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66% VOTER TURNOUT

INTEKHAB REVOLUTIONISES ARAB WORLD'S FIRST APP-BASED ELECTIONS

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A milestone election of the Majlis A'Shura came to an end on Sunday night with 65.8% voters casting their ballot to choose 90 members for the tenth term of the shura.

According to the Ministry of Interior, 496,279 of the 753,260 registered voters - 65.8% - exercised their franchise for the tenth term.

Voter turnout was 16% more than the last shura elections.

These elections saw the second highest voter turnout. Elections for the seventh term in 2011 had 76% turnout.

The vote was to elect 90 members from 843 candidates, of which 32 were women. Voting started at 8am via the Inthikab app and concluded at 7pm. Results were announced within an hour.

The election was historic as it was the first time in the Arab world that a mobile app was used for the electoral process, serving as a blueprint for other nations seeking to modernise their electoral systems.

Continuing the abyssal representation of women in the shura, no female candidate was elected.

H E Sayyid Hamoud Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, accompanied by members of the Main Committee of the Majlis A'Shura's tenth term elections, visited the operations centre to oversee the election process.

H E Sayyid Hamoud described the modernisation of the electoral process as "unprecedented".

H E Sayyid Hamoud Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, and members of the Main Committee of the Shura Council's Tenth Term Elections, visited the operations centre to oversee the election process (Supplied photos)

> *I wish the winners success in performing their duties in order to achieve the national goals*
>
> **H E SAYYID HAMOUD FAISAL AL BUSAIDI**

"I congratulate all those who were elected to the Majlis A'Shura and wish them success in performing their duties in order to achieve the national goals."

He lauded the efforts made to provide communications services in all niyabats, wilayats and governorates. "The services enabled citizens to cast their vote electronically, wherever they were," he added

Talal Said al Ma'amari, CEO of Omantel, informed that the security systems operated efficiently and there were no reports of cyber attacks.

"This exercise proves that technology can be utilised in complex and sensitive operations like the electoral process, which promises to bring about fruitful outcomes," said Ma'amari. He praised the efforts of the government and private entities to streamline the process.

Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) monitored the vote. A team from the commission visited the main operations centre of the elections at the Ministry of Interior.

OHRC commended the technological breakthrough, while pointing out that the process facilitated smooth conduct and encouraged public participation.

In particular, OHRC valued the artificial intelligence technology used in the app which assisted visually impaired voters through a speech-to-text feature.

International journalists, experts laud vote process

Journalists and media professionals from several countries praised Oman's use of the Intekhab app in the Majlis A'Shura elections

Saud bin Sultan al Azmi, a broadcaster with Kuwait Television, described the app as a "qualitative leap" in electoral technology. "Oman has taken a pioneering step. Using the Intekhab app not only simplifies counting votes but also bolsters voter confidence through real-time data," he said.

Mirza al Khuwailidi, editor of Gulf affairs at Saudi Arabia's *Asharq al Awsat*, concurred. "Introduction of Intekhab proves Oman's advancement in automation and technology," he remarked. "It's a transformative experience that allows voters from all social strata to participate with ease and transparency."

Kuwait's Ministry of Information representative **Ibrahim bin Ali al Rashidi** noted that Oman has taken "unprecedented measures" for electoral success. "International journalists monitoring the vote shows the advanced technical work involved," he said.

Zaid al Zoghbi, a Jordanian TV correspondent, was impressed by the user-friendly features of the updated app. "The technology simplifies voting, whether you're at home or work, and has drawn good early turnout," he observed.

Pointing out the app's contribution to transparency and immediate results **Dr Fayez al Jabour**, managing editor at Jordanian News Agency, said, "The app has increased voter participation, which is a positive sign for the democratic process in Oman."

ISRAEL PURSUING SCORCHED EARTH POLICY: ARAB LEAGUE

Cairo, Egypt – The Arab League has asserted that the Israeli occupation is mercilessly pursuing the policy of scorched earth in the Gaza Strip.

It added that the massive destruction inflicted upon vital infrastructure underscores an abhorrent intention to unleash devastation and make the remaining Palestinian territories uninhabitable.

Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of Arab League, said Israel is using "the most lethal weapons to forcibly evacuate the Palestinians in pursuit of liquidating their cause."

13

2 killed by 'bomb blast' at prayer meeting in Kerala

15

Eternal rest in an urn buried at the foot of a tree

Landmark forum seeks to reshape future urban cities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The three-day 'Urban October – The First Gulf Housing Week' conference, organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, started at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Sunday.

Presided over by H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, the event marks a significant moment for urban planning and housing in the region.

H H Sayyid Shihab emphasised the conference's importance, noting its far-reaching local, regional and international impact. He lauded the advancements in planning of housing and smart city technologies in particular, citing the Sultan Haitham City project as a crucial development for Greater Muscat.

Themed 'Building Better Cities, Enhancing Lives,' the conference seeks to underscore the vital role of urban planning in improving both social and economic outcomes, while showcasing successful models that elevate quality of life and foster environmental sustainability and economic resilience.

> *Running parallelly, the 'Urban October Exhibition' features 35 booths showcasing groundbreaking innovations in housing and urban planning*

The event will address four primary sectors: housing, urban planning, future school buildings and city resilience. With presentations of more than 65 research papers on the agenda, experts will delve into subjects ranging from sustainable development to climate change mitigation. Over 60 international specialists are slated to contribute to these critical discussions.

In a session titled 'A Prosperous Urban Economy', experts discussed the blueprint for the Sustainable City of Yeti, citing it as a model for sustainable urban growth. Another key session, 'Sustainability of the Housing Sector', explored current and future trends in housing and urban development in Gulf cities, emphasising the role of sustainability and social considerations.

Running parallel to the conference is the 'Urban October Exhibition,' featuring 35 booths showcasing groundbreaking innovations in housing and urban planning.

A symposium on the future of educational buildings, organised by the Ministry of Education, is also taking place alongside the event. Twenty-four papers focused on design standards, site selection and the impact of educational environments on students will be presented during the symposium.

Additionally, the 'Gulf Urban Hackathon,' a competition involving 80 participants from various GCC universities, is part of the conference. Organised into 16 teams, these young innovators will address architectural and planning challenges for a selected region. Winners will be announced on the conference's final day.

The conference and its related events are expected to draw more than 50,000 visitors, including local, regional and international participants.

UN warns order 'starting to break down' in Gaza

Gaza, Palestine - Israel pounded Hamas-ruled Gaza on Sunday in an escalating air and ground campaign as the UN warned civil order was "starting to break down" in the besieged Palestinian territory.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu steeled the nation for a "long and difficult war" ahead as the Red Cross voiced shock at the "intolerable" human suffering inside Gaza.

Despite calls for a humanitarian ceasefire and outrage across the Muslim world, Israel has intensified the war triggered by Hamas's unprecedented attack more than three weeks ago.

Hamas fighters stormed across the Gaza border on October 7 in the deadliest attack in Israel's history, killing 1,400 people, mostly civilians, and kidnapping 230 others, according to Israeli officials.

The Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza says the unrelenting retaliatory Israeli bombardment has killed more than 8,000 people, mainly civilians and half of them children.

Israel's army said "stage two" of the war started with ground incursions since late Friday.

On Sunday, the military said it had struck another 450 Hamas targets in the past 24 hours, and that it was increasing its ground forces in Gaza.

In a late-night televised address on Saturday, Netanyahu announced a "second stage of the war whose goals are clear: Destroying the military and leadership capabilities of Hamas, and bringing the hostages back home".

A Palestinian man covered in dust carries a baby girl into the Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City following Israeli strikes on Saturday

He vowed to "eradicate" Hamas "for the sake of our existence".

Panic and fear have surged inside Gaza, where more than half of its 2.4mn residents are displaced, according to the UN, and thousands of buildings destroyed.

UN chief Antonio Guterres said the situation was "growing more desperate by the hour" as casualties increase and essential supplies of food, water, medicine and shelter dwindle.

He reiterated appeals for a ceasefire to end the "nightmare".

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, on Sunday said "thousands of people" broke into several of its warehouses and distribution centres in Gaza, grabbing basic survival items like wheat flour and hygiene supplies.

'This is a worrying sign that civil order is starting to break down,' it stated.

AFP

YOUR SAY

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

With Oman set on diversifying its economy, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism recently unveiled plans to develop Wadi Shab with attractions such as a zip line and water sports facilities. While some see these additions as scope for job creation and local tourism, others express concern about preserving the site's natural beauty and cultural heritage. Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers said about the decision -

Salman al Kindi
Private sector employee

The development of Wadi Shab with a zip line and water sports facilities can be a positive move if done thoughtfully, with a focus on preserving its natural and cultural heritage. Some other places that can be developed are in Dhofar, which has beautiful beaches, abundant wildlife and historical sites with immense untapped potential. Developing eco-tourism and promoting its unique character can be beneficial.

Salim Abri
Salesman

This is indeed an excellent decision and I wish to see it developed at the earliest. The zip line will be a great excitement, mainly for children. Another place that has a lot of potential is Masirah Island. It offers pristine beaches and excellent opportunities for water sports, and to see birds and turtles. Infrastructure and marketing improvements can attract more nature enthusiasts.

Sunil Kumar
Businessman

The decision will definitely be a boon for tourism and create more jobs in and around the place. Developing such facilities often involves improving the overall infrastructure of the area, including roads, parking and safety measures. Some other places that are in my mind for similar development are the caves, mainly Al Hoota and Majlis al Jinn. The authorities can also think of developing Jabal Akhdar.

Anne Malin
Private sector employee

I think it's a great pity that this wonderful location is going to be developed. I am so happy that I have seen it in its original state since the 70s.

Dharani Koyalkar
Architect

The beauty of Wadi Shab - and Oman itself - lies in the absolute 'rawness' it possesses. Going above and beyond by constructing zip lines, water sports, etc is only going to take away from the beauty and originality of the place."

Geoff Brouman
Tourist from Cleveland, Ohio, US

I have travelled to Oman many times. Keep it natural and unspoiled. If you want to see zip lines, go to the UAE.

Meera Venkitaraman
Homemaker

That would be a nice idea, as long as the existing natural wonder and beauty of Wadi Shab stays intact. It is one of the best trekking and tourist sites in Oman.

NEXT ON YOUR SAY

Many areas in Muscat have chronic traffic congestion. Which area do you find most congested and what can be done immediately to reduce traffic jams?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to **muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om**

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

SEND US ON OUR NEW WHATSAPP NO 91953774

Rains lead to collapse of Rustaq Fort tower

Muscat – Heavy to moderate rains lashed several governorates in the last four days with Suwaiq in North Batinah recording 80mm rainfall, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

The downpour caused the collapse of one of the towers of Rustaq Fort.

In a statement, CAA said, 'A number of wadis overflowed in this period and there were low clouds and fog over parts of Oman.'

Data collected from the rain monitoring stations of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources showed that Saham received 60mm of rainfall, Amerat 58mm, Bidiyah 56mm, Barka 52mm, Nakhal 50mm, Hamra 38mm, Rustaq 35mm, Quriyat 34mm and Liwa 30mm from October 26 to the morning of October 29.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism announced that one tower of Rustaq Fort collapsed following the rains. It had recently commenced restoration and maintenance work of the fort.

'The ongoing restoration efforts include repairing deteriorating parts of the fort in accordance with prescribed practices,' the ministry stated.

(Supplied photo)

Royal Cavalry's 'Fatina' wins first place in France

Muscat - Royal Cavalry's Fatina won the first place in the eighth-round competition called Prix Jean Laborde, held at the French Bordeaux-Le Bouscat racetrack on Saturday. The race is restricted to purebred Arabian horses competing over a distance of 1,400m.

Fatina was ridden by jockey Michael Forrest and trained by Senchaz.

The second place was secured by Adelbar, owned by Jules Aoki, ridden by jockey Thomas Demolet and trained by Valentin Siguy.

The third place was claimed by Madrasa, owned by Khalifa Rabeh al Shammari, ridden by jockey Jean Bernard and trained by Julemin.

Project in Seeb to be a hub for street vendors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

'Muscat Municipality invites bids to set up a project for street vendors on an area of 16,715sqm in South Mawaleh along Sultan Qaboos Street'

Muscat Municipality has unveiled a new project in Mawaleh in Seeb in an effort to regulate street vending activities in the city. The initiative is set to centralise street vendor operations, enhancing not only urban aesthetic but also ensuring safety and orderliness.

'Muscat Municipality invites bids to set up a project for street vendors on an area of 16,715sqm in South Mawaleh along Sultan Qaboos Street with the provision of all necessary services and facilities in one integrated location,' a statement said.

A critical aspect of the project is to boost the business environment for street vendors, ensuring they can operate without inadvertently causing traffic congestion. The municipality's objective is to eliminate random and unregulated business activities while enhancing the overall visual appeal of the area. One of the strategic elements of this initiative involves repositioning entrances and exits and keeping vending sites at a safe distance from residential communities.

Designed to accommodate up to 25 vendor vehicles, the new site has necessary infrastructure, including lighting, waste disposal containers, seating areas and restrooms.

The project will also include a dedicated area for children's games, a plaza and landscaping works, while ensuring upkeep of the area, maintenance of health and hygiene standards and preventing traffic congestion.

Earlier this year, Muscat Municipality revised regulations for mobile vending. The new guidelines serve as a testament to its commitment to preserve urban spaces. 'Our objective is to ensure these businesses operate within a structured, legal framework that prioritises public safety,' the civic body stated.

The updated regulations stipulate that only Omanis are eligible to run mobile vending businesses. Vendors are mandated to secure initial approval for their intended activity and can only commence operations after obtaining final clearance from the municipality of the concerned wilayat. Furthermore, all licensed vendors are obligated to meet established health criteria while conducting business.

MHT launches 'Kashtat Zawaya' to boost adventure tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

(Supplied photo)

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), in collaboration with Al Ethar Projects for Organising Exhibitions and Conferences and Heroes Club, is set to host an exhibition called Kashtat Zawaya from October 30 to November 4.

The event will be inaugurated by Sayyid Firas bin Fatik bin Fahr al Said at Mall of Muscat on Monday.

Twenty businesses and organisations engaged in camping activities will participate, attracting adventure enthusiasts and those interested in touring equipment, domestic tourism, resort management, 4x4 accessories, auto repair and outdoor furnishings.

An MHT official stated, "We invite companies focused on camping to join the expo. The goal is to facilitate knowledge exchange among industry specialists and to cater to the needs of outdoor adventure enthusiasts."

MHT's initiative to hold this exhibition aligns with its broader objectives to promote adventure tourism. "Recently, we coordinated a sand dune walking adventure in Shuja al Jafwa in North Sharqiyah. This event celebrated Omani Youth Day and marked the onset of the winter tourist season in the governorate," the official informed.

He confirmed that the sand dune walk was one of many activities planned from October 2023 to May 2024.

Over 150 enthusiasts, both local and international, participated in the sand dune adventure. The objective was to inspire Omani youth and sports teams specialising in this type of activity. "The event promoted tourism in the sandy regions of Bidiyah and Qabil wilayats," he added.

MTH will be organising several winter tourism events in North Sharqiyah, capitalising on the governorate's appeal as a seasonal destination.

S Batinah unveils 5 development projects with focus on waterfronts, public spaces

Our Correspondent
Muscat

South Batinah has announced five projects aimed at enhancing recreational facilities across various wilayats in the governorate.

According to an official at the Office of the Governor of South Batinah, the governorate has called for bids to develop waterfronts in the wilayats of Musannah and Barka. "We also invite bids for developing the entrance to Al Hazm and Rustaq Gate. Proposals for the renovation of Nakhal Public Park are also sought"

The tender documents also include maintenance work of lampposts affected by weather and traffic accidents, scheduled for 2024-2025. The deadline for bid submissions is November 20.

These projects align with the broader goals of the Governorates Development Programme, which received a financial boost from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, doubling the budget to RO20mn for each governorate for the 2021-2025 Five-Year Plan, effective from 2022.

The official also highlighted the completion of multiple initiatives in Nakhal, including development of Nakhal Market, and new public facilities and parks in Wadi Mistal and Khubat al Qa'dan.

Earlier this month, senior civic officials conducted field inspections of the Al Khandaq tourist site, among other locations, slated for future development.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism recently reported that as of August this year, South Batinah had 490 registered archaeological landmarks across various wilayats.

MTCIT grants several licences for app-based taxi services

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has granted several licences for app-based taxi services to be operated from commercial centres, hotels and Sultan Qaboos Port.

For hotels, the approved apps include Marhaba and Oman Taxi, while commercial centres will see taxis operated by Hala, Oman Taxi, Marhaba, Otaxi and Tasleem. Sultan Qaboos Port will be serviced by Marhaba taxis.

This is the second phase of MTCIT's initiative to regulate taxi services in Oman. On October 1, the ministry approved Otaxi and Oman Taxi applications to operate from Muscat International Airport.

MTCIT has advised taxis operating from hotels, commercial centres and Sultan Qaboos Port to register with the approved apps by November 1, 2023. 'Only taxis registered with these apps will serve passengers in these areas.'

Phase 3 will begin on January 1, 2024 targeting taxis operating in public places.

The Aber app is a single window that includes all licensed taxis in Oman, offering easy access and registration on one platform.

Forum held on women's leadership in digital media

Muscat- The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth partnered with Al Anqa Foundation to host a forum focusing on women's leadership in the digital sphere on Sunday.

