

40,000 employed, 115% of MoL target

1,000 new jobs to be generated through a development agreement focused on inspection and security support services

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) announced a significant achievement on Wednesday in which it surpassed its employment target for 2023, attaining 115% of its goal in creating job opportunities in both the government and private sectors.

The ministry also revealed ongoing efforts to bolster employment by generating a thousand new jobs through a development agreement focused on inspection and security support services.

These announcements were made at MoL's annual conference, themed 'Renewed Labour Market and Regulated Employment Sectors'.

MoL's strategy encompasses a broad spectrum of initiatives aimed at addressing unemployment, improving professional standards and fostering a skilled workforce across the nation. It emphasises the importance of national training programmes for jobseekers, bolstering recruitment efforts and enhancing



human capital development within administrative units through performance evaluation.

Last year, the ministry successfully implemented various initiatives that led to the employment of over 40,000 individuals, surpassing the target of 35,000. These included more than 20,000 opportunities in the government sector, over 17,000 in the private sector, and over 2,000 through non-employ-

ment-linked training programmes.

Additionally, over 29,000 individuals entered the job market, taking the total to close to 70,000 jobs (first-time and experienced workers).

Looking ahead, MoL is set to focus on attracting investments through the development of labour market policies, implementing the National Professional Standards Strategy and monitoring the national employment policy.

Additionally, the ministry is committed to advancing digital transformation by enhancing electronic links with government units, amending recruitment and work permit systems, and introducing new services through the Ma'ak mobile application. This digital shift aims to streamline processes for employers and employees alike and facilitate remote working arrangements for ministry staff.

MoL's efforts align with Oman Vision 2040, targeting strategic development in the labour market, education, learning and national capacity building. These initiatives underscore Oman's commitment to shaping a dynamic and competitive workforce, ready to meet future demands of the sultanate's growing economy.

CBO to implement IBAN banking system

Our Correspondent Muscat

Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has announced a plan to introduce the International Bank Account Number (IBAN) standard in a bid to modernise the sultanate's financial system and foster seamless domestic and international transactions.

CBO's IBAN project, involving collaboration with the sultanate's banking community, marks a significant step forward in Oman's pursuit of a more efficient, transparent and globally connected banking system.

'IBAN is a globally recognised standard that facilitates the identification of bank account numbers across national borders. The standard is currently used in over 80 countries,' CBO stated in a post in X.

By adopting the IBAN system, CBO aims to further simplify financial transactions, increase transparency and streamline payment processes in the sultanate, ultimately enhancing the overall efficiency of the banking system.

CBO said key benefits of adopting IBAN include simplification of complex account numbers and bank codes, reducing the risk of errors and promoting greater transparency within the financial system. IBAN also offers faster processing times for both domestic and international payments, saving time for businesses and individuals alike.



IBAN is a significant step forward in modernising Oman's financial infrastructure, enabling seamless local and international payments

ditional number with extra information to help overseas banks identify the right account for payments.

CBO has outlined a phased implementation plan for the IBAN system, with Phase 1 focusing on international remittances scheduled for completion by the end of Q1 2024. Phase 2 will encompass local transactions and will commence following the completion of Phase 1.

Additionally, CBO stated that banks operating in Oman will be required to upgrade their systems to accommodate IBAN generation and processing, as well as conduct thorough testing and validation across all digital banking channels. Banks will also be responsible for raising awareness among their customers about the benefits of IBAN and providing online services for IBAN number generation and validation.

Oman's IBAN standard will comprise two alpha country codes, two numeric check digits, a three-numeric bank identifier, and a 16-numeric customer account number. This structure is designed to provide clear identification of financial institutions and facilitate smoother cross-border transactions.

As the IBAN standard gains traction in Oman, CBO anticipates the sultanate's position will be strengthened in the global financial market aligning it with international best practices.

'Oman oasis of security and stability'

Our Correspondent Muscat

Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Republic of Kosovo, praised Oman's comprehensive development journey and its foreign policy, describing it as 'an oasis of security and stability' in the Middle East.

The minister affirmed that Oman's efforts to spread and enhance security, peace and coexistence in the region are receiving special appreciation from the international community when she was received by H E Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations, at the headquarters of the Permanent Mission of the sultanate to UN in New York.

She called for strengthening



Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Kosovo, meets H E Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, Permanent Representative of Oman to UN, in New York (ONA)

ties of cooperation and friendship between Oman and Kosovo in various fields, especially in investment, education and tourism.

According to the minister, Kosovo welcomes Omani students and visitors who wish to

study in its universities and explore its tourist attractions.

Donika reaffirmed the sympathies of the people of Kosovo with the issues of the Middle East and called for an immediate end to the war in the Gaza Strip and

provision of all means of protection for civilians.

The meeting was attended by several Kosovar officials and Khalid bin Saleh al Rubaie, Deputy Permanent Representative of Oman to UN.



MoCIIP enforces Omanisation policy for foreign investor firms

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has mandated foreign investors to employ at least one Omani citizen in their commercial firms within one year of initiating operations.

The ministry announced that this measure will come into effect from April. The Omani employee must also be registered with the Social Protection Fund.

This measure is in implementation of a Council of Ministers decision regarding reduction of commercial registration fees for foreign investors and treating



them on par with Omani investors, with the obligation to employ at least one Omani national.

According to Ammar bin Sulaiman al Kharousi, Director General of Investment Services Centre at MoCIIP, the decision follows a series of initiatives aimed at enhancing the investment environment in Oman.

Starting April 1, MoCIIP will implement an administrative obligation on the Oman Business Platform, prohibiting transactions for foreign investor companies that still need to comply with the employment requirement after one year of establishment. Companies will be given 30 days to rectify their situation, failing which they will face notifications and monitoring by relevant government agencies.

Kharousi informed that the ministry is making continuous efforts to enhance the attractiveness of the investment environment in the sultanate by removing obstacles for investors, whether local or foreign.

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MoCIIP holds Ramadan evenings to boost market awareness

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to support economic activities in all governorates of the sultanate, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) is continuing to hold evening seminars during Ramadan.

A statement issued by the ministry said its directorate in the wilayat of Nizwa, Dakhliyah, organised a Ramadan evening

event at Al Aqr Square under the theme 'From Us and Within Us' under the auspices of Sheikh Saleh al Rubaie, Wali of Nizwa, in the presence of representatives from various government entities.

The event aimed to introduce regulations for organising marketing and promotional activities on electronic platforms and social media, discuss licensing requirements, and promote investment opportunities in the governorate's economic sectors, it added.

NEW CAMPAIGN TO CURB BEGGING IN MUSCAT

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A campaign titled 'Don't Encourage Them' has been launched in Muscat governorate to address the issue of begging through on-line posters.

According to a statement, the governorate is taking a decisive stand against begging with a new public awareness initiative. 'In response to the Public Prosecution's cautionary notice against begging and exploitation of minors for begging purposes, the Governorate of Muscat has launched a series of online posters under the theme 'Don't Encourage Them' to combat this practice.'

Begging in mosques, on roads, at commercial centres and any other public place is socially unacceptable and strictly prohibited under Omani law. Begging has been criminalised as promulgated by Royal Decree No 7/2018.

The statement further highlighted the importance of social responsibility and collective action in addressing the issue. The campaign posters have slogans such as 'Be the hand that constructs, not the hand that destroys', 'Together, let us work to stop begging', 'Be responsible and participate in reducing begging', and 'Don't encourage beggars. Before you extend a helping



Begging in mosques, on roads, at commercial centres and any other public place is socially unacceptable and strictly prohibited under Omani law

hand to beggars, consider the potential contribution to child abuse and harm to society'.

The campaign underscores the commitment of the governorate to combat begging and the social implications related to it, urging citizens to refrain from supporting this practice and instead promote constructive efforts for social welfare.

Initiative launched to spread culture of blood donation during Ramadan

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To address the ongoing shortage of blood and cultivate the culture of blood donation, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with Oman Blood Donor Team, is holding its initiative called Waai al Hayat - or Life Awareness - this Ramadan.

Ahmed bin Hamad al Kharousi, Supervisor of Oman Blood Donor Team and the initiative, told *Muscat Daily*, that Oman Hereditary Blood Disorders Association and his team visited Gulf Collage on Monday.

The visit aimed to raise awareness on blood donation and address the current shortage in blood banks.

The visiting team also spoke on hereditary blood disorders.

Waai al Hayat has enlisted 25



volunteers from various governorates. Its core activities include organising workshops in colleges, schools and clubs throughout the sultanate.

According to Kharousi, such initiatives are crucial for motivating individuals to donate blood and foster a culture of mutual support within society.

He informed that Central Blood Bank in Bausher requires more than 2,700 blood and 260 platelet donors this Ramadan.

In April, the team will organise another campaign on blood donation awareness in the wilayat of Khabourah.

"All blood banks across the sultanate require a continuous supply of blood due to various ongoing factors, including surgeries, treatment of cancer and road accidents," he said, urging the community to actively participate in the initiative's workshops and donation drives to save lives, especially during Ramadan.

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Record growth in renewables, but progress needs to be equitable

Abu Dhabi, UAE – Renewable Capacity Statistics 2024 released by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) Wednesday showed that 2023 set a new record in renewables deployment in the power sector by reaching a total capacity of 3,870 Gigawatts (GW) globally.

Renewables accounted for 86% of capacity additions; however, this growth is unevenly distributed across the world, indicating a trend far from the tripling renewable power target by 2030.

The 473 GW of renewables expansion was led once again by Asia with a 69% share (326 GW). This growth was driven by China, whose capacity increased by 63%, reaching 297.6 GW. This reflects a glaring gap with other regions, leaving a vast majority of developing countries behind, despite massive economic and development needs.

Even though Africa has seen some growth, it paled in comparison with an increase of 4.6%, reaching a total capacity of 62 GW.

IRENA Director-General Francesco La Camera said, "This



Global power capacity additions reached a new benchmark of 473 gigawatts in 2023, but many countries are cut off from the benefits of energy transitions, IRENA says

extraordinary surge in renewable generation capacity shows that renewables are the only technology available to rapidly scale up the energy transition

aligned with the goals of the Paris Agreement. Nevertheless, the data also serves as a telltale sign that progress is not moving fast enough to add the required

7.2 TW of renewable power within the next seven years, in accordance with IRENA's World Energy Transitions Outlook 1.5°C Scenario."

"Policy interventions and a global course-correction are urgently needed to effectively overcome structural barriers and create local value in emerging market and developing economies, many of which are still left behind in this progress.

The patterns of concentration in both geography and technology threaten to intensify the decarbonisation divide and pose a significant risk to achieving the tripling target," La Camera said.

For China, solar and wind's increasing competitiveness against coal and gas power generation became the key driver of renewable power development. Meanwhile in the EU, enhanced policy focus and heightened en-

ergy security concerns have become the main catalysts for the rapid growth, apart from the increasing cost-competitiveness of renewables against fossil fuel alternatives.

Other regions that saw significant expansion were the Middle East at 16.6% increase and Oceania at 9.4% increase. The G7 countries as a group increased by 7.6%, adding 69.4 GW last year. The G20 nations on the other hand increased their capacity by 15.0%, reaching 3084 GW by 2023.

However, for the world to reach over 11 TW for the tripling target requires the G20 members alone to reach 9.4 TW of renewable power capacity by 2030, IRENA noted.

