

# Cruise ships revive tourism

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

With over 3,000km of pristine coastline, and three major tourism ports in Muscat, Salalah and Khasab, Oman has the potential to develop a thriving cruise tourism industry and attract substantial investment to the country.

Over 85,000 cruise tourists visited Oman in 2022, with that number expected to increase to 100,000 this year. In 2022, cruise passengers were received at Port Sultan Qaboos, Port of Salalah and Khasab Port aboard 77 cruises. This year, Omani ports are expected to receive 142 port calls.

An official at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) said the ministry is conducting a study with an international company on the readiness of Oman's ports to receive more cruise ships and private yachts.

MHT has also formed a team to discuss challenges and prepare programmes that will see cruise ships and yachts making more trips to the sultanate.

In conjunction with MHT, the



(Supplied photo)

*The ministry has reopened all foreign tourism promotion offices that were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. MHT currently has ten tourism offices*

MHT OFFICIAL

Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) is planning to offer sites for investment along Oman's pristine coast to promote yacht tourism in the country.

An official at MTCIT said, "The ministry will offer several sites to the private sector to invest along

the Omani coast after determining the best places for berthing yachts and setting up allied services. The ministry also wants to establish a harbour in the wilayat of Sur, South Sharqiyah, with the aim of berthing yachts as well as maintaining small and medium sized ships."

The latest *Economic Impact Report* by World Travel & Tourism Council revealed that the travel and tourism sector in the Middle East is expected to generate around 3.6mn new jobs over the next decade, while a Future Market Insights report indicated that the global cruise tourism industry is likely to grow to over US\$17.4bn by 2032.

In the past few weeks, Port of Salalah saw a flurry of activity with thousands of passengers visiting Dhofar on board large cruise liners. According to MHT, Salalah port received six cruise

ships and 13,178 passengers in April alone.

The tourists visited the popular markets and heritage sites in Dhofar.

Referring to the ministry's efforts to support tourism, the MHT official said it seeks to attract more charter flights, raise occupancy rates of hotels in Dhofar and make the governorate a year-round destination.

According to the official, the plan in the next stage includes attracting charter flights to Sohar and Duqm. "These wilayats need to invest in tourist facilities overlooking the sea and establish hotels to boost tourism from charter flights."

He added that the ministry has reopened all foreign tourism promotion offices that were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. MHT currently has ten tourism offices across Britain, France, Germany, Italy, UAE, Saudi Arabia, India, China, and the Scandinavian countries.

"The ministry is currently promoting conference, adventure and wedding tourism in Asian markets to bolster the tourism sector in the sultanate."



(Supplied photo)

## Pacts worth RO32mn to boost food security

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) signed six usufruct contracts worth RO32mn to establish agricultural projects in four governorates on Thursday. The projects cover an area of more than 3mn sqm.

The contracts seek to implement the ministry's initiatives to support the agricultural sector and consolidate its partnership and integration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, with the primary objective of consolidating food security in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The agreements were signed by H E Dr Khalfan Said al Shuaili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, in the presence of H E Dr Saud Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The contracts, which provide land under the usufruct system, will help support the economy and investments, MHUP stated. "These will augment the sustainability of land use through implementation of modern, innovative projects to be carried out in line with the National Strategy for Development of Governorates."

Of the projects signed, one

*The contracts, which provide land under the usufruct system, will help