

► NEWS BRIEF

NO CEASEFIRE
IN SIGHT AS
RAMADAN
BEGINS IN GAZA

Cairo, Egypt - Ramadan began on Monday in much of the world, ending hopes for a new ceasefire in Gaza by the start of the holy month after a latest round of truce talks between Hamas and Israel in Cairo stalled.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for “silencing the guns” in Gaza in honour of Ramadan on Sunday.

However, Israel continues to strike Gaza and stall aid to enter the strip with at least 31,184 Palestinians killed and 72,889 wounded since the start of the offensive on Gaza.

A UN report, citing the health ministry in Gaza, said 25 people have now died from malnutrition and dehydration, most of them children.

A ship carrying almost 200 tonnes of food to Gaza left a port in Cyprus early on Tuesday.

Service fees reduced to support health sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In an effort to attract investments in the health sector in alignment with directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has issued a decision to amend the service fees structure for private health institutions.

H E Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, has issued Ministerial Decision No 71/2024, specifying fees for services provided by MoH, effective from March 17, 2024.

Dr Muhanna bin Nasser bin Rashid al Musalhi, Director General of Private Health Institutions in MoH, highlighted the Ministerial Decision's focus on supporting the private health sector. It entails the abolition of fees for more than ten services, including those related to hospital establishment, addition of specialties, immunisation activities, data amendment, ambulance services, and approval of medical reports and sick leave, with the aim of encouraging the private health sector.

Licensing fee for institutions has been reduced and validity period increased. “These amendments not only support the private health sector but also take into account the interests of the society. The fee adjustments extend to pharmacies, pharmaceutical factories, registration of pharmaceutical companies,



These amendments not only support the private health sector but also take into account the interests of the society

DR MUHANNA AL MUSALHI

health preparations, and licences for Omani medical and paramedical categories with the aim of promoting Omanisation in private health institutions,” Dr Musalhi added.

MoH's efforts to support investments in the sector and establishment of health institutions include granting initial approval for 16 private hospitals and 215 private health institutions, mostly located outside Muscat gover-

norate. The ministry actively supervises the private health sector through regular visits in collaboration with partner departments in the governorates. It works closely with other supervisory bodies such as Consumer Protection Authority, Muscat Municipality and Royal Oman Police, addressing violations and ensuring compliance.

Dr Musalhi highlighted the ministry's confidence in the pri-

rate health sector. Additionally, it allows Omani physicians from the government sector to work as visiting doctors in private health institutions after official working hours. “MoH encourages private health institutions to respond to a questionnaire to evaluate the performance of evaluation teams during visits.”

He emphasised the positive outcomes of a health laboratory held last year, including establishment of an academy for dental specialities training. More than 200 Omani dentists have been employed in the private sector, and plans are afoot to provide specialised training in various dental specialities.

These initiatives and programmes of MoH aim to support the private health sector and contribute to the economic development of the sultanate.

12 pacts worth RO2.6mn inked to boost economy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP), in collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, has signed 12 usufruct contracts totalling investment value exceeding RO2mn. These contracts aim to bolster the agriculture and industrial sectors in the sultanate.

The signing ceremony, presided over by H E Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Undersecretary for Housing in MHUP, saw the participation of representatives of investing companies and institutions. H E Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Undersecretary for Agriculture in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, also attended.

The signed contracts include six usufruct agreements, with combined investment value exceeding RO1.9mn. These projects, spanning 1.3mn sqm, are strategically located in the governorates of Dakhliyah, Dhahirah, North Batinah, South Batinah and North Sharqiyah.

The primary objectives of these initiatives are to boost food security and contribute to the growth of the agriculture sector in alignment with the nation's ambitious vision for the future.

Ahmed bin Saud al Kamiani, Director General of Lands at MHUP, informed that the signing

Six agreements worth more than RO1.9mn are in the agriculture sector and six for SMEs exceeding RO738,000

of these usufruct contracts is part of the ministry's broader strategy to provide investment land throughout the sultanate.

“This initiative aligns with the national objective of enhancing economic diversification and ensuring financial sustainability.”

The six agriculture contracts are for vegetable and fruit cultivation and animal husbandry.

Six other usufruct agreements are tailored for small and medium enterprises, totalling investment value exceeding RO738,000. These industrial projects cover a total area of 3,611sqm, distributed across the governorates of Dakhliyah, North Sharqiyah, North Batinah and South Batinah. These six projects are allocated to Riyada cardholders, specifically SMEs.

Elaborating on MHUP's plan for 2024, Kamiani informed that these include offering 800 investment opportunities across various governorates through the Tatweer platform. Of these, 200 plots of land are available for auction and 200 for agriculture projects to contribute to the economic development of the sultanate.



Social media awards celebrate digital creativity

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Municipality prepares Mawaleh market for Ramadan rush

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality is geared up to manage an expected increase in demand for fruits and vegetables during Ramadan at Mawaleh Central Market for Fruits and Vegetables.

With a strategic plan in place to ensure sufficient supply and stocks, the municipality aims to meet consumer needs efficiently during the holy month.

A Muscat Municipality official outlined the measures taken to secure a steady supply of produce. "We are encouraging traders to ramp up direct imports and have collaborated with the Omani Farmers Society to ensure the availability of local products. Our efforts have already seen a significant increase in shipments, with 1,073 trucks delivering fresh fruits and vegetables to the market between February 10 and March 10."



To align with Ramadan's timing, the market's working hours have been adjusted. Wholesale stores will be open from 4am to 5pm, while retail and local production stores will operate in both morning and evening sessions on all days except Friday. The market has designated specific gates for entry of various

cafes and food stores, to maintain hygiene in food preparation and handling," the official added.

The municipality is working closely with other entities, like Royal Oman Police and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, to manage traffic effectively and ensure the smooth entry of refrigerated vehicles. Collaboration with the Quarantine and Food Safety Department will facilitate swift processing and delivery of goods.

Additionally, a crucial partnership with Consumer Protection Authority will ensure monitoring of prices to prevent market violations during peak season.

These comprehensive measures by Muscat Municipality are designed to make sure that Mawaleh Central Market remains well-equipped to serve the community's needs during Ramadan, reflecting a commitment to health, efficiency and consumer protection.



Winter Ramadan makes fasting more manageable

Our Correspondent
Muscat

For the first time in many years, Ramadan is being observed in March at the end of the winter season in Oman and most parts of the region. Based on the lunar calendar, the beginning of the holy month gradually changes every year determined by sighting of the crescent moon.

In recent years, the faithful have endured the challenge of fasting during long, hot days at the peak of summer. This year, however, fasting at the end of winter is going to make the experience considerably comfortable and pleasant.

"The shorter days of winter significantly reduce the fasting hours, allowing us to break our fast earlier," said Rashid Khan, a salesman based in Ghubra. "This change is greatly appreciated, as it lightens the physical burden of fasting. Also, the cooler weather enables engaging in outdoor activities during iftar and after."

Mohammad Amri, a taxi driver from Muttrah, echoed Khan's view on fasting in cooler

months. "The lower temperatures and shorter days ease the practice of fasting, particularly for those of us who cannot always stop for iftar due to the nature of our work. The pleasant weather not only makes fasting less daunting but also improves our

The shorter days of winter significantly reduce the fasting hours, allowing us to break our fast earlier

RASHID KHAN

overall well-being, making the spiritual journey more engaging and fruitful."

Commenting on the many advantages - both in term of spiritual upliftment and social engagement - when Ramadan is observed in cooler months, bank employee Khalid Rashid said, "The confluence of spiritual reflection and favourable weather makes winter Ramadan a uniquely enjoyable experience.

The nights will be particularly lively, with traditional decorations and treats drawing more people outdoors than in the hotter months."

In Oman, the tradition of hosting iftars in mosques and tents has been popular for many years but disrupted following the COVID-19 pandemic. With milder temperatures, there's a heightened sense of expectation for outdoor iftars, enhancing communal dining experiences for families and friends.

Explaining the shift

The Hijri calendar, which Muslims follow for marking religious events and rituals, is a lunar calendar based on the phases of the moon. This results in the Hijri year being ten to 12 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar, causing Ramadan to begin ten to 12 days earlier each Gregorian year. Approximately every 33 Hijri years, or 32 Gregorian years, the start of Muharram, the first month of the Hijri calendar, aligns with the early days of January, illustrating the cyclical shift of Ramadan through the seasons.

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Khedmah inks deal with OCO to boost donations

Muscat -Oman Investment and Finance Company has signed an agreement with Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO) to collect donations through the Khedmah app and the company's electronic channels.

The agreement was signed by Mohammed bin Hamoud al Dhahli, CEO of OCO, and Said Ahmed Safrar, CEO of Oman Investment and Finance Company (OIFC), on Sunday.

The strategic agreement aims to streamline the donation process and enhance OCO's ability to engage with donors interested in supporting its activities and programmes.

The collaboration underscores OIFC's active support for initiatives that aim to propel social development and welfare. As part of the agreement, Khedmah will host a section in its app, website and kiosks, allowing customers to donate for OCO activities and programmes.

"We are pleased to sign this agreement with OCO, as we consistently strive to establish fruitful collaborations with various char-



itable institutions," said Safrar. "Our aim is to bolster local communities and drive efforts towards sustainable economic and social development. The signing of this significant agreement will facilitate the collection of donations for the benefit of the organisation through the Khedmah app in a smooth and efficient manner."

OIFC is currently preparing to launch its electronic wallet with the aim of enhancing electronic payment mechanisms in line with Oman Vision 2040.

ROP bans trucks on main roads during peak hours

Muscat - To avoid traffic congestion, Royal Oman Police has restricted truck movement on main roads during peak hours.

A statement said, "To avoid any possible traffic congestion, Royal Oman Police's Directorate General of Traffic announces that movement of trucks is forbidden Sunday to Thursday, from 6.30am to 9.30am and 12pm to 4pm, and on Saturday from 6pm to 10pm, during the Holy Month of Ramadan."

The restriction applies to main roads in Muscat governorate, Dakhiyah Road (Muscat-Bidbid Bridge) and Batinah Highway (Muscat-Shinas).

ROP urges all truck drivers to comply with these instructions for their and other motorists' safety.

Chairman's Report



Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present the financial statements of ahlibank for the year ended 31 December 2023.

In the midst of a rapidly changing global environment marked by economic and geopolitical changes, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) foresees world economy poised for nuanced changes with growth expected to undergo a slight moderation, from a forecast of 3.0 percent in 2023 to around 2.9 percent in 2024. In this ever-changing landscape, ahlibank strategically charted its course, aligning efforts with Oman Vision 2040, aiming not only to be a trusted financial institution but a Partner in Excellence.

ahlibank's string of successes, driven by a deep understanding of prevailing market dynamics, position itself as a leading Bank in digital and financial offerings. This has benefited clients across diverse segments who continue to benefit from a tailored and unparalleled banking experience.

Financial Performance

ahlibank's trajectory showcases sustained progress throughout the year, as illustrated further below:

	31-Dec-23	31-Dec-22	Growth %
	RO Million		
Net Loans, Advances & Financing	2,694.2	2,500.4	7.8%
Total Assets	3,318.3	3,075.5	7.9%
Customers' Deposits	2,475.7	2,296.2	7.8%
Equity	521.4	460.9	13.1%
Operating Income	98.54	91.70	7.5%
Operating Expenses	43.13	40.23	(7.2)%
Profit for the Period	36.45	33.09	10.2%

The Bank's Net Loans, Advances & Financing witnessed a 7.8% growth, reaching to RO 2,694.2 million at end of 31st December 2023, over the corresponding period in 2022. Customers' deposits increased by 7.8% to reach RO 2,475.7 million, compared to the corresponding period of last year; Total Assets increased by 7.9%, reaching to RO 3,318.3 million. Operating Income increased by 7.5% to reach RO 98.54 million. Operating Expenses, increased by 7.2% to reach RO 43.13 million. Profit for the period grew by 10.2% to reach RO 36.45 million, demonstrating the Bank's sustained growth strategy.

Achievement Highlights

In 2023, ahlibank witnessed remarkable advancements across various fronts, reinforcing its commitment to excellence and innovation.

The Bank successfully raised CET-1 Capital through a rights issue of RO 50 million, which was oversubscribed by 1.44 times, showing the trust and confidence placed by shareholders in the Bank's potential to grow further.

During the year, the Bank also raised AT1 capital of RO 54 million on 25 December 2023 after exercising the first call option on AT1 Capital of RO 54 million, issued in December 2018.

The Bank took significant strides in bolstering its physical and digital footprint. Introducing state-of-the-art digital branches and enhancing the network of conventional ones, ahlibank aimed to redefine customer experience. The Bank's investment in digital infrastructure and the expansion of branch network were pivotal in delivering convenient banking solutions for customers across the length and breadth of the Sultanate. The launch and enhancement of intuitive digital platforms and mobile banking applications aimed to streamline financial interactions, providing seamless, user-friendly experiences for valued customers. These innovations underscore ahlibank's commitment to staying at the forefront of digital banking in Oman.

On the retail side, the Bank has led the way in developing digital services, and touchpoints such as ahliexpress, and digital branches, that bring us closer to our customers. With a segmented approach to developing new products, and services, ahlibank caters to a growing base of customers through tailor-made financial solutions. As part of its wide array of innovative and inclusive products and services, ahlibank has introduced its new children's account, in line with the bank's efforts to raise its customers' and their children's financial stability.

Contributing to Oman's economic vitality remained a top priority for ahlibank in 2023. Financing strategic national projects played a pivotal role in bolstering key sectors critical to the nation's growth. The Bank's commitment to supporting initiatives aimed at infrastructural development, energy, and other strategic sectors underscores its dedication to Oman's progress. The Bank takes pride in delivering innovative funding structures for its clients, and meet the requirements of investors and issuers. A strong and vastly experienced investment banking team provided support to state entities and corporates wanting to tap into the capital markets. ahlibank continued to make significant strides in the realm of investment banking, showcasing its expertise in handling landmark Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) and Bonds issuance. Similarly, the Bank's innovative Digital 1:1 Financing option, revolutionizes accessibility to financial services for individuals.

Through its sustainable resource planning, and employee learning & development initiatives, especially those under Himam, the Bank has been swiftly empowering the people of Oman with relevant employment, and on-the-job opportunities.

ahlibank celebrated a multitude of successes over the year, showcasing its prowess with a remarkable collection of 10 awards. The Bank set a strong tone at the Oman Banking and Finance Awards, securing a triumphant trio of accolades that underscored its unwavering commitment to excellence. Notably, the recognition included the prestigious 'CEO of the Year' award, alongside acknowledgments for 'Excellence in Corporate Banking' and 'Digital Transformation', solidifying ahlibank's reputation for visionary leadership and operational excellence.

Additionally, the Euromoney Award for Excellence in the SMEs category highlighted the Bank's pivotal role in empowering Small and Medium Enterprises, a significant stride in bolstering Oman's economic strength. The acknowledgment of ahlibank as the Best Private Bank in Oman at the Banking Excellence Awards further reaffirmed its dedication to innovation and outstanding performance within the financial sector.

These achievements underscore ahlibank's unwavering commitment to innovation, customer-centricity, and socio-economic progress.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

ahlibank's CSR initiatives have made a meaningful impact, resonating deeply within the Omani society. Collaborating with Dar Al Atta'a's "Sawa Nabni," ahlibank's 'ahli cares' initiative breathed new life into dilapidated homes, fostering volunteerism and community engagement.

The blood donation campaign orchestrated by 'ahli cares' not only witnessed robust participation from the Bank's employees but also from its valued customers, underscoring commitment to saving lives and fostering community solidarity. The ahli cares CSR initiatives complement the furthering of the nation's socio-economy, and contribute to achieving Oman Vision 2040.

