

Self-sufficiency in food production surges ahead

S&P upgrades Oman outlook to ‘positive’

Food production increases 6.4%, valued at RO1.261bn

Our Correspondent Muscat

H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, addressed crucial areas related to the sultanate’s food and water security at the sixth regular session of the tenth term of Majlis A’Shura on Thursday.

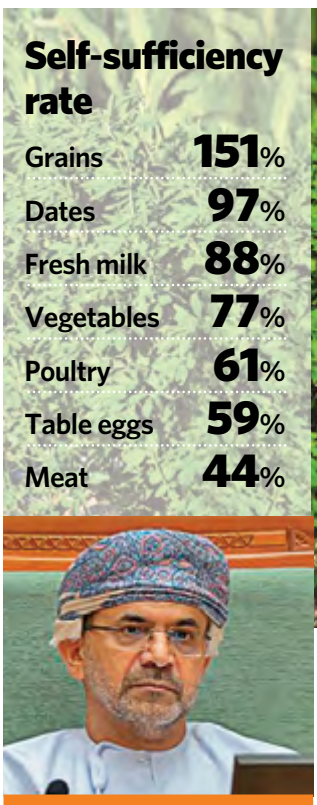
The session aimed to evaluate the performance of the food and water security sector and its contribution to the sultanate’s GDP.

H E Habsi emphasised the ministry’s dedication to improving performance indicators across the agricultural, fisheries and water resources sectors through strategic planning and adoption of modern technologies.

This, he said, was in line with the objectives outlined in the tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) and in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

He highlighted significant achievements, including a notable increase in the total volume of food production from various sources. Production surged from 3.9mn tonnes in 2019 to 4.7mn tonnes in 2022, representing an average growth rate of 6.4%.

The total value of food production rose from RO958mn to



The ministry is dedicated to improving performance indicators through strategic planning and adoption of modern technologies

H E DR SAUD AL HABSI

RO1.261bn in this period, a growth of 9.6%.

H E Habsi underscored Oman’s remarkable progress towards achieving self-sufficiency, citing impressive figures such as a self-sufficiency rate of 151% in



grains, 97% in dates and 88% in fresh milk. Other significant self-sufficiency rates include 77% in vegetables, 61% in poultry, 59% in table eggs, 44% in meat and 26% in fruits.

The minister also highlighted

the substantial contribution of the agricultural and fisheries sectors to the GDP, reaching 2.1% in 2022. This contribution to the non-oil GDP surged to 3.5%, driven by remarkable growth rates of 11.4% and 12.4% in agricultural

and fisheries activities for the years 2021 and 2022, respectively.

He reiterated the pivotal role of the private sector as a key partner in comprehensive development, emphasising the ministry’s efforts to empower it through active participation in various investment projects in agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture.

While committed to sustainable growth and economic diversification, the ministry remains steadfast in its pursuit of advancing national food security and driving economic prosperity in the sultanate, he added.

H E Habsi also shared details of positive developments in the country’s food security efforts, including significant growth in fish production, fish exports and livestock production. Initiatives like the wheat price stability programme and collaboration between public and private entities on projects such as establishing agricultural cities are contributing to further enhancing food security in the sultanate.

Additionally, the ministry actively monitors imported and exported food products and prioritises water resource management through dam maintenance, upkeep of traditional water channels and well rehabilitation. Rainfall enhancement efforts, including the establishment of 13 rain seeding stations across the sultanate’s mountain ranges, have contributed a 15-18% increase in rainfall in recent years.

Our Correspondent Muscat

S&P Global Ratings has revised its outlook on Oman to ‘positive’ from ‘stable’. At the same time, the rating agency affirmed its ‘BB+/B’ long- and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings on the sultanate.

The positive outlook reflects S&P’s confidence that the Omani government’s balance sheet will strengthen and the economic reform programme could lead to faster-than-expected deleveraging in many state-owned enterprises, without dampening economic growth outcomes. This would strengthen the economy’s resilience to adverse oil price shocks.

In a statement released on Friday, S&P said it could raise Oman’s sovereign ratings over the next 18 months if the sultanate’s fiscal position strengthens further – for instance, from a continued reduction in government debt – and the state-owned enterprise sector continues deleveraging. A stronger economic growth trajectory could also contribute to an upgrade, it added.

The outlook revision reflects ongoing improvements in Oman’s government balance sheet. We estimate the government’s budget surplus over 2023 at 2.6% of GDP. Net government debt declined to an estimated 2.4% of GDP in 2023

compared to 7.7% in 2022. With forecast budget surpluses averaging 1.2% of GDP over 2024-2027, the government is well placed to continue reducing external debt or accumulate assets.’

The rating agency expects the Omani government to broadly continue with its fiscal reform programme. However, because oil prices are still high, S&P said the government has the flexibility to moderate some measures to support economic activity and reduce the effects of past austerity on the population.

For example, electricity subsidies will be cut more gradually, over ten years, instead of the initially planned five. To limit the impact of food price inflation, the authorities expanded the list of VAT exemptions to 488 items from 93. They also reduced work visa fees for expatriates to encourage private sector activity and lowered or cancelled several municipality and services fees, while also streamlining these,’ the agency added.

As per S&P estimates, total state-owned enterprises (SOEs) debt decreased to US\$33.9bn (31% of GDP) at year-end 2023 from US\$34.3bn (31% of GDP) at year-end 2022, after peaking at US\$35.9bn (41% of GDP) at year-end 2021. The rating agency expects Omani SOEs debt to remain broadly flat in nominal terms, but reforms could lead to deleveraging in 2024 and 2025.

See also Page 04

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US rejects UN report accusing Israel of ‘genocide’ in Gaza as ‘unfounded’

Oman Air marks turnaround with 30% increase in revenues

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman Air has embarked on a notable transformation journey, witnessing a substantial improvement in its financial health and operational efficiency at the end of 2023. The national carrier reported a 36% decrease in net losses and 30% increase in revenues compared to the previ-

ous year.

H E Said Hamood al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Chairman of Board of Directors of Oman Air, shared these figures at the third media briefing on Saturday dedicated to discussing the airline’s ongoing transformation initiatives.

According to H E Mawali, the positive results stem from the

successful execution of the second phase of the airline’s transformation programme initiated in March 2023. This phase included strategic adjustments to flight destinations for the 2023 winter season, leading to the optimisation of flight frequencies on certain routes due to underperformance, without necessitating the suspension of any routes or the sale of aircraft.

The minister highlighted rigorous cost-control measures, including cessation of all non-essential expenditures, such as sponsorships and unnecessary service contracts. A significant step in this direction was the termination of a sponsorship agreement with Chelsea FC.

Oman Air concluded fiscal year 2023 without resorting to additional bank loans or govern-

ment guarantees. The airline’s load factor improved 9%, successfully flying over 6mn passengers across its network and operating more than 45,000 scheduled flights.

In a move to enhance affordability and accessibility for Omani citizens, H E Mawali announced a fixed price of RO64 (return) and RO35 (one-way) for economy class tickets on the Muscat

- Salalah - Muscat route, and RO54 during the khareef season (return).

Looking ahead to 2024, Oman Air is set to implement a series of fundamental changes to further enhance its financial stability and operational efficiency. These include a strategic overhaul of the route network and flight schedules commencing in April 2024.

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Ibri revives age-old Ramadan tradition

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In the quaint old quarter of Harat al Shanadid in the heart of Ibri, Dhahirah, residents and visitors alike came together in a display of communal harmony for a group iftar, breathing life into an age-old Omani custom that defined the holy month of Ramadan.

The gathering, set against the backdrop of Ibri's historic market and fort, underscores the deep-rooted cultural significance of such events in Omani society.

Shihab al Shandoudi, a resident of Harat al Shanadid, shared his insights with *Muscat Daily*, reflecting on this cherished tradition. "Communal iftars in Harat al Shanadid, an archaeological wonder of Ibri, were a longstanding custom. These epitomised the



Communal iftars in Harat al Shanadid were a longstanding custom. These epitomised the unity and mutual respect that bound Omani villages together

SHIHAB AL SHANDOUDI

unity and mutual respect that bound Omani villages together, offering a platform for the community to share a meal, exchange



greetings and celebrate the spirit of Ramadan," Shandoudi said.

He further highlighted the architectural harmony of the area,

where homes and historical landmarks, such as the traditional mud entrances known as 'sabahat', stand as a testament to

Oman's rich heritage.

The event saw participation of over 150 individuals, including local families, expatriates and visitors.

Fostering community ties, the event helped instill a sense of unity and cohesion among attendees, while also emphasising the

importance of preserving Oman's ancient customs and architecture.

Looking ahead, Shandoudi expressed a steadfast commitment to upholding this tradition in future Ramadan seasons. "We remain dedicated to organising such iftar gatherings, and we encourage all Omanis to partake in similar communal meals at heritage sites. This initiative is not only about celebrating our culture but also about promoting Omani tourism and raising awareness of our rich heritage in our society."

Through events like the communal iftar in Harat Al Shanadid, the people of Oman continue to celebrate their culture and traditions, reinforcing the values of unity and heritage that are especially poignant during the holy month of Ramadan, he added.



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Al Rahma distributes half a million iftar meals in ten days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Rahma Association has embarked on a commendable journey this Ramadan, distributing over half a million iftar meals among the needy within the first ten days of the holy month.

An association official detailed the scale of its efforts aimed at supporting underprivileged communities during this time of reflection and generosity.

In addition to providing iftar meals, the association has significantly broadened its charitable outreach. "In a collaboration with local charities, we have supplied 1,500 livestock heads for sacrifice to families across Muscat and various other wilayats in the sultanate," the official informed.

Al Rahma Association's charitable initiatives extend beyond the month of Ramadan. Plans are



underway to distribute Eid clothing and gifts, further enriching the lives of those in need during the festive season. The association is devoted to maintaining its philanthropic activities throughout the year, reinforcing its commitment to social welfare.

To facilitate the distribution of

aid, the association has emphasised the importance of registration. Needy families are encouraged to sign up through the Zakat Committee or affiliated charitable teams in their localities, ensuring that support is directed to those most in need.

For individuals and entities looking to contribute to this noble cause, the association has multiple donation channels. Contributions can be made online, through the Al Rahma account or platforms like Talabat, while cash donations are accepted at the association's headquarters in Al Khoudh, Seeb.

"We welcome donations of any amount. Every contribution plays a critical role in our mission to assist those in need," the official added.

To donate, call 93957770 or transfer funds to Bank Muscat A/C No 030101158080017.

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Our Correspondent

Muscat

The project will feature a diverse array of facilities, including restaurants, retail outlets, children's play areas, both open and enclosed fitness spaces, beach activities and restrooms. The project plan includes pedestrian

MASOUD AL HASHMI

Hashmi described the project as a continuation of South Bati-

According to Sheikh Ahmed bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Musannah, the Musannah waterfront project is a cornerstone initiative for the governorate. "It is set to bolster the local economy and attract tourists, leveraging its prime location. Currently, the governorate is experiencing a transformative phase, with a surge in diverse projects across all wilayats, capitalising on optimal use of available resources and geographical diversity."

Our Correspondent
Buraimi

The second tender involves drilling nine wells at various sites across the governorate - five in the wilayat of Buraimi, two in Mahdha, one in the niyabat of Hafeet and one in Sunaina. All wells will be of 120m depth.

Bids submission ends on April 9.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Khalid Salim al Zuhaïmi, Commissioner-General of Oman's pavilion, said the recognition acknowledges the sultanate's commitment and unique approach in implementing the expo's main theme 'Green Desert, Better Environment' focused on sustain-



The pavilion - named Oman Garden - was the result of a partnership between the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

Oman Garden recreated some of the sultanate's diverse envi-

The prize distribution ceremony included a number of awards covering various categories and segments. The award for the best self-constructed pavilion went to the UAE, the best large pavilion award was won by South Korea and the best mid-sized pavilion award went to Senegal.



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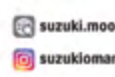
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'Higher hydrocarbon output will support Oman's growth'

S&P forecasts real GDP will expand by about 2% per year on average over 2024-27 period

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman, a voluntary adherent to the OPEC+ agreement, is expected to experience low economic growth of about 1.4% this year due to OPEC+ related oil production cuts, according S&P Global Ratings.

'We expect hydrocarbon sector output to remain broadly flat in 2024, with the decline in oil production offset by an increase in condensate and gas production. A probable increase in hydrocarbon production should stimulate growth in 2025 and 2026,' S&P said in a report released on Friday, which revised Oman's outlook from 'stable' to 'positive'.

Oman's total oil production declined by 4.3% during January-February this year, attributable to the sultanate's commitment to the OPEC+ agreement. Crude oil production dropped by 6.8% to 46.025mn



barrels in the first two months of this year from 49.391mn barrels in 2023, while condensate production rose by 5.2% to 14.047mn barrels, according to the latest NCSI data.

Earlier this month, Oman and other OPEC+ member nations agreed to extend their voluntary cuts to oil production through the second quarter of 2024, as part of the OPEC+ group's strategy to stabilise the oil market and prices by reducing supply. Oman extended its additional voluntary cut of 42,000 barrels per day of crude oil until the end of June 2024.

S&P forecasts that Oman's non-hydrocarbon economy will expand by about 2% in 2024. It also noted that credit conditions in Oman remain accommodative, and credit to the private sector should help support non-hydrocarbon sector growth in 2024, as it did in 2023.

The rating agency expects Oman's real GDP growth to average about 2% a year over the 2024-2027 period.

'In the past, public sector spending and investment were significant drivers of growth. Continued deleveraging by the government and in the govern-

ment-related entities (GRE) sector could dampen growth, in the absence of economic reform measures to improve private-sector performance,' S&P said.

Even with reform efforts over the past three years, Oman's economy remains dependent on the oil sector, which accounts for about 30% of GDP, 60% of goods exports, and 75% of government revenues, S&P noted.

The rating agency pointed out that entities under the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and Energy Development Oman (EDO) will undertake most large investment projects in Oman in the coming years. It expects the related funding to be deployed over several years without undermining the entities' credit standings.

According to S&P, although GDP per capita is comparatively high at \$21,200 in 2024, Oman's real GDP per capita growth has consistently underperformed that of similarly wealthy countries.

S&P further said that favourable oil sector dynamics, coupled with higher non-hydrocarbon output driven by domestic demand and the performance of key sectors such as tourism, transportation (mainly shipping), and utilities, should sustain Oman's real economic growth over the 2023-2026 period.



Mubashir secures funding from ITHCA Group for expansion

Muscat - ITHCA Group has announced an investment in Mubashir, a leading digital out-of-home (DOOH) advertising network in Oman. The investment will fuel Mubashir's expansion and technological plans as well as its mission to provide its clients with the most effective and comprehensive solutions both in the country and regionally.

Mubashir's platform reaches millions of people across Oman through its network of strategically located digital screens. The company offers a variety of advertising formats that leverages smart data and analytics to deliver targeted campaigns that generate measurable results for advertisers.