Titled 'A Journey Towards Sustainability and Creativity', the forum was held at Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah and inaugurated by H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The forum featured two key discussions, one on 'Building Identity and Empowering Women in the Digital Age,' and another on 'The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Economy and Investment.'

According to Naima al Mahriya, chair of the organising committee, the forum was designed to explore the intersection of women and digital media. "It aims to broaden women's engagement in various sectors via digital and social media platforms."

مسندم للطاقة
MUSANDAM POWER

Musandam Power Company SAOG

P.O. Box: 228, PC 134, Al Qurum, Jawharat Al Shatti, Muscat, Sultanate Of Oman. web: www.musandampower.com

THE COMPANY REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Musandam Power Company SAOG (the "Company"), it's a pleasure to present the Company's Report for the nine months ended on 30 September 2023.

Operational Results

The plant delivered 328.4 GWH to the Musandam grid compared to 320.3 GWH delivered by the end of the same period of the previous year with a growth in demand by 2.5%. The plant achieved 99.9% reliability during the period.

On the 27th of August 2023, the plant experienced two instances of complete shutdown, each lasting approximately 1.8 hours and 4.8 hours, respectively. These shutdowns were the result of technical issues within the diesel fuel system. The plant was successfully restored and returned to normal operations after prompt corrective measures were taken. An ongoing investigation and root cause analysis are currently in progress to identify the underlying reasons for these shutdowns. It is imperative that both short-term and long-term recommendations be developed and subsequently implemented to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents in the future.

There were no Lost Time Incidents (LTI) during the period, resulting in 710 days of free Lost Time Incidents since the last incident, demonstrating our continued focus on Health, Safety, Environment, and Quality Management.

Financial Results

For the nine months ended on September 2023, revenue increased due to annual tariff indexation and higher electricity demand compared to the same period in 2022.

The company's profit before interest and tax dropped by 8% in comparison to September 2022. This decline is primarily due to the company's reduced dependence on fuel oil, which led to nil realization of the fuel thermal efficiency gain. Additionally, there is a temporary timing difference in the consultancy cost incurred in the first half of this year, as compared to the previous year when it was incurred near the year-end.

The net profit for the period decreased by 12% during the period ending in September 2023 as compared to September 2022. This decline was primarily caused by an increase in finance costs, which rose by 5% compared to September 2022. The increase in finance costs was due to a rise in the interest rate on the senior facility loan from 4.6% to 5.25%, which went into effect in October 2022.

The share price was Baizas 272 at the end of September 2023 (Baizas 334 at the end of September 2022).

Corporate Social Responsibility

Economic development is no longer possible without environmental and social progress. We at Musandam Power believe that we have a lead role to play in helping to build more inclusive development models and enabling the emergence of new drivers of sustainable growth in the region of the Musandam area. Social responsibility is at the heart of Musandam Power.

During the Holy month of Ramadhan, MPC effectively served the community and supported families with limited income by forming a campaign team to visit families in Bukha for food distributions that targeted social security families. Also, MPC contributed RO 4,000 to the Oman Charity Organization (OCO) as per the directives from the Capital Market Authority regarding obligating joint-stock companies to deduct 20% from its CSR budget to OCO.

Outlook

The company anticipates a mix of challenges and opportunities in 2023. Challenges include the availability of natural gas and an increased reliance on diesel fuel. The company is actively collaborating with government authorities to address these issues. Notably, in November 2022, efforts were made to compensate for a gas shortage, reducing the dependence on diesel. Currently, the plant mainly operates on gas, with plans to continue this trend in the future. However, it is important to note that the inconsistent gas supply requires occasional use of diesel as an alternative fuel. Despite these challenges, the company remains confident in the plant's reliability.

Furthermore, the company recognizes the significance of rising interest costs and the pressure of operating outside warranty. However, the company is actively focusing on addressing these cost pressures while maintaining a positive outlook.

All reasonable and prudent measures will be taken by the Company to ensure high standards of health, safety, environmental compliance reliability, and availability are maintained over 2023.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to extend our deep appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik Al Said and His Government for their continued support and encouragement to the private sector by creating an environment that allows us to participate effectively in the growth of the Sultanate's economy and to dedicate our achievements to the building of a strong nation.

Unaudited statement of financial position as at 30 September 2023

	30 September 2023 RO '000	Audited 31 December 2022 RO '000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets:		
Property, plant, and equipment	66,577	68,069
Current assets:		
Inventories	3,313	3,403
Trade and other receivables	21,580	23,648
Cash and bank balances	1,080	1,522
Total current assets	25,973	28,573
Total assets	92,550	96,642
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity:		
Share capital	7,039	7,039
Legal reserve	1,810	1,515
Retained earnings	3,849	3,133
Total equity	12,698	11,687
Non-current liabilities:		
Senior facility loan	50,737	52,590
Provision for asset retirement obligation	189	183
Lease liability	105	100
Deferred tax liability	4,069	3,672
Employees' end-of-service benefits	4	3
Total non-current liabilities	55,104	56,548
Current liabilities:		
Senior facility loan	3,357	3,249
Lease liability	3	3
Trade and other payables	21,388	20,655
Short-term loan facility	-	4,500
Total current liabilities	24,748	28,407
Total liabilities	79,852	84,955
Total equity and liabilities	92,550	96,642
Net assets per share	0.180	0.166

Unaudited statement of profit or Profit and other comprehensive income for the nine months period ended 30 September 2023

	30 September 2023 RO '000	30 September 2022 RO '000
Revenue	15,776	15,536
Operating costs	(9,268)	(8,612)
Gross profit	6,508	6,924
General and administrative expenses	(827)	(779)
Finance costs	(2,330)	(2,213)
Profit before tax	3,351	3,932
Tax expense	(397)	(592)
Profit and total comprehensive income for the period	2,954	3,340
Basic and diluted profit per share for the period	0.042	0.047

Changan EADO Plus redefines luxury standards of sedan

Changan's EADO Plus is the answer to everyone's quest for a captivating sedan. This breathtaking design is paired with a spacious and luxurious interior, setting it apart as a truly remarkable offering.

Not just a treat for the eyes, the EADO Plus redefines expectations, serving as a compact yet powerful family sedan. Its premium styling radiates elegance, while the lavish interior and comprehensive safety features ensure an unparalleled driving experience.

Building on the allure of the EADO Plus, its performance is just as impressive. Powered by a robust 1.4 Turbo engine,155 hp and paired with a seamless seven-speed dual-clutch transmission, this sedan guarantees a driving experience that is as dynamic as it is extraordinary.

Expect nothing less than sheer brilliance on the road. Discover the magnetic charm of the Changan EADO Plus, where sophistication meets unparalleled performance and value. Embarking on every journey becomes a comforting thought, given its suite of advanced safety features that ensure unmatched tranquility on the road.

With Dual 10" screens, this premium sedan effortlessly combines user-friendly technology and connectivity. Enhanced with adaptive cruise control, drivers can navigate life's highways with ease. The panoramic sunroof offers breathtaking views, while the integrated navigation system ensures pinpoint accuracy. With the Changan EADO Plus, every trip becomes an eagerly anticipated adventure, promising attention at every twist and turn.

The Changan EADO Plus 1.4 Turbo stands out with a myriad of exceptional attributes. Highlighted by the eye-catching Star Eye LED Headlamp paired with a unique point grille, it exudes undeniable elegance.

Its 7" Dual Tone Alloy Wheels add a touch of sophistication, complemented by the seamless Full LCD Integrated Dual Screens for a modern touch. Luxuriate in the plush sport seats draped in fine leather, ensuring both aesthetics and comfort.

The Rear AC vents promise a cozy ride for all passengers, and the Front Collision Warning system underscores its commitment to safety. Moreover, its commendable fuel efficiency, recording 18.3km/litre under GSO standards, guarantees an economical journey.

Prioritising safety above all, the EADO Plus is meticulously crafted to shield its occupants. It boasts state-of-the-art enhancements such as a 360-degree camera for a comprehensive view and side airbags that fortify passenger security.

In addition, the dual exhaust features, typically reserved for luxury vehicles, infuse an added layer of sophistication to this remarkable sedan.

A spokesperson for Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment LLC (AGAE) says, "The Changan EADO Plus is not merely about aesthetics and utility - it's a masterclass in harmonising elegance with purpose. From its striking façade to its lavish cabin, interactive controls, and state-of-the-art safety features, this family car stands as an epitome of vehicular excellence. Dive into a world where the exceptional becomes the standard and let the EADO Plus stand as the emblem of your car aspirations."

EADO PLUS 1.4 T 7 DCT Limited

With an engine of 1.4 Turbo, the Changan EADO Plus sport edition offers power of 155 hp, Nm torque and transmission of 7 speed DCT. The model offers a dimension of 4730x1820x1505 mm (LxWxH), a wheelbase of 2700mm, fuel tank of 53 litres.

The highlights of Changan EADO Plus 1.4 T 7 DCT's limited edition includes EADO Plus 1.4 T 7 DCT SPORT features and some extra features.

The exterior has dual tone 17" alloy wheels, sportier front grille, ORVM - electrically folding, panoramic sunroof. The interior features include sporty red interior, front seats ventilation, six-way driver seat electrically adjustable, rear armrest and 60:40 rear seat split.

Safety attributes include adaptive cruise control, forward collision warning, automatic emergency brake and 360° Camera. The Infotainment section has 10" LCD instrument cluster, six speakers and navigation features.

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment has set up a spacious and state-of-the-art Showroom in Qurum, Mawaleh, Sohar and main service centre in Azaiba in Muscat. AGAE has already tied up for Periodic Maintenance Services in many cities including Salalah, Sohar, Sur, Nizwa, Ibra, Ibri and Barka etc.

Bank Muscat takes part in exhibition for dates, honey

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, participated in the First International Exhibition for Dates and Honey held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from October 25 to 28.

The exhibition was held under the patronage of H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, with the attendance of a number of officials and experts in the field.

Salim Mohammed al Kaabi, General Manager - Credit & Legal, represented Bank Muscat in the opening ceremony. About 180 local and international companies working in production and packaging of honey and dates participated in the exhibition.

The exhibition aims to introduce dates and honey production in Oman, enable companies to see the new technologies used in the field, follow up on the recent developments provided though showcasing the latest products and innovations, encourage small and medium enterprises to participate and share their experiences, and open new horizons for investment in the sector.

MSMEs have always been an area of focus for Bank Muscat, which is keen to provide businesses with various financial services and facilities.

During the four-day exhibition, the bank is showcasing through a dedicated stall the services and benefits offered by Najahi Business Banking. Najahi is designed to enable MSMEs to develop and expand their businesses through a suite of products, including the value-added Najahi Current Account, Najahi Flexi Loan to support working capital, business expansion and other business needs; the Najahi Business Credit Card; and Najahi PoS Receivables financing for customers who use PoS machines for sales. All financing options are available to the bank's customers 'collateral free'.

The bank participated previously is such local and international exhibitions and festivals held across Oman.

NATIONAL BISCUIT INDUSTRIES LTD. SAOG

DIRECTORS REPORT

Company performance from 1st April, 2023 to 30th September, 2023

The Company has recorded sales of RO 7,630,962 for the six months period ending 30th September, 2023 as against RO 6,484,113 in the corresponding period of last year thereby registering growth of 18%.

The gross profit earned during the period of six months is RO 1,012,143 against RO 461,774 in the corresponding period of last year thereby registering growth of 119%.

The net profit for the six months period ending 30th September, 2023 stood at RO 117,245 as against net loss of RO 196,607 for the corresponding period in the previous year.

Future Outlook

The company is strengthening the distribution network in GCC as well as Levant regions via a revamped RTM (Route to Market) especially for KSA and Qatar markets. Moreover, the company is innovating new products and expanding the range of existing products to increase the revenue and profitability.

The company is rolling out the "Win with NABIL" promotion campaign in the Sultanate of Oman to ensure the sales of the profitable product assortment to drive margins.

Nooh Bin Mohammed Al Zidjaly
Chairman

UNAUDITED BALANCE SHEET AS ON 30th SEP 2023

	30-Sep-23 RO	30-Sep-22 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	6,509,292	6,078,551
Intangible Assets	148,442	122,988
Right of Use assets	255,988	278,554
Advance for Capital Goods	78,007	218,921
Total non-current assets	**6,991,729**	**6,699,014**
Current assets		
Inventories	2,246,439	2,757,171
Trade and other receivables	4,711,720	3,418,498
Wakala deposits	0	755,260
Bank balances and cash	202,064	170,521
Total current assets	**7,160,223**	**7,101,450**
Total assets	**14,151,952**	**13,800,464**
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity attributable to equity holders of the Company		
Share capital	1,000,000	1,000,000
Legal reserve	333,333	333,333
Retained earnings	6,051,314	6,096,489
Total Shareholders' equity	**7,384,647**	**7,429,822**
Non-current liabilities		
End of Service Benefits	503,670	427,398
Deferred tax liability	88,948	45,909
Lease Liabilities	290,867	310,031
Total non-current liabilities	**883,485**	**783,338**
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	5,834,083	5,067,299
Provision for Income tax	30,500	55,598
Current Portion of Lease Liabilities	19,237	13,260
Bank Borrowings	0	451,147
Total current liabilities	**5,883,820**	**5,587,304**
Total liabilities	**6,767,305**	**6,370,642**
Total equity and liabilities	**14,151,952**	**13,800,464**
Net assets per share	**7.385**	**7.430**

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30TH SEP 2023

	6 Months 30-Sep-23 RO	6 Months 30-Sep-22 RO
INCOME		
Sales	7,630,962	6,484,113
Cost of sales	(6,618,819)	(6,022,339)
Gross profit	**1,012,143**	**461,774**
Other income	13,862	61,791
	1,026,005	**523,565**
EXPENSES		
Selling and distribution	(472,383)	(342,839)
General and administration	(387,007)	(356,529)
Directors' meeting attendance fees	(7,800)	(10,800)
Finance costs	(21,120)	(19,859)
	(888,310)	**(730,027)**
Profit before tax	137,695	(206,462)
Income Tax	(20,450)	9,855
Profit/(Loss) for the Period	**117,245**	**(196,607)**
Attributable to:		
Equity shareholders of the Company	117,245	(196,607)
Earnings/(Loss) per share	0.117	-0.197

Sohar International launches new corporate mobile banking app

Demonstrating its unwavering dedication to continually improving and expanding its services to better serve corporate clients, Sohar International introduces its latest addition to the suite of its corporate Internet banking services revealing its new corporate mobile banking app.

This innovative app is tailored to cater to the unique requirements of the corporate world, enabling clients to run and grow their businesses effortlessly.

The new corporate app is designed to provide unmatched convenience, speed, and cost-effectiveness to a diverse corporate audience, including large corporations, government entities, SMEs, and retail businesses. This innovative app responds to the growing demand for remote banking, enabling businesses to manage financial transactions and accounts from anywhere at any time. The corporate mobile banking app offers a suite of features tailored to businesses, including statement checks, salary transfer, fund transfers, and bill payments.

To ensure security, the application is fortified with two-factor authentication, providing the choice of static and dynamic passwords, as well as advanced biometric authentication options like fingerprint or Face ID.

Bank's CEO Ahmed al Musalmi emphasised the paramount significance of modernised digital tools for contemporary businesses.

"In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, companies are increasingly drawn toward digital solutions that offer efficiency, convenience, and utmost security," he stated. "Our primary objective is to empower our corporate clientele with enhanced control and deeper financial insights," the CEO noted, referring to the app launch.

Malabar Gold ushers in festive season with exciting offers

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 335 showrooms across 11 countries, has announced their much-awaited festive season offers.

Adding more sparkle to the numerous celebrations in the season, customers can get assured gold coins with their gold & diamond jewellery purchases. Malabar Gold & Diamonds has also unveiled a stunning array of festive jewellery collections in gold, diamond and precious gems, designed to be an alluring attraction to customers.

The limited period offer can be availed across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds outlets in the Middle east, Far east, the US and the UK till November 12.

For every diamond or precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO500 customers will get free 1gm gold coin and for diamond and precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO300 they will be eligible for 1/2 gm gold coin.

Embracing the spirit of the season, the festive jewellery collection that the brand has unveiled consists of exquisite and unique designs in gold, diamonds & precious gem jewellery that have been carefully curated by considering the varying jewellery preferences that exists amongst their vast customer bases.

The special designs have been made available across a wide range of sub-brands such as Mine, Era, Precia, Viraaz, Ethnix and Divine. Elegant designs crafted in contemporary fashion have also been introduced in the 18K gold category as well.

Additionally, the brand will also be setting up Special Buy counters at their showrooms, offering incredible discounts on selected jewellery designs.

"The offers that we unveil during the festive season are always looked forward to by our customers. By giving away free gold coins with their festive jewellery purchase, we are ensuring that our vast plethora of customers gets to indulge in their festivities with all the pomp & and vigour they can muster," said Shamlal Ahamed, MD - International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds. "The attractive offers and the exquisite array of designs that have been made available in our festive jewellery collection is our way of reiterating that Malabar Gold & Diamonds stands by our customers in all their celebrations."

Prima Pramac's Spanish rider Jorge Martin celebrates on the podium

Martin wins Thai MotoGP thriller, Bagnaia second

Buriram, Thailand - Spain's Jorge Martin won a thrilling Thailand MotoGP race Sunday to close the gap on Francesco Bagnaia to 13 points in the world championship, with three legs of the season to go.

Italy's Bagnaia crossed the line third, behind Brad Binder, but was awarded second place after the South African was penalised one position for exceeding track limits on the final lap.

