second half when they took the lead we started to press a bit more, but not enough.

"The feeling was that we were comfortable, but we lacked intensity. We gave them too many chances to take control of the game. We didn't want to play in a low block and we went on doing that. We were soft."



Carlo Ancelotti

Ancelotti defended his decision to substitute midfielder Toni Kroos, who set up Vinicius' opener with a brilliant pass and was arguably Real's best player.

The Italian said that he made four substitutions in an effort to shake his team up and was relieved that they ended up scoring the equaliser that he believes "left the tie open" for the return leg in Madrid next week.

"Jude Bellingham had a cramp, Toni Kroos played a spectacular game but the plan was to try to recover the control of the game by putting fresh legs in," Ancelotti told a press conference.

"As always, at this point in the season we have a great opportunity to play in another final. It's an even tie against a great team.

"It will be another 90 minutes of suffering but in an atmosphere that we know quite well.

The fans are going to help us," said Ancelotti.

Bayern ready for the return leg in Madrid, says Tuchel

Munich, Germany - Bayern Munich were victims of Real Madrid's lethal efficiency in Tuesday's 2-2 draw but the Germans are ready to beat them in next week's Champions League semi-final return leg in Madrid, coach Thomas Tuchel said.

The Bavarians struck twice in four minutes early in the second half with a shot from Leroy Sane and a Harry Kane penalty to turn the game around after Vinicius Jr had put the visitors ahead in the 24th against the run of play.

The Brazilian striker also bagged an equaliser with an 83rd minute spot kick as Bayern were pushing for a third goal.

"The result is what it is and it's not worth spending any time thinking about it," Tuchel, who will leave Bayern at the end of the season after a disappointing domestic campaign, told a press conference.

"Real have done it before, to score twice with two chances. We are not the first team to suffer that. They have the finish, they have the quality to do that.

"We had a strong start then we lost a bit our rhythm. We



Thomas Tuchel

should have scored a third but we were not efficient enough, not cold enough to add a third. Then we gifted them a penalty."

Bayern enjoyed a strong start and also had chances to score again after going 2-1 up. They will now need to win against Real, who are chasing a 15th European Cup, in Madrid next Wednesday if they are to advance to the final at Wembley.

Borussia Dortmund and Paris St Germain face each other in the other semi-final on Wednesday.

"The situation is now very clear," Tuchel added. "We go to Madrid and the winner takes it all. We are ready to fight. It is important to believe that.

"It is still possible. It is 50-50. It is one of the toughest places to win but that is also what makes this challenge exciting."

Atletico hit with stand closure for racist abuse

Madrid, Spain - Atletico Madrid have been ordered to partially close their south stand for two matches by the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) after Athletic Bilbao player Nico Williams suffered racist abuse in Saturday's LaLiga game.

Referee Juan Martinez Munuera stopped the match in the 36th minute as part of LaLiga's protocol against racism after he heard racist abuse directed at the 21-year-old Spain international, who was born in Pamplona to Ghanaian parents.

Atletico, who did not immediately respond when contacted by Reuters for comment, have also been fined 20,000 euros (\$21,360). They have 10 days to appeal. The RFEF said in a statement on Tuesday that the closed area in the stands must display a visible message condemning vi-



Nico Williams suffered racist abuse at Atletico Madrid

olent, racist, xenophobic and intolerant acts in football and supporting fair play. A few minutes after he was abused, Williams scored and ran in front of the south stand tapping his arm in reference to his skin colour.

Al Ain's Erik: We'll fight with all our strength for big dream

Al Ain, UAE - Al Ain deserved to reach the Asian Champions League final after eliminating Saudi giants Al Hilal and Al Nassr and will continue to defy the odds to make their dream of lifting the trophy come true, Brazilian defender Erik has told Reuters.

The side from the United Arab Emirates progressed 5-4 on aggregate against Al Hilal, winning 4-2 in the first leg before losing 2-1 in the return last Tuesday when Erik equalised before suffering an injury that forced him off after 18 minutes.

They will face Yokohama F Marinos in the final after the Japanese team beat Ulsan Hyundai on penalties.

Against the odds Al Ain beat Al Hilal, who have several internationals including defender



Al Ain's Erik (L) celebrates after scoring against Al Hilal in the AFC Champions League semifinal

Kalidou Koulibaly, goalkeeper Bono and striker Alexander Mitrovic, who missed the tie injured, plus midfield duo Sergej Milinkovic-Savic and Ruben Neves. "God wrote the perfect story and chose Al Ain to fight Al Hilal's invincibility and there

is nothing more rewarding than that".

Al Ain ended Al Hilal's world record run of 34 consecutive victories when they won the first leg.

Al Ain's Argentine coach Hernan Crespo exacted re-

venge for last season's 7-0 loss to Al Hilal in the Champions League when he was in charge of Qatar's Al Duhail.

"Crespo told us before the first game that he is very proud of us and that Al Hilal players are not from another world," the

Brazilian added. "We trust our coach; he is a legend in the world of football. He spoke to us with confidence, experience and his words gave us hope."

Surprise package Al Ain knocked out Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr in the quarter-finals in a penalty shootout after a 4-4 draw on aggregate.

"Before the tournament began, according to the media, our chances were 1% or less of being champions.

"I think logically we made the job easier and only us or Marinos can win the competition this season.

"That's already a big privilege and we are very proud and will fight with all of our strength for our big dream," he said of his side's chances of lifting the trophy.