Beyond advertising, the network focuses on reaching different consumer segments with infotainment communication that engages customers.

"Advertising technology is changing rapidly, innovative AdTech companies in this space are leveraging data analytics, automation and AI to meet consumers where they are in the physical world, offering real-time targeting capabilities to advertisers," said Ameer al-Alawi, Group Director Investments at ITHCA Group.

"We are thrilled about the investment in Mubashir and the technology platform they have built to date. We lend them our support in their innovative journey to be a global player in this space," he added.

Raif al-Harthy, Chief Growth Officer of Mubashir, said, "We are thrilled to partner with ITHCA, a renowned investor with a deep understanding of the region's growth potential. This investment is a strong validation of our vision and will enable us to accelerate our expansion, invest in new technologies, and further enhance our offerings to clients."



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(TAIO 2024/006): BCP Business Continuity Plan

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Project Title: Development of Business Continuity Plan for Takaful Oman Insurance Company

1. Overview:

Takaful Oman Insurance Company, hereinafter referred to as "the Company," is seeking proposals from qualified third-party vendors to develop a comprehensive Business Continuity Plan (BCP). The BCP should cover all aspects including policies, procedures, and conduct the first test run.

2. Background:

The Company recognizes the critical importance of having a robust Business Continuity Plan in place to ensure the continuation of its operations in the event of unforeseen disruptions. As an insurance provider, it is imperative for the Company to have contingency measures in place to safeguard the interests of its clients and stakeholders.

3. Objectives:

The primary objectives of this project are as follows:

a. Develop a comprehensive Business Continuity Plan tailored to the specific needs and operations of the Company.

b. Establish clear policies, procedures, and protocols to mitigate risks and ensure business continuity during disruptive events.

c. Conduct the first test run of the Business Continuity Plan to assess its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

d. Provide training and guidance to key personnel on the implementation and execution of the BCP.

4. Scope of Work:

The scope of work for this project includes, but is not limited to, the following:

a. Conducting a thorough risk assessment to identify potential threats, specific scenarios and vulnerabilities to the Company's operations including potential cybersecurity threats.

b. Collaborating with key stakeholders to gather input and insights into critical business functions and dependencies.

c. Developing comprehensive policies, procedures, and protocols for business continuity and disaster recovery including protocols for mitigating cyber risks during disruptive events, such as cyberattacks or data breaches.

d. Ensure that the business continuity policies, procedures and protocols align with relevant regulatory requirements and standards applicable to insurance providers.

e. Ensure that the business continuity policies, procedures address remote work scenarios. This could involve ensuring the availability of remote access to systems and data, as well as communication protocols for remote teams.

f. Creating a communication plan to ensure timely and effective communication with internal and external stakeholders during emergencies.

g. Designing a testing and exercise plan to validate the effectiveness of the BCP and identify areas for improvement.

h. Providing documentation and training materials to facilitate the implementation and maintenance of the BCP.

i. Conducting the first test run of the BCP in coordination with the Company's personnel and stakeholders.

5. Deliverables:

The following deliverables are expected as part of this project:

a. Risk assessment report outlining identified threats, vulnerabilities, and risk mitigation strategies.

b. Business Impact Analysis report identifying critical business functions, dependencies, and prioritized recovery efforts.

c. Business Continuity Plan document detailing policies, procedures, and protocols for various scenarios, including the call tree.

d. Communication plan outlining channels, procedures, and protocols for internal and external communication during emergencies, including the call tree.

e. Testing and exercise plan outlining the methodology, scenarios, and objectives for the first test run of the BCP.

f. Training materials and documentation to support the implementation and maintenance of the BCP.

g. Test run report summarizing the outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations for improvement.

6. Proposal Requirements:

Interested vendors are requested to submit proposals addressing the following:

a. Company profile, including relevant experience in developing Business Continuity Plans for insurance companies or similar organizations.

b. Proposed approach and methodology for developing the BCP, including key activities, milestones, and timelines.

c. Qualifications and experience of the proposed project team, including resumes of key personnel.

d. Detailed cost breakdown, including fees for services, expenses, and any additional costs.

e. References from previous clients for similar projects).

7. Proposal Submission:

Proposals must be submitted electronically to procurement@takafuloman.om no later than 7 April 2024. Late submissions will not be considered.

8. Evaluation Criteria:

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

a. Experience and expertise in developing Business Continuity Plans (30%)

b. Qualifications and experience of the project team (25%)

c. Cost-effectiveness of the proposal (30%)

d. References and client feedback (15%)

9. Confidentiality:

All proposal/communication / information provided in response to this RFP is considered confidential and should not be disclosed to third parties without the Company's consent.

The Company reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals received in response to this RFP, to negotiate with any qualified vendor, or to cancel this RFP at any time without incurring any liability.



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Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date
PRE/23/060	Development Works at Al Wadi Park	16/04/2024	07/05/2024
PRE/23/190 Re-Call	Design & Construction of the Upgradation of Existing Al Marid at Al Uthaiba	16/04/2024	07/05/2024
PRE/23/244 Re-Call	Supply, replacement of Computers – Unit Rate	07/04/2024	14/04/2024
PRE/24/022	Satisfaction reports & Studies for Muscat Municipality	16/04/2024	07/05/2024
PRE/24/026 Re-Call	Supply of solution materials for MM lab	16/04/2024	07/05/2024
PRE/24/033 Re-Call	Activation Works for Traffic Control Center - phase 2	07/04/2024	14/04/2024
PRE/24/042	Beautification of Muttairah Wall	16/04/2024	07/05/2024
PRE/24/067	Paving Works near Al-Muhaymin Mosque at Al Seeb	16/04/2024	07/05/2024
PRE/24/068	Consultancy Services for Landscaping Development at Muscat Governorate	16/04/2024	07/05/2024
PRE/24/069	Protection Works of Wadi Bousher 37 (Hai AlSalam)	16/04/2024	07/05/2024
PRE/24/075	Upgrade and centralize Avaya call manager for DGs at MM	16/04/2024	07/05/2024
PRE/24/082	Design and Construction of Balance Internal Roads in Al Amerat	16/04/2024	07/05/2024
PRE/24/083	Offices Renovation in Building "A" at Muscat Municipality	16/04/2024	07/05/2024

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

• For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .

• For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).

Global real estate market hits \$365tn

Istanbul, Turkey – A Turkish real estate firm, Trem Global, announced that the global real estate and infrastructure market hit a record high of \$365.5tn in 2023.

The real estate sector, which has defied global economic fluctuations, continues to maintain its strength this year, according to the company's statement Thursday, based on Precedence Research results.

The increase in the market was achieved in an environment full of geopolitical tensions in the residential segment.

Murat Meric, deputy general manager of sales at Trem Global, said Turkey is an attractive destination for foreign and domestic investors with its dynamic economy and rich real estate options.

"Turkey is a bridge in international real estate markets and its



The real estate sector is expected to witness significant transformation towards a smart and diverse future

competitive advantages are increasing," he added.

Meric stated that between 2022 and 2023, investors from 52 nationalities pioneered their investments in Turkey, and "in 2024, the demand started to

come mainly from western countries and this situation will provide diversity in Turkey's real estate markets and will pave the way for both Turkish economy and innovative approaches in the real estate sector."

The firm expected that 2024 will see significant transforma-

tion for the real estate sector toward a smart, sustainable and diverse future.

While tourism and infrastructure investments in the Middle East support the growth of the real estate market, trends such as the rise of co-living spaces, increasing digitalisation in real estate transactions and sustainable development come to the fore, according to the statement.

The company said factors such as Saudi Arabia's mega cities, Dubai's rising trend and Istanbul's topping the list of the world's most visited cities last year are increasing the daily interest of international investors in those countries.

International investment trends continue to play an important role in real estate markets, it noted.

While factors such as wars and natural disasters cause pop-

ulation loss, issues such as economic opportunities, education and quality of life increase the demand for migration to developed and developing countries, it said.

The US, Germany, Canada, Australia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates are among the countries expected to receive the most immigration in 2024, it asserted.

It stressed that while this trend increases the demand for real estate in immigrant countries, it leads to a decrease in demand in immigrant countries.

Turkey continues to attract the attention of international investors in 2024 with its strategic geographical location, increasing tourism statistics, diversity in the real estate ecosystem and climate advantages, the company added.

Anadolu Agency

Inflation data ‘along the lines of what we want to see’: Fed chief



Jennifer Schonberger

US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said that a new inflation report released Friday is "along the lines of what we want to see," sticking to an assertion that inflation is still on a "bumpy path" to the central bank's goal of 2%.

"It's not as low as most of the good readings we got in the second half of last year, but it's definitely more along the lines of what we want to see," Powell said during a question-and-answer session at a San Francisco Federal Reserve conference.

Powell was referring to new data released earlier Friday showing a slight cooling in the Personal Consumption Expenditures index, which is the Fed's preferred inflation gauge.

The year-over-year change in the so-called "core" Personal Consumption Expenditures index — which excludes volatile food and energy prices — clocked in at 2.8% for the month of February. That was in line with economist expectations and down from 2.9% in January.

Core prices rose 0.3% from January to February, which was also in line with expectations and down from 0.5% in the previous month.

The new numbers did show less of a cooling than last year, and Powell reiterated that the central bank needs to see more good inflation readings like those in the second half of 2023.

The Fed didn't overreact to good inflation data last year, he said, and won't overreact to two months of higher inflation data this year.

"The question then is, are those just bumps or are they something more than bumps? Is progress on inflation going to

We expect inflation to come down on a sometimes bumpy path to 2%. But if that doesn't happen, then obviously our rate policy will be different

JEROME POWELL

slow for more than two months?"

The Fed chair maintained the Fed's base case is still the expectation that inflation will drop.

"We expect inflation to come down on a sometimes bumpy path to 2%," said Powell. "But if that doesn't happen, then obviously our rate policy will be different."

Powell says the Fed doesn't want to cut too soon and risk inflation popping back up, while at the same time the central bank does not want to wait too long and cause unnecessary harm to the economy.

Still Powell noted, the job market and the economy are strong right now and "that means that we don't need to be in a hurry to cut," he said.

"It means we can wait and, and become more confident that in fact, inflation is coming down to 2% on a sustainable basis."

Markets, which are closed for Good Friday, priced in a better than 60% chance Thursday the Fed will begin cutting rates in June.

The Fed decided last Wednesday to hold interest rates steady and maintain projections for three rate cuts this year. Officials also raised their outlook for inflation and economic growth.