The trio had been involved in a titanic tussle over the closing laps with the lead changing hands before pole-sitter Martin, on a Pramac-Ducati, pipped his rivals and celebrated wildly as he crossed the line.

"I'm so happy. This feeling is amazing because today I wasn't better than them," said Martin.

The Spaniard managed the race masterfully from pole position, conserving his tyres to leave him with enough grip to withstand the late onslaught from the fast-finishing KTM rider Binder and factory-Ducati pilot Bagnaia.

"I had the same tools, same tyres, but I had better pace than them and I had to go more than 100 percent on the last lap to stay in front," added Martin.

"I was pushing on the last lap like it was qualifying."

Bagnaia, attempting to defend his world title, came into the weekend with a 27-point cushion in the championship but saw that slashed by Martin, who also won Saturday's sprint at the Buriram International Circuit.

"I felt like I was in a (video) game room. It was incredible," said Bagnaia of the final daredevil minutes of the 26-lap race around the 4.554-km-long circuit that saw the leading trio go wheel-to-wheel. That last lap was on the limit but second place is positive for the championship this weekend considering where I was at the start," added Bagnaia, who began from sixth on the grid and was down to seventh by the fourth lap.

Bagnaia began to claw his way through the pack and was then gifted third when Alex Marquez crashed his Gresini-Ducati on lap 12, allowing the world champion to close on the leading duo of Martin and Binder.

> *I'm so happy. This feeling is amazing because today* ***I wasn't better than them***
>
> JORGE MARTIN

"I'm really happy with the way I rode today," said Binder. "I didn't leave anything on the table."

Marco Bezzechi was fourth on a VR-46 Ducati, Aleix Espargaro crossed the line fifth and Fabio Quartararo sixth.

Espargaro was later penalised three seconds, relegating him to eighth, for running with tyre pressures lower than permitted.

South Africa's Siya Kolisi (C) and teammates celebrate with the trophy after winning the Rugby World Cup on Saturday (AFP)

Springboks champions

South Africa beat New Zealand by a point to win record fourth Rugby World Cup

Paris, France - Handre Pollard kicked four penalties to help South Africa to a nail-biting 12-11 victory over 14-man New Zealand in the Rugby World Cup final on Saturday to claim a record fourth title.

As is so often the case with finals, the match was a tight, edgy encounter at a rain-soaked Stade de France where defence ruled and the All Blacks lost captain Sam Cane to a first-half red card for a high tackle.

But the Springboks prevailed to win a third successive knockout match in this tournament by a point and add to their titles in 1995, 2007 and 2019.

Player of the match Pieter-Steph du Toit said: "The last three games have been quite tough, each one we have played has been a final and each one we have won by one point.

"As a team we like drama. It has helped us through the last few years, it shows the resilience of this team. We are honoured to play for the whole of South Africa and the Springboks. When we go back home it will be a warm welcome for us."

> *"As a team we like drama. It has helped us through the last few years, it shows the resilience of this team.* ***"We are honoured to play for South Africa and the Springboks***
>
> PIETER-STEPH DU TOIT

South Africa captain Siya Kolisi added: "Honestly, people who are not from South Africa don't understand what this means for our country.

"It's not just about the game on the field. Our country goes through such a lot. We are the hope they have."

The game, with tennis stars Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic among the 80,000 spectators, got off to a dramatic start.

All Black flanker Shannon Frizell was yellow carded by referee Wayne Barnes after just two minutes for an illegal ruck clearout that saw Bok hooker Bongi Mbonambi, the sole specialist number two in the squad, leave the pitch with an injured right knee.

Pollard kicked the penalty as Deon Fourie, a 37-year-old flanker, replaced Mbonambi, who was cleared earlier in the week of using a racial slur against England flanker Tom Curry in the semi-final. Pollard, who kicked 22 points in South Africa's final victory over England four years ago in Japan, booted a second penalty after Codie Taylor failed to roll away in a ruck.

The opening quarter was not for the faint-hearted, each side delivering a succession of eye-watering hits as the Boks, whose aggressive defence was led by the outstanding Du Toit, pinned the All Blacks in their own territory.

A late Faf de Klerk hit on Mark Tele'a saw Jordie Barrett kick for the corner and from a series of drives, the Boks infringed and Richie Mo'unga got the All Blacks on the scoreboard with an easy penalty.

Pollard hit straight back after Ardie Savea flopped over a ruck, connecting perfectly to convert a monster 49-metre effort.

New Zealand's woes were compounded when Cane was yellow-carded in the 29th minute for a high tackle on Jesse Kriel, later upgraded to red for a high degree of danger with no mitigation, according to the television match official.

Cane became the first player to be shown a red card in a World Cup final and the All Blacks were reduced to 14 men for 46 minutes.

A dejected Cane said afterwards he was "extremely gutted and disappointed".

"The boys had to play with 14 men for the last 50-odd minutes. I thought the courage that they showed out there was incredible. The whole team are absolute warriors."

AFP

France's Celine Boutier celebrates with the trophy after winning in the final round of the Maybank Championship

Celine Boutier seals Maybank Championship title after playoff

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - France's Celine Boutier converted a birdie on the ninth playoff hole to seal a dramatic, rain-filled inaugural Maybank Championship title on Sunday after besting Thailand's Atthaya Thitikul in Kuala Lumpur.

The 29-year-old's triumph also tied the second-longest sudden death playoff in LPGA history, equalling the mark set at the 2012 Kingsmill Championship.

Boutier had to play a total 81 holes before she finally secured her sixth LPGA Tour title, four of which have come this year.

Victory at the Kuala Lumpur Golf And Country Club also meant Boutier became the first LPGA golfer this year to amass four title wins.

"This year has definitely been unbelievable for me and very rewarding. I couldn't be happier with the way this season is going," said Boutier, who pocketed $450,000 for the win.

Thitikul was gracious in defeat. "I fought really hard in the playoff, and both of us were hitting really great shots and it paid off. It just goes to someone who did it better," she said.

Both Boutier and Thitikul finished at 21-under scores of 267 over 72 holes, with the champion turning in a final round of 64, while the 20-year-old Thai sank in a birdie at the final hole to notch a 68 and force sudden death.

Ferrari's Leclerc grabs surprise pole for Mexico Grand Prix

Mexico City, Mexico - A surprised Charles Leclerc admitted he did not expect his success on Saturday after he secured pole position ahead of team-mate Carlos Sainz as Ferrari locked out the front row for Sunday's Mexico Grand Prix.

In a chaotic and confusing qualifying session that seemed set to see Max Verstappen on pole again, Ferrari emerged in Q3 with a surge of pace that surprised almost everyone.

The Monegasque clocked a best lap in one minute and 17.166 seconds to beat the Spaniard by 0.067 seconds, leaving newly-crowned three-time world champion Verstappen third for Red Bull.

"It's two weekends in a row where we say that we don't know if we have the pace," said Leclerc. "People will start not believing us anymore! To be honest, I did not expect to be on pole today."

Finnish prodigy Rovanpera wins second straight world rally title

Passau, Germany - Kalle Rovanpera sealed his second straight world rally title on Sunday with the young Finnish driver declaring: "I am going to enjoy this one more than the first".

The 23-year-old Toyota star finished second to Thierry Neuville in the Central European Rally to take an unassailable lead in the standings with one round of the season remaining.

"I am feeling really good," beamed Rovanpera, who last year became the youngest ever champion one day after his 22nd birthday.

"I am going to enjoy this one more than the first one," added the winner of 11 rallies in three years.

"I think this year was, for me personally, more important than last year. The competition was tighter and we did a really good job." He said the "biggest thank you" was reserved for his co-driver Jonne Halttunen.

"He is the world's best co-driver," he said.

Rovanpera and Halttunen became only the sixth driver combination in history to win back-to-back world rally crowns.

Rovanpera was helped along the way when his teammate and only remaining title challenger Elfyn Evans crashed on Saturday.

Finland's Kalle Rovanpera (R) and co-driver Jonne Halttunen of celebrate their victory on Sunday

The Welsh driver returned to the race on Sunday in a desperate bid to prolong the title battle, but in vain despite collecting five points for winning the closing Power Stage.

"Kalle was very strong on Friday and we didn't have the pace to follow him," said Evans.

"After that, of course we continued to try but it didn't work out this time and sometimes that's the way it goes," he added.

Rovanpera had been virtually untouchable in the treacherous Czech rain and mud on Friday and had built up a 36-second lead over Neuville in this new addition to the calendar staged over three countries - Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic.

A spin on Saturday's second stage allowed Neuville to cut his advantage by more than half with the Belgian claiming the lead on the next stage. Then, Evans drove into a farm when placed third, his slim title hopes gone.

AFP

THE PERENNIAL FAVOURITE

Messi eyes eighth Ballon d'Or as Bonmati set to win women's award

Lionel Messi

Paris, France - Lionel Messi is the favourite to win the eighth Ballon d'Or of his remarkable career when this year's ceremony to crown the planet's best footballer takes place in Paris on Monday, while Spain's World Cup-winning star Aitana Bonmati is tipped to take the women's prize.

The prestigious award has been dominated over the last 15 years by Messi and his old adversary Cristiano Ronaldo, who have won it 12 times between them.

Only two other players have won the Ballon d'Or since Ronaldo claimed his first in 2008 - Luka Modric won it in 2018 and Karim Benzema was crowned last year following a brilliant season with Real Madrid.

Messi is set to benefit from a recent change which means the award is now based on a player's record over the last season, rather than over the course of the calendar year.

Last season saw Messi lead Argentina to glory at the World Cup in Qatar, where he scored seven times and was named the tournament's best player.

It was the crowning moment of his astonishing career, and is likely to mean Messi sees off the considerable competition elsewhere among the 30 nominees.

Most notably, there are seven members of the Manchester City team that won the English Premier League, FA Cup and UEFA Champions League under Pep Guardiola.

The obvious candidate among them is Erling Haaland, who scored 52 goals in 53 games and has already won the UEFA Player of the Year award for last season.

"I always said that the Ballon d'Or should be in two sections, one for Messi, and after that look for the other one," Guardiola said recently.

"Haaland should win. We won the treble and he scored, I don't know, 50 million goals.

"But of course if you tell me the worst season of Messi, it would be the best season for the rest of the players.

"Both deserve it, so what can I say? Selfishly I would say I want it to be Erling because he helped us to achieve what we achieved. I would love it."

The case for Mbappe?

Messi's season at club level with Paris Saint-Germain was underwhelming, even if he won Ligue 1 alongside Kylian Mbappe and Neymar.

He scored 21 goals for the French club, but was clearly never happy in Paris and was even jeered by his own supporters at times, before moving to Inter Miami in Major League Soccer earlier this year.

There is at least a case to say this should be Mbappe's time.

He was clearly PSG's most important player last season, scoring 41 goals, and was also the World Cup's top scorer with eight goals after his incredible hat-trick in that epic final.

The French lobby is strong in favour of Mbappe, 24, winning a prize organised in France and handed over in Paris.

As an example, the manager of leading French club Lens, Franck Haise, last week did not hesitate when asked who he would vote for. "Another Frenchman, Kylian Mbappe," he said.

"Because he had such a complete season and he is an exceptional player. Even if I think it will be won by a player who won the World Cup, which I would not find jarring."

The prize is voted for by a jury of one journalist per country from the top 100 nations in FIFA's ranking.

AFP

Oman Sail's optimist will be hoping for fine showing in Abu Dhabi

Oman Sail's Optimist team ready for Asian and Oceanian Championship

Muscat - Nine talented young sailors from Oman Sail's Optimist team will travel to Abu Dhabi to represent Oman at the 2023 IODA Optimist Asian and Oceanian Championship. Racing begins on 31 October, through until the final day on 4 November, and brings together 161 young sailors from 28 nations for the event, which is also part of the 50th anniversary celebrations for the Optimist class.

Representing Oman will be Saoud al Shaqsi, Tameem al Balushi, Firas al Nabhani, Hasan al Wahaibi and Abdul Rahman al Hadi. Harib al Busaidi and Habib al Hussaini will compete in the U-12 category, while Hadeel al Mushaifri and Tarteel al Hasani will race in the Optimist girls competition.

The team will be led by Mohsin al Busaidi and coached by Sultan al Zadjali, and assistants Suhail al Mayahi and Ibraham al Fedhaili. Huda al Ghilani will travel with the team to support in a team management role. Abdulaziz Salim al Shidi has been nominated by the Organising Committee to act as a race officer for the event, with Ali Salim al Harbi and Aabid Yaqoob al Balushi assisting as mark layers.

Mohsin al Busaidi, Team Leader and Head of Performance at Oman Sail, said, "This is an important step in the development of our sailing team. We expect a strong fleet and a high level of competition on the water, but we are confident of performing well."

Sultan al Zadjali, Head Coach of the Optimist team, added, "Participation in recent regattas, including Mussanah Race Week, have helped prepare the team for higher levels of competition and given them vital exposure to competitive environments. We have all been working hard to give the team the best possible chance to sail well and, hopefully, earn honours.

CLASSIFIEDS

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Please email your listing to

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BIRTHDAY WISHES

ANKITA

Dear Ankita
Happy Birthday!
You inspire us to be better every day.
Your strength, patience, kindness, and joy are contagious to everyone around you
Mom & Dad

NAME CHANGE

I MAGESH , (holder of Indian Passport N5786663) Son Of/GOPATHI CHANDRAN having permanent residence in NO.432 RAHAMATH NAGAR, PUDUPATTINAM complete postal address in India), and presently residing BUILDING :1464 ,44th DOOR GHALA, MUSCAT (complete postal address in Oman, intend to change my name from MAGESH to (Old name) ABDUL RAHEEM , (new name) for all practical . Any objection towards my name change may please be communicated to Embassy of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, PO Box No : 1727, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.

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Experience: Minimum 2 years in Security System/Real time Operation of Security System monitoring.

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- Able to operate and monitor Security System within Security Monitoring Room in efficient manner.
- Ensuring Security System (CCTV, Access Control, BMS, Electric Fence etc.) are working properly.
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JUDE, THE REAL HERO

'Lord Bellingham' taking Spain by storm after Clasico brace

Barcelona, Spain - Jude Bellingham's star keeps rising at Real Madrid even when it seems it can't get any higher.

The England international's bolt from the blue seemed to rescue Los Blancos a point in his first Clasico in a match where they deserved less, outplayed by rivals Barcelona for the majority of it.

That would have been enough for a relieved Madrid, but it was not for Bellingham, who found a late winner in the 92nd minute to send Madrid back top of La Liga.

Bellingham now has 13 goals in 13 games for Madrid since his move from Borussia Dortmund this summer, with the 103 million euro ($109 million) transfer fee not weighing him down in the slightest.

"I wasn't at my best," Bellingham admitted after the Clasico - just imagine what he will do when he is.

"Lord Bellingham," ran the headline in AS newspaper, while Marca went with "Bellingham sticks out his tongue" - Barcelona played with Rolling Stones' iconic tongue and lips logo on their shirts as part of their Spotify sponsorship deal.

Some members of the veteran rock band watched the game from the stands, but in the end the Beatles' "Hey Jude" was the song that sprang to mind.

The 20-year-old's Clasico brace crowned a superb start to life in the Spanish capital, with three goals in three in the Champions League too, and Bellingham told fans to expect more of the same.

The midfielder says he has been working on adding long-range strikes to his game, and that paid off with his goal to level Ilkay Gundogan's early opener at the Olympic Stadium.

> *Maybe the opponents expect me to try to get into the box or find a team-mate and I wanted to surprise them by hitting it from outside the box*
>
> JUDE BELLINGHAM

"I got the ball on the edge of the box, I've been saying for a few weeks that I need to try from outside the area," Bellingham told Real Madrid TV.

"Maybe the opponents expect me to try to get into the box or find a team-mate and I wanted to surprise them by hitting it from outside the box.

"I know I have the technique and it went into the top corner."

Bellingham barely celebrated his first goal, knowing the job was only half done.

Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham scores against Barcelona in their Spanish League match on Saturday (AFP)

"He seems like a veteran," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti, when asked about it.

His second involved some luck, with Luka Modric miscontrolling Dani Carvajal's cross and the ball fell perfectly for Bellingham. However the midfielder has perfected his runs into the area and has been a constant menace in opposition boxes through the season.

This time Bellingham ran to the corner and his arms held wide. "Yep," he said, nodding, while facing stunned Barcelona supporters.

Sucker-punched by Bellingham, Barcelona were left with only hurt and self-reflection.

"I wish there was more anger, frustration and disappointment," said Barca goalscorer Ilkay Gundogan.

"There has to be more emotion, especially when you lose."

Marc-Andre ter Stegen might have got more on Bellingham's vicious drive than a fingertip, Oriol Romeu should have tracked him deep into the area when he scored his winner, but the Englishman is unstoppable at the moment.

AFP

Cambiaso ends Juve's three-year absence from Serie A summit

Milan, Italy - Juventus moved top of Serie A for the first time in over three years on Saturday after Andrea Cambiaso's stoppage-time winner in a dramatic 1-0 success over struggling Verona.

Massimiliano Allegri's side moved one point ahead of Inter Milan thanks to substitute Cambiaso pushing in his first Juve goal from close range in the 97th minute of an otherwise uninspiring performance in Turin.

The hosts, who have kept five straight clean sheets, looked like they were set for a disappointing stalemate after Moise Kean had two goals disallowed and Kenan Yildiz looped a golden late chance over the bar.

But instead they lead the league for the first time since last winning it in August 2020.