Mayank Yadav

Mayank walks off field under injury cloud

Lucknow, India - Lucknow Super Giants express pace bowler Mayank Yadav has had another injury scare at IPL 2024, having walked off against Mumbai Indians after the first ball of his fourth over. His captain KL Rahul said that was more of a precaution after he complained of pain in the same area he's had issues with, which had kept him out of five games before this one. He will have scans on Wednesday to rule out further issues.

"I have not really spoken to him," Rahul said at the post-match presentation. "He was out in the last game because of a slight pain in his side, not a side strain, but slight pain there. After the first ball [of his fourth over], he said the same thing, 'thoda dukh raha hai [it's hurting a bit]'. So I said might as well go out and not risk the next five balls. He is still young and precious to us, so we need to look after him."

Mayank, 21, had earlier

played three matches at this IPL before being sidelined because of abdominal soreness. "Looks like he is sore in the same spot," LSG head coach Justin Langer said. "His rehab has been perfect, he bowled pain-free in the last week and looked in great condition. But we'll have a scan and find out tomorrow."

In his first two IPL matches, against Punjab Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Mayank had bagged the Player-of-the-Match awards with three-fors in both games when he went past 150kph regularly and surprised with his speed on the big stage, especially without much experience in domestic cricket; Mayank had played just one first-class match, 17 List A matches and 10 T20s before making his IPL debut.

At the toss on Tuesday, Rahul had said he had been keen to get Mayank back in the playing XI as quickly as possible.

STOINIS SPECIAL

Australian star shines again as Lucknow beat Mumbai

Lucknow, India - Having lost more wickets (4) than they hit boundaries (3) in the powerplay, Mumbai Indians were always going to struggle. Four of the first six overs cost a run a ball or less. Two of the last four suffered the same fate. A total of 144 did not look like it would be enough and so it proved as Lucknow Super Giants secured victory with four wickets to spare and moved into third place on the points table.

Really, the only thing that didn't go according to plan for KL Rahul - well two things - was Mayank Yadav leaving the field early on the very night he returned from injury.

There is almost no relation between Mohsin Khan's amble up to the crease and the ball that he sends down. At times, he gets big on the batter. Other times he gets swing that they aren't expecting. He uses his height to great effect and must have incredible strength in his shoulder. It seems to be where he gets all his pace, which deceived pretty much everybody. He was producing a false shot roughly once every three deliveries.

Rohit Sharma spooned a ball that he saw as hittable straight into the hands of short cover. The MI batter threw his head back in utter disappointment. He was still thinking that should have gone for four. But instead



Marcus Stoinis plays a shot during his knock of 62

he was the one gone for 4, on his birthday. Nehal Wadhwa had cleared his front leg looking to go big. Except he was met with a searing yorker, dipping beneath his bat before he was ready for it and crashing into his stumps.

Marcus Stoinis has a hundred in this tournament, batting at No. 3. He also occasionally opens the bowling for LSG. Imagine what India would do to have a player like that in their T20 squad?

Someone who can bat up the order and give them two or three overs every game. Stoinis knows his limitations. He knows he doesn't have a lot of pace, but that actually worked in his favour when was bowling to Suryakumar Yadav.

The attempt to flick a boundary to fine leg ended up as a feather through to the keeper. It was brave of LSG, keeping Stoinis on for a second over, long after the swing from the new ball had disappeared, against one of the most dangerous batters in the world. But that was probably the plan - deny SKY the pace he likes - and it worked.

They lost Rohit and Suryakumar in back-to-back overs. They lost Tilak Varma and Hardik Pandya in back-to-back balls. MI were a sinking ship after just 5.2 overs. They could hit only three boundaries in the powerplay, the fewest this season. It was the perfect situation for Ravi Bishnoi to come in and dictate terms.

He bowled four overs on the trot, giving away 28 runs and picking up Ishan Kishan's wicket with a gorgeous googly, deceiving the left-hander as he went for a slog across the line and having

TODAYS MATCH

MATCH 50

6 PM

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD VS RAJASTHAN ROYALS

him caught at short third. Wadhwa tried his best from the other end, progressing from 9 off 15 to 13 off 20 to finally 46 off 41. Most of his runs came off Mayank (21 off 12, 2x4s, 2x6s)

Batting average almost 40, strike rate above 150, four wickets from 12 overs bowled, LSG have a cheat code and his name is Stoinis. This chase really got in gear when he pulled Gerald Coetzee for back-to-back boundaries in the third over. Until then the new ball was doing a fair bit and LSG's focus was seeing that spell of play out. Rahul had dropped anchor (5 off 13, before finishing with 28 off 22). He was looking to his partner to make the play and he did. Big time.

Stoinis came into this game with an average of 19 and strike rate of 128 against spin in IPL 2024. But he found Piyush Chawla and Mohammad Nabi just to his liking, taking them for a combined 29 off just 16 balls with four fours and a six. That ended up as necessary insurance because after the fall of his wicket, LSG needed 27 balls to score the remaining 30 runs, losing two wickets as well.

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ILYAS TO LEAD OMAN AT T20 WORLD CUP

The 15-member squad comprise mostly all-rounders as they compete at the continental showpiece for the third time

Muscat - Experienced all-rounder Aqib Ilyas has been entrusted with the responsibility of leading Oman at the forthcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024, to be jointly hosted by West Indies and the USA from June 1-29.

