

NEWS BRIEF

ISRAEL OPPOSES 'UNILATERAL' IMPOSITION OF PALESTINIAN STATE

Jerusalem, Israel - Israel on Sunday formalised its opposition to what it called the 'unilateral recognition' of Palestinian statehood, and said any such agreement must be reached through direct negotiations.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu brought the "declaratory decision" to a vote in cabinet, which unanimously approved the measure, according to a statement.

Netanyahu said that the move comes after "recent talk in the international community about an attempt to unilaterally impose on Israel a Palestinian state".

The formal Israeli statement, according to Netanyahu's office, reflects the fact that 'Israel rejects outright international dictates regarding a permanent accord with the Palestinians'.



India crush England in third Test

MTCIT to launch hydrogen power station, green mobility award

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has announced a series of ambitious projects for 2024, highlighting a significant push towards sustainable and innovative transportation solutions in Oman.

Among the key initiatives are inauguration of Oman's first hydrogen power station and completion of crucial studies for Muscat Metro and a link between South Batinah and Jabal Akhdar.

These announcements were made during a media briefing aimed at outlining the ministry's objectives this year and reviewing achievements of 2023.

In a move to foster sustainability in the transport sector, MTCIT announced the launch of the Green Mobility Award and plans for the second Green Mobility Forum. Additionally, April 30 has been designated a day to celebrate the logistics sector in the sultanate annually.

H E Said bin Hamood bin Said al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, shared insights into the ministry's broader strat-

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H E SAID AL MAWALI



egy, which includes launching a unified national portal for e-government services in the communications and information technology sector this year.

MTCIT is also focused on developing projects at the National Centre for Space, Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technology.

Plans for the year include establishing a dry dock, starting a project for construction and maintenance of medium to large vessels, and the first hydrogen energy station in Oman.

MTCIT is also poised to kick-start the Suhar-Abu Dhabi joint railway project and is preparing a draft law for railways. "We are on track to complete comprehensive studies for Muscat Metro, which envisages an investment of RO1bn for a 55km line with 42 passenger stations, and the project linking South Batinah with Jabal Akhdar," H E Mawali stated. Additionally, the launch date of the Omani satellite is expected to be announced this year.

Reflecting on the achieve-

ments of 2023, the minister highlighted the growth of Omani ports which welcomed approximately 11,000 ships, with the volume of general and bulk cargo surpassing 93mn tonnes. The year also saw registration of 662 ships with the Omani flag. Despite challenges posed by regional tensions in the Red Sea, Omani ports have demonstrated resilience and acquired strategic importance.

MTCIT floated 98 tenders valued at over RO612mn in 2023, covering transport, com-

munications, logistics and information technology sectors. The transport and logistics sector alone presented investment opportunities totalling RO1.6bn.

Infrastructure development continued with over 200km of roads being paved at a cost of RO96mn, 16km of which were new roads, while 185km were existing roads damaged by climatic conditions. The cost of maintaining asphalt and dirt roads was RO114mn.

The ministry's digital transformation efforts have also wit-

nessed significant progress, achieving 72% of the government digital transformation targets and development of 39 electronic platforms and portals.

In the field of technology and innovation, MTCIT successfully tested the advanced microchips Oman-1 and Oman-2 and trained 4,800 individuals in advanced digital skills under the Makin initiative. These efforts underscore the ministry's commitment to leading Oman towards a sustainable, digitally empowered future.

Announcements for 2024

- Unified national portal for e-government services
- Inauguration of first hydrogen energy station
- Initiation of Suhar-Abu Dhabi joint railway project
- Complete study for Muscat Metro, valued at RO1bn
- Complete study to link South Batinah and Jabal Akhdar
- Announcement of Omani satellite launch date
- April 30 designated as day to celebrate logistics sector

RO15mn allocated for AI projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Economy has earmarked a development budget of RO15mn for 2025 to advance artificial intelligence (AI) projects across the sultanate. Of this, RO10mn is allocated to government agencies and the remaining RO5mn directed towards projects in the governorates.

The funding was announced by H E Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, at a forum called Artificial Intelligence Economics Initiative 2024 held on Sunday.

The forum, a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), aimed to foster local innovation by providing a platform for Omani companies specialising in AI.

It sought to enhance collaboration between the government



and private sectors, leveraging expertise of the latter to increase the local value derived from national projects and acquaint government bodies with cutting-edge AI technologies.

H H Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Secretary-General of Secretariat-General of the Council of Ministers, graced the forum's opening ceremony.

The event underscored Oman's commitment to integrating AI in enhancing the national economy and governance.

H E Ali al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology in MTCIT, highlighted the fact that the private sector's investment in AI reached RO30mn in 2023. This demonstrates the growing

interest and confidence in AI's potential to transform various industries.

In his address, H E Saqri detailed the launch of the 'National Initiative to Empower the National Economy Enhanced with Artificial Intelligence' in June 2023. This initiative is part of the 10th Five-Year Plan aiming to embed AI applications in diversi-

fication sectors to foster economic growth and innovation. An initial RO10mn was approved for the initiative's projects in 2024.

H E Saqri highlighted the significance of aligning national efforts with global technological advancements to make the Omani economy more adaptable and investment-friendly. He pointed out that AI is projected to contribute up to US\$23tn to the global economy by 2025, with Oman poised to capitalise on this opportunity through product improvements and enhanced consumer demand.

The minister also reflected on the crucial role of AI in the sultanate's economic development, highlighting its potential to create new investment opportunities and job prospects across multiple sectors. The 10th Five-Year Plan prioritises AI for its critical contribution to economic growth, aiming to boost the digital economy's GDP share to about 10% by 2040.



Families queue for hours to receive a hot meal in Deir al Balah, Gaza. According to UNRWA, desperately needed aid is not going into Gaza

Sayyid Badr speaks to PLO secretary, calls for ceasefire

Muscat - H E Sayyid al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received a phone call from Hussein al Sheikh, Secretary of the Executive Committee of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), on Sunday.

They discussed current developments in Palestine and repercussions of the brutal Israeli war in the Gaza Strip.

During the call, they also stressed the importance of reaching an immediate ceasefire, the release of all prisoners and detainees, the entry of necessary humanitarian relief into the Gaza Strip, ending the siege of Gaza, and the exit of all Israeli forces from it in preparation of achieving a just and comprehensive political solution to the Palestinian issue.

They also stressed the need for the international community to recognise the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and the practical implementation of the two-state solution, while supporting the leadership of the Palestinian National Authority as the legitimate representative of the brotherly Palestinian people of all faiths and factions.

US likely to block Gaza ceasefire resolution

The UN Security Council is likely to vote on Tuesday on an Algerian push for the 15-member body to demand an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, a move the United States indicated it would veto.

"Should it come up for a vote as drafted, it will not be adopted," said Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US Ambassador to the UN, in a statement on Saturday. She said the resolution could "run counter" to the goals that Washington says can be achieved through diplomacy in talks between Israel and Hamas that Qatar and Egypt are also mediating.

Meanwhile, the Gaza Strip's second-largest hospital has been put "completely out of service", a spokesperson for the Gaza health ministry said on Sunday. The health ministry in Gaza said at least 28,985 people have been killed and 68,883 wounded in Israeli strikes on the enclave since October 7, the vast majority women and children.

Agencies

ASMED sets ambitious goals for SME development

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has outlined its strategic vision for 2024, with plans to finance 300 SMEs across various sectors.

Announced at a media briefing on Sunday, the authority's plans for 2024 underscore a significant push to bolster the SME sector in Oman.

Halima bint Rashid al Zaria, Chairperson of ASMED, highlighted the authority's recent achievements, noting that SMEs received funding totalling RO165mn in 2023 from government companies under Oman Investment Authority and an

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HALIMA AL ZARIA



additional RO47mn from public agencies in line with Tender Board requirements.

She highlighted the substantial growth of the sector, with the number of SMEs registered with the authority increasing 30% to 135,064 at the end of 2023.

A total of RO200mn has been allocated for the Future Fund for

emerging companies over the next five years. This move is part of a broader strategy to support SMEs in all governorates in partnership with public and private sector entities.

The authority has established 15 business incubators and plans to roll out 36 training programmes for over 900 en-

trepreneurs in 2024, enhancing their financial and business development skills.

Ishaq bin Khalifa al Shukaili, Director of In-Country Value at ASMED, detailed the regulatory strides made in 2023 for an environment conducive for SME growth. This includes the introduction of entrepreneurship cards, leading to an integrated register for SMEs and encouraging public-private sector partnerships. The entrepreneurship card initiative has seen a 22% growth, with more than 29,000 enterprises benefiting and approved loans surpassing RO22mn.

ASMED's achievements extend to the crafts sector, with over 2,064 applications ap-

proved for craft support and significant participation in training and marketing services. Furthermore, 167 small enterprises transitioned to medium-sized enterprises, and 31 medium enterprises evolved into large businesses. The Supplier Development Programme, aiming to qualify 80 SMEs for increased business opportunities, is one among other innovative projects launched to empower local enterprises.

Training remains a key focus, with 57 specialised and public training programmes conducted in 2023, benefiting 1,383 employers. In collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, 2,330 on-the-job training opportunities were approved for SMEs.

Documentary showcases Oman and US educational ties

Our Correspondent Muscat

National Museum of Oman's Learning Centre hosted the premiere of *More than a Teacher: A Story from Oman*, a documentary showcasing the educational ties between Oman and the United States.

The screening on Sunday was graced by Dr Madiha Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education, among others marking a significant moment in Oman's cultural and educational outreach.

Produced by Aisha Sahar Wahid al Kharousi, the documentary celebrates Oman's storied past, vibrant present and bright future through Don Yager's journey.

An American educator, Yager played a pivotal role in The Sultan's School scholarship programme from 1980 to 2005, a testament to the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said's visionary leadership.

Yager's story serves as a poignant example of the bilateral relations between Oman and the US, underscoring the late sultan's emphasis on education as a cornerstone of the nation's renaissance.

"This documentary not only commemorates Oman's enduring friendship with the United States but also highlights the promising opportunities that lie within Oman's renewed renaissance under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik," Aisha said.

Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority and a graduate of the scholarship, remarked, "The film narrates the story of a man deeply rooted in this land, showcasing Oman's rich cultural and tourism heritage."

Yager himself reflected on the documentary as a celebration of the kinship he shares with his students, highlighting the significant achievements and developmental contributions of the programme's alumni. "The film is



The film is a testament to the special bond that Americans residing in Oman have with this country

DON YAGER

a testament to the special bond that Americans residing in Oman have with this country, showcasing the modern renaissance of Oman and its achievements across various domains," Yager added.

The documentary offers a cinematic journey through Oman's scenic beauty, cultural richness and historical depth, aiming to promote the sultanate's touristic and cultural heritage globally. It is a collaborative effort by Omanis in production, direction, editing and music, illustrating the nation's creative prowess.

The documentary will be screened at The Sultan's School and in the United States, in partnership with educational and cultural institutions, as part of a broader effort to highlight Oman's unique story to a global audience.

Dhahirah Tourism Festival woos 20,000 visitors

Our Correspondent Muscat

The inaugural Dhahirah Tourism Festival 2024 has received overwhelming response, attracting over 20,000 visitors in its first two days.

Inaugurated on February 15 under the theme 'Richness and Diversity', the festival will run till March 6 and showcase the unique cultural and tourism offerings of Dhahirah.

Ahmed al Marsoudi, a representative of Dhahirah Governor's Office, expressed his satisfaction with the festival's success. "This first edition has received excellent response. Over 100 young men and women from our governorate are diligently working to ensure the event's success."

The festival aims to present the diverse attractions of Dhahirah, from its competitive



advantages to its rich heritage, providing an engaging experience for both locals and visitors from neighbouring regions.

Marsoudi informed that the festival has brought together various government and private entities, creating a collaborative atmosphere.

With a wide variety of cultural, art, social, sports and entertainment activities, the event caters to all community segments. "One of its goals is to generate added value for the local economy by offering opportunities for entrepreneurs, small and medium enterprises,

and cottage industry families." The festival features a heritage village, rides for all ages, shopping pavilions, SME kiosks, dining options, and a theatre for cultural performances, including poetry evenings. Additionally, visitors can enjoy a Smurfs Village, acrobatics and juggling

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AHMED AL MARSOUDI

Mövenpick opens hotel and apartments in Ghala

Muscat - Mövenpick, an Accor brand known for its Swiss hospitality, has opened in Muscat as the debut property in Oman.

The five-star property takes its design inspiration from the sultanate's culture and heritage. Mövenpick Hotel and Apartments Ghala Muscat features 282 rooms and suites and 58 hotel apartments, complemented by facilities, services and culinary experiences for which Mövenpick is renowned.

"This marks an important milestone for Accor as our expansionist vision for Oman gains considerable momentum," said Paul Stevens, Chief Operating Officer - Premium, Midscale and Economy Division in Middle East, Africa and Türkiye at Accor.

"The opening of Mövenpick Hotel and Apartments Ghala Muscat enriches the city's hotel landscape by introducing a premium hospitality concept rooted in culinary excellence and unpar-



alleled service. We are honoured to raise our first flag for the Mövenpick brand in Oman, a country known for its warm welcome, which perfectly complements the Mövenpick spirit of providing guests an opportunity to indulge in life's simple pleasures."

Nestled in Ghala Heights, the hotel offers convenience, comfort, flexibility and modern day indulgence for all types of travellers.

The apartments are fully serviced and provide access to all hotel facilities, catering to the growing number of long-stay guests making Muscat their home.

Guests can enjoy the hotel's wellness facilities, which include a spa, a fitness centre offering personal training services with city views, and a rooftop infinity pool. For those travelling for business or looking to host an event, the property has four flex-

ible venues that can accommodate up to 570 guests, including three meeting rooms with natural daylight and the 630sqm pillar-free Al Falaj Ballroom, with each space offering the latest audio-visual equipment.

Designed with the flexibility to host a wide range of occasions, from ceremonies and gala dinners to weddings, the ballroom can be fully customised according to desired set-up, theme and colour scheme, all orchestrated

by a dedicated events team. It also features a unique video wall - the first-of-its-kind in Muscat - and for comfort and convenience, there is a dedicated Bride Room plus basement parking for guests.

"We are thrilled to be opening the doors to the first Mövenpick Hotel and Apartments in Oman, and are committed to delivering enriching guest experiences that reflect the brand's more than seven decades of culinary excellence and elevated service," said Arshad Mahmood, General Manager of Mövenpick Hotel and Apartments Ghala Muscat. "Offering convenience and comfort, a range of accommodation options to suit long and short stays, plus a gastronomic offering unique to Muscat, we look forward to welcoming business and leisure travellers, as well as local residents seeking to experience a unique blend of Swiss hospitality and Omani charm."

Suhar recognised as 'Healthy City' by WHO

Muscat - Suhar has been officially recognised by World Health Organization's Regional Office as a Healthy City within the Eastern Mediterranean region. The recognition underscores Suhar's commitment to achieving sustainable development and enhancing the well-being of its community members.

Sharing insights into the city's proactive approach towards health and wellness, Dr Najat bint Mohammed al Zadjali, Director of Executive Office of Suhar Health City, said, "Our office is dedicated to the implementation of health-promoting projects, fostering healthy lifestyles and conducting health



awareness campaigns. We also focus on promoting social and cultural activities through collaborations in government, civil and

private sectors."

Suhar took the initiative to join the Healthy Cities Programme in 2005, becoming one of the first

cities in the Eastern Mediterranean region to embrace this model.

Najat further elaborated that Suhar's journey to this recognition spanned nearly 19 years of diligent efforts, culminating in the fulfillment of 80 standards across nine domains. This achievement led to the World Health Organization's formal recognition of Suhar as a Healthy City, highlighting the significant transformations and adherence to the required standards.

WHO's Healthy Cities Programme operates in Oman with the supervision of the Ministry of Health. It serves as a collaborative platform engaging gov-

ernment agencies, civil society organisations and private sector entities alongside local community members. The programme aims to address social determinants of health, enhance health services and improve the local environment and public facilities to boost community well-being and quality of life.

According to WHO, Healthy Cities strive to benefit both people and the planet. These foster inclusive participation from all community sectors in promoting peace and prosperity. Healthy Cities exemplify leadership in addressing inequalities and enhancing governance, leading the way in health and well-being improvements.



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BRIEFS

Turkish firm signs deal with Saudi Investment Ministry

Turkish company Tor Holding and Saudi Arabia's Investment Ministry signed an agreement in Istanbul on Saturday during the Türkiye-Saudi Arabia Investment and Business Forum.

The agreement, which aims at a high level of cooperation, will further strengthen economic ties between the two countries, Tor Holding said in a statement.

"The high-level cooperation agreement would strengthen the relations between two nations, paving the way for mutually beneficial projects and initiatives for both countries," the statement quoted Tor Holding Chairman Mustafa Torun as saying.

Several other agreements were signed at the forum to further strengthen economic relations between Türkiye and Saudi Arabia.

SIMAK set to boast GCC region's largest seafood processing capacity

Our Correspondent Muscat

The International Seafood Company (SIMAK), a subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), is developing a large canning plant for Tuna, Sardine, and Mackerel in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). This plant will boast the largest seafood processing capacity in the GCC region, according to an Oman News Agency report.