With solar energy continuing to dominate renewable generation capacity expansion, the report underscores that the growth disparity did not only affect geographical distribution but also the deployment of technologies. Solar accounted for 73% of the renewable growth last year, reaching 1 419 GW, followed by wind power with 24% share of renewable expansion.



Abbas Rizvi

Investcorp appoints Abbas Rizvi as CFO

Manama, Bahrain – Investcorp, a leading alternative investment firm, announced the appointment of Abbas Rizvi as its Group Chief Financial Officer (CFO), effective April 1, 2024. This appointment follows Investcorp's current CFO, Jan Erik Back's decision to retire.

Rizvi has been an integral part of the Investcorp finance team for 19 years, demonstrating exceptional dedication, expertise, and leadership in various organizational roles. His deep understanding of the firm's operations, financial systems, and strategic objectives uniquely positions him to excel as the new CFO.

Rizvi is a fellow member of Institute of Chartered Accountants of Pakistan from where he qualified in 2003. He is also an alumnus of Yale School of Management, graduating from the Global Executive Leadership Program in 2018.

Climate change could turn up heat on inflation: Report

Doloresz Katanich

Rising temperatures and extreme weather events are expected to have a global impact on agriculture.

Increased average temperatures could drive up annual food inflation by up to 3.2% per year and overall inflation by up to 1.18% per year by 2035, according to a fresh study by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK).

In the study, the scientists looked at how climate factors such as high temperatures and extreme rainfall have affected inflation in historical data, but they did not take a separate look at which food items were likely to be most affected.

"Looking at over 27,000 observations of historical data, we found that increases in temperatures can increase food prices, particularly in hot regions and seasons," said Dr Max Kotz, one of the authors of the study.

"Under future climate conditions, these impacts could become large, approximately 1-3% points per year on food inflation by 2035, threatening the price

stability mandates of central banks such as the ECB which aims to keep inflation below 2%."

Meanwhile, headline inflation could be driven up by 0.32-1.18% points every year on average globally, the study found.

Rising or unstable prices threatened economic and human welfare as well as political stability,



ity, the report noted, citing that the 2021-2022 cost of living crisis pushed an additional 71mn people into poverty across the world, according to the UN.

Food inflation and headline inflation are expected to be affected by global warming in both higher- and lower-income countries.

Inflation goes up when temperatures rise, and it does so most strongly in summer and in hot regions at lower latitudes, where it will persist all year long. For this reason, the global south, especially Africa and South America, will be more affected, according to the study.

Meanwhile, at high latitudes, there is a strong seasonality, peaking in summer.

According to the report, a 1 degree Celsius increase in the average monthly temperature has an impact on prices for up to a year, just like excess rain, but the impacts on prices are only short-lived when they stem from excess drought.

The study took a close look at the extremely hot European summer of 2022, when heat and drought had a wide-spread impact on agriculture and the economy.

"We estimate that the 2022 summer heat extreme increased food inflation in Europe by about 0.6%. Future warming projected for 2035 would amplify the impacts of such extremes by up to 50%," added Kotz.

[Source: Euronews.com]

Japan vows to take appropriate action as yen slides to 34-year low

Tokyo, Japan – Japan will respond "resolutely" to excessive weakness in the yen, Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki said Wednesday, after the currency fell to a 34-year low against the US dollar despite the Bank of Japan's first interest rate hike in 17 years last week, Kyodo News reported.

Suzuki told reporters that appropriate action would be taken "without excluding any options" to cope with excessive moves in the yen, driving speculation that the government may intervene in the currency market for the first time since late 2022.

He also said Japan will be closely monitoring developments in the market with a "high sense of urgency."

At a parliamentary session, meanwhile, Chief of the Bank of Japan (BOJ), Kazuo Ueda, said the central bank is "closely" watching the impact of the yen's movements on the economy and prices, but declined to comment on currency market moves.

On 19th March, the BOJ



scrapped its negative interest rate policy in its first rate hike since 2007, overhauling the central bank's unorthodox monetary easing framework that had been implemented over the past decade to fight deflation.

The central bank, however, pledged to maintain monetary easing for now, prompting market participants to assume the

interest rate gap between Japan and the United States is unlikely to shrink sharply.

Earlier in the day, BOJ board member Naoki Tamura said short-term interest rates would remain near zero for the time being, while the market is expecting the U.S. Federal Reserve to go ahead with three rate cuts this year.

The yen briefly sank near the

152 line against the dollar in Tokyo on Wednesday. The currency last depreciated to 151.94 against the dollar in October 2022, before Japan stepped into the market by buying the yen for the dollar.

Since the late Shinzo Abe became Japan's prime minister in December 2012, the yen has been on a downward trend due largely to his economic policy, dubbed "Abenomics," which included drastic monetary easing, massive fiscal spending and a growth strategy.

A falling yen is usually a boon for exporters as revenue from Japanese-made products sold overseas is inflated in yen terms, but it also drives up import prices and Japan depends on imports for more than 90% of its energy needs.

Japan's nationwide core consumer price index, excluding volatile fresh food, rose 2.8% in February from a year earlier, above the BOJ's 2% target for the 23rd straight month, government data showed late last week.

WAM

China vows to further expand foreign investment

Beijing, China – China will further expand its high-level opening up, offering more opportunities for foreign investors to engage in deeper operations in the country, the Ministry of Commerce said Monday.

As China continues to lift market access restrictions in the manufacturing sector, it will also promote the opening up of sectors such as telecommunications and medical care to create more trade and investment opportunities for foreign investors, Vice Commerce Minister Guo Tingting said at the China Development Forum 2024.

The country will also launch a campaign to boost investment, continue to optimize services,



and fully ensure national treatment for foreign-funded enterprises, Guo said.

"We will further enhance innovation drive and actively participate in global industrial and supply chain cooperation," Guo said, adding that efforts will be made to develop new technologies, industries and business models, expand service trade and digital trade, and promote the innovative development of enterprises.

Guo noted that China will deepen multilateral and bilateral cooperation and work for more practical outcomes in mecha-

nisms such as G20, APEC and BRICS so that the results of economic globalization can better benefit all parties.

China is also planning to step up efforts to expand its global network of high-standard free trade areas in 2024, building on significant accomplishments in negotiating free trade agreements (FTAs) over the past year.

Chinese Vice Commerce Minister Wang Shouwen told a recent press conference that China has already inked 22 FTAs with 29 countries or regions, and the combined trade value with those countries and regions accounted for one-third of China's total.

Xinhua

عمان للصرافة ش.م.م OMAN EXCHANGE L.L.C.					
SUMMARY OF ASSETS & LIABILITIES AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2023					
(In RO '000)					
ASSETS	31 Dec 2023	31 Dec 2022	LIABILITIES	31 Dec 2023	31 Dec 2022
1 Cash in Hand	161	505	1 Capital and Reserve	2,241	2,178
2 Deposits with Central Bank of Oman	150	150	2 Borrowings from Banks	-	-
3 Precious Metal	-	-	3 Balance due to Branches	-	-
4 Balance due from Banks	2,379	1,980	4 Balance due to Money changers	258	181
5 Balance due from branches	-	-	5 Loans and Advances payable	-	-
6 Balance due from Money changers	14	8	6 Cheques and Drafts issued outstanding	37	-
7 Cheques and Drafts purchased	-	-	7 Other financial Liabilities	396	510
8 Loans and Advances	-	-			
9 Investment	-	-			
10 Fixed Assets	117	168			
11 Other Financial Assets	111	58			
Total	2,932	2,869		2,932	2,869

Shangri-La Muscat appoints new executive chef, assistant F&B manager

Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn, Muscat, have added two new leadership roles heading its culinary and Food and Beverage operations this March 2024.

Eric Fettke joins the complex boasting 640 rooms and 14 dining venues as the new Executive Chef while Nabil El Nakib, no stranger to Shangri-La, moves from the Jeddah property to Oman as the new Executive Assistant Manager in charge of Food and Beverage operations.

Nabil El Nakib moved to Muscat from Shangri-La Jeddah where he played a crucial role in the hotel's inaugural success during and post opening since 2021. Spearheading distinguished dining concepts like Shang Palace, Kaia, COPA, Niyyali, just to name a few, Nabil has successfully reshaped Jeddah's culinary scene with his commitment to delivering exceptional dining experiences. Nabil has also been commended Director of Food and Beverage in Saudi Arabia for Hotelier Magazine and nominated Shangri-La Jeddah's dining venues in numerous restaurant categories such as Time Out.

"I am thrilled to join the team in Muscat and to bring some new



Nabil El Nakib and (right) Eric Fettke

I am thrilled to join the team in Muscat and to bring some new concepts to the local dining scene and continue the path in shaping Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Al Husn as a key leading dining destination

NABIEL EL NAKIB

Nconcepts to the local dining scene and continue the path in shaping Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Al Husn as a key leading dining destination," said Nabil.

Nabil's career spans over two decades with roles in food and beverage across continents - the St Regis in Texas, the Fat Duck Group in UK where the

restaurant was awarded it first Michelin-star in 2013 and ranked 54 in Top 100 UK restaurants in 2015, several key leadership positions across UAE at Shangri-La Dubai, Marriott hotels, and Shangri-La Jeddah.

With an impressive 25-year culinary journey spanning Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa, Eric brings a wealth of expertise and experience to Shangri-La Muscat's kitchen brigade. Previously holding the esteemed po-

sition of Executive Chef at the InterContinental Mauritius Resort, Eric's track record within the IHG family spans through the past 23 years.

The forte of the seasoned Chef lies in managing large banquet events and during this tenure at IHG Vietnam in 2020, the hotel was awarded the Best Conference and MICE Hotel Vietnam and Best Business Hotel Vietnam by World Travel Awards multiple years in succession.

Eric's culinary abilities and leadership skills as well as his business acumen have been proven progressively over two decades by running successful and profitable kitchens while still delivering unique dining experiences at the highest level.

In his new capacity, the German and South African national will play an integral role in overseeing the kitchen operations and culinary management across the hotel's 14 dining venue.

Nick Flynn, Hotel Manager for Shangri-La Al Husn, said, "We are very excited to have two Food and Beverage experts on board who will be working strategically together to create new, innovative and promising culinary journeys for our guests."



Mazda unveils its Ramadan campaign

Mazda Oman proudly announces its latest campaign, 'Season of Blessings in Every Mazda Drive'. This specially designed initiative celebrates the holy month with exceptional offers that resonate with the values of generosity and joy.

As families and communities come together during Ramadan, Mazda Oman recognises the importance of giving back. They are dedicated to providing customers with not just a vehicle, but a journey filled with blessings, comfort, and unparalleled excellence.

Renowned for its focus on innovation, safety, and driving pleasure, Mazda is making it easier than ever to embark on a re-

warding ownership experience with a range of exclusive Ramadan offers, a press release said.

These offers are designed to ensure that every Mazda drive is a journey filled with blessings. Customers can enjoy complimentary first-year registration and insurance coverage in Oman, ensuring a seamless and worry-free transition to Mazda ownership.

Additionally, the linjaz+ Service package extends over 5 years or 100,000km, guaranteeing the continued excellence of their Mazda. AAA Roadside Assistance, available for 3 years, supports peace of mind readily available for any adventure.

ahlibank hosts Ramadan Souq at headquarters

For the second year in a row, Ahlibank recently held its Ramadan Souq initiative in collaboration with the SMEs Development Authority (Riyada), an event aimed at supporting local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

The second edition of the Souq was held at Ahlibank's Headquarters in Wattayah from March 21-23, and was met with resounding success, a press release said.