Ilyas replaces long-serving skipper Zeeshan Maqsood at the team's helm and the 15-member announced on Wednesday doesn't have many surprises. Maqsood had captained Oman on 92 occasions.

National team head coach and Oman Cricket's chief development officer Duleep Mendis has reposed faith in his experienced players, with nine of the team members having featured in Oman's previous participation at the T20 World Cup in 2021.

Among the six players who will be making their debut at the T20 World Cup are specialist batters, Kashyap Prajapati and Khalid Kail, wicketkeeper Pratik Athavale, spinner Shakeel Ahmad, and all-rounders Shoaib Khan and Rafiullah.

Skipper Ilyas and Maqsood along with Mohammad Nadeem, Ayaan Khan, Rafiullah, Mehran Khan and Shoaib Khan are designated all-rounders while the pace attack will be spearheaded by Bilal Khan, Fayyaz Butt, and Kaleemullah. Shakeel Ahmad is the specialist spinner, and he will be supported by Ilyas, Maqsood and Ayaan in the spin department.

Athavale and Naseem Khushi will be the two wicket-keepers in the squad.

Oman played their maiden ICC T20 World Cup in 2016 in India and four players from the team - Maqsood, Nadeem, Mehran and Bilal - still continue to play key roles for the national side. The quartet were joined by Ilyas, Butt, Kaleemullah, Khushi and Ayaan at the 2021 T20 World Cup that was jointly hosted by Oman and the UAE.

Four reserves - Jatinder Singh, Samay Shrivastava, Sufyan Mehmood and Jay Odedra - were also named on Wednesday.



Oman are in Group B alongside defending champions England, Australia, Namibia and Scotland; Aqib Ilyas (R)

'Excited to take over as captain'

I am truly honoured to be entrusted with the captaincy," said Aqib Ilyas, brimming with enthusiasm.

"It's a huge responsibility, and I aim to lead the team to many victories. We are preparing rigorously for the World Cup, and the recent ACC Premier Cup has provided us with invaluable preparation."

Ilyas expressed his "thanks to Oman Cricket" for "believing in him".

Highlighting the team's ambitions, Ilyas affirmed, "Our goal is

to qualify for the next round. We are not merely making up the numbers; we are determined to showcase our talent and prove that our journey to the World Cup was no fluke."

Coach Duleep Mendis shared his optimism, and said, "I have high hopes for our boys under Aqib Ilyas's leadership. With a balanced team, we are capable of surprising a few nations in the West Indies."

Reflecting on the transition, Mendis paid tribute to former skipper Zeeshan Maqsood [Shani], acknowledging his remarkable contribution to Oman

Cricket. "Shani has rendered yeoman service as a skipper," Mendis remarked. "He is among the best Oman has ever produced, and even won the Cricketer of the Year award among Associate Nations in 2022. We want him to play freely as an all-rounder, his contribution will be vital."

The former Sri Lankan Test star, who will be leading Oman to their third ICC Men's T20 World Cup appearance, said: "We wish to make an impact at the World Cup and with a balanced team, we are capable of surprising few nations in West Indies."



I aim to lead the team to many victories. We are preparing rigorously for the World Cup, and the recent ACC Premier Cup has provided us with invaluable preparation.

AQIB ILYAS

The squad, dominated by versatile all-rounders, features a mix of seasoned campaigners and promising World Cup debutants, signalling Oman's intent to make a mark on the global stage.

Facing formidable opponents in their group, including defending champions England, Australia, Namibia and Scotland, Oman aims to defy odds and leave an indelible mark on the tournament.

Shoaib Khan, Mohammad Nadeem, Naseem Khushi (wk), Mehran Khan, Bilal Khan, Rafiullah, Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt, Shakeel Ahmad. Reserves: Jatinder Singh, Samay Shrivastava, Sufyan Mehmood, Jay Odedra.

Officials: Duleep Mendis (head coach), Evert Laubscher (assistant coach), Sean Novak (physio), Mazhar Khan (coach co-ordinator), Zeeshan Siddiqui (video analyst), Champaka Ramaniyake (bowling coach), Alkesh Joshi (team manager), Dr Manjunath (team doctor), Varun Khimji (media manager) and Amjad Khan (masseur).

Smith and Fraser-McGurk miss Australia's T20 World Cup squad

Melbourne, Australia - Australia selectors have dropped veteran campaigner Steve Smith for the T20 World Cup and ignored calls to include Jake Fraser-McGurk in their squad despite the young batsman's sensational form in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Smith, a member of Australia's title-winning squad at the 2021 tournament in the United Arab Emirates, played T20s against New Zealand in February but was unable to push his claims further after missing out on an IPL contract.

With more than 16,000 runs in international cricket, Smith has been one of Australia's finest all-format servants and his omission will be a bitter pill for the 34-year-old.

Selectors chief George Bailey said there was no room for Smith in a settled top order featuring David Warner, Travis Head and Mitchell Marsh, who was confirmed as captain.



Mitchell Marsh will lead Australia

It's probably for Steve to answer what his goals or challenges are going forward and what he wants to achieve. I know he still loves playing T20 cricket.

GEORGE BAILEY

tals at an astonishing strike rate of 237.50.

Bailey said Fraser-McGurk was among players who were part of "long conversations" for the June 1-29 showpiece in the United States and the Caribbean.