Looking ahead

ahlibank remains resolute in tackling the challenges to ensure the stability of Oman's economy. It will continue to enhance its portfolio of cutting-edge digital products and services in tandem with the latest trends in the global banking scene. Having curated select services for various segments of customers, the Bank is poised to bolster its growth in accordance with its holistic approach of providing the best and being a Partner in Excellence to its growing customer base.

2024 will open a new chapter in ahlibank's prodigious journey. The year will mark the Bank's 16th anniversary since its inception in the Sultanate of Oman. Its string of successes, achievements, and milestones will continue well into 2024, and beyond.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to extend gratitude towards our shareholders for their heartfelt support to ahlibank, and for their trust in us delivering on our commitments. Your faith has been instrumental in our sustained progress throughout the past year.

I would also like to thank the Bank's Executive Management and all the employees whose discerning efforts have been key to our continued success. My sincere thanks goes out to the teams for their dedication and relentless pursuits for Excellence.

We at ahlibank will continue to pledge our commitment and undivided support to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the country's economic progression in realizing the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Hamdan Ali Nasser Al Hinaï
Chairman

Financial Statements

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2023

	2023 RO '000	2022 RO '000
ASSETS		
Cash and balances with Central Bank of Oman	171,935	132,212
Due from banks	88,238	75,147
Investment securities	303,305	293,163
Loans, advances and financing, net	2,694,160	2,500,435
Other assets	19,576	39,405
Property, equipment and intangibles	41,131	35,104
TOTAL ASSETS	3,318,345	3,075,466
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY		
Due to banks	185,801	223,353
Customers' deposits	2,475,666	2,296,231
Borrowed funds	38,500	-
Tax Liability	12,840	11,444
Other liabilities	84,144	83,499
TOTAL LIABILITIES	2,796,951	2,614,527
EQUITY		
Share capital	244,966	194,966
Legal reserve	43,858	40,213
Fair value reserve	230	(2,463)
Special reserve	298	998
Impairment reserve	10,867	10,127
Retained earnings	72,175	68,098
TOTAL NET EQUITY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE OWNERS OF THE BANK	372,394	311,939
TIER 1 PERPETUAL SUBORDINATED BONDS	149,000	149,000
TOTAL EQUITY	521,394	460,939
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET EQUITY	3,318,345	3,075,466
Net assets value per share (baizas)	159	160
Contingent liabilities and commitments	219,609	236,319

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

	2023 RO '000	2022 RO '000
Interest income	143,044	126,436
Interest expense	(82,239)	(63,982)
NET INTEREST INCOME	60,805	62,454
Income from Islamic financing and investments	32,811	24,657
Unrestricted investment account holders' share of profit and profit expense	(17,320)	(13,267)
NET INCOME FROM ISLAMIC FINANCING AND INVESTMENTS	15,491	11,390
Fees and commission income	16,525	14,363
Fees and commission expense	(1,274)	(904)
Net fees and commission income	15,251	13,459
Other operating income	6,993	4,395
OPERATING INCOME	98,540	91,698
Net impairment on financial assets	(13,092)	(13,064)
NET OPERATING INCOME	85,448	78,634
Staff expenses	(26,146)	(24,273)
Depreciation and amortisation	(3,898)	(3,317)
Other operating expenses	(13,088)	(12,642)
OPERATING EXPENSES	(43,132)	(40,232)
PROFIT BEFORE TAXATION	42,316	38,402
Tax expense	(5,864)	(5,312)
PROFIT FOR THE YEAR	36,452	33,090
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME / (LOSS)		
<i>Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss</i>		
- Equity investments at FVOCI - net changes in fair value	600	855
<i>Items that will be reclassified to profit or loss</i>		
- Cash flow hedge - net changes in fair value	(30)	211
- Changes in fair value of FVOCI debt investments	2,155	(1,292)
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME/(LOSS) FOR THE YEAR	2,725	(226)
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	39,177	32,864
Basic and diluted earnings per share (baizas)	12	12

To obtain a full copy of the accounts please write to Head of Finance
PO Box 545, PC 116, Sultanate of Oman

Sri Lankan wellness resort to set foot in Jabal Akhdar, Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sri Lankan retreat brand Santani Wellness Resorts has partnered with the Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) to establish two properties in Oman, marking its international debut.

The resorts, located in the Jabal Shams in Dakhiliyah and another in Dhofar governorate, will encompass a total of 182 keys and adhere to high-level sustainability standards.

Santani, which derives its name from the Sanskrit term signifying 'in harmony with,' was established in 2016 and draws inspiration from Sri Lankan Ayurveda traditions.

With three existing retreats in Sri Lanka and ambitious plans for eight additional properties (including in Oman), Santani's rollout is intended to provide authentic and consistent wellness experiences aimed at fostering long-term habits to benefit mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing.



Unveiled at the ITB Berlin 2024 travel trade show in Berlin, the signing of the agreement was undertaken by Hashil al Mahrouqi, CEO, Omran Group, and Vickum Nawagamuwage, Founder and CEO, Santani Wellness Resorts.

"Thankful to the Omran group for entrusting close to

US\$100mn worth of assets for us to operate. Our shared vision for health, wellbeing and environmental stewardship will allow us to provide unparalleled wellness experiences while preserving the natural beauty and cultural heritage of the locations," the Santani CEO said.

In a statement, Mahrouqi said, "This partnership with Santani Wellness Resorts is a testament to our commitment to enhancing Oman's position as leading destination for sustainable tourism and wellness."

"By integrating Santani's world-renowned wellness philosophy with Oman's unique natural beauty and rich cultural

heritage, we are setting new standards for luxury and sustainability."

Omran stated the partnership will enhance Oman's position as a leading destination for sustainable tourism and wellness and has promising prospects for the future of wellness tourism in the country.

The collaboration is expected to create significant economic benefits, including job creation, and is being pitted to become a model for sustainable development and wellness tourism in Oman.

Santani says its upcoming destinations in Oman are being designed to blend harmoniously with their natural rugged environment, offering a sanctuary for transformative wellness experiences while adhering to the highest standards of sustainability.

Focused on stress management, detoxification, yoga and weight management, programming will be tailored to individual needs and designed to promote holistic wellbeing.

Madayn launches Green Industrial Cities initiative in Samail

Muscat - The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has launched a green movement in alignment with the national initiative to plant 10mn wild trees in Oman - led by the Environment Authority (EA) in various governorates.

Madayn, in cooperation with EA, commenced the 'Green Industrial Cities' initiative planting Samar, Sidr, Ghaf and Shua trees in Samail Industrial City.

The group plans to expand this mission gradually to all the industrial cities under its purview.

Eng Ibtisam al Shanfari, Environmental Affairs Specialist Manager, Head of Operations Office, Madayn, said the Green Industrial Cities initiative is a key component of Madayn's ongoing efforts to promote healthier living and working environment.

"This initiative is pivotal in ensuring the sustainable preservation of the environment against air, soil, and water pollution, while addressing the challenges posed by climate change," Ibtisam explained.

"Additionally, the initiative aims to raise environmental awareness and align with the sustainable development goals of the United Nations."



Eng Ibtisam al Shanfari

tanate's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, particularly within the industrial sector, through the advancement of clean energy technologies."

She pointed out that Madayn, in cooperation with its partners, is actively engaged in enhancing awareness among investors in the various industrial cities to promote the adoption of safe, sustainable and innovative alternative sources.

These efforts focus on hazardous and non-hazardous waste management, disposal of liquid waste into marine environments, reduction of air and noise pollutant emissions, proper handling and usage of chemicals in storage, transportation, and loading.

Social media awards celebrate digital creativity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The third edition of the Social Media Award Show was held at Hotel Muscat Holiday on Sunday to celebrate the achievements of digital creators.

Organised by Syed Hassan Investment LLC and supported by the embassy of Pakistan, the event acknowledged the contributions of 160 creators from Pakistan, India and Oman.

H E Imran Ali, Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman, commented on the significance of social media in today's globalised society.

"Social media is crucial in shaping narratives and enhancing cross-cultural communication. This award recognises the talents of individuals from diverse backgrounds, fostering



unity and celebrating the evolving art forms in the digital age," he stated.

The event showcased a wide range of talents, including comedians, dancers, singers, actors, travel bloggers, and fashion influencers, underscoring the variety and richness of content available on social media platforms.

Syed Zaib Hassan Jaffery, the

chief organiser of the event, reflected on the growing importance of social media.

"This year's increased participation underscores the rising influence of social media. Our goal is to honour the dedication of digital creators who enrich the online space with their creativity. This platform acts as a springboard for the burgeoning community of digital artists, who play a pivotal role in enriching our cultural landscape," Jaffery remarked.

These awards serve as an acknowledgment of the creativity and hard work of digital content creators, promoting a spirit of unity and appreciation for the arts within the digital sphere, the organisers said.

community of digital artists, who play a pivotal role in enriching our cultural landscape," Jaffery remarked.

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MAFWR cancels licences of several vet clinics

Muscat - The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources (MAFWR) conducted inspections of several private veterinary clinics in Dhahirah governorate on Monday, aiming to enforce compliance with regulatory standards.

According to a statement from the ministry, the Directorate General of Agriculture and Water Resources in Dhahirah spearheaded these inspections. The focus was on ensuring that veterinary practices within the region adhered to the strict regulations and laws that govern the veterinary medical profession.

The judicial control team of the directorate took decisive action against a number of clinics found in violation of these



standards. Following the directives of the Veterinary Medical Licensing Committee, licences were revoked from those clinics

failing to meet the required legal and professional criteria.

The move underscores the ministry's resolve to maintain high standards in veterinary services. By revoking licences from non-compliant establishments, the ministry aims to ensure that veterinary care is provided in a manner that is safe and beneficial to both animals and the wider community.

The directorate reiterated its commitment to continuous monitoring of veterinary clinics. 'This ongoing initiative seeks to assure that all private veterinary facilities operate within the framework of established laws, thereby ensuring the delivery of quality veterinary care and protecting public health and safety,' MAFWR stated.



Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health (Al Masarra Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tenders Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 08:00 am Sunday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
1073/2024/MOH/AMH-I	Supply and installation of the Queue Management System at Al Masarra Hospital	24-03-2024	28-04-2024	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	25.000 Per Set

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

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Microscopy- WBCs | RBCs
Epithelial Cells | Casts | Crystals
Bacteria | Nitrite | Parasites
Yeasts/Fungus
Biochemistry- Glucose | Bilirubin
Ketones | Blood Protein | Urobilinogen
- LIVER PROFILE
ALT (SGPT) | AST (SGOT)
- KIDNEY PROFILE
Creatinine | Uric Acid | Calcium
- BLOOD GROUP

- LIPID PROFILE
Total Cholesterol
Triglycerides (TG) | HDL Cholesterol
LDL Cholesterol | VLDL Cholesterol
TC/HDL Ratio | LDL/HDL Ratio
Non-HDL Cholesterol
- COMPLETE BLOOD COUNT (CBC)
Haemoglobin | Total WBC Count
Total RBC Count | DC-Neutrophil%
Lymphocyte% | Eosinophil% | Basophil%
Monocyte% | Absolute-Neutrophil Count
Absolute-Lymphocyte Count
Absolute-Eosinophil Count
Absolute-Basophil Count
Absolute-Monocyte Count
Hematocrit | MCV | MCH | MCHC
RDW-SD | RDW-CV | Platelet Count
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Bangladesh	285.32
Philippines	143.72
Sri Lanka	797.86

*Rates as on March 12
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Red Sea crisis has limited impact on food exports: FAO

The situation in the Red Sea has not yet been reflected in the pace of prices for foods monthly reflected in the FAO Food Price Index, Monika Tothova, the economist at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), told TASS.

"Following on its 2023 and early 2024 trajectory, the FAO Food Price Index declined in February by 0.7%, standing 10.5% below its value one year ago, and 26.8% below the peak it reached in March 2022," the economist said.

The decline in the Index in February 2024 "was led by decreases in the price for cereals and vegetable oils which more than offset increases in the sugar, meat and dairy prices," the expert noted. The FAO Index is formed on the basis of export prices, Tothova said.

"These usually include a shipping to a particular destination or port in the exporting country but not to the final destination. The insurance and freight cost to the final destination depend on a number of parameters," she stressed.

The Index drop "means that export prices have declined in the past month. Not all countries report prices they pay for their imports (which includes shipping and insurance), and some report this information with a delay."

GCC growth set to slow in 2024 due to oil output cuts

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The economic growth of the GCC region is projected to significantly slow down this year compared to last year's figures, thanks to the extended oil production cuts implemented by GCC countries as part of OPEC+ agreements, according to a new report.

The latest Economic Insight report for the Middle East, commissioned by ICAEW and compiled by Oxford Economics, projects a slowdown in 2024 as oil production cuts persist. The GCC growth forecast has been revised down to 2.7% from 3.9% three months ago, while non-energy sectors are expected to drive growth in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Despite the energy sector exerting downward pressure on GCC economic growth, robust performance in non-energy sectors is expected to offset some of the impact. However, disruptions in shipping routes through the Red Sea and Suez Canal have led to increased freight and raw material costs, suggesting a possible loss of momentum in the coming months, the report said.

GDP growth projections for Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been revised to 2.1% and 4.4%, respectively, down from 4.4% and 4.8% three months ago. These adjustments reflect a strong non-oil economy and the gradual easing of oil cuts from the third quarter.

The sharp decline in GCC oil output last year, resulting from the introduction of oil cuts, set a very low baseline. Even with the OPEC+ group's voluntary extension of output cuts through the second quarter, the regional energy sector is poised for growth this year.

The report forecasts a cumulative expansion of the energy



sectors by 1.3%, a notable turnaround from last year's 5.7% decline. In Saudi Arabia, specifically, oil activities are expected to grow by 0.7% this year after a 9.5% year-on-year plunge in 2023.

Non-energy sectors in the GCC are positioned to continue

aged by the resilience of non-energy sectors to drive recovery. The UAE and Saudi Arabia's unwavering commitment to diversifying their economies away from oil and meeting ambitious vision deadlines speak volumes about their pragmatic and fiscally prudent approach."

Despite the energy sector exerting downward pressure on GCC economic growth, robust performance in non-energy sectors is expected to offset some of the impact

benefiting from government and private investment.

Hanadi Khalife, Head of Middle East at ICAEW, said, "Despite the GCC economic outlook facing mounting headwinds from the war in Gaza and disruptions in Red Sea trade, we are encour-

Scott Livermore, ICAEW Economic Advisor, and Chief Economist and Managing Director at Oxford Economics Middle East, said, "The Middle East faces escalating pressures, with most economies poised for a slowdown and regional fiscal policies

remaining relatively unsupportive this year. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia's successful raise of \$12bn in its largest bond sale since 2017 signals market confidence in the kingdom's creditworthiness. This issuance covers about half of the year's projected borrowing needs as the government continues spending on diversification projects."

The report also predicts GCC inflation to hover around 2.5%, primarily driven by housing costs. Positive trends in inflation have eased concerns of additional rate hikes by the Federal Reserve and GCC central banks. The first cut is expected to come in the second quarter, with interest rates gradually declining thereafter. Looser monetary policy will help stimulate regional credit growth and momentum in the real estate sector, supporting investment.



Masirah Oil signs drilling rig contract for offshore Block 50

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Masirah Oil Limited, the operator of Oman's offshore Block 50, recently announced the signing of a contract for the Energy Emerger jack-up drilling rig.