"It was a huge goal and a really important win. We're top and we're going to enjoy it, for the next few hours anyway," said Cambiaso, who was booked for taking his shirt off in the wild celebrations which followed his goal.

Andrea Cambiaso of Juventus celebrates his goal against Verona

Asked by Sky Sport if that was the best booking of his career, he joked: "Absolutely. It was well worth getting the yellow card!"

Inter can retake the lead when they host Roma on Sunday evening in former fan idol Romelu Lukaku's return to the San Siro.

Fans have been banned from distributing thousands of whistles with which to barrack Lukaku but will still offer a hostile atmosphere for the Belgium striker.

Hwang strikes as Wolves peg back charging Newcastle; Everton win

Wolverhampton, United Kingdom - Hwang Hee-chan scored a brilliant equaliser to slow Newcastle's Premier League charge as Wolves battled back to earn a 2-2 draw after Callum Wilson's double at Molineux on Saturday.

England international Wilson scored twice as Newcastle led 2-1 at the break, on course for their fifth league win in six games.

But South Korea international Hwang grabbed a deserved equaliser for the home team in the 71st minute - his sixth Premier League goal of the season.

Wilson replaced the injured Alexander Isak in the only change to the Newcastle side that started Wednesday's 1-0 Champions League defeat at home to Borussia Dortmund.

There was no Sandro Tonali in the squad as the Italy midfielder begins a 10-month ban for betting offences. Wilson scored the opener after a scramble in the box started when the ball slipped through Jose Sa's hands as he came to try and collect Anthony Gordon's cross.

Wolverhampton Wanderers' Hwang Hee-chan (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Newcastle United on Saturday (AFP)

Wilson's first effort was blocked by defender Toti but when the ball bounced up the Newcastle striker acrobatically turned it home, adjusting to fire over his shoulder.

Wolves levelled in the 36th minute after Mario Lemina got the right side of Kieran Trippier at the far post to head in Pedro Neto's corner.

Newcastle were presented with the chance to retake the lead in first-half stoppage time when they were awarded a controversial penalty.

Hwang took a loose touch inside his own box and was adjudged to have clipped Fabian Schaer as he stepped in to nick the ball away.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin scored the only goal of the game as Everton beat West Ham 1-0 on Sunday to give themselves breathing space above the Premier League relegation zone.

Parents of Liverpool's Luis Diaz kidnapped in Colombia

Bogotá, Colombia - The mother of Liverpool winger Luis Diaz was rescued from kidnappers on Saturday but a search remains ongoing for his father, Colombian President Gustavo Petro said.

Petro posted on X, formerly known as Twitter, that Diaz's mother was rescued in Barrancas, in the north of Colombia. "We continue in the search for the father," he added.

Colombia's attorney general's office said it had been working intensively on the case.

"From the moment the attorney general's office learned of the kidnapping of the parents of the Colombian player Luis Diaz, in the Barrancas sector of La Guajira, a specialised team of prosecutors, police and military personnel have been working to find the location of these people, clarify the facts and find those responsible," the office said on X.

Local media reports said that Luis Manuel Diaz and Cilenis Marulanda were at a service station when armed men on motorbikes kidnapped them.

The director of the police, General William Salamanca, said he deployed intelligence agents and officers to deal with the case.

The governor of La Guajira, Diala Wilches, condemned the crime.

AFP

Arsenal's Eddie Nketiah (R) celebrates after scoring against Sheffield United (AFP)

Arsenal hat-trick hero Nketiah 'top level' for boss Arteta

London, United Kingdom - Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta said Eddie Nketiah is a "top level" striker with the ability to get even better after scoring a hat-trick in Saturday's 5-0 demolition of Sheffield United.

But many have questioned whether Arsenal have the natural goalscorer needed to take the title from Manchester City.

Nketiah could be set for a run in the side after Gabriel Jesus picked up a hamstring injury in Tuesday's 2-1 Champions League win away to Sevilla.

And Arteta heaped praise on England's all-time top goalscorer at under-21 international level.

"For me, he is top level," said Arteta. "He has started eight out of the 10 Premier League games, so that tells you how much we and I trust him and the importance he has in the team.

"Really happy for him, an academy player, to experience a hat-trick in the Premier League.

"He needs to enjoy the moment, he fully deserves it, and hopefully there are many more to come."

Nketiah was forced to deputise for Jesus for long spells last season after the Brazilian suffered a knee injury at the World Cup.

After an initial impressive impact with four goals in five games in December and January, Nketiah failed to score in his final 13 Premier League appearances of the campaign as Arsenal were overhauled by City in the title race.

ICC MEN'S CRICKET WORLD CUP INDIA 2023

Indian pace crushes England

Shami stars with four wickets as hosts hammer reigning champions to continue unbeaten run

INDIA VS ENGLAND

Lucknow, India - Mohammed Shami led an inspired bowling display as India hammered England by 100 runs on Sunday to stay unbeaten in the World Cup and all but push the defending champions out of the semi-final race.

Chasing a tricky 230 for victory in Lucknow, England collapsed to 129 all out in 34.5 overs to suffer their fifth defeat in six matches and leave their title defence at the mercy of a mathematical miracle.

The hosts have six wins in as many games and are virtually assured of a semi-final place.

Skipper Rohit Sharma led the charge with 87 as India posted 229-9, a total that looked below par but proved enough for a struggling England side on a sluggish pitch.

"It was a great performance and we would take that win any day," said man-of-the-match Rohit.

Shami returned figures of 4-22 while fellow quick Jasprit Bumrah took three wickets to wrap up the match as fireworks lit up the sky.

India's Mohammed Shami celebrates after taking the wicket of England's Jonny Bairstow (AFP)

England had a disastrous start and fell to 52-5 after Bumrah took wickets on successive ball to be on a hat-trick and Shami joined forces to grab two more.

Bumrah sent back Dawid Malan, for 16, and Joe Root, for nought, but Jonny Bairstow played out the hat-trick ball.

England soon lost Ben Stokes, bowled by Shami, to raise India's hopes of defending the total he then brought the house down when he bowled Bairstow for 14 as 46,000 fans, largely all Indian in blue jerseys, roared.

Wickets kept tumbling and skipper Jos Buttler was bowled by Kuldeep for 10, and Shami sent Moeen Ali packing for 15 and the end was near.

Earlier England left-arm quick David Willey returned figures of 3-45, including the prized wicket of Virat Kohli for a nine-ball duck, after they elected to bowl.

The unbeaten hosts lost three early wickets, including two to Chris Woakes, to slip to 40-3 before Rohit steadied the innings and built a 91-run stand with KL Rahul, who made 39.

Rohit survived a reprieve on 33 when he was given out lbw but the opener reviewed the decision in his favour with tracking showing the ball would have missed the leg stump.

Rohit reached his second fifty of the tournament -- he also hit a century against Afghanistan -- to the noisy delight of the nearly-packed 50,000-seater stadium.

The captain and Rahul, who was returning to his IPL home ground where he suffered a serious injury earlier this year, kept the score ticking before Willey broke the stand with Rahul's wicket.

"I know I have got the experience to bat situations, not just going out there and playing my shots all the time," added Rohit.

"It was about using that experience to help the team and it was my job there to take the game as deep as possible. I still felt we were about 20 runs short even after that."

Rohit kept up the fight but fell to leg-spinner Adil Rashid after he holed out to deep mid-wicket where Liam Livingstone took a low catch.

Kohli, who endured his 16th duck in ODIs, remains one century away from equalling all-time great Sachin Tendulkar's record of 49 hundreds in the 50-over format.

Afghanistan's Noor Ahmad bowls in the match against Pakistan

Spin to win for black horses Afghanistan at World Cup

Pune, India - When cricket lovers refer to a 'fearsome foursome' they are usually talking about one of the West Indies' celebrated fast-bowling attacks of the late 1970s and 1980s.

But the way Afghanistan deployed four spinners in their recent World Cup win over Pakistan could lead to a new meaning for the term.

Even though the Chennai pitch is known to provide plenty of turn, some pundits were still taken aback when Afghanistan brought teenage left-armer Noor Ahmad into their XI to give themselves a fourth spin option against Pakistan.

Yet the 18-year-old wrist-spinner, appearing in just his fourth one-day international, responded with a return of 3-49 in 10 overs.

Not only that, his haul on World Cup debut included three frontline batsmen in Abdullah Shafique, Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan.

Afghanistan's spinners bowled 38 overs between them, with the experienced Mohammad Nabi (1-31) and Rashid Khan (0-41) proving particularly tough for Pakistan's batsmen to get away even if off-spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman, opening the bowling, conceded 55 runs from his eight overs. As it was, Pakistan were held to 282-7 in a match Afghanistan won by eight wickets following their 69-run rout of reigning champions England.

Noor's left-arm angle complements that of right-arm leg-spinner Rashid, with the 25-year-old the first global superstar of Afghanistan cricket following his exploits in various Twenty20 competitions. Nabi's flighted off-spin has been a key component of Afghanistan's rise through the ranks of world cricket, with the 38-year-old now a veteran of 152 ODIs.

With the roots of so much Afghanistan cricket in neighbouring Pakistan, where players learned the games in refugee camps following the Soviet invasion or, in Nabi's case, in Peshawar after his parents moved across the border to avoid the conflict, it is perhaps unsurprising that spin bowling has long been a key compoent of their team.

They have slow-bowling depth as well, with the likes of 23-year-old leg-spinner Qais Ahmad - not in the World Cup squad - having had stints with English county side Kent.

For much of cricket history, the concept of a 'balanced attack' has held sway. But that idea was rejected by celebrated West Indies captain Clive Lloyd, who reasoned that if your four best bowlers were quicks, then why not field them all?

India, by contrast, had a celebrated 1960s and 1970s quartet of spinners in Erapalli Prasanna, Srinivasaraghavan Venkataraghavan, Bhagwat Chandrasekhar and the late Bishan Bedi but they rarely all appeared in the same XI.

AFP

Dushmantha Chameera

Chameera replaces injured Kumara

Pune, India - Dushmantha Chameera has been called into Sri Lanka's World Cup squad after fellow paceman Lahiru Kumara was ruled out through injury, the tournament's event technical committee announced Sunday.

The 31-year-old Chameera, a veteran of 44 one-day internationals, was selected after Kumara was sidelined by a left thigh-muscle injury sustained during training in Pune, where Sri Lanka play Afghanistan on Monday. Kumara took 3-35 in Sri Lanka's eight-wicket thrashing of defending champions England in Bengaluru on Thursday.

That success was one of just two victories 1996 World Cup winners Sri Lanka have managed in their opening five games.

Bangladesh captain Shakib stumped by 'worst' display

Kolkata, India - Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan said his team's 87-run loss to the Netherlands in Kolkata on Saturday was their worst-ever World Cup performance.

After starting the tournament with a win against Afghanistan, Bangladesh slumped to a fifth successive defeat against the Dutch.

"I don't have an answer," said a visibly upset Shakib. "You can say that this is our worst, without any doubt. I don't have an answer to why we played this way."

Bangladesh had the Netherlands in trouble at 63-4 but paid the price for dropping skipper Scott Edwards twice in three balls when he was on nought. Edwards went on to finish as top scorer with 68.

Chasing a modest 230-run target, Bangladesh folded for just 142 in 42.2 overs against some accurate Dutch bowling led by Paul van Meekeren (4-23) and Bas de Leede (2-25). Bangladesh are ninth in the 10-team table with games remaining against Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Australia.

"I don't want to blame anyone. We are a better team than our performance. We were disappointing in this tournament, something that the whole dressing room would agree," said Shakib.

Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan walks back to the pavilion after his dismissal in the match against the Netherlands on Saturday

"I don't know what's going on," he added. "As a batting unit, if you ask me to summarise our six matches with the bat. We were very poor other than Mahmudullah and Mushfiqur Rahim."

Mahmudullah hit a century in a lost cause against South Africa in Mumbai while Mushfiqur has scored two fifties in the tournament. Shakib has been a shadow of himself, managing just 65 runs in five matches after notching 606 runs in the 2019 World Cup.

"All other batters were not up to the mark. I thought we were well short of confidence in both batting and bowling," said Shakib.

"We couldn't meet up with our high expectations. I thought we bowled really well after losing the toss but we were sloppy in the field."

AFP

Netherlands demand 'bigger nation' status after new shock

Kolkata, India - All-rounder Bas de Leede demanded the Netherlands be afforded "bigger nation" status after defeating Bangladesh by 87 runs in Kolkata on Saturday.

The Dutch, the only non-Test playing country at the tournament, now have two huge wins at this World Cup after also upsetting South Africa by 38 runs in Dharamsala.

"We want to try and get the International Cricket Council's attention to start looking at us as a potentially bigger nation in the coming years," said de Leede.

Netherlands' Paul van Meekeren (2R) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim

Skipper Scott Edwards starred on Saturday with a top score of 68 in his team's 229 in 50 overs.

Fast bowler Paul van Meekeren then grabbed 4-23 to send Bangladesh crashing to 142 all out in 42.2 overs.

"I think obviously every win we get is going to be big for us and for cricket in the Netherlands," said de Leede.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The African Union (AU) has emphasised the need to exert concerted efforts to augment the economic empowerment of women for the realisation of gender equality, and addressing the scourge of domestic violence

Bank Muscat (S.A.O.G.) Nine-Month Results 2023

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is with great pleasure that I share with you the results achieved by Bank Muscat during the nine months period ending 30 September 2023. The Bank continued to perform well and maintain its leadership position in Oman's financial services sector.

Financial Overview

The Bank posted a net profit of RO 158.88 million for the period compared to RO 148.29 million reported during the same period in 2022, an increase of 7.1 per cent.

Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 280.98 million for the nine months period ended 30 September 2023 compared to RO 254.93 million for the same period in 2022, an increase of 10.2 per cent.

Non-interest income was RO 100.23 million for the nine months period ended 30 September 2023 as compared to RO 100.69 million for the same period in 2022. Non-interest income for the previous comparative period included a one-time gain from sale of investments of around RO 8 million. Excluding this, non-interest income has witnessed an increase of 8.1 per cent.

Operating expenses for the nine months period ended 30 September 2023 was RO 146.48 million as compared to RO 139.85 million for the same period in 2022, an increase of 4.7 per cent.

Net Impairment for credit and other losses for the nine months period ended 30 September 2023 was RO 46.91 million as against RO 41.58 million for the same period in 2022.

Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 6.9 per cent to RO 9,865 million as against RO 9,229 million as at 30 September 2022.

Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits increased by 8.9 per cent to RO 9,485 million as against RO 8,709 million as at 30 September 2022.

Strategic Initiatives & Key Developments

In keeping with our commitment to transparency and accountability, Bank Muscat held a conference with Muscat Stock Exchange investors to keep them abreast of recent developments and brief them on the Bank's fiscal results and performance for the first half of this year. This online meeting also offered the opportunity to answer questions from attendees' regarding the Bank's performance.

Notable during the third quarter of the year was the Bank's appointment as the Issue Manager for the OQ Gas Networks Company (OQGN) Initial Public Offering (IPO). This IPO, the largest ever listed on Muscat Stock Exchange, was also supported by the Bank as the Joint Global Coordinator, alongside other regional and international financial institutions. To enable our customers to benefit from this IPO, the Bank made a bespoke financing product available for both corporate and individual investors.

Continuing its long-term strategy of strengthening its network and providing high-quality banking services across Oman, the Bank celebrated the opening of a new retail branch in Madinat Al Nahdha, Al Amerat. It also inaugurated a new corporate branch in Duqm, Al Wusta Governorate, a high-potential business and industrial hub that is receiving substantial international investments and making significant contributions to Oman's economic growth. To meet the needs of individuals and businesses in Duqm, the Bank recently opened the first Meethaq Islamic banking branch in this fast-growing city. This brings the total number of Meethaq branches across the Sultanate to 27 and Hafawa Centres to 20.

With a strong ongoing focus on excellence in e-services, digital innovation and enhancement of the customer experience, the Bank has seen continued success in the growth of Internet and Mobile banking channels with registered users reaching 1.76 million by September 2023, an increase of 11.7 percent from December 2022. To meet the needs and expectations of our customers, the total number of active phygital devices – both conventional and Meethaq – now stands at 849, including automated self-service devices/ machines that cater to customer needs such as cash withdrawals/ deposits, cheque deposits, statement printing and other Banking services. Also, there was 35.7% growth in the number of acquiring transactions via e-channels and POS machines.

As part of our digital evolution and financial inclusion strategy, the Bank introduced services for opening children's accounts through Mobile Banking and Internet Banking. The Bank also launched the new Doorstep Banking service which provides corporate employees with the convenience of opening bulk personal accounts from their workplace.

The Bank's early leadership in the development of cutting-edge e-solutions has been a key driver in the creation of a best-in-class banking experience for corporate, SME, institutional and government customers alike, resulting in a significant increase in the value of online corporate transactions which, for this reporting period, stands at OMR 8 billion. Inspired by this success, the Bank will continue to expand digital offerings and introduce further cutting-edge technologies to empower customers and support the country's digital transformation in line with the goals and ambitions of Oman Vision 2040.

During the quarter, the Bank's Asset Management division completed the sale of one of its GCC private equity real estate investments, realising an annualised return of over 13.5% for investors. Additionally, Money Market Fund, the largest open-ended fund in Oman, continued to enhance its returns thereby making it more attractive for investors seeking to deploy short term cash surpluses. The yield for investors in the Fund touched 5% during the quarter, its highest ever. Furthermore, the Money Market Fund and the Oryx Fund investment process has become more convenient for investors, allowing them to invest and redeem investments through the Mobile Banking and Internet Banking.