SIMAK, the sultanate's flagship seafood cannery nestled within the Fisheries Zone of SEZAD, is poised to redefine the landscape of seafood processing and distribution in the Middle East region.

With an impressive processing inflow of 30,000 tonnes per year, SIMAK boasts a staggering estimated output of over 100mn cans annually, translating to more than 16,000 tonnes of premium-grade seafood products, according to the report.



SIMAK offers several commercial partnership opportunities viz white labeling for regional retailers and brands, catering to discerning consumers across MENA region, US, EU, and West African markets

ZAKARIYA AL HASNI

With its huge processing and canning capacity, SIMAK is all set to mark a significant milestone in the region's endeavor to provide value-added services to the burgeoning fishery sector. The project encompasses cutting-edge facilities for processing, cold storage, and finished goods storage, ensuring optimal efficiency and quality control. This state-of-the-art canning facility will focus on processing Tuna, Sardine, and Mackerel, offering a compelling value proposition to stakeholders across the supply chain.

SIMAK presents a compelling value proposition, leveraging its access to both local and external sources for raw materials, cost advantages derived from proximity to local suppliers and burgeoning markets, and premium quality products at competitive prices, ensuring freshness and authenticity.

"SIMAK offers several commercial partnership opportunities viz white labeling for regional retailers and brands, catering to discerning consumers across the MENA region, the US, EU, and West African markets. By providing top-tier quality canned products, SIMAK aims to establish itself as the partner of choice for brands seeking excellence and reliability," said Zakariya al Hasni, CEO of SIMAK in a statement to Oman News Agency.

Hasni said, "We are driven by a commitment to sustainability. SIMAK integrates business-led and environmental sustainability initiatives into its operations. From leveraging the latest technological advancements to promote efficiency and reduce waste, to implementing eco-friendly practices such as water conservation and solar energy utilization, SIMAK is dedicated to minimising its environmental footprint while maximising operational efficiency."

He further said that SIMAK prioritises the development of the local economy by sourcing from SMEs and local fishermen, fostering employment opportunities, and investing in skill development initiatives. In June 2022, International Seafood Company (SIMAK) had signed a construction contract with an Omani company for the construction of its seafood canning plant in Duqm. Designed to the highest international and food safety specifications, the plant will have a production capacity of 30,000 tonnes annually, subject to future expansion.

FDO is participating in the highly anticipated Gulfood Exhibition and Conference which is taking place from February 19 to February 23 in Dubai. FDO's participation during this event will be spearheaded by SIMAK.

FDO, along with its subsidiary companies Blue Waters, Natural Shrimp Aquaculture Company (NSA), and Oriental Shrimp Aquaculture Company (ORA), will showcase a range of products, including White Pacific Shrimp and Seabream, demonstrating its dedication to quality and innovation.

With a strategic focus on market expansion, SIMAK is set to showcase its offerings at international platforms like Gulfood in Dubai, while simultaneously exploring opportunities for R&D and product innovation. The company's relentless pursuit of excellence positions it as a trailblazer in the seafood industry.

Sohar Freezone, Starsun sign deal to establish battery recycling plant

Our Correspondent Muscat

Sohar Port and Freezone on Sunday signed a land lease agreement with Starsun Sohar (FZC) to establish a recycling plant dedicated to the sustainable management of lead-acid batteries in Sohar Freezone.

Ensuring compliance with environmental standards, this project is set to enhance the recycling industry, highlighting Sohar Port and Freezone's dedication to circular economy principles in Oman.

With a total investment of \$3mn and an area of 7,000sqkm, the recycling plant, furnished with cutting-edge technologies, is focused on re-



covering valuable materials from locally used batteries, with a projected production capacity of 1,000 tonnes per month, along with exporting lead ingots, lead oxide, and red lead oxide to key markets, including India, China, Korea, and several European countries. These products will be traded on the London Metal Exchange, thereby bolstering global trade capacities.

The agreement between Sohar Freezone and Starsun Sohar SFZ leverages existing industrial activities in Sohar, transforming waste into resources and fostering a sustainable economic ecosystem.

Israil Khan, Chief Managing Director of Starsun Sohar, said, "We are excited about this agreement with Sohar Freezone and the promising opportunities it offers to investors. By leveraging the strategic advantages provided by Sohar Freezone and its continued growth, this project will create new avenues for economic growth and advance the technology behind lead acid battery recycling."

In a press statement, Omar bin Mahmood al Mahrizi, CEO of Sohar Freezone and Deputy CEO of Sohar Port, said, "By establishing this new recycling plant, the third in Sohar Freezone, we are taking a step forward in demonstrating our commitment to circular economy. We are setting a model for sustainable industrial practices, where waste is transformed into valuable resources, thereby fostering a greener, more resilient economic ecosystem."

Meethaq Sharia board discusses future plans

Muscat - Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat convened its first Sharia Supervisory Board meeting of 2024 at the bank's head-office. The meeting was attended by esteemed board members, including Sheikh Dr Abdullah bin Mubarak al Abri, Board Chairman, alongside Shamzani Mohammed Hussain, General Manager of Meethaq Islamic Banking, and the Sharia supervisory and audit management members.

The session commenced with a comprehensive presentation delivered by Meethaq's team, covering Meethaq's performance in 2023 and outlining its strategic initiatives for 2024.

During the meeting, the board also discussed and scrutinised into various details and reports pertaining to Meethaq's transactions. The Sharia Supervisory Board also deliberated on various topics, including the implementation of a structured mechanism for seeking the board's guidance and resolutions effectively.

In addition to this, the board reviewed and accredited the financial data of the financial year ended December 31, 2023, the Sharia annual certificate of sep-



arating Meethaq's capital, the consolidated annual Sharia-based audit report, and the amendments made within a number of legal documents and restructured financing transactions.

During the meeting, the board also discussed effectiveness of the Temenos Islamic Core Banking system (T24) which Meethaq has recently launched. The board's regular meetings play a pivotal role in deliberating on topics pertaining to Islamic transactions, business contracts and practices, thereby facilitating the formulation of requisite recommendation and resolutions.

The Shariah Supervisory Board is composed of scholars renowned for their expertise in Islamic jurisprudence, particularly in Islamic transaction processing and contemporary economy. Their primary scope of duties encompasses the review and approval of products, services, activities, investments, operations, and transactions before implementing them for business practices.

Since its inception in 2012, Meethaq Islamic Banking has spearheaded advancement in the Islamic banking landscape revolutionising the quality of the sharia-compliant banking services, products, and facilities. Catering to the diverse needs and preferences of Meethaq's valued customers, including individuals, institutions, and SMEs, Meethaq offers a comprehensive suite of value-added products and services.

ACCA announces strategic plans to reinforce presence in Oman

Dubai - The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) announced its strategic developments with the Oman Association of Chartered Public Accountants (OACPA), marking the beginning of an innovative partnership.

Strategic plans and developments were discussed by Helen Brand, ACCA's Chief Executive, and Sheikh Mahfouz Aljuma, Chairman of OACPA, reinforcing the enduring relationship between the two institutions and was marked with a commitment to excellence, pushing boundaries and setting new benchmarks for the accounting profession in Oman.

Fazeela Gopalani, Head of ACCA Middle East, said, "For

over 15 years, ACCA has been a steadfast presence in Oman, supporting entities and professionals across the sultanate. Our partnership with OACPA has proven to be nothing short of groundbreaking for the accounting profession in the region."

Speaking at the Oman International Conference on Accounting and Auditing, held on January 29th and 30th, Gopalani said, "With a clear vision and realistic belief in what we can contribute - we can continue to be a force for public good in 2024 and beyond, working to create a future in alignment with the Oman Vision 2040."

The conference was attended by accounting and finance professionals from public sector institutions, regulators and audit firms and included networking opportunities, panel discussions and keynote speeches on important topics facing the accounting profession.

Sheikh Mahfouz Aljuma, Chairman of OACPA, said, "We are delighted to witness the best minds in accounting and auditing unite to exchange ideas and challenge conventions. The conference addresses some of the most pertinent issues our profession faces today and provides the opportunity for accounting professionals to equip themselves with the knowledge required to tackle and embrace the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead."



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INVITATION TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF MUSANDAM POWER COMPANY SAOG

The Board of Directors of Musandam Power Company SAOG invites its respective shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") which shall be held at 3:00 pm, on 06-March-2024 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOG ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). The Agenda include the following:

Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 3:00 pm, on 12-March-2024 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOG ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). The agenda include the following:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To consider the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider the Auditor's report and to approve the Financial Statements in respect of the Company for the year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To approve the proposal authorizing the Board of Directors to determine and distribute cash dividends to the Company's Shareholders who are registered with the MCD as of the dates to be decided by the Board of Directors in March 2024 and September 2024 out of the retained earnings as per the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2023, provided that the amount shall not be more than 27.6 Baisas per share.
- To disclose the transactions that the Company entered into with related parties during the financial year ended on 31 December 2023 (Annexure 1).
- To consider and approve the proposed transactions to be entered by the Company with related parties during the financial year ending on 31 December 2024 (Annexure 2).
- To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2023 and to determine the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the next financial year ending on 31 December 2024 (Annexure 3).
- To ratify the payment of Directors' remuneration for an amount of RO 51,750 (Rials Omani Fifty-one thousand seven hundred fifty) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023 (Annexure 4).
- To notify the General Assembly of donations disbursed to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2023. (Annexure 5).
- To consider the Proposal the allocation of an amount of RO 20,000to support community services during the financial year ending 31 December 2024.
- To appoint an independent party to evaluate of the Board Members during the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and approve its fees.
- To appoint the statutory auditors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2024 and approve its fees.

According to the CCL promulgated vide the Royal Decree No. 18/2019 and the Regulation for Public Joint Stock Companies Decision No. 27/2021, the Shareholders shall have the right to nominate a proxy to attend and vote on their behalf on decisions/resolutions of the meeting, such proxy must be on the proxy form issued by Muscat Clearance and Depository Company, save the shareholders who owned shares in the Company after it has delivered the invitation of the general meeting, provided that such shareholders shall provide a proof to that effect. If the proxy is on behalf of more than one shareholder, it must not be on behalf of more than five percent (5%) of the shares of the Company, else the proxy shall be deemed null and void. The natural shareholder shall enclose a copy of the ID card, or the passport copy for minors who do not have an ID card, residence card or passport copy for non-Omanis along with the proxy form. The juristic shareholder's proxy must be signed by an authorized signatory and sealed with entity's stamp and should be submitted along with a commercial registration certificate and copy of the authorized signatory. The proxy will not be valid if a member of the board of directors represents a shareholder.

In accordance with the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means, issued by the CMA we would like to call your attention to the following:

- only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the AGM general meeting, through electronic means, provided such natural person must have an investor number at MCD;
- voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the AGM general meeting at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the day of the AGM. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by increase or decrease the voting process shall stand canceled and must revoke at the AGM.

Please attend at the e-portal at least 30 minutes prior to the AGM.
For more information, please contact **Mr. Abdulhamed Al Jabri** of Musandam Power Company (SAOG) on **telephone No. 24063555**.

Chairman	Auditor	Legal Advisor
Proxy Form		

No. of Shares: _____

We/_____the shareholder of Musandam Power Cmpny Co. SAOG hereby authorise Mr./_____to attend the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") at 15:00 hrs (3:00 pm) on 06-March-2024 at the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOG ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 15:00 hrs (3:00 pm), on 12-March-2024 at the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOG ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om), to vote on our behalf on all matters set out in the agenda of the meetings.

Date:	Signature:	Legal Advisor
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Ominvest Masters Golf underscores potential of sports in Oman

Dedicated to bolstering the sports and tourism industries in the Sultanate of Oman, Oman International Development and Investment Company 'Ominvest', orchestrated the Oman Ominvest Masters Golf Tournament on February 16-17 in the La Vie Club at Muscat Hills, Madinat Al Irfan.

The closing ceremony was attended by H H Azzan bin Qais al Saeed, Abdulaziz Mohammed al Balushi, Group CEO of Ominvest, CEOs of the group's companies, and a number of amateurs and concerned parties, a press release said.

The event drew 60 golfers from the GCC countries, featuring participation from national teams of the Sultanate of Oman,

as well as teams from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

H H Saeed and Balushi presented the award to the Saudi player Khalid al Attiyah, who secured the championship title.

The Oman Ominvest Masters Golf Tournament, recognised as the largest amateur golf event in the Sultanate of Oman, showcased the considerable potential within the sports and tourism sectors in the country.

Balushi stated that the tournament played a role in advancing the opportunities within the Sultanate of Oman to support and foster the sport of golf. It also aimed to inspire talented

individuals and amateurs to enhance their skills.

In a media announcement, he expressed, "LA VIE Club, an investment of Ominvest, features mountainous terrain, lush greenery, and panoramic views of the Sea of Oman. This enhances the Sultanate of Oman's standing in the realm of golf both regionally and globally."

Attiyah, the Champion of the Tournament, expressed his delight of the participation in Oman's Masters Golf Tournament. He indicated that the tournament was successful from the organisational and competitive point of view and witnessed a great participation of professional and distinguished players, applauding the organizers' great efforts.

"Oman stands out with its global stadiums and the well-organised tournaments it hosts, drawing in a significant number of international events. I've taken part in several of these tournaments, and there's considerable enthusiasm for the game in Oman," he added.

Al Attiyah commended the Saudi Arabian Golf Federation for its substantial support to Saudi players and their active involvement in the tournament. He emphasised the remarkable growth of the game in the Gulf region, attributing it to the heightened interest, leading to the emergence of players, training programs, and officiating teams.

Al Madina named Best General Takaful Provider



Al Madina Insurance Company (Al Madina Takaful), one of Oman's leading Insurance companies and the first Takaful provider, has recently received the 'Best General Takaful Provider Oman 2023' honour at the prestigious UK-based Global Banking & Finance Awards 2023.

The Global Banking and Finance Awards are highly regarded in the financial sector. Renowned for recognising excellence and innovation in the global financial sector, the 13th edition of the Global Banking and Finance Awards acknowledged Al Madina Takaful's outstanding contributions to the Insurance industry and to its customers, a press release said.

Al Madina Takaful's win is attributed to its exceptional performance in various aspects of the Insurance industry. The company offers a comprehensive range of Sharia'a-compliant insurance products to both, retail and corporate, clients. Its wide product portfolio includes General, Life, and Health Takaful products, covering areas such as Motor, Travel, Home, Domestic workers, Pleasure craft, Fire, Engineering, Energy, Aviation, Liability, General accident, Marine cargo Insurance products, served through an extensive network of branches, kiosks, and agencies.

Al Madina Takaful distinguishes itself through professionalism, integrity, exceptional

services and commitment to its customers and all the stakeholders.

Usama al Barwani, CEO of Al Madina Takaful, stated, "This prestigious award is a testament to our unwavering commitment to excellence, innovation and sustainability in the insurance industry. We are proud to be recognised for our dedication to providing top-notch insurance solutions to our valued customers."

Deputy CEO, Shakaib Mahmood, said, "Receiving the 'Best General Takaful Provider Oman' award is a reflection of the collective effort of our entire team. It motivates us to continue striving for excellence and delivering superior services."



OMAN CHROMITE CO.(S.A.O.G)

P.O. BOX: 346, PC 321, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman

Tel: 26845115, Fax: 26845155

AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

CHAIRMAN REPORT

In the name of God, the Grateful, the Merciful

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman Chromite Company (SAOG), I am pleased to present to you the annual report on the activities and performance of the Company for the financial year ending 31st December 2023.

1. Exploration and Production:
The quantities produced during the year 2023 amounted to about 59,438 tons, compared to a production amount of 105,992 tons during the year 2022, a decrease of 44%. The reason for the decrease in production is due to a decrease in ground stock, as the small amount of reserve stock is still one of the most prominent challenges that the company will face after 2024. However, the company is working hard on several axes to overcome these challenges, as it was able during the year 2023 AD to achieve good exploratory results in the current permit areas, which will enable the company to achieve the targeted production level and satisfactory returns during the year 2024. The company's acquisition of new sites by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals - which will take some time until the results of exploration and prospecting are verified in the coming years - as well as continuing efforts to obtain other new mining areas with the concerned authorities will enable the company to overcome the situation of decline. Ground stock, God willing.

2. Marketing:
The total quantities sold internally and externally during 2023 amounted to 86,840 tons, an increase of 26% over the company's sales during the year 2022, which amounted to 68,937 tons. The quantities sold locally amounted to 31,570 tons, representing 36% of total sales.

3. Income and Profits:
A- The value of sales for the year 2023 amounted to 5.9 million Omani riyals, compared to 4.5 million Omani riyals in 2022, an increase of 31%. This is due to the increase in selling prices during the middle of the year and to the increase in demand and sales quantities as a result of the quality of the company's products and its good reputation among customers. The total value of sales for the year 2023 amounted to 5.9 million Omani riyals, compared to 4.5 million Omani riyals in 2022, an increase of 31%, mainly due to the increase in the company's sales and the good reputation of the company and its products.
B- The net profit after taxation in 2023 amounted to 1,631,775 Omani riyals. compared to net profit after taxation amounting to (1,384,110) Omani riyals in 2022. The increase in net profit is due to the increase in sales and the company's efforts to reduce production costs.