In line with its commitment to furthering the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040, ahlibank's Souq provided a platform for SMEs to showcase their products and services. The event garnered attention and exposure to SMEs that are new to the market, thereby facilitating their growth and enhancing their



reach to a wider audience

Jumana al Hashmi, head of Marketing and Corporate Communications at Ahlibank, said, "During the holy month, we not only aim to promote creativity, but also provide opportunities

for SMEs to prosper in the current financial landscape. The event supports various entrepreneurs, showcasing their talents and displaying their offerings. We believe SMEs are the backbone of the economy."

Nesto offers Vltava product line

Nesto Hypermarket announces the launch of an exclusive product line, Vltava, aimed at revolutionising household essentials. Nesto Hypermarket has been instrumental in bringing this brand to Omani consumers, marking a significant milestone to meet customer needs.

The unveiling of Vltava products took place at Nesto Hypermarket - Mabelah on February 24, graced by Al Sayyid Khalid Mahfoodh Salim al Busaidi, alongside Nesto regional directors Haris Palollathil and Mujeeb VTK, commercial head Mussavir Musthaffa, and other top management personnel.

Shaheem, business head - Private label, presented the new Vltava product range during the launch event, highlighting its impact on home lifestyles.



New MG3 - where agility meets affordability

Today, the automotive landscape of Oman undergoes a thrilling transformation with the launch of the new MG3, a symphony of agility, affordability, and innovation.

Representing a leap forward in automotive engineering and design, the new MG3 promises to redefine the driving experience for Oman's discerning motorists.

At the heart of the new MG3 is its advanced petrol engine, delivering an exhilarating 109 horsepower, coupled with an 8-gear i-CVT transmission for

seamless power delivery. But what truly sets this remarkable vehicle apart is its exceptional efficiency. With a peak torque of 142 NM, the MG3 offers outstanding fuel economy without compromising on performance, a press release said.

"Today marks not just the launch of a new car, but the beginning of a new chapter in the automotive landscape of Oman," said Mohsin Hani Bahrani, CEO at MHD ACERE. "At MG, we're dedicated to making cars that everyone can afford and enjoy. With the launch of the MG3 in

Oman, we're committed to offering affordable options that give people in Oman the freedom to travel comfortably and confidently, ensuring a smooth ride ahead."

Beyond the numbers, the new MG3 offers a driving experience like no other. With agile handling and flexible steering, it redefines what it means to have fun on the road. Whether navigating through city streets or cruising along the open highway, every moment behind the wheel of the new MG3 is filled with excitement and joy.

PURSHOTTAM KANJI EXCHANGE شركة برشوتم كانجي للصرافة					
SUMMARY OF ASSETS & LIABILITIES OF PURSHOTTAM KANJI EXCHANGE CO. L.L.C. PO BOX NO.41 MUSCAT -100 SULTANATE OF OMAN (MONEY CHANGING ESTABLISHMENT) AS AT 31st DECEMBER-2023					
ASSETS	31.12.2023	31.12.2022	LIABILITIES	31.12.2023	31.12.2022
	(RO' 000)	(RO' 000)		(RO' 000)	(RO' 000)
1.Cash In Hand	1,485	2,827	1.Capital And Reserve	5,479	5,268
2.Deposits With Central Bank Of Oman	190	190	2.Borrowing From Banks	559	1,683
3.Precious Metals	12	23	3.Balances Due To Branches	-	-
4.Balances Due From Banks And Money Changers	1,242	1,560	4.Balances Due To Banks And Money Changers	446	417
5.Balances Due From Branches	-	-	5.Loans And Advances Payable	-	147
6.Balances Due From Money Changer	-	321	6.Cheques And Drafts Issued And Outstanding	-	-
7.Cheques And Drafts Purchased	-	-	7.Other Liabilities	5,019	9,397
8.Loans And Advances	-	-			
9.Investments	-	-			
10.Fixed Assets	499	185			
11.Other Assets	8,075	11,806			
TOTAL	11,503	16,912	TOTAL	11,503	16,912
For Purshottam Kanji Exchange Co. L.L.C CHAIRMAN			For Abu Timam Grant Thornton EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN		

Ooredoo organises business workshop

Ooredoo understands that if businesses leverage cutting-edge, end-to-end technologies and solutions, they can optimise their digital infrastructure, the engine driving their digital operations.

For this reason, Ooredoo organised an exclusive workshop entitled 'Upgrade Your Digital Infrastructure'. The event was held together with Starlink, a leading distributor of telecom products in the GCC region and Ooredoo's ICT partner, and Netceed, a global value-added distributor for the telecom network and digital infrastructure industries, and Ooredoo's partner offering solu-



tions for Enterprise customers in Oman.

During the workshop, experts shared their experience and know-how on the latest trends and developments in FTTO (Fibre to the Office) technologies and Micro Data Centres. Fibre-

enabled FFTO connections are Internet connectivity solutions that significantly benefit businesses with high reliability. Small-footprint, easy-to-deploy Micro Data Centres can maximise a business's value through increased scalability.

Israel unlikely to comply with UN ceasefire call in Gaza: Law expert

Gaza City, Palestine - Israel is not expected to comply with the UN Security Council's recent call for a ceasefire in Gaza, according to an international law expert.

"Israel has a significant record of non-compliance with international law," Lima Bustami, director of the Law Department at the Geneva-based civil society organisation Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, told Anadolu.

Bustami stressed that Tel Aviv disregards international organisations, including the UN and the UN Security Council.

"Although compliance with the UN Security Council resolution is mandatory, there are no direct measures or sanctions in case of non-compliance because it is a decision made under Chapter 6 of the UN Charter," Bustami noted.

"We will likely witness Israel continuing to commit genocide crimes in Gaza, and have to appeal to the UN Security Council to issue a new decision," according to Bustami.

The possibility of decisions being made under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, involving economic and diplomatic sanctions as well as the use of military force in the event of Israel's non-compliance with the ceasefire call, is 'unlikely' due to the US veto power, Bustami said.

Underlining that the UN has failed to stop the crime of genocide committed by Israel since October 7, Bustami said: "Nevertheless, this decision represents a significant development at the



We will likely witness Israel continuing to commit genocide crimes in Gaza, and have to appeal to the UN Security Council to issue a new decision

LIMA BUSTAMI

international level regarding the events occurring in the Gaza Strip."

"The decision indicates increasing international pressure against Israel and its allies to halt

the war, as well as a shift in international approach towards Israel," Bustami added.

On Monday, the UN Security Council passed a resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

While Hamas welcomed the resolution, Israel rejected the ceasefire call and vowed to continue its war on the Palestinian enclave.

Death toll rises to 32,490

The Palestinian death toll from Israel's deadly offensive on the Gaza Strip has reached 32,490 since last October, Gaza's Health Ministry said on Wednesday.

At least 74,889 other Palestinians have been injured in the onslaught, the ministry added in a statement.

"Israeli attacks killed 76 people and injured 102 others in the

last 24 hours," the ministry said.

"Many victims are still trapped under rubble and on the roads and rescuers are unable to reach them," it added.

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since the October 7, 2023 cross-border attack by Hamas, which killed nearly 1,200 people.

The Israeli war, now in its 173rd day, has pushed 85% of Gaza's population into internal displacement amid acute short-

ages of food, clean water, and medicine, while 60% of the enclave's infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, according to the UN.

Meanwhile, in the northern occupied West Bank, an Israeli army airstrike killed three Palestinians in the Jenin refugee camp on Wednesday.

In a statement, the Palestinian Health Ministry said three Palestinians were martyred and four others injured in the (Israeli) occupation aggression on Jenin.

Eyewitnesses told Anadolu that an armed Israeli army drone struck the Al-Damj neighbourhood of the Jenin refugee camp while Israeli forces, escorted by bulldozers, raided Jenin, and the adjacent towns of Qabatiya and Burqin, and started to destroy the infrastructure there.

The Israeli army arrested at least three Palestinians from Jenin, and withdrew from the area after nine hours of military operations there, the eyewitnesses added.

Clashes were also reported between the Israeli army and Palestinians in Qabatiya that left at least three Palestinians injured.

The new deaths bring the Palestinian death toll in the West Bank, killed by the Israeli forces and settlers, since October 7 to 453, in addition to over 4,600 others injured. Besides, at least 20 Palestinians were detained in fresh Israeli military raids in the occupied West Bank late Tuesday and early Wednesday.

Anadolu Agency

Israeli citizen killed in Hezbollah attack

Jerusalem - An Israeli citizen was killed on Wednesday when rockets reportedly fired by the Lebanese Hezbollah group hit the settlement of Kiryat Shmona, northern Israel, near the border areas with Lebanon.

In a statement, the Israeli ambulance service, Magen David Adom, said the 25-year-old man was a worker in an industrial structure in the settlement and was pronounced dead at the scene when pulled out of the rubble after the attack.

The Israeli Army Radio said his death brings the Israeli deaths from the clashes with the Hezbollah group since October 8 to 18.

The Hezbollah group, for its part, said it struck the Kiryat Shmona settlement and the command base of the Israeli army's Brigade 769, stationed in the vicinity of the settlement, with dozens of rockets.

Hezbollah added that the rockets firing came in response to the Israeli 'massacre' in Habbariyeh town, southern Lebanon, early on Wednesday that left seven paramedics killed.

Tension has flared along the border between Lebanon and Israel amid intermittent exchanges of fire between Israeli forces and Hezbollah, in the deadliest clashes since the two sides fought a full-scale war in 2006.

Anadolu Agency



Ukraine's security service should be declared 'terrorist organisation', says Russia

Moscow, Russia - Ukraine's Security Service should be declared a 'terrorist organisation', the head of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said on Tuesday.

"We need to do this, of course, yes. I believe that this is the basis. Not only to count, but also to make appropriate decisions," Alexander Bortnikov told reporters in Moscow following an expanded meeting of the board of Russia's Prosecutor General's Office. Bortnikov said the leadership of Ukraine's special services, including Kyrylo Budanov, the head of defence intelligence, are

'legitimate targets' of Russia.

He also accused the US, UK and Ukraine of being behind the Friday attack on the Crocus City Hall in the Moscow region.

He claimed Kyiv is trying to 'prove its worth', and that it is necessary to carry out 'sabotage and terrorist acts' in order to do so, which he argued is what the leadership of the Ukrainian and British intelligence services are aiming to do.

Bortnikov further claimed that Ukraine carried out training of 'terrorists' in the Middle East.

Anadolu Agency

Israeli army says it killed Hamas commander in Gaza airstrike

Jerusalem - After two weeks of silence, Israeli army spokesperson Daniel Hagari claimed on Tuesday evening the assassination of Marwan Issa, a key leader in the military wing of Hamas known as the Al-Qassam Brigades, in a strike in the Gaza Strip.

"This evening, after examining all intelligence information, we can confirm the elimination of Marwan Issa in an airstrike we carried out about two weeks ago," Israeli army spokesperson Daniel Hagari said in a recorded speech.

"Alongside Marwan Issa, Ghazi Abu Tamaa was killed in the attack," he added.