CSR & Sustainability

A long-term active champion of social initiatives, Bank Muscat continues its impactful involvement in a variety of community-based social, economic and sports programs. This quarter saw the Bank welcome 20 new teams to the 12th edition of the annual Green Sports Program, taking the total number of teams supported by the Bank since the inception of the Program to 183. Further to this, the Bank issued its annual Sustainability Report 2022 during the quarter. The Bank was also pleased to lend its support to the Zakat Committee's Back to School initiative in the Wilayat of Mutrah, providing students from low-income and social welfare families with school requirements.

Awards & Accolades

The third quarter saw Bank Muscat receive a number of highly prestigious local, regional and global honours. It was named Best Corporate Digital Bank, Best Consumer Digital Bank and Best Digital Islamic Bank in Oman 2023 by Global Finance. At the Euromoney Awards for Excellence 2023, the Bank was lauded as the Sultanate's Best Bank, Best Corporate Bank and Best Bank for ESG. A landmark achievement was Bank Muscat's Meethaq Islamic Banking winning the Market Leadership Award (Islamic Banking Window Operations) at the Global Islamic Finance Awards 2023 for the second year in a row. These outstanding industry accolades are resounding endorsements of the Bank's industry leadership, commitment to service excellence and digital innovation.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to thank our shareholders for the trust they have placed in the Bank and to express our appreciation to the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority for their steadfast support of Oman's financial sector and the creation of the dynamic conditions in which the Bank can prosper and grow to better serve the needs of our customers and continue to be their banking partner today and every day. Above all, we extend our profound gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the renewed renaissance Oman is experiencing as a result of his enlightened vision and wise guidance.

Khalid Bin Mustahail Al Mashani
Chairman

INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2023

	Unaudited 30-Sep-2023 RO' 000	Audited 31-Dec-2022 RO' 000	Unaudited 30-Sep-2022 RO' 000
Assets			
Cash and balances with Central Banks	**807,898**	883,060	584,607
Due from banks	**784,051**	641,480	830,882
Loans and advances	**8,329,406**	7,967,470	7,778,622
Islamic financing receivables	**1,535,948**	1,449,424	1,450,503
Investments securities	**1,821,559**	1,571,984	1,782,400
Investment in associates	**8,818**	8,795	8,932
Other assets	**156,792**	185,465	237,749
Property, equipment and software	**70,809**	68,304	68,804
Total assets	**13,515,281**	12,775,982	12,742,499
Liabilities and equity			
Liabilities			
Deposits from banks	**1,018,078**	1,004,106	928,378
Customers' deposits	**8,128,269**	7,409,967	7,500,625
Islamic customers' deposits	**1,356,508**	1,236,854	1,208,330
Sukuk	**46,501**	45,876	46,515
Euro medium term notes	**192,853**	390,376	385,747
Other liabilities	**415,899**	400,973	453,614
Taxation	**51,406**	55,706	46,886
Total liabilities	**11,209,514**	10,543,858	10,570,095
Equity			
Equity attributable to equity holders of parent:			
Share capital	**750,640**	750,640	375,320
Share premium	**156,215**	156,215	531,535
General reserve	**410,258**	410,258	410,258
Legal reserve	**139,229**	139,229	119,149
Revaluation reserve	**4,904**	4,904	4,904
Cash flow hedge reserve	**9,608**	-	-
Cumulative changes in fair value	**28,849**	(587)	(11,815)
Foreign currency translation reserve	**(3,791)**	(3,881)	(3,495)
Impairment reserve / restructured loan reserve	**2,136**	2,330	2,335
Retained earnings	**302,399**	267,696	614,213
Total equity attributable to the equity holders	**1,800,447**	1,726,804	2,042,404
Perpetual Tier I capital	**505,320**	505,320	130,000
Total equity	**2,305,767**	2,232,124	2,172,404
Total liabilities and equity	**13,515,281**	12,775,982	12,742,499
Net assets per share (in RO)	**0.240**	0.230	0.544
Contingent liabilities and commitments	**1,626,495**	1,630,064	1,693,894

INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE NINE MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 SEPTEMBER 2023

	Unaudited - for nine months period ended- 30-Sep-2023 RO' 000	Unaudited - for nine months period ended- 30-Sep-2022 RO' 000
Interest income	**416,863**	341,350
Interest expense	**(163,371)**	(114,300)
Net interest income	**253,492**	227,050
Income from Islamic financing / investments	**73,376**	62,756
Distribution to depositors	**(45,893)**	(34,878)
Net income from Islamic financing	**27,483**	27,878
Net interest income and income from Islamic financing	**280,975**	254,928
Commission and fee income (net)	**67,446**	67,654
Other operating income	**32,781**	33,038
Operating income	**381,202**	355,620
Operating expenses		
Other operating expenses	**(131,564)**	(126,222)
Depreciation	**(14,918)**	(13,629)
	(146,482)	(139,851)
Share of results from associates	**377**	950
Net impairment losses on financial assets	**(46,911)**	(41,584)
	(193,016)	(180,485)
Profit before taxation	**188,186**	175,135
Tax expense	**(29,310)**	(26,845)
Profit for the period	**158,876**	148,290
Other comprehensive (expense) / income		
Net other comprehensive (expense) / income to be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods, net of tax:		
Translation of net investments in foreign operations	**90**	(997)
Change in fair value through other comprehensive income (FVOCI) debt investments	**(55)**	(7,847)
Share of other comprehensive income of associates	**(58)**	(57)
Change in fair value of cash flow hedge	**9,608**	-
	9,585	(8,901)
Net other comprehensive (expense) / income not to be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods, net of tax:		
Change in fair value of FVOCI equity investments	**29,253**	(7,030)
	29,253	(7,030)
Other comprehensive income / (expense) for the period	**38,838**	(15,931)
Total comprehensive income for the period	**197,714**	132,359
Total comprehensive income for the period attributable to		
Equity holders of Parent Company	**197,714**	132,359
Profit attributable to		
Equity holders of Parent Company	**158,876**	148,290
Earnings per share (in RO)		
Basic and diluted	**0.020**	0.019

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OPAZ delegation meets with chief of Saudi Economic Cities

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidi, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and his accompanying delegation met with Nabil Khojah, Secretary General of Economic Cities and Special Zones Authority of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in Riyadh on Sunday.

The meeting comes within the framework of OPAZ delegation's visit to the kingdom.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed means of enhancing cooperation between the economic zones and the free zones of the two countries. They also highlighted prominent investment opportunities in target sectors, as well as the incentives that are proposed for the Integrated Economic Zone in Al Dhahirah.

The two sides also reviewed investment opportunities that are available in the fields of renewables, petrochemicals, fisheries, pharmaceutics, medical supplies and services in the oil and gas sector.

The meeting was attended by H H Sayyid Faisal Turki al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and several officials from both sides.

Oman's oil exports exceed 230mn barrels by end of Sept

Muscat - The total volume of Oman's oil exports till the end of September stood at 230,292,300 barrels, at an average price of US$79.9 per barrel.

Exports comprised 80.2% of total oil production, which stood at 287,037,500 barrels, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total crude oil production of the sultanate dropped by 3.3% to reach 223,555,200 barrels. The total condensates production rose by 8.1% to reach 63,482,300 barrels. The average of daily oil production hit 1,051,400 barrels as at the end of September.

China topped the list of countries importing Oman's crude oil with 210,172,000 barrels, followed by Japan with 7,384,500 barrels. Korea stood next with 2,851,600 barrels, followed by India with 2,716,200 barrels, while exports to other countries stood at 7,168,000 barrels.

Meanwhile, the total local production and imports of natural gas stood at 40,589.9mn cubic metres as at the end of September 2023, constituting a rise by 3.6% compared to 39,174.1mn cubic metres reported during the corresponding period in 2022. Natural gas usage by industrial projects stood at 23,777.0mn cubic metres, constituting 58.5% of total usage. Oilfields used 10,089.0mn cubic metres of natural gas whereas power generation plants used 6,526.8mn cubic metres of natural gas. Industrial estates used 197.1mn cubic metres of natural gas.

Moreover, production of non-associated natural gas including imports stood at 32,442.5mn cubic metres whereas production of associated gas stood at 8,147.4mn cubic metres.

China topped the list of countries importing Oman's crude oil with 210,172,000 barrels, followed by Japan with 7,384,500 barrels. Korea stood next with 2,851,600 barrels, followed by India with 2,716,200 barrels

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE NINE MONTHS ENDED 30TH SEPT 2023.

Dear Shareholders,

It is my privilege to present to you the company's operating report for the nine months ended 30th sept 2023.

Overview of operations and financial performance

During the period we registered a gross revenue of RO 16.2 million and pretax profit of RO 4.6 million. Revenue declined by 24 % and pretax profit increased by 91.5 % respectively. Other income was buoyed by a fair value gain (realized and unrealized) of RO 2.207 million on our investments. Profit after tax stood at RO 3.944 million as compared to RO 1.57 million for the same period last year.

The revenue and profitability were impacted mainly on account of overall dip in demand for ceramic tiles in the regional market, imposition of customs duty in KSA and revoking of antidumping duty in UAE. Resolution of the customs duty issue in one of our largest markets KSA which has been going on since July last year is vital to our interests.
To compensate for the loss of business in KSA, we have increased our emphasis in other markets, notably Yemen and Jordan and in both these markets we have registered significant growths. We are also exploring other new markets. However this is inadequate to make up for the loss of business in KSA which remains by far the largest market in the region. **A quick resolution of the customs duty in KSA remains key to our growth and profitability.**

We are doing satisfactorily in the other GCC markets and are pleased to state that we continue to be market leaders in our home market in Oman.

Future Outlook

We are working closely with the authorities in KSA, providing them with all the information that they need to provide us the necessary exemptions. We are hoping for a satisfactory resolution soon, enabling free and fair access to the Saudi market. Our priority continues to be expanding in other markets.

The enhancement of our capability to produce larger format tiles will improve our realisation and the additional volumes will help amortise our fixed costs more optimally. We have also adopted stringent cost reduction measures on all our costs which will help us to improve our profitability as we go forward.

Corporate Governance

I am pleased to report that your company has adhered to all the regulations covering Corporate Governance in Oman. We remain committed and aspire to becoming model corporate citizens.
We are grateful to the government of Oman for their support and encouragement.
We are confident that Oman will continue to grow and prosper under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and we hope to play our part in this.

Hussain Ali Habib Sajwani
Chairman

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME (Unaudited) for the nine months ened 30th Sept 2023

	2023 RO	2022 RO
INCOME		
Revenue from contract with customers	16,181,862	21,281,323
Cost of Revenue	(11,575,163)	(12,445,300)
Gross profit	**4,606,700**	**8,836,023**
Other income	13,544	64,236
	4,620,244	8,900,259
EXPENSES		
General and Administrative Expenses	(1,956,479)	(1,928,602)
Selling and distribution Expenses	(1,276,231)	(2,235,233)
Net finance charges	(233,138)	(47,757)
	(3,465,848)	(4,211,592)
Profit from Operation	1,154,396	4,688,667
Investment Income	1,285,074	1,013,963
Fair value gain in investment thru Profit & Loss Account	2,206,521	(3,276,278)
Profit for the year before taxation	4,645,991	2,426,352
Taxation	(701,939)	(855,395)
Net profit for the year	3,944,052	1,570,957
	306,149	(133,642)
Total comprehensive income for the year	**4,250,201**	**1,437,315**
Basic earnings per share	**0.018**	**0.007**

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION (Unaudited) - at 30th Sept 2023

	30th Sept 2023 RO	30th Sept 2022 RO
Assets		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	19,344,116	10,683,811
Capital Work in progress	-	9,627,338
Right of use of Asset	3,573,815	3,706,178
Fair value through other comprehensive income investment	1,980,923	1,800,908
Deferred Tax Asset	4,787	--
Total non-current assets	**24,903,641**	**25,818,235**
Current assets		
Debt instruments at amortised cost	5,968,477	7,507,923
Inventories	6,357,496	4,871,176
Trade & Other receivables	12,092,518	10,391,107
Bank balances and cash	388,762	2,381,898
Total current assets	**24,807,253**	**25,152,105**
Total assets	**49,710,893**	**50,970,339**
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	22,000,000	22,000,000
Legal reserve	7,333,333	7,333,333
Retained earnings	5,394,885	2,295,963
Equity Investment reserve	(737,605)	(956,586)
Total equity	**33,990,613**	**30,672,710**
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Non current portion of lease liabilities	3,669,472	3,667,314
Employees' end of service benefits	1,181,821	1,058,439
Deferred tax liability	--	240,261
Term Loan	2,576,737	4,123,421
Total non-current liabilities	7,428,029	9,089,435
Current liabilities		
Current portion of lease liabilities	207,222	207,222
Current portion of term loan	1,031,123	--
Short Term loan	1,500,000	2,000,000
Accounts and other payables	5,189,119	5,367,832
Taxation	364,787	861,244
Bank overdraft	--	2,771,897
Total current liabilities	**8,292,251**	**11,208,194**
Total liabilities	**15,720,281**	**20,297,629**
Total equity and liabilities	**49,710,893**	**50,970,339**
Net assets per share	**0.155**	**0.139**

IMF mission's visit to Oman begins on Wednesday

Muscat - The Central Bank of Oman together with the Ministry of Finance is going to host the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Article IV consultation - set to take place in the sultanate for 15 days from Wednesday.

These meetings are a continuation of the IMF team's preparatory visit that was held from June 6 to 14 this year.

This visit aims to discuss the latest macroeconomic developments and prospects, in addition to a number of topics related to fiscal and monetary policies, and government measures taken to mitigate the economic and financial repercussions at the regional and global levels.

Furthermore, the visit focuses on monitoring potential risks that could threaten financial stability.

During this visit, the IMF experts will hold meetings with a number of officials from the Central Bank of Oman, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy, and several public authorities and other government entities, in addition to some civil society institutions, and private sector. During these meetings, the IMF will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the economic and financial situation in the Sultanate of Oman.

ONA

Our corporate fixed deposits highly lucrative: National Finance CEO

Muscat - As the leading finance company with a market share of 46%, the National Finance unequivocally establishes itself as a paragon of credibility and dependability among financial service providers.

Keeping pace with the dynamic currents of the financial sector, the sultanate's leading finance company is focused on offering corporates with comprehensive financial instruments that can help propel growth. The company's corporate fixed deposits offering is one such appealing investment opportunity for businesses that promises high returns and flexible tenures.

"Corporate fixed deposits have demonstrated their value by offering stability and reliability to businesses seeking consistent and predictable returns, all while preserving their capital and liquidity," Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance, commented on the offering.

"We welcome businesses to invest their corporate funds with National Finance as our corporate fixed deposits offer outstanding value and allow for safe investment portfolio diversification," the CEO added.

Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi

In a time of market fluctuations, the company stated that its Corporate Fixed Deposits 'are a safe and rewarding investment opportunity designed to cater to the financial needs of businesses of all sizes'.

The company offers a lucrative proposition for businesses who prioritise guaranteed returns, with attractive interest rates. "At National Finance we understand that businesses require financial solutions that offer the perfect blend of flexibility, profitability, and these are all guaranteed with this proposition," Farsi asserted.

According to its latest financial statements as of June 30 this year, National Finance stands out with an impressive regulatory capital of RO100.59mn and asset under management portfolio encompassing RO494.88mn, setting a benchmark among Finance and Leasing Companies (FLCs).

A trusted partner for growth, National Finance's corporate fixed deposits offer a level of flexibility that makes this proposition all the more attractive to business entities. Corporates have the option to choose a minimum tenure starting at just three months, to a maximum of 60 months, enabling them to tailor their investments to specific financial objectives - whether for short-term liquidity or long-term financial planning.

Customers can also choose from multiple payout frequencies, including on maturity, quarterly, semi-annually, annually, or at maturity.

The corporate fixed deposits can be initiated with just RO5,000 and are accessible to various types of organisations, including SAOG, SAOC, LLC, Partnership, Government entities, Pension Funds, and Trusts. In addition, the multifaceted nature of the deposits extends beyond investments; they can also serve as valuable collateral, thereby boosting financial security.

Israel should protect Gaza residents: US

The White House said Israel must distinguish between Hamas and civilians in Palestinian territory

Washington, US - Israel must protect innocent Gaza residents by distinguishing between Hamas fighters and civilians in the Palestinian territory, the White House warned on Sunday ahead of a call between President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israel's military has been urged to avoid civilian casualties in Gaza, where health officials in the Hamas-run territory say more than 8,000 people have already died in three weeks of air strikes that Israel has conducted in retaliation for Hamas's unprecedented deadly attacks on October 7.

"There is a burden, as I said before and as the president has said, on Israel to take the necessary steps to distinguish between Hamas, who does not represent the Palestinian people, and innocent Palestinian civilians' in Gaza," US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on CNN talk show 'State of the Union'.

'We do believe that thousands of Palestinian civilians have been killed in this bombardment, and every single one of those deaths is a tragedy', just as those in Israel are, Sullivan said.

An injured woman carries a baby in the aftermath of Israeli bombing in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Sunday. Israel pounded Gaza with more air and ground attacks on Sunday (AFP)

"What we believe is that every hour, every day of this military operation, the IDF, the Israeli government, should be taking every possible means available to them to distinguish between Hamas - fighters who are legitimate military targets - and civilians who are not."