4. Other Investments:
During the year 2023, the company invested in a low-carbon ferrochrome plant project by 20%, in addition to the company's bank deposits in commercial banks in the Sultanate.

The total interest on bank deposits during the year 2023 amounted to 129,680 RO, compared to 103,207 RO in 2022. The increase is due to the increase in interest rates on deposits and the increase in the value of deposits.

While the completion of the implementation of the low-carbon ferrochrome plant project was delayed than planned, resulting in book losses amounting to \$59,191 in 2023. It is worth noting that the trial operation of the plant actually began in January 2024, as it is expected to compensate for the losses and obtain good returns after commercialization. Factory products, God willing, in the year 2024.

5) Donations, Grants, and the Local Society Development:
The Company continuously supports the community by communicating with the offices of the Walis and Governors and through direct interaction with the citizens of the region. Whereas, 1% of the revenue in 2023 according to the law of minerals was allocated as support to the local community, with an amount of 59,856 Omani riyals.

Thanks, And Gratitude:
In the end, we are pleased to extend our thanks and appreciation to the honorable shareholders for their trust and permanent

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS ON 31 DECEMBER 2023

	2023	2022
	RO	RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Plant and equipment	870,163	629,205
Intangible assets	560,051	336,693
Guarantee deposits	152,000	92,000
Investment in associates	440,809	500,000
Term deposits	2,750,000	-
Total non-current assets	4,773,023	1,557,898
Current assets		
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	5,037	3,293
Inventories	1,416,768	1,379,936
Trade and other receivables	215,807	526,866
Loan to associate	115,452	-
Term deposits	250,000	2,050,000
Cash and bank balances	822,469	660,420
Total current assets	2,825,533	4,620,515
Total assets	7,598,556	6,178,413
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	3,000,000	3,000,000
Legal reserve	1,000,000	950,970
Optional reserve	114,148	-
Retained earnings	1,813,851	945,254
Total equity	5,927,999	4,896,224
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Employees' end of service benefits	51,020	32,134
Deferred tax liability	59,857	39,087
Total non-current liabilities	110,877	71,221
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	1,200,383	1,016,092
Income tax payable	359,297	194,876
Total current liabilities	1,559,680	1,210,968
Total liabilities	1,670,557	1,282,189
Total equity and liabilities	7,598,556	6,178,413
Net assets per share	1.976	1.632

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

	2023	2022
	RO	RO
Revenue	5,985,630	4,517,561
Cost of revenue	(2,615,556)	(1,750,713)
Gross profit	3,370,074	2,766,848
Other income	654	62,553
Salaries and other related staff costs	(438,427)	(416,033)
Selling and distribution expenses	(695,338)	(524,317)
General and administrative expenses	(332,754)	(325,164)
Finance charges	(8,277)	(9,854)
Profit from operations	1,895,932	1,554,033
Share of loss of an associate	(59,191)	-
Unrealised fair value gain / (loss) on investments at fair value through profit or loss	1,744	(975)
Interest income	129,680	103,207
Profit for the year before taxation	1,968,165	1,656,265
Income tax	(336,390)	(272,155)
Profit and total comprehensive income for the year	1,631,775	1,384,110
Basic earnings per share	0.544	0.461

support to the company, to the respected members of the Board of Directors for their efforts and constructive cooperation, and to the executive management of the company and all its employees for their effective efforts during the fiscal year 2023 and the previous years. Looking forward, God willing, to be able to overcome the obstacles and challenges facing the company's and to achieve better future results, God willing.

In this regard, we put pray to God Almighty to perpetuate His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq - may God protect him - with good health, wellness, and long life, and to perpetuate this country with more progress and development. We also appreciate the efforts made by the wise government to support all sectors in the Sultanate, including the mining sector, in line with Oman's Vision 2040.

Humaid bin Masoud AL Maqbali
Board Chairman

Liva sponsors Ominvest Masters 2024

Liva Insurance has announced its sponsorship for the highly anticipated Oman Ominvest Masters 2024 event as a gold sponsor.

Organised by Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), the event is an ideal opportunity to promote the Sultanate of Oman as an international sporting destination on the global map, a press release said.

The premier golf tournament was scheduled for February 16-17 at LA VIE Club, a brand new mixed-use development project located in the heart of Muscat.

The club has 18-hole golf courses, and this tournament marks its first major competition.

The event aims to attract golfing amateurs from across the GCC with a unique opportunity to compete for a coveted spot in the International Series that will be held at Al Mouj Golf Club next week.

Hanaa al Hina'i, CEO of Liva Insurance Oman, said, "Stemming from our firm belief in the importance of enriching the local communities, we proactively endeavour to support initiatives and activities that serve the national agenda of the country. In

the light of the growing sports industry in Oman, the tournament presents a unique opportunity to enhance the nation's position as an international destination for global sports, particularly golf tournaments.

"Liva Insurance is privileged to sponsor this premier event, anticipating the participation of prominent golf professionals and amateurs from across the world. The company is committed to provide the necessary support for such activities to enhance the golfing sport's popularity and encourage its practice among various sections of society."

Dr Yasmin leaves Knowledge Oman

After successfully completing a year of community service, Dr Yasmin Al Bulushi has announced her decision to step down as the chairperson of the award-winning community knowledge platform - Knowledge Oman, effective February 18.

In a heartfelt message shared on various social media platforms, Dr Yasmin expressed her appreciation and gratitude to Knowledge Oman's founder and leadership team for the opportunity given to serve the platform and for the support rendered throughout her tenure, a press release said.

"I am immensely grateful to have had the opportunity to serve in this role and to be a part of impactful initiatives led by Knowledge Oman. The experience has been nothing short of transformative. I leave with a heart full of gratitude and memories that will last a lifetime. Thank you for entrusting me with this responsibility and for the invaluable learning experience it has been."

Knowledge Oman founder, Tariq Hilal al Barwani, at a team



gathering, honoured Dr Yasmin al Bulushi with a community recognition trophy for her contribution to the development of the platform. "We extend our sincere appreciation to Dr Yasmin for her valuable contribution to supporting the development of

our community initiatives. We wish Dr Yasmin the very best in her future endeavours," he said.

Knowledge Oman leadership team will be announcing new direction, plans and projects during its up-coming 16th year Anniversary in April 2024.

MoE implements National Olympiad in Informatics

The Ministry of Education (MoE), represented by the Department of Innovation and Scientific Olympiads, is holding, for two days, the National Informatics Olympiad at the Arab Open University.

The Olympiad is implemented by the Programming Academy and is targeting 52 students from educational directorates from various governorates in the Sultanate of Oman. During the two-days Olympiad, students compete on procedural programming skills and designing algorithms, a press release said.

The National Olympiad in Informatics Competition is considered the national version in the Sultanate of Oman of the International Olympiad in Informatics Competition, which is held across



the world in more than 90 countries. The idea of the competition is that general education schools compete in solving a set of real-life problems that require the design of computer algorithms to be applied as computer programs during the competition sessions

using one of the high-level programming languages.

Dr Mohammed al Badawi, CEO of the Programming Academy, said, "At the end of the first training period, the qualifying competition was held from which 52 participants qualified for the

finals of the National Olympiad, which began yesterday, and its activities conclude today. The Olympiad finals are held in two sessions, each of which continues from 3 to 5 continuous hours, so that the contestants are given the same number of questions, vary-

ing in their levels.

"The contestants must solve the largest number of questions within the period specified for each Olympiad session, so that at the end of the competition the results of the two sessions are collected for each contestant, and thus the contestants are ranked based on the highest points."

Al Qassim al Maamari, Scientific Olympiad specialist at the Department of Innovation and Scientific Olympiads, said, "The National Informatics Olympiad is concerned with modern programming languages that help the student in developing logical thinking skills and problem solving. It also helps in transforming the student from a mere consumer of technology into an effective producer.



166 teams participate in MC Abu Dhabi Cup

The fifth edition of the Manchester City Abu Dhabi Cup kicked off at Zayed Sports City on Saturday, with over 2,200 players playing the Sgame in an international football festival in the UAE.

As the region's youth football tournament of choice, 166 teams from 12 countries, including Oman, took to the pitch for the opening fixtures of the cup, with an exciting finals day set to conclude the record-breaking edition of the competition on Sunday, a press release said.

Away from the action, players and fans from around the world enjoyed the thrilling activities in City Village, with the BIG FIVE from Manchester City's success on the pitch in 2023 returning to the UAE, with the iconic Treble on display at Zayed Sports City.

The City Village was packed with entertainment for all the family, with live music, immersive experiences from Puma, Aldar and Experience Abu Dhabi while special appearances from club mascots, Moonbeam and



Moonchester brought a festive, fun atmosphere to the tournament on the opening day.

Launched in 2017, the Abu Dhabi Cup is a youth football tournament held by Manchester City FC, supported by the Abu Dhabi Sports Council and the Department of Culture of Tourism, that welcomes players from all over the globe and of all abilities to Abu Dhabi, with the aim of developing and inspiring youngsters.

The 2024 edition sees the expansion of the tournament with over 160 teams from 12 nations competing in the event, including over 40 international teams.

Otaxi launches enhanced new version of app

Over time, transportation has become an integral part of our daily lives, among these taxi-hailing applications, which have recently gained significant importance in the arena. One of the prominent such applications in Oman is Otaxi.

Established in 2018 as a ride-hailing application, Otaxi has achieved great success and

gained its user's trust by providing a variety of services that meet their needs. Its services include: the economy taxi, the Ofemale taxi, the van, the premium, and luxury car services, a press release said.

Thanks to the accuracy and quick service, along with its availability 24x7 and the diversity of services it provides,

Otaxi has been able to gain popularity in Oman. It has become the preferred choice for many passengers seeking a comfortable and reliable transportation experience.

Otaxi always seeks continuous development and improvement, considering it as a cornerstone to achieve its goals and vision of providing a better

experience for its users. In this context, Otaxi has launched an enhanced version of its application, which is a strategic step reflecting the company's commitment to providing the best technological solutions for its guests.

Aimed to improve and enhance the customer experience and facilitate ordering a taxi

process smoothly and effectively, this enhanced version includes new features and technological improvements that make using the application more convenient and easier. This reflects Otaxi's ongoing commitment to meet its guests' needs and aspirations and continually strive for excellence in service.



Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG

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DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

In its meeting held on 13 February 2024, the Board of Directors approved Shell Oman Marketing Company's (the Company) audited financial results for the year ended 31 December 2023.

SUMMARY FINANCIALS

In OMR'000	Quarter			12 Months		
	Q4/23	Q4/22	%	2023	2022	%
Revenue	129,881	126,565	3%	519,466	499,912	4%
Gross profit	7,872	8,357	(6%)	35,471	35,367	0%
Add: Other income	964	1,082	(11%)	4,188	4,146	1%
Less: Selling, distribution and administrative expenses	(8,241)	(7,823)	5%	(32,411)	(30,432)	7%
Less: Financing and taxation	(785)	(875)	(10%)	(3,645)	(3,375)	8%
Profit and comprehensive income	(190)	741	(126%)	3,603	5,706	(37%)

- Twelve Months Revenue was OMR 519,466 million, 4% higher than the same period last year.
- Twelve Months Gross Profit was OMR 35,471 million, which remained steady year over year despite lower stock gain from Aviation fuel price movements in 2023 versus the same period last year. The volume growth helped offset the impact of Aviation fuel price fluctuations.
- Twelve Months Profit and Comprehensive Income was OMR 3,603 million. This is 37% lower than the same period in 2022 mainly due to lower stock gain while operating within a constrained margin environment as well as the increase in overall expenses including impairment adjustments towards some large trade receivables.

BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Mobility Business continued delivering its mission of making life's journeys better by improving the customer experience through its wide range of products and services. Shell service stations continue to be transformed to integrated destinations with an elevated customer journey, variety of facilities, quality products, and convenient services.

The Company aims to make our customers life journeys better through its strategically located 211 Shell service spread across the Sultanate. Through Shell V-Power, our premium fuel, the business continued to offer our customers with our best performance and efficiency fuel tied up with exclusive promotions and on-site activations as well as digital engagements. Our sites were made ready to address our customer needs through our range of quality fuels and our forecast service champions who are trained to cater to our customers.

The expansion of non-fuel-retail (NFR) remained strong, through the rapid expansion of Shell Select, bringing the total number of Shell Select shops to be at 57 shops across Oman. This makes one of our main NFR offers accessible to a wider audience across the Sultanate. At many of the Shell Select shops, customers can enjoy a wide range of convenient offers, including beverages, fresh food, and localized offers to meet their needs while on-the-go, in addition to the high-quality coffee offers that carry the brand Shell Café.

Digitalization of offers continued to grow through the newly launched Shell GO+ app where multiple campaigns were delivered with a focus on cross-promotions between fuels and non-fuel products and services, bringing the registered loyal users to more than 70,000 users. Shell GO+ is now one of our main platforms to engage with our customers through different communication channels and allow us to launch digital promotions at scale across the year in both our fuels business and NFR.

Fleet Solutions Business witnessed growth in 2023 due to diversifying its customer portfolio through signing new deals during the year. This was done through addressing the ever-evolving customer needs and enhancing customer value propositions (CVPs).

The business realizes the importance of digitalization, hence aimed to achieve better transactional controls and digital value propositions through an accelerated digitalization journey such as "Go Green" invoicing system, digitizing elements in our Customers Operations and enabling NFR offers for Shell Cards holders. This was to help with providing enhanced fleet solutions and continuous improvement in terms of operational excellence.

Commercial Fuels Business continued to operate in the competitive business-to-business (B2B) market and in a landscape of limited infrastructure projects. Nevertheless, the Company's unwavering dedication to ensuring the uninterrupted continuity of its customers' businesses remains steadfast which was reflected on the company's cash flow efficiency, operation excellence and introducing new industrial solutions. As a result, the company managed to secure major projects in the registered and power sectors which were considered the biggest contracts of 2023 for the business.

Marine Business continued to serve its customers at key ports in the Sultanate leveraging its global expertise to ensure successful delivery of bunkering solutions to its marine customers. The Company's focus remained on strengthening its position and exploring new business opportunities to expand its footprint across all major ports in the Sultanate while remaining fully committed to the highest HSSE, Ethics & Compliance and operational excellence standards.

Aviation Business maintained its focus on retaining and winning new key contracts at Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport, while continuing to apply efficiency and

local society through its Corporate Social Responsibility program, with environment, community skills & enterprise development, and people well-being as its main pillars.

In addition, there has been an ever-increasing focus on creating in-country value through strategic and sustainable initiatives, to support increasing retained value within the country, especially through collaborating with local small and medium enterprises to provide them with business opportunities across the Company's supply chain and operations, and through other social initiatives.

The Company strives to reinforce its collaboration with all stakeholders, whether government, private and non-government organizations (NGOs), to deliver its role as a responsible corporate citizen in Oman, and support the delivery of the Oman Vision 2040 priorities, Shell's Powering Progress strategy and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

PROPOSED DIVIDEND

The Board is proposing that the dividend for 2023 be paid at 36 baiza per share for distribution in March 2024. This decision came after Board's consideration of the Company's net income of the year as well as the Company's commitment to provide its shareholders with a meaningful return on investments whilst factoring current and expected market conditions, existing and anticipated borrowings, and the capital investment programme for the year 2024.

BUSINESS OUTLOOK

The positive economic indicators influenced by higher oil revenue and fiscal discipline are expected to further stabilize the economy in 2024 following a year of steady growth.

The current geopolitical situation and its impact on different business workstreams and supply chains internationally might pose its own set of challenges, which the Company is bearing in mind with its future planning, risk mitigation and business continuity strategies.

The Company has maintained a robust balance sheet throughout the year 2023 and closed the year with a strong cashflow position to be able to meet shareholders expectation on returns and continue investment in new business opportunities in 2024, where commercially feasible. The Company aims to maximize returns and lead in the energy transition and decarbonization journey together with key stakeholders.

People make the difference real. The Company invested in the development of the Omani youth through internship opportunities and on-job learning prospects as well as through the Edzad programme, which allows the interns to learn through a nine-month period and apply hands-on experience in multidisciplinary functions. The Company will continue investing in its people across the network of employees, partners, and stakeholders, whether by deploying an inclusive learning organization to onboard, build and sustain professional competency and operational excellence, or by sustaining the diverse and inclusive organizational culture that makes it what it is.

The focus will continue to be on maintaining Goal Zero, keeping customers, frontline workers, and each other safe and healthy. Reinforcing Shell's core values of honesty, integrity, and respect for people, and adhering to Ethics and Compliance without compromise will remain at the heart of what we do.

RISK AND CONCERNS

The downstream sector remains highly dependent on customers and projects as well as disposable income, hence, supply and demand volatility can create profitability swings as external risks and opportunities develop. Similarly, supply chain continuity and access to raw materials at competitive and sustainable levels can be influenced by external economic factors as global indicators evolve.

Liquidity in the market has seen general improvement but receivables in certain segments and delay in collection continues to impose credit pressure on the Company, which it continues to balance by effective working capital management and ensuring balance sheet resilience.

The Company's forward investment and business plan assume stability in the fixed margin rates in the dominant Mobility Business segment, and this is dependent on the authorities.