But his only hope of playing now rests with injuries occurring in the 15-man squad. Selectors opted for a second spinner in Ashton Agar and picked Cameron Green as a back-up all-

rounder while remaining loyal to the core of players who helped Australia win an unprecedented sixth 50-over World Cup in India last November.

Josh Inglis was included as a reserve wicketkeeper along with the seasoned Matt Wade.

Several players have struggled for form in the IPL, while Warner has missed cricket with bone bruising in his hand and all-rounder Glenn Maxwell took a mental and physical break from the game.

Bailey shrugged off the concerns, saying he expected everyone to be fit and ready when Australia start their World Cup campaign against cricketing minnows Oman in Barbados on June 5.

Australia have also been grouped with defending champions England along with Namibia and Scotland.

The Australians will bid to become the first nation to hold all three major global titles, having

Former captain Shahidi fails to find place in Afghanistan squad

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghanistan have packed six all-rounders, including captain Rashid Khan, in their 15-member squad for the T20 World Cup in the United States and West Indies in June.

Ibrahim Zadran, Najibullah Zadran, and the wicketkeeping duo of Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Mohammad Ishaq were the only four frontline batters in the squad unveiled on social media platform X on Tuesday night.

Afghanistan will hope the presence of all-rounders Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad



Rashid Khan

Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Karim Janat and Nangeyalia Kharote will add depth to their batting.

Mujeeb-ur-Rahman and Noor

Ahmad will join Rashid and Nabi in Afghanistan's formidable spin attack, which is likely to be key to their performance in the 20-team tournament.

Top-order batter Hashmatullah Shahidi, who led Afghanistan in the 50-overs World Cup in India last year, did not make the squad.

Afghanistan begin their Group C campaign against Uganda on June 3.

The top two teams from the group, which also include New Zealand and West Indies, will advance to the Super 8 stage.

Nadal bids farewell to Madrid after losing to Lehecka

Madrid, Spain - Twenty-two-time Grand Slam champion Rafa Nadal fell 7-5 6-4 to Czech Jiri Lehecka in the fourth round of the Madrid Open on Tuesday, marking his final appearance at a tournament he has won five times.

In just over two hours, a feisty Lehecka thwarted Nadal's hopes of reaching his 100th Masters 1000 quarter-final after a fairytale run in only his second tournament since January as the Spaniard struggled with injury.



Rafael Nadal waves to the crowd after his defeat to Jiri Lehecka in the fourth round of the Madrid Open on Tuesday

Nadal has said he expects to retire after the 2024 season.

"I'm happy. It was a very special week for me, very positive in every way. I was able to play again on a court that has given me a lot, also on an emotional level," the 37-year-old Nadal said in an on-court interview in front of an emotional crowd.

"It has been unforgettable, and I can only say 'thank you'. It has been an incredible journey. It's very difficult, but life and my body have been sending signals

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Ange Postecoglou

VAR needs changes, says Postecoglou

London, England - Other than moving to Sweden where the introduction of VAR has been rejected after opposition from clubs, Tottenham Hotspur manager Ange Postecoglou said there is no escape from it in England despite almost weekly criticism.

"Yeah, it's here to stay -- absolutely. It's not going away," the Australian told reporters on Wednesday ahead of his side's away Premier League clash at Chelsea.

"I'd change a hell of a lot on it but again I've said before that I think it's changed the game materially, which I don't think was the intention when it was brought in."

The use of VAR in the Premier League has created more controversy than it was introduced to solve with offside decisions being forensically examined and hand ball decisions often wildly inconsistent to the frustration of managers.

Referees chief Howard Webb admitted on Wednesday that VAR should have intervened in Nottingham Forest's recent loss at Everton, saying they should have been awarded a penalty. Postecoglou has had his own frustrations with VAR and says the impact has not been in the best interests of the game.

"Like I said we're trying to pick the bones out of every little thing that happens in a football game at the moment - whether that's the referee or any other part," he said. "I don't like it -- it changes the game, the game experience whether you're involved or not as an active spectator. But hopefully they'll find the right sort of ground for it to work."

Postecoglou said he did attend meetings with officials but it was down to the Professional Game Match Officials Limited (PGMOL) to iron out the issues with VAR.

Chelsea's Pochettino ready for emotional clash against Spurs

London, England - Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino expects yet another emotional night when his side take on his former club Tottenham Hotspur in the Premier League on Thursday, but said his focus remains on grabbing on all three points at Stamford Bridge.

Pochettino guided Spurs to the 2019 Champions League final and turned them into Premier League title contenders as they finished in the top four for four straight seasons before he was fired after a five year stay in north London.

Chelsea, who appointed Pochettino in May last year, are ninth in the league standings with five matches remaining. Spurs are fifth with 60 points, seven behind fourth-placed Aston Villa, who have played two more games.

"It was special when we played there (when Chelsea played at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in November). It was my first time since leaving the club, but now it is a different time," Pochettino told reporters on Wednesday.

"It will be emotional coming up against people who I worked with for a long period. I can't hide my emotion for the club. I think it is going to be emotional because facing a former team, where the history was good, you remember that.

"But I have said before -- across the 90 minutes we want to win and Tottenham are going to come here to try and win. It will be a good game."

Chelsea handed Spurs a 4-1 defeat in the reverse fixture in November, in which the hosts



Mauricio Pochettino

were reduced to nine men, to end their unbeaten start to the season.

Thursday's game will mark Pochettino's 400th game as a manager in England. Pochettino was also in charge of Southampton from 2013-14.