Sullivan, speaking on ABC's 'This Week' as he made a round of Sunday talk shows, said Hamas, 'this brutal organisation that conducted the attack, is hiding behind the civilian population - which puts an added burden on Israel to differentiate between the fighters and innocent civilians'.

"But it doesn't lessen their responsibility under international humanitarian law and the laws of war to do all in their power to protect the civilian population."

Sullivan said the White House has been communicating its position to Israeli officials at the highest levels, and will do so in a Biden-Netanyahu call.

"The president will speak again with the prime minister in a few hours' time today, and he will continue to reiterate the United States' position on this issue."

> *Thousands of Palestinian civilians have been killed in this bombardment, and every single one of those deaths is a tragedy*
>
> **JAKE SULLIVAN**

Raisi's warning

Meanwhile, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Sunday said Israel's ongoing bombardment of Gaza 'may force everyone' to act in the latest warning issued by the Islamic republic since the start of the Israel-Hamas conflict. "The crimes of the Zionist regime have crossed the red lines, and this may force everyone to take action," Raisi said on X, formerly Twitter, on Sunday.

"Washington asks us to not do anything, but they keep giving widespread support to Israel," he said.

"The US sent messages to the Axis of Resistance but received a clear response on the battlefield," he said, using a term often used by Iranian officials to refer to the Islamic republic and its allies like Lebanon's Hezbollah, Yemen's Huthis and other Shiite forces in Iraq and Syria.

Although it was not immediately clear what he was referring to, there have been a string of attacks on US forces in Iraq and Syria as well as increasing exchanges of fire between Hezbollah and Israeli forces on the Lebanon border since the Gaza conflict began.

Iran, which financially and militarily backs Hamas, hailed the October 7 attacks as a 'success'. But it has insisted it was not involved in the onslaught, during which 230 people were also taken hostage, according to Israeli authorities.

"Iran considers it its duty to support the resistance groups, but ... the resistance groups are independent in their opinion, decision, and action," the Iranian president said in an interview with Al Jazeera on Saturday, according to excerpts released by state news agency IRNA.

"The United States knows very well our current capabilities and knows that they are impossible to overcome," he said.

AFP

Thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters march in New York

New York, US - Thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters poured onto the streets of Brooklyn, New York's largest district on Saturday to voice their anger at Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip.

Home to between 1.6 and two million Jews and hundreds of thousands of Muslims, New York has for the past three weeks been rocked by demonstrations, rallies and vigils in support of the Palestinians and Israel. Left-wing American Jewish activists are also up in arms against Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.

Hundreds of people were arrested on Friday when police broke up a large demonstration of mostly Jewish New Yorkers who had taken over the main hall of Manhattan's Grand Central station in protest at Israel's bombardment of Gaza.

'We're mobilising all across New York City, flooding Brooklyn', to call for the 'liberation (of) each and every single Palestinian', said 21-year-old protester Abdullah Akl.

Protest organiser Nerdeen Kiswani took aim at American 'politicians' for their unwavering support of Israel.

People take part in a protest in support of the Palestinian people in New York on Saturday (AFP)

"We are here as New Yorkers to say that we're against this and we're against the politicians, the local politicians as well like New York City Mayor Eric Adams and New York State Governor Kathy Hochul, who have both pledged unconditional support to Israel," said Kiswani.

Their stance 'means that they provide unconditional support to the killing of our people', added Kiswani.

Adams, who governs a city of nearly nine million people, including the world's largest Jewish community after Israel, has repeatedly assured pro-Israel rallies that Israel's 'fight' is New York's fight too.

New York media and AFPTV estimated the crowd at thousands of demonstrators, who waved 'Free Palestine' and 'By any means necessary' placards.

AFP

Israeli forces kill 3 Palestinians in West Bank: Health ministry

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - Israeli forces killed three Palestinians across the occupied West Bank on Sunday, the Palestinian health ministry said, as violence surges across the territory during the ongoing war in Gaza.

More than 110 Palestinians and one Israeli have been killed in the West Bank since the war between Israel and Hamas erupted on October 7.

The health ministry said three people aged 29 to 31 were shot dead by Israeli forces at dawn, with the incidents taking place in Beit Rima, northwest of Ramallah, in Nablus's Askar refugee camp and in Tubas, a town further north.

The ministry did not provide further details.

The Israeli military said that during activity to demolish the home of a fighter in Askar, 'explosive devices were hurled at Israeli security forces and exchanges of fire took place with fighters'.

A man bids farewell to one of three Palestinians killed, inside a mosque in the Askar refugee camp near the West Bank city of Nablus, on Sunday (AFP)

During arrests of fighters in Jenin and nearby, 'suspects hurled explosive devices at the forces and exchanges of fire took place with fighters,' the army said.

Israel occupied the West Bank during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and its forces regularly carry out raids on Palestinian fighters there. In recent months there has also been a rise in violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians.

On Saturday, a 40-year-old Palestinian who was harvesting his olives was killed by a settler in the village of Sawiya near Nablus, the health ministry said.

Settlers said he was killed as they acted in self-defence after a clash erupted between Palestinians and members of an Israeli community nearby.

AFP

شركة صناعة مواد البناء (ش.م.ع.ع)

Construction Materials Industries (S.A.O.G)

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MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Management of Construction Materials Industries SAOG has the honour of submitting the report on the performance of the Company for the nine months ended on 30th September 2023.

Key Performance Indicators

Particulars	2023 30 – Sep RO	2022 30 – Sep RO	Increase / (Decrease)	% of Increase / (Decrease)
Sales	1,920,375	2,314,106	(393,731)	(17.01) %
Gross Profit	289,059	498,363	(209,304)	(42.00) %
Finance Cost – Interest on Lease Liability (IFRS16)	77,846	19,894	57,952	291.30%
Amortization of Lease Liability	48,100	40,274	7,826	19.43%
Profit/(Loss) before Tax	(81,242)	165,296	(246,538)	(149.15) %
Net Profit /(Net Loss) after Tax	(81,242)	165,296	(246,538)	(149.15) %
Earnings Per Share	(0.0013)	0.0026	(0.0039)	(149.15) %
Particulars	**2023 30–Sep RO**	**2022 31-Dec RO**	**Increase / (Decrease)**	**% of Increase / (Decrease)**
Total Assets	9,076,366	8,058,992	1,017,374	12.62 %
Total Liabilities	2,535,829	1,280,963	1,254,866	97.96 %
Net Assets	6,540,537	6,778,029	(237,492)	(3.50) %
Total Number of Shares	62,500,000	62,500,000	---	---
Net Assets Per Share	0.1046	0.1084	(0.0038)	(3.50) %

Operating Performance

Production:

Production of Quick Lime from our Plant has been decreased by 1.73%, (742 MT.) during the third quarter 2023 compared to the same period last year. (2023 – 42,259MT, 2022 – 43,001MT). There was no production of dololime in 2023 compared to 6,854MT produced during the same period 2022.

Sales:

Sales has been decreased by 17.01% (RO.393,731/-) until the end of third quarter of this year 2023, compared to the same period in the previous year, due to several reasons. The most important of which is the decrease in demand in the iron industry sector, the main user of quicklime and dololime products. As a result of the decision the Ministry of Transport, to prevent the entry of (empty) land transport vehicles into the Sultanate, had a significant impact on the company's failure to achieve the volume of sales of Hydrated Lime to desalination plants in the neighboring countries as well as the low demand from some customers outside the Sultanate due to low production they have.

Comparative sales statement until the end of the third quarter of the current year (2023: RO.1,920,375/-, 2022: RO.2,314,106/-)

Net Profit/Loss:

The results of the third quarter of 2023 were affected due to the occurrence of some obstacles beyond the control, the most important of which is the decrease in demand for the dololime product within the Sultanate due to the cessation of operations by the main consumers of the company's products (Dololime and quicklime), as well as the decision of the Ministry of Transport to prevent the entry of (empty) trucks from neighboring countries that were transporting the company's products to desalination plants in neighboring countries, which had a significant impact on the decline in the company's sales of the hydrated lime products.

In addition to the increase in the cost of transportation and the increase in direct production costs (electricity, natural gas, water and raw materials), customs duties on byroad deliveries to outside Sultanate of Oman have been increased by RO.15/- per trip in addition to the existing fee per load, but the administration is striving to find possible solutions to reduce the impact on the workflow and achieve the best possible results under these difficult circumstances, and by comparing net profits with the same period of the previous year. 2023: RO.(81,242/-), 2022: RO.165,296/-.

On the other hand, the company still faces some obstacles, the most important of which are the following:

In contrast the company still faces some obstacles of which the most important are mentioned below:

1. The recent decisions of Ministry of Transport to prevent the entry of (empty) land transportation tankers to the Sultanate of Oman to transport hydrate lime, had a negative impact on the company and led to a decline in our sales.
2. The high cost of direct and indirect production, and as a result of intense competition in neighboring countries, the company is unable to charge this increased cost to selling prices, including the increase in tariffs for electricity, water, natural gas and other components used in operating the lime kilns, which negatively affected the company's ability to compete in the markets, domestic and foreign.
3. Increase in customs duties imposed by neighboring countries on importing raw materials and exporting our products, the most important of which is the increase and introduction of road tolls, which negatively affect significantly in the cost of the product.
4. The fierce competition that we face in the local market from competitors from neighboring countries is very difficult, as we are unable to pass those additional expenses to our customers.
5. Work is underway to operate the company's quarry in Wadi Al-Jizi to provide the necessary raw materials in the production process in order to reduce the cost of production, as the company is now procuring the necessary raw materials from other suppliers inside and outside the Sultanate, which led to a high cost of production compared to whether it was provided through the company's quarries.

Prospects:

The company's management and all the company's employees are actively and continuously seeking to find new markets and new customers for the company's products quick lime, dolo lime and hydrated lime to compensate for the negative effects that affected the company's sales as a result of the reasons mentioned above, and as a result of the continuous effort and endeavor is underway with some customers in foreign markets to find New markets for the company's products such as quick lime, dolo lime and hydrated lime, which promise promising results, God willing.

The company's management also strives to solve the important problems facing the company by developing new production methods, reducing expenses and costs, and maintaining the level of product quality through maintenance and continuous improvement of the performance of production machines and the development of the technical staff in factory.

In order to improve the level of performance of the company, work is underway to obtain the completion of necessary licenses to operate the company's suspended quarries through continuous follow-up with the concerned government agencies, where a mining license was obtained for the company's quarry located in the state of Sohar - Wadi Al-Jizi and the provision of raw materials to the factory at a lower cost than it is now.

"Un Audited" Statement Of Financial Position As At September 30, 2023

ASSETS	2023 SEPTEMBER RO	2022 December RO
Current Assets:		
Cash and bank balances	151,447	564,008
Term deposit	515,112	500,000
Trade and other receivables	965,258	866,492
Inventories	1,759,432	1,505,353
Total Current Assets	3,391,249	3,435,853
Non-current Assets:		
Property, plant and equipment	3,937,733	4,088,896
Right of use of Assets	1,747,384	534,243
Total Non-current Assets	5,685,117	4,623,139
TOTAL ASSETS	9,076,366	8,058,992
LIABILITIES AND SHAREHOLDERS' EQUITY		
Current Liabilities:		
Trade and other payables	355,237	390,073
Tax provision	1,320	2,363
Amount due to related parties	----	378
Current Portion of Lease Liability	96,000	72,000
Total Current Liabilities	452,557	464,814
Non-current Liabilities:		
Employees service benefits	160,844	136,808
Non-Current portion of Lease Liability	1,755,333	512,246
Provision for decommissioning	16,112	16,112
Deferred Tax Liability	150,983	150,983
Total Non-current Liabilities	2,083,272	816,149
Total Liabilities	2,535,829	1,280,963
Shareholders' Equity:		
Share capital	6,250,000	6,250,000
Legal reserve	370,078	370,078
Accumulated profit/(loss)	(79,541)	157,951
Total Shareholders' Equity	6,540,537	6,778,029
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND SHAREHOLDERS' EQUITY	9,076,366	8,058,992
Net Assets Per Share [face value RO.0.100 each]	0.105	0.108

"Un Audited" Statement Of Comprehensive Income For The Third Quarter Ended On September 30, 2023

	September 2023 RO.	September 2022 RO.
Sales	1,920,375	2,314,106
Cost of sales	(1,631,316)	(1,815,743)
Gross Profit	289,059	498,363
Other income	48,758	37,075
General and administrative expenses	(279,025)	(292,308)
Selling and distribution expenses	(73,681)	(66,608)
Interest – bank facilities (net)	11,493	8,668
Interest – on lease liability (IFRS16)	(77,846)	(19,894)
Profit/(Loss) for the period before taxation	(81,242)	165,296
Taxation provision	(----)	(----)
Profit/(Loss) for the Period	(81,242)	165,296
Earnings/(Loss) per share [basic and diluted]	(0.0013)	0.0026

Note: The complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent to any shareholder by mail within 7 days of receipt of request

Turkey celebrates centenary in shadow of Israel-Hamas war

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey marked its centenary as a post-Ottoman republic on Sunday with somewhat muted celebrations held in the shadow of Israel's escalating war with Hamas fighters in Gaza.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was front and centre of day-long events that both honour the secular republic's founder and play up the achievement of the Islamic-rooted party that has run Turkey since 2002.

"Our country is in safe hands, you may rest in peace," Erdogan said after laying a wreath at the mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk - the Turkish military commander whose legacy the current president has vied with during his two-decade rule.

Ataturk is lionised across Turkish society for driving out invading forces and building a brand new nation out of the fallen Ottoman Empire's ruins in the wake of World War I.

Turkey was formed as a Westward-facing nation that stripped religion from its state institutions and tried to forge a modern new identity out its myriad ethnic groups. It eventually became a proud member of the US-led NATO defence alliance and a beacon of democratic hopes in the Middle East.

But Ataturk's social and geopolitical transformation of the overwhelmingly Muslim nation created divisions that weigh on Turkish politics to this day.

Erdogan tapped into these as he led his conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power over the leftist Republican People's Party (CHP) formed by Ataturk. He has spent much of the past decade testing the limits of Turkey's secular traditions as well as its ties with the West.

These competing forces were on full display as Erdogan moved from honouring Turkey's past to celebrating his own government's achievement while he was prime minister and president.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and state officials visit Anitkabir to mark the 100th anniversary of Turkish Republic in Ankara, on Sunday (AFP)

> *President Erdogan was front and centre of day-long events that both honour the secular republic's founder and play up achievement of the Islamic-rooted party that has run Turkey since 2002*

Palestinian cause

Sunday's celebrations have been partially eclipsed by Erdogan's increasingly fierce attacks against Israel over its response to the October 7 Hamas attacks.

Turkish state television has also scrapped the broadcast of concerts and other festivities because of the 'alarming human tragedy in Gaza'.

Erdogan's lifelong defence of Palestinian rights has turned him into a hero across swathes of the Muslim world.

He announced that 1.5mn people had come out for a pro-Palestinian rally in Istanbul on Saturday that ended up drowning out national television coverage of the centenary.

Erdogan accused the Israeli government of behaving like a 'war criminal' and trying to 'eradicate' Palestinians.

"Israel, you are an occupier," Erdogan declared.

His remarks prompted Israel to announce the withdrawal of all diplomatic staff for a 're-evaluation' of relations.

Turbulent spell

The emerging diplomatic crisis further pulled attention away from Turkey's birthday party and onto Erdogan's handling of global affairs.

Turkey has suffered a turbulent spell of relations with Western allies since Erdogan survived a failed coup attempt in 2016 that he blamed on a US-based Muslim preacher.

Istanbul's Kadir Has University lecturer Soli Ozel saw Saturday's pro-Palestinian rally as part of Erdogan's tacit effort to undermine Ataturk's secular vision.

"Couldn't (this rally) have waited until next week? The centenary only comes around once in a century," Ozel said in an interview.

But one survey suggested that Erdogan's comments play to his Islamic conservative core of supporters and not the public at large.

The Metropoll survey showed just 11.3 per cent of the respondents saying they 'back Hamas'.

But 34.5 per cent said Turkey should stay 'neutral' and 26.4 per cent said it should mediate.

AFP

Path to Biden-Xi meeting not smooth, says Wang

Beijing, China - Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the path to a meeting between President Xi Jinping and Joe Biden was 'not smooth', state media reported as the top diplomat wrapped up a rare visit to Washington.

Wang met with Biden and other senior US officials this week, with both sides agreeing on Friday to set up a meeting between the leaders next month.

Biden has invited Xi to San Francisco in November for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit at a time of tense relations between the two powers. Xi has not yet confirmed he will come.

Wang on Saturday told the audience at a Washington event hosted by the Aspen Strategy Group that 'both sides hope to stabilise and improve bilateral relations as soon as possible and agreed to work together toward a San Francisco summit between the two heads of state', state news agency Xinhua reported.

"The path to San Francisco is not smooth and cannot be left to 'autopilot'," Wang warned, according to Xinhua.

AFP

Mike Pence and his wife Karen Pence at the Republican Jewish Coalition (RJC) Annual Leadership Summmit in Las Vegas, Nevada on Saturday (AFP)

Republican Pence drops out of US presidential race

Las Vegas, US - Former US vice president Mike Pence dropped out of the 2024 presidential race on Saturday, saying it was not 'my time' - and underlining his scandal-embroiled previous boss Donald Trump's total dominance of the Republican Party.

The timing was a surprise.

Pence got a warm reception when he stepped up to speak at the annual meeting of the Republican Jewish Coalition in Las Vegas, only to cause a shock by using the occasion to become the first major 2024 candidate to suspend his campaign.