The Company tests investments against various scenarios, including changing price structures, forecasted demand and the evolving economic environment to ensure we continue to take robust investment decisions concerning the shareholders' available funds.

INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEMS

The Board of Directors recognises that good corporate governance results from strong internal controls. The Board affirms its overall responsibility for reviewing the adequacy and the integrity of the Company's internal control and management information systems, including systems for compliance with applicable laws.

There was no material loss reported during 2023 because of weaknesses in internal controls. The management of the Company continues to take measures to strengthen the overall internal control environment.

BOARD CHANGES

In the latest Directors elections held at the March 2023 annual general meeting, there were two vacant seats whereas Maoi Fung Fong has resigned in July 2022, and Sheikh Faisal Al Hashar has resigned in February 2023; the shareholders elected Nasser Al Shorani and Asma Al Ghazali filling the vacant seats.

Furthermore, Amr Adel resigned in October 2023 and the Board of Directors appointed Min Yuh Tan effective October 31, 2023, until the nearest ordinary general meeting.

The shareholders were promptly informed of all relevant developments through timely disclosure updates posted on the MSX website.

IN APPRECIATION

We, in Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG, would like to reaffirm our commitment as part of this nation to stand shoulder to shoulder with our partners and stakeholders in the Sultanate and work to power its progress together and build on its achievements. We will continue to serve Oman and its people under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq and to support his vision for the Sultanate.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express my sincere thanks to our shareholders,

the management, our employees, customers, contractors and all our other stakeholders for their loyalty, perseverance, dedication, and effort in the face of an ever growing and challenging business environment.

The Board of Directors remains committed to pursuing all opportunities with a view to maintaining the company's growth while enhancing shareholders' value. We are grateful for your constant support as we work to Power Progress together.

Walid Hadi

Chairman, Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG
Muscat, February 13, 2024

Audited Financial Statements for the Year ended 31 December 2023

AUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME		
	Audited Year ended 31 Dec 2023 OMR'000	Audited Year ended 31 Dec 2022 OMR'000
Income		
Revenue	519,466	499,912
Cost of sales	(483,995)	(464,545)
Gross profit	35,471	35,367
Other income	4,188	4,146
Selling, distribution and administrative expenses	(32,411)	(30,432)
Operating profit	7,248	9,081
Interest expense	(2,963)	(2,366)
Interest income	14	22
Profit before income tax	4,299	6,737
Income tax expense	(696)	(1,031)
Profit and comprehensive income for the period	3,603	5,706
Basic and diluted earnings per share (OMR)	0.036	0.057

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	Audited 31 Dec 2023 OMR'000	Audited 31 Dec 2022 OMR'000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	63,888	60,527
Right-of-use assets	39,816	38,849
Intangible assets	150	186
Deferred tax assets	358	101
Total non-current assets	104,212	99,663
Current assets		
Inventories	7,364	10,695
Receivables and prepayments	52,194	47,207
Cash at bank and in hand	3,997	6,928
Total current assets	63,555	64,830
Total assets	167,767	164,493
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
EQUITY		
Share capital	10,000	10,000
Legal reserve	3,587	3,587
Retained earnings	39,922	42,019
Total equity	53,509	55,606
LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Long-term lease liabilities	37,397	35,975
Employee terminal benefits	150	187
Total non-current liabilities	37,547	36,162
Current liabilities		
Short-term loans	15,000	8,334
Short-term lease liabilities	3,081	2,773
Payables and accruals	57,658	60,430
Income tax payable	935	1,176
Provisions	37	12
Total current liabilities	76,711	72,725
Total liabilities	114,258	108,887
Total equity and liabilities	167,767	164,493
Net assets per share (OMR)	0.535	0.556

* The complete financial statements are available from the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

* The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder on request, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of receipt of the request. The request should be sent to the Chief Financial Officer at the address shown above.

* The previous year's figures have been reclassified to conform to the presentation adopted in the current year.

Education in spotlight at 37th AU summit

Summit convened on how to enhance education and skills to meet continental vision and market needs

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - The 37th ordinary session of the African Union (AU) assembly of the heads of state and government opened on Saturday, with a call to increase efforts to improve the state of education in Africa and fast-track the realisation of Africa's development endeavours.

The two-day meeting, comprising African leaders from AU member states, is held under the AU's theme of the year for 2024, 'Educate an African fit for the 21st Century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality and relevant learning in Africa', at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.

As Africa puts a spotlight on education in 2024, the summit convened on how to enhance education and skills to meet the continental vision and market needs, and further deliberated on the progress, challenges and prospects of the continent's overall development.

Addressing the opening session, Azali Assoumani, president of the Comoros and chairperson of the AU, highlighted the crucial need for increased efforts to promote continental stability and development. "With particular interest in the promotion and preservation of peace and security on our dear continent, this shared security concern has guided all our activities during our term.

"The peacefulness of our continent remains the very basis of realising our vision by 2063 for a united and prosperous Africa," Assoumani said.

Chairperson of the AU Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat



A view of the 37th ordinary session of the African Union (AU) assembly of the heads of state and government in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on Saturday (Xinhua)

The peacefulness of our continent remains the very basis of realising our vision by 2063 for a united and prosperous Africa

AZALI ASSOUMANI



echoed the sentiment, as he underscored the need for AU member states to collectively tackle incessant challenges that are jeopardising Africa's development aspirations.

"Our main challenges have

not diminished in importance. Peace, political and institutional instability, climate change, deficits in economic governance, poverty, marginalisation of women and youths in development and leadership pro-

cesses in our political and social system, remain our main sources of concern," Faki said.

The AU commission chief, however, said despite challenges, the African continent has made progress in various sectors, including continental integration, and boosting the African common position on the global arena, among others.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, on his part, underscored the need to realise strong regional and continental plat-

forms, where national development challenges from geographical, logistics and security perspectives are taken into account.

He further called for advancing Africa's socio-economic and infrastructure integration to fast-track the realisation of key development ambitions.

"Increasing infrastructure connectivity between our countries, by building roads, airports, and ports, rail networks, pipelines, and communication

networks, will link communities, increase trade, and enable economic integration," Ahmed said.

As part of the two-day summit, African leaders are expected to deliberate on continental issues, ranging from regional peace and security to continental development, the reform of the AU, and Africa's increased presence on the international stage, as well as boosting the continent's socio-economic and infrastructure integration.

Brazil to engage more with Africa

Meanwhile, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said that Brazil will engage more with Africa, urging the two sides to contribute more for a fairer world. The president made the call at the opening of the AU session in Addis Ababa on Saturday.

Lula said as the president of Brazil, he will reiterate the closest ties with Africa and consolidate cooperation with the countries of the continent. "As Africa is an important part of the world, especially to the Global South, it is vital to build inclusive social projects for a prosperous society that is free, democratic, and sovereign."

Noting that the new multipolarity is the best approach for the 21st century, the Brazilian president highlighted that the BRICS will play a key role in helping emerging countries to prosper.

"There is undeniable progress in the BRICS alliance in networking emerging countries and addressing global crises, particularly those that disproportionately affect the poorest and migrants," Lula said.

He urged African leaders to strengthen cooperation between Africa and Brazil in various fields to achieve mutual progress and address global challenges.

The Brazilian leader also said Africans and Brazilians need to forge their own path in the emerging international order and create a new global governance system to tackle contemporary challenges.

Xinhua

'Assange likely to be extradited'

Ankara, Turkey - Ahead of a crucial UK court hearing next week, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's wife sees dim chances for her husband to succeed in his last-ditch attempt to stop his extradition to the US.

In an interview with Australian broadcaster SBS News on Sunday, Assange's wife and lawyer, Stella Assange, said she doesn't have hope 'this will go our way'.

The High Court in London is set to begin a two-day hearing on Tuesday to decide Assange's fate, and if the judges reject his application, he will have exhausted his legal options in Britain.

Assange has been fighting extradition from Britain to the US, where he is wanted on espionage charges.

"I don't have hope that this will go our way. And even if it were to



WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's wife and lawyer, Stella Assange

go our way - meaning he'd have leave to appeal and have his arguments heard in full - then it would mean Julian continues in prison," said the lawyer.

If Assange loses his appeal, then he can file an appeal with the European Court of Human Rights to prevent his extradition to the US.

However, his legal team fears that the British government could try to put him on a plane before that can happen.

"It's now a matter of life and death for my husband," Assange added.

"Julian will be put in a hole if he is extradited, there is no doubt about that," she said. "He will be

put in a hole so far and deep in the ground that I don't think I'll ever see him again."

Julian Assange, an Australian citizen, is being held in the UK, where authorities authorised his extradition to the US last year. He is wanted for his alleged role in espionage and the dissemination of classified US military information.

The US Justice Department labelled Assange's actions part of the 'largest compromises of classified information in the history of the United States'.

He has been on remand for about four years at Belmarsh Prison after spending seven years in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he initially sought diplomatic asylum from Swedish authorities.

Anadolu Agency

Two Cuban doctors held hostage by Al-Shabaab terrorists killed

Mogadishu, Somalia - Two Cuban doctors held captive by the Somali-based terrorist group Al-Shabaab were killed in a US airstrike, the militant outfit claimed on Saturday.

The Al-Qaeda-affiliated terror group claimed in a Telegram statement that the doctors were killed in a US air raid in Somalia's southern state of Jubaland on Thursday. "The aerial bombardment which began at around 12:10am targeted a house in Jilib, killing Assel Herrera and Landy Rodriguez," the statement said.

The terrorist group blamed the US for 'deliberately targeting the prisoners for several years and have conducted strikes' in at least two locations before Thursday's airstrike in Jilib town.



"We neither confirm nor deny the terrorist group's claims," a local official told Anadolu over the phone, requesting anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

On April 12, 2019, the Al-Shabaab terrorists kidnapped the Cuban doctors while on their way to work in Kenya's north-

eastern province, killing one of their bodyguards in the process.

Meanwhile, the Somali Defence Ministry said on Saturday that 15 Al-Shabaab terrorists were killed and 20 others were injured during national army aerial operations in Lower Shabelle and Galguduud provinces.

Anadolu Agency

Historic citadel in Syria's Aleppo reopens to visitors

Damascus, Syria - Syria's culture ministry announced on Saturday the reopening of the historic citadel of Aleppo to visitors following the completion of initial restoration work on damage sustained during the major earthquakes in February of last year.

In a statement, the ministry announced the completion of the first and second phases of the restoration, reinforcement, and rehabilitation of the southern tower of the citadel's entrance. The area was significantly affected by the major earthquakes in February 2023 and subsequent aftershocks that shook Turkey and Syria.

The ministry stated that after it was alerted to the danger of cracks and fissures that appeared



A view from the historic citadel of Aleppo in Syria (Xinhua)

in the structure of the entrance following the earthquakes, visits to the castle were suspended as a precaution against any serious repercussions on the citadel and

visitors.

It noted that detailed tests conducted by the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, in cooperation with a

mission from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that visited Aleppo, revealed a movement in the entrance that

concentrated in the supporting pillars of the bridge leading to the southern tower. The ministry assured the public that the citadel has reopened to visitors following the necessary restoration work, noting that rehabilitation of the remaining parts of the citadel will begin soon.

The Aleppo Citadel, a historic fortress in Syria dating back to the 3rd millennium BC, has been occupied by various civilisations and undergone significant damage and reconstruction throughout history. After it was damaged during the Syrian Civil War, efforts are ongoing to restore and preserve the structure, which is part of the ancient city of Aleppo, a UNESCO world heritage site.

Xinhua

Jailed ex-Thai prime minister Thaksin released on parole

Bangkok, Thailand - Thailand's convicted former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was released on parole on Sunday, six months after his return to the country from self-exile.

Xinhua reporters observed that a car carrying Thaksin left a police hospital in Bangkok at 6:06am local time (2306 GMT) on Sunday, where he received medical treatment and served six months of his one-year prison sentence.

Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin previously said that the release on parole of Thaksin was in line with the

law.

According to the country's Justice Ministry, the 74-year-old former prime minister is among the 930 inmates approved for parole this month. He is eligible for parole as he is over 70 years old and suffers from a serious illness.

Thaksin ended his exile of over 15 years and returned to Thailand in August last year, but was soon detained and faced an eight-year prison sentence on several charges. However, shortly after his return, he was transferred from a Bangkok prison to a hospital due to health concerns.

Xinhua

Israel’s Rafah offensive is unacceptable, says Canada

Oviedo, Spain - An Israeli offensive on the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah is 'unacceptable because Palestinians have nowhere to go' Canada's foreign minister said on Sunday.

"We believe in the right of Israel to exist ... We also have a foreign policy all about human security ... And the protection of civilians has been at the core of everything we've been doing," Melanie Joly said during a panel discussion at Germany's Munich Security Conference.

"I believe that every single civilian life - Israeli and Palestinian - is equal. This conflict has had proportions that are unacceptable," she later added.

Some 1.5mn Palestinians previously displaced by Israel's offensive on Gaza are holed up in Rafah, seeking refuge from hostilities that have laid waste to wide swathes of Palestinian territory. Israel's reported plans for an offensive on the city have sounded international alarm bells, with many countries urging restraint or cancellation of the operation.

Discussing the Palestinian and Israeli situation with her Spanish and Jordanian counterparts, as well as with a former Israeli foreign minister, Joly outlined Canada's vision for a lasting



peace. First, she said: "We need an Israeli government that is willing to talk about a two-state solution." At the same time, she said Arab nations must normalise

diplomatic ties with Israel, which would include a security deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

"We could have a very different Munich Security Conference next year. But time is of the essence; we only have a couple of months," she said. "(Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu cannot just continue to wage his war."

Joly added that it is important to 'put pressure' on Netanyahu and to differentiate between his government and the nation of Israel. In the short term, she said what is needed is a hostage deal and the entrance of humanitarian aid in Gaza to build political momentum, as she said 'good dancing partners' are currently lacking.

During the conversation, Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel disagreed slightly, saying the what is needed immediately is a permanent cease-fire as well as a release of hostages.

And he said what is needed 'for tomorrow, not the day after tomorrow, is a Palestinian state'.

Albares defined Spain's vision for a viable Palestinian state as 'Gaza and the West Bank, under one single Palestinian authority, connected by a corridor with an exit to the sea and with its capital in East Jerusalem'.

His description received nods of agreement from Joly but was contested by former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who said the corridor did not exist in 1967 and that the situation is 'more complex' than the 'slogans that some are using'.

Albares added that Israel is a 'friend to Spain' but said his government will not 'lower its voice in the defense of Palestinian citizens'. "I don't see any political vision behind all this violence," he added, saying the Palestinian people's hopes for a realistic state are 'completely interlinked' with Israeli security.

Anadolu Agency

Palestine PM calls for deal to implement 2-state solution

Mohammad Shtayyeh was speaking at Germany's Munich Security Conference on Sunday

Ankara, Turkey - Palestine's prime minister on Sunday called for a deal to take place between the Palestinian resistance and Israel 'as soon as possible'.

Speaking at Germany's Munich Security Conference, Mohammad Shtayyeh said: "All our eyes are focused on the suffering of the Palestinians both in Gaza and the West Bank," adding: "What is needed immediately is a ceasefire, and even more, to allow international aid into Gaza."

He stressed: "We would like to see the release of all the hostages and we would like to see a deal ... in the making as soon as possible because every single day that is delayed, it means more killings, it means more sufferings and it means more disaster for the people."

"We need to move from talking about a two-state solution into implementing it," he said.

"We should not allow the circle of violence to repeat itself," he added.

The Munich Security Conference is concluding on Sunday with leaders' speeches and high-level talks on security challenges around the world, especially concerning the war in Ukraine and Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip.



Palestine Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh

Gaza death toll climbs to 28,985

At least 127 Palestinians were killed and 205 others injured in the last 24 hours as Israel continues its onslaught on the besieged Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Health Ministry said on Sunday.

"The Israeli occupation committed 13 massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 127 martyrs and 205 injured during the past 24 hours," the ministry said in a statement.

"Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them," the statement said.

Flouting the International Court of Justice's provisional ruling, Israel continues its onslaught

All our eyes are focused on the suffering of the Palestinians both in Gaza and the West Bank. What is needed immediately is a ceasefire

MOHAMMAD SHTAYYEH

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since the cross-border attack by Hamas, which Tel Aviv says killed nearly 1,200 people.

The Israeli offensive has left 85 per cent of Gaza's population internally displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicine, while 60 per cent of the enclave's infrastructure was damaged or destroyed, according to the UN.

WHO chief voices concerns

The head of the World Health Organization on Sunday voiced grave concerns over the deteriorating situation at a hospital in the southern Gaza Strip city of Khan Younis, stressing the urgent need

for access to patients and medical facilities.

"Nasser hospital in Gaza is not functional anymore, after a week-long siege followed by the ongoing raid," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on X.

Despite concerted efforts by a WHO team and its partners, access to the hospital for assessing patients and critical medical needs was denied, he underlined.

"Both yesterday and the day before, the WHO team was not permitted to enter the hospital to assess the conditions of the patients and critical medical needs, despite reaching the hospital compound to deliver fuel alongside partners," he said.

According to Tedros, nearly 200 patients still remain within the hospital, with at least 20 needing immediate referral to other healthcare facilities 'to receive health care; medical referral is every patient's right'.

"The cost of delays will be paid by patients' lives. Access to the patients and hospital should be facilitated," he urged.