Hagari noted that Issa was the deputy to Mohammed Deif, the overall commander of the Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, and one of the planners of the October 7 attack on Israel last year.

Issa and Abu Tamaa were eliminated in a complex and precise operation based on in-



telligence provided by the Shin Bet internal security service and military intelligence, Hagari said.

Issa, 58, nicknamed 'the shadow man' for his ability to evade Israeli surveillance over the years, has been pivotal in resisting the occupation. He was born in Gaza to a family displaced from the village of Beit Tima near Ashkelon in the

occupied territories in 1948.

Accused of joining Hamas, Issa was arrested by the Israeli army during the First Intifada in 1987 for five years. He also spent four years in Palestinian Authority prisons and was released during the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000.

Post-2000, Issa, alongside Salah Shahada, played a significant role in rebuilding Hamas's

military wing. He is rumoured to be fluent in Hebrew, according to Israeli media.

Issa joined the Al-Qassam Brigades since its inception, assuming various positions until becoming the deputy to its overall leader, Mohammed Deif, succeeding Ahmed al-Jabari, who was assassinated by Israel in 2012.

Anadolu Agency

Belgian farmers drive tractors into Brussels to protest EU's agri policy

Ankara, Turkey - Belgian farmers on Tuesday drove tractors into the capital Brussels, near the EU Commission building, to protest the bloc's agricultural policy and low income, local media reported.

The farmers were staging a rally on their tractors at the same time that EU agriculture ministers were meeting, RTL broadcaster reported.

Approximately 150 tractors blocked the streets and caused traffic disruptions, the broad-

caster said.

Farmers from various regions of Belgium travelled to Brussels to protest for the third time, following previous demonstrations on February 1 and 26.

Farmers across Europe have been expressing their anger for months over low wages, and EU and national policies including restrictions, food imports, and trade support for Ukrainian grain.

Last week, the EU decided to introduce barrier duties on grain



exports from Belarus and Russia, following a series of protests in Europe by farmers demanding the cessation of the export of Ukrainian food products that are exempt from taxes and duties.

They said cheap Ukrainian agricultural products destroy farming in EU countries, particularly those bordering Ukraine.

The EU Commission in mid-March also agreed to abandon pesticide restrictions, increase rye and barley subsidies, maintain the current level of agricul-

tural tax, and lift restrictions on plant protection products and the need for fallow land.

The Polish government, for its part, reached an agreement with farmers last week to end ongoing nationwide protests.

The EU Special Committee on Agriculture approved the EU Commission's proposal to revise the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as requested by farmers during the Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting.

Anadolu Agency

Moscow terror attack: Teen honoured for saving over 100 people

Moscow, Russia - Russian Children's Rights Ombudswoman Maria Lvova-Belova presented an award on Tuesday to a 15-year-old Muslim boy who saved over 100 people during last week's shooting at a concert hall in the Moscow region.

Lvova-Belova arrived at the school where Islam Khalilov studies and in a solemn atmosphere presented him with a diploma 'for dedication, courage and personal bravery'.

The teenager worked part-time at the Crocus City Hall concert venue as a cloakroom attendant and was on duty when the shooting occurred.

The boy saw people panicking, being unable to understand where to go and what to do to save their lives and took the lead. He loudly announced that he was an employee, that he knew where the exits were, and pointed out the way.

Khalilov wanted to make sure that no one was left behind even though he was in mortal danger.

Speaking at the ceremony, he attributed his action to the way he was brought up.

"Dad has always said that if you can help in any way, always help people," he said.



A view of damage at Crocus City Hall concert venue near Moscow, Russia

The teenager also said that many people have been writing to him on social media, thanking him for saving the lives of their relatives. "This is amazing how children who needed to be saved themselves were helping people," Lvova-Belova said.

At least 139 people were killed and more than 180 injured on March 22 when gunmen opened fire at Crocus City Hall in Krasnogorsk, Moscow Oblast.

The Investigative Committee said it detained 11 people, including four perpetrators, in the border region of Bryansk, who were on their way to Ukraine.

Moscow's Basmanny District Court charged the four perpetrators late on Sunday with terrorism and approved their pre-trial detentions until May 22.

Meanwhile, Russian lawmakers called on Tuesday for lifting the moratorium on the death penalty following the attack on a concert hall.

Speaking at a plenary session of Russia's lower chamber of parliament, the State Duma, its chairman Vyacheslav Volodin said all the necessary legislation exists and it is up to the Constitutional Court to decide.

Anadolu Agency

Baltimore bridge collapse: Six missing people presumed dead

Maryland, US - The Maryland state police on Wednesday said that the six people who were missing after the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsed on Tuesday in Baltimore, Maryland, have been presumed dead.

The Singapore-flagged vessel collided with one of the pillars of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Maryland, leading to its collapse on Tuesday.

Earlier, as stated by US President Joe Biden, eight people were unaccounted for after the Baltimore Bridge collapse, out of which two have been rescued, while the rescue operation was ongoing for the remaining six.

He added: "Ship traffic in the port of Baltimore has been suspended until further notice and we'll need to clear that channel before the ship traffic can resume...It's my intention that the federal government will pay for the entire cost of reconstructing that bridge...The people of Baltimore can count on us."

The shipping company, Synergy Maritime Group, said on Tuesday in a statement that there were 22 Indians on board.

The six missing individuals are believed to have been part of a construction crew who were working on the bridge filling potholes when it was struck around 1:30am local time (0530 GMT), Maryland Transportation Secretary Paul Wiedefeld said.

It is unclear if any cars were transiting the bridge when it collapsed, but Maryland Governor



The collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland, US (Xinhua)

The six missing individuals are believed to have been part of a construction crew who were working on the bridge filling potholes when it was struck

Wes Moore said that the operators of the Dali container ship radioed in a mayday call that allowed officials at the bridge 'to begin to stop the flow of traffic so more cars were not up on the bridge.' He did not say whether any vehicles were on the bridge at the time of impact, emphasizing that the investigation remains ongoing.

"Many of the vehicles were stopped before they got onto the bridge, which saved lives in a very, very heroic way," he added.

Water temperatures in the Patapsco River were sitting at a frigid 47 degrees Fahrenheit (8

degrees Celsius) on Tuesday morning, according to federal tracking data.

The Key Bridge was one of three main arteries used to transit the Baltimore Harbour with roughly 35,000 people using it daily for their commutes, spanning the entryway to the harbour where the vital Port of Baltimore is located. All commercial ship traffic has been halted to allow for search and rescue efforts to continue.

Moore said authorities are solely working on finding the six people who are confirmed to have gone missing following the incident. He said that for Marylanders, the news that the bridge collapsed early on Tuesday morning was 'shocking and heartbreaking'.

"For every single one of us who are Marylanders, the words that the Key Bridge is gone, it still shakes us because for 47 years that's all we've known, and so this is not just not just unprecedented from what we're seeing, and what we're looking at today, it's heartbreaking," he told reporters at a press conference.

Agencies

North Korea not interested in talks with Japan: Kim Yo Jong

Ankara, Turkey - North Korea on Tuesday ruled out 'any contact or negotiations' with Japan in the future after Tokyo rejected Pyongyang's claim regarding the resolution of a lingering abductees issue.

In a statement carried by state-run Korean Central News Agency, Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of the country's leader Kim Jong-un, accused Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of using bilateral ties for 'political calculations'.

"This is proven by the attitude of Japan clinging to the unattainable issues which can never be settled and have nothing to be settled," said Kim.

Japan, she added, has 'no courage to change history, promote regional peace and stability and take the first step for the fresh DPRK-Japan relations', using the acronym for Pyongyang's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Kim, the vice department director of the ruling Workers' Party's Central Committee, made the remarks a day after Kishida, according to her, expressed a willingness to hold a summit with her brother.

She pointed to comments made by the Japanese government's top spokesman on Monday that Tokyo would not accept North Korea's assertion that the issue of Japanese nationals abducted by Pyongyang in the 1970s and 1980s had already been resolved.

"It was the Japanese side that knocked at the door first requesting 'the Japan-DPRK summit without preconditions', and the DPRK only clarified its stance that it would welcome Japan if it is ready to make a new start, not being obsessed with the past," she said.

Kishida declined to directly respond to Kim's comments, telling reporters late on Tuesday that Japan would continue its efforts to resolve issues with Pyongyang based on 'existing policies'.

In 2002, North Korea admitted that it had sent agents to abduct 13 Japanese people in the 1970s and 1980s, pressing them into service training its spies in Japanese language and customs.

This has since remained a major issue in Japan.

Japan's former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi paid a landmark visit to Pyongyang in 2002 and met Kim's father Kim Jong-il.

Anadolu Agency

China sends multirole satellite into orbit: Report

Beijing, China - China launched a Long March 6A carrier rocket to send a multirole satellite into orbit on Wednesday morning, China Daily reported, citing the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

In a news release, the State-owned space contractor announced that the rocket was launched at 6:51am from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Centre in Shanxi province, successfully placing the Yunhai 3B satellite into its designated orbit.

The satellite is tasked with surveying atmospheric, marine and space environments, providing data to support disaster prevention and mitigation efforts, and carrying out scientific experiments, it said.

Both of the satellite and rocket were designed and built by the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, a CASC subsidiary. By now, China has deployed a number of Yunhai-series multifunctional satellites in



space via several launches.

The medium-lift Long March 6A consists of a 50-metre, liquid-propelled core booster and four solid-fuel side boosters. The core booster has a diameter of 3.35 metres and is propelled by two 120-tonne-thrust engines burning liquid oxygen and kerosene.

With a lift-off weight of 530 metric tonnes, the rocket is

Government to challenge Catalan bill for independence from Spain in court

Oviedo, Spain - The Spanish government announced on Tuesday that it will challenge a Catalan bill proposing a unilateral declaration of independence in the Constitutional Court.

Earlier this year, the Catalan politicians gave the green light to move forward with a popular initiative that suggests the region should declare independence from Spain. Spanish ministers agreed to challenge the bill in the court, which will also effectively paralyse it.

Speaking to journalists on Tuesday, Justice Minister Felix Bolanos emphasised that 'in no case do we (the government and the Socialist Party) support the independence and isolation of Catalonia in respect to Spain and the rest of Europe'.

His comments come days after Marta Rovira, secretary general of the major separatist party ERC, told Spanish daily La Vanguardia that her party was in talks about an independence referendum with Spain's ruling Socialist Party. Socialist politicians have firmly denied her claim.

On Tuesday, Bolanos explicitly said Rovira was not telling the truth due to upcoming elections and reproached her party for returning to 'old formulas of conflict and collective failure'.

Catalan voters will go to the polls on May 12 in snap elections.

Spain's government has come



This file photo shows people taking part in demonstrations to mark Catalonia's national day 'La Diada' at the Plaza de Espana square in Barcelona, Spain on September 11, 2023

under heavy criticism for passing the amnesty bill, which drops non-violent criminal charges for those involved in the Catalan independence push.

Bolanos emphasised that challenging the Catalan bill for independence is 'coherent' with the government's approach that focuses on 'dialogue, living in harmony and protecting the Catalan institutions'.

However, Patricia Plaja, the spokesperson of the Catalan government, slammed the government's decision to tie up the legislation in courts.

"To us, it seems like the government hasn't learned anything... trying to restrict and limit parliamentary debate will never be a solution," she said, according to La Vanguardia.