"It's become clear to me: this is not my time," Pence said. "After much prayer and consideration, I have decided to suspend my campaign for president."

The setting, perhaps, was unexpected. But the eventual demise of Pence's bid to be chosen to take on President Joe Biden next year had only seemed a matter of time.

For four years, he stood out for unquestioning loyalty to Trump, even as the White House lurched through impeachment, ethics scandals, and a dizzying rate of turnover among senior staff.

But when Trump pressured Pence to go one step further - helping to overturn the legitimate win by Biden in the 2020 election - the long-submissive deputy stood firm.

That defiance, which saw enraged pro-Trump supporters chanting 'hang Mike Pence' as they stormed the Capitol to stop certification of the election on January 6, 2021, immediately made the devout Christian a pariah to the far-right.

With Trump bouncing back from what many thought would have been a career-ending episode, then seemingly brushing off a series of criminal indictments in his post-presidential life, Pence's hopes of building a new career of his own were doomed.

Despite national name recognition and years of experience in Washington, his campaign was anemic. Had he not dropped out on Saturday, he faced the humiliation of not being invited to join a primary candidates' debate in Miami on November 8 due to lack of support in the polls.

The departure of Pence leaves the field a little clearer for Trump's main rival, Ron DeSantis, the right-wing governor of Florida.

AFP

Myanmar ex-information minister arrested

Bangkok, Thailand - Myanmar's former information minister has been arrested and charged with encouraging dissent against the military, the junta said on Sunday, the latest in a series of high-profile arrests.

In recent months the military, who have faced armed resistance since seizing power in a 2021 coup, have detained a number of trade and commerce officials as the civil conflict batters Myanmar's already struggling economy.

Ye Htut was information minister and presidential spokesperson under the military government of Thein Sein, which ceded power to Aung San Suu Kyi following 2015's landmark elections.

In a statement, the junta information team said the 64-year-old had been detained on Saturday evening in connection with 'spreading wrong information on social media'.

"U Ye Htut was arrested last night and charged under section 505 (a)," a security source told AFP on condition of anonymity and without giving further detail.

Section 505 outlaws any action deemed to undermine the military. The law carries a maximum jail term of three years.

His arrest comes a week after pro-junta Telegram channels accused him of exposing the address of a retired military officer on social media.

Thein Sein's administration permitted some economic and social liberalisation - including granting Suu Kyi's opposition party access to mainstream politics - but also oversaw waves of deadly religious violence.

Ye Htut earned the moniker 'the Facebook Minister' at the time for his frequent posting on the social media network, which was among the country's most popular.

Following his retirement he remained active on the platform, sharing details about his travels.

He last posted on October 27 during a trip to Inle Lake, a popular spot for tourists.

AFP

This file photo shows Ye Htut, then Myanmar's Minister of Information talking to the media after meetings at the president's office in Naypyidaw on October 31, 2014 (AFP)

> *The 64-year-old had been detained on Saturday evening in connection with spreading wrong information on social media*

Friends actor Matthew Perry found dead at home

Los Angeles, US - Matthew Perry, troubled star of the smash hit TV sitcom *Friends*, was found dead at his home in Los Angeles on Saturday, US media reported. He was 54.

First responders found Perry unconscious in a hot tub at his house and were unable to revive him, law enforcement sources told the Los Angeles Times.

"We responded at 4:10pm... It is a death investigation for a male in his 50s," a Los Angeles Police Department spokesman told AFP, without confirming the deceased's name.

A fire department spokesman confirmed it had responded to a 'water emergency', which could refer to a 'pool, spa, bathtub or fountain', but could not confirm reports that Perry had drowned.

American broadcaster NBC, which aired *Friends* for nearly a decade, confirmed the death.

Matthew Perry (AFP)

"We are incredibly saddened by the too soon passing of Matthew Perry," said NBC said in a post on social media platform X, formerly Twitter.

"He brought so much joy to hundreds of millions of people around the world with his pitch perfect comedic timing and wry wit. His legacy will live on through countless generations," it said.

Perry was best known for his portrayal of the wise-cracking Chandler Bing on the wildly popular *Friends*, which ran for 10 seasons from 1994 to 2004.

Friends followed the lives of six New Yorkers navigating adult life, dating and careers. It was a mainstay of NBC's much-vaunted 1990s and early 2000s television lineup, and drew a massive global following.

Battle with addiction

During the height of his success, Perry battled for years with addiction to painkillers and alcohol, and attended rehabilitation clinics on multiple occasions.

Perry experienced health problems including a burst colon in 2018 due to his drug usage, which required multiple surgeries and the use of a colostomy bag for months after.

In his memoir *Friends, Lovers and the Big Terrible Thing*, published last year, Perry described going through detox dozens of times, and spending millions of dollars in repeated attempts to get sober.

Perry dedicated the book to 'all of the sufferers out there', and wrote in the prologue: "I should be dead."

He wrote: "People would be surprised to know that I have mostly been sober since 2001. Save for about sixty or seventy little mishaps over the years."

TMZ, which first reported the news on Saturday, said that no drugs were found at the scene. The celebrity news outlet said Perry was found by his assistant, who called 911.

The *LA Times* and TMZ both said there were no signs of foul play, citing anonymous sources.

Reactions poured in from the Hollywood community on social media as news of Perry's death spread. "Oh no!!! Matthew Perry!! You sweet, troubled soul!!" wrote Mira Sorvino, who starred with Perry in the 1994 television movie *Parallel Lives*.

"May you find peace and happiness in Heaven, making everyone laugh with your singular wit!!!"

Josh Charles, who appeared with Perry on *The Good Wife*, wrote: "Awful news. RIP brother."

Warner Bros. TV, which produced *Friends*, wrote: "We are devastated to learn of Matthew Perry's passing. He was a true gift to us all."

AFP

India: Two killed by 'bomb blast' at prayer meeting in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram, India - A suspected bomb blast during a Christian prayer meeting in India's southern state of Kerala killed two people and wounded more than 35 others, police said on Sunday.

More than 2,000 people were attending a three-day Jehovah's Witnesses prayer meeting at a convention centre in Kalamassery near the port city of Kochi when the blast ripped through the crowd.

"At about 9:40am (0410 GMT) approximately there was an explosion in Zamra International Convention Centre in which one person died and 36 are undergoing treatment," Director General of Police of Kerala Darvesh Saheb told reporters.

"We will find out who is behind this and take stringent action... preliminary investigation shows it was an IED (improvised explosive device) blast."

Local assistant police commissioner PV Baby, speaking to AFP, said one women died in the initial explosion, and a second woman later died of her wounds.

A man handed himself in to the police after releasing a video message on social media and aired on television channels, in which he claimed to be a former member of the church who now disagreed with its beliefs.

Victims receive medical treatment at the Government Medical College hospital in Ernakulam on Sunday (AFP)

Police said they are 'examining his claims and the reasons given for carrying out the act', according to *The Times of India*.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency reported at least three 'blasts' had occurred inside the convention centre.

Around two per cent of India's 1.4bn people are Christian, according to the last census in 2011.

There are nearly 60,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in India, according to the church's website.

Jehovah's Witnesses are members of a US-based Christian evangelical movement, and are perhaps best known for knocking on doors around the world, bible in hand, trying to convert people to their beliefs.

The movement, which preaches non-violence and is politically neutral, has a history of persecution, with its activities banned or restricted in several countries. It is a millennial faith, meaning its members believe that the end of the world is near and that God's kingdom will soon rule over the Earth.

AFP

Bangladesh opposition chief held after anti-PM protests

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh's main opposition leader was detained for questioning on Sunday, as clashes raged for a second day between police and protesters demonstrating against the prime minister ahead of upcoming elections.

Police also made a series of raids on the homes of senior Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leaders, party spokesman Zahir Uddin Swapan said, adding that nearly 3,000 party activists and supporters had been detained in the past week.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Habibur Rahman said BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir had been 'detained for interrogation'.

Rahman told AFP that Alamgir would be questioned over Saturday's violence in which a police officer and a protester were killed, and at least 26 police ambulances were torched or damaged.

Alamgir, 75, the BNP's secretary-general, has led the party since BNP chairwoman and two-time former premier Khaleda Zia was arrested and jailed, and her son went into exile in Britain.

The resurgent opposition has been mounting protests for months, despite their ailing leader Zia being effectively under house arrest after a conviction on corruption charges.

Saturday's protests by BNP and the largest Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, were among the biggest this year, and marked a new phase in their campaigning with a general election due before the end of January.

A police personnel stands beside a charred bus torched by BNP activists during a rally amid ongoing nationwide strike in Dhaka on Sunday (AFP)

Islam Alamgir, 75, the BNP's secretary general, has led the party since BNP chairwoman and two-time former premier Khaleda Zia was arrested and jailed, and her son went into exile

Rubber bullets, tear gas

More than 100,000 supporters of the two major opposition parties rallied on Saturday to demand Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina step down to allow a free and fair vote under a neutral government.

Protests descended into several hours of violent clashes in central Dhaka, and both the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami called for a nationwide strike on Sunday to protest the violence.

Security on Sunday was tight in the capital with thousands of members of security forces patrolling the streets.

But police in the northern district of Lalmonirhat said a youth leader in the ruling party was killed and several others injured during violent clashes between hundreds of opposition and ruling party supporters.

"He was rushed to a hospital where he died," local police chief Ershadul Alam told AFP.

Police accused protesters of setting fire to a bus in Dhaka in the early hours of Sunday morning, after a blaze in which one person was killed and another badly burned.

Opposition activists and police clashed in several rural districts as well as the industrial city of Narayanganj, police said.

AFP

A man reacts during a vigil in Seoul on Sunday, held to mark the first anniversary of the crowd crush that killed 159 people (AFP)

Commemoration held for Seoul 2022 crush victims

Seoul, South Korea - Thousands of people, including victims' families, survivors and activists, held a mass commemoration in Seoul on Sunday to mark the first anniversary of the deadly crush that killed nearly 160 people during Halloween festivities last year.

Tens of thousands of people - mostly in their 20s and 30s - had been out enjoying post-pandemic holiday festivities in Seoul's Itaewon district at the time of the disaster.

The night turned deadly when people poured into a narrow, sloping alleyway between bars and clubs, the weight of their bodies and a lack of effective crowd control leaving more than 150 crushed to death.

A year on, victims' families say they are still seeking answers to what went wrong and who was responsible for the deadly crush. "We did not want to become bereaved families," Lee Jung-min, who lost his daughter to last year's disaster and now leads the families' group, said during the rally in Seoul.

"Why do you think the 159 victims who lost their lives in the Itaewon disaster had no choice but to become stars in the sky?" he asked, adding: "I would like to hear an answer to whether you think the government is not responsible." A police probe into the disaster found massive failures in planning, and a botched and delayed response to the unfolding catastrophe.

But it stopped short of assigning blame to any top officials, and no senior figures were fired or resigned over the disaster.

Lee Ju-hyun, a survivor of the crush, said she had regularly been visiting the site of the disaster since last year.

"Some people say I'm lucky, but then, did 159 people have to die because they were unlucky? Was this something where luck had to determine life or death?" she asked the crowd.

AFP

Sri Lanka lets Chinese ship conduct research despite spying concerns

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Sri Lanka has granted 48 hours for a Chinese vessel to conduct marine research off the island's west coast under supervision, the foreign ministry said on Sunday, despite Indian concerns that it could be a spy ship.

Ministry spokesman Kapila Fonseka said Chinese research ship *Shi Yan 6*, which has been in Colombo since Wednesday, would be allowed to carry out work for two days starting on Monday.

Earlier, Sri Lanka allowed the vessel to enter the main port of Colombo only for 'replenishments' over concerns raised by neighbouring India that the craft could be used to spy against them.

New Delhi is suspicious of China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean and its influence in Sri Lanka, which is strategically placed halfway along key east-west international shipping routes.

A spacecraft-tracking Chinese vessel last year raised security concerns from India, and Sri Lanka prohibited it from undertaking any research activities while in its waters.

Fonseka said local scientists will be onboard *Shi Yan 6* during two days of research activities along the western seaboard of the island.

"Apart from our scientists and researchers, the Sri Lanka navy too will be monitoring this vessel," Fonseka told AFP.

The 90-metre (300-foot) vessel is anchored at the Colombo harbour where a Chinese state-run company operates a deep sea terminal.

A pair of Chinese submarines docked there in 2014, raising protests from India.

AFP

Kazakhstan mourns for 42 dead in mine disaster

Karaganda, Kazakhstan - Kazakhstan held nationwide mourning on Sunday after 42 people died in a blaze at an ArcelorMittal mine, the worst accident in the Central Asian country's post-Soviet history.

The tragedy, which struck at the Kostenko coal mine in the Karaganda region on Saturday, came after a series of deadly incidents at ArcelorMittal mines and has prompted the nationalisation of the company's local affiliate. "As of 3pm (0900 GMT) the bodies of 42 people were found," Kazakhstan's emergency services said on social media.

"The search for four miners continues."

Rescuers earlier warned that finding the remaining miners alive were 'very low', due to the lack of ventilation and the force of Saturday's explosion, which spread over two kilometres (1.2 miles).

The death toll overtook a 2006 accident that killed 41 miners at another ArcelorMittal site. It also came just two months after another incident killed five miners.

The Kazakh national flag is fluttering at half-mast in Karaganda, north-western Kazakhstan, on Sunday (AFP)

Anger and disbelief reigned after the disaster in Karaganda, central Kazakhstan.

"Every miner is a hero, because when he goes down, he does not know if he will come back or not," said former miner Sergei Glazkov.

Many welcomed the government's move towards nationalisation, angered by the company's safety record.

Daniar Mustafin, a 42-year-old salesman, said he favoured 'full nationalisation without material compensation for the current owners'. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has ordered cooperation with the Luxembourg-based company to be 'brought to an end'.

'Worst' company in history

Speaking to victims' relatives at the mine, Tokayev called ArcelorMittal 'the worst enterprise in Kazakhstan's history in terms of cooperation with the government'. The Kazakh government and the steel giant announced a preliminary agreement to 'transfer ownership of the (local) firm in favour of the Republic of Kazakhstan', Prime Minister Alikhan Smailov stated.

"ArcelorMittal can confirm that the two parties have... signed a preliminary agreement for a transaction that will transfer ownership to the Republic of Kazakhstan," the global steel giant stated, adding it was committed to 'finalising this transaction as soon as possible'.

On Sunday, flags were at half-mast to mark the day of national mourning declared by Tokayev, an AFP correspondent saw.

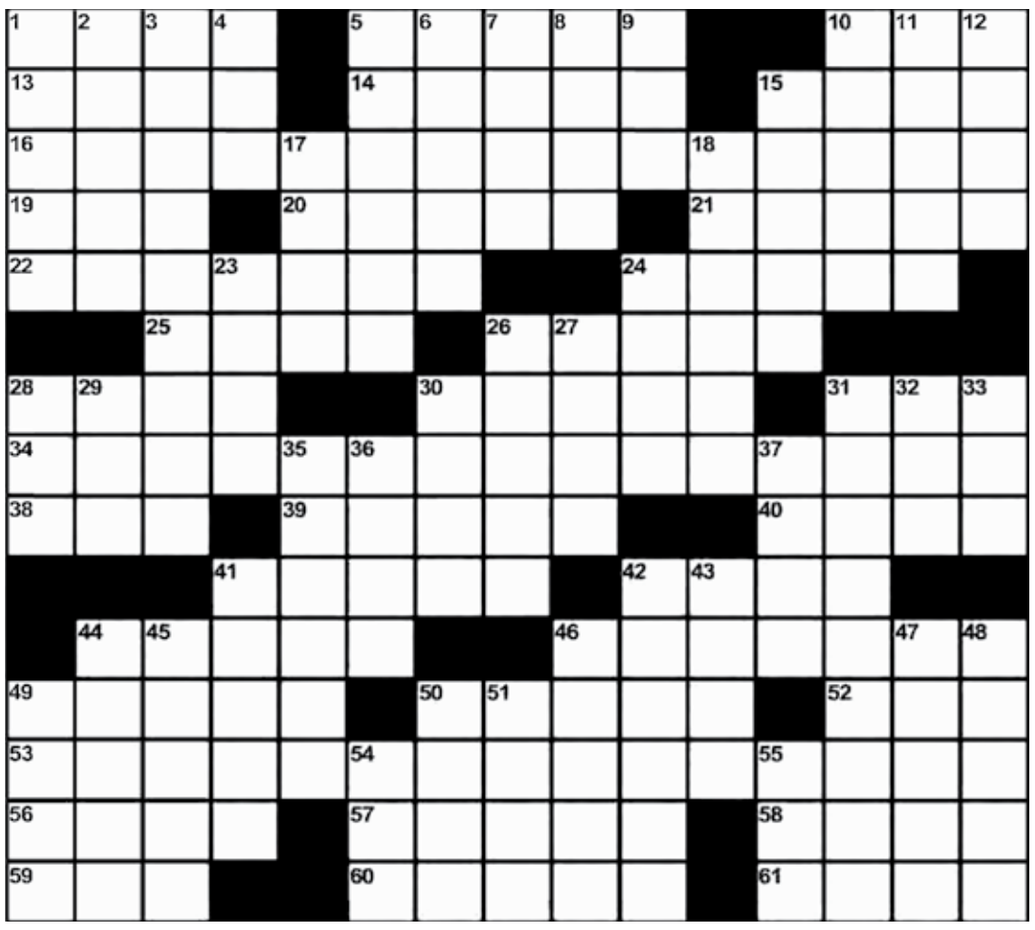
Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, about 200 miners have died in Kazakhstan, the vast majority at ArcelorMittal sites.