"Amazing, a dream come true..." the Argentine said.

"Tottenham was amazing also because the challenge was to create a team that could challenge and compete with top sides.

Tottenham was amazing also because the challenge was to create a team that could challenge and compete with top sides. Now, arriving at Chelsea, it is an amazing club with an amazing history.

MAURICIO POCHETTINO

"Now, arriving at Chelsea, it is an amazing club with an amazing history.

It is in the process of building an exciting project that needs time and that is maybe the most challenging period."

Defenders Axel Disasi and Thiago Silva have been added to Chelsea's lengthy injury list, which includes midfielder Enzo Fernandez, left back Ben Chilwell and right back Malo Gusto, among several others.



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Wolves manager O'Neil banned for 'threatening' behaviour

London, England - Wolverhampton Wanderers manager Gary O'Neil has been handed a one-match touchline ban and an 8,000 pounds (\$9,981) fine for "threatening" behaviour after last month's 2-1 Premier League defeat by West Ham United, England's Football Association (FA) said on Tuesday.

Wolves were left fuming on April 6 when a stoppage-time equaliser from Max Kilman was ruled out by referee Tony Harrington after a VAR check for offside against Tawanda Chirewa, who was in front of keeper Lukasz Fabianski.

O'Neil had described the call



Gary O'Neil

as a "scandalous" and "horrendous" decision while Wolves chairman Jeff Shi urged the Premier League and referees' body to "uphold the integrity" of the league.

O'Neil was charged for "threatening" behaviour after the referee's call. The FA confirmed that O'Neil has admitted the charge and will not be able to be in the dugout for Wolves' game at title-chasing Manchester City on Saturday.

"It was alleged that following the completion of the fixture, his language and/or behaviour in or around the match officials' changing room was improper and/or threatening," the FA said in a statement. "Mr O'Neil admitted the charge and the sanctions were subsequently imposed by an independent Regulatory Commission."

Djokovic splits with fitness coach Panichi

Paris, France - World number one Novak Djokovic thanked his long-time fitness coach Marco Panichi for his years of service on Tuesday, signaling the end of their working relationship in the latest shakeup in the 24-times Grand Slam winner's camp.

The Serb said last week that he was considering going without a coach after ending a five-year partnership with Croatian coach Goran Ivanisevic last month, following his early exit from Indian Wells.

The Italian Panichi joined Djokovic's team as fitness coach in 2017.

Rybakina survives Putintseva scare to enter Madrid semis

Madrid, Spain - Fourth seed Elena Rybakina rallied from a set down to beat fellow Kazakhstani Yulia Putintseva 4-6 7-6(4) 7-5 in a two-hour and 48-minute battle as she advanced to her first Madrid Open semi-final on Wednesday.

The 50th-ranked Putintseva looked on course to cause an upset as she put on a near-flawless display to take the opening set in 45 minutes, but Rybakina managed to regain her composure and saved two match points at 5-2 down in the final set.

"It was really tough. I knew it wouldn't be easy. I was hoping I'd start better... it wasn't easy always coming back," Rybakina said.

"At 2-5, I already left the emotions and frustration and just kept playing. The momentum



Elena Rybakina

shifted. Yulia started to get a bit more angry and some mistakes helped me. I just kept on playing.

"I'm really happy."

After an underwhelming start, Rybakina stepped up a gear to level the contest by taking a tight second set, which was ultimately settled in a tiebreak where she made the most of her opportunities, securing it with a high backhand volley.

Weekend



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Take a break from regular cuisine, cook up healthy meals for a change



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PROMOTING OMAN

Mohammed Taha

Two Omani adventurers - Khalid bin Said al Anqoodi and Nabil al Riyami - successfully reached the summit of Mount Kosciuszko, the tallest mountain in mainland Australia, standing at 2,228m above sea level, a fortnight ago.

Located on the main range of the snowy mountains in Kosciuszko National Park, New South Wales, Australia, this achievement marks another milestone in the duo's impressive mountaineering journey.

Speaking to Muscat Daily from Australia, Anqoodi said, "We began our journey on April 15,4, and reached the summit of Mt Kosciuszko on April 18 at 5pm."

"Determination proved essential," Anqoodi explained, detailing the challenges faced during their ascent. "The climb was arduous due to unpredictable weather conditions. We trekked for nine hours to reach the summit."

He further said, "We embarked on a demanding hike in the Kosciuszko Reserve, dedicating full nine hours, from 8 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon. Our goal was to conquer the summit of Mount Kosciuszko and then safely return to the cozy city of Jinda Pine, where we planned to camp under the stars. With persistence and determination, we conquered the chilling four degrees below zero atop the mountain, proudly raising Oman's flag at the summit."

Mental and physical preparedness

Anqoodi emphasised that the purpose of their expedition was to promote

SOUL TWINS ON A SUMMIT



Oman tourism, inspire Omani youth to engage in hiking, and foster a culture of adventure within society.

Discussing the preparations required for such expeditions, Anqoodi highlighted the importance of both, physical and mental training. "In addition to physical conditioning, mental preparedness is crucial for climbers undertaking such journeys. We underwent two months of walking practice, dedicating four to five hours weekly to prepare for this climb. We also familiarised ourselves with the area's topography through interactions with

locals."

Riyami said, "Khalid and I represent soul twins in adventures and journeys for many years, during which we travelled to many countries and organised thousands of hiking trips inside and outside Oman. Climbing mountains has taught us many qualities such as patience, strength, endurance, and getting to know many cultures of different peoples, which has gained us more knowledge and the customs and traditions of those peoples."