Anadolu Agency

India objects to Washington's remarks on Delhi CM's arrest

New Delhi, India - India on Wednesday summoned a US diplomat and strongly objected to Washington's remarks regarding Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who was arrested in a graft case last week.

"We take strong objection to the remarks of the spokesperson of the US State Department about certain legal proceedings in India," the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement. Earlier on Wednesday, the US Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Gloria Berbena was seen leaving the MEA headquarters. The meeting lasted for approximately 40 minutes.

The MEA's remarks come in the backdrop of a US State Department spokesperson telling Reuters this week, that the US is closely following reports of the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest. "We encourage a fair, transparent, and timely legal process for Chief Minister Kejriwal," the US spokesperson said in response to an emailed query about the case.

"In diplomacy, states are expected to be respectful of the sovereignty and internal affairs of others," the ministry said, adding: "This responsibility is even more so in the case of fellow democracies. It could otherwise end up setting unhealthy precedents."

The ministry said India's legal



US' Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Gloria Berbena (Inset) arrives at South Block in New Delhi on Wednesday (ANI)

processes were 'based on an independent judiciary which is committed to objective and timely outcomes'.

"Casting aspersions on that is unwarranted," it noted.

Weeks ahead of general elections in India, Arvind Kejriwal was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate in a graft case. After the arrest of Kejriwal, who is a critic of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has been protesting continuously.

The opposition parties in India too have criticised the arrest.

This is the second time in the last few days that India has reacted strongly over remarks on Kejriwal. The German Foreign

Office last week had made remarks on Kejriwal's arrest which led India to lodge a strong protest with the German Embassy in the national capital.

Earlier this month, the US had expressed concern over the im-

We take strong objection to the remarks of the spokesperson of US State Department about certain legal proceedings in India

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTRY

plementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

In his daily briefing on March 15, the US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller had said: "We are concerned about the notification of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on March 11." External Affairs Ministry rejected the remarks as 'misplaced, misinformed, and unwarranted'.

Moreover, on March 25, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) raised the alarm on the government's notification of the Citizenship Amendment Rules (CAR) in a move to begin implementing the CAA. In a statement, the USCIRF said that last week, USCIRF Commissioner Stephen Schneck testified at a Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on this matter.

Agencies

India has new heads for BPR&D, NIA, NDRF

New Delhi, India - In a reorganisation within India's security apparatus, the Centre has announced pivotal appointments in key agencies, giving charge to IPS officer Sadanand Vasant Date as the new director general of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), his batchmate Rajeev Kumar as chief of BPR&D and Piyush Anand, a year junior to them, as head of the NDRF.

Date, a 1990-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of Maharashtra cadre, was appointed as the new NIA chief for a tenure up to his superannuation on December 31, 2026, as the incumbent chief Dinkar Gupta, will retire on March 31. Piyush Anand, a 1991-batch Uttar Pradesh cadre IPS officer, has been entrusted with the responsibility of leading the National Disaster Response Force. Currently the special DG of the Central Industrial Security Force, he has been given the new charge for a period of two years.

Simultaneously, Rajeev Kumar, an IPS officer from the Rajasthan cadre, was appointed as the director general of the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D).

ANI

Remains of Kenya doomsday cult victims released to families

Nairobi, Kenya - Authorities on Tuesday handed over seven bodies, from the Shakahola cult, which were positively identified through DNA analysis to their families for burial.

Titus Ngonyo one of the people receiving the bodies of their family members was overwhelmed with sorrow.

While speaking to reporters he expressed profound sadness as he lost four family members to the Shakahola doomsday starvation cult.

"My heart is heavy with grief as I mourn the tragic loss of my dear family members. I am asking the government to help my family with the burial as I cannot raise the money on my own."

The victims, once members of the Good News International Church under cult leader Paul Mackenzie, had been coerced into starvation and promised a spiritual afterlife in heaven with Jesus.

Kenyan authorities plan a phased release of the remaining identified bodies, with 34 slated for handover in the coming weeks from the Malindi Sub-



This file photo shows officials inspecting a site where bodies were found near the Good News International Church in Malindi town of Kilifi, Kenya on May 11, 2023

The victims had been coerced into starvation and promised a spiritual afterlife

County Hospital Mortuary in Malindi, situated approximately 478km (297 miles) northeast of Nairobi.

A total of 429 bodies were exhumed from 35 shallow mass graves found near Malindi in the Shakahola forest since mid-April, the forest is located on land belonging to Paul Mackenzie's church. Police investigations have revealed that some of the victims had their organs missing, which has led to suspicions of trafficking in human organs.

Anadolu Agency

NADRA leaks data of over 2mn people of Pakistan: Report

Islamabad, Pakistan - The Pakistan Joint Investigation Team (JIT) submitted a report to the interior ministry on Tuesday, regarding the leakage of citizens' data by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), as reported by *The News International*.

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) issued directions to the Interior Ministry to probe into the data leak in collaboration with the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), and Military Intelligence.

According to the report, data of 2.7mn Pakistanis was stolen from 2019 to 2023 with the help of Nadra offices of Multan, Peshawar and Karachi.

The JIT report stated that the data was obtained from Multan to Peshawar and then to Dubai, and was also sold in Argentina and Romania, according to *The News International*.

Following this, the report recommended action against several senior officers of NADRA.

The joint investigation team, headed by FIA Director Cyber-



crime, was created to investigate the March 2023 cyberattack, in which the personal information of citizens, including military officials, was accessed and stolen.

Later, the JIT submitted its report to then-caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar after the inquiry was completed, reported *The News International*.

The caretaker premier ordered NADRA to initiate actions as per the findings and recommendations.

According to the report, the

proposed measures to protect the citizens' data included regulatory actions along with technology upgrades.

Meanwhile, the authorities have launched compliance measures in light of the prime minister's orders.

Moreover, the report emphasised that the measures will allow better delivery of emergency services and help in ensuring standard database security, *The News International* reported.

ANI

Armenia-EU-US meet will create 'dividing lines' in region: Azerbaijan

Istanbul, Turkey - Azerbaijan on Wednesday said a scheduled meeting between Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken early next month will create 'new dividing lines' in the South Caucasus region.

The conference 'creates new dividing lines and so-called spheres of influence in the region, instead of encouraging the

Armenian side to negotiate in good faith', Aykhan Hajizada, Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry spokesman, said in response to a media inquiry.

The actions taken by the EU and US 'clearly have a one-sided and biased character' and are based on a 'double standard approach', Hajizada noted, saying the conference scheduled to take place in Brussels on April 5 is not fully transparent, lacks regional in-



clusivity, and runs contrary to the 'promoted and much needed confidence-building and integrity in the region'.

Hajizada further said the 'open pro-Armenian public manifestation' undertaken by Washington and Brussels may create an illusion in Armenia that the EU and US will support Yerevan in potential future provocations against Baku.

"In such (a) case, the EU and US will share responsibility for

any possible destabilising action by Armenia," Hajizada also said, adding that Azerbaijan calls on all sides to refrain from taking steps that are counterproductive to peace talks and may escalate tensions.

Relations between Baku and Yerevan have remained tense since 1991, when the Armenian military occupied Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan, and seven adjacent

regions.

Most of the territory was liberated by Azerbaijan during a war in the fall of 2020, which ended after a Russian-brokered peace agreement that also opened the door to normalisation. Azerbaijan established full sovereignty in Karabakh after an 'anti-terrorism operation' in September 2023, after which separatist forces in the region surrendered.

Anadolu Agency



COMPLETE DOMINATION

Rachin, Dube and CSK's quicks dispatch Titans

Chennai, India - The new faces of Chennai Super Kings impressed against the team they took down in the IPL 2023 final, signalling that the post-MS Dhoni era could also be filled with lots of success.

Rachin Ravindra (46 off 20), Shivam Dube (51 off 23), Sameer Rizvi (14 off 6) and the captain Ruturaj Gaikwad himself (46 off 36) led them to a total of 206, which proved plenty more than enough for a bowling attack that is also undergoing change.

For the second game running, Chepauk offered no wickets to the home team's spinners. Instead, it was the fast bowlers led by Deepak Chahar (2 for 28) and Tushar Deshpande (2 for 21) who did all the damage.

Rachin is a back-foot player. Yet his drives are the best part of his game. They look so natural. Almost instinctive. This is a result of a switch in mindset, which



Shivam Dube of Chennai Super Kings plays a shot en route to his half century

was very apparent at the ODI World Cup, where he permitted himself to go hard at the ball. Now watching him, there's almost no bias.

He was straight-driving sixes.

He was front-foot pulling boundaries. He was pouncing on rare short balls from Rashid Khan. This was a batter showing off just how early he was picking length and just how good his

hand-eye coordination is. He was never out of position. He was never rushed. He never even looked like he was trying. His 46 off 20 balls is already in the Super Kings hall of fame because

he hit nine boundaries, the joint-fifth-most by any CSK batter inside the powerplay in all IPL history.

Left-arm spinner Sai Kishore and Rashid Khan were immense

TODAYS MATCH

MATCH 09

6 PM



RAJASTHAN ROYALS VS DELHI CAPITALS



in helping Titans shut down Mumbai Indians in their first match of the season. Here they were almost not allowed to finish their full quota of overs. Because Shivam Dube.

The first ball of the 11th over resulted in Ajinkya Rahane's wicket with the score on 104 for 2. The second and third were sent up into orbit by the one of the league's best spin-hitters.

Dube's story might well be the strongest argument in favour of role-clarity in T20 cricket. Here was a power-hitter who had only one fifty from his first 22 IPL innings because teams kept using

him as a finisher. He isn't that, because he is still a work in progress against fast bowling.

All the power he had was going to waste, until CSK came calling in 2022 and decided they'd use him against the slower bowlers; against the kind of people he can just plant that front foot down and use all of his wingspan. Even Rashid wasn't able to keep Dube quiet. That's the quality of his spin-hitting. He has 57 sixes since the switch to yellow and that puts him level with IPL legend Andre Russell and Liam Livingstone and behind only Jos Buttler (59).

At the fall of Dube's wicket, with less than two overs to go, Chepauk might have expected Dhoni to stride out to the middle. The camera certainly did. It kept panning to him in the dressing room.

Instead, it was 20-year old Rizvi who stepped up. And he swept the first ball that he faced in the IPL for six. That it happened to be Rashid bowling and that he hit him for another six - this one a bit of a mis-hit as he charged out of his crease and swung himself almost off his feet - only added to the occasion. If this is the new CSK, there's going to be a few more special years ahead.

ESPNCricinfo

Gaikwad 'fantastic' as captain so far, says Hussey

Chennai, India - The start of Chennai Super Kings' transition has been smooth with Ruturaj Gaikwad leading the team to back-to-back wins in IPL 2024 after MS Dhoni had handed over the captaincy to him. Gaikwad has been rifling through fielding changes, working closely with his predecessor Dhoni on the field and coach Stephen Fleming off it. Michael Hussey, CSK's batting coach, is pleased with how Gaikwad has managed the team.

I know he's (Ruturaj Gaikwad) got some good support around him but he's a very smart guy and a very cricket-savvy guy, you know

MICHAEL HUSSEY

"I think he's been fantastic," Hussey said after CSK thumped Gujarat Titans by 63 runs at Chepauk on Tuesday. "He's very well prepared. Him, Flem, MSD - they get together and they talk

tactics before the game. But I think the way Rutu changes the bowlers around... the fields are very good. He seems very clear.