The rig, operated by Northern Offshore Ltd, will perform a multi-well programme in the offshore Yumna Field in Block 50, Oman, Masirah Oil said in a statement.

The programme will consist of drilling and completing a new infield well and the workover of two existing production wells. The programme will commence in mid-March 2024, the company added.

Mike Hopkinson, General Manager of Masirah Oil, said, "We are very appreciative of the support and assistance from

Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals, enabling us to secure the rig in a tight supply environment."

The gross production in January 2024 from the Yumna Field in offshore Block 50 amounted to an average of 1,732 stock tank barrels per day over the full month.

Masirah Oil Ltd is the operator and holds 100% of Block 50 Oman, an approximately 17,000 sq km offshore concession located in the Gulf of Masirah, east of Oman.

Masirah Oil is a subsidiary of Singapore-based Rex International Holding.

The offshore Block 50 concession in Oman is a key asset of the group. The group successfully achieved first oil in the Yumna Field in February 2020.

Oil prices up over escalating tensions in Middle East

Muscat - Oil prices increased on Tuesday with greater supply risks with the rising conflict in the Middle East, while investors await several key supply and demand data sets from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) as well as inflation data from the US Federal Reserve.

Global benchmark Brent

crude traded at \$82.61 per barrel in morning trade in London for an 0.48% increase from the closing price of \$82.21 a barrel in the previous trading session.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at \$78.25 per barrel at the same time, a 0.41% rise from the previous session that closed at \$77.93 per barrel.

Agencies

Al Buraimi Industrial City signs deal for RO7mn furniture factory

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Buraimi Industrial City, managed by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has signed an investment agreement with Golden Palaces for Trade and Investment to establish a furniture manufacturing factory.

The factory will cover an area of 17,000 square meters, with an investment of RO7mn.



Combining traditional features with modern technology, the factory will use sustainable materials to produce high-quality contemporary furniture designs.

The project aims to fulfill 10% of the local market demand and export 90% of its products to European, American, and Middle Eastern markets, thereby creating new job opportunities and contributing to the national economy.

Sukuk issuance to decline in 2024: Moody's

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Global long-term sovereign and supranational sukuk issuance volumes will fall again this year, extending the decline since issuance peaked in 2020, before rebounding slightly in 2025, according to Moody's Investor Service.

"Global sovereign long-term sukuk issuance volumes, including all issuances by national governments and multilateral development banks with a tenor of more than one year, have declined from a peak of \$114bn in 2020 and are unlikely to return to this level over the next several years," Moody's



said in a new report.

The rating agency expects issuance activity in the sovereign long-term sukuk market to decline to \$86bn in 2024, before rebounding slightly in 2025. Moody's said that the sukuk issuance volumes will drop 6% this year.

Saudi Arabia will lead the decline, along with Malaysia. A siz-

able drop in Saudi Arabia's domestic sukuk issuances reflects a shift in the government's funding strategy.

"Based on the assumption that oil prices average around \$80 per barrel for the Brent crude benchmark during 2024-2025, we expect the net aggregate financing needs, or the combined fiscal deficit, of key sovereign is-

suers to increase very modestly over the next two years, compared with 2023," Moody's said.

As per Moody's forecasts, net financing needs will rise to \$162bn in 2024 and \$157bn in 2025 from an estimated \$148bn in 2023. This increase, combined with a modest increase in the sukuk repayment schedule, could support sukuk issuance volumes. However, Moody's expects country-specific factors to lead to another small issuance decline in 2024.

Moody's said that new issuers are continuing to broaden the global sovereign sukuk market, while established issuers expand their sukuk programmes.



Muscat Finance (S.A.O.G)
P.O.Box: 888, Ruwi, P.C. 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24625300, Fax: 24625310

**NOTICE AND INVETATION TO ATTEND
THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

"The Board of Directors of Muscat Finance SAOG is pleased to invite the honorable shareholders of the Company to attend the Annual General Meeting (AGM) to be held at 9:00 PM of the evening of Tuesday corresponding to 26 March 2024, at Movenpick Hotel & Apartments – Ghala, Muscat and via the electronic portal for General Meetings, which you can access through the Muscat Clearing and Depository website (www.mcd.om), and if there was lack of quorum, requirement for holding the AGM has not met, a second AGM (as the case may be) will be held Thursday 28/03/2024 at 9:00 pm to discuss the following work schedule:"

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agendas :

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the Company's activities and financial position for the financial year ended 31 December 2023
- To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider the Auditors' Report and to approve the Auditor's Report on the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2023
- To consider and approve the sitting fees of the directors and sub-committees of the Company during the year ended 31 December 2023, and determine the sitting fees for the next financial year as set out in the Annexure.
- To notify the General Meeting of the related party transactions during the financial year ended 31 December 2023, as set out in the Annexure.
- To notify the General Meeting of the donations made by the Company on the account of corporate social responsibility during the financial year ended 31 December 2023 as set out in the Annexure.
- To consider and approve the allocation of an amount of RO 20,000/- during the financial year ending 31 December 2024 as corporate social responsibility initiative
- To Approve the criteria for measuring the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending December 31, 2024 (as per Attachment)
- To appoint Statutory Auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and approve their fees
- To appoint an independent entity to evaluate the performance of the Board of directors for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2024, and determine their fee. (as per Attachment)

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority , we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on telephone No +96892739184 or email: ahmedtaqi@mfcoman.com

**Chairman
Consultanta**

**Legal Advisor
Albusaidy , Mansoor
Jamal Barristers & Legal
Consultanta**

**External Auditor
BDO**

Omran's landmark participation at ITB Berlin 2024 scripts new chapter for Oman

The Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) is elated to announce the culmination of its strategic participation at ITB Berlin 2024. This significant event has marked a new chapter for Oman's booming tourism industry, showcasing the Sultanate of Oman as the distinguished Official Host Country. This year, Omran Group took centre stage, co-hosting the prestigious ITB Buyers Circle alongside Visit Oman, illustrating an unparalleled commitment to fostering high-level dialogues and establishing formidable networks in the global tourism arena. This collaboration highlighted the Group's strategic initiatives and its owned assets and subsidiaries, elevating the Sultanate of Oman's presence on the international stage, fostering effective interactions with a broad spectrum of operators and key decision-makers.

In a dedicated pursuit to amplify Oman's global appeal as a premier tourist destination, Omran Group's participation aligns seamlessly with the strategic efforts spearheaded by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. This initiative continues to promote the inherent beauty and tourist attractions of Oman and highlighting the propelling investment opportunities across



its diverse development projects. The trade show served as a prime meeting ground for industry titans, facilitating an exchange of global trends and insights, while unveiling over 15 of the Group's pioneering hotels, resorts, and comprehensive tourism complexes, including Oman Adventure Centre, which made a significant impact in the

adventure tourism segment of the exhibition.

A highlight of ITB Berlin 2024 was the strategic unveiling of the 'See Double' campaign, a joint promotional effort by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAK-TDA), in collaboration with Omran Group. This innovative

campaign is set to enhance the tourism appeal of both the nature-embraced Governorate of Musandam and Ras Al Khaimah, offering an enticing, combined experience for travellers and visitors alike.

Amidst this backdrop of strategic dialogues and cultural showcases, Omran Group announced milestone collabora-



tions and initiatives set to redefine Oman's tourism landscape. Notable among these is the groundbreaking venture with Global Leisure & Entertainment, aiming to launch Oman's first

A highlight of ITB Berlin 2024 was the unveiling of the 'See Double' campaign, a joint effort by MHT and the Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority

Water & Bike Adventure Centre in Khasab, Musandam. This initiative aligns with Oman's vision to augment its adventure tourism offerings while reinforcing its

ing unprecedented standards in the realm of wellness tourism within Oman, particularly in the Al Dakhiliyah and Dhofar Governorates. This collaboration is set to revolutionise the country's tourism sector, projecting Oman as a leading destination for sustainable and wellness travel.

In alignment with its strategic vision, Omran Group also announced a partnership with the globally esteemed SIRCO Group, marking a significant milestone in elevating Oman's culinary and lifestyle sectors. This collaboration, solidified at ITB Berlin 2024, is a testament to Oman's evolving luxury and dining landscape, contributing significantly to the nation's economic and cultural prosperity.

The event also spotlighted the inaugural Oman DownWinder 2024, a pioneering maritime event set to shed light on Oman's rich coastal beauty and its potential as a prime destination for wind and sea sports. This initiative reflects Omran Group's dedication to eco-conscious and adventure tourism, setting a new benchmark in sustainable and engaging travel experiences.

Dr Hashil al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran Group, took part in a thought-provoking panel discussion, articulating the group's ambitions in fostering responsible tourism.

INVITATION FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING AND ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of **Ahli Bank SAOG** (the "**Bank**") are pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting and Annual Ordinary General Meeting to be held at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, the 27th of March 2024 via the electronic platform for general meetings on Muscat Clearing and Depository's website (www.mcd.om). In the event that the quorum for the Extraordinary General Meeting and/or Annual Ordinary General Meeting is not complete, the second Extraordinary General Meeting and/or Annual Ordinary General Meeting will be held at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, the 31st of March 2024 via the abovementioned electronic platform to discuss and consider the following agenda:

FIRST MEETING: EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

- To consider and approve the issuance of 103,661,359 free mandatory convertible bonds to the shareholders of the Bank (being 1 bond for every 22.666667 shares with a nominal value of 100 Baiza plus issuance expenses of 2 Baiza for each convertible bond) as a dividend of 4.5 Baiza per share aggregating to RO 10,573,458,618, for the financial year ended 31st December 2023. The terms of the mandatory convertible bonds would be as per the attached annexure, and the issue of the mandatory convertible bonds would be subject to obtaining all the required regulatory approvals.
- To consider and approve the issuance of up to a further 750,000,000 mandatory convertible bonds at nominal value of 100 baiza, plus issuance expenses for each convertible bond to the shareholders of the Bank, on the basis that such convertible bonds may at the discretion of the Board of Directors be issued in lieu of all or some cash dividends, if any, for the next five financial years (with the first such financial year ending on 31st December 2024 and the last such financial year ending on 31st December 2028), subject to obtaining all required regulatory approvals.
- To authorize the Board of Directors to take all the necessary actions to execute item (1).
- To authorize the Board of Directors to take all the necessary actions to execute item (2).

SECOND MEETING: ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the Bank's activities and its financial position for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the organization and management of the Bank (Corporate Governance Report) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the auditor's report on the Bank's audited financial statements for the year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To notify the general assembly on the Sharia Compliance Report of Ahli Islamic for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the proposal to distribute a total dividend of 9 Baiza (of 4.5 Baiza per share in the form of cash and 4.5 Baiza per share in the form of mandatory convertible bonds in accordance with item 1 of the EGM agenda above) to the shareholders on the date of the Annual General Meeting.
- To ratify the sitting fees paid to the Board of Directors and Board Sub-Committees for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023 and determine their sitting fees for the financial year ending on 31 December 2024.
- To consider and approve the proposal to distribute remunerations of an amount of RO 300,000 to the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To ratify the remuneration and sitting fees of the Shari'a Supervisory Board for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To approve the appointment of the Sharia Supervisory Board and to determine their remuneration and sitting fees for the financial years 2024-2026.
- To notify the general assembly of the related party transactions entered into by the Bank during the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To notify the general assembly of the contributions made to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the report on the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To approve the criteria for the performance appraisal of the Board of Directors of the Bank.
- To appoint a third party for appraising the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2024 and determine their fees.
- To appoint auditors and external Shari'a auditors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2024 and determine their fees.

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

- Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting and the Annual Ordinary General Meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on any of the items on the agenda shall commence no more than three (3) days before the date of the general meeting and until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting. If a shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder must cast his vote again on the day of the general meeting.

In case of any enquiries, please contact **Mr. Habib Murtadha Al Hamaid** at telephone number **24577200**.



Sneak thief of sight - Glaucoma



DR PREETHA MANIYALATH

Specialist in Ophthalmology
Badr Al Samaa, Al Khuwair

Glaucoma is the number one cause of preventable irreversible blindness in the world. 7.7 million people have moderate or severe distance vision impairment or blindness from glaucoma. It is estimated that by 2040 number of people with glaucoma worldwide will increase to around 111.4 million. Glaucoma is nicknamed the "Silent thief of sight" as it can jeopardise your vision stealthily that you might not notice until significant vision loss occurs. Most glaucomas are asymptomatic and all vision loss due to glaucoma is irreversible. By regular eye exams, understanding risk factors, spreading awareness, early detection and intervention we can hand cuff glaucoma.

What is glaucoma?

Glaucoma is an eye condition that damages optic nerve due to high eye pressure. In healthy eyes, the rate of production of aqueous (the fluid that nourishes the front part of the eye) matches the rate of its drainage, thereby maintaining optimal pressure inside the eye. However, with age, disease, trauma or other factors, the channels carrying this fluid may get blocked and fluid cannot exit the eye thereby increasing the pressure inside the eye which damages the optic nerve. The optic nerve comprises of millions of nerve fibres that carry signals of what we see from eyes to the brain similar to how the information

is transmitted from a camera to a monitor screen. In glaucoma the nerve fibres in the optic nerve are progressively damaged like a wire that becomes progressively frayed and thinner. Working silently glaucoma damages side vision first maintaining central vision. So by the time glaucoma is detected, the person has already suffered extensive peripheral vision damage or even permanent blindness which can no longer be restored. Glaucoma treatment aims to reduce further risk of optic nerve damage by reducing the eye pressure.

Risk factors

You are at risk if you

- are 45 years of age or above
- have a family history of glaucoma
- have diabetes, hypertension or thyroid disease
- are near sighted or long sighted
- have had eye trauma like tennis ball hit or intraocular surgery in the past
- are on treatment with long term corticosteroids.

There are two major types of primary glaucoma - Primary open angle glaucoma steals your vision gradually and is painless. Second one called closed angle glaucoma can cause sudden increase of intraocular pressure and can cause severe eye pain and redness. If not treated by an ophthalmologist immediately it can cause blindness. At times children can also be affected with glaucoma due to development anomaly called congenital glaucoma or juvenile glaucoma.

Symptoms

Most glaucoma patients have zero symptoms. Once glaucoma progresses symptoms can be needing more light to see, fading of letters while

reading, difficulty in seeing objects at the sides, darker or missing areas in visual field, frequent change of eye glass prescription, blurred vision, seeing coloured haloes around light, red eyes, headache, nausea and vomiting.

How does glaucoma affect these individual's lives?

As the glaucoma progresses it can impact driving, walking, reading, seeing at night, adjusting to different levels of illumination, judging distances seeing peripheral objects and moving objects coming from the side. They may not be able to work or do certain jobs, perceive colours normally and may be at risk of falls and mental health issues.

Diagnosis of glaucoma

It is imperative to get your eyes checked every year after 40 years to detect glaucoma. Glaucoma is assessed by many tests like checking vision, measuring eye pressure or tonometry, assessing optic nerve damage with dilated eye examination and imaging tests like OCT, visual field test or perimetry, and drainage angle evaluation or gonioscopy. Once diagnosed periodic follow up throughout lifetime is necessary.

Treatment

Glaucoma can be treated, not cured. Eye drops and sometimes oral medicines are used to control glaucoma. Glaucoma needs continuous daily use of medications like diabetes and hypertension. Laser therapy and surgical procedures are employed in advanced or uncontrolled glaucoma to prevent blindness

Once vision is lost, it cannot be regained. Luckily, with early detection and treatment, blindness can be prevented.

Lulu ‘Shop and Win’ promotion gets off to amazing start

Lulu Hypermarket has unveiled its much-awaited Ramadan promotion to make the season even more rewarding for both online and offline shoppers.