Talking about the benefits of mountain climbing, Riyami emphasised how

exploring natural landscapes and reaching the summit can be immensely rewarding experiences. "Spending time outdoors while hiking or mountaineering offers not only memorable moments but also long-term health benefits. It's not just about getting in shape; mountain climbing can make fitness enjoyable and engaging. Preparing your body for climbing improves flexibility and overall fitness, making it a fun way to stay healthy and active," he asserted.

In addition to Mount Kosciuszko, Anqoodi and Riyami have conquered various peaks worldwide, including the Italian Alps in 2022, Mount Ararat (5,137m) in Turkey in 2019, and Mount Fuji (3,776m) in Japan in 2017 and Everest Base Camp Trek (5,364m) in Nepal in 2018.

Career peaks

Anqoodi's mountaineering resume boasts ascents of 15 mountains, including three of the 'Seven Summits' - Kilimanjaro in Africa, Elbrus in Russia, and Aconcagua in Argentina. He expressed his ambition to scale the remaining four in years ahead.

Following their triumph on Mount Kosciuszko, Anqoodi's list of conquered peaks now includes Toubkal (4,167m) in Morocco, Kala Patthar and Everest in India, Mount Kinabalu (4,095m) in Malaysia, Mount Apo (2,954m) in the Philippines, Mount Cheget (3,150m) in Russia, and Mount Kinabalu (4,095m) in Malaysia, as well as Mount Bromo (3,229m) and Mount Semeru (3,667m) in Indonesia.

Having explored over 75 countries, Anqoodi affirmed that these journeys serve as opportunities to showcase Oman's tourism potential.

Looking ahead, Anqoodi and Riyami are planning to conquer one of the peaks of the North American continent in 2025. They also encourage the youth of Oman to pursue their dreams with patience and determination.

With persistence and determination, we conquered the chilling four degrees below zero atop the mountain, proudly raising Oman's flag at the summit

KHALID AL ANQOODI



Spending time outdoors while hiking or mountaineering offers not only memorable moments but also long-term health benefits. It's not just about getting in shape; mountain climbing can make fitness enjoyable and engaging

NABIL AL RIYAMI



cook-up



Grilled Hamour and Veggies

Ingredients

- 5-6 new or red potatoes - quartered
- 2-3tbsp olive oil - divided
- Fresh rosemary sprigs
- 4 cloves of garlic – sliced in half
- ½ cup baby carrots
- 1 large onion – quartered
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 lemon - sliced into wedges
- 600g Mahi Mahi or any firm-flesh fish fillets

Method

Preheat oven to 200°C. Toss the potatoes in a large bowl. Pour over 1tbsp olive oil and a sprinkle of salt and pepper, and toss to coat. Add the rosemary and garlic and toss again. Don't wash the mixing bowl - set it aside. Spread the potatoes in a single layer on a large baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes. Remove from the oven and turn the potatoes, then bake for another 15 minutes and set to one side of the pan. Add the carrots and onion to

the mixing bowl, toss to coat in any remaining olive oil, sprinkle salt and pepper, and add this to the baking tray besides the potatoes.

Now, gently toss the fish fillets in the mixing bowl, adding more olive oil to coat. Place the lemon in a single layer in the centre of the baking pan and put the fish on top, skin side down. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and bake for 15-20 minutes or until the fish flakes. Allow the dish to rest for 5 minutes before serving.

DIET CONSCIOUS

Healthy meals

It's good to step off your regular food intake, occasionally, and prepare healthy meals, especially if you have undertaken new fitness goals



Broccoli & Apple Salad

Ingredients

- 2 heads fresh broccoli - chopped, steamed
- 2 apples - diced
- ¼ cup sweet onion – diced
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- 2tbsp sugar
- 6tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 2tbsp Dijon mustard
- 2tbsp canola oil
- ½tsp ground black pepper
- Salt, to taste

Method

In a large bowl, add broccoli, apples, onion, and dried cranberries, and toss well. In a medium bowl, combine the remaining ingredients to form the dressing. Fold dressing into broccoli mixture until broccoli is completely covered. Toss, cover and chill for at least 2 hours before serving.



Grilled chicken, bulgur and green beans

Ingredients

- 250g chicken breast
- 200g Bulgur wheat
- 200ml Boiling water
- 1tbsp olive oil
- ½tsp each - salt, ground black pepper
- 100g green beans
- 2tbsp shredded bell pepper (any colour)
- 2tbsp chopped parsley
- 2tsp lemon juice

Method

Place the bulgur wheat in a bowl and add the salt and oil. Then, add the boiling water and cover with cling film for 30 minutes. Fluff it up with a fork then add the lemon juice, parsley, beans and bell pepper shreds. Mix well.

Season the chicken with salt and pepper, drizzle olive oil and grill for 10-15 minutes, as desired. Serve the seasoned bulgur and beans topped with slices of grilled chicken..



Mango Chia Pudding

Ingredients

- 2 cups unsweetened soy or almond milk
- 1 heaping cup mango chunks
- ½ cup blueberries
- 2-3tbsp maple syrup
- ¼tsp cinnamon
- 2tsp vanilla extract
- ¼tsp salt
- ½ cup chia seeds
- Few mint leaves – for garnish

Method

Add all ingredients, except chia seeds, mango and blueberries, to a blender and blend until smooth. Add the blended mix to a medium glass bowl. Add the chia seeds, stir and refrigerate for at least 6 hours.