The Palestinian Health Ministry on Friday said at least five patients died at the hospital due to a power outage after the Israeli army raided the facility.

The Israeli army on Thursday stormed the hospital, forcing everyone inside to evacuate and flee for their lives. Yet a small medical team stayed inside to take care of patients in critical condition, who were all held in one building of the hospital by the Israeli army amid a lack of basic needs.

Since January 22, Khan Younis has witnessed a massive Israeli ground invasion, forcing tens of thousands of the city's residents to flee.

Anadolu Agency



Egypt to establish logistics centre in Rafah for Gaza aid

Istanbul, Turkey - Egypt announced on Saturday that it is beginning to establish a logistics centre in Rafah to facilitate humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, which is under attack and occupation by Israel.

Government of North Sinai in Egypt, Maj. Gen. Muhammad Abdulfadil, noted that the centre is to be built in the border town, including the Rafah Border Crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.

Abdulfadil said the Egyptian army has begun constructing the centre in Al-Arish to facilitate the work of the Egyptian Red Crescent and to reduce congestion in the area and on the road.

He noted that the centre will have parking areas for trucks, secure warehouses, administrative offices and accommodation for drivers, as well as facilities such as water and electricity.

Aid to Gaza is reaching the Sinai region by land, sea and air, and efforts are being made to transport aid to Gaza by trucks from the Al-Arish Port and the Al-Arish International Airport, he added.

Rafah, on the southern border of Gaza, was home to 280,000 Palestinians, before Israel began to attack the Gaza Strip.

Attacks on October 7 displaced 1.9mn people in Gaza, which has a population of about 2.3mn.

The majority of displaced Palestinians sought refuge in Rafah, which Israel claimed was 'safe'.

With the influx of residents from the northern regions, Rafah's population increased to more than 1.4mn, more than four times its original size.

Palestinians who sought refuge in Rafah are struggling to survive in makeshift tent camps due to a lack of adequate housing.

Israeli forces frequently target Rafah with airstrikes. There are concerns that if Israel launches a ground attack on Rafah, there will be no safe place for civilians in Gaza.

On February 9, Netanyahu instructed the army and security forces to 'prepare a plan for an attack on Rafah'.

Anadolu Agency

Western Balkan leaders reiterate desire for EU membership by 2028

Belgrade, Serbia - The leaders of three Western Balkan states, North Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro, have expressed a desire for their countries to join the EU by 2028.

North Macedonian President Stevo Pendarovski said at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday that his country is the only one in the world to change its name to join the bloc.

"We have been waiting for 17 years to solve the legendary name dispute with Greece. When we solved the issue, the international community supported us, (allowing) us to become a member of NATO. But we are still not fully aligned with the full accession of the European Union," Pendarovski said at the annual meeting that holds

high-level debates on pressing global security challenges. He said if the EU does not change a key decision-making mechanism, no one will be allowed to enter the bloc for years.

"I hope that we will get into the European Union within the next four to five years," Pendarovski said, adding that if the EU does not change the key decision-making process and everyone says 'yes', no one will join the union for a decade.

Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama said at the conference that his country wishes to begin accession talks so that it can prepare for membership.

Rama said his country is not requesting EU membership, but rather that accession talks begin, and that his government



has no specific date in mind, but wants to know the requirements for negotiations.

"Negotiations are the most incredibly productive know-how transfer that a country can get in this plant to become a functioning state with functional institutions. So give us this option. So we can make our countries member states," he added.

Albania was granted EU candidate status in 2014. The EU held its first intergovernmental conference with Albania in July 2022.

Montenegro's President

Jakov Milatovic, on the occasion, said his country's agenda is ambitious and full of EU integration, with the goal of joining the bloc by 2028.

"The agenda is ambitious, the agenda is pro-European, with the aim to have the country into the European Union by 2028 and to become the 28th member state," he said.

On July 1, 2013, Croatia joined the EU as the first of seven countries in the region, while Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia have candidate country status.

Negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia began in July 2022, and Kosovo submitted its application for EU membership in December 2022,

according to the EU parliament.

The 60th Munich Security Conference concluded on Sunday, with three days of events and debates focused on international conflicts, including Gaza and Ukraine.

This year's conference drew about 50 world leaders and 100 ministers, including US Vice President Kamala Harris, Israel's President Isaac Herzog, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, EU's Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell, and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Organisers of the Munich Security Conference did not invite official representatives from Russia, Iran, and North Korea to this year's gathering.

Anadolu Agency

‘Era of peace’ in Europe has come to an end: Ukraine’s FM Kuleba

Munich, Germany - Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba warned on Saturday that the ‘era of peace’ in Europe has come to an end, urging Kyiv’s partners to ramp up military production.

“To those who don’t want to find and spend money on the production of weapons, the era of peace in Europe is over,” Kuleba said during a panel discussion at the Munich Security Conference.

Speaking about the situation of ammunition supply in Ukraine, Kuleba said there are two issues in this regard: the first is the ‘quantity and sustainability’ of supply, and the second is rounds deliveries, which he said that some are produced for specific weapons produced in a specific country, meaning that these rounds cannot be used for every cannon.

“Politicians tick the box, they get credited for delivering these tons of rounds, but on the ground, it becomes a massive technological problem to send the right round to the right cannon,” he said.

Ukraine’s foreign minister went on to say they need much more artillery ammunition, and that despite drones having become a ‘part of the game’, they will not replace artillery ammunition. Indicating that Ukraine has ramped up production of everything it can, he called on Ukraine’s partners to increase production and invest in new



To those who don’t want to find and spend money on the production of weapons, the era of peace in Europe is over

DMYTRO KULEBA

production lines, as well as accept that Russia cannot be ‘pacified’ or ‘appeased’.

He also reiterated his call for the EU and NATO to launch a programme to establish a com-

mon defence industry space.

“Every time (when) Ukrainian soldiers withdraw from a Ukrainian town because of the lack of ammunition, think of it not only in terms of defending democracy and world-based order but also in terms of Russian soldiers getting a few kilometres closer to your towns, your homes, your families and children. And if you look at it from this perspective, you will find the money,” he added.

Speaking at the same panel, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said the G-7 supports Ukraine because it means defending freedom, democracy, and international law.

“We want peace, but peace with justice, which means Russia out of Ukraine,” he said, adding that this is a clear political message to Russia’s President Vladimir Putin.

He also said Italy is already working to help the reconstruc-

tion of Ukraine. For instance, he said he signed an agreement on Saturday with the European Investment Bank to co-finance a project for the energy infrastructure in Ukraine worth 200mn (US\$215.5mn).

“Italy has also recently approved its eighth package of military aid for Ukraine,” he said.

“We are ready to do more, but we are not the US, which is richer than us,” he said.

Anadolu Agency

5 factors to affect Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2024

As the Russia-Ukraine conflict drags on, five essentials will exert great influence on the development of the conflict in 2024, namely Russian and US presidential elections, Western assistance, the prospect of peace talks, Black Sea situation and Western sanctions against Russia, said a Chinese scholar.

Despite signs of fatigue in the US and Western aid to Ukraine, this conflict will be prolonged, said Sun Zhuangzhi, director of the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, at a seminar on major international issues held recently in Beijing.

The ongoing Ukraine crisis will enter its third year in late February this year ahead of the upcoming of Russian and US presidential elections scheduled for March and November respectively.

Noting that the Russia-Ukraine conflict itself is a tragedy caused by the geopolitical games among great powers and the result of the confrontation between the US and Russia, Sun believed the domestic political trends of the two countries will determine the development of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Sun noted that Western assistance is another factor to affect the conflict. He explained that Ukraine is in dire straits right now, with nearly half of its fiscal expenditures having to be paid by the West. With the decreasing assistance from the Western countries, Ukraine has no choice but to depend on itself to find a way out.

Speaking of the peace talks, Sun noted that although Ukraine and Russia carried out their largest prisoner swap since February 2022 on January 3, the crisis is still escalating, which means the prospects of peace talks are still bleak.

Underscoring the important role of Black Sea situation, Sun said that the Black Sea region will become the focus of competition between Russia and Ukraine in 2024.

The last factor lies in the sanctions against Russia. In Sun’s view, the West has fewer sanction options. On the one hand, it hopes to weaken and hit Russia as much as possible, but on the other hand, the trump cards it could play are increasingly limited, Sun added. Besides these factors, Sun said both Russia and the West regarded the conflict as a war around the Europe.

Xinhua



Libyan unity under threat, says UN’s special representative

Geneva, Switzerland - The current situation in Libya poses a significant risk to the North African nation’s unity, the UN’s special representative to the country warned on Saturday.

“The fragility of its (Libya’s) institutions and the deep divisions within the nation represent grave risks to its stability,” said Abdoulaye Bathily, UN special representative of the secretary general to Libya, in a statement marking the beginning of 2011 uprising that ousted longtime ruler Muammar

Gaddafi after four decades in power.

“It is imperative that Libyan leaders acknowledge their responsibility and be held accountable for their decisions and actions, as they directly impact the lives of the Libyan people,” Bathily said in the statement, released by UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

He reaffirmed UNSMIL’s commitment to ‘supporting the Libyan people in their pursuit of peace, justice, legitimate institutions, and inclusive governance’.

Libyans hope to hold parliamentary and presidential elections to end conflicts and divisions that have manifested since early 2022.

Two governments currently exist in the country: One led by Osama Hamad and mandated by the House of Representatives in the east of the country, and the other the Government of National Unity led by Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, based in the capital Tripoli, which enjoys international recognition.

Anadolu Agency

US Vice President Kamala Harris holds bilateral talks in Germany

Istanbul, Turkey - US Vice President Kamala Harris held separate talks with world leaders at the Munich Security Conference in Germany, according to a statement from the White House.

Harris discussed the situation in Gaza with Israeli President Isaac Herzog during a meeting on Friday where she emphasised the need to ensure the safety of more than one million civilians in the region in the event of a possible attack by Israel against Rafah.

In the meeting where the leaders evaluated the long-term cessation of conflicts in Gaza, the release of prisoners and plans thereafter, Harris stressed that Palestinians should not be forcibly displaced from Gaza.

Harris also highlighted the importance of protecting civilians, increasing humanitarian aid and establishing an appropriate environment for a cease-fire to ensure aid reaches those in need in Gaza.

In a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia’ Al Sudani, Harris reiterated her commitment to a security agreement between the US and Iraq



US Vice President Kamala Harris

Harris highlighted the importance of protecting civilians, increasing humanitarian aid and establishing an environment for a cease-fire to ensure aid reaches Gaza

and emphasised the importance of the High Military Commission and economic relations between the two countries.

Harris underscored that attacks on US personnel will be

met with a response when necessary and requested the support of the Iraqi government to stop the attacks.

She reiterated US President Joe Biden’s invitation to Sudani

to visit the White House.

Harris congratulated Slovenian Prime Minister Robert Golob for Slovenia’s presence on the UN Security Council for the 2024 - 2025 term.

She emphasised the importance of a NATO-EU partnership for Ukraine’s independence and transatlantic security as she thanked Golob for Slovenia’s cooperation in delivering humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

Anadolu Agency



Congo accuses Rwanda of airport ‘drone attack’

Kigali, Rwanda - The Rwandan army carried out a ‘drone attack’ on the Democratic Republic of Congo’s airport in eastern Goma, which damaged civilian planes, Congo’s military said on Saturday.

The accusations came after a bomb blast was reported early on Saturday at the Goma International Airport in North Kivu province amid ongoing fighting between M23 rebels and government forces.

“The Rwandan army drones targeted aircraft of FARDC (DR Congo army), in the wee hours of

Saturday,” army spokesperson in North Kivu province, Guillaume Djike Kaiko, said in a video shared by provincial authorities.

But ‘the FARDC aircraft were not hit, it was rather the civilian planes that were damaged’, he said.

The security situation remains volatile around Goma, where thousands of residents fleeing war have sought safety amid heavy fighting.

Recently, Congolese fighter jets have reportedly been used to hit M23 rebels after fighting intensified around the strategic

town of Sake, 20km (12 miles) from the provincial capital, Goma.

Sake is said to be the last barrier before Goma, whose capture by rebels would cut off Goma.

The Congo accuses Rwanda of backing M23 rebels battling government forces in the east, a claim Kigali consistently denies.

Kigali has also accused Kinshasa of pursuing regime change in Rwanda.

There was no immediate response from the Rwandan military on the latest allegations.

But Congolese President Felix

Tshisekedi and his Rwandan counterpart, Paul Kagame, met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on Friday at a mini-summit hosted by Angolan President João Lourenço to discuss the conflict in eastern Congo.

Lourenço, African Union designated mediator on the peace and security situation in eastern Congo, stressed the need to revive the peace process and achieve a cease-fire between the Congo’s armed forces and the M23 rebel group, as well as to initiate direct dialogue between Tshisekedi and Kagame to end

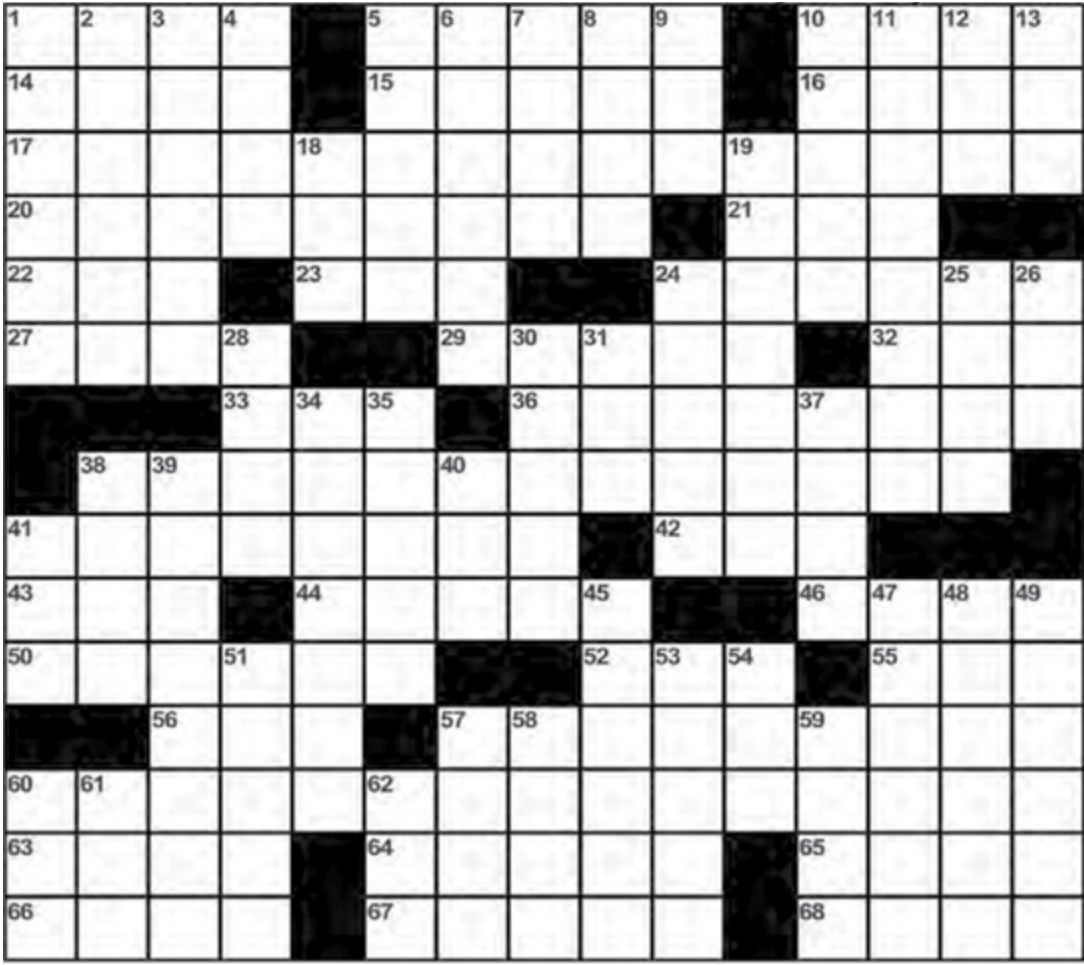
the conflict between the two neighbouring countries.

The second round of the summit is due to take place on the sidelines of the 37th African Union summit.