The Shop and Win promotion, which started on February 15 and will run till April 20 at all Lulu stores in Oman, will give customers a chance to win RO100,000 worth cash prizes during the entire promotional period. Shoppers are entitled to an e-affle coupon on purchase of products worth RO10. The cash prize includes a grand prize of RO10,000 and weekly cash prizes of RO5,000, RO750, RO500, RO200 and RO100.

There are eight draws to select a total of 281 lucky winners throughout the period.

The first and second set of winners were selected through a raffle draw held on February 28 and March 6 at Lulu Baushar. Seventy winners were selected in these two draws.

Buthaina Mohammed al Kindi and Mohammad Paramban won a cash prize of RO5000 each while Issa Fahad al Naeemi and Fatma Lawati took home RO750 each.

Six winners won RO500 each. Twenty winners won RO200 and 40 others won RO100 each.



Special Ramadan discounts and exclusive offers are available on all essential commodities, a wide variety of groceries, home essentials, and much more. There are numerous daily deals on the online shopping app, which will make shopping more convenient and full of savings for shoppers. Ramadan Kits will also be available to make shopping for Ramadan essentials an easy experience for customers. The kits will include essential grocery items, such as milk powder, rice, sugar, instant foods, jellies,

ketchup, oil, pulses, pasta, grains, coffee and tea, at the lowest consolidated prices. Lulu has also introduced gift items such as watches, perfumes, sweet boxes, and assorted gift baskets.

Speaking about the promotion, Ananth A V, Director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman & India, said, "Ramadan is the most blessed time of the year. Our Shop and Win promotion have been launched to coincide with Ramadan every year as we believe this is the perfect time for customers to enjoy great deals

and offers without feeling the pinch. Our objective is to provide customers with good value for money at every season and occasion," he added.

Shabeer K A, Regional Director - Lulu Hypermarkets, Oman, stated, "The Shop & Win promotion has been receiving amazing response from customers. The promotion is part of Lulu's initiative to support the community during the Holy Month. We are sure our customers will make best use of this opportunity to get all that they need during this sea-

son. We are regularly updating the availability of stocks to bring in more products at affordable rates, giving customers the flexibility to choose what they want."

Standing firm on its core values of exceptional quality, extensive product range, affordable pricing, and outstanding service, Lulu is committed to offering its customers an unparalleled shopping experience every time they shop. The group's innovative strategies and ideas are tailored to always meet and exceed customer expectations.



Four matches lined up today for OQ Ramadan tourney

Wednesday marks the holding of four riveting matches in the prestigious OQ Ramadan Championship, organised by OQ, the global integrated energy group.

Featuring 24 teams and nearly 600 participants, including players, technical, and administrative staff, this championship promises intense competition and excitement.

The action-packed day begins with a clash between the Cosmos and Al Mutaa teams at 9.15pm, setting the stage for a thrilling showdown. Following this, at 10.15pm, the Al Maheet team Al Mahout team squares off against the Nujoom al Akhwa, adding to the evening's excitement.

Group Three competitions kick off at 11.15pm with a match between the Al Sahwa and Diesel Sports teams, promising intense battles on the field.

Wrapping up the second round of Group Two matches is a face-off between the Al Najd Sports and Al Noor Sports teams at 12.15am.

This tournament's organisation reflects the company's commitment to social responsibility, serving as one of the annual sporting highlights during the sacred month of Ramadan.

Hamad al Burwani, the chair-



man of the tournament organising committee, emphasised the championship's significant following among athletes, with numerous former and current national team players participating. It's no wonder it's hailed as the most popular championship during Ramadan.

Burwani highlighted the committee's dedication to enhancing the championship's appeal and competitiveness, encouraging greater team participation.

He underscored the importance of the championship's ranking system, which motivates teams to strive for positive results and thorough preparation to avoid exclusion from future seasons.

Burwani expressed optimism that this year's championship would reach new heights in technical prowess, solidifying its significance and influence.

Sohar International onboards BIMA to enhance insurance offerings

Sohar International, the fastest-growing bank in Oman, recently entered into a strategic partnership with Insurance House LLC (BIMA), the only digital insurance aggregator licensed to operate in Oman.

This collaboration aligns with Sohar International's mission to transcend conventional banking boundaries and establish itself as a world-leading Omani service company with a holistic ecosystem dedicated to enriching lives.

By onboarding BIMA to the 'My Life/My Goals' section of



Sohar International's mobile banking app, the bank aims to offer individuals enhanced access to a multitude of insurance

solutions that cater to their diverse needs. BIMA's extensive network includes partnerships with 13 out of the 18 insurance

companies operating in Oman, presenting Sohar International mobile banking users with a plethora of options and flexibility when it comes to choosing insurance coverage.

Abdul Qader Ahmed Mohammed al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer, and Said bin Salem al Rashidi, CEO and founder of BIMA, have officially endorsed the strategic partnership. The signing ceremony was attended by several executive members from both organizations.

Sumali said, "The integration of BIMA's platform into our digital ecosystem reflects our dedication to harnessing technology for the benefit of the broader community."

"At Sohar International, we recognise the crucial role of the insurance sector in promoting socio-economic development. Through our partnership with BIMA, we aim to contribute to this progression by offering proactive protection in a seamless and competitive manner," he added.



Dr Siju George receives Clinical Excellence Award from European Board of Aligner Orthodontics

Dr Siju George, a specialist orthodontist based in Muscat, with over 20 years of clinical experience, has been honoured with the Clinical Excellence Award from the European Board of Aligner Orthodontics (EBAO). This prestigious award recognises Dr George's outstanding contributions and dedication to the field of aligner orthodontics.

Dr George specialises in treating children with preventive and interceptive orthodontics, as well as adults with invisible and conventional orthodontics. He has been a certified provider of Invisalign since 2011 and holds the status of Diamond Invisalign Provider since 2019.

Dr George is known for his expertise in applying a variety of treatments, including the Damon System and other aesthetic treatments.

NATIONAL MINERAL WATER COMPANY (SAOG)
Post Box No. 2740, Ruwi, Postal Code: 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: +968 24628900, Fax: +968 24628990
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Notice and Invitation to attend the Annual General Meeting

AGM Agenda
The Board of Directors of National Mineral Water Company S.A.O.G (the Company) has the pleasure to invite all the Shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Company scheduled to be held at 9 p.m. on Wednesday, 27 March 2024, at via electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which you can login through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om); and in the event that quorum was not achieved for the AGM, the second AGM, shall be held at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, 03 April 2024 via same electronic platform above to discuss the following agenda items:

1. To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors on the business of the Company and its financial position for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
2. To consider and approve the Company's Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
3. To consider and approve the Auditor's Report about the Company's audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
4. To approve the sitting fees being available by the members of the Board of Directors and members of the Board's sub-committees for the previous financial year and to fix the sittings fees for the next financial year.
5. To notify the general meeting of the related parties' transactions entered into during the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
6. To notify the general meeting of the amounts allocated and spent for the Company's social responsibilities for the year ended 31 December 2023.
7. To discuss and approve the proposed allocation of OMR 7,000 to fulfil the Company's social responsibilities for the year ending 31 December 2024.
8. To approve the appointment of the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and the proposed remuneration.
9. To elect a new Board of Directors for the Company. Any person who wishes to be nominated to the Board of Directors of the Company is required to fill in a Director's Nomination Form. Such a form can be obtained from the CMA website. The completed form should be delivered to the Company at least five (5) days prior to the date of the Annual General Meeting (no later than the end of business hours on Thursday, 21 March 2024). The candidate must satisfy the Company's board membership requirements.

In accordance with the company's articles of association and the regulations for holding general assembly's using modern technology means issued by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

A. Only juristic persons may deputize a natural person to attend the AGM and vote on their behalf through the electronic systems, provided that the deputized natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.

B. Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For any queries please contact Mohammed Al Saqri on 90691585 or e-mail at: mohammed@tanufwater.com.

تكاful عمان للتأمين ش.م.ع.ع
TAKAFUL OMAN INSURANCE SAOG

Invitation to Annual General Meeting of Takaful Oman Insurance Company SAOG

The Board of Directors of Takaful Oman Insurance Company SAOG (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders of the company to the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") to be held at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, 27th March 2024 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om).

Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 3p.m. on Tuesday, 2nd April 2024 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om) to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
2. To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
3. consider and approve the Auditor's report and the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
4. Consider and approve the report of the Sharia Supervisory Committee for the financial year ended on the 31st of December 2023.
5. 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.
6. To ratify the payment of Directors' remuneration for an amount of RO 50,000 (Rials Omani Fifty thousand) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
7. To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the shari'a Supervisory Committee for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
8. To ratify the payment of remuneration to the Shari'a Supervisory Committee for an amount of RO 15,000 (Rials Omani Fifteen thousand) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023
9. To notify the General Assembly with transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2023 .
10. To notify the General Assembly of donations disbursed to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2023
11. To consider and approve the allocation of a budget of RO 12,000 (Rials Omani twelve thousand) to support community services during the financial year ending 31 December 2024.
12. Consider and approve the appointment of members of the Sharia supervisory committee for the ending on the 31st of December 2024.
13. To appoint the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and approve their fees.

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:

A. only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the AGM through electronic means, provided such natural person has an investor number with the MCD.

B. voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the AGM 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 re-vote at the AGM.

For more information, please contact Mr Hamza Al Saadi of Takaful Oman Insurance Company SAOG on telephone No. 99328983.

Colombia: Venezuelan influx on a decline

The Venezuelan migrant influx into Colombia has seen a notable decline for the first time in a decade

Bogota, Colombia - The Venezuelan migrant influx into Colombia has seen a notable decline for the first time in a decade, according to the country's migration agency.

The agency noted a peak in Venezuelan migrants in December 2022, with a subsequent month-by-month decrease. As a result, in December 2023, the number of Venezuelans in Colombia decreased from 2,896,748 to 2,864,796, indicating a 1.11 per cent decline.

Fernando Garcia, the director of Migration Colombia, attributed this decline to the resumption of diplomatic relations between Colombia and Venezuela, suggesting that Venezuelans are returning home.

However, experts challenge this view, asserting that the decrease is not explained by improved relations even after years of ongoing fragmentation between the two countries. In fact, the outflow of migrants from Venezuela remains the largest displacement crisis in the world, reaching nearly 7.7mn people by August 2023, with an 8.3 per cent increase in migration from 2022 to 2023.

"There has been a shift in migration patterns, with more individuals targeting the United States via the Darien Gap - a challenging land connection between Central and South America - rather than staying in Latin America," Ronal Rodriguez, a professor at the Venezuelan Observatory, a think-tank at the University of Rosario in Colombia, told Anadolu. The Darien Gap has witnessed an increase of migrants crossing, including those from Venezuela, Ecuador, Haiti and China. Panama's Security



There has been a shift in migration patterns, with more individuals targeting the United States via the Darien Gap rather than staying in Latin America

RONAL RODRIGUEZ

Minister Juan Manuel Pino revealed that approximately 70,000 migrants have crossed the Darien jungle so far in 2024, a notable increase from the previous year, with Venezuelans constituting over 60 per cent of Darien crossings in 2023.

According to the International Crisis Group, in January 2023, approximately 75 Venezuelans went through each day. By late April, this figure had surged to around 850, and by August, it had risen again to about 2,000.

Analysts suggest that the poli-

cies of Colombian President Gustavo Petro's administration and a rise in xenophobia in other countries in the region are contributing to the decline in migration, highlighting a lack of prioritisation of immigration issues.

Rodriguez notes the absence of a clear policy, creating uncertainty about the future of Venezuelans in Colombia.

Nearly three million Venezuelans live in Colombia, but despite the immigration authority granting over 500,000 Temporary Protection Permits during Petro's government, migrants argue that

it is not enough. The administration's removal of the Border Management Office, responsible for migrant integration, has further limited collaboration between local governments and migrants' access to established projects and programmes around the country. Although President Petro attributes the Venezuelan exodus to economic blockades, often blaming US sanctions, Rodriguez counters this, saying that migration trends began before these sanctions in 2019, emphasising that 2018 saw the most significant migratory growth.

The Petro government, says Rodriguez, has chosen to resume bilateral relations with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government, sidelining the immigration issue. This stance has raised concern among migrants who are looking north for a better future.

"The proximity of speeches between President Petro and the Venezuelan government has made migrants question their decision of making Colombia their home," said Rodriguez. "When migrants hear that the president denies or even justifies their real-

ity, that creates anxiety in them, it generates fear."

Venezuelan migrants are also leaving countries like Peru, and Chile, where they had originally migrated, due to rising xenophobia, discrimination and legislative discussions that seek to criminalise irregular migration. The governments of these countries have militarised their borders in order to stop the arrival of undocumented people to the country, especially those of Venezuelan origin.

In Colombia, xenophobia does not reach the levels of Peru or Chile due to the similarity between the Colombian and Venezuelan cultures. But along with insecurity in the country, xenophobia has also grown in the last few years. Rodriguez said there is a tendency 'to hold Venezuelans responsible for security problems'. "It is easier to point the finger at the foreign population than to say that insecurity problems are the product of the peace process that we are experiencing in Colombia, or the long-lasting effects of the (coronavirus) pandemic and the dynamics of crime in cities."

The fear with the growth of xenophobic dynamics adds to an environment of instability, making many wonder if it is worth staying or if they should go in search of the American dream, even if it means risking the well-being of their families by undertaking that dangerous route.

When crossing the Darien, migrants are exposed to multiple human rights violations, including sexual violence, murders, disappearances, trafficking and robbery by organised criminal groups.

Anadolu Agency

Haiti's PM resigns amid increase in violent incidents

Bogota, Columbia - Haiti Prime Minister Ariel Henry resigned on Monday due to increased violent incidents by a notorious gang in the country that has already forced the general elections to be cancelled on multiple occasions.

"We acknowledge his resignation upon the establishment of transitional presidential council and naming an interim prime minister," said Mohamed Irfaan Ali, Guyana's president and current Caribbean Community (CARICOM) chair, in a statement.

The heads of state from the 25 CARICOM member countries met in Kingston, Jamaica,



Haiti Prime Minister Ariel Henry

for an extraordinary meeting to discuss the Haitian security crisis. Following the meeting, 74-year-old Henry, who had

been in Puerto Rico for security reasons since March 5, informed CARICOM of his decision to resign.

Armed gangs demanding Ariel Henry's resignation clashed with security forces on March 2 and 3, carrying out armed attacks on two prisons

Meanwhile, gang members attempted raids on two police stations and the Interior Ministry, but were repulsed by po-

lice, according to local media.

Gang leader Jimmy Cherizier, also known as 'Barbecue', whose actions resulted in the escape of thousands of prisoners from different jails, warned on March 6 that if Prime Minister Henry did not resign, 'either Haiti becomes a paradise for all of us, or a hell for all of us'.

Armed gangs demanding Henry's resignation clashed with security forces on March 2 and 3, carrying out armed attacks on two prisons across the country. Almost 4,000 prisoners escaped during the clashes, with 12 people killed.

On March 4, the government declared a 72-hour state of

emergency to apprehend the escaped prisoners and announced a curfew that would be enforced during specific hours.

Cherizier's gang has attempted to seize control of the airport in the capital multiple times to prevent Henry from returning to the country.

During the gang attacks, Henry was in Nairobi planning the deployment of a multinational security force led by Kenya to Haiti.

The state of emergency declared on March 4 to apprehend escaped prisoners was extended for one month on March 7.

Anadolu Agency

Indonesia: 23 dead after flash floods, landslides hit Sumatra

Ankara, Turkey - The death toll from flash floods and landslides on Indonesia's Sumatra island rose to 23 while six have been still missing, local media said on Tuesday.

The country's National Search and Rescue Agency said thousands of people were displaced in different areas after heavy floods hit the region.

"The flood and landslide disaster occurred in three sectors in Sutera Subdistrict. There are 23 confirmed fatalities, with six individuals still being searched for - three in Sutera Subdistrict, two in Tarusan, and one in Bayang Subdistrict," local online daily Jakarta Globe quoted Abdul Malik, the head of Search and Rescue agency in the region, as saying.

The search operation is still underway in three locations in West Sumatra for the missing people.

Since Thursday, flash floods and landslides devastated Pesisir Selatan and other districts as so far, 70,000 people have been affected in the area, according to the daily.

Flash floods and landslides are common in Indonesia, where millions live near floodplains, particularly during the rainy season.

Anadolu Agency

Spain marks 20th anniversary of deadly Madrid train bombings

Oviedo, Spain - Spain on Monday marked the 20th anniversary of the Madrid bombings, which killed 193 people and injured around 2,050, making it the deadliest terrorist attack in Europe since 1988.

"We need to remember, but this remembrance should be active," said Pedro Sanchez at a ceremony. "It should be an incentive for the present and future, so it does not happen again."

He spoke of remembering as a way to protect the dignity of the people affected - from those who were killed to survivors who continue to deal with debilitating physical and psychological traumas; from families of victims to the associations that keep the memory alive and defend their rights.

Sanchez also added that 'human rights' and the 'rule of law' are the 'best vaccines' against preventing and prosecuting terrorism. "We need to emphasise principles of living in harmony and respect, which are the best antidote to terrorist violence and its breeding ground - fanaticism and intolerance," he said.

March 11 has also become the European Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism, which also commemorates other violent attacks in Europe.

Speaking about Europe, Sanchez said 'solidarity' is the main value that brings cohesion across the territory.

"Democracy, the state of law and social rights are the symbols of identity of Europe that fanatics, from whatever belief



system they come from, could never destroy," said Sanchez.

On Sunday, Madrid inaugurated a new memorial for victims of the attack in the Atocha train station, near where the at-

tacks occurred.

The 2004 Madrid train bombings came three days before Spain's general elections.

The attack was marked by confusion, not only due to the

victims who were killed during rush hour on Madrid's commuter rail network, but also regarding the authors of the attack.

The conservative govern-

ment originally attributed the attack to the Basque terror group ETA.

However, in the following days, evidence pointed to the bombings being carried out by other groups opposing Spain's involvement in the US-led invasion of Iraq.

In 2006, Judge Juan del Olmo found 'local cells of Islamic extremists inspired through the Internet' guilty for the 11 March attacks.

In the elections in the following days, the Socialist Party, which opposed the war in Iraq was voted into government. Some studies, such as one published in the academic journal The Review of Economics and Statistics, suggest that the bombing swung the vote.

Anadolu Agency

Jewish settlers storm Al-Aqsa Mosque

Settlers escorted by Israeli forces stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque in groups from the Al-Mugharbah Gate area

Jerusalem - Hundreds of Jewish settlers on Tuesday again stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem amid Israeli forces' security protections and tightened measures against Palestinians.

According to the Palestinian official news agency Wafa, the settlers escorted by Israeli forces stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque in groups from the Al-Mugharbah Gate area on the holy mosque's west side.

Earlier on Monday, approximately 275 Israeli settlers entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex on calls given by extremist Jewish groups to intensify incursions into the mosque during Ramadan, the news agency said.

Despite Israeli restrictions on access to Islam's third holiest site, approximately 35,000 Palestinians performed special tarawih prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque on Monday, the second evening of Ramadan - holy month of Muslims.

Tarawih prayer is a voluntary prayer that is performed during the fasting month after Isha, the last evening prayer.

Al-Aqsa Mosque is the world's third-holiest site for Muslims. Jews call the area the Temple Mount, claiming it was the site of two Jewish temples in ancient times.

Israel occupied East Jerusalem, where Al-Aqsa is located, during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. It annexed the entire



Thousands of Palestinian worshippers performed tarawih prayers on Monday at Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, despite Israeli restrictions

Al-Aqsa Mosque is the world's third-holiest site for Muslims. Jews call the area the Temple Mount, claiming it was the site of two Jewish temples in ancient times

city in 1980 in a move never recognised by the international community.

Tensions have been running

high across the occupied West Bank since Israel launched a deadly military offensive against the Gaza Strip after a

cross-border attack by the Palestinian group Hamas last October.

Nearly 425 Palestinians have since been killed and more than 4,600 others injured by Israeli weapons fire, according to the Health Ministry.

UN voices concern

Meanwhile, the UN on Monday voiced concern over provoca-

tion in the holy sites in Jerusalem.

Asked about Israeli forces' blockage on hundreds of Palestinians wanting to perform the first Tarawih prayer of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan from entering Al-Aqsa mosque, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said: "We're always very concerned about any provocation in the holy sites in

Jerusalem."

He recalled that there 'is a status quo that needs to be observed and respected'.

Palestinians waiting for aid killed

In the northern Gaza Strip, on Tuesday, several Palestinians were killed and dozens injured in a new Israeli shelling of Palestinians waiting for humanitarian

aid. Israeli forces opened fire on Palestinians waiting to receive aid near Kuwait roundabout, Salameh Maarouf, head of the Gaza-based government media office, said in a statement.

He said the new attack brought the death toll of Palestinians waiting for humanitarian aid to 400 people with 1,300 others injured.

Earlier, the Palestinian official news agency Wafa reported that at least nine people were killed and more than 20 others injured when the Israeli army dropped bombs and opened fire on Palestinians waiting for aid trucks south of Gaza City.

Mahmoud Basal, a spokesperson for the enclave's civil defence unit, told Anadolu that the Israeli army targeted Palestinians waiting for aid trucks near the Kuwait roundabout south of Gaza City.

Israel has waged a deadly military offensive on the Gaza Strip since an October 7 cross-border attack led by the Palestinian group Hamas in which nearly 1,200 people were killed.

More than 31,100 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have since been killed in Gaza, and over 72,700 others injured amid mass destruction and shortages of necessities.

Israel has also imposed a crippling blockade on the Gaza Strip, leaving its population, particularly residents of northern Gaza, on the verge of starvation. Anadolu Agency

100 rockets fired from Lebanon: Israel

Istanbul, Turkey - The Israeli army on Tuesday claimed nearly 100 rockets were fired from Lebanon towards northern Israel and the occupied Golan Heights.

The Israeli Army Radio, which described the firing of the rockets as 'heavy bombardment', said no injuries or material damage was reported.

According to the Times of Israel news website, the rockets were fired in two barrages - 70 rockets were fired at northern Israel, and 30 were fired at the occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

The Israeli media published videos showing some of the rockets being intercepted by the Israeli Iron Dome air defence system. Meanwhile, the Hezbollah group leader Hasan Nasrallah met with a top delegation from the Palestinian Hamas group, headed by Khalil Al-Hayya, deputy of Hamas leader in Gaza. They discussed the field situ-



ation in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as the indirect negotiations aimed at ending the Israeli war on Gaza, according to a statement by the Hezbollah group.

Tension has flared along the border between Lebanon and Israel amid intermittent exchanges of weapons fire between Israeli

forces and Hezbollah, in the deadliest clashes since the two sides fought a full-scale war in 2006. The border tension comes amid an Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip following a cross-border attack by Hamas on October 7.

Meanwhile, in Washington, US President Joe Biden said that

he has no plans to speak with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"No," Biden told reporters when asked if he has scheduled a meeting with Netanyahu.

Asked whether he plans to schedule such a meeting, he said: "We'll see what happens."

Anadolu Agency

French state institutions targeted by 'unprecedented' cyberattacks since Sunday

Paris, France - French state institutions have been targeted in 'unprecedented' cyberattacks since Sunday, according to media reports.

Anonymous Sudan, a group of pro-Russian hackers, claimed responsibility for the cyberattack on the Telegram messaging app, France Info reported on Monday.

The cyberattack was 'unprecedented in intensity' and targeted ministry websites, but access to those pages has been

restored, government sources told French media outlets. The attack type was 'denial-of-service' (DDoS), which involves disrupting a target's traffic by overwhelming it with a flood of traffic, the source added.

France-Russia relations are currently at the lowest ebb over the war in Ukraine, which began in February 2022.

Last month, French President Emmanuel Macron did not rule out sending Western soldiers to

Ukraine 'to make sure Russia does not prevail', a proposal that was rejected by allies including Germany. However, it is reported that Paris is allying with countries that are open to the idea.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, the French Parliament will vote symbolically on the bilateral security agreement signed with Kyiv last month, as well as Paris' strategy to support Ukraine. Anadolu Agency

UAE University, supported by DoH, offers first master's programme in genetic counselling

Al Ain, UAE - The Department of Genetics and Genomics at the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) has launched the first master's programme in Genetic Counselling in the UAE.

Supported by the Department of Health - Abu Dhabi (DoH), the college aspires to enhance its outcomes by offering modern academic specialisations, providing the community with an elite group of medical graduates to meet the needs of medical institutions, and enhancing clinical medical consultations.

Dr Muna Al Saffar, the director of the Genetic Counselling Programme said: "The Master of Genetic Counselling programme is the first and only programme in the UAE. It is a two-year academic and clinical journey de-



signed specifically for individuals passionate about pursuing a specialised profession to support and improve the wellbeing of individuals and their extended families who are diagnosed or at risk for genetic disorders.

"Our programme is dedicated to preparing our students with the needed skills and knowledge

to positively impact the wellbeing of individuals at risk or diagnosed with genetic disorders and, most importantly, to reduce the burden of genetic conditions in the community at large."

The programme aims to develop professional, qualified and competent genetic counsellors; nurture the clinical counselling

capability in various areas, including paediatric genetic assessment, prenatal diagnosis, cancer and adult genetics; attention to talents in psychological support; protect patients' rights; and develop skills in clinical genetic research and community service.

Dr Rashed Obaid Alsuwaidi, the executive director of the Healthcare Workforce Planning Sector at the DoH, said: "The department is proud to support the launch of the master's programme in genetic counselling at the UAE University. This launch underscores our collective commitment to fostering and strengthening capabilities and expertise in areas of high demand such as genome science, genetic counselling, and personalised and precision medicine." WAM

شركة سرايا عُمان القابضة ش.م.ع.م.

Saraya Oman Holding Company SAOC

Facility Management Building, Muscat Bay, Jissah, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Invitation to Annual General Meeting

of Saraya Oman Holding SAOC

The Board of Directors of Saraya Oman Holding SAOC (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders of the company to the Annual General Meeting (the "AGM") to be held at 9 a.m. on Thursday, 28th March 2024, at the Company's offices located at the Facility Management Building, Muscat Bay, Jissah, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. Failing quorum, the AGM shall be reconvened at 9 a.m. on Sunday, 31st March 2024, at the Company's offices located at the Facility Management Building, Muscat Bay, Jissah, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the Auditor's report and the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To notify the General Assembly with transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2023 (Annexure 1).
- To consider and approve the proposed related party transactions to be entered into by the Company 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 31 December 2024 (Annexure 2).
- To appoint the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and approve their fees.
- To elect and appoint new Board member from shareholders or from non-shareholders.

Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete a nomination form available with the Company. The nomination form can be obtained from the Company's head office. The completed forms should be delivered to the Company minimum five (5) days prior to the AGM date. Nomination forms received after 5pm on Friday, 22nd of March 2024 shall not be accepted.

According to the Commercial Companies Law RD 18/2019, Executive Regulations issued by MOCIP Decision 146/2021, and the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means issued by MOCIP, we would like to call your attention to the following:

(a) Only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the general meeting, through electronic means, provided such natural person must have an investor number at MCD.

(b) Voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convening of the general meeting at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the date of the meeting. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by increase or decrease the voting process shall stand cancelled and must revoke on the date of the meeting.

In accordance with the CCL (Royal Decree No. 18/2019), and the Executive Regulations (issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion No. 146/2021) and Articles of Association, 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 attached herewith. 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.

Respected shareholders are requested to attend at the AGM venue at least 30 minutes prior to the commencement time.

For more information, please contact Mr. Abhay Singh on mobile No. (+971) 564529549.

Chairman

Legal Adviser

INDIA

CAA will be repealed if INDIA alliance assumes power: Tharoor



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar meets with Belarus Foreign Minister Sergei Aleinik, in New Delhi on Tuesday (ANI)

Jaishankar holds discussions with Belarusian FM

New Delhi - External Foreign Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday held discussions with Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Aleinik on bilateral ties including development partnership in the field of defence.

The meeting, held in New Delhi, saw both leaders delving into various facets encompassing political, trade, and economic dimensions.

Both the leaders took stock of the cooperation between India and Belarus. "A good meeting with Foreign Minister and Special Envoy for relations with India, Sergei Aleinik of Belarus. Took stock of our bilateral political, trade and economic ties. Exchanged views on development partnership, defence, S&T and education," stated Minister Jaishankar in a post on X.

"Also discussed the regional situation and cooperation in NAM, SCO and UN," Jaishankar added.

The leaders also exchanged views on the regional dynamics

and cooperation within multilateral frameworks such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and the United Nations (UN).

Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs arrived in Delhi to hold meetings with prominent leaders and ministers and discuss India-Belarus bilateral ties.

The visit, scheduled from March 11 to 13, aims to strengthen the bilateral ties between Belarus and India.

Minister Aleinik's departure is scheduled for Wednesday night, marking the conclusion of his brief yet pivotal diplomatic mission to India, the MEA added. Jaishankar last met his counterpart from Belarus in Kampala on January 19 on the sidelines of the NAM Summit.

During the meeting, Jaishankar and his Belarusian counterpart spoke about developments related to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

ANI

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala - Backing the opposition's move to approach the Supreme Court over the enforcement of the CAA and denouncing the act as 'unconstitutional', Congress MP Shashi Tharoor affirmed that it would be repealed if the INDIA alliance assumes power.

Presenting historical evidence to highlight the flaws in the legislation, Tharoor argued that the CAA is both morally and constitutionally incorrect. He pointed out that 'the basis on which partition occurred, was one country saying that religion was the basis of their country, and they went on and created Pakistan and Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Dr Ambedkar, had said that religion won't be the basis of our nationhood. Our struggle for freedom is for everyone, and the constitution and nation we create will be for everyone'.

"It is clearly timed, four years after the passage of the bill, for their benefit in these elections. I'm fully in support of the decision of the Indian Union Muslim League to go to the Supreme Court against this," he said.

Tharoor declared that if the INDIA alliance and the Congress party assume power, they will unequivocally revoke this provision of the law, and will be a part of their manifesto.

"And I must say, if the INDIA alliance and the Congress party come to power, we will withdraw this provision of the law beyond any shadow of a doubt. It's going to be in our manifesto. We will not support introducing



Paramilitary and police personnel stand guard outside the Rajiv Bhawan to obstruct the Congress supporters as they stage a protest a day after the Ministry of Home Affairs notified the rules for implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, in Guwahati, Assam, on Tuesday (ANI)

If the INDIA alliance and the Congress party come to power, we will withdraw this provision of the law beyond any shadow of a doubt. It's going to be in our manifesto

SHASHI THAROOR

religion into our citizenship and into our nation's life," Tharoor said. However, Delhi Haj Committee Chairman Kausar Jahan welcomed the move and said that the act is meant to give citizenship and not take it away.

"I welcome this. This is an act to give citizenship and not take it away. The condition of non-

Muslims in our neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh is not good. If the govt wants to give them a respectful life, what is the problem with it? The Muslim community will not have any problem with this, there is no need to panic," she said.

Meanwhile, UDF Chairman

and Opposition Leader V D Satheesan said that widespread agitation programmes against the implementation of CAA will be conducted nationwide.

"The Congress and the UDF will resist the efforts of the Sangh Parivar forces to reap political gains by creating division and fear among the people. The law will not be allowed to be enforced under any circumstances," he added.

DYFI moves SC

Meanwhile, the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), the youth wing of the Communist Party of India

(Marxist) on Tuesday approached the Supreme Court demanding to stay the implementation of CAA.

DYFI contended that granting citizenship based on the religion of immigrants offends the fundamental principle of secularism, which is enshrined as the basic structure of the Constitution. The writ petition filed stated that the petitioner has been aggrieved by the enactment of CAA wherein first-time religion is used as a reference point/condition for the acquisition of Indian citizenship for illegal/undocumented migrants.

ANI

MARKING THE TIBETAN UPRISING



Members of the Tibetan community hold flags during a protest rally to mark the 65th anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day, in Dehradun on Tuesday (ANI)

SC suggests Centre to give special package to Kerala by March 31

New Delhi - The Supreme Court on Tuesday suggested the Centre to be liberal and give a one-time package as a special case to Kerala, subject to harsher conditions than other states.

A bench of justices Surya Kant and K V Viswanathan's suggestions came while dealing with the matter relating to Kerala's plea against Centre over financial matters.

The court remarked to the Centre that they can be slightly liberal, give a one-time package as a special case and apply more rigid conditions in future budgets.

The court also suggested giving the special package to Kerala by March 31 subject to harsher conditions than other States. "For the existing States you will be liberal next time," the court remarked.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal mentioned Kerala's suit before the Supreme Court on Tuesday and apprised the court that Centre is not releasing any money to the tune of 19000 crore.

The top court remarked to the Centre that they can be slightly liberal, and give a one-time package as a special case

The court suggested the Centre and Kerala to try and work out.

The court said that it will hear the matter tomorrow.

Earlier the Supreme Court had directed the Kerala gov-

ernment to hold a meeting with Centre and state officials to resolve the financial issues arising between them.

Earlier in its affidavit, the Kerala Government said that the Central Government accounts for approximately 60 per cent of the total debt or outstanding liabilities of India.

In an affidavit, the Kerala Government said that the Centre can't control the debt of state and the justification put forth by the Union Government to control the borrowings of the Kerala State are fallacious, exaggerated and unjustified.

Kerala's financial health and debt situation have attracted adverse observations from successive Finance Commissions (12th, 14th and 15th) as well as the CAG.

ANI

Pakistanis gear up for Ramadan amid high hopes for newly-elected government

Islamabad, Pakistan - As people in Pakistan geared up to embrace the blessings and joy of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, many citizens pinned high hopes on the newly-elected government to be able to overcome the ongoing economic challenges and bring peace, prosperity and stability to the country.

In Pakistan, the sacred month is marked by mass prayers, the decoration of streets and markets, traditional food, family and friends gatherings, and charity.

Murtaza Saleem, a banker in Pakistan's capital Islamabad, said

that though the auspicious month of Ramadan brings along immense happiness and festivities, many people facing financial difficulties cannot enjoy the month as others.

"Inflation has reached an all-time high in the country. Many people are not able to buy good food and other supplies during Ramadan as food items are being sold at even higher prices. Even the people with comparatively decent salaries are finding it hard to spend freely on foodstuff," he told Xinhua.

Expressing hope of an eco-



nomic turnaround in the coming months, Saleem said that as the country has recently held general elections and the new government has taken shape, a large number of people are optimistic about the good days ahead.

After being elected, Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has said that his government would leave no stone unturned in stabilising the national economy. "We have got the mandate to improve the economy and this is the top priority of our government ... an action plan will be prepared on an emergency basis to streamline

the overall economic situation of the country and improve economic indicators," the prime minister said.

Unveiling the Ramadan relief package recently, the government has announced a subsidy of 12.5bn rupees (about US\$44.8mn) to lower the rates of essential items for the poor, saying the scope of the relief package will be broadened further, according to the Prime Minister's Office.

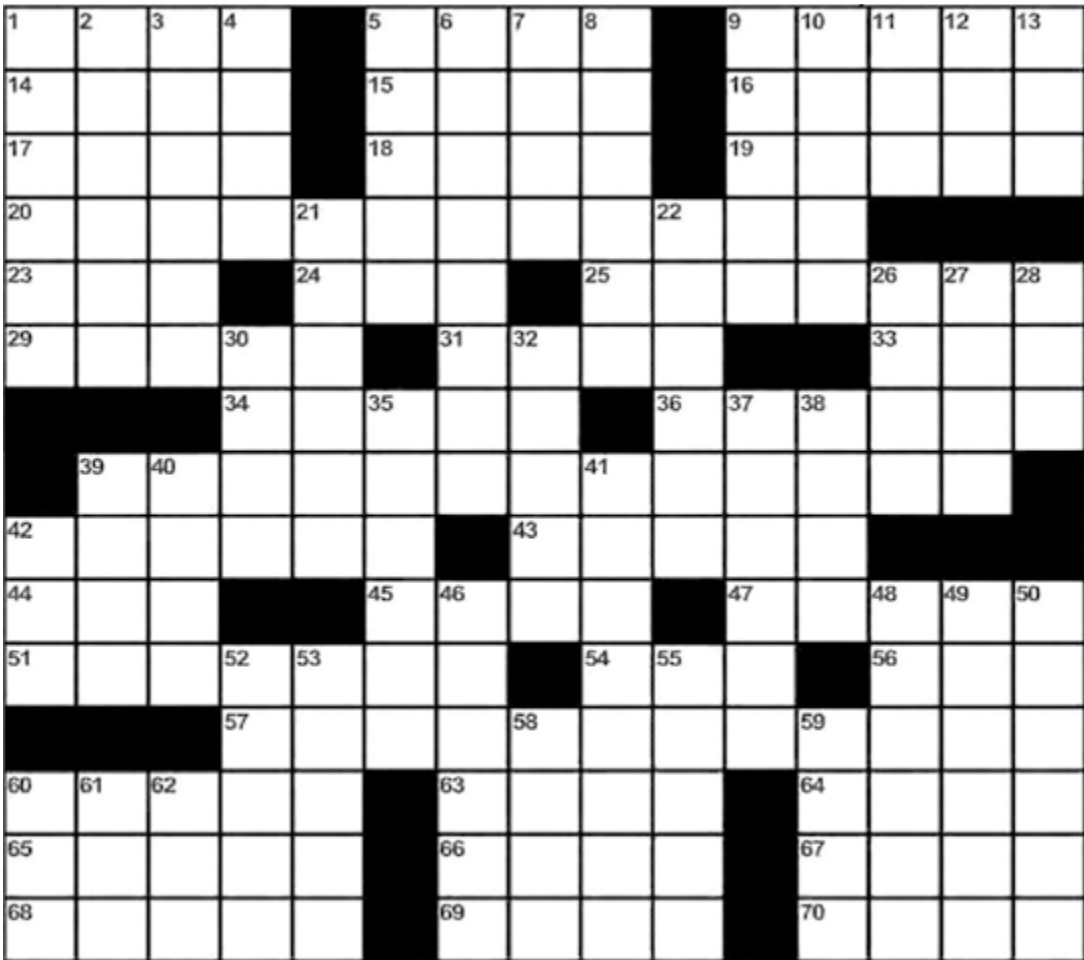
Under the package, more than 1,200 mobile points and 300 permanent package relief centres are being established, which

would provide food items at cheaper prices than the market during the whole month.

A few days ahead of Ramadan, a large number of people thronged markets to purchase daily commodities, with wholesale utility stores witnessing long queues of shoppers, especially women. Nida Munir, a mother of two children and resident of the eastern Rawalpindi district, was excited to welcome Ramadan as a time of generosity, togetherness, and blessings for Muslims around the world.

Xinhua

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Additional thought preceder
- 5) Gue sey's grazing areas
- 9) Having a sharp taste
- 14) Whopper teller
- 15) Unwanted aquarium organism
- 16)_apso(dogbreed)
- 17) Pinnacle
- 18) Cow's hurdle, in rhyme
- 19)ltmaybetuckedbyadoc-tor
- 20) Wisher's object
- 23) Mauna _ (Hawaii's highest point)
- 24) Get droopy
- 25) Potential ring accepter
- 29) Actress Potts
- 31) Islamic leader, one way
- 33) "Who_ Seen The Wind?"
- 34) Kansas, e.g.
- 36) Casual wear
- 39) Big Dipper, r one
- 42) Nurture
- 43) Scots trills
- 44) Re ned petroleum
- 45) Red cheese
- 47) Aromatic compound
- 51)Quali cation
- 54) Your nancial advisor

advises it

- 56)"How_you?"
- 57) Larger than large
- 60) Even a bit
- 63) Hit
- 64) An amount of medicine
- 65) Mischievous one
- 66) Ireland, a ectionately
- 67) Writing on the wall
- 68) Sound om the nest
- 69) Model cars, e.g.
- 70)A er everybody else

DOWN

- 1) Nome's home
- 2) Mossy growth
- 3) Certain islander
- 4) A vorite with milk
- 5) Female monster
- 6) Stretchout
- 7) Overly eager
- 8) Grandchild of Japanese immigrants
- 9) Site rsomerites
- 10) Grouch
- 11) Farm butter?
- 12) Skeptic or cynic llower
- 13) "Our_ Will Come"
- 21) Fly from A ica
- 22) Deposit on teeth
- 26) "Birthplace of Avia-tion"

- 27) Loft locale
- 28) Quick or slow attach-ment
- 30) Does not exist
- 32) Peach_
- 35) Like a body in New-ton's rst law
- 37) Water source
- 38) Vent sound
- 39) Rope fiber
- 40) City where "The Scream" was stolen
- 41) Inspirational celebrity
- 42) Dandy dresser
- 46) English county known r sheep
- 48) Port on Commence-ment Bay
- 49) Shakes an Etch A Sketch
- 50) Show mercy
- 52) Worth
- 53) Land in a lake, e.g.
- 55) Lassos
- 58) Hodgepodge or mish-mash
- 59) Worshipped carving
- 60) Gar nkel or Carney
- 61) AAA specialty
- 62) Birthday number

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

There are too many strangers in your life, right now! It's time for you to acknowledge those familiar faces and try to turn one or two of them into casual acquaintances. Smile and say hello the next time you stand next to that person in the elevator for the millionth time. They recognize you, you recognize them, so what's the holdup? It's easy to break the ice. It's all about living life to its fullest, and doing your best to connect with other human beings.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You are full of determination and capable of amazing things right now. No one can tell you differently, although that is not going to stop them from trying. Some pushy people are planting false doubts in your mind, but you must pay them no attention. You know exactly what to do and how to do it, so just listen to your intuition and then act, once you know what you're doing, of course. Just because you're confident doesn't mean you shouldn't also be prepared.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Relationship issues could come to the forefront today when it feels like someone isn't being completely honest with you. It is time to re-evaluate the situation and ask yourself if this person is adding anything valuable to your life or just chaos. Do they make you happy or confused? If they make you happy, then this tenseness if just a phase you are going through together. Don't give it another thought. But if they add only chaos and confuse you, it's time to end it.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

All signs are pointing to you taking a positive journey. Some sort of geographical change is coming your way and it will bring a smile to your face. If a business trip is already planned, you can expect it to go well, and the higher-ups will reward you for the role you played in it. And if your upcoming travel is devoted to pleasure, then you should prepare yourself for a few unexpected perks, perhaps a free upgrade is in your future?



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You are probably going to have a lot of time to play with today, so what kind of game are you in the mood for? If you do something fun that's also physical, you are sure to have a fabulous time. Bonus points if you can partake in some sporting activity with friends you haven't seen in a while. Everyone is in a great mood to blow off some steam and get competitive in a friendly way. Few things will feel as rewarding today as whooping it up with your favorite people.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You are going to be impressing others left and right today, and these people could make some important things happen for you. You are about to be invited into the inner circle, so get ready to show off some skills you haven't used in a while. But don't be nervous about your debut! These people want to get to know you better, and they already like what they see. So you should feel relaxed and confident. Your genuine charm is going to shine through.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Big news is coming your way today, but try not to overreact when you hear it. Other people are going to be watching you for clues about how they should react, and if you amp up the hysteria, they're sure to follow suit. Stay cool, calm, and collected no matter what the news is. Carry on as you normally would and roll with the punches that come along. It might be hard to hide what you really feel, so if you have to talk about your reaction, at least try to play it down.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your tense relationship with an authority figure is becoming a lot more amicable, so take advantage of this opening and build something. Ask them to a social event or at least book some one-on-one time with them. You two need to find some time alone in order to clearly communicate what you want to ask of each other and what you can give each other. Rely on your good communication skills to ease any potentially rough spots that may appear in the near future.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You've been going full steam ahead for way too long, so it's probably no surprise to you that today you're going to be feeling extra tired. But the good news is you can take a break very soon, if not today. Whatever you had planned should either be cut back, rescheduled, or canceled altogether. You're not going to be able to completely relax until you have no commitments or appointments weighing on your mind. You have to get bored before you can get reenergized.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You might not feel like coming out of the introspective phase you've been going through lately, but you should try to. There are quite a few people who are interested in you. Maybe their interest is romantic, maybe it's professional -- but you'll never find out unless you make yourself more available. Start returning those voicemails and messages. Find out what's cooking for next weekend. When word hits the streets that you're back in action, you'll be highly sought after.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Little changes in your life will create larger and more inspiring changes down the road, so don't assume that you always have to make major revisions in order to make a major difference. Once the ball gets rolling, you can ride it to some amazing adventures. You just need patience. Start small today. Instead of leaping out of your rut, just nudge your way a little to the side. Sometimes reaching smaller goals is much more valuable than reaching the big ones.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You've been going full steam ahead for way too long, so it's probably no surprise to you that today you're going to be feeling extra tired. But the good news is you can take a break very soon, if not today. Whatever you had planned should either be cut back, rescheduled, or canceled altogether. You're not going to be able to completely relax until you have no commitments or appointments weighing on your mind. You have to get bored before you can get reenergized.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. By what name is Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus better known?

- A. Octavian
- B. Nero
- C. Caligula
- D. Decameron

02. Of the first underground rail-ways to open in Europe, which was the next to open after the Metropolitan Railway (now part of the London Underground), in 1863?

- A. Budapest Metro
- B. Paris Metro
- C. Glasgow Subway
- D. Berlin U-Bahn

03. What was the name of the evil wizard that appeared in the TV series "The Smurfs"?

- A. Gilgamesh
- B. Gargamel
- C. Gorgon
- D. Graham

Answers: 1.C 2.A 3.B

KIDS COLOURING



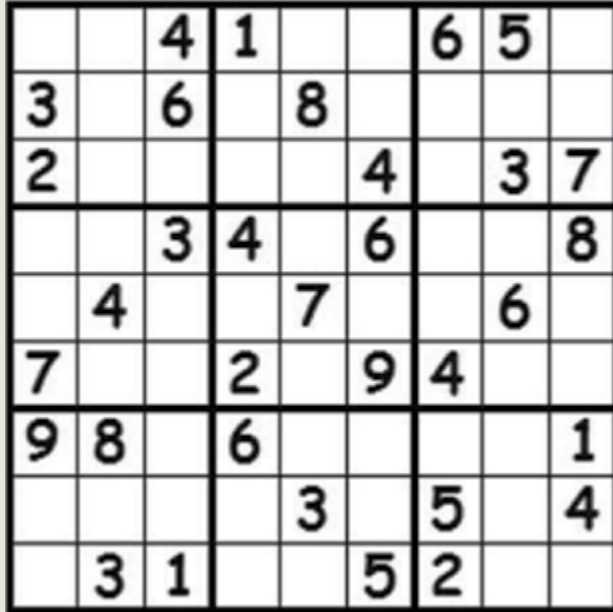
BOGGLER



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



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



COLE COMFORT

Palmer stars as Chelsea edge Newcastle United to ease some pressure on coach Pochettino

London, England - Chelsea eased some of the pressure on coach Mauricio Pochettino with a 3-2 home win over fellow mid-table side Newcastle United in the Premier League on Monday with Cole Palmer, the Blues' best player this season, creating one goal and scoring another.

Chelsea's Senegal striker Nicolas Jackson diverted a Palmer shot past goalkeeper Martin Dubravka in the sixth minute before the hosts allowed Newcastle to get an equaliser in the 43rd when Alexander Isak curled a shot beyond the diving Djordje Petrovic.

Chelsea, urged on by their



Chelsea's Cole Palmer scores against Newcastle United on Monday

We played a very good team, it was really tough. We made the victory, but we keep looking forward and moving forward - the most important is the three points

MAURICIO POCHETTINO

fans after some had turned on Pochettino and the club's U.S. owners in a 2-2 draw at Brentford nine days ago, restored their lead in the 57th when Palmer, the Blues' top scorer this season who is in contention to go to the Euros with England this year, scored from outside the box.

Substitute Mykhailo Mudryk made it 3-1 in the 76th minute when the Ukrainian danced through Newcastle's defence, rounded Dubravka and slotted

home. A fierce shot by Jacob Murphy gave the visitors hope in the 90th minute but Chelsea held on. The win left Chelsea in 11th position, a point and one place behind Newcastle but with a game in hand. Another three points would push the Blues up to eighth and within sight of qualifying for the Europa League or the Europa League Conference.

Both clubs have failed to live up to the hopes of their deep-pocketed owners with Newcastle manager Eddie Howe under just as fierce a spotlight as Pochettino at Chelsea.

It was the Argentine who could breath a sigh of relief on Monday as the home fans left Stamford Bridge singing the Bob Marley song chorus "Don't worry about a thing", a sign perhaps that most of them remain patient with Pochettino's attempts to build a team from his expensive but young squad.

"We played a very good team with amazing players, it was really tough," he told the BBC. "We made the victory, but we keep looking forward and moving forward - the most important is the three points. "We are building something different and we need to accept it. Today the fans were good, we need to keep moving and being strong."

Chelsea's only hope of silverware now lies in the FA Cup and they have a last-eight tie against second-tier Leicester City at home on Sunday.



Kyle Walker

City hungry to win fourth title in a row, says Walker

Manchester, England - A close three-horse title race is great for the Premier League and should motivate Manchester City to go after a fourth successive league title as they sit one point behind the top two teams, City defender Kyle Walker said.

City, who have won three league titles in a row since the 2020-21 season, shared a point at Anfield on Sunday that left them in third place on 63 points. Arsenal lead with 64 points and Liverpool are in second place on goal difference.

There are 10 games left to be played in the season. City host

It's great for the Premier League - to have three teams so close, at the top of their game with great players, it's a great spectacle

KYLE WALKER

title rivals Arsenal on March 31, the same day that Liverpool host Brighton & Hove Albion, which could further reshuffle the standings.

"There's so much football and key, important games to play," Walker told the club's website after the draw at Anfield.

"It's great for the Premier League - to have three teams so close, at the top of their game with great players, it's a great spectacle.

"We need to make sure we're there and fighting until the end. To win four (league titles in a row) which no one has ever done, that's what we are striving for - that's our hunger."

City host Newcastle United in the FA Cup quarterfinals on Saturday.

Premier League clubs to prioritise new financial system, says league

London, England - The Premier League clubs agreed to prioritise their efforts around a new financial system, the league said on Monday, after no agreement was reached during shareholders' meeting.

The British media reported that the league has failed to agree to a new financial settlement at the meeting on Monday as the planned vote was scrapped when it became clear it would not be supported by the required majority of 14 clubs. "At a Premier League Shareholders' meeting today clubs agreed to prioritise the swift development and implementation of a new League-wide financial system," the league said in a statement.

"Alongside this, Premier League clubs also re-confirmed their commitment to securing a sustainably funded financial agreement with the EFL, subject to the new financial system being formally approved by clubs."

The English top-tier clubs were warned by the British government to reach agreement for a new financial deal with Football League (EFL) teams or have one imposed on them by an independent Football Regulator. The league and clubs also reaffirmed their commitment to the wider game, the Premier League added, which includes £1.6 billion (\$2.05 billion) distributed to all levels of football across the current three-year cycle.

Jokic helps Nuggets rally past Raptors

Denver, US - Nikola Jokic had 35 points, 17 rebounds and 12 assists, Jamal Murray added 26 points and 12 assists, and the host Denver Nuggets rallied from a 22-point deficit to beat the short-handed Toronto Raptors 125-119 on Monday night.

Jokic has 21 triple-doubles this season and 126 in his career.

Aaron Gordon and Michael Porter Jr. scored 19 points each for Denver, which has won nine of 10.

Toronto was already without Scottie Barnes and Jakob Poeltl due to hand injuries and then ruled out Immanuel Quickley (hip flexor), Gary Trent Jr. (groin strain) and Chris Boucher (knee).

That gave little-used Javon Freeman-Liberty, Jontay Porter and Ochai Agbaji meaningful playing time for the Raptors on Monday.

Jontay Porter, Michael Porter Jr.'s younger brother, scored a



Nikola Jokic of Denver Nuggets drives to the basket despite the close attention of Toronto Raptors' Kelly Olynyk

career-high 14 points off the bench. RJ Barrett finished with 26 points, Kelly Olynyk added 24 points, Grady Dick scored 17 points, Bruce Brown had 13 points and 10 rebounds, and Jalen McDaniels contributed 12 points for Toronto.

Inter sweat on Arnautovic fitness; Griezmann boost for Atletico

Madrid, Spain - Inter Milan forward Marko Arnautovic faces another month on the sidelines because of injury while teammate Carlos Augusto will also miss Wednesday's match against Atletico Madrid in the Champions League round of 16.

Both players had to come off in Inter's 1-0 win at Bologna on Saturday after sustaining injuries. They underwent medical tests on Monday.

"The Austrian (Arnautovic) has suffered a muscle strain in the right thigh, while the Brazilian winger has a calf strain in the right leg," the club said in a statement. "The two Nerazzurri players will be reassessed in the following days."

Inter — last season's Champions League runner-up — visit Atletico with a 1-0 lead from the first leg, courtesy of a late Arnautovic strike.



Inter Milan's Marko Arnautovic with Carlos Augusto

Italian media reported that Arnautovic will likely be sidelined for a month but Carlos Augusto could return for this weekend's Serie A match against Napoli.

The 34-year-old Arnautovic, who returned to Inter on loan from Bologna in August, missed two months earlier this season with a hamstring injury.

Inter have won all 13 of their matches this year in Serie A, the Italian Super Cup and the Champions League. Simone Inzaghi's men lead Serie A by 16 points.

Atletico will be boosted by key player Antoine Griezmann's likely return from injury. Griezmann sprained his ankle at the San Siro in the first leg.

The French forward missed four games since, of which Atletico have won only once, but has returned to training and Spanish media say he is set to feature in the second leg.



Ulsan Hyundai FC players celebrate Seol Young-woo's goal against Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors

Seol strike takes Ulsan past Jeonbuk

Ulsan, South Korea - Ulsan Hyundai FC booked their place in the semifinals of the AFC Champions League for the third time in four editions after they edged domestic rivals Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors 1-0 in the second leg of their quarterfinal at Ulsan Munsu Football Stadium on Tuesday.

After the two sides played out a 1-1 draw in the first leg in Jeonju

Seol Young-woo's volley in the dying seconds of the first half proved to be the difference as Korean champions Ulsan progressed to the final four

last week, a Seol Young-woo volley in the dying seconds of the first half proved to be the difference this time round as Korean champions Ulsan progressed to the final four where they will face either Shandong Taishan of China or Japan's Yokohama F Marinos.

Ulsan had the majority of the possession in the early stages and went close with a Lee Myung-jae free-kick in the 13th minute, but it was the visitors who created the best chances in the opening half hour.

Lee Dong-jun carried the ball forward on the right wing in a quick break for Jeonbuk in the 14th minute and crossed it in for Tiago Orobó to direct it towards goal - the Brazilian's deft touch, however, was matched by a brilliant reflex save from Ulsan goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-woo.

His opposite number Kim Jeong-hoon was made to work four minutes later when he denied Ulsan striker Joo Min-kyu who emerged unmarked to head a Lee Myung-jae corner on target.

Dan Petrescu's Jeonbuk then went close again in the 28th minute as Moon Seon-min latched onto a ball over the defence from Maeng Seong-ung and went one-on-one with goalkeeper Jo, who once again saved the home side with a crucial stop.

Those misses would come back to bite Jeonbuk as two-time AFC Champions League winners Ulsan took the lead in first-half stoppage time when right-back Seol's foray forward ended with the 25-year-old brilliantly volleying home a cross from Gustav Ludwigson to make it 1-0.

Jeonbuk came out for the second half desperate to find an equaliser and Ulsan custodian Jo had to dive low to deny Orobó's first-time effort from the edge of the box seven minutes into the restart.



Al Ain players celebrate after their victory against Al Nassr in the AFC Champions League quarterfinals on Monday

AL AIN MAKE SEMIS AS AL NASSR PAY PENALTY

Dramatic end to thrilling clash as UAE side edge Ronaldo and Co

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Al Ain booked their place in the AFC Champions League semifinals after beating Al Nassr 3-1 on penalties at Al Awwal Park on Monday, after the two teams played out a 4-4 aggregate draw over 90 minutes in Al Ain and 120 minutes in Riyadh.

Having scored the goal which gave the Emirati side a 1-0 advantage in the first leg, Soufiane Rahimi added two more goals in the first half, but Al Nassr bounced back in the second half, before a late Cristiano Ronaldo penalty sent the game into the shootout.

It was end-to-end action from the get-go as the hosts chased the game and the away side at-

tempted to find an early goal to cement their lead. Defender Mohammed Al Fatil saw his header from Alex Telles' free-kick delivery saved by Al Ain goalkeeper Khaled Eisa inside six minutes, while at the other end, Raghib Najjar produced a fine save to deny Matias Palacios from close range.

The first goal of the night came in the 28th minute when Paraguayan playmaker Kaku sent a fine-through pass for Rahimi, who broke the offside trap and ran through on goal from the left before slotting through the legs of Najjar for the opener.

Ronaldo came within a whisker of equalising for Al Nassr when he got on the end of

a Marcelo Brozovic pass from the left, drilling a powerful strike towards the near post which required an exceptional low save from Eisa to keep it away.

In the final minute of the first 45, Rahimi added his eighth goal of the tournament, moving joint-top on the scoring charts. The Moroccan winger collected Palacios' pass on the edge of the area, after the ball was intercepted inside Al Nassr's half, then found the bottom corner, for his third goal across the two legs, extending Al Ain's aggregate lead to three goals.

Late into six minutes of added time, Al Nassr revived their hopes thanks to Abdulrahman Ghareeb who was well posi-

tioned inside the box to finish off a move that saw Sadio Mane drag Eisa out of his goal before feeding the ball to his fellow winger to make it 2-1.

Luis Castro's men picked up exactly where they left off after the restart, finding the back of the net within the first five minutes of the second half. Mane fed Otavio down the right and the Portuguese midfielder powered in a shot from an extremely tight angle which struck the legs of Eisa and went into the net to restore parity on the night.

Everyone at Al Awwal Park thought Al Nassr had completed a comeback at the hour mark when Eisa spilled his save of Ali Lajami's shot into the path of

Ronaldo who had the empty net at his mercy from all of three yards out, but somehow sent the ball wide.

The aggregate score was levelled with 16 minutes to go and it was former Manchester United left-back Alex Telles who curled in a free-kick from the right that went past everyone and tricked the Emirati goalkeeper, making its way to the back of the net to make it 3-2 to the hosts and take the game to extra time.

Al Nassr were reduced to 10 men in the early minutes of extra time Ayman Yahya was found guilty of violent conduct against Bandar Al Ahbabi, with the initial yellow card upgraded to red following a VAR review.

CLASSIFIEDS

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Novak Djokovic

'My level was really bad'

Indian Wells, US - Novak Djokovic waited five years to return to Indian Wells but the Serb's campaign in the California desert came to a close much quicker than anyone expected after 20-year-old Luca Nardi pulled off a stunning 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 upset on Monday.

The world number one had not competed at the tournament since 2019 due to U.S. travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and saw his hopes of winning a record sixth title dashed by the 123rd ranked lucky loser.

"He really didn't have anything to lose, so he played great. Deserved to win," Djokovic told reporters.

"I was more surprised with my level. My level was really, really bad. These two things come together. He's having a great day, I'm having a really bad day."

'MIRACLE' AT INDIAN WELLS

Lucky loser Nardi stuns Djokovic; Monfils rally to beat former champion Norrie

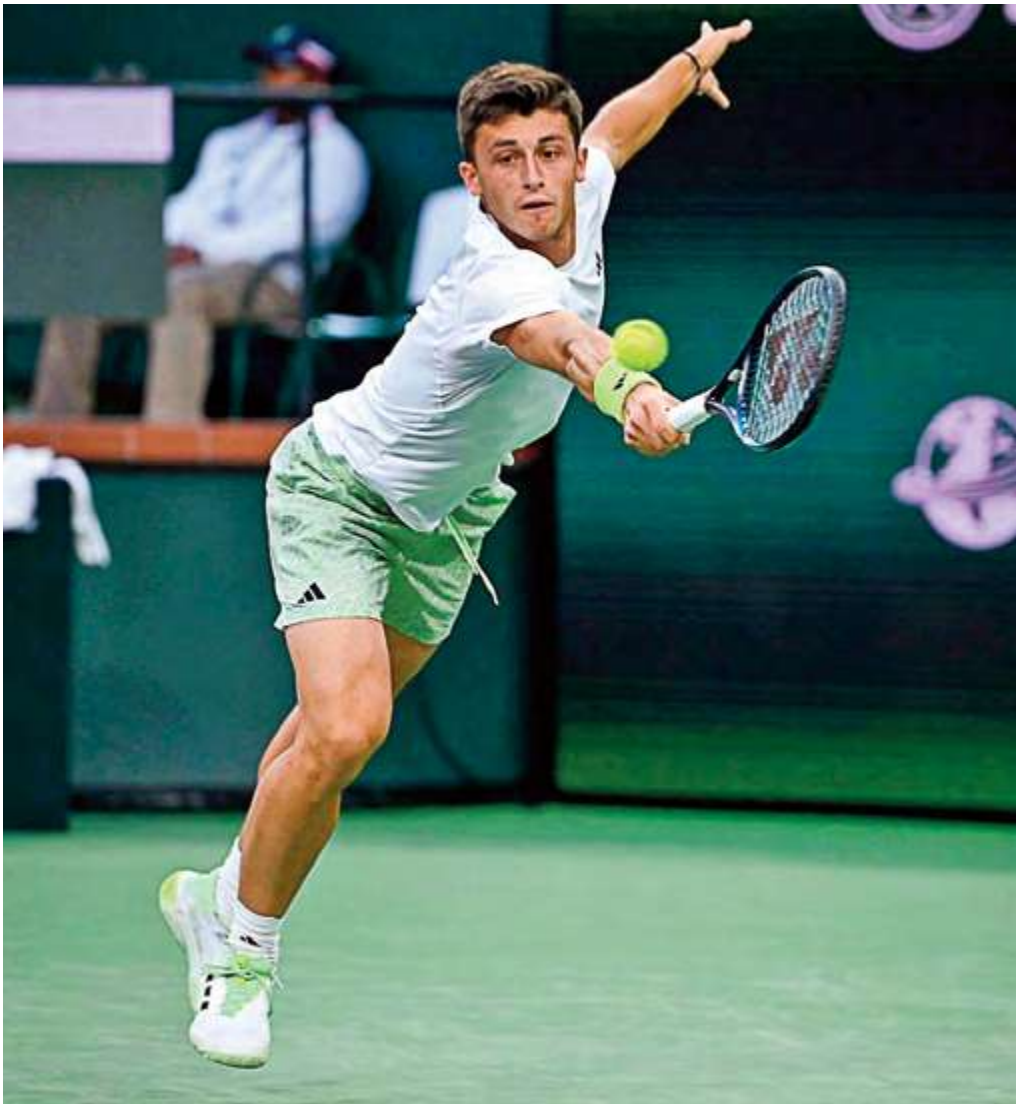
Indian Wells, US - World number one Novak Djokovic was stunned 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 by lucky loser Luca Nardi in the third round of Indian Wells on Monday, a victory which the 20-year-old Italian described as a "miracle".

Nardi, who grew up idolising Djokovic and is ranked 123rd in the world, played the match of his life to defeat the Serbian,

"I'm a 20-year-old guy, 100 in the world and I beat Novak. Crazy. Just crazy."

Nardi came out flying under the lights on centre court, drawing Djokovic to the net with a short ball and then rifling a forehand past him for an early break and a 3-2 lead.

Djokovic was well short of his best and a service return from the 24-times Grand Slam cham-



Luca Nardi hits a return to Novak Djokovic during their third-round match at Indian Wells on Monday

Nardi will next face American Tommy Paul.

Earlier, Gael Monfils produced a stunning display of shot-making and showmanship to rally from a set and 3-0 down to beat former champion Cameron Norrie 6-7(5) 7-6(5) 6-3 to reach the last 16.

The 37-year-old Frenchman electrified the crowd with his creativity to set up fourth round meeting with ninth seed Casper Ruud.

Norrie, who won the tournament in 2021, piled up 60 unforced errors and could not solve the unpredictable Monfils puzzle in the three hour and 15 minute affair.

"I feel better and better, to be honest," said Monfils, who was sidelined with a wrist injury for part of last season.

"I've been playing weeks after weeks, which has been a long time I am able to do that. I feel good. So far the body is holding, so I'm happy with that."

American Taylor Fritz, the tournament's 2022 champion, breezed past Sebastian Baez 6-2 6-2 and Grigor Dimitrov's career renaissance got another big lift with a 6-3 6-3 win over France's Adrian Mannarino.

I feel better and better. I've been playing weeks after weeks, which has been a long time I am able to do that. I feel good. So far the body is holding, so I'm happy with that

Gael Monfils

dropping his racket and putting his hands over his face after firing an ace out wide to seal the win.

The defeat ends Djokovic's bid for a record sixth title at the tournament in the California desert.

"This is a miracle," said Nardi, who lost to David Goffin in qualifiers on Tuesday and only got into the main draw after Tomas Etcheverry withdrew due to injury.

pion found the net to hand Nardi the first set.

The top seed broke Nardi twice in the second set and held at love to level the contest but his opponent, who had a poster of Djokovic on his wall growing up, refused to back down.

Nardi hit a backhand that Djokovic could not put back in play for a crucial break and a 4-2 advantage in the decider before pulling off the upset.

Massa takes action against F1, FIA in London High Court

London, England - Former Ferrari driver Felipe Massa has taken action in the London High Court against Formula One, former commercial supremo Bernie Ecclestone and the governing FIA seeking recognition as 2008 world champion and financial compensation.

A court document provided by Massa's representatives said the best estimate of his alleged financial losses from missing out on the title by a single point was 64 million pounds (\$82 million) plus interest.

That sum represented the difference in salary for the remainder of his career and money from sponsorship and commercial opportunities, as well as a 1.7 million pound bonus he would have received from Ferrari. "I always said that I would fight until the end. As FIA and

FOM decided to do nothing, we will seek the correction of this historical injustice through the courts," Massa said. "The matter is now with the lawyers and they are fully authorized to do whatever is necessary so that justice is done for the sport."

Formula One Management (FOM) and the Paris-based International Automobile Federation would not comment on the move when contacted by Reuters. The 2008 title went to Britain's Lewis Hamilton, who was then racing for McLaren and is now a seven-times champion with Mercedes. Massa, 42, wants the FIA to acknowledge it breached its own regulations by not immediately investigating a Singapore GP crash that blew up into one of the sport's biggest scandals.



Felipe Massa



Aryna Sabalenka

Sabalenka marches on; Osaka loses to Mertens

Indian Wells, US - Aryna Sabalenka's powerful serve and groundstrokes proved too much for Emma Raducanu as the Australian Open champion reached the fourth round at Indian Wells with a 6-3, 7-5 victory while Naomi Osaka fell to Elise Mertens in straight sets.

Britain's former Grand Slam champion Raducanu is trying to find her form after multiple surgeries last year and played well but was unable to seize her opportunities, converting just one of 10 break points in her first meeting with Sabalenka.

The Belarusian, bedevilled by double faults in the past, issued one on her first match point but kept her composure and blasted a cross-court forehand winner on her fourth opportunity to seal the win under sunny skies in the

California desert.

"I felt like the last game was kind of a key moment," said Sabalenka, who is seeded second.

"If I would lose that game this would give her emotionally much more belief and confidence, and going to the tiebreak you never know. It's like 50/50. I didn't want that to happen," she said.

"That's why I felt a little bit of relief after I closed this match in two sets." Sabalenka, who won her second straight Australian Open in January, will face either Ukrainian Elina Svitolina or American Emma Navarro in the Round of 16.

Mertens held her nerve to send Osaka packing with a gutsy 7-5 6-4 victory over the Japanese player, who returned to the WTA Tour in January after a maternity break.

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OSCARS 2024

THE 96TH ACADEMY AWARDS, PRESENTED BY THE ACADEMY OF MOTION PICTURE ARTS AND SCIENCES AT THE DOLBY THEATRE IN HOLLYWOOD, LOS ANGELES, ON SUNDAY HONOURED FILMS RELEASED IN 2023 ACROSS 23 DIFFERENT CATEGORIES, MANY OF WHICH MIRRORED THE CURRENT BANE OF GLOBAL UNREST



(From left) Robert Downey Jr, Da'Vine Joy Randolph, Emma Stone and Cillian Murphy

Reflection of reality

Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* - an unsettling look at the dawn of the atomic era - dominated the 96th Academy Awards on Sunday, winning seven prizes, including best picture and best director.

The film, which took on an added resonance at a time of international conflicts, also scored Oscars for Cillian Murphy's haunted lead performance as J Robert Oppenheimer and Robert Downey Jr's supporting turn as a vengeful bureaucrat.

Blocks away from the Oscars red carpet, several hundred protesters called for a ceasefire to the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, while winners used their speeches to decry the humanitarian crisis in that region, along with the one sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The pro-Palestinian demonstrations in the heart of Hollywood snarled traffic around the Dolby Theatre, the venue where the show is held, resulting in a late start for the ceremony as A-listers scrambled to make it to their seats.

The ceremony, which was televised in the United States by ABC, was produced by Raj Kapoor, Molly McNearney, and Katy Mullan, with Hamish Hamilton serving as director. Comedian Jimmy Kimmel hosted the show for the fourth time - he had done so previously at 95th edition in 2023, 90th edition in 2018, as well as the 89th edition in 2017.

For Nolan, the honours came after a tangled history with the Oscars. He had been nominated several times before, including for directing 2017's *Dunkirk*, as well as for his work on movies like 2001's *Memento* and 2010's *Inception*.

But the Academy snubbed his biggest hit, 2008's *The Dark Knight*, for best picture and director, an omission that provoked outrage and helped prompt the organisation to increase the number of films nominated for best of the year from five to 10. Finally given an Oscar of his own, Nolan, who has been a passionate advocate for the big screen



experience, paid tribute to the art form he loves.

"Movies are just a little bit over 100 years old," he said, adding, "We don't know where this incredible journey is going from here, but to know that you think that I'm a meaningful part of it means the world to me."

Seven years after winning for *La La Land*, Emma Stone earned her second best actress Oscar for *Poor Things*. Stone played a child-like woman who embarks on a journey of self-discovery in the steampunk fantasy.

"The best part about making movies is all of us together," she said. "I am so deeply honoured to share this with every cast member, with every crew member, with every single person who poured their love and their care and their brilliance into the making of this film."

Da'Vine Joy Randolph earned best supporting actress for her role as a grieving cafeteria manager grappling with the death of her son

in *The Holdovers*. Tearing up, Randolph thanked voters for 'seeing me', adding, "For so long, I've always wanted to be different, and now, I realise, I just need to be myself."

Like Randolph, Cord Jefferson and Justine Triet won on their first nominations. Jefferson was lauded for adapted screenplay for *American Fiction*, a satire that explores race and art, while Triet won for original screenplay for her courtroom drama *Anatomy of a Fall*.

Other winners used their time on stage to make political statements.

Jonathan Glazer, director of the best international feature winner *The Zone of Interest*, a drama set in Auschwitz, spoke out about the ongoing violence in the Middle East. He cited the message of his searing look at the Holocaust in condemning Israel's military response, as well as the terrorist attacks launched by Hamas last fall.

"Our film shows where dehumanisation leads at its worst," Glazer said. "It shaped all of our past

and present. Right now, we stand here as men who refute their Jewishness and the Holocaust being hijacked by an occupation which has led to conflict for so many innocent people. Whether the victims of October 7 in Israel or the ongoing attack on Gaza, all the victims of this dehumanisation - how do we resist?"

20 Days in Mariupol, a harrowing report from a besieged Ukrainian city, won best documentary. Its director, Mstyslav Chernov, drew attention to the human costs of Russia's invasion - a message that comes as US support for Ukraine is wavering. "Russians are killing tens of thousands of my fellow Ukrainians," he said. "I wish I had never made this film. I wish to be able to exchange this to Russia (for) never attacking Ukraine, never occupying our cities."

Billie Eilish made history, becoming the youngest two-time Oscar recipient at age 22 after winning best song for her Barbie ballad '*What*

Was I Made For? She co-wrote the song with her brother, Finneas O'Connell - the pair previously won for penning the theme to 2021's '*No Time to Die*'.

On the other end of the age divide, Hayao Miyazaki became the oldest winner of best animated feature for *The Boy and the Heron*. The 83-year-old Japanese animation maestro previously won for 2002's *Spirited Away*.

The Oscars, which have been suffering from declining ratings, also face questions about their relevance. Last year, an audience of 18.75 million tuned in to watch *Everything Everywhere All at Once* sweep the major prizes. That was a bump from the 16.62 million viewers from the 2022 show, but it's a far cry from the record 57.25 million viewers who witnessed *Titanic* capture best picture in 1998.

The hope is that with popular films such as *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie* nominated for top honours, ratings will improve.

WINNERS

- Best Picture
Oppenheimer
- Best Director
Christopher Nolan — Oppenheimer
- Actor in a Leading Role
Cillian Murphy — Oppenheimer
- Actress in a Leading Role
Emma Stone — Poor Things
- Actor in a Supporting Role
Robert Downey Jr — Oppenheimer
- Actress in a Supporting Role
Da'Vine Joy Randolph — The Holdovers
- Adapted Screenplay
American Fiction
- Original Screenplay
Anatomy of a Fall
- Cinematography
Hoyte van Hoytema — Oppenheimer
- Original Song -
What Was I Made For? — Barbie
- Costume Design
Holly Waddington — Poor Things
- Sound
Tarn Willers and Johnnie Burn — The Zone of Interest
- Original Score
Ludwig Goransson — Oppenheimer
- Live Action Short Film
The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar
- Animated Short Film
War Is Over!
- Documentary Feature Film
20 Days in Mariupol
- Documentary Short Film
The Last Repair Shop
- International Feature Film
The Zone of Interest (UK)
- Animated Feature Film
The Boy and the Heron
- Film Editing
Jennifer Lame — Oppenheimer
- Visual Effects
Godzilla Minus One



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French officials have called on artists to submit designs for six new windows to be installed in the south aisle of Notre-Dame Cathedral.

When a fire raged through Notre-Dame Cathedral in 2019, it didn't destroy the structure's stained-glass windows, which were created by the architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc in 1859. Last month, however, French President Emmanuel Macron proposed replacing them with contemporary designs.

Spirited backlash followed, with critics arguing that the change would disrupt the 'architectural unit of the famous landmark. Now, more than 125,000 people have signed a petition against the new windows' installation.

"What sense does it make to restore the cathedral to its last known historical state (before April 15, 2019), that of Viollet-le-Duc, only to deprive the building of an essential element that Viollet-le-Duc wanted?" the petition reads, per a translation by Artnet's Jo Lawson-Tancred. "Who gave the head of state a mandate to alter a cathedral that does not belong to him, but to everyone?"

Laurent Ulrich, the archbishop of Paris, first suggested the idea, reports the Guardian's Kim Willsher. When announcing the plan, Macron invited contemporary French artists to submit designs for six new windows, which would ultimately be installed in the cathedral's south aisle. The current windows would likely be housed in a new museum dedicated to the cathedral and the restoration process.



RESTORATION

Design debate

Plans to install contemporary stained-glass windows in Notre-Dame Cathedral spark severe backlash

Just how faithful the restorations should be to historic designs has been a matter of debate ever since the fire. In the aftermath of the disaster,

Macron suggested replacing Notre-Dame's iconic spire (also designed by Viollet-le-Duc) with a modern version to symbolize the cathedral's endurance. That

idea was swiftly shut down. Workers eventually replaced the spire with a design that was identical to the original.

"Emmanuel Macron wants to



put the mark of the 21st century on Notre-Dame. ... A little modesty might be best," reads the petition, per Google Translate. "We will not be cruel enough to remind you that this mark already exists: fire."

If the French government moves forward with the plan, it won't be the first time the cathedral's windows have been updated. Only a small portion of the current glass dates back to the 12th century, while the majority was added much later in the 17th, 19th and 20th centuries, as Olivier Ribadeau Dumas, the rector-archbishop of Notre-Dame, tells the French newspaper La Croix, per El País' Sara González.

Didier Rykner, the founder and editor of La Tribune de l'Art, has a suggestion of his own: He thinks that the updated stained-glass windows should be added to Notre-Dame's north tower, which currently has regular windows rather than stained glass.

Replacing the north tower windows would "enrich the cathedral" and have "magnificent symbolic" value, writes Rykner in the magazine. "It was in the north tower, when they fought the fire that threatened to bring down the bells and, in turn, the cathedral, that the firefighters risked their lives to save the monument. Paying tribute to the firemen, bringing new stained-glass windows to Notre-Dame without vandalizing Viollet-le-Duc's work, giving future visitors more to see—this common-sense solution could suit everyone."

The reconstructed cathedral is scheduled to reopen on December 8, 2024.

(Courtesy: smithsonianmag.com)

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