Serve out the chia pudding topped with mango chunks, blueberries and a mint leaf.

taste the

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take a break

IN TOWN

ITALIAN FOOTBALL JOURNEY



'Welcome Azzurri: An Italian Football Journey', a photo exhibition dedicated to historical football moments of 'The Azzurri' opened at Bait al Zubair



Photos: V K Shafteer

Networking Dinner



H E Dr Thomas Oertle, Ambassador of Switzerland to Oman and Yemen, hosted a Networking Dinner to mark Oman Sustainability Week



Photos: V K Shafteer

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your feelings could fly around unpredictably today, so this wouldn't be the best time to make a first impression on somebody. Stick with the people who know you well. You can't control what kind of mood you'll be in when you are with others, but if they already know you, they'll be fine with whatever energy you put out.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your feelings could fly around unpredictably today, so this wouldn't be the best time to make a first impression on somebody. Stick with the people who know you well. You can't control what kind of mood you'll be in when you are with others, but if they already know you, they'll be fine with whatever energy you put in.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Try to spend some time in nature today. You don't have to go on an all-day hike, but the more time you can spend breathing fresh air the better. Take a walk in your yard, visit a botanical or neighbourhood garden, or even just pick up a bouquet of flowers at the grocery store. Getting in touch with nature will keep you balanced and feeling more confident about an upcoming event.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're feeling less decisive today, and you could be forced to rely on your intuition more than you're comfortable with. Even though all the information you want to know isn't going to be available, you will still have to make a choice. Luckily, your fortune is good, and chances are you will make the right decision whatever it may be.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Don't be surprised if one of the authority figures in your life starts acting oddly today. Everyone is more concerned with their own issues right now, and this person is no exception. You might be tempted to take advantage of their distracted mood and start slacking off, but that wouldn't be wise. Now is the time to be a model citizen in every sense of the word.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your high-flying ideas are great for motivating people and keeping you feeling hopeful, but they might be a bit too unrealistic to come to fruition, and that could ultimately be quite disappointing. To save yourself from such a harsh reality check, be more grounded about your chances for success in a new venture. It isn't that you will necessarily fail, but you can't assume you'll be victorious.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Avoid making any big commitments or major decisions right now, especially if they have anything to do with financial matters. Throwing money at a problem is never a wise idea, but today it could have serious, long-term ramifications. You're full of confusion right now, which could cause you to spend money unwisely. Let time sort out any issues that pop up today.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

There's a magnetic pull tugging at you today. Your friends are desperate to get some of your free time, and they're pulling out all the stops to do it. Their tantalizing offers for good times are flattering, but you have to keep your priorities straight today. And unfortunately, painting the town red doesn't rate higher than getting your work finished.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

There's a magnetic pull tugging at you today. Your friends are desperate to get some of your free time, and they're pulling out all the stops to do it. Their tantalizing offers for good times are flattering, but you have to keep your priorities straight today. And unfortunately, painting the town red doesn't rate higher than getting your work finished. Don't put off the important stuff.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

There's a magnetic pull tugging at you today. Your friends are desperate to get some of your free time, and they're pulling out all the stops to do it. Their tantalizing offers for good times are flattering, but you have to keep your priorities straight today. And unfortunately, painting the town red doesn't rate higher than getting your work finished.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Stop the engines and cool your jets today, because if you don't slow down the pace of your life, you could zip right past something wonderful and miss out on a life-changing opportunity. Someone has been desperately trying to get your attention, but you have been so busy with other things that you haven't noticed.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You could get some major motivation from someone powerful today, which will help you get yourself out of a situation that's been making you feel like a bit of a door-mat with a friend or coworker. Your backbone will stiffen instantly, and you'll be able to tell that certain bossy someone that you are not going to take it any more.

BOGGLER

D	O	N	K
D	E	U	I
S	D	E	C
C	E	L	A

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

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

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. When was the iPad first released?

- A. 2010
B. 2012
C. 2014
D. 2015

2. What flower plant does vanilla flavour come from?

- A. Sunflower
B. Orchid
C. Lotus
D. Gladiola

3. What is Rihanna's full name?



- A. Maria Rihanna Fletcher
B. Robyn Rihanna Fenty
C. Julie Rihanna Jude
D. Marie Rihanna Fenty

Answers
1. A
2. B
3. B

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

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

entertainment

HOLLYWOOD STUNT PERFORMERS REV UP 'FALL GUY' PREMIERE

Fresh from the high-profile success of *Barbie*, Ryan Gosling used the Los Angeles premiere of his next movie *The Fall Guy* to cede the spotlight to Hollywood's unsung heroes - stunt performers.

Loosely based on the 1980s TV series of the same name, *The Fall Guy* stars Gosling as a veteran stunt double who must recover from a severe on-set injury to save an old flame (Emily Blunt) from a mysterious real-world threat.

The movie's release comes as pressure is mounting in Hollywood for stunt performers to receive more recognition, including an Oscar category of their own.

"He got set on fire eight times for me," said Gosling, pointing to one of his stunt doubles during Tuesday's red carpet event.

In the film, Gosling's hero must draw on all of his impressive stunt tricks and know-how - navigating high-speed chases, and fighting goons with hastily improvised weapons - to save the day and win back the girl.