Since the first week of February, at least 15 civilians have been killed and 29 injured around Goma and Sake, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said earlier this week. Roughly 135,000 internally displaced persons have fled Sake to Goma, according to the UNHCR.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) "Beg pardon ... "
- 5) Much, slangily
- 10) It's far from a flattop
- 14) Handed-down history
- 15) Hole- (golf coup)
- 16) Common roller-coaster feature
- 17) They include numerators and denominators
- 20) Providing bearings
- 21) Tiny carpenter
- 22) Thing picked up at the beach
- 23) Animated Olive
- 24) Drunk, in slang
- 27) Not us
- 29) Short choral composition
- 32) Tokyo oflong ago
- 33) "Much _ About Nothing"
- 36) Fence for defense
- 38) It includes angles and shapes
- 41) Jon Bon Jovi, for one
- 42) "What_ the odds?"
- 43) Notable period of history
- 44) Golden Horde member
- 46) D.C. veterans
- 50) Spanish capital

- 52) Clairvoyant's favorite letters?
- 55) Lobster eggs
- 56) Moray, e.g.
- 57) Evolution adherent
- 60) X = 3, X + 2 = 5, and others
- 63) Pavarotti solo
- 64) Tossed with force
- 65) Singing club
- 66) Like much lingerie
- 67) Make fun of
- 68) Half a matched set

DOWN

- 1) March family creator
- 2) "Yippee!" alternative
- 3) Ferret's cousin
- 4) Humorous internet image
- 5) Full of dryer fluff
- 6) Photographed or taped
- 7) In a quandary
- 8) It might produce a run
- 9) Former nuclear power agcy.
- 10) Flared dress style
- 11) Shoes, sandals, sneakers, etc.
- 12) Director Howard
- 13) Photo_ (media events)
- 18) Plastic_ Band
- 19) More moth-eaten, e.g.
- 24) Historic Alabama city

- 25) Challenge to a canoeer
- 26) Bambi's mother, e.g.
- 28) Bit of Halloween attire
- 30) Musical with its own glasses?
- 31) "The _ of Pooh"
- 34) Concentrate, in a way
- 35) Group of eight
- 37) It's used to take flight?
- 38) When doubled, a Society Island
- 39) Campus VIP
- 40) angster's gun in old films
- 41) Sleep phenomenon
- 45) "The Twilight Zone" telecasts, today
- 47) Baltimore's bird
- 48) Body shop convenience
- 49) Has a hunch
- 51) One way to get out of debt
- 53) Metal-shaping tool
- 54) Place for an orchestra
- 57) Take out, to an editor
- 58) Lung opening?
- 59) Approaching, in romantic poetry
- 60) "Do the Right Thing" pizzeria owner
- 61) Common savings vehicle
- 62) Little salamander

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Someone's recent generosity toward you could be covering up a guilty conscious. Start by asking them what has led them to be so kind and giving to you today. Yhe answer they give you might surprise and disappoint you. Getting to the truth might burst your blissful bubble, but it's never a good feeling to be ignorant of the facts. You are better off knowing the real deal and being able to react based on knowledge rather than hunches. You can indeed handle the truth.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Could you use some motivation right now? Looking for someone to light a fire under you? Then go out and seek some stimulation today. You're sure to find a qualified mentor, or at least someone who has reached a goal that you want to reach. They can help you get there too, if you ask them the right questions and show them that you are ready for the work that this goal requires. Be adaptable and ready to do whatever they tell you. Now is not the time to be picky or lazy.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

You might not realize it, but you have been pulling back from the people around you for a while now. Today, you need to try to connect instead of avoid if you want to maintain some important relationships. You relate well to other people when you put yourself in the role of listener, so you should get yourself involved in group events and conversations. When you hear something that sparks your emotions, pipe up. Add your two cents and everyone will win.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. Which is the oldest identified era of activity by homo sapiens and relatives?
A. Bronze Age
B. Palaeolithic
C. Iron Age
D. Jurassic

2. What sportsman would perform a triple salchow?

- A. Show jumper
- B. Figure skater
- C. Gymnast
- D. High diver

3. What is the nationality of Mohammed Al Fayed, who sold the department store Harrods Knightsbridge to Qatar Holdings in 2010?

- A. Iranian
- B. Iraqi
- C. Egyptian
- D. Syrian

Answers: 1.B 2.B 3.C



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

The games people are playing today are getting pretty competitive, and things could get ugly if cooler heads don't prevail. Is this something that you want to get involved in? Think long and hard about it. Getting your hands dirty is one thing, but getting bruised is quite another. These types of power struggles usually end up having the same winners every time, the people who play dirty and don't care about who gets hurt. And that isn't who you are.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If your daily routine is starting to feel like a rut, it's easy for you to mix things up today. Just be sure that you don't create drama just for the sake of having something to talk about! Make some healthy excitement happen today by mixing up your regular schedule. Getting together with a new person is always good. Change your surroundings, and you'll increase your chances for stimulation. Travel is helpful, and even a trip to the park could yield some fun.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

The stimulating energy you get today will be intoxicating, but be careful not to use it up all at once! Take it slowly today and budget your time. There is no reason to hurry or run around too quickly. Physical exercise is a good thing, but try to keep it reasonable and do not push yourself too far. This is not the time to start a new routine or join a new gym. To maintain this invigorated feeling, savor it. Don't take it for granted or waste it.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Today is well suited to deep thought and contemplation about a project you've been considering. Your brain is ready and eager to come up with new plans right now, and all it needs is some quiet time to put the pieces of the puzzle together. A socially active friend may start tugging at you to drop everything and go somewhere with them, but don't go if you would rather be alone. They don't need your company as much as they might want you to think they do.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Any rough patch that you're going through right now will smooth out to a tiny wrinkle by the day's end, so you shouldn't waste too much time worrying about things. Turn your thoughts to tomorrow, when all of this will be over and things will be so much better. You can't have a good day every day, but you can certainly choose to focus on positive things instead of negative ones. And if the only positive thing in your life right now is hope, then so be it.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Create something artistic today! It doesn't have to be a masterpiece. Any act of creation will make you feel quite accomplished and put a smile on your face all day long. So instead of buying someone a birthday card, why not create one on your own? There is nothing better than putting a smile on someone's face with something you made. Sharing your artistic visions with other people, no matter how silly you might think they are, is a real gift.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Just by being yourself and being honest about what you think, you can change someone's life today. But the question is are you ready to? You cannot be irresponsible in giving your feedback or giving your input. If you feel that you are prepared to make a difference, then open your heart to as many people as you can today. Skip past the small talk and talk to them about substantial topics. Try to connect with them intellectually too, rather than just connecting with their emotions.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

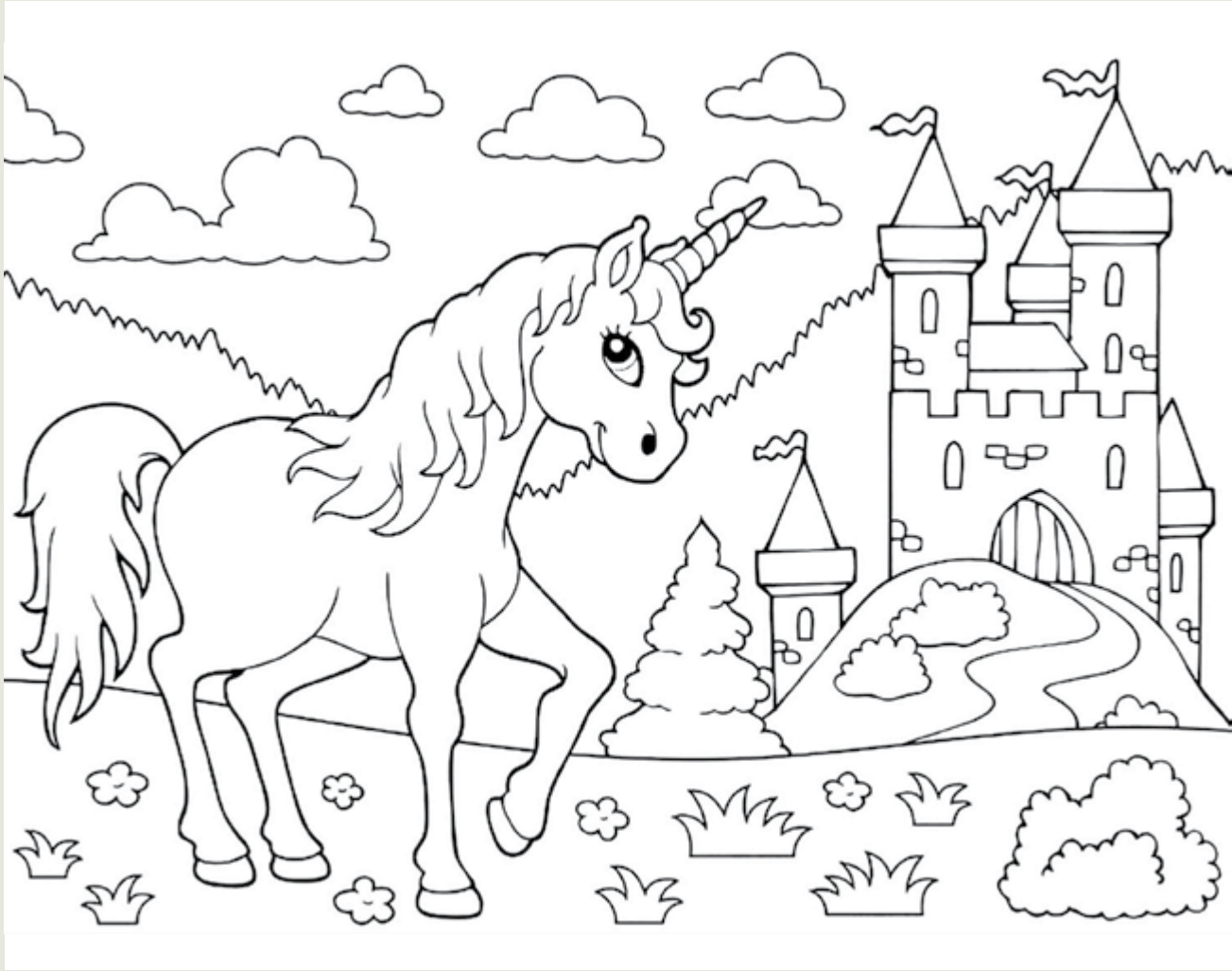
You're still in a phase of life where stability is much more important to you than taking risks, no matter what the perceived payoff may be. So it's a great day to spend more time with family members and other people who know you inside and out. The tried-and-true people in your life aren't boring to you right now. They are comforting! You have a chance to expand these close relationships even more now. Everyone is ready to talk and ready to share a whole new level of themselves.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

It's a good thing that you have so much flexible energy around you right now, because there will be some last-minute changes today that will demand your cooperation. You know how to be open to change better than most people, so you might want to keep an eye open for someone who can't make the adjustments as easily as you can. They may need a hand, and you will get a huge rush out of helping them get their bearings. Their gratitude could pay off for you in surprising ways.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

C	R	E	G
A	I	L	O
C	U	E	A
H	A	T	R

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

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

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

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

RODRI TO THE RESCUE

Midfielder's late strike helps Man City draw with Chelsea

Manchester, England - Rodri's late goal salvaged a 1-1 Premier League draw for Manchester City against Chelsea on Saturday as the below-par champions narrowly avoided their first home loss in 15 months.

Pep Guardiola's team, unbeaten in their last nine league games, remained third in the table on 53 points, four behind leaders Liverpool and two adrift of Arsenal, but with a game in hand.

"We weren't great in the first half," Rodri told Sky Sports.

"We conceded another easy goal. We knew about their counter-attacks and fast players, but we have to defend the counter-attack better. From there, it's always more difficult to come back," he added.

"We (defended better) in the second half... more spirit, we wanted the ball and wanted to take risks. You have to be brave."

City's decision to park in Chelsea's half proved costly as Nicolas Jackson's deft flick began a counter-attack in the 42nd minute. He sent a perfect pass behind the defence to Raheem Sterling, who rounded City defender Kyle Walker and curled the ball past keeper Ederson to score against his former team.



Manchester City's Rodri celebrates after scoring against Chelsea on Saturday

We conceded another easy goal. We knew about their counter-attacks and fast players, but we have to defend the counter-attack better. From there, it's always more difficult to come back

RODRI

"We countered them well so I think it is a fair result in the end," Chelsea midfielder Conor Gallagher told Sky. "The lads were brilliant and defensively we were very focused. We were very tired

but we saw it through and we are happy with the performance." After numerous near-misses

that had the City fans holding their heads in frustration, Rodri equalised in the 83rd minute after Walker's shot was blocked with a thunderous shot that deflected off Trevoh Chalobah into the net.

Victory would have given City the chance to go top of the table when they host Brentford on Tuesday but the draw with Chelsea means they can climb no higher than second.

"Good game. First half we didn't perform too good, second half really good," Guardiola said. "We had chances and in the second half we were better."

City tested Chelsea's back line with 31 shots to the visitors' nine, but only five were on target.

Prolific striker Erling Haaland, who leads the league with 16 goals, was frustrated by nine shots with no goals for the first time in his City career, including an unmarked late close-range header the Norwegian sent over the bar before covering his face in disbelief.

Chelsea had their chances including Jackson's one-on-one with Ederson and the City keeper saved a point-black shot by Sterling early in the second half.

"I'm so pleased," Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino said. "I told the players I feel so proud. In the last three games we've started to create a very good spirit."

"We only conceded one chance - against a team like Manchester City who, for me, are the best team in the world."

City have not lost at the Etihad since a defeat by Brentford in November, 2022.



Arsenal's Martin Odegaard scores against Burnley

Five-star Arsenal stay hot on Liverpool heels

London, England - Arsenal's goal rush continued unabated as they thrashed Burnley 5-0 to stay right in the slipstream of Premier League leaders Liverpool who thumped Brentford on Saturday.

Liverpool took advantage of an early kickoff to stretch their lead to five points with Mohamed Salah scoring on his return in a 4-1 victory in west London, while Manchester City salvaged a 1-1 draw with Chelsea thanks to a late goal by Rodri.

Arsenal were undaunted, however, and followed up their

6-0 win at West Ham United with a 5-0 victory at Turf Moor.

Liverpool have 57 points from 25 games with Arsenal on 55 and champions City in third place on 53 from 24.

Aston Villa climbed back into fourth courtesy of a 2-1 victory at Fulham and Tottenham Hotspur's 2-1 home defeat by Wolverhampton Wanderers.

After a dip in form late last year, Arsenal have won five league games in a row and scored 21 goals in that sequence, conceding only two.

Haaland fumes after missed chances in draw against Chelsea

Manchester, England - Erling Haaland pushed aside a television camera after the final whistle, his frustration spilling over after he took nine shots but scored no goals for the first time in his Manchester City career.

Rodri netted a late equaliser to salvage a 1-1 Premier League home draw for the champions against Chelsea as they avoided their first loss at the Etihad in 15 months.

"That's good, it's good to have nine shots," City manager Pep Guardiola said. "Next game he is going to score. I was a football player, I played 11 years, I scored 11 goals. One goal a season. It's football, it's human beings."

As the players gathered on the pitch after the final whistle, Haaland pushed aside a live TV camera focused on the striker's face. Haaland, who rewrote the scoring record books in his Premier League debut season last year, continued his prolific form before a broken foot sidelined him for nearly two months.

He scored twice in City's 2-0 win over Everton last weekend to



Erling Haaland looks frustrated after failing to find the target

reclaim sole possession of the league scoring lead with 16 goals.

City remained third in the table on 53 points, four behind leaders Liverpool and two adrift of Arsenal, but with a game in hand. They can climb to second with victory over visiting Brentford on Tuesday.

"If Haaland put away the chances we're not even talking about this," former City player Micah Richards said on Sky

Hernandez, Mbappe on target as PSG beat Nantes to extend lead

Nantes, France - Kylian Mbappe and Lucas Hernandez scored second-half goals to earn leaders Paris St-Germain a 1-0 win at Nantes and extend their unbeaten Ligue 1 run to 17 matches on Saturday.

Luis Enrique's side moved on to 53 points, 14 clear of second-placed Nice who lost 1-0 at Olympique Lyonnais on Friday.

"It was a tough first half but the attitude of the players was excellent," the Spaniard told reporters. "In the second half we were better with more attacking presence in the box, it was difficult but we were fortunate to score the first goal."

Hernandez opened the scoring with PSG's first shot on target in the 60th minute with a long-range strike that Nantes' Moussa Sissoko deflected into the top corner past his goalkeeper. Substitute Mbappe doubled the lead from the penalty spot in the 78th minute, the France striker's 21st league goal of the campaign confirming his position as Ligue 1's top scorer this season.



PSG's Lucas Hernandez celebrates with teammates after scoring against Nantes

"The league is not settled, it is true that we lack an opponent that challenge us but it is the result of our performance," Luis Enrique added.

"Until it is mathematically certain we can't say anything, there are still a lot of games left."

"It is important for us to be solid in the league, to be a team that uses the league to reinforce a way of playing to win more titles."

Late Lewandowski penalty gives Barca victory at Celta

Vigo, Spain - Robert Lewandowski's penalty deep into added time earned Barcelona a fortunate 2-1 win at Celta Vigo in LaLiga on Saturday ahead of their Champions League game at Napoli.

It was another uninspired performance by Barcelona until a moment of brilliance from Lewandowski gave the visitors the lead just before halftime.

Winger Lamine Yamal found the Polish forward on the edge of the box and he made space

with the outside of his boot to fire a bullet strike past goalkeeper Vicente Guaita.

Under pressure in 17th place, fourth bottom and three points above the relegation zone, Rafa Benitez's side fought back to level in the 47th minute when Iago Aspas netted a deflected strike past keeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

The match grew in tension with the raucous Galician stadium roaring support for their team who had suffered five

losses in their last six games in all competitions and managed only four wins in 26 league games this season.

Celta were pushing for victory with Aspas missing three clear chances before defender Fran Beltran made a bad mistake, missing the ball completely in a clearance attempt and hitting Yamal's leg in the 93rd minute to give Lewandowski his chance seven minutes into stoppage time.