"So I think he's taking to the job brilliantly at the moment; I

know he's got some good support around him but he's a very smart guy and a very cricket-savvy guy, you know; he understands the game well. He's got a good team to work with as well, which helps as well, but I think he's been fantastic so far."

Gaikwad's new opening partner Rachin Ravindra has seamlessly slotted into the team, in Devon Conway's injury-enforced absence.

Ravindra hit 37 off 15 balls

against Royal Challengers in the season-opener and followed it up with a similarly punchy 46 off 20 balls against Titans.

"He's just trying to soak up as much knowledge as he possibly can," Hussey said of Ravindra. "I think he really feeds off the crowd a bit as well. And yeah, once you've got a couple of good shots away earlier, I think his confidence grew and he believed that 'I can perform on this stage and grow from there.'"



Ruturaj Gaikwad

CLASSIFIEDS

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Elena Rybakina

Rybakina reaches semis in Miami

Miami, US - Elena Rybakina survived a gruelling Miami Open quarter-final against Maria Sakkari on Tuesday as the former Wimbledon champion advanced to the last four for a second straight year with a 7-5 6-7(4) 6-4 victory.

Rybakina, who will meet Victoria Azarenka for a place in the final, needed nearly three hours to beat Sakkari. The Greek saved two match points in the second set before ultimately succumbing to the fourth seed's overwhelming serve in the final game of the third set.

"I have no words because I'm so tired," Kazakh Rybakina said. "It was such a tough battle. I got a little bit lucky with new balls, so it was easier to serve it out... now, I just need to recover."

Rybakina, the world number four and 2022 Wimbledon champion, will need to bring her

best again when she takes on three-time tournament champion and former world number one Azarenka.

The veteran Belarusian player contended with a near hour-long stoppage in the first set because of a power outage to the electronic line-calling system before beating Yulia Putintseva 7-6(4) 1-6 6-3 earlier in the day.

Azarenka saved three set points en route to clinching the first set tiebreak in the 90-minute opener before her unseeded opponent raised her game in the second to force a decider.

Azarenka proved too solid down the stretch, firing an unreturnable serve on match point.

"Very happy with today's win," the 34-year-old told reporters. "It's good to be back in the later stages of the tournament, it's what I work for."

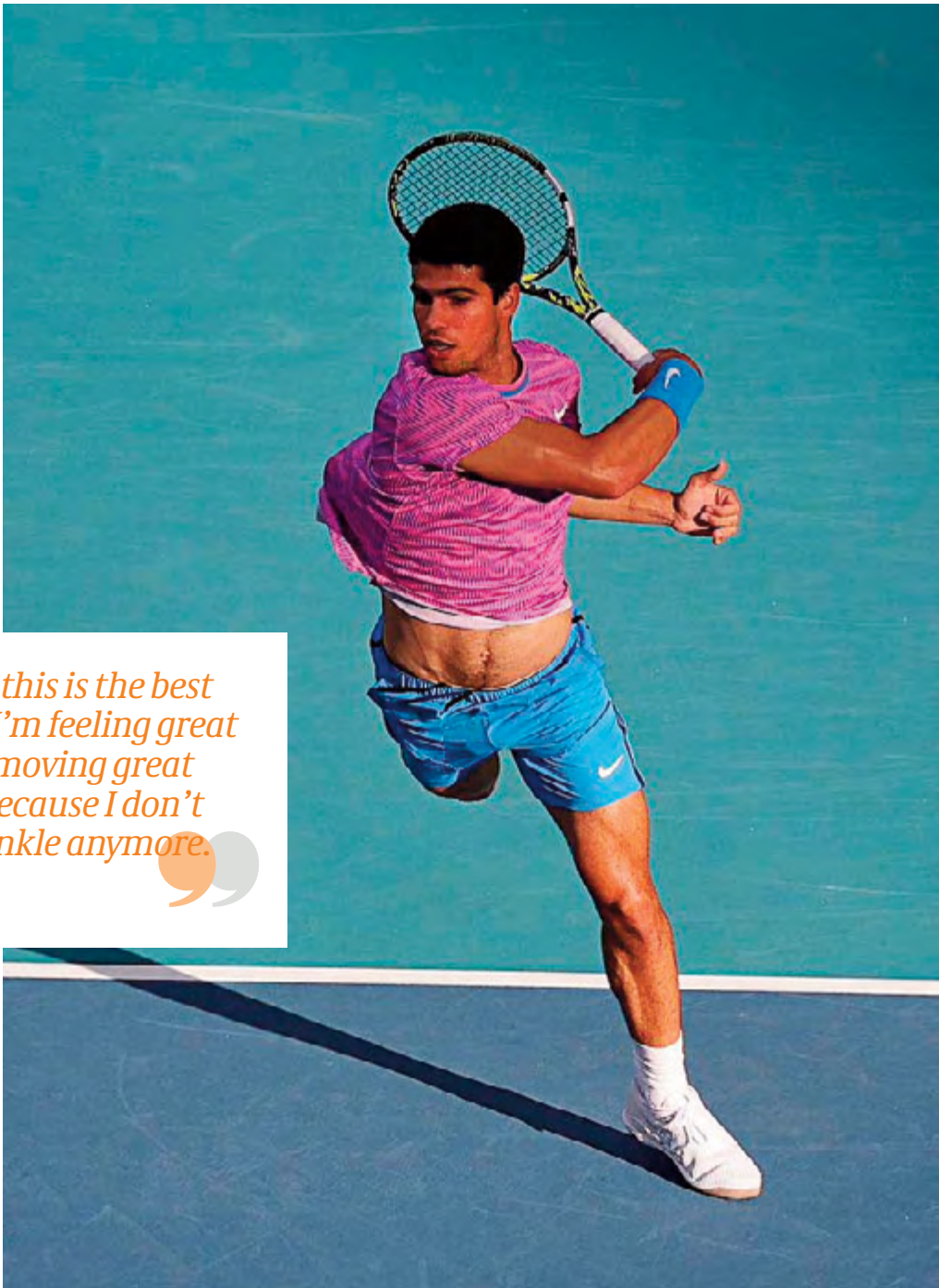
Alcaraz in cruise control

Spaniard eases past Italy's Musetti to enter Miami Open quarterfinals

Miami, US - Indian Wells champion Carlos Alcaraz kept his hopes for a Sunshine Double alive with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Lorenzo Musetti to reach the Miami Open quarter-finals for the third straight year on Tuesday.

The Spaniard needed less than 90 minutes to dispatch the 23rd seed from Italy, pounding forehands and winning 18 of 22 points when he charged to the net. Alcaraz broke serve to start the match and again to grab the drama-free first set against his overmatched opponent.

Musetti would finally secure his first break of the match to get back on serve trailing 4-3 in the second set when a suddenly



Carlos Alcaraz

Without a doubt, this is the best I've been feeling. I'm feeling great on the court, I'm moving great with no injuries because I don't think about the ankle anymore.

CARLOS ALCARAZ

error-prone Alcaraz misfired with a backhand.

The momentum would be short-lived, however, with the tournament's 2022 champion breaking back with ease in the next game and ending the affair when Musetti's shot landed in the net on match point.

Musetti's best moment came in the second set when he hit a front facing tweener lob over Alcaraz's head and ended the point

with a volley to gasps from the fans at Hard Rock Stadium.

"Without a doubt, this is the best I've been feeling," Alcaraz, who had struggled with an ankle injury earlier in the season, said after winning his ninth consecutive match.

"I'm feeling great on the court, I'm moving great with no injuries because I don't think about the ankle anymore on the court."

Alcaraz will next face 11th seed Grigor Dimitrov after the Bulgarian's career renaissance continued with a gritty 3-6 6-3 7-6(3) win over Poland's Hubert Hurkacz.

Daniil Medvedev took another step towards retaining a title for the first time in his career as the Russian third seed beat Germany's Dominik Koepfer 7-6(5) 6-0 to make the quarter-finals.

Medvedev overcame a shaky start and converted four break points while dropping serve just once to secure a spot in the last eight in Miami where he has yet to drop a set.

Koepfer was the early aggressor, using a pair of holds at love to build a 4-3 lead in the first set, but Medvedev forced a tiebreak in which he lost the opening four points before finding his way.

With a frustrated Koepfer suddenly losing control of his forehand, Medvedev enjoyed much smoother passage through the second set where he broke twice to build a commanding 4-0 lead before closing out the match with a break to love.



Al Omaniya Financial Services (SAOG)

Values stronger than money



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2023



On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present our 26th Annual Report, for the year ended 31st December 2023.

Economy:

Global growth is projected by IMF at 3.1 percent in 2024 and 3.2 percent in 2025 on account of greater-than-expected resilience in the United States and several large emerging market and developing economies, as well as fiscal support in China. Oman's economy is projected to achieve a growth of 3% during 2024 with moderate level of annual inflation while the World Bank recently forecasted a growth rate of 2.7% for 2024 for Oman.

Oman's economy continues to perform well supported by high oil prices and fiscal consolidation under the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan and Vision 2040. The Oman's 2024 budget is based on an assumed oil price of \$60 per barrel. Favorable oil prices and gas production coupled with continued fiscal reforms are expected to maintain fiscal and external balances in comfortable positions over the medium term.

With the oil prices predicted to remain stable for the near future, the continuous recent upgrades in the credit rating for the economy, the reduced debt percentage, the last two year's budget surpluses, moderate spending, fiscal prudence and the resilience of the banking system augur well for the economy to achieve financial stability. This will pave the way for realizing the government's objectives of enhancing the business environment and creating an attractive and stimulating investment climate in the country and continue to help implementing the 10-year planned national programs successfully.

Financial Highlights

In the year 2023, the company achieved a net operating income of RO 11.06 million as compared to RO 10.36 million in the previous year, showing an increase of 6.76%. The company achieved a Net Profit after tax of RO 3.201 million compared to RO 2.750 million for the same period last year, showing an increase of 16.42%. The company's net instalment finance receivables stood at RO 127

million as of 31 December 2023 as against RO 119 million last year. The company has made a charge of RO 2.130 million towards estimated credit loss for the year 2023. The non-performing assets coverage including the specific reserve for non-performing assets are in excess of 450%. The company has followed a conservative and pragmatic policy in writing new businesses with focus on maintaining the asset quality besides scouting for quality assets, keeping the non-performing loans under control. The Total ECL and reserve interest on Instalment Finance receivables stands at RO 13.35 million as on 31st December 2023.

Proposed Dividend

It is the intention of your company to continue the sustainable dividend policy that the company has been following since inception. Your directors have proposed a dividend of 13.25% for the year 2023, after considering the CBO guidelines, comprising 8.25% cash and 5% of the paid-up capital as unsecured non-convertible redeemable bonus stock bonds. This will be paid from the company's retained earnings, thus maintaining its track record of paying consistent dividends without interruption since inception. This takes the cumulative dividend paid to shareholders to 491.83% since inception.

Capital Enhancement

The company's equity capital stands at RO 30,767,440/- which is well above the regulatory requirement. The company is well capitalised and the capital adequacy stands at a healthy 32.14%. The company has issued compulsorily convertible bonus stock bonds in the earlier years which are listed. One of the existing convertible bonus stock bonds (listed in 2018) got converted to Equity Shares in April 2023. Another lot of the existing convertible bonus stock bonds (listed in 2019) will be converted to Equity Shares in 2024 ensuing further Capital enhancement.