Source: Yahoo Finance

اس ام ان باور القاضة ش.م.ع.ع. SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG				
Audited Consolidated Financial StatementsFor the Year Ended 31 December 2023				
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT				
Dear Shareholders On behalf of the Board of Directors ("the Board") of SMN Power Holding SAOG ("the Company"), I have the pleasure to present the Board of Directors' Report for the year ended 31 December 2023. The Company ended the financial year of 2023 with solid results on every aspect of the business's operation. This was crowned with remarkable outcomes of receiving the letters of awards for SMN Barka Power Company SAOC ("SMN Barka") for a new Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) for an 8.75-Year term and for a new PPA for Al Rusail Power Company SAOC ("Al Rusail") for a 5.75-Year term. While both Companies received the letter indicating the award in principle, SMN Barka and Al Rusail are finalizing the final PPAs with Nama Power and Water Procurement Company ("PWP") to make the award effective. This remarkable achievement marks a historical record in the Power Generation Sector in Oman. Corporate Governance The Company has complied with the Code of Corporate Governance and applicable circulars issued from time to time by the Capital Market Authority (CMA). Operations Providing a safe working environment is a key priority and the Board is pleased to share that during the year 2023, the Health & Safety ("H&S") performance was excellent with no Lost Time Accident ("LTA") in line with previous years. In 2023, a total of 5,428 LTA-free days were recorded at the Al Rusail, while SMN Barka achieved 5,904 days without any LTAs. The commercial performance of both plants, SMN Barka and Al Rusail, is measured by their reliability, which is the ability to deliver the declared capacity as per the contract. In 2023, the reliability at SMN Barka Plant was 98.64% (97.66% in 2022) for power and 97.75 % (97.41% in 2022) for water. The reliability at Al Rusail Power Plant was 99.49% (99.4% in 2022) for the same period. The Company produced an aggregate net power volume of 3,970.10 GWh (3,602.12 GWh in 2022) and a total volume of 33,956,488 m³ of potable water was delivered (34,440,050 m³ in 2022). All necessary maintenance activities of key equipment were performed in accordance with Original Equipment Manufacturers' recommendations, while applying the best industry standards and practices for health & safety and maintenance, during the period. Financial Results Total Revenues in 2023 amounted to RO 87.50 million (RO 70.26 in 2022), representing an increase of RO 17.23 million compared to 2022. Total Revenues include fixed revenues (Fixed Capacity Fees) and variable revenues (Fuel Charge and Variable Operating & Maintenance Charge). The Company generated a consolidated net loss of RO 26.37 million during 2023 compared to a net profit of RO 11.09 million for 2022. The reduction in net profit of RO 37.46 million is mainly due to the Impairment on non-financial assets of RO 43.87 million. The Company would like to highlight that a non-financial assets impairment of OMR 43.08 million has been recorded in the financial statements for the year ended 31st December 2023 which is pertaining to SMN Barka only in accordance with the requirements of the International Financial Reporting Standards. The Company would also like to highlight that the Consolidated Profit before Tax, excluding the assets impairment impact, for the year ended 31 December 2023 amounted to OMR 16.34 million compared to the Consolidated Profit before tax RO 13.2 million for 2022, representing an increase of RO 3.15 million from 2022. Furthermore, the assets impairment is an accounting adjustment with no cash impact. The assets impairment represents the difference between the book value of the Plant and its projected discounted cash flow until the end of its useful life. The increase in Profit Before Tax of RO 3.15 million highlighted above is mainly due to the following variances compared to the same period in 2022: - Income from sale of surplus Fuel oil at Al Rusail, - Higher capacity charge for both SMN Barka and Al Rusail for the year, - Lower operating costs for the year, - Deferred operating income from insurance claims, - Reduction in finance costs following the scheduled repayments of the term loan facilities for the SMN Barka. The reduction in Non-Current Assets is driven by the Impairment of non-financial assets and depreciation of the plant (fixed assets). The decrease in Current Assets is due to the dividend payment, higher repayment to senior debt lenders and sale of Inventory (fuel oil). Future Outlook The Company will continue its focus on HSE and maintain excellent reliability at both plants. In terms of the latest developments on the initiatives to prepare for the future of Al Rusail and SMN Barka power plants: - As disclosed to the market, PWP launched the tenders for procurement of Power and Water in April 2023, namely, the Power 2024 tender and Barka Water 2024 tender. Al Rusail have participated in the Power 2024 tender while SMN Barka have participated in both the Power 2024 tender and Barka Water 2024 tender. - It gives the board of directors great pleasure to inform the shareholders that as announced recently to the market, SMN Barka has received a letter of award for a new PPA with PWP for a 8.75-year term and Al Rusail has received a letter of award for a new PPA for a 5.75-year term. With these new PPAs in place, Al Rusail Power plant operations will continue until December 2029 and Barka Power Plant operations will continue until December 2032. While both Companies received the letter indicating the award in principle, SMN Barka and Al Rusail are finalizing the final PPAs with PWP to make the award effective. - After the expiry of Ancillary Service Agreement with PWP to sell a capacity of 184.972 MW from October 2022 to December 2023, Al Rusail signed a short extension of the existing Ancillary Service Agreement with PWP to cover the period from 04th February 2024 to 31st March 2024 which was disclosed to the market. - For Al Rusail, Gas Turbine 1 to Gas Turbine 6, which were erected between 1984 to 1986, have retired from operation on 30th September 2021 as disclosed to the market. Al Rusail plans to sell these units and the process of sale and decommissioning for these units has been initiated. Al Rusail has obtained bids from prospective buyers for purchase of Gas Turbine 1 to Gas Turbine 6. Due to Power 2024 tender preparation and other related activities, the tender for the sale of the equipment and dismantling/ decommissioning process pertaining to GT1 to GT6 units is expected to be finalized during the course of 2024. - As disclosed to the market, Al Rusail signed a sale and purchase agreement for selling the excess diesel in the plant. Approximately 12 million liters of diesel were sold and the sale of fuel oil and ownership transfer to the bidder have been fully completed in 2023. - SMN Barka is participating in the spot market, however, such participation has no material impact on the Company's revenue until the expiry of the PWWA framework in March 2024. - As previously disclosed and in line with the financing arrangements disclosed during the IPO, the cash sweep mechanism (accelerated repayment of the debt) started on 30th September 2018 for SMN Barka. As a consequence, the excess cash generated by the Company is paid to the lenders and will not flow to the Shareholders until the loans are fully settled or until the time the loans can be restructured. However, as SMN Barka have now received the letter of award from PWP, which has been accepted, for a new PPA for an 8.75-year term, SMN Barka is currently working on refinancing its commercial loan. Should the Company successfully refinance its commercial loan, taken into consideration any relevant requirements under the existing facilities agreement, this should enable the Company to make future dividend distributions subject to the availability of cash, fulfillment of loan covenants in addition to satisfying the relevant requirements of the Commercial Companies Law and other applicable legislation. - Al Rusail has declared and paid dividend in 2022 to its shareholders. Additionally, the Board of Directors of Al Rusail, at its meeting held on 29th February 2024, approved a proposal for the distribution of cash dividend in March 2024 to its Shareholders, out of retained earnings as reflected in Al Rusail audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31st December 2023, provided that the aggregate amount of the dividends shall not exceed RO 6 per share. The dividend distribution is subject to Shareholders' approval at the Annual General Meeting to be held on 19th March 2024, fulfillment of the relevant requirements of the Commercial Companies Law, and any other applicable legislation. As Chairman of the Board, I would like to thank our Shareholders, not only for their confidence, but also for their continued support and for the expertise they bring into the Company. The Board of Directors expresses its gratitude to PWP, APSR, the Capital Market Authority ("CMA") and other governmental and non-governmental bodies for their guidance and support. Finally, on behalf of the Board, I would like to extend our deep appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and His Government for their continued support and encouragement to the private sector by creating an environment allowing us to contribute effectively to the growth of the Sultanate of Oman. Dr. Abdullah Al Yahya'ey Chairman of the Board				
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2023(Audited)				
	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	2023 RO '000	2022 RO '000	2023 RO '000	2022 RO '000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	-	-	93,954	130,523
Right-of-use-assets	-	-	305	297
Investment in subsidiaries	27,405	27,405	-	-
Goodwill	-	-	-	14,952
Deferred tax asset	-	-	318	36
	27,405	27,405	94,577	145,808
Current assets				
Inventories	-	-	1,924	2,984
Trade and other receivables	19	17	8,256	8,094
Due from related parties	24	33	20	273
Fixed term cash deposits	-	-	1,700	250
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	60	-
Cash and cash equivalent	46	3,060	7,910	15,411
	89	3,110	19,870	27,012
	27,494	30,515	114,447	172,820
TOTAL ASSETS				
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	19,964	19,964	19,964	19,964
Statutory reserve	6,655	6,655	6,691	6,691
Retained earnings	797	3,790	23,575	53,126
Hedging reserve	-	-	51	(178)
Net equity	27,416	30,409	50,463	79,603
Non-current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	21,341	45,858
Lease liabilities	-	-	427	365
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	-	15
Provision for end of service benefits	-	-	58	54
Provision for site restoration	-	-	1,726	2,965
Deferred operating income	-	-	-	808
Deferred tax liability	-	-	10,449	15,417
	-	-	34,001	65,482
Current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	17,376	14,705
Lease liabilities	-	-	26	52
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	-	195
Provision for site restoration	-	-	1,682	-
Trade and other payables	77	106	7,396	8,648
Due to related parties	-	-	567	1,208
Current tax payable	1	-	2,936	2,927
	78	106	29,983	27,735
Total liabilities	78	106	63,984	93,217
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	27,494	30,515	114,447	172,820
Net assets per share (RO)	0.137	0.152	0.253	0.400
STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023(Audited)				
	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	2023 RO '000	2022 RO '000	2023 RO '000	2022 RO '000
Revenue	-	-	87,497	70,263
Direct costs	-	-	(69,417)	(52,834)
GROSS PROFIT	-	-	18,080	17,429
General and administrative expenses	(255)	(279)	(1,432)	(1,074)
Reversal of expected credit losses	-	-	4	25
Impairment loss on non-financial assets	-	-	(43,874)	-
(LOSS) / PROFIT FROM OPERATIONS	(255)	(279)	(27,222)	16,380
Finance charges, net	-	-	(3,118)	(3,777)
Dividend income	-	3,000	-	-
Other income	258	279	2,807	582
(LOSS) / PROFIT BEFORE TAX	3	3,000	(27,533)	13,185
Income tax income / (expense)	(1)	-	1,159	(2,095)
(LOSS) / PROFIT FOR THE YEAR	2	3,000	(26,374)	11,090
<i>Other comprehensive income</i>				
<i>Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods:</i>				
Fair value of cash flow hedge adjustments	-	-	441	1,494
Reclassification to profit or loss - gross	-	-	(172)	1,309
Deferred tax liability-current year charge	-	-	(40)	(421)
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	-	229	2,382
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE (LOSS) / INCOME FOR THE YEAR	2	3,000	(26,145)	13,472
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	-	0.015	(0.132)	0.056
SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG, P.O.Box 121, Postal Code 134, Sultanate of Oman, Qurum Building, Building No.1022, 1st Floor, Office No.15, Way No. 1013, Al Qurum – Muscat. Tel. +968 2493 5800, Fax: 2493 5830, E-mail: info@smnpower.com, www.smnpower.com				

SBA raffle winner from Izki bags Toyota Crown

Toyota Oman recently announced one more winner of the Biggest Excitement campaign's raffle draw. The winner of the Toyota Crown is Said Moshin Fael Mohammed al Jahhafi from Izki.

To bring customers closer to owning their favourite Toyota vehicle, the Biggest Excitement campaign offers customers buying a new Toyota, a chance to enter the Raffle draw and win one from 5 Toyota Crown cars and avail exclusive benefits including service from 3 Years /30,000km up to 10 Years /100,000km (whichever is earlier), insurance 1 year and free registration, a press release said.

Apart from that, customers can also avail attractive instalments. The campaign is valid from March 2024 3 till May 1 (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. EMI calculated are for base models with 20% down payment for 10 years. Loan approval is based on the sole discretion of banks.

Said, sharing his thoughts, said, "Thank you Toyota Oman for this wonderful Ramadan gift. I am very happy to have won this. I cannot describe in words how excited and happy I am. Indeed,



being a customer of Toyota definitely has its benefits."

Speaking about why he choose a Toyota, he said, "I have always been a customer of Toyota due to its exceptional characteristics of quality, durability and reliability. Something that really enhances the joy of owning a vehicle that stays with you longer. This time, I purchased a Toyota Hilux S/C 2.7 GL-S Premium and although I was wishing to win a

Toyota Crown, I never really imagined it would happen. As we all know no one can predict luck. I am definitely going to enjoy driving experiences in the Crown, that is for sure."

Building on the legacy of one of the world's best-loved vehicles since the 1950s the Crown has been built to provide an intuitive driving experience that will exceed expectations and establish a new benchmark. When the

first generation was launched, the Crown came to symbolise 'innovation' and 'pushing the limit' within Toyota. Since then, it has gained recognition in Japan as Toyota's premium sedan.

The Toyota Crown is built around the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA-K) platform. The new Crown comes exclusively with a choice of two environment friendly powertrains. The first hybrid electric powertrain consists of a front electric motor and Toyota's first-ever 2.4ltr inline four-cylinder turbo engine with All Wheel Drive, paired with direct shift six-speed automatic transmission with a combined power of 340 HP and 40.7 Kg.m. torque. The second hybrid electric powertrain consists of two electric motors and a 2.5ltr four-cylinder petrol engine, generating a total power of 222 HP. The hybrid-electric system, paired with an Electric Continuously Variable Transmission (e-CVT), achieves the lowest fuel efficiency, with a consumption rate of 21.6 km/l.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade. Parameters such as vehicle weight, could vary from the GSO conformity.



Bank Muscat gets HDFC Bank Partnership award

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has been honoured with a prestigious Long-Standing Partnership Award from HDFC Bank, India's leading private sector bank.

This recognition underscores the enduring collaboration and relationship spanning 19 years between the two institutions. Leveraging cutting-edge technology in partnership with HDFC Bank, Bank Muscat has emerged as the foremost remittance service provider in the sultanate, facilitating seamless fund transfers for the bank's Indian customers to India and many other countries through innovative digital solutions. The award was handed over to Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, general manager - Products, Bank Muscat, by

Raveesh K Bhatia, group head - Emerging Corporates Group and Healthcare Finance, HDFC Bank, a press release said.

On this occasion, Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, general manager - Products, Bank Muscat, said, "We are delighted to receive this honour from HDFC Bank, which affirms Bank Muscat's deep commitment to strengthen its long-standing partnership with prestigious international banks to further enhance the services provided for our valued customers. The remittance services the bank provides have been developed as a result of a comprehensive study of customers' needs and expectations, ensuring along the way to offer a seamless experience. I would like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation

for HDFC Bank for the deep-rooted relationship and cooperation throughout the years. We thank our customers for their continuous confidence in the services the bank offers and we assure them that we will continue the hard work to further develop one-of-a-kind experience."

Bank Muscat continues its commitment to innovation reflecting the latest technological trends in banking. The bank has upgraded its Speed Transfer services on Mobile Banking, Internet Banking Mobile Remittance App to further expand the services offered for customers, especially that it is one of the most cost-effective options of transferring money. With over 1.8 million users, the bank continues to upgrade its Mobile and Internet banking platforms.

MoE holds forum for values

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development Department of Citizenship, organised a virtual forum under the title 'Promoting Values of Citizenship and Identity in the School Community: Educational Practices and Modern Trends', within the framework of the ministry's direction towards strengthening the values of citizenship and identity in the school community and achieving the priorities of the Oman Vision 2040.

The forum included the presentation of three papers. The first paper was presented by Dr Moza al Saadi, senior citizenship specialist at the Department of Citizenship. The paper dealt with the topic of mechanisms for enhancing citizenship practices in the digital age. The second paper was presented by Ahmed al Rashidi, head of the Child Culture Department at the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, and was entitled 'The folk tale as an Educational Method to Enhance the Values of Citizenship'. The third paper dealt with the topic of Omani azimuth practices through classroom and extracurricular activities, presented by Moza al Saeedi, senior supervisor at South Al Batinah Educational Directorate-General.

The forum aims to enhance the values of citizenship and identity in the school community and address the challenges that young people face in preserving the values and customs associated with Omani society. It also aims to enrich the experiences of educators and educational bodies in schools.

OHB inaugurates new branch in Sur

Oman Housing Bank celebrated the opening of its new branch in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate in the Wilayat of Sur, under the patronage of H E Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, in the presence of members of the State and Shura Council representing the Wilayats of South Sharqiyah and the bank's executive management.

Arif bin Maqboul al Zaabi, general manager of business at Oman Housing Bank, provided a comprehensive overview to the governor regarding the new branch. He emphasised that the new branch replaces the old location to improve services for citizens' transactional requirements. This initiative is part of the bank's strategy to leverage the latest digital technologies in line with the banking sector, focusing on optimising system efficiency, incorporating modern technologies, and streamlining operations.

The general manager of OHB highlighted the bank's significant



impact since its establishment in 1977, enabling over 3,470 Omani families in South Sharqiyah Governorate with total financing exceeding RO96mn. The bank's services extend to five Wilayats in South Sharqiyah Governorate - Sur, Al Kamil Wal Wafi, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, and Masirah, benefiting nu-

merous eligible applicants for supported housing finance.

He also mentioned the recent launch of the Iskan Housing Programme by the bank, which aims to expedite subsidised housing finance requests for citizens on waiting lists through an effective partnership with various local banks. The programme

targets around 671 Omani families in the five Wilayats of South Sharqiyah Governorate who meet the criteria for subsidised housing loans. The bank aims to lead in housing and urban development, aligning with national development plans and driving development efforts in various governorates of the sultanate.

Sohar International registers remarkable growth among GCC banks

Sohar International has showcased remarkable growth among top banks in the GCC as it firmly positions itself as a pioneering institution with a strong roadmap and a vision for progress.

This has come to light in a new KPMG report, titled 'GCC Listed Banks' Results: Adaptation and Growth'. The report factored in countries comprising the GCC (Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait) and summarised the financial results and selected key performance indicators (KPIs) of the 52 leading GCC banks for the year-ended 31 December 2023. The data has been benchmarked against the prior year (year-ended 31 December 2022), a press release said.

Demonstrating unparalleled growth and robust financial performance throughout the fiscal year 2023, Sohar International achieved top rankings in Total Assets and Return on Equity



(ROE) among all GCC banks, solidifying its status at the forefront of excellence and innovation in the financial sector.

Sohar International led the charge with the highest year-on-year growth in total assets across the GCC, marking a staggering 61.9% increase. This remarkable achievement underscores the bank's strong financial health, strategic asset management, and commitment to expanding operations and market reach. Its asset growth reflects its operational excellence as well as strategic foresight.

Al Omaniya announces 13.25% dividend at AGM

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Al Omaniya Financial Services was held on March 2, presided by its chairman Khalid Said al Wahaibi.

Wahaibi stated that the shareholders have given their approval for the audited financial statements of the company as well as for the 13.25% dividend comprising of 8.25% cash dividend and 5% unsecured non-convertible redeemable bonus stock bonds

The board of directors appreciated the measures taken by the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority with a view to strengthening the financial sector in the sultanate.