Vicente Guaita saved his first

effort, but the VAR check showed the keeper was in front of the goalline before the ball left the spot and Lewandowski tucked away his second effort.

Xavi Hernandez's side are third in the standings on 54 points, two behind Girona and seven adrift of leaders Real Madrid, both of whom have a game in hand.

"In the second half we didn't play well. They were lucky in their goal, but we did little offensively," Lewandowski said.



Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski scores against Celta Vigo

ANNIHILATION

Jadeja takes five wickets after Jaiswal double hundred as India crush England

Rajkot, India - India set England a huge target and then skittled the tourists out for 122 to romp to a 434-run victory in the third Test and go 2-1 up in the five-match series on Sunday.

India had been in the box seat since grabbing a handy first-innings lead of 126 and they never took their foot off the pedal at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium.

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal smashed an unbeaten 214, Shubman Gill made 91 and debutant Sarfaraz Khan struck his second fifty of the match before India declared their second innings on 430-4.

Jaiswal equalled Wasim Akram's record of hitting 12 sixes in a Test innings and it followed his 209 in the second Test in Visakhapatnam.

Chasing an improbable 557 for victory, England slumped to 50-7 with Ravindra Jadeja (5-41) wrecking their middle order.

Once Kuldeep Yadav dismissed England captain Ben Stokes lbw for 15, the match was effectively over.

Mark Wood made a quickfire 33 before being the last England



India's Ravindra Jadeja celebrates with teammates after taking an England wicket on Sunday; (R) Yashasvi Jaiswal (L) celebrates with Sarfaraz Khan after his double century

England played well and put us under pressure but we have class bowlers and the message was to stay calm. I am really proud of how we came back

ROHIT SHARMA

batter dismissed as India registered their biggest Test win in terms of runs.

"England played well and put

"It is easy to drift away from what you do as a team but I am really proud of how we came back."

After play resumed on the penultimate day, Gill consolidated India's position with his assured accumulation of runs. Gill was run out after a misunderstanding with Kuldeep Yadav but there was no respite for England as Jaiswal, who had retired hurt on 104 on Saturday, walked in.

Jaiswal and Sarfaraz tore into



the England attack and it suddenly started raining boundaries as they plundered 172 runs off 158 deliveries.

Jaiswal took a single off Root to bring up his double hundred, while Sarfaraz smashed three sixes in his unbeaten 68.

Left with a mountain to climb, England lost their openers cheaply and could never arrest the slide.

Ben Duckett (four), who smashed 153 in the first innings,

Leverkusen beat Heidenheim to equal record unbeaten run

Heidenheim, Germany - Bayer Leverkusen scored in each half to battle past hosts Heidenheim 2-1 on Saturday and open up an eight-point gap at the top of the table as they equalled a German record by going 32 matches unbeaten in all competitions.

The visitors, who have never won a Bundesliga title, snatched the lead on the stroke of halftime when Jeremie Frimpong slotted home a deflected shot.

Leverkusen, whose last major trophy was the 1993 German Cup, had chances to score again and Germany international Florian Wirtz hit the crossbar in the 77th minute.

He made soon amends, however, delivering a superb assist for Amine Adli to make it 2-0. Heidenheim reduced the deficit in the 87th through Tim Kleindienst but could not find an equaliser.

Xabi Alonso's team have not lost a match this season in domestic and European competitions, equalling Bayern Munich's record run of 32 unbeaten matches from 2020.

"It was not difficult for us to



Bayer Leverkusen's Amine Adli celebrates after scoring against Heidenheim on Saturday

play well after last week," Alonso said, in reference to his team's 3-0 win over Bayern Munich.

"We were ready to do it today and I liked that. The players are

the Spaniard. "I am satisfied with the game and the performance and the result. We are in a good situation, we will keep going and we will take it one game at a time."

Leverkusen, who have won 28 and drawn four matches in all competitions, head the Bundesliga standings on 58 points.

Dortmund stumble to draw

Borussia Dortmund and hosts VfL Wolfsburg shared the points in a 1-1 draw on Saturday, leaving the visitors fourth in the Bundesliga, five behind VfB Stuttgart in third.

Dortmund grabbed the lead when Wolfsburg defenders failed to clear a Marco Reus shot and keeper Koen Casteels pushed it into the path of Niclas Füllkrug, who stabbed the ball over the line.

Wolfsburg's Kevin Behrens had two chances in first-half stoppage time, including a shot that hit the woodwork but Yannick Gerhardt did better in the 64th minute, nodding in from close range to level.



Victor Osimhen

Osimhen battles fatigue, could miss Napoli's crucial tie against Barca

Naples, Italy - Napoli could be without Victor Osimhen when they host Barcelona in the Champions League last 16 after the striker missed their last-gasp 1-1 home draw with Genoa in Serie A on Saturday due to fatigue.

Osimhen returned to his Italian club after helping

According to him and the doctors, the boy is at his lowest

WALTER MAZZARRI

Nigeria reach the Africa Cup of Nations final which they lost 2-1 to hosts Ivory Coast on Sunday.

"According to him and the doctors, the boy is at his lowest," coach Walter Mazzarri told DAZN.

"Coming back from the African Cup of Nations it wouldn't have been the best choice to risk it and let him play for a quarter of an hour to 20 minutes, so the doctor told me."



Harry Kane

Tuchel: Kane is unhappy with the way he is involved

Bochum, Germany- Harry Kane is not happy with "the way he is involved" in games of late but Bayern Munich are relying on his leadership to get their season back on track, manager Thomas Tuchel said ahead of Sunday's Bundesliga match at VfL Bochum.

Bayern were beaten 3-0 at Bayer Leverkusen in the Bundesliga last weekend and lost 1-0 at Lazio in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Wednesday.

Kane, who has scored 28 goals in 29 appearances for Bayern in all competitions this season, failed to find the net in both defeats, and Tuchel said there appeared to be a disconnect between the striker and his team mates.

"Harry ... already knows what he's doing. And of course he's

unhappy with the way he's involved at the moment. And we are dissatisfied with how we find and don't find him (in games)," Tuchel told reporters.

"I have very rarely, perhaps never before, seen such a discrepancy between performances in training and matches, the way he scores, the way he leads the team, the way his team wins. It's unbelievable. It's absolutely world-class."

"And then how little we find him in the game? That's a bit indicative of the current situation. But he's the one who behaves like a captain. That's why everything's okay with Harry. He's low maintenance at the very highest level."

Serial Bundesliga champions Bayern trail leaders Leverkusen by eight points but have a game in hand.

Blow for Juve title hopes after draw against Verona

Verona, Italy - Juventus' fading title hopes suffered another blow after they had to come from behind twice to rescue a 2-2 draw at relegation-threatened Hellas Verona in Serie A on Saturday.

Second-placed Juventus are on 54 points from 25 games, nine points behind Inter Milan who have a game in hand.

AC Milan, in third on 52 points, can further dampen the mood in Turin as they can leapfrog Massimiliano Allegri's side if they beat 11th-placed



Adrien Rabiot of Juventus scores against Verona

Monza on Sunday.

Champions Napoli rescued a point on Saturday with a 90th-minute goal by substitute Cyril Ngonge as they struggled to a 1-1 home draw with mid-table Genoa.

Meanwhile, Juventus, who suffered back-to-back 1-0 defeats against Udinese and Inter, have now picked up only two points in their last four matches.

"We have to improve in choosing the last pass and put aside the post-Empoli draw," Allegri said.



Jarry downs top seed Alcaraz in Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Third-seeded Chilean Nicolas Jarry cruised to a 7-6 (2), 6-3 upset of No. 1 seed Carlos Alcaraz of Spain on Saturday in the semifinals of the IEB+ Argentina Open in Buenos Aires.

Jarry battled back from a 6-5 deficit in the first set to force a tiebreaker, where he raced out to a 6-1 lead that ended up being too much for Alcaraz to handle. Jarry then won the final three games of the second set to complete the sweep.

Alcaraz was the defending champion of the Argentina Open. He didn't record a single ace on Saturday while Jarry recorded seven, and the latter also saved three of four break points.

With the win, Jarry punched his ticket to the final, where he will face wild card Facundo Diaz Acosta of Argentina. Diaz Acosta beat countryman Federico Coria 6-2, 6-3 in Saturday's other semifinal. Coria was playing on a special exemption.

Sinner in final

Top-seeded Italian Jannik Sinner earned a 6-2, 6-4, straight-set victory over Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor to advance to the final in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Although Griekspoor was playing in front of a friendly crowd, it was Sinner who was in full control of the match, saving all six break points he faced while picking up seven aces.

Sinner will face Australia's Alex de Minaur, the fifth seed, in the final.

SWIATEK REIGNS SUPREME

Top seed defeats Rybakina in straight sets to win third consecutive Qatar Open title

Doha, Qatar - Top seed Iga Swiatek overcame a gritty challenge by world number four Elena Rybakina to take home the Qatar Open title for the third straight year with a 7-6(8), 6-2 victory in Saturday's final.

The 22-year-old Pole, who raced to her 12th consecutive match win in Doha, became the first player to capture a singles title at an event in three successive years since Serena Williams triumphed in Miami from 2013-15.

The win also improved her head-to-head record over Rybakina to 3-2, having lost on all three occasions last year.

Swiatek endured a slow start as she went 4-1 down in a roller-coaster opening set before the four-times Grand Slam champion slowly found her groove to level things up at 4-4.

After the set went into a tiebreaker, the momentum swung back and forth before Swiatek wrapped up the 90-minute-long set with a well-executed backhand winner.

"It was really long, I wasn't expecting that. It was really tough," Swiatek said while describing the marathon first set.

"I came here and was pretty stressed... I felt the expectations. I wanted to do everything step-by-step, as I always do, and it



Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates with the Qatar Open trophy

worked... I'm really happy. I'm really proud of myself.

"Congrats to Elena for a great tournament and to her team. We have already played so many tough matches that I think it's going to be great if we continue, have fun and give a nice experience to the fans."

Rybakina had taken a medical timeout after hitting her own leg during the opening set and that seemed to hamper the 24-year-old Kazakh as Swiatek wasted no time to take the second set and

It's been a great last two weeks ... I didn't expect to see so much support

ELENA RYBAKINA

secure her first WTA 1000 title of the year.

Despite her defeat, Rybakina said she had many positives to take from her second final in as many weeks, having won the Abu Dhabi Open last Sunday.

"It's been a great last two weeks ... I didn't expect to see so much support. It really helps, especially when it's such tough matches," Rybakina said.

Oman's Al Rawahi finishes Rally Sweden at first attempt

Umea, Sweden - Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi and his Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud fulfilled their objective of finishing Rally Sweden and getting their challenge for honours in the FIA Junior World Rally Championship (JWRC) off to a strong start in Umea on Sunday.

The Oman Rally Team duo overcame a collision with a snowbank and a damaged radiator on Friday afternoon and a second similar stoppage late on Saturday - in what turned out to be unlucky stage 13 - to complete one of the most specialised and difficult rallies in the FIA World Rally Championship calendar at their first attempt.

Heavy snowfall and tricky



Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi in action at Rally Sweden

road conditions made the going even more difficult early in the rally but the defending FIA Middle East rally champions persevered and got to grips with their M-Sport Poland Ford Fiesta Rally3 running on studded tyres to reach the finish in 14th place in the JWRC category.

Al Hmoud said: "Finally, we made it to the finish. Almost a crash on every stage. It was a really tough one. We had so many mistakes. For sure, the first time doing an event like this in such difficult weather and conditions, but at least we manage to complete the rally and see all the stages. We have good data for our next event or next year, hopefully. It was a dream partic-

ipating on it and we have done it. We learned such a lot and gained good experience from it. Now we can focus on Croatia..."

Victory at the first round of the JWRC went to local driver Mille Johansson, who finished 48.9 seconds in front of Estonian Romet Jurgenson. Ireland's Eamonn Kelly was a distant third.

After taking a time penalty and restarting on Saturday morning, following the collision with a snow bank on Friday, Al Rawahi emerged unscathed from the first pass through the Vannas, Sarsjoliden and Bygdasiljum specials and reached the service break in Umea without dramas as he continued to gain winter experience and time behind the

wheel of the M-Sport Fiesta Rally3. Johansson, meanwhile, extended his advantage over Estonian Romet Jurgenson to 37.5 seconds.

The three specials were repeated on Saturday afternoon before competitors tackled an additional 10.08km stage at Umea in the evening that would also act as the Power Stage finale on Sunday.

Al Rawahi was 11th through the re-run of Vannas but hit trouble on the second pass through Sarsjoliden, when he again damaged the front of the car after an impact with a snowbank and incurred additional time penalties for missing the last two stages of the day.

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A female project co-ordinator and research assistant with 15 years experience in training, recruitment, administration, and finance; work experience with UN-FAO; Exe, with MBA, MSc in Sustainability, MA in English, is-looking for a full-time job. Contact: +968-98260708 email: meena.v24@gmail.com

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KENYA SAFARI

ON THE WILD SIDE

A KENYAN SAFARI IS A ‘ONCE IN A LIFETIME EXPERIENCE’ NOT TO BE MISSED. HOWEVER, THE THRILL OF STAYING IN TENTS AMID PRECINCTS WHERE WILD BEASTS ROAM FREELY IS SOMETHING NOT FOR THE CHICKEN-HEARTED. TRAVEL WRITER FOR *FAR AND WILD TRAVEL*, **LOUSIE** SHARES HER OWN EXPERIENCE IN KENYA

Potentially lethal wildlife... Flights in motorhome-sized aircraft... An unfamiliar country. It's fair to say that I had my reservations when it came to embarking on a first-time safari – it meant stepping firmly out of my comfort zone.

My feelings were of excitement and apprehension in equal measure. While

I was keen to see majestic animals in their natural habitat that I'd only ever seen in photos or a zoo, the idea of cruising around in an open-sided 4x4 and sleeping under canvas with prowling predators and huge beasts roaming outside seemed preposterous, going against every survival instinct I possessed. Yet, as with many situations involving the unknown, any fears I had were ultimately unfounded.

The location for my safari debut? Kenya. Arguably the world's best wildlife destination, I'd been told there was no better place for sightings and that if I couldn't find animals here, I never would. This point was proven almost immediately – on my light aircraft journey from the country's capital, Nairobi, to the magnificent Masai Mara.

Arriving at the Mara

Flying on the fun-size aeroplanes that perform domestic Kenyan flights is an experience in itself. It's akin to climbing into a 12-person people carrier with wings – Cessna didn't name them 'Caravans' for nothing – with the pilot and co-pilot sitting fully accessible up front. It was immediately clear to see why the baggage allowance was 15kg in soft-sided bags – the aircraft appeared to weigh little more than this itself and all bags were squeezed into small compartments of varying sizes under the cabin.

I found these short trips highly entertaining and relished the fantastic views from the large windows, enjoying the touch-downs en route to destinations to drop off and pick up other passengers. After an unusually bumpy (and most amusing) landing on my first such stop-off, having already been delighted to witness dozens of zebras, wildebeest and even the odd giraffe from the air, I had a pinch-me moment when I spotted at the end of the run-

way (dirt airstrip) a herd of elephants shading themselves under the trees. Now that's something you don't see at Heathrow.

Feeling fortunate to have already ticked off one of the 'Big Five', I was keen to search for more of the same. Yet on the game drive from the airstrip to my accommodation, I was surprised at how thrilling it was to glimpse some of Africa's more compact wildlife, such as rainbow-like reptiles.

On arriving at our remote lodge in the Mara, I immediately realised that my tent wasn't as envisaged – a flimsy shelter with no mod cons. No, we were talking glamping accommodation on the grandest of scales, made from robust canvas that felt almost like a permanent structure. With proper beds and bedding, space to hang your clothes and fully-functioning bath-

rooms boasting towels and toiletries.

Rooms at most camps contain a safe for storing valuables, plus either a reassuring air horn or walkie-talkie, so you can sleep easy knowing that someone will rush to your aid should the need arise. After dark, guests are walked safely back to their rooms by attentive staff, who are generally armed with a spear or gun.

Kenyan camps normally serve fixed courses, which your server will detail beforehand. Only guests with dietary requirements receive something different from other diners. While food, flights and facilities are vital aspects of any trip, a safari in Kenya is, of course, first and foremost about the wildlife.

Game drives usually take place twice daily – once in the early morning and again in the late afternoon or early evening. As I set off on my first official game drive to explore the world-renowned Masai Mara, I can't deny that I was filled with a sense of vulnerability. My friendly and informative guide attempted to put my mind at ease, explaining that animals see the 4x4 vehicle as a large entity that's part of the landscape and ignore it, as they would a tree.

We passed groups of gazelle, herds of buffalo ... and before long, my guide slowed to a snail's pace and simply said, 'Lion.' He had spotted a large male and made to pull up some way ahead of it. Both, petrified and captivated, I watched – hardly daring to

breathe – as it slowly meandered right up to the vehicle. It then stalked close behind it, swishing its tail as it went and hitting the back of the truck, making me jump almost out of it.

Sightings such as this were by no means isolated and the following day offered the most mind-blowing moment of my entire trip, when we witnessed a female cheetah with her adorable adolescent cub. Even better, after several minutes of patiently waiting, we observed the mother run at full pelt in pursuit of a Thomson's gazelle.