Those techniques were on show alongside the A-list stars at the Los Angeles premiere, as stunt actors roared motorcycles down the red carpet, leapt from a sky-high platform, and brawled through a plate-glass window.





MEGAN FOX, MACHINE GUN KELLY DANCE AT STAGECOACH FESTIVAL

Machine Gun Kelly held his emo girl close. The 'Don't let me go' artist and Megan Fox were spotted having a sweet slow dance during Jelly Roll's song 'Save Me' at Stagecoach Festival April 26.

As Jelly Roll sang, 'And all of my sorrows, I'd just wash them down - It's the only peace I've ever found', MGK was seen singing the lyrics to the Jennifer's body star as they swayed in sync.

MGK—whose real name is Colson Baker—wore a leather jacket, grey slacks, red Converse sneakers and black shades to the country music event. While the couple shared a loving moment at the Coachella Valley Festival, they've chosen to stay private about much of their romance, which has led to speculation about where they stand.

Nicole Kidman's daughters stun on red carpet

Nicole Kidman and Keith Urban made a rare appearance alongside their teenage daughters at the 49th AFI Life Achievement Award Gala. The A-list couple were joined on the red carpet at Los Angeles' Dolby Theatre by Sunday, 15, and Faith, 13, to celebrate the *Moulin Rouge* star being honoured with the Life Achievement Award.

The actress was all smiles as she beamed alongside her family wearing a gold-sequenced Balenciaga dress while the *Blue Ain't Your Colour* crooner sported a black tuxedo.

Sunday stunned in a white floral strapless gown as she stood beside her youngest sister who wore a strapless coral gown. The foursome was also joined by Kidman's sister, Antonia, and the actresses' niece Sybella Hawley.

It was an emotional night for Kidman, 56, as she accepted the award alongside her friends and family, including her *Big Little Lies* co-star Reese Witherspoon.





'MUFASA: THE LION KING' TRAILER RELEASED

Disney on Monday released the first trailer for *Mufasa: The Lion King*.

Directed by Barry Jenkins, the music-filled film serves as both an origin story and follow-up to Jon Favreau's 2019 photorealistic movie *The Lion King*. That film was based on the 1994 Disney animated classic of the same name.

The new film, which hits theaters Dec. 20, will tell the backstory of Simba's father, Mufasa, an orphan who grew up to be a wise, powerful and compassionate ruler.

Aaron Pierre voices the title character (voiced by James Earl Jones in both of the previous films), while Kelvin Harrison Jr. voices his evil brother, Scar (Chiwetel Ejiofor in the 2019 film and Jeremy Irons in the 1994 animated classic).



MALAYALAM MOVIE REVIEW:
THE GOAT LIFE

Genre: Drama, Survival

Starring: Prithviraj Sukumaran, Talib al Balushi, Amala Paul, Jimmy Jean-Louis

Saga of sorrow in the sands

Movies on survival do not have any selective audience unlike the genres of romance, thriller and period. *The Goat Life* falls in this category. The film is poised to be etched on memories for a long time.

Everything in the movie is a painting on reel. Every image of the film is loaded with information and intrigue. And when individual stories are interwoven with music from A R Rahman, sterling performances by the likes of Prithviraj and skillful direction from Blessy, the film gets a space in festivals all around the globe.

It is a film that is disturbing to watch, a film that reminds of painful separation sans proper goodbyes and a film that pushes a weak, timid man to fight back everything that is bigger and stronger than him.

The 180-minute saga of sorrow in the land of sand undermines its achievements by choosing to be protracted rather than pointed. Benjamin's best-selling novel is based on the real-life Na-



jeeb Muhammed, who was tricked into slaving away on a livestock farm in the Saudi Arabian desert for over three years.

Najeeb gets separated from his co-traveller Hakeem (KR Gokul) soon after arriving in an unnamed Gulf country and is treated in an inhuman manner by his 'khafeel' aka boss (Talib al Balushi) and condemned to tending goats and camels in the remote desert.

As the Sun rises and sets in the vast open desert 'prison', Najeeb, too, gets transformed with an animal-like appear-

ance and instincts. He forgets his prayers, his language, and track of time - the only thing he doesn't forget is his wife and mother. Love, belongingness and the urge to be free compels him to attempt to escape many times, only to meet with failure and get punished by his khafeel.

Najeeb's saviour - Ibrahim Kadri, comes as a 'God sent' to his rescue and as Najeeb is done with his struggle, he vanishes mysteriously. The Sun over his head, as he prays, is a clear indication of the spiritual quest of man. The discarded rusted car, as his shelter, the same shirt on his back for years, and the twilight encounter with his lost friend Hakim, are strong metaphors in the story.

The Goat Life stands testimony to goodness even in harsh times. Even in severe pain Najeeb makes sure to feed the goats and camels (his only friends) as he plans to leave the camp for good. And when in severe desperation, all he sought support was from his mother.

There are moments of suspense throughout the film. Special mention must go to Talib al Balushi who acted as the cruel khafeel. And the final rendition from singer Jihad al Raisi lingers long.

A must watch!

Rating ★★☆☆☆

COMING SOON

GODZILLA X KONG: THE NEW EMPIRE

When the discovery of an ancient artifact unleashes an evil force, Ghostbusters new and old must join forces to protect their home and save the world from a second ice age.



Genre: Adventure, **Starring:** Annie Potts, Mckenna Grace, Carrie Coon

Language: English **Release date:** May 2