Concerns

The world's central banks have had the steepest series of interest-rate increases in decades during their two-year drive to tame inflation. Higher rates have driven up the cost of funds, while NBFCs have limited ability to reprice their assets to offset the impact thus affecting the bottom line in the medium term. This has also reduced the ability of individuals and corporate borrowers to service their debts, where the rates have been reset, thus increasing the credit risk. The deferment of installments from the COVID affected borrowers continues to impact the cash flows of the company. Expected delinquencies due to reduced cash flow at the borrower's level may reduce the net margins and result in dilution of the NPA coverage. Given the country's dependence on

imports for meeting a large part of day-to-day requirements, the global inflation condition continues to impact prices in Oman. Volatility and unpredictability of oil prices could pose significant fiscal challenges. The challenging geopolitical situations are an added cause of concern.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The Company continues to contribute to social causes as part of its Corporate Social Responsibilities in line with the corporate objectives during the current year.

Prognosis

We continue to foresee a challenging year ahead tempered with optimism. The company is resilient, proactive and fundamentally strong with solid net worth, clean loan book, lowest Non-Performing Loans, high NPA coverage and a robust liquidity buffer in the form of liquid deposits with commercial banks which is being leveraged for effective treasury management.

We assure the shareholders that, as outlined in the Report on Corporate Governance and the Management Discussion and Analysis Report by the Chief Executive Officer, the company has adequate internal control systems and processes and has good governance systems in all the areas of management. The company has the ability and acumen to continue as a going concern and the company is cautiously optimistic of posting satisfactory performance in the coming years. The Board also understands its responsibility for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with IFRS and the relevant requirements of the Commercial Companies Law 1974 and the Capital Market Authority of the Sultanate of Oman.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the company and the Board of Directors, I would like to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for continuing to lead the Sultanate on the path of development and prosperity.

We are also grateful to the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority and other regulatory authorities for their guidance and support. We also thank our shareholders, bankers, dealers and customers for their continued trust, confidence and support. Last, but not least, we acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the management and staff of the company.

Khalid Said Al Wahaibi
Chairman

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME (AUDITED) FOR THE PERIOD 1 JANUARY 2023 TO 31 DECEMBER 2023

	Year end 31 December 2023	Amount In RO Year end 31 December 2022
Interest income on finance lease, working capital finance and other advances	11,514,273	8,923,339
Finance Income	4,103,001	3,756,083
Total Instalment finance and finance income	15,617,274	12,679,422
Interest Expense	(6,233,579)	(4,452,739)
Net Instalment finance and finance income	9,383,695	8,226,683
Other income	1,710,307	2,074,994
Administration & operational costs	(5,177,200)	(4,816,004)
(Loss) / Gain on Derivative	(31,748)	55,388
Provision for expected credit loss, net	(2,130,119)	(2,304,834)
Profit before Taxation	3,754,935	3,226,227
Provision for taxation	(553,623)	(486,417)
Net Profit	3,201,312	2,749,810

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION (AUDITED) AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2023

	Amount In RO 31 December 2023	Amount In RO 31 December 2022
Assets		
Gross Instalment Finance Receivables	140,352,132	132,483,231
Less: ECL on instalment finance receivables including reserve finance interest	13,350,954	13,422,377
Net Instalment Finance Receivables	127,001,178	119,060,854
Deposit with CBO	250,000	250,000
Deposits with Commercial Banks	84,627,400	84,627,400
Cash & Bank balances	6,532,719	765,441
Land and Buildings	673,746	714,695
Other assets	1,549,197	1,171,046
Total Assets	220,634,240	206,589,436
Liabilities		
Deposit	4,500,000	4,500,000
Bank borrowings	133,000,000	118,924,500
Trade Creditors & Other liabilities	10,766,549	11,800,258
Unsecured Compulsorily Convertible Bonus Bonds	4,111,931	3,426,235
Unsecured Non Convertible Redeemable Bonus Bonds	1,459,676	1,459,676
Total Liabilities	153,838,156	140,110,669
Equity		
Share Capital	30,767,440	30,321,363
Legal Reserve	10,255,814	10,107,122
Share Premium	986,988	751,385
Exchange Reserve	-	636,114
Special Reserve for Non Performing Assets	4,997,937	4,997,937
Retained Earnings	19,787,905	19,664,846
Total Equity	66,796,084	66,478,767
Total Liabilities & Equity	220,634,240	206,589,436

Contingent Liability of RO NIL (2022 - RO Nil) is outstanding as of 31st December 2023 towards BankguaranteesAs approved by the regulatory authorities the unsecured compulsorily convertible bonus bonds are treated as part of the networth, accordingly the networth of the company for computing all regulatory limits is RO 70,908,015 (2022: RO 69,905,002)

Note : The complete report is available with the Muscat securities Market. The Complete financial statements of the company together with the financial statements of any subsidiary company required to file financial statements would be available to any shareholders or interested party on request in Arabic or English within seven days as of the date of request.

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RAMADAN DESSERTS
Indulge in irresistible desserts and then walk a couple of miles to burn the calories



15

IN TOWN
British Business Forum iftar meet and ISC, Dec-cani Wing, iftar



16

ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood



LADY IN PINK

Cancer caution

Despite concerted efforts to raise awareness every year, breast cancer remains a key cause of concern in Oman as many women prefer to keep it under wraps until it is too late. ‘It might be time for men to take the initiative to ensure that female members of every family undergo regular screening,’ says **Dr Rajyashree Narayanankutty**, who specialises in breast cancer diagnosis in Oman, in an exclusive chat with **Hubert Vaz**

In June 2023, the Directorate General of Health Services of Muscat Governorate, represented by the Department of Primary Health Care at the Ministry of Health (MOH), in cooperation with Oman Breast Cancer Society and Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre had organised a health symposium on early detection of breast cancer, to raise awareness and urge women to perform the early detection of breast cancer.

The symposium defined breast cancer as well as touched upon detection and prevention methods, treatment, the psychological and family dimension caused by the disease to the patient, the role of healthy food in avoiding the disease, as well as the importance of breastfeeding for the child. However, the stigma associated with breast cancer yet compels many women to neglect themselves causing irreparable damage.

Dr Rajyashree Narayanankutty, an award-winning Breast and Perianal Diseases Specialist and General Surgeon, specialising in Breast Cancer diagnosis in Oman for over 25 years at Barakath Al Noor clinic, al Khuwayr, has called on all women to undergo regular screening so that they can detect irregularities early and avail of timely treatment.

Is the situation regarding breast cancer incidence in Oman a matter of concern?
Certainly, it is alarming and not acceptable, in spite of the awareness pro-

grammes conducted by various organisations and health institutions. We have to act from immediate effect – it is ‘the need of the hour’. Various awareness programmes have encouraged more ladies to go for breast checks, and many have been identified. However, Breast Cancer Awareness should be continued throughout the year, and not restricted to the month of October or World Cancer Day (February 4).

What do you think are the key causes of rising cases in Oman?
The rise in the incidence of breast cancer is all over the world, mainly due to lifestyle changes, and lack of persistent awareness, even though there have been a lot of awareness programmes. Health has not been a priority for most people.

Of these, 2,089 (90.55%) were among Omanis, 200 (8.67%) were Non-Omanis and only 18 (0.78%) cases were carcinoma in Situ.

Of the total 2,089, males accounted for 931 cases (44.57%) and females accounted for 1158 (55.43%) cases. Overall, breast cancer, predominantly female, was the most common cancer, with the median age at diagnosis being 48.5 years, followed by thyroid cancer and colorectal cancer.

I believe, that breast cancer awareness should be done 365 days of the year

Dr Rajyashree Narayanankutty

Is it time for concerted efforts by public-private sector institutions to tackle this problem together?
I believe, that breast cancer awareness should be done 365 days of the year, with constant reminders by various institutions, health centres and by health care workers.

Why are women in Oman hesitant to undergo periodic screening?
Health is not in the list of priorities for most women, and self-care is also not prevalent. Balancing multitasking and self-care has been an issue among most

women. Most are shy or in denial or scared of detecting something abnormal.

Have awareness/ screening camps not reached all areas in Oman?
Besides existing efforts, we could do much more awareness campaigns through schools, colleges, local women’s associations and in institutions that employ more women staff. There is definitely more awareness now, than 15 years ago, and more women are being diagnosed at an early stage. However, getting women to go for regular screening has been a challenge.

At what stage do most women come forward? Why?
Women still wait for symptoms to appear, and do not go for regular screening. So by the time the symptoms do appear, if there is cancer, it is usually identified as 3rd or 4th stage. Unlike the west, we do not have National screening programmes yet for breast cancer, but we have to definitely thank Oman Cancer Association, founded by HE Yuthar al Rawahy.

There is round the year screening of women above 40 by the Mobile Mammogram Van that goes all over Oman, which has screened more than 25,000 women, so far. Recently with great efforts, OCA has been successful in getting two more MMUs – in Sohar and Dhofar regions, so that more women can be screened.

Also, the Oman Breast Cancer Society, headed by Dr Adil Mohammed Al-jarrah Alajmi, are doing regular breast cancer awareness programmes.

Is breast cancer still a social stigma in Oman?
Yes, breast cancer is still a social stigma, and people would not want to talk about it. Mainly, since it involves the personal and sensitive part of womanhood, women do not want even their own partner to know about any problem in their breasts, fearing isolation.

What are the key concerns of women in this regard?
Every women affected by the disease is worried about the loss of hair due to chemotherapy and loss of femininity – which may affect her relationship with her spouse, the family and friends. Above all, they are very worried about not being there for their children, and in their future.

Is there need to shift the focus to educating male members of the family?
I strongly believe that men of the society or male members in a family should be educated and given awareness about the importance of women in the family undergoing regular screening, besides being counselled on acceptance and support for an affected female member diagnosed with breast cancer.

(More details in online edition)

cook-up

Umm Ali

Ingredients

- 500g puff pastry or plain croissants
- 1 litre full-fat milk
- ½ cup sugar
- 1tbsp ghee
- 250g cream
- ½ cup toasted nuts (almonds, pistachios) - coarsely chopped
- ½ cup raisins
- 20g desiccated coconut

Method

Use a large baking dish. Preheat the oven to 200° C. Break half or 3/4 of the amount of puff pastries and arrange it in layers. (You can also use plain croissants). Add in the nuts. Over medium-high heat, stir the milk and sugar in a medium saucepan until the sugar dissolves and the milk boils. Pour the sweetened boiling milk over the pastries and add the reserved amount of pastries on top of the milk-soaked pastries to create an extra crunchy layer. Add the ghee and the cream on the top, then place the dish under the oven’s broiler until it starts bubbling around the edges and becomes golden brown - not more than 10 minutes. Remove and cool. Garnish with more nuts and coconut shreds. You can serve it warm, as well.