The best non-wildlife-related discovery for a first-time safari-goer is undoubtedly the obligatory sundowner – as the name suggests, this ritual entails a refreshing drink served as the sun slips below the horizon. As you round off your day's adventures, your guide will pause your game drive to stop in a spot ideal for celebrating a great day in the African bush.

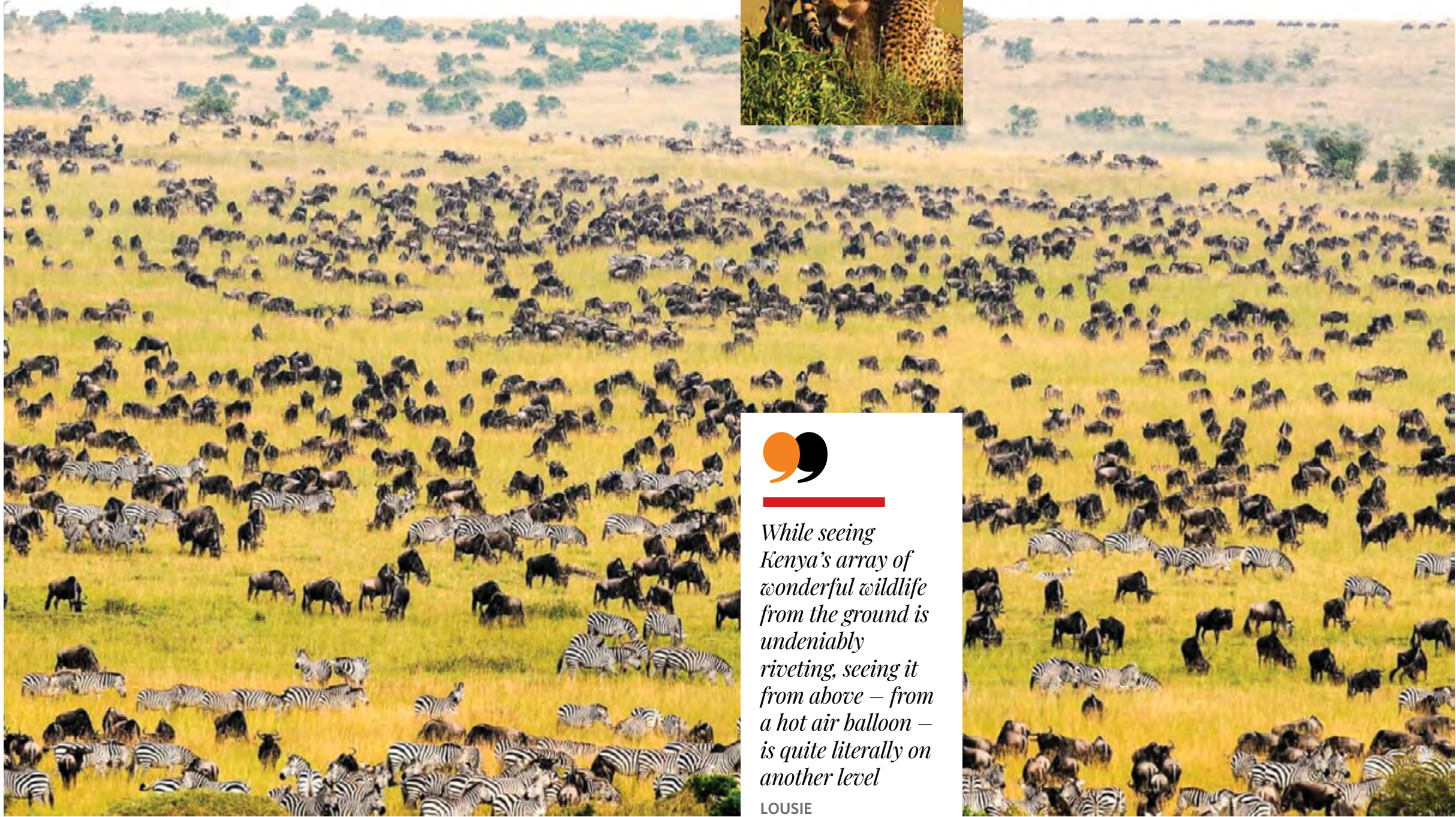
While seeing Kenya's array of wonderful wildlife from the ground is undeniably riveting, seeing it from above – from a hot air balloon – is quite literally on another level. A sunrise balloon safari begins with a ridiculously early wakeup call (usually around 4.30am) and ends with a lavish bush breakfast that more than makes up for any lack of sleep. While you're sure to witness a good variety of wildlife, as you float gently over the treetops it dawns on you that this serene activity is about more than just the animals below. It's the joy of having a bird's eye view of Kenya's vast plains – any wildlife is merely a bonus.

The final safari of my trip was on foot. A walking safari is unlikely to appeal to every traveller – including me. Why would any sane person willingly venture off the beaten track to be so exposed to Africa's teeming wildlife? Signing the mandatory liability waiver, I wondered what I was letting myself in for; no sooner had I embarked on this ambling adventure than I knew I was in safe hands, however.

We were advised on how to react in different animal-altercation scenarios, before learning about the fascinating landscape, plants and birdlife. Having identified multiple animal tracks and droppings, we heard dozens of vervet monkeys in the tall trees screeching alarm calls, indicating that a leopard was nearby. We did pass several giraffe, plus countless zebra and gazelle.

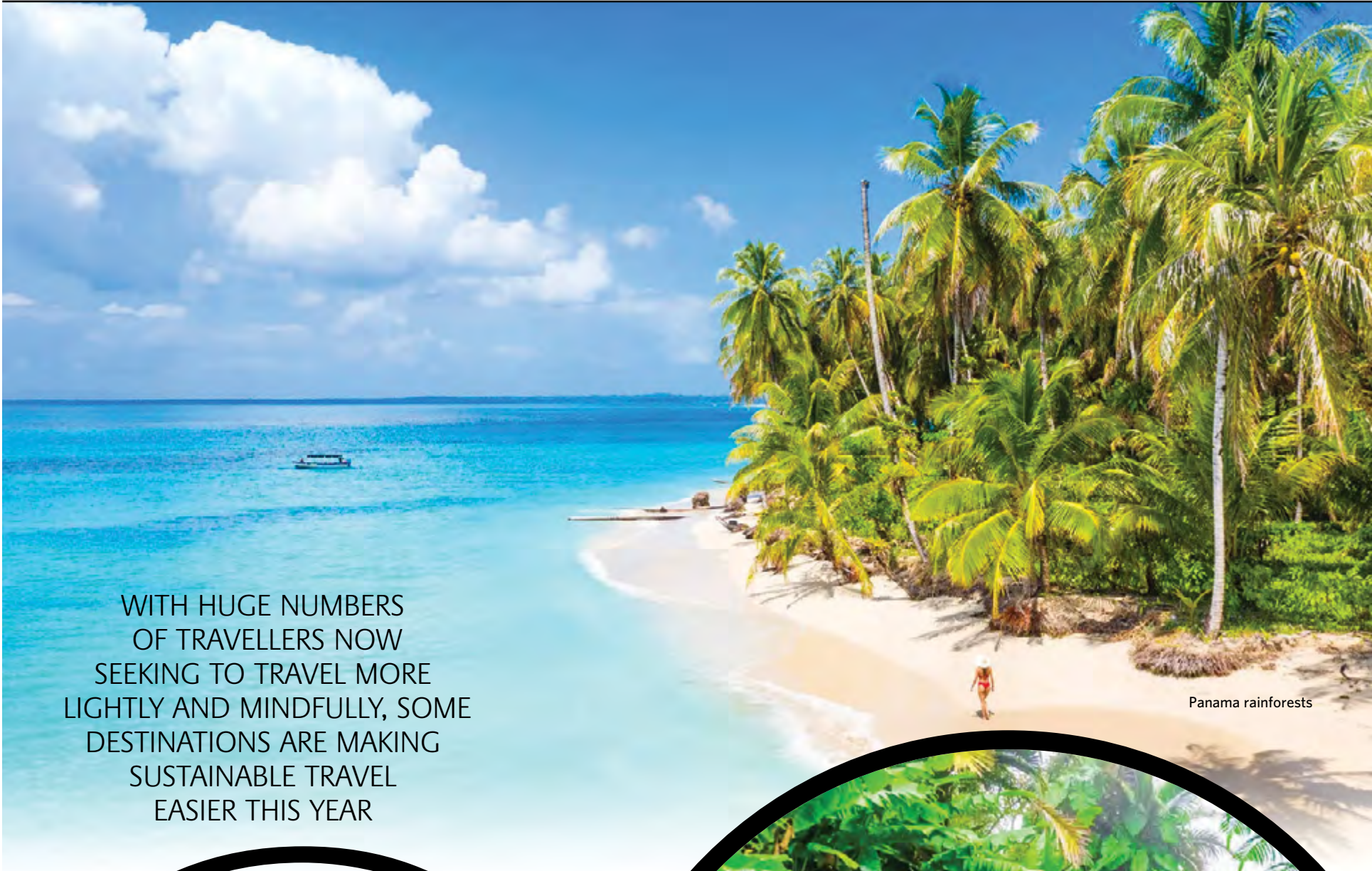
The highlight of the walk was without a doubt the sight of four noisy hyenas across the plain, whooping and cavorting not far ahead. A little unnerved at this point, I was rightly told that this raucous quartet would 'give way' so long as we remained close together. Talk about a walk on the wild side!

(Courtesy: farandwild.travel)



While seeing Kenya's array of wonderful wildlife from the ground is undeniably riveting, seeing it from above – from a hot air balloon – is quite literally on another level

LOUSIE



WITH HUGE NUMBERS OF TRAVELLERS NOW SEEKING TO TRAVEL MORE LIGHTLY AND MINDFULLY, SOME DESTINATIONS ARE MAKING SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL EASIER THIS YEAR

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL



green

Travellers in 2024 don't need convincing that they have an important role to play in addressing the climate crisis. This awareness is reflected in an ever-increasing array of studies finding that more than three-quarters of global travellers want to travel more sustainably over the coming year, and that 90% of consumers look for sustainable options when travelling.

Mindful travel to places recovering from unrest or disaster, meanwhile, can also help to support a more sustainable future for these destinations.

From destinations carving out innovative green spaces to places ready to welcome back tourists in the wake of tragedy, here are some destinations welcoming sustainable travellers in 2024:

Valencia, Spain

Each year, the European Green Capital Award is given to a city with an established and ongoing commitment to improve the environment and quality of life for residents and visitors. This year's recipient was Valencia. Currently working towards generating 100% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2025, the Mediterranean city prides itself on its green spaces, with 500 hectares to explore - including a suite of new urban parks such as its Parque Central, which unites neighbourhoods previously divided by a railway that has since been relocated below ground.

With improved mass transit services and pedestrian spaces making it easier to get around Valencia, the relatively flat city also offers 200km of bike lanes. Visitors can even cycle (or take public transport) to two national parks fringing the city: the bird-filled Parque Natural de l'Albufera, and Turia Natural Park, which is laced with trails and dotted with natural pools.

High Atlas Mountains and Marrakesh, Morocco

The earthquake that struck central Morocco in September 2023 caused the deaths of more than 2,900 people and the complete or partial

destruction of 50,000 homes - most of these near the 6.8-magnitude quake's epicentre in the High Atlas Mountains near Marrakech.

While Morocco's tourism industry has proven to be resilient in the face of disaster, with record tourism arrivals in 2023, hotels in largely unscathed Marrakech have reported a drop in bookings, while artisans behind the workshops damaged in Marrakech's old medina are still waiting for aid. All of the city's main attractions, including the El Badi and Bahai palaces, Secret Garden and the Saadian Tombs, have reopened since the earthquake, and while some areas of the old medina remain closed, its spice-scented alleys are as atmospheric as ever.

Saba, Dutch Caribbean

The smallest special municipality of the Netherlands, the tiny tropical island of Saba is emerging as a champion of sustainable tourism in the Caribbean. Balancing the carbon cost of flying

to the 13sqkm island (reached by ferry from neighbouring St Maarten) is an impressive array of initiatives, including a solar park producing 35-40% of the island's power needs, a comprehensive recycling system, a marine park encircling the island (with excellent diving) and a ban on single-use plastics (Saba has its own water bottling plant).

In 2023, the Saba Bank - the largest submarine atoll in the Atlantic Ocean - was named by international marine conservation organisation Mission Blue as a Hope Spot, a designation identifying destinations scientifically identified as critical to the ocean's health.

The mountainous volcanic island is laced with lush hiking trails, while beautifully patterned Nassau groupers are among the abundance of reef fish commonly encountered by snorkellers and scuba divers.

Singapore

Singapore's sustainability journey is legendary, kicking off in 1967 when then-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew mooted his 'city in a garden' vision. Following more than 50 years of mindful urban development - including the creation of

more than 300km of green corridors as part of the city-state's Park Connector Network - Singapore became the world's first entire nation to receive sustainable destination certification from the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, in 2023.

Locals and visitors continue to reap the benefits, with new and upcoming attractions including the 24km hiking-biking Rail Corridor (due to fully open in 2024) and the enhancement of 13 southern parks, along with two new trails on the Coast to Coast Trail network. Singapore is also set to welcome seven new MRT (metro) stations on the Thomson-East Coast Line in early 2024.

Belfast, UK

The UK's tourism industry remains the strongest supporter of the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism launched at COP25 in 2021, with 172 signatories compared to the US in second place with 73. Among the UK cities making the biggest strides towards a sustainable future is Belfast, which in 2023 jumped from 47th place in the Global Destination Sustainability Index into the top 11 within 18

months. The Northern Ireland capital is now being held up as a blueprint for excellence in a white paper published by Edinburgh-based sustainability certification organisation Green Tourism.

Popular Green Tourism-certified attractions include the Titanic Belfast museum, which aims to be a zero-waste organisation by 2030, and the neighbouring Titanic Hotel Belfast, created in the former headquarters of Harland and Wolff, builders of the RMS Titanic.

Southern Great Barrier Reef, Australia

Approximately 90% of the two million annual visitors to the Great Barrier Reef stick to the sultry northern hubs of Cairns and Townsville. Yet, some of the most rewarding and low-impact opportunities to experience this 2,300-km-long ecosystem occur in the Southern Great Barrier Reef.

Rehabilitated from a guano-mined coral cay left to feral goats, the manta ray haven of Lady Elliot Island at the reef's southern tip is now one of Australia's foremost eco-resorts, run almost entirely on renewable energy. Just 40km to north-east as the crow flies, uninhabited Lady Musgrave Island provides a wild backdrop for day trips and overnight glamping experiences with Lady Musgrave Experience, which holds Advance Ecotourism and Climate Action certifications from Ecotourism Australia.

Panama, Central America

Costa Rica has carved out a reputation as Central America's leader in sustainable tourism, and now neighbouring Panama - which in 2023 granted legal rights to turtles - is stepping into the limelight as a community-based tourism pioneer. Despite Panama's diverse array of Indigenous cultures (accounting for approximately 14% of the population) and rich biodiversity, the nation's tourism has traditionally centred on its famed canal and sultry capital Panama City.

Now, visitors can explore Panama's lush rainforests and palm-fringed islands more meaningfully with the people who know it best: Indigenous and rural communities. A new portal is enabling visitors to explore Panama's lush rainforests and palm-fringed islands more meaningfully.

Maui, United States

The horror of the wildfires that ravaged the Hawaiian island of Maui in August 2023, claiming at least 115 lives, destroying more than 2,200 buildings and homes and uprooting thousands, was felt around the world. In the days following the tragedy, many Hawaiians told tourists to stay away. But with restaurants, hotels and tour operators since forced to lay off workers and unemployment rates surging, officials are now asking people to return responsibly.

Given the extensive devastation on the north-western side of the island, the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) reports that Lāhainā will remain closed to the public until further notice.

Greenland

Long overshadowed by the ground-breaking sustainable tourism initiatives of the lower Nordic nations, Greenland is increasingly also taking steps to safeguard its icy territory - and its growing tourism industry - as it navigates its future on the frontline of the climate crisis.

Nuuk became the world's first capital city to be certified by EarthCheck as a sustainable tourist destination in 2020. In 2022, Visit Greenland announced the cessation of its support for conventional cruise tourism on sustainability grounds, and in 2023, Visit Greenland invited the tourism industry to support a shared pledge towards more sustainable and responsible tourism development.

Encouraging tourism beyond the capital is the excellent Icefjord Centre in Ilulissat, due to welcome a new airport of its own in the coming years.

Dominica, Lesser Antillies

In the wake of the category-five hurricane that devastated the small Caribbean island nation in 2017, Dominica's prime minister announced plans to make Dominica 'the world's first climate-resilient nation'. While the development of early-warning systems and resilient housing is now helping to safeguard residents, a new kayaking trail is helping to promote the island - already home to the Caribbean's longest hiking trail - as a sustainable tourism destination.

Hugging the island's dramatic west coast for more than 60km, the Waitukubuli Sea Trail is the Caribbean's first dedicated sea kayaking route. It runs south to north along the island's western coastline, taking in welcoming communities, secluded beaches, dramatic scenery and local cuisine.

(Courtesy: cnn.com)



Southern ridges trail, Singapore



Great barrier reef, Australia