Aftab Patel, CEO added that the company's loan book stands at RO140mn at the yearend of 2023. The total revenues of the company stood at RO17.327mn.



The pre-tax profit stands at RO3.755mn and the net profit is RO3.201mn. The Earnings per Share is RO0.010 and net worth of the company stands at RO70.908mn. The book value

of the share is RO0.217.

He further added that the company has a well-diversified portfolio of assets with the lowest NPA ratio of 2.65% in the industry (As per IFRS9). The

cumulative ECL provisions towards Instalment Finance receivable including special reserve for non-performing assets stands at RO18,349K which covers 493% of the non-performing assets

Patel added that the company has been at the forefront of issuing innovative financial instruments and that the company has pioneered the issue of Bonus Stock Convertible bonds as divi-

dends over several years. The company has been paying consistent dividend and has the unique distinction of paying dividend every single year since inception.

Alfa Romeo Tonale tops performance and luxury

MHD Automobiles, the premier distributor of luxury performance automotive brands in Oman, announced the launch of the all-new Alfa Romeo Tonale. This latest addition to the Alfa Romeo lineup sets a new benchmark in its class, offering unmatched power, advanced technology, and an exceptional ownership experience.

The Alfa Romeo Tonale is engineered to deliver exhilarating performance, featuring the most powerful engine in its class. With a 2.0 Turbo engine paired with a 9-speed automatic transmission, the Tonale delivers an impressive 268 horsepower, ensuring dynamic acceleration and an exhilarating driving experience. Its remarkable 0-100 km/h acceleration time of just 6.5 seconds demonstrates its unparalleled performance on Oman's roads, a press release said.

The Tonale is available in two distinctive trims: Ti and Veloce. The Ti version features sporty design elements both inside and out, including a satin chrome V front bezel, 20-inch dark finish diamond cut alloy wheels, gloss-black body kit, black painted mirror caps, and a sport leather steering wheel.



The Veloce builds on the Ti trim with additional features such as a dark Miron V front bezel, Veloce badging and body kit, gloss black window surrounds, and 20-inch dark finish diamond cut alloy wheels with red Brembo brake calipers. Inside, the Veloce offers fully electrical ventilated black leather seats and aluminium door sills.

Safety is paramount in the Tonale, with advanced features designed to provide peace of mind on every journey. Equipped with all-wheel-drive (AWD) capability, the Tonale offers enhanced traction and stability, ensuring confident handling in all driving conditions. Advanced safety features such as blind-spot monitoring, forward collision warning, and a 360-degree parking radar and camera provide drivers with comprehensive protection on the road.

In addition to its performance and safety features, the Tonale is equipped with advanced technology to enhance the driving experience. Featuring cutting-edge features like NFT, Wireless Apple CarPlay, and Android Auto, the Tonale offers seamless connectivity and entertainment options for drivers and passengers alike. The 10.2-inch infotainment system with 3D navigation ensures easy access to information and entertainment on the go, while the wireless charging pad keeps devices powered up throughout the journey.

MHD Automobiles is also offering exclusive Ramadan offers on the Alfa Romeo range. Customers can enjoy a segment-leading 7 years/200,000km manufacturer's warranty, along with 5 years/120,000km complimentary service, first year insurance, registration and 5 years/100,000km roadside assistance.

Mall of Muscat, leading leisure and entertainment destination, renowned for its diverse culinary landscape, recently welcomed Habib Beirut, a new dining experience. This latest addition provides gourmets with the chance to savour authentic Lebanese cuisine in the heart of Oman.

By opening in the Mall of Muscat, Habib Beirut sets out to enchant Oman's food enthusiasts, providing a dining adventure that mirrors the genuine tastes of Lebanon. The introduction of Habib Beirut in Oman signifies an important chapter in the brand's journey, introducing its cherished tastes and dishes to a fresh audience, a press release said.



Habib Beirut opens at Mall of Muscat

A spokesperson for Mall of Muscat stated, "We are delighted to have welcomed such a prestigious brand to our mall and are already seeing it become a favourite among our visitors. Habib Beirut represents a cultural journey that epitomises the finest of Lebanese cuisine."

The menu at Habib Beirut is a testament to the rich cultural heritage of Lebanon, featuring a wide range of cold Mezze, including Shanklish, Hummus, homemade Kibbeh, and Lebanese pastries. Each dish is crafted with the utmost care, embodying the spirit of Lebanese hospitality and culinary innovation.

The story of Habib Beirut began with the esteemed Habib, an aficionado of Lebanese pickles and dairy items, evolving from a modest home-based operation into a distinguished

ahlibank holds electronic AGM and extraordinary EGM via MCD website

Ahlibank announced the successful conclusion of its Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM), which took place on March 27, 2024 via an electronic platform for general meetings through Muscat Clearing and Depository's (MCD) website.

The meeting was presided over by Hamdan Ali Nasser al Hinai, chairman of the Board of Directors, and was attended by the board members, senior management, and shareholders, a press release said.

During the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM), the shareholders reviewed and approved the issuance of 103,661,359 free mandatory convertible bonds to the bank's shareholders, with one bond issued for every 22.666667 shares, having a nominal value of 100buz plus an issuance expense of 2bz per bond. This equates to a dividend of 4.5bz per share, totalling RO10,573,458.618 for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2023.

Additionally, during the course of AGM, the shareholders approved the Board of Director's Report on the Bank's activities and its financial position for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2023. Shareholders also approved the bank's Organisation



and Management Report (Corporate Governance Report), Auditor's Report on the bank's Audited Financial Statements and the Sharia Compliance Report of Ahli Islamic for the year ended December 31, 2023.

Moreover, the bank's shareholders approved the dividend distribution of 9bz per share, divided into 4.5bz in cash and 4.5bz in the form of mandatory convertible bonds, which was approved in the EGM. Further, the general assembly was informed of related party transactions the Bank completed during the previous fiscal year.

On the sidelines of the general assembly meeting, Hamdan Ali Nasser al Hinai, chairman of the

Board of Directors, commented, "With promising future steps, we at ahlibank affirm our commitment to a path of excellence and innovation to provide the best services and products to our customers. The trust and support we receive from our shareholders are a testament to the success of our strategy to build sustainable relationships with our partners, enhancing our efforts towards achieving more growth and success."

"As we quickly and flexibly adapt to the steady changes in the market, we renew our resolve to provide the best services to our customers and the community around us with utmost dedication and integrity.

Ahlibank's vision is based on clear and firm pillars - setting new standards in the banking sector by focusing on customer satisfaction and achieving well-being for community members, thereby driving the wheel of economic and social development in the country."

The shareholders appointed the Sharia Supervisory Board for 2024-2026. The shareholders also ratified and approved the sitting fees and remunerations for the Board of Directors and the Sharia Supervisory Board for the past year and outlined their compensation for the 2024 fiscal year. Moreover, a third party was appointed to evaluate the Board's performance.

Movenpick unveils sustainability

Movenpick Hotel and Apartments Ghala Muscat, the brand's landmark debut property in the sultanate, hosted a dinner to introduce its sustainability programme in Oman.

The hotel will adopt and tailor its global sustainability programme, called SHINE in Oman. The broad-based programme aims to give back to the local community and contribute towards the economic prosperity of the destinations where Movenpick operates, a press release said.

"The practices envisioned under our programme are based around three key sustainability pillars - Environment, Employer and Society," explained Arshad Mahmood, general manager, Movenpick Hotel and Apartments Ghala Muscat. "Our goal



is to uplift and inspire the community through a range of activities focused on the environment, society, and our own business practices."

According to Arshad, Movenpick's sustainability certification partner, Green Globe, puts each of the chain's hotels through a rigorous inspection process to

prove their credentials. The audit covers a full spectrum of parameters, including efficiency of energy and water usage, and the use of locally supplied and sustainable ingredients in the restaurant menus.

The centrepiece was a full course Iftar dinner that was true to the Butcher House's promise.

Kalyan Jewellers offers 'Fly for Free'

Kalyan Jewellers, one of the largest and most-trusted jewellery brands has recently announced the launch of a one-of-its-kind 'Fly for Free' offer, in line with the auspicious season of Ramadan.

This limited period promotional offer is valid throughout the brand's Middle Eastern stores in UAE, Qatar, Oman, and

Kuwait. As part of this, the company will be offering select lucky customers with a free flying experience to a destination of their choice, a press release said.

Customers making purchases of value AED 000/QAR3000 /RO300 or KWD300 and above stand a chance to win free air tickets. The unique offer will be an all-inclusive package offered

to the customers, at no additional cost. A total of 60 free flight tickets will be offered to all their customers across the GCC region until April 14.

Ramesh Kalyanaraman, executive director, Kalyan Jewellers, said, "We are delighted to announce the launch of our special Eid Offer, wherein customers can enjoy a free flight."

Ooredoo, ZTE Corporation establish 5G Innovation Centre in Dhofar

Transforming how young students learn and share knowledge, Ooredoo partnered with ZTE, a global leading provider of information and communication technology solutions, and Dhofar University to establish a cutting-edge 5G Innovation Center (SGIC).

The smart and next-gen 5G campus will be located at Dhofar University's Faculty of Engineering and will drive innovation and continuous learning, shaping a brighter future for all stakeholders in Oman. Meanwhile, the name of the tripartite industry partnership will be the 'Dhofar University - Ooredoo -



ZTE 5G Innovation Lab Project', a press release said. Bassam Yousef al Ibrahim,

CEO at Ooredoo, said, "This collaboration between industry and academia is part of our commitment to playing a significant role in driving Oman's digital transformation and supporting Omani

youth and education. The smart 5G campus will upgrade the learning environment for stu-

dents in Oman and support the emerging Internet of Skills. In an increasingly connected world, we need to leverage the many powers of 5G and IoT technologies, which, thanks to 5G's ultra-low latency and super-fast connectivity, includes the creation of outstanding remote and virtual learning environments."

Zhang Meng, managing director of Ooredoo Group Business Unit at ZTE, said, "We are honoured to cooperate with Ooredoo and Dhofar University in Salalah, Oman, to establish a cutting-edge 5G Innovation Center. The collaborative efforts demonstrate ZTE's commitment to the

Omani society by driving innovation, fostering continuous education and nurturing telecommunications industry talents at Dhofar University and across Oman."

Professor Amer al Rawas, Dhofar University (DU) Vice Chancellor, said, "We are excited that a 5G Innovation Center will be established at our campus. This center will serve as a national hub for education, research and training, empowering students, faculty, and professionals to explore the full potential of cutting-edge 5G technologies and related Internet of Things (IoT).

3mn Afghan children will suffer malnutrition this year, says WFP

Kabul, Afghanistan - The World Food Programme (WFP) in Afghanistan has warned that this year, up to three million children could suffer from malnutrition under the Taliban regime, Khaama Press news agency reported.

The organisation stated that since last year, due to a reduction in foreign aid, the number of malnourished children seeking treatment has increased.

Khaama Press reported, citing Mona Sheikh, Head of Nutrition at the World Food Programme in Afghanistan who said in a video posted on the organisation's account on its social media platform X, "We will be able to assist about 1.6mn malnourished children."

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) previously announced that in 2023, it assisted 715,000 malnourished children in Afghanistan.

According to international organisations, many families in Afghanistan under Taliban control are unable to provide food for their children.

Additionally, reports indicate that since the Taliban took power, Afghanistan has been facing a dire humanitarian crisis, exacerbating the already precarious situation. The lack of stability and access to basic necessities has led to widespread suffering, particularly among vulnerable groups like women and children.

Moreover, the shortfall of funds from international organisations has significantly hindered relief efforts in Afghanistan. This has left millions of people at risk of famine and deprived them of essential humanitarian aid, further worsening the humanitarian situation in the country.

Despite over 450 days passing, universities in Afghanistan remain closed to girls, with no signs of reopening on the horizon, TOLO News reported.

Expressing their frustration, female students highlight the significant delay in their academic progress, urging the Taliban caretaker government to prioritise the reopening of universities this year.

Khadijah, speaking on behalf of many, emphasises: "The education of girls holds immense importance... Neglecting it jeopardises the education and advancement of society."

ANI



This file photo shows Afghan children with their mothers in Kabul, Afghanistan (Anadolu Agency)

Senegal: Constitutional Council confirms Faye as new President

The stage is now set for Bassirou Diomaye Faye's inauguration on April 2

Dakar, Senegal - Senegal's highest judicial authority, the Constitutional Council, has officially affirmed the triumph of opposition leader Bassirou Diomaye Faye in the presidential election, solidifying his path to becoming the nation's fifth president, Al Jazeera reported.

The announcement, made on Friday, sets the stage for Faye's inauguration, slated for April 2.

This confirmation follows the validation of provisional results announced earlier in the week, derived from complete vote counts across all polling stations. Faye, known for his anti-establishment stance and affiliation with prominent opposition figure Ousmane Sonko, secured over 54 per cent of the ballots in the delayed presidential election held the previous Sunday.

His primary contender, Amadou Ba, representing the ruling coalition and personally selected by outgoing President Macky Sall, garnered approximately 35 per cent of the vote, according to the Council's findings. Notably, no objections were raised by other candidates in response to the results, as reported by Al Jazeera.

At just 44 years old, Faye's ascent to the presidency makes him the youngest head of state in Africa, marking a significant moment in Senegal's political landscape. The African Union lauded the widespread acceptance of



Bassirou Diomaye Faye attends a press conference in Dakar, Senegal, on March 15 (Xinhua)

Just 44 years old, Faye's ascent to the presidency makes him the youngest head of state in Africa

the election outcome, with Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat extending warm congratulations to Faye and expressing optimism for his tenure.

French President Emmanuel

Macron echoed these sentiments, extending felicitations to Faye and affirming France's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations with Senegal.

Faye's victory carries particu-

lar resonance as it comes a mere 10 days after his release from imprisonment. Despite facing charges of contempt of court, defamation, and actions deemed potentially disruptive to public order stemming from critical social media posts, Faye emerged unconvicted and eligible to contest the election.

The scale of Faye's win reflects

not only popular discontent with the incumbent leadership but also internal divisions within the ruling coalition, which has seen its influence wane amidst a backdrop of political turmoil and civil unrest over the past three years.

The election, which saw significant voter turnout, served as a referendum on the trajectory of Senegalese politics following a period of instability marked by widespread protests against the government.

Faye's candidacy gained momentum after his ally, Sonko, was disqualified due to a prior conviction for defamation. Sonko's endorsement of Faye further bolstered his standing among voters, positioning him as a viable alternative to the status quo.

Faye, often referred to as 'Diomaye', campaigned under the banner 'Ousmane mooy Diomaye' ('Ousmane is Diomaye' in Wolof), underscoring the symbiotic relationship between him and Sonko. Both men share a background in law and previously served as tax inspectors, leveraging their experiences to denounce corruption and advocate for reform.

The duo co-founded the PASTEF party in 2014, portraying themselves as incorruptible public servants committed to upholding integrity in governance - a message that resonated deeply with Senegalese voters.