RAMADAN DESSERTS

Sweet cheat days

For the sweet tooth, Ramadan offers irresistible desserts from around the world. Go indulge, enjoy cheat days, and then run a few miles to get rid of the extra calories



Kunafa

Ingredients

- 450g shredded phyllo dough
- 450g ricotta cheese
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- ⅓ cup white sugar
- 350g unsalted butter
- For the syrup**
- 1 cup white sugar
- ½ cup water
- 1tsp lemon juice
- ⅛tsp rose water

Method

Preheat the oven to 200° C. Finely chop frozen, shredded phyllo dough using a food processor until the strands are about the size of a grain of rice. Pour into a large mixing bowl. Mix together ricotta, mozzarella, and sugar in a separate bowl. Place butter in a large, microwave-safe liquid measuring cup or bowl with a spout. Heat in microwave until completely melted, and let it sit for several minutes until a thick white foam has formed on top. Clarify butter by using a spoon to skim off the foam. Carefully pour butter into the bowl of phyllo dough. Avoid pouring in the white milk solids at the bottom of the clarified butter.

Use your hands to mix butter and dough together. Make sure butter is absorbed by taking handfuls of the dough and rubbing it between your palms. Evenly spread buttered phyllo dough into a pan and firmly press it into the bottom and edges. Spread cheese mixture onto the dough, avoiding the edges of the pan.

Bake in the preheated oven until the cheese is slightly golden and the edges of dough are brown and bubbly, 30 to 35 minutes.

While the kunafa is baking, prepare the syrup by combining 1 cup sugar and water in a small saucepan. Bring the mixture to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and stir in lemon juice. Simmer, stirring constantly, until the sugar is dissolved and the mixture is thickened, 5 to 7 minutes. Be careful not to let the mixture turn golden and caramelize. Remove from heat and add rose water; set aside.

Remove the kunafa from the oven. Place a large platter or baking sheet over the baking dish. Using oven mitts, carefully invert the baking dish onto the platter so phyllo is on top. Pour syrup over kunafa. Cut into pieces and serve while hot.



Mamoul Date Cookies

Ingredients

- 33 cups fine semolina
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 2tbsp sugar
- ½tsp salt
- ½tsp active dry yeast
- 1 cup ghee
- ½ cup lukewarm water
- 1/3 cup whole milk

For the filling

- 3 cups pitted, softened dates
- 2tbsp oil
- 1tsp ground cardamom
- 1tsp orange blossom water
- Powdered sugar - for dusting

Method

Blend dates together in a food processor with spices and 1tbsp oil until smooth. Add orange blossom water. Roll 1tbsp each date mixture into 24 small balls. In a small bowl, mix yeast in water and allow to stand for 3 minutes. In a stand mixer with paddle attachment, mix together semolina, flour, salt, sugar and butter. Add the yeast, water and milk to the bowl and mix until dough forms. Allow dough to rest for 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 200° C. Using moulds, press dough into the center, place a date ball in the centre of the dough, place a second smaller piece of dough over the top of the date and cover the filling neatly. Tap the mould until the dough releases. Place on parchment lined baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes, or until golden brown. Dust with sugar.

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take a break

IN TOWN

BBF IFTAR



The British Business Forum organised an iftar meet for its members on Sunday



Photos: V K Shafteer

Iftar at Ruwi Clock Tower



Indian Social Club, Deccani Wing, organised a public iftar at the Ruwi Clock Tower last Friday



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Deadlines are deadlines, and there is no getting away from your responsibility to meet them. So if you're not feeling really great about your chances of getting things done on time, then you need to reach out for some assistance as soon as your doubts start emerging. Do not worry about how that will look to others.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Someone you know and love may be feeling especially sensitive today, and it will be easier for you to hurt their feelings than you realize. So it's time for you to walk on eggshells. While this doesn't exactly sound like fun for you, it's necessary. This person you need to consider is not secure about who they are or what they are doing.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You will be at the top of your game today! You'll come up with the perfect answer at the perfect time. You'll toss out the sassiest comeback to a flirtatious comment. You'll be in the right place at the right time. In short, everything you need will be at the tip of your tongue or your fingertips. This will naturally put you in a great mood.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You might get backed into a corner by a boss or coworker today, but don't panic. When you panic, you start to make unwise decisions, and your tendency to exaggerate grows. So if someone asks for something you haven't done yet, don't run around like a chicken with its head cut off throwing things together. Ask for the time you need and get things done correctly.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your naturally warm personality is going to melt any icy personalities you encounter today, so it's going to be a very social day whether you had planned on it or not. From small talk with the stranger standing in line behind you to a surprisingly in-depth conversation with a coworker you never get a chance to talk to, this day offers enriching exchanges that will make you interact.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The warmth you feel from friends will keep you in a fabulous mood today. You are gaining a whole new level of appreciation for the value that your friendships bring to your life, and today will offer you a few opportunities to show it. Now is the time to splurge on a gift for a friend's birthday, especially since they never hold back when it comes to you.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You should get in touch with your flexibility at the start of the day. It will come in handy as you are faced with lots of unexpected barriers. Some of your plans may have to be cancelled altogether in order to make way for a bigger opportunity. Romantic goals are going to be blown away when you overhear a comment that forces you to reevaluate everything you thought you wanted in a partner.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Has your push for success gone into overdrive? It's all well and good to be aggressive about your goals, but you have to be mindful of the fact that not everyone has the level of stamina that you have. Just because you want something badly does not mean that everyone is eager to help you get it. Your personal desires are not something everyone can relate to.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

There is an exciting surprise coming your way today, and it's going to push a few of your carefully made plans off the track, but you've been hoping for more spontaneous energy in your life, so this will be a very good thing. You'll be delighted by the unexpected developments, and you'll be happy to be flexible. You can accommodate whatever has to happen.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You finally have a chance at something that will change how your future plays out, and the great news is that all you have to do is greet it with open arms. It could come in the form of a new person, and old friend, or even an accident. The key is that you have to stay open-minded. Don't be afraid. You need to move forward firmly.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your routine used to feel boring, but it is calming to you right now, and you're not going to mind not being at the heart of everything. You'll be ready to welcome a new challenge soon enough, but right now the tried and true feels too good to stop. It helps that all of the obstacles in your life are minor ones now.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Positive reinforcement is headed your way in the form of laughter and applause. Today, you will be the star in someone's life whether you know it or not! When you're in a social situation this afternoon or evening, you should step on to center stage and give your best performance. Someone is looking for you to be their inspiration, so don't disappoint them.

BOGGLER

T	L	A	N
M	I	L	W
L	S	O	E
B	G	B	U

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. Which is not a way of cooking eggs?

- A. Scrambling
- B. Poaching
- C. Toasting
- D. Frying

2. From which tree is cork obtained?

- A. Acorn
- B. Beech
- C. Willow oak
- D. Cork oak



3. What does this symbol stand for?

- A. Send
- B. Save
- C. Play
- D. Power

Answers
1. C
2. D
3. D

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

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

entertainment



KATE MIDDLETON
REVEALS CANCER
DIAGNOSIS

Kate Middleton has finally broken her silence and revealed that she is battling cancer. Following heightened media scrutiny and a flurry of conspiracy theories over her health and whereabouts after not being seen since the end of last year and a January statement from the Palace saying that the Princess was recovering from a planned abdominal surgery. The Princess revealed the shocking news herself in a video message.

Alia Bhatt to host first
hope gala in London

Actor, producer and entrepreneur Alia Bhatt is all set to host her first Hope Gala in London. As per a source close to the actress' team, Alia will host Hope Gala on March 28 in partnership with the Mandarin Oriental hotel group at the Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London. This is in support of Alia's chosen charity *Salaam Bombay* which is focused on engaging Mumbai's most vulnerable 'at-risk' children through in-school programmes (leadership and advocacy) and after-school academies (skill building) that help build their confidence, self-esteem and commit them to stay in school.



WHATS ON



Genre:
Comedy
Starring:
Kareena
Kapoor Khan,
Kriti Sanon,
Tabu
Language:
Hindi

CREW

Follows three hard-working women as their destinies lead to some unwarranted situations and end up caught in a web of lies.

BOLLYWOOD
celebrates
HOLI

Bollywood glitterati celebrated Holi with renewed enthusiasm this year, after a lull in the usual celebrations over the past few years following the pandemic. *Seen here are Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan with his son Abhishek and daughter Shweta Nanda*



RON HARPER
PASSES AWAY,
AGED 91

The American actor, who starred in *Planet Of The Apes* and *Land Of The Lost*, died of natural causes at his Los Angeles home on Thursday, his daughter Nicole Longueay, told *Hollywood Reporter*. His notable career spanned decades, serving in the US Navy before returning to New York City to serve as Paul Newman's understudy in *Sweet Bird of Youth* on Broadway.

He then moved to Los Angeles later on to pursue a career in television, getting his foot in the door with a 1960 role in NBC's *Tales of Wells Fargo* before booking spots in shows such as *Wagon Train*, *Shotgun Slade* and *87th Precinct*, in which he played Det. Bert Kling on multiple episodes.

SCARLETT
JOHANSSON
may lead new
'Jurassic World'
movie

Scarlett Johansson is taking a bite out of a new blockbuster. The actor is in talks to join Universal's new *Jurassic World* movie. Universal is moving quickly on the film, which has a July 2, 2025, release date. Gareth Edwards is directing the new *Jurassic World*, which has a script from *Jurassic Park* scribe David Koepp. The film returns Johansson to the world of franchises. She had starred as *Black Widow* in a number of Marvel Studios movies, including the *Avengers* features.



BUDDY ROLLER-COASTER



BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW:
MADGAON EXPRESS

Genre: Comedy Starring: Avinash Tiwary, Pratik Gandhi, Divyendu Sharma

Madgaon Express is a 2024 Hindi-language comedy film written and directed by actor Kunal Khemu in his directorial debut and produced by Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani under the banner of Excel Entertainment. The film stars (oops!) features 'award winning' actors like

Avinash Tiwary, Pratik Gandhi, Divyendu Sharma, who have been seen in popular films here, though they lack sheer star value, Marathi actors Upendra Limaye and Chhaya Kadam, and Kunal Khemu's lucky charm) Nora Fatehi who he had been fantasising about as the 'heroine of his debut film' for quite some time. If you've seen *Dil Chahta Hain*

(2001) and ten years later *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011), you've seen it all - the roller-coaster of three friends catching up on old promises - besides more buffoonery, like the *Fukrey's* and the *Pyar ka Panch-namas*. *Madgaon Express* is yet another example of old wine in new skins - but enjoy it for its new humour and treatment, to



de-stress yourself.

The story, much like most 'Goa plans' begins in the '90s, when Dhanush (Divyendu), Ayush (Avinash Tiwary) and Pratik (Pratik Gandhi) dream of a Goa vacation with beaches and 'bikini babes' as three outspoken, overzealous school-going losers.

The three remain lifelong friends, but not all of them follow rewarding careers. While Ayush and Pratik move abroad for big bucks, Dhanush aka Dodo grows up in penury. Years later, a random plan brings the three together in Mumbai, for one last attempt at doing that unfulfilled Goa trip. A bag gets exchanged aboard a filthy train and all hell

breaks loose in Goa, teeming with drug gangs, et al.

The plot is basic and an extension of the several loose roles Khemu himself has been playing in several masala flicks over the years. It's like, he wanted to stand aside and view all the on-set fun from a different perspective as 'director'. If the likes of Prabhu Deva and Remo can be directors overnight, why can't our little Khemu, who always charmed audiences with his cute screen appeal?

After all, this is more than an ABCDEFG, though akin to Farhan Akhtars preceding flicks.

Rating ★★☆☆☆