There were 252 people inside the mine when the fire started, ArcelorMittal said.

Outside a hospital in Karaganda, relatives of those who had survived the blast were thanking the heavens. "His guardian angel saved him. He is alive," said Nikolai Bralin, the brother of an injured miner.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



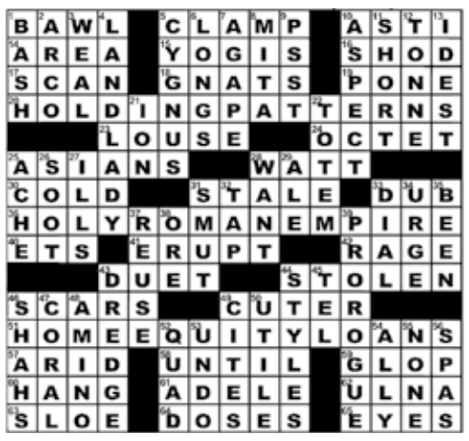
ACROSS

1) Sub outlet
5) _ del Sol
10) Vatican vestment
13) And others, in footnotes
14) Elephant goad
15) Busy as_
16) Study of the juvenile mind
19) Young goat
20) Sneak_ (glimpse)
21) Places for pews
22) Reddish color
24) Big-top figure
25) Sunflower yield
26) Mature insect stage
28) Part of a birthday suit
30) Hacienda brick
31) Chinese philosopher_tze
34) Being delusional
38) Snacked
39) Movie spools
40) "Stop right there!"
41) Male and female
42) Fly with eagles
44) Like an eagle in flight
46) Western address?
49) Military mix-up
50) Having a ho-hum attitude
52) Chicken_ king
53) Rapt and then some
56) "Et tu, Brute?" day
57) Fence crossover
58) Arm bone
59) T. _ (dinosaur)
60) Room's color scheme and furniture
61) Cheek marker

DOWN

1) Knocks down in a ring
2) Moral code
3) Saved for the future
4) _at ease
5) Subject to a limit, like a payroll
6) First appearance, as of symptoms
7) Scottish terrier
8) Hood's Friar
9) Fire residue
10) Over your head
11) Cubism pioneer F emand
12) Turkish governors of yore
15) Texas shrine to remember
17) Chip's cartoon buddy
18) Zebra relative
23) Rip up
24) Forbidden perfume brand?
26) Tranquil scenes (Var.)
27) Bovine calls
28) Jamaican music genre
29) Mess or first-aid
30) "A Death in the Family" writer James
31) Like good lessons for students
32) Each and every
33) Frequently, in poems
35) Filled with wrath
36) Barbershop call
37) Herringlike food fish
41) Living-room items
42) Backtalker
43) Cookie many take apart
44) Battery pole
45) Rubber glove material
46) Painter Picasso
47) "Maria_" (old tune)
48) Kind of gun for speeders
49) Cooking instruction
50) Computer data amount
51) Not of the clergy
54) Hallucinogenic initials
55) Rural road feature

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It's perfectly acceptable to rely on the support of friends and family to see you through a tough time. After all, they love you. But after a certain point you have to get back to normal life and start dealing with your emotions on your own. You can do it. You've done it before and you'll have to do it again. Move away from the caring but limiting arms of loved ones. Go off on your own and remind yourself that being independent is the healthiest way to be right now.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Get ready to compromise with a friend today, because it will be the only way to get anything close to what you want without ticking them off. Don't create tension when you can think of a way for everyone to get what they want. It's not difficult for you to see things from another perspective, so try to see things from their point of view and have some compassion. This is a time to work for everyone's best interests, not compete for a bigger slice of the pie.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Unless it's the boss announcing a firm rule, you don't have to obey anyone except yourself today. If people are trying to restrict what you can do, work your way around them. You're the one in control of your life, and it's the right time to remind yourself of this. Point your ship wherever you want it to go, and start off on your journey. Just fulfill your own goals right now. Worry about following all the rules later.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Becoming more involved in the life of another person can be a tricky thing. You don't want to share too much too soon, but you don't want to hold back when there's an opportunity to really connect. This delicate balance is something you can easily achieve if you take things slowly. If you give yourself and them the space and time necessary to get used to changes, all will go very smoothly. Just don't rush it. They aren't going anywhere and neither are you.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

There's too much up in the air right now for you to barrel ahead with your plans, excited as you may be. Instead, you'll have to figure out a way to curb your enthusiasm. One idea is to find out what your friends are up to. One of them has some exciting stuff going on, and they'd like your help or advice. Training your mind on someone else's goals for a while will keep it off your own. Distraction can be a very useful tool to keep yourself centered.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your charm is a powerful tool, and you know how to use it to full advantage. Probably the greatest outlet for all of your warmth and wit would be a social event, especially one you organize. Plan something to show you in your best light. When you start designing this get-together, make sure to add lots of interesting people to the guest list. Make the event all about people making new connections and not just hanging out with the same old crowd.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Today, it looks like you'll finally be able to close the door on a past issue at work or school. That water is finally going to be under the bridge and become part of your memories. Try not to dwell on things that have gone before. It isn't healthy or helpful. Now you can set your sights on a new adventure. Start planning your next vacation, date, or project. It's time to schedule something to look forward to. Your future is bright.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Resisting temptation isn't going to be hard for you today. Your self-control is at an all time high, mostly because you're finally starting to see the benefits of all your efforts. You like this feeling. It's the feeling of getting a reward for doing hard work. Keep up the momentum. You've come too far to let it all go now. And if you see a friend who's struggling with their own self-discipline, give them a pep talk. It could make all the difference.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

The good news is you've done a great job of impressing everyone you need to impress. Now you can kick back and relax a bit. Make today all about the simple stuff, the shortcuts, and the fun tasks you know inside and out. Enjoy the ease of knowing exactly how to do everything you need to do without hesitation. Mysteries are fun, but you don't have to solve one every day. This effortless energy will keep you smiling all day long.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

There's no reason to be afraid to step into a new world today. Your energy won't let you down, and your desire to experience novel and challenging events is only going to get stronger, so you have to satisfy it. There is no better way to get that confident feeling than by stepping out of your comfort zone and trying a new task or hobby. Take a deep breath and dive right in. What are you waiting for? It could be an exciting day.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You might think that by giving yourself boundaries you'll give yourself more self-discipline. This is definitely not the case, though, especially today, when you'll be better off just letting yourself go. Enough with the self-imposed restrictions! You need more freedom in your life, and you should give yourself that freedom. Don't schedule everything down to the minute. Leave room for spontaneity and last-minute ideas. They're usually the best anyway.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Your high energy level is a mixed blessing today. It will help you get a lot off your plate, but it could trigger some tension between you and the people who are moving a lot more slowly than you. Changes are happening in your group, and not everyone is on the same page right now. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to become a leader. Others are a little bit lost and looking for some clarity. Share your ideas with them.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. What is a Saanen?

A. A kind of bell
B. A goat
C. A chocolate
D. A wolf

02.Who has hosted the US series "Power of 10", "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" and "The Price Is Right"?

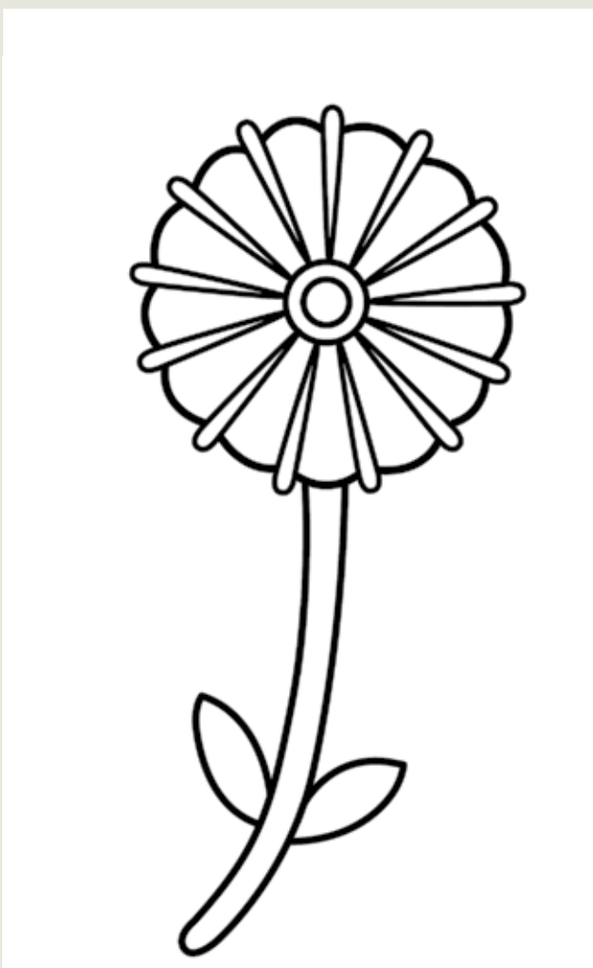
A. Larry King
B. David Letterman
C. Regis Philbin
D. Drew Carey

03. An operation known since prehistory, to relieve pressure inside the skull or remove splintered bone is known as what?

A. Trepanging
B. Trepidating
C. Treponemation
D. Trepanning

Answers: 1. B 2. D 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	T	E	T
A	Y	D	R
W	M	H	I
B	A	I	E

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

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

A meditation area in the forest sanctuary in Muttersholtz, eastern France. (Right) Gabrielle and Jean-Pierre Grasser view a paving stone with a commemorative plaque in the forest sanctuary

RETURN TO NATURE

AS A BLISSFUL OPTION FOR RESTING IN PEACE, PEOPLE IN FRANCE ARE OPTING FOR THEIR MORTAL REMAINS TO BE BURIED IN URNS IN SANCTUARY FORESTS

No grave, nor a wreath. Instead, eternal rest in an urn buried at the foot of a tree...

This alternative to cemeteries, known as sanctuary forests, are spreading in eastern France, an ecological project inspired by neighbouring Germany.

Gabrielle and Jean-Pierre Grasser, 81 and 85, take a walk in the woods at Muttersholtz, some 40km south of Strasbourg, not far from the border with Germany.

Near an oak tree, a commemorative slab emerges from underneath fallen leaves. It bears a name, a surname and dates of birth and death, marking the spot where an urn has been buried. Three small, inconspicuous plaques indicate the presence of other urns.

The couple from Barr, some 20km away, have come to discover the forest cemetery which opened in March. As they favour being cremated when the time comes, they are mulling what will happen to their ashes.

"The idea of eternal rest in a setting such as this appeals to me more than a niche in cemetery funeral urn," said Gabrielle. "I find it very relaxing and it's also in tune with the times in terms of ecology."

"It brings us a little closer to nature, which we love," added her husband.

"Several people have come to have a look and have reserved a space," said Muttersholtz deputy mayor Luc Dettwyler. The spaces allocated around a majestic oak tree were almost all taken.

The commune, home to 2,200 people, launched its project in 2017 after a visit to a similar initiative some 30km away on the German side of the border.

An area has been turned into a communal forest sanctuary. Some oak, hazelnut and acacia trees have been selected and almost 500 urns will be able to be buried there.

The 30-year leases cost between 600 and 1,000 euros (US$633 to US$1,060) depending on the size of the tree and are available to people who live outside Muttersholtz for an additional 200 euros.

A meditation area has also been created with carved stones to allow young and old to sit.

"It's a place which we try to leave as close as possible to nature," said Dettwyler.

We are the first major city to offer this service. This responds to society's expectation and it is also an environmental approach, within the dynamic of a return to nature

CHANTAL FINCK
Deputy Mayor

Living links

Well established in Germany, the concept of a forest sanctuary or cinerary for urns is only a recent development in France.

Arbas, a village in the southwestern Haute-Garonne region, was the first to try out the idea in France in 2019 but the prefecture suspended its project.

Other more urban communes, however, picked up on the idea, including Strasbourg suburb Schiltigheim with a population of 32,000.

Unlike Muttersholz, whose project developed within an existing forest, Schiltigheim's trees were planted in a part of the town cemetery specifically earmarked for a forest sanctuary, with a capacity for 1,760 urns.

For civil registry assistant Bernard Jenaste, the space bears a 'very strong symbolism' and 'there is a link between the living tree and the deceased person'.

Schiltigheim received backing from the association Au dela des racines (beyond the roots), co-founded in 2017 by Denise Heilbronn, a nature enthusiast who wanted to see this option flourish.

"Ageing myself, I don't want to end up in a marble compound with plastic flowers," she explained. "It doesn't suit me, and I don't want to force my daughters to care for a grave every six months." She has received interest from communes right across France, she said.

"There's a huge lack of cemetery space," Denise said, referring to the ageing of the baby-boom generation and the ravages of Covid. The French are also increasingly likely to prefer cremation to burial.

Today, major cities such as Nancy are also taking an interest, which plans to open a forest space in December planted on a 6,000 sqm area of one of its cemeteries. The ashes of the city's inhabitants will be buried there free of charge, without flowers, wreaths or distinguishing marks.

"We are the first major city to offer this service," said deputy mayor Chantal Finck. "This responds to society's expectation and it is also an environmental approach, within the dynamic of a return to nature," she added. For her, the future forest was a place to meditate, but also for walking.

In Muttersholtz, the Grassers made their choice, opting to book a space at the foot of a hazel tree. But so far as when they might need it? Hopefully as late as possible.

AFP

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DA BO GONG CENTENARY

DIVINE assistance

SINGAPORE PILGRIMS SEEK DIVINE HELP AT CENTURY-OLD TEMPLE

On Singapore's tiny Kusu islet, legend has it that a giant turtle turned itself into an island to save two sailors. A century after a Chinese temple was opened on its shores, pilgrims are still flowing in, seeking good fortunes.

Tens of thousands of Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian devotees are making the annual pilgrimage to Da Bo Gong Temple until November 12 to mark its 100th year on the island, whose name translates to 'turtle'.

Founded in 1923, the green, red and white temple named after the God of Prosperity is believed to grant good fortune, serenity and protection. Guan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, is one of the temple's main deities and is thought to answer the prayers of childless couples.

Velmurugan Kolanjinathan, 39, an engineer from India working in Singapore, and his wife Selvarani, 35, made the half-hour ferry trip to the southern island to pray for a child after six years of marriage.

"A boy or a girl is fine for us," Kolanjinathan said. His friend, whose wife had a baby after praying at the temple, had advised him to try the same, he said.

Grades from God

Others prayed for good fortune for themselves and for the world at the temple, which is built on the island's shore and elevated on stilts to protect it against rising tides.

Triton Lee, 10, said a little prayer could help improve his grades in Singapore's pressure-laden school system.

"When I enter the temple I'm going to pray for higher scores," he told AFP after disembarking from the ferry. While he's not doing well in a Chinese class, Lee believes he has a chance of getting better grades in maths, English and science.

He prayed at the temple last year and was surprised by the maths results that came after.

"I was astounded to get full marks. I couldn't even speak," the boy said.

"I think both hard work and prayers (lead to good grades)."

The boy's mother, Sam, said that she would pray for world peace.

"At home we pray for peace and happiness and, at a greater level, hope that the world will get to a more peaceful state," she said.

Waning tradition

For Lau Cheng Poh, 63, and two of his siblings, coming to Kusu on the ninth month of the Chinese lunar calendar is a tradition instilled by their father. Like most of the older generation in the city-state, which is largely ethnic Chinese, he had migrated from China.

"There was no ferry before. So we rode on small boats," said his brother Lau Cheng Eng, 60, adding that coming to Kusu was the equivalent of an overseas holiday for them at that time. But, the brothers said, the younger generation is more reluctant to make the yearly pilgrimage.

That's despite more than 31% of Singapore residents identifying themselves as Buddhist and 8.8% as Taoist, according to a 2020 census.

"I don't want to force my children," said Lau Cheng Poh. "Young people are busy with their own lives." His son Ivan Lau said he will make the pilgrimage for as long as he can, but worries for its future.

"I got a feeling that this tradition will be lost," said the 29-year-old engineer. "Like the Chinese dialects, I fear it will become extinct."

AFP

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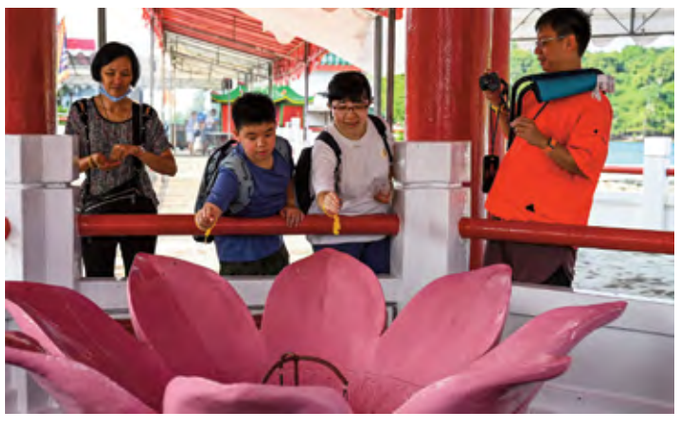
> SAM



Singaporean Lee Yeong Chee takes pictures of his family throwing coins in the wishing well

Offerings placed on altar by devotees during the annual pilgrimage on the ninth month of the Lunar calendar at the Da Bo Gong Temple on Kusu island

Shoppers walk under festoons displayed for sale in a market at Little India district in Singapore