ANI

Saudi to chair UN forum on women's rights next year

New York, US - The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) unanimously appointed Saudi Arabia to chair its 69th session in 2025, CNN reported, citing the Saudi Arabia Mission to the UN.

Saudi ambassador to the UN, Abdulaziz Alwasil, was elected as chair on Wednesday. The decision by the United Nations to appoint Saudi Arabia as the chair of a gender equality forum has been criticised by women's rights advocates.

Ahead of the decision, Amnesty International Deputy Director for Advocacy Sherine Tadros called out Saudi Arabia for its notorious treatment of women.

"The Commission on the Status of Women has a clear mandate to promote women's rights and gender equality and it is vital for the chair of the commission to uphold this. Saudi Arabia's abysmal record when it comes to protecting and promoting the rights of women puts a spotlight on the vast gulf between the lived reality for women and girls in Saudi Arabia, and the aspirations of the commission," Tadros said on Friday.

"Saudi Arabia cannot prove its commitment to women's rights merely by securing a leadership role in the commission. It must demonstrate its

commitment through concrete actions domestically," Tadros added. Human Rights Watch also warned about the UN decision, saying last week that 'Saudi Arabia systematically discriminates against women and persecutes women's rights activists'.

But Saudi Arabia says it is eager to help women by working with the CSW as part of its new vision for the kingdom, CNN reported.

"The kingdom's chairmanship of the committee comes as an affirmation of its interest in cooperation within the framework of the international community in enhancing women's rights and empowerment, and it is also in line with the qualitative achievements achieved by the kingdom in this field, thanks to the special attention and care the kingdom's leadership pays to (women's) empowerment and rights," state-run Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported on Wednesday.

The Saudi government's website, 'Saudi Vision 2030' says it aims for 'a strong, thriving, and stable Saudi Arabia that provides opportunity for all'. The Saudi Press Agency added: "The Saudi Vision 2030 also included priorities and targets that focused on women's full participation at all levels."

ANI

BLOSSOMS AFTER DARK



People take selfies with illuminated cherry blossoms while attending the Blossoms After Dark event at David Lam Park in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, on Friday (Xinhua)

US: Joe Biden says world leaders keep telling him 'you can't let Trump win'

New York, US - US President Joe Biden has claimed that at multiple meetings, wherever he goes to attend them, including the G20 meeting in India, the world leaders express support for him and implore that you can't let the former US President Donald Trump win in the upcoming presidential elections.

His remarks came as President Biden addressed a public event during his election campaign in New York and said that world leaders always say that their democracies are at stake.

"And - but whether it's the G20 meeting - in India or whatever the meeting where there are other heads of state, I am not exaggerating when I say - and I say it in front of the press without giving the names - almost every one of the world leaders finds an excuse to get me alone for a moment, put their hand on my arm, and say, 'you can't let him win'. 'My - meaning his country or her country - my



US President Joe Biden

democracy is at stake. My democracy is at stake.'" Biden said.

"And, again, it's not an exaggeration. Think about it. This is a guy who walked away from NATO. He told Putin he could do whatever he wants if they're not paying their dues. As I said, he's working - talks about - anyway," he added.

President Biden also highlighted Donald Trump's state-

ment that he would encourage Russia to do whatever it wants with the countries that don't spend two per cent of their GDPs on defence.

"Just look at what he's done. The rest of the world is wondering what in the hell is happening to us. And they're relieved, not because I'm so special but that I'm not Trump. I'm serious. I wish it was because they thought Biden was such a wonderful

guy," Biden said. "I think they respect me. I think they listen to me. But the point is, it's because they're scared to death for their countries if he were to win again," he added.

The Republican front-runner had said that, as president, he warned NATO allies that he 'would encourage' Russia 'to do whatever the hell they want' to countries that are 'delinquent' as he ramped up his attacks on foreign aid and longstanding international alliances.

Speaking at a rally in Conway, South Carolina, Trump recounted a story he has told before about an unidentified NATO member who confronted him over his threat not to defend members who fail to meet the trans-Atlantic alliance's defence spending targets. But this time, Trump went further, saying that he had told the member that he would, in fact, 'encourage' Russia to do as it wishes in that case.

ANI

US rejects UN report accusing Israel of ‘genocide’ in Gaza as ‘unfounded’

Washington D.C., US - US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller rejected ‘unfounded’ allegations on Friday of genocide in the Gaza Strip.

Miller commented on the report released on Wednesday by the UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine, Francesca Albanese, which said Israel’s actions against Palestinians in Gaza have ‘crossed the threshold of committing’ ‘genocide’ against Palestinians in Gaza’.

He said Washington fully supports Tel Aviv on the issue without entering into a discussion of possible war crimes that Israel may have committed.

Miller also accused Albanese of making ‘antisemitic statements’. “We have made clear that we believe that allegations of genocide are unfounded. But at the same time, we are deeply concerned by the number of civilian casualties in Gaza, and that’s why we have pressed the government of Israel on multiple occasions to do everything it can to minimise those civilian casualties,” he added.

Albanese’s report

Albanese held a news conference at the UN Geneva Office on her report which addressed Israel’s attacks on Gaza.

Albanese noted that she prepared the report after monitoring and analysing Israel’s attacks on



Palestinians walk past destroyed buildings in Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza

the enclave since October 7.

“The report presents compelling reasons to believe that Israel has crossed the threshold of committing ‘genocide’ against Palestinians in Gaza,” she said.

The ‘chilling’ intent of Israel to systematically eradicate all or a ‘significant portion of people’ in

Gaza.

She accused Israeli soldiers and officials of distorting legal principles by engaging in violence, genocide and attempted extermination against the Palestinian people, and added: “Israel is implementing a policy of genocidal violence against Palestinians in Gaza.”

Tripartite meeting in Cairo

Jordan announced on Saturday that Cairo is hosting a to discuss the latest developments in the Gaza Strip amid ongoing Israeli aggression.

“Today, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Ayman

Safadi, begins a working visit to Cairo to participate in the tripartite ministerial meeting hosted by the Arab Republic of Egypt, which includes the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Jordan and France,” the Jordanian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

It added the meeting will discuss the latest developments in

Gaza and the efforts made to stop the war and ensure the protection of civilians and the delivery of humanitarian aid.

On Friday, the Egyptian News Agency reported that Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry will hold ‘trilateral discussions on Saturday with his French and Jordanian counterparts at the Tahrir

Palace in Cairo to discuss regional developments, most notably the war in the Gaza Strip’. The foreign ministers of Egypt, France, and Jordan are scheduled to hold a joint press conference at the conclusion of the tripartite meeting, according to the same source.

Police crackdown in Berlin

German police on Saturday cracked down harshly on pro-Palestinian protesters inside Berlin’s Central Train Station, including assaulting a Muslim

The report presents compelling reasons to believe that Israel has crossed the threshold of committing ‘genocide’ in Gaza

FRANCESCA ALBANESE

82 more Palestinians killed in Gaza, death toll climbs to at least 32,705

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 82 more Palestinians were killed and 98 others injured over the last 24 hours, as Israel continues its onslaught on the besieged Gaza Strip, the territory’s Health Ministry said on Saturday.

“The Israeli occupation (forces) committed eight massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 82 martyrs and 98 injured during the past 24 hours,” a ministry statement said.

“Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them,” it added.

Flouting the International Court of Justice’s provisional ruling, Israel continues its onslaught on the Gaza Strip where at least 32,705 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, and 75,190 injured since October 7, according to



Palestinian health authorities.

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

The Israeli war on Gaza has pushed 85% of the territory’s

population into internal displacement amid acute shortages of food, clean water and medicine, while 60% of the enclave’s infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, according to the UN.

Israel stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice. An interim ruling in January ordered Tel Aviv to stop genocidal acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is pro-

vided to civilians in Gaza.

Hostilities have continued unabated, however, and aid deliveries remain woefully insufficient to address the humanitarian catastrophe.

Meanwhile, the Central Governorate in the Gaza Strip said on Saturday that the Israeli army bombed the headquarters of the Bureij and Al-Zawaida municipalities.

“The occupation (forces) deliberately bombs the administrative headquarters of the municipalities and other municipal services, such as water wells, emergency stores, and water and sewage lines,” the municipalities said in a statement on Saturday.

The municipalities stated that ‘the Israeli occupation forces continue to work to make the Strip uninhabitable’.

Anadolu Agency



Hostage crisis in Netherlands ends as all people held captive in cafe released

Amsterdam, The Netherlands - The hostage crisis in the Netherlands has ended after all the people taken hostage in a café have been released, according to police.

The last hostage has been released, and one person has been arrested, the police said on X, adding: “We cannot share more information at this time.”

What happened?

Several people were held hostage in a building in the town of Ede, in central Netherlands, police said on Saturday.

A large number of police and fire trucks were dispatched to the area due to the hostage-taking incident in a

cafe in Ede, the Netherlands.

Hundreds of houses in the vicinity were also evacuated.

People in a cafe in the city of Ede were taken hostage and the incident was not terrorist in nature, Dutch police said in a statement on X.

Police asked people to stay away from the city centre and not to go around the cafe to watch the incident.

Around 150 houses in the area were evacuated as a precautionary measure and people were evacuated to a safe place, according to the statement. Earlier, police reported that three hostages were released early in the morning but the incident is ongoing.

Anadolu Agency

Iranian journalist stabbed outside his home in UK

London, UK - Iranian host, Pouria Zeraati, was stabbed on Friday outside his home in London, said Metropolitan Police.

Zeraati, who lives in Wimbledon in the south of the city, was stabbed by someone in his thirties, according to a statement.

Police said Zeraati’s life was not in danger and although the motive for the attack was unclear, authorities noted that the Iran International station, where Zeraati works, has received various threats.

Dominic Murphy, head of the London Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Unit, said officials are investigating numerous threats against Iran International and considering all possibilities regarding the attack.



He said police activities would be increased in the Wimbledon area and urged witnesses and anyone with information to contact authorities.

The statement highlighted

multiple abduction and assassination attempts against Iranians in the UK in the last two years.

It also noted security support provided to Persian-language or

Iran-related media outlets.

Michelle Stanistreet, general secretary of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), said Zeraati’s stabbing was shocking.

She noted two attempted attacks on Iranian journalists in the UK in 2022 and that the latest attack would have a ‘negative impact on Iranian journalists in the country’.

Three suspects under suspicion

The Telegraph newspaper said Zeraati was approached by a suspicious individual around 3.30pm local time as he left his home. While one person attempted to talk to him, another stabbed him from behind.

The two suspects then fled in a taxi, with the driver believed

to be a third suspect.

Police said no arrests have been made and the MI5 counter-intelligence and security service has been informed.

In December, a suspected who captured footage of the Iran International building outside its studio in London’s Chiswick area was arrested.

The Austrian national had a special messaging application on his mobile phone for sending the footage, but it was revealed that the app automatically deleted messages and images without leaving a trace. Magomed Husejn Dovtaev was sentenced to three years and six months in prison for ‘attempting to gather information that could be useful for terrorism’.

Anadolu Agency

Ukraine accuses Russia of destroying thermal power plant

Moscow, Russia - Ukraine on Saturday accused Russia of effectively destroying the Zmiivska Thermal Power Plant located in the eastern Kharkiv region.

Centrenerg, a company managing the plant, said on its website that the plant was critically damaged during attacks on March 22.

“On March 22, the Russian army destroyed one of the largest thermal power plants in the Kharkiv re-

gion. All blocks have been destroyed, and auxiliary equipment has been damaged. The degree of destruction varies from complete to significant,” it said.

Work is underway to clear the rubble blocking access to most of the equipment, which has also made precise assessments of the scale of damage and prospects for restoration impossible, it added.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

Bharat Ratna conferred on 4 luminaries

President Murmu will pay a visit to Advani's residence and present the award

New Delhi, India - President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday conferred Bharat Ratna on four eminent personalities, including two former prime ministers, Chaudhary Charan Singh and P V Narasimha Rao. Former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur and agronomist M S Swaminathan were also conferred with the country's highest civilian award.

The central government announced five names for the Bharat Ratna this year, which also included BJP leader L K Advani. Sources said that President Murmu will pay a visit to Advani's residence and confer him with the prestigious award. This was decided in view of the ailing health of the veteran BJP leader, they added.

Former PM Charan Singh's award was received by his grandson, Jayant Singh, and P V Narasimha Rao's award was received by his son, P V Prabhakar Rao. M S Swaminathan's daughter, Nitya Rao, received the award for her father and Karpoori Thakur's award was



Agronomist Dr M S Swaminathan's daughter Dr Nitya Rao receives Bharat Ratna on behalf of her father from President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

received by his son, Ram Nath Thakur.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP national president J P Nadda, Congress leader and leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge were present among other leaders on the occasion.

Born on June 28, 1921, in Karimnagar, Telangana, being an agriculturist and an advocate, Narsimha Rao joined politics and held some important portfolios. He was the minister of Law and Information (1962-64), Law and Endowments (1964-67), Health and

Bharat Ratna, country's highest civilian award was conferred on former prime ministers Chaudhary Charan Singh and P V Narasimha Rao, former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur and agronomist M S Swaminathan

Medicine, (1967) and minister of Education (1968-71) of Andhra Pradesh. He was the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh from 1971-73 and general secretary of the All India Congress Committee from 1975-76.

Trained as a plant geneticist,

Swaminathan's significant contributions to India's agricultural sector have earned him a reputation as the scientific leader of India's green revolution movement. His work has been instrumental in the agricultural renaissance of India.

Born in Karachi, in present-day Pakistan, on November 8, 1927, Advani has served as the president of the BJP for the longest period since its inception in 1980. Capping a parliamentary career of nearly three decades, he was, first, the Home minister and, later, the deputy prime minister in the cabinet of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1999-2004).

Karpoori Thakur was born in 1924 in one of the most backward sections of society, the Nai Samaj. He was a remarkable leader whose political journey was marked by his unwavering commitment to the marginalised sections of society. He served as the chief minister of Bihar and was a key figure in the struggle against social discrimination and inequality. His commitment to affirmative action gave representation and opportunities to the poor, oppressed, exploited and deprived sections of the country. Chaudhary Charan Singh was born in 1902 at Noorpur in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh, in a middle-class peasant family. He shifted to Meerut in 1929 and later joined the Congress.

ANI

Indian Navy rescues 23 Pakistan nationals from Somali pirates

New Delhi, India - At least 23 Pakistani nationals were rescued from the clutches of Somali pirates during a daring 12-hour-long operation in the Arabian Sea, said the Indian Navy.

The dramatic rescue unfolded in the early hours of Friday, when the Indian Navy warship INS Sumedha intercepted the hijacked vessel, FV Al-Kambar, as it was being held captive by pirates. Acting swiftly, INS Sumedha was soon joined by the guided missile frigate INS Trishul to bolster the operation.

Utilising their tactical expertise and strategic coordination, Indian naval forces initiated negotiations with the pirates, compelling them to surrender without bloodshed. The surrender marked a decisive victory for the Indian Navy in combating piracy and ensuring the safety of maritime activities in the region.



The dramatic rescue unfolded in the early hours of Friday

Following the successful apprehension of the pirates, Indian Naval specialist teams embarked on the FV Al-Kambar to undertake thorough sanitisation and seaworthiness checks. These meticulous examinations aim to ensure the vessel's safety before escorting it to a secure area, enabling the resumption of normal fishing activities for its crew.

The Indian Navy received

input regarding a potential piracy incident onboard the Iranian fishing vessel 'Al Kambar'.

Following this, two Indian Naval ships deployed in Arabian Sea for maritime security operations were diverted to intercept the hijacked fishing vessel.

At the time of the incident, the Iranian vessel was approximately 90 Nm south-west of Socotra and was reported to have been boarded by nine

armed pirates.

"Indian Navy remains committed to ensuring maritime security in the region and safety of seafarers, irrespective of nationalities," the statement added.

The Indian Navy has carried out several high-octane operations against piracy attacks lately. Earlier this month, the Indian Navy in a daring operation, intercepted the under-attack pirate ship Ruen, sailing almost 2600km from the shores of the Indian Coast, and forced the pirate ship to stop through calibrated actions.

The Indian Navy reiterated its unwavering commitment to maintaining maritime security and ensuring the safety of seafarers navigating through these perilous waters. This action by the Indian Navy serves as a testament to India's resolve to combat piracy, said a statement.

ANI

European Space Agency chief heaps praise on ISRO

Paris, France - Director General of European Space Agency (ESA), Josef Aschbacher, heaped praise on the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for its recent successful launches and said that India's accomplishments in space and especially in lunar exploration is 'astounding'.

Aschbacher posted an appreciation post on X, after ESA hosted its 323rd Council meeting in Paris which was attended by the ISRO Chairman, S Somanath. The European scientist also underscored that the significance of strengthening ties and deepening cooperation with international partners cannot be underestimated.

"What India is accomplishing in space - especially in Lunar exploration - is astonishing. We hosted ISRO's Chairman, Dr S Somanath at ESA Council today. It was a milestone occa-



Josef Aschbacher

sion for delegates to learn more about current and future plans for ESA-ISRO cooperation," he posted on X.

Additionally, astronaut Thomas Pesquet also shared about meeting with the ISRO chairman and the ESA director and said that they witnessed enthusiastic exchanges between the two leaders.

"Enthusiastic exchanges between the two men, and abounding cooperation oppor-

tunities between the two organisations. Let's co-travel to space together!," he posted on X.

In a stellar display of prowess, India soared to new heights in 2023 with the successful soft landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the South Pole of the Moon and the launch of Aditya-L1, India's first solar mission.

These milestones not only secured India's standing in the global space economy but also fuelled the engines for the private space sector in India.

On August 23, 2023, the Chandrayaan-3 mission created history with the successful soft landing on Moon's surface.

India is now the first nation to reach near the Moon's unexplored South Pole and ranks amongst the top four nations to carry out a soft landing on the lunar surface.

ANI

Maldives: Solih operated on foreign ambassador's orders, alleges Muizzu

Male, Maldives - Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu has alleged his predecessor and the opposition leader, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, of operating on orders from the foreign ambassador, Maldives-based Maldives News Network (MNN) reported.

In an interview with Public Service Media (PSM), President Muizzu responded to criticism regarding the recent procurement of military drones.

Muizzu noted that the main opposition, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP),

when it held office from 2018-2023 failed to protect the Maldives independence, leaving it in hands of foreign country despite having supermajority in the Parliament. He said that Solih had operated on orders from a foreign ambassador, which resulted in extensive damage, reported MNN.

However, he did not specify which foreign country he was referring to. "We had lost independence in all sense of the word, including economically," he said.

ANI

Pope Francis skips 'Way of Cross' ceremony before Easter

Rome, Italy - Pope Francis cancelled his participation in the traditional 'Way of the Cross' ceremony in Rome before the Easter holiday 'to preserve his health', according to a statement.

On 'Good Friday', celebrated as the resurrection of Jesus in the Christian faith, the 'Way of the Cross' ceremony, typically presided over by the pope in front of the Colosseum, was again conducted this year without his presence. His absence from the ceremony, where extensive security measures were taken due to his expected attendance, led to the removal of a chair he would have sat in.

"To preserve his health until the Easter Eve ceremony tomorrow and the Easter Sunday cere-



mony, Pope Francis will follow the 'Way of the Cross' ceremony at the Colosseum from the Santa Marta residence," according to

the statement from the Vatican Press Office.

Francis attended a ceremony on Thursday commemorating

Jesus at the Vatican before the 'Way of the Cross' ritual.

The pope missed the 'Way of the Cross' ceremony due to a res-

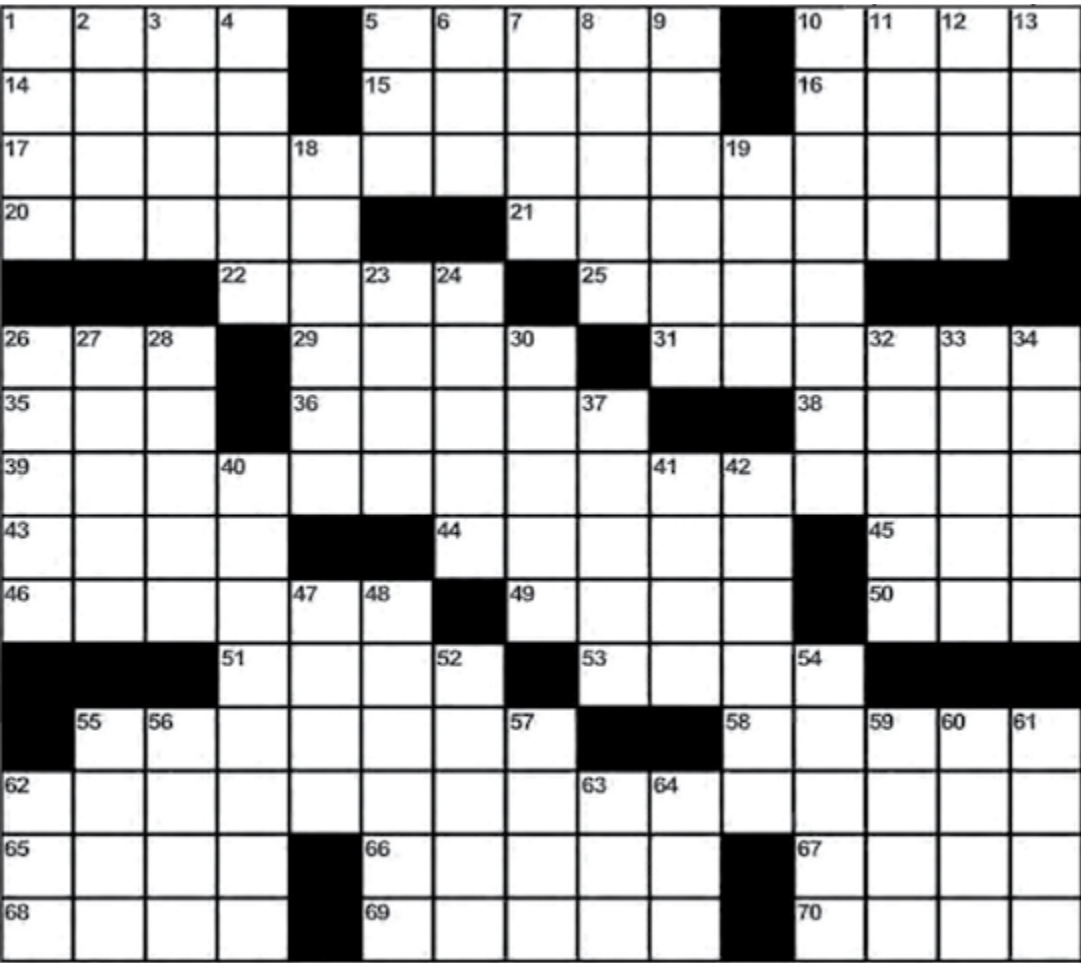
Francis attended a ceremony on Thursday commemorating Jesus at the Vatican before the 'Way of the Cross' ritual

piratory infection. Due to various health issues, the 87-year-old pope, who frequently visited the hospital last year, has been using a wheelchair and a cane in recent years due to knee problems.

In the past few weeks, Francis has delegated his speeches to aides due to bronchitis and a cold.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Closure for loose clothing
- 5) Movie theater yell
- 10) Coin hole
- 14) Eye lasciviously
- 15) Make up for, as sins
- 16) Well-drawn character?
- 17) Traveling at 186,500 miles per second
- 20) Add bells and whistles
- 21) Baltimore's nine
- 22) Celestial spheres
- 25) Show gloominess
- 26)_ about (wander)
- 29) Japanese aborigine
- 31) Make a second account
- 35) Bobby, Bruins' #4
- 36)_ r the mill
- 38)_weight (precious metal measurement)
- 39) How actions speak?
- 43) Abu Dhabi dignitary
- 44) Art photo shade
- 45) This may be in ated
- 46) Titles for chairwomen
- 49) Lunar valley
- 50)_ Monte (od giant)
- 51) Stake-driving hammer

- 53)_on(putttrustin)
- 55) Tilted
- 58) Like porridge or granola
- 62) Tooth-cleaning product's claim
- 65) Fi ies audiophile's purchase
- 66) A ne playing marble
- 67) Heavy burden
- 68) Oil cartel letters
- 69) Did a cobbler's job
- 70) Big name in elevators
- DOWN**
- 1) Place r lost change
- 2) "By gosh!"
- 3) As well
- 4) The rst "M" in M-G-M
- 5) "A Bridge Too..."
- 6) Giant legend "Master Melvin"
- 7) Silversalmon
- 8) Divestofmunitions
- 9) Fourth-year student
- 10) Small dagger
- 11) Opera house box
- 12)_and aahs
- 13) Dangerous stick
- 18) Make enemies of
- 19) Care ee gait
- 23) Whirring sound

- 24) Peevish states
- 26) Automaton ofJewish legend
- 27) It lures people to the kitchen
- 28) Tree worshiper
- 30) Poe's doomed house
- 32) Went the wrong way
- 33) Skier's quarters
- 34) Household antiseptic brand
- 37) Fleshy-snouted beast
- 40) Striking in appearance
- 41) Shade of green
- 42) Rejoice in
- 47) Long, heavy hair
- 48) Buddhist sennons
- 52) Set free
- 54) Web company
- 55) Liner or tanker
- 56) Term r some judges
- 57) Indian dish made with stewed legumes (var.)
- 59) Add a little color to
- 60) Vanity case for milady
- 61) Costner role
- 62) One of the ve W's
- 63) Donned the edbag
- 64) "Waking_Devine" (1998 lm)

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Someone in your family or social group is going through something that is starting to affect your relationship with them. Communication is going to be either strained or outright hostile, but you need to try very hard not to take anything personally. Remove yourself from the situation and let them know that you are giving them space instead of creating more conflict. This is one of those times when you need to give them the benefit of the doubt.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Tightening your belt is not very much fun, but having the extra money there when you really need it sure is. Think about long-term gains in your finances today and be more thrifty. Order less, skip all the fancy extras, and make your own meals. If you enjoy a small convenience today, you will suffer a major inconvenience tomorrow, so do your future self a favor by simply saying no to your usual luxuries for a day. You will be glad you did, and it might become a habit.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21
Although today is a very good day for starting new searches and new journeys, don't rush around making plans and booking tickets. There are many details that still need to be covered. It's important to do your planning at a slow, deliberate pace. If you are in the midst of a career change, put some work into it today. Update your resume. Put a few feelers out on the job market. Seeds that you plant today will soon grow into beautiful new opportunities.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Who was on the English throne at the time of the "Gunpowder Plot" to blow up the House of Lords?
A. James I
B. William I
C. King Canute
D. Harold I



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
People who love you may start showing their affection for you in odd ways today, and you might not fully appreciate it at first. So let an odd or even offensive statement settle into your brain for a while before you react to it. Your first reaction will be coming from an emotional and defensive place, but there isn't really any attack to defend yourself against. The truth can be harsh, but when it comes from someone you love, it is always meant to be helpful.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
This day could be full of unique events that will spark your creative output and get you inspired enough to do something with it. Write out your feelings either to yourself, to the person you are trying to get to know better, or to someone who is getting on your last nerve. Your way with words is quite skilled and will evoke exactly the right message. Your clear messages will help make it all too obvious what the next steps should be



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Research and planning is always a good idea, but you may be getting too caught up in the details of it all. Could it be that you're looking for an excuse not to move forward? The time is right to get active. If you are having any doubts, just use your imagination to come up with ideas or choices that will fill in the blanks and keep you going. If you need to make revisions, you can always work them out as you go along. It's important to make a commitment today.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You've been out of the loop in terms of socializing lately, but you are still on the minds of your friends. They've been reading your mood incorrectly and think you need time alone, so if that's not the case, you need to let them know as soon as possible. Get yourself more involved in the rhythms and activities of your favorite people and let them know that you'd love to tag along. Volunteer to help them with tasks and get some quality time together.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Every time you get rid of an outdated idea, assumption, or unwanted item, you make room for new energy, growth, and opportunity. Today, you could use a big dose of freshness, so see what you can do to empty a few closets, both the emotional and the physical kind. Whether you toss out a tired relationship, nasty grudge, or old sweater, you'll immediately feel a sense of freedom and relief. Release yourself from what you thought you needed.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Today, you could be placed in a leadership role that is flattering but also a little overwhelming. You've got to check in with yourself and make sure you keep a level head. If you feel at any point that you are too confused to continue, ask for help. This is not time to be hung up on your reputation. No one is perfect, and no one expects you to be. Turn to that trusted coworker or friend who you know you can count on for the guidance you might need. Do not go it alone.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Today is a very good day to get what you want from one of the people who have never been interested in coming to your aid before. It's apparent that your charm is strong enough to overcome anyone's selfishness, and you shouldn't think twice about celebrating the fact that you have finally won them over. Invite them out for some coffee or even a nice dinner. Now that you have melted the ice, it's time to build on that warmth and create something long-lasting.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Shared experiences are the best glue when you want to connect with other people, so get connected today by telling someone what you want either from them or from life in general. This is a great day to have relationship discussions, negotiate new work hours, or lobby for a raise. You might even want to confess a guilty secret that you have been holding on to for way too long. It won't be hard to find someone to talk to. A lot of folks are curious about what makes you tick!



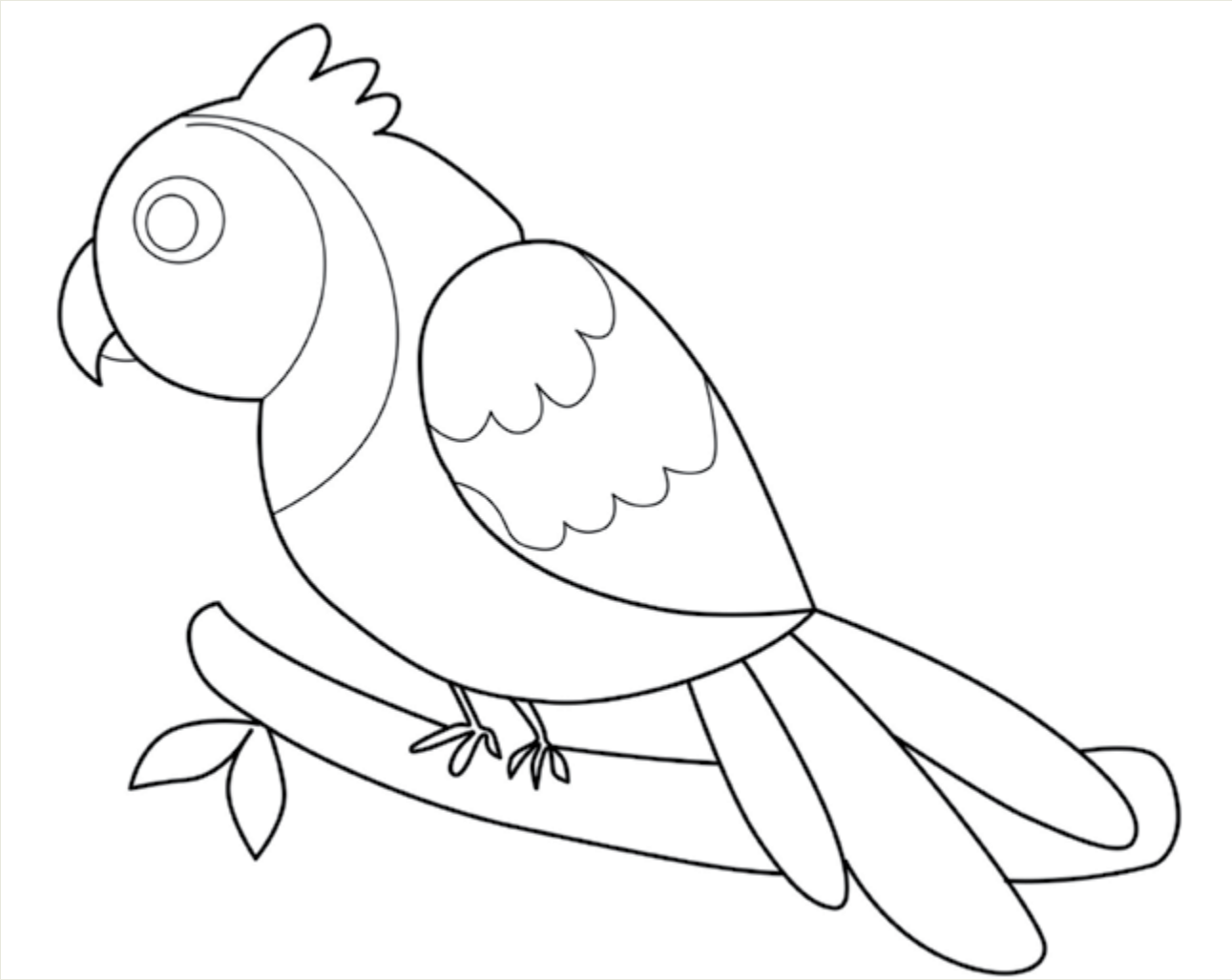
PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
The worst thing that you can do right now is let yourself get intimidated by expectations. You might be approaching a critical point today, so if you start to feel nervous about it, do your best to relax. Keep an open mind and focus on having a positive outlook about how things will turn out. If you overthink this situation, you'll lose perspective. Don't sell yourself short. You know exactly what to do and how to do it. Just listen to your intuition.

2. According to the Guinness Book of World Records in 2010, what is the most watched TV series, ever?
A. Bay Watch
B. Dallas
C. Star Trek
D. Coronation Street

3. Before 1972, what was Sri Lanka known as?
A. East Pakistan
B. Burma
C. Ceylon
D. Persia

Answers: 1.A 2.A 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

M	E	M	Y
W	O	A	R
O	A	P	E
N	A	B	R

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

DIMITROV WINS ‘DOGFIGHT’

Bulgarian battles past Zverev to book Miami title clash with Sinner

Miami, US - Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov defeated Alexander Zverev 6-4, 6-7(4), 6-4 in a thrilling contest on Friday to reach the Miami Open final, where he will face world number three Jannik Sinner.

Dimitrov, the 11th seed, utilised his forehand to devastating effect throughout the match, making just three unforced errors to take the first set.

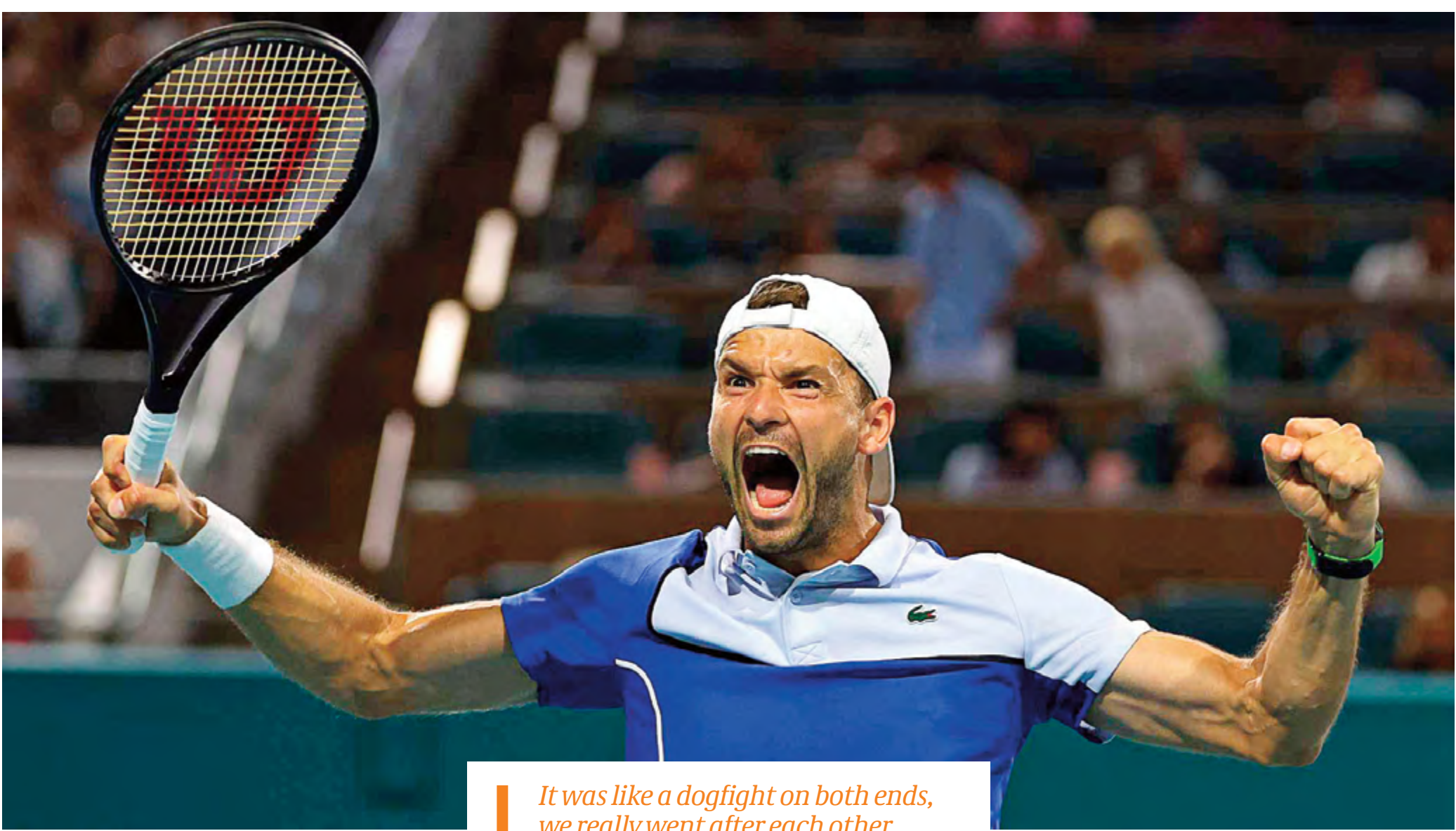
Fourth seed Zverev, however, regained some control in a tight second set, serving with accuracy to deny Dimitrov any opportunities to break before clinching the tie-break to level the match.

Dimitrov took his tally of winners up to 44 in the decider as he defended a break point and then took the lead at 4-3, before confidently settling the match on serve for his first win over Zverev since 2014.

“It was like a dogfight on both ends, we really went after each other,” said Dimitrov, whose victory will see him return to the top 10 for the first time since 2018.

“He upped his game in the second set, in the third set he also had a chance but I served well.”

In Sunday’s final, Dimitrov will face Sinner, who powered past defending Miami Open champion Daniil Medvedev 6-1, 6-2 to



Grigor Dimitrov

It was like a dogfight on both ends, we really went after each other. He upped his game in the second set, in the third set he also had a chance but I served well.

GRIGOR DIMITROV

reach the final for the second year in a row.

When Medvedev beat Sinner to claim the Miami title 12 months ago, he extended his head-to-head record over the Italian to 6-0.

But since then, the second seed has enjoyed the upper hand as he has delivered the knockout

blow on five successive contests, including a five-set thriller in the Australian Open final earlier this year.

There was no such drama on Hard Rock Stadium court as Sinner delivered a clinical performance to end Medvedev’s challenge in 69 minutes.

“I felt great on court today,

usually the more you go on in a tournament the more comfortable I feel and I’m very happy about today’s performance,” Sinner said after reaching the Miami final for a third time in four years.

“I don’t think Daniil felt too well today he made a lot of mistakes he usually doesn’t make.

“For me it is an important tour-

nament if I can get it good, if not I had another great chance.”

Sinner, whose only loss this season was a semi-final defeat to Carlos Alcaraz in Indian Wells two weeks ago, becomes the first player this season to reach three finals.

The Italian had Medvedev under pressure right from the gun

with three break chances on the Russian’s opening service game converting on a blistering forehand winner for a 2-0 lead.

The third seeded Russian would finally hold serve at 5-1 but only delayed the inevitable as Sinner bagged a high quality opening set without committing a single unforced error.



Elena Rybakina

Rybakina overcomes Azarenka challenge to reach Miami final

Miami, US - Fourth seed Elena Rybakina overcame a second-set meltdown to beat Belarusian Victoria Azarenka 6-4, 0-6, 7-6(2) on Thursday and secure a return trip to the Miami Open final.

In Saturday’s title clash, Rybakina will face off against American Danielle Collins, who beat Russian 14th seed Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-3 6-2 in the other semi-final.

Rybakina, the highest seed remaining in the women’s draw, won nearly 82% of her first-serve points but converted only two of her 11 break-point chances en route to securing victory in two hours 33 minutes.

“It was such a tough battle,” Rybakina, a Moscow-born Kazakh, said during her on-court interview after reaching her fourth final of the year.

In the opening set, Rybakina squandered her first five break-point chances before solving Azarenka’s serve to

grab a 4-3 lead and she leaned on her astonishing power before closing out the 51-minute set with a hold to love.

Azarenka refused to go quietly, however, conjuring up a flawless display in the second set in which she limited Rybakina to five points and broke her serve three times to force a decider.

Rybakina, after a change of outfits, opened the third set moving much better and broke at the fifth attempt in the fifth game to move 3-2 up when Azarenka splashed a backhand into the net.

Rybakina crumbled in her first chance to serve out the match, however, as Azarenka got a break to get to 5-5 after she chased down a drop shot before her opponent sent a backhand volley into the net.

Rybakina, serving to stay in the match, held to love to force a tiebreak and she won the first three points of it before closing out the win.

Dimitrov made me feel like I'm 13 years old, says Alcaraz

Miami, US - World number two Carlos Alcaraz said he felt like a frustrated 13-year-old searching for answers after his crushing defeat by Bulgarian veteran Grigor Dimitrov in the Miami Open quarter-finals on Thursday.

Alcaraz, 20, arrived in Miami in top form after winning the Indian Wells trophy, but his hopes of becoming the first man to complete the Sunshine Double since Roger Federer in 2017 were dashed in a 6-2, 6-4 defeat.

It was the Spaniard’s second consecutive defeat by the 32-year-old Dimitrov following last year’s three-sets loss in the Shanghai Masters.

“He played amazing tennis, almost perfect. I couldn’t find solutions. I couldn’t find a way to make him feel uncomfortable on the court. It was a great game from his side,” Alcaraz said.

“I left the court thinking that probably I had to change my game a little bit earlier, but anyway, I feel like I played good tennis. Not perfect but good.

“But I have a lot of frustrations



Carlos Alcaraz greets Grigor Dimitrov after their Miami Open semifinal

right now, because he made me feel like I’m 13 years old. It was crazy. I was talking to my team saying that I don’t know what I have to do. I don’t know his

weakness. I don’t know anything.”

Twice Grand Slam champion Alcaraz said that he was already looking ahead to his next meet-

ing with Dimitrov and planned to switch his game to extend his 3-2 win-loss record over him.

“Probably the next match that I’m going to play against him, and I’m sure that there’s going to be another one, I’ll try to do a lot of different things,” Alcaraz added.

“Let’s see how it’s going to be.”

Dimitrov, ranked world number 12, will play his fourth semi-final of the season when he takes on Alexander Zverev and will enter the top 10 if he wins.

“I’m not going to think from now what I can do. It’s just very important to stay in the moment,” Dimitrov said.

“That’s what our game is about. That’s the beauty of our game and it’s always the most simple things that are the most difficult to do.

“This is actually what I did tonight. I was just trying to do everything as simple as possible ... I think in a way, same thing tomorrow, the same thing every match I’m going to be playing from now on. There’s no pulling back.”

Stoinis, Agar lose Australia contracts

Melbourne, Australia - All-rounder Marcus Stoinis and spin bowler Ashton Agar have been dropped from Australia’s contracts list for the 2024/25 season after falling out of favour with selectors.

Stoinis lost his spot in Australia’s ODI team to Marnus Labuschagne during the World Cup in India and has not been seen in the team since, while left-arm spinner Agar has played only one international match in the past year. The Western Australian duo were jettisoned from the 23-man central contracts list released on Thursday along with test opener Marcus Harris, pace-man Michael Neser and the retiring David Warner.

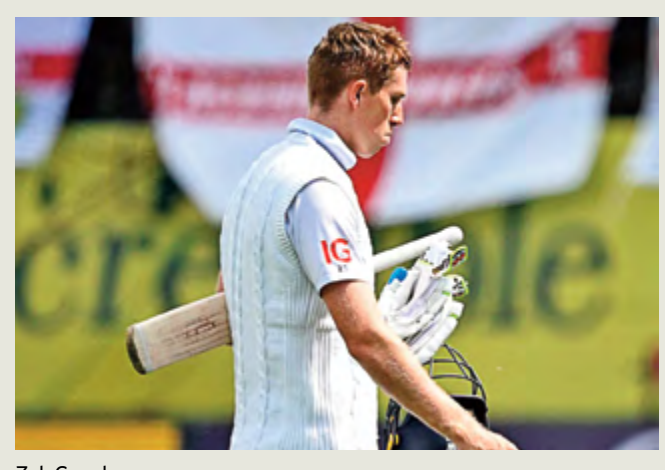
The annual contracts list offers a snapshot of the pecking order in Australian cricket before the start of a new season, though players can be promoted into it based on performance during the season. Queensland quick Xavier Bartlett is the sole new face on the list, rewarded after his impressive debut ODI series against West Indies.

Bazball needs a bit of refinement, says Crawley after India defeat

London, England - England need to remain positive and make some adjustments to their aggressive style of play in test cricket following their 4-1 series defeat in India this month, opener Zak Crawley said.

India won the series despite losing the first test, with their dominance in the series subjecting the visitors’ much-hyped “Bazball” approach to significant scrutiny.

Former England captains including Nasser Hussain and



Zak Crawley

Michael Atherton urged the team to temper their strategy laid out for the side by skipper Ben Stokes and head coach Brendon ‘Baz’ McCullum.

Asked about England’s approach, Crawley, who scored 407 runs in the series, told reporters: “It just needs a bit of refinement. We always talk about absorbing pressure and putting pressure back on.

“The last couple of years we’ve done the putting back on pretty well, and we’ve spoken

about maybe picking those moments to absorb at the right times as well. We can certainly refine that. That’s not to say we’re going to get more negative.

“We will still try to play the way we have and try to score quickly, but just pick those moments where they’re on top. We need to make sure we stay positive and don’t let a tough result get in the way of what we’ve done really well over the last couple of years.”



FIRST AWAY VICTORY



Sunil Naraine made 47 off 22 balls to give Kolkata Knight Riders a rollicking start

Narine and Venkatesh star as KKR end home teams' winning streak

Bengaluru, India - It took 10 matches for IPL 2024 to produce a victory by the away team. Though it was perhaps predictable that it came at the M Chinnaswamy stadium, where the small ground really does favour the chasing team. That, on Friday, was Kolkata Knight Riders, who overcame a Virat Kohli masterclass to chase down 183 and claim two points against Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

KKR's opening partnership had been a problem area in recent years. But they won this game with it. They had to score a lot of their target inside the first six overs, not just because of the field restrictions, but because that's when the ball is hard and new and that's when it comes onto the bat. RCB's innings already showed that as it got softer

and older, going into the wicket and taking pace off became mighty effective. Andre Russell (2-29) and Harshit Rana (2-39) used it to good effect.

This, though, is the KKR game-plan regardless of the venue they're playing at because they keep using Sunil Narine at the top, giving him a licence to play those 30 off 10 cameos. He over-achieved, which was fitting on his 500th T20, making 47 off 22. Phil Salt did plenty of damage too. He very nearly didn't play this IPL. At the end of the powerplay, KKR had 85 for 0. They'd taken down almost 50% of their target in just 30 per cent of the overs with 100 per cent of their wickets still in hand. Upon that platform, Venkatesh Iyer raised a half-century and Shreyas Iyer ensured he was there till the end, which

It is well known that Kohli hits pace as well as anybody in world cricket. He smashed Mitchell Starc for 33 in 17 balls with three fours and two sixes.

came as early as the 17th over. RCB's lopsided line-up - world-class batters and inexperienced bowlers - was laid bare. The most economical of their three main bowlers was Yash Dayal (11.5)

Kohli has often said he has nothing to prove, but the fact that he said that at the end of RCB's last match suggests there has been talk about the way he bats

in T20 cricket.

Usually cricketers don't get riled up by talk that comes from outside. That's white noise and they spend their whole lives ignoring it, hard though it certainly is.

Kohli saying he's still got it feels like there's some input from within the Indian team about how they want him to go about his business. His performance in this IPL - which has become a bit of a showcase for players hoping to make it to the T20 World Cup in June - has reflected a change in his game.

A previously risk-averse batter, a limited-overs run-machine who sets his stall out to play the whole innings, is willing to put less of a price on his wicket. And he's been doing that by hitting the ball in the air a lot more than he

TODAYS MATCHES

MATCH 12

2 PM



GUJARAT TITANS VS SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

MATCH 13

6 PM



DELHI CAPITALS VS CHENNAI SUPER KINGS



used to. This is from data collected from the 2014 season onwards. It really does tell a tale.

It is well known that Kohli hits pace as well as anybody in world cricket. He smashed Mitchell Starc for 33 in 17 balls with three fours and two sixes. The revelation was he was showing the same kind of intent against the slow bowlers. Having hit Narine for just one six in 106 balls across all IPLs, Kohli launched the mystery spinner out of the Chinnaswamy off just the fifth ball on Friday. In the course of this beligerence, he went past Chris Gayle (239) as RCB's most prolific six-hitter (241).

Faf du Plessis, in the post-match presentation, mentioned that RCB did try to take the learning from the first innings - how the slower balls were sticking in the surface - and put it to use but they were impeded by the dew that had set in.

ESPNCricinfo



Hardik Pandya

Ashwin defends Hardik: 'Fan wars should never take an ugly turn'

Jaipur, India - Ravichandran Ashwin has come out in strong support of Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya, blaming India's "fan wars" and "cinema culture" for the vehement booing Hardik has been subjected to at various grounds this IPL season.

Hardik, who took over the Mumbai captaincy from Rohit Sharma this season, was given a hostile reception by the fans in Ahmedabad last week when he faced his former team Gujarat Titans, whom he had led to successive IPL finals including the title in 2022. The booing continued when Hardik faced Sunrisers Hyderabad at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, as Mumbai began their campaign with back-to-back defeats.

Answering a question from a viewer on his YouTube channel on whether Mumbai should issue a statement to diffuse the situation, Ashwin said that the onus lay with the fans, not the team, to "get our act together" and put an end to such "ugly" scenes.

"People should remember which country these players represent. It's our country," Ashwin said. "Fan wars should never take such an ugly route.

I've said it many times, this is cinema culture, that happens only here.

"I know there are many things like marketing, branding, and positioning. I don't deny it, but have you seen these fights happen in any other country? Have you seen, for instance, Joe Root and Zak Crawley fans have a fight? Or Joe Root and Jos Buttler fans fight? It's crazy. Do you see Steven Smith fans fighting with Pat Cummins fans in Australia?"

Ashwin brought up examples from the past, when several Indian greats like Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid all played under each other's captaincies, with minimal fuss or backlash from the fans.

"I don't understand. If you don't like a player and boo him, why should the club come out and issue a clarification? We act like this has not happened before.

Ashwin said he believes that all fans have a collective responsibility to "correct ourselves" before blaming others, explaining that cinema can't be compared directly to sports.

ESPNCricinfo

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From a steam train shooting out of a fireplace (Time Transfixed, by Rene Magritte) or to the nude back of a woman transformed into a violin (Le Violin D'Ingres by Man Ray) surrealist art still has the power to intrigue.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the movement, yet its influence still resonates with artists around the world.

Surrealism's origins are in the collective trauma of World War I and the global flu epidemic of 1918.

agery and visual games are its recurring features, as are an underlying political sensibility and a desire to make the viewer question the world around them. However, the absence of a defined aesthetic gave surrealist artists a unique freedom to express themselves in whatever way they chose.

In 'Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)' painted in 1936, the Spanish artist Salvador Dali depicts a delirious, bizarrely distorted giant figure gleefully ripping itself apart in reference

core selection of works and add to them with others from their own collections, emphasising how the movement developed in different regions.

Influencing a new generation of artists

While surrealism had a reputation for misogyny - Breton and the group's early male hierarchy thought of women within the movement as simply 'muses' - women were making and exhibiting art alongside male peers right



Marcel Marien was a pivotal figure in the Belgian surrealism movement. This piece titled 'Le Tao' was created in 1976

surrealism today. In his book New Surrealism: The Uncanny in Contemporary Painting, artist and writer Robert Zeller explores why and how contemporary artists are engaging with surrealist ideas and imagery.

Zeller believes that surrealism's appeal to today's artists is down to the freedom it gives them to express themselves in a way that is accessible to everyone - the language of dreams. "By using a visual language that would normally be reserved for dreams, artists can be

Dream language



'Le Bain de Cristal' (The cut glass bath) by Ren Magritte, painted in 1946

SURREALISM CENTENARY

SURREALISM TURNS 100 THIS YEAR – BUT WHAT IS ‘SURREALISM’ AND WHY IS IT MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER?



'The Enigma of Desire' by Salvador Dali still intrigues viewers today, despite being painted 95 years ago

Convinced that the rational, masculine world was to blame for such horrors, the group's founder, French writer Andre Breton, sought an 'irrational' alternative rooted in the world of the subconscious and dream states.

In the first 'surrealist manifesto' - an explanatory booklet published in Paris in October 1924 which outlined the group's ideals - Breton called for a revolution in thinking 'dictated by the absence of all control exercised by reason.' Although that might sound somewhat bewildering, it was in effect a call for freedom and a rejection of the status quo.

"It's a movement of rebellion against institutions, religion, the army and all the powers who tried to imprison the mind," said Xavier Canonne, curator of the show 'Histoire De Ne Pas Rire' - which translates as A History of Not Laughing - at the Bozar Center for Fine Arts in Brussels, Belgium.

A movement with unique freedoms

Having begun as a literary movement, surrealism soon morphed into an artistic one. Dreamlike im-

to the tragic self-destruction brought about by the Spanish civil war.

Rene Magritte's 'The Treachery of Images' from 1929 takes a more coolly cerebral approach. Combining an image of a pipe with the words 'Ceci N'est Pas Un Pipe', (which translates as 'This is not a pipe'), it forces us to question what we see and what we are told.

The movement caught fire as it traversed geographical boundaries and decades, with artists from different countries and eras adapting its ideals to their own styles and preoccupations.

"Metamorphosis is one of the key ideas of the entire movement and, of course it has changed over time. Different artists from different backgrounds can use surrealism to explore their individual concerns," said Francisa Vandepitte, curator of 'Imagine! 100 Years of Surrealism' currently showing at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium before moving to the Hamburger Kunsthalle in Germany, Madrid's Fundacion Mapfre and lastly the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Each host venue will show a

from the start. Their work, however, was overlooked for many years by an art historical establishment which certainly was misogynistic.

To redress the balance, the Brussels exhibitions are showing the work of Belgian artists Jane Graverol and Rachel Baes who "took advantage of the movement's calls for freedom and explored it on their own terms," said Vandepitte.

Other notables - such as British painter and writer Leonora Carrington, who pursued freedom in both her life and work - continue to be influential to a new generation of artists. Carrington moved to Mexico in the 1940s and together with Remedios Varo and Hungarian-Mexican photojournalist Kati Horna, developed a uniquely feminine version of surrealism which referenced matriarchal societies and mysticism. Her work, which also focused on ecological issues and androgyny, inspired the theme of the 2022 Venice Biennale whose virtually all female line-up included many influenced by her practice.

Which is not to say that it is only female artists who are embracing



The work of female surrealists — often overlooked at the time — is enjoying increased visibility. This piece by Belgian artist Jane Graverol in 1949 is called Untitled (Liberated Woman)



Rene Magritte's, 'Le double secret' from 1927

indirect, more obtuse in communicating through the use of absurdity, non-sequiturs and hidden meanings," said Zeller.

Artists are engaging with classic surrealist tropes such as presenting the familiar as unfamiliar and uncanny, the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated imagery and the use of absurdity to critique political or social issues "but in new ways that speak to a younger generation," Zeller said.

Given our current political and social situation, which in some ways mirrors that of the 1920s, there is much that contemporary artists want to speak about. "It's not as dire, at least in terms of the many millions of casualties of World War I, but we do have many wars that are ongoing, and a subsiding global pandemic," said Zeller.

The ambiguous language of surrealism may be the perfect one in which to have those conversations, too. As Zeller noted, "It can be hard to express oneself, one's beliefs without offending someone. But no one is going to be offended by the use of dream language."

(Courtesy: cmn.com)



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ANCIENT ART

COLOURFUL PAINTINGS OF DAILY LIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT HAVE BEEN DISCOVERED IN A TOMB DATING BACK MORE THAN 4,300 YEARS

The daily life of the ancient Egyptians and their animals can be seen in the paintings

The outside of the large tomb in Dahshur, south of Cairo

underground

A tomb, known as a Mastaba, was found in the pyramid necropolis of Dahshur, about 25 miles south of Cairo, during a recent Egyptian-German archaeological mission. Dahshur is the southernmost of the great pyramid necropolises of the Old Kingdom in the vicinity of the ancient capital of Memphis. The main attractions there are two large pyramids of King Sneferu - the so-called Bent Pyramid and the Red Pyramid. Made from unfired mud brick, the rectangular Mastaba measures about 8m by 12m and features seven burial shafts, as well as another shaft for ceramic bowls and other items used in burial rituals. According to inscriptions on a massive



In their elegant forms and perfect execution, the pictures offer valid evidence of the artistic milieu of the capital region of the developed Old Kingdom

Stephan Seidlmayer

limestone false door, the tomb belonged to a man named Seneb-nebef, who served in the administration of the residents of the palace district, as well as his wife, Idut. The shape of the Mastaba, together with the inscriptions, images and ceramics found inside, suggest it dates from the end of the 5th or the beginning of the 6th dynasty - approximately 2,300 BCE. Stephan Seidlmayer, former director of the German Archaeological Institute in Berlin, led the expedition. He disclosed, "The corridor and the cult chamber were decorated with subtle paintings on mud plaster - a rarity in the necropolis of Dahshur. Despite extensive destruction, numerous images have been preserved. They show pictures of the tomb owner and his wife in front of the offering table, scenes from daily life - donkeys on the threshing floor, ships on the Nile, a market place - and servants who bring gifts for the mortuary cult. "In their elegant forms and perfect execution, the pictures offer valid evidence of the artistic milieu of the capital region of the developed Old Kingdom." According to a statement from the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, inscriptions revealed that the owner of the tomb "held several positions in the royal palace in the administration of tenants," while his wife "held the titles of Priestess of Hathor and Lady of the Sycamore." The German Archaeological Institute Cairo has been excavating at Dahshur since 1976. The initial stages focused on the pyramids of King Sneferu from the Old Kingdom and King Amenemhat III from the Middle Kingdom. More recent excavations have, however, centred on the tombs of great statesmen, priests and administrators from same eras. Seidlmayer and his team will continue to excavate the site "in an attempt to search for more secrets of this area," the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities said in its statement. It added, "Cleaning and documentation work will be carried out on the tomb and its inscriptions during the coming period." (Courtesy: cnn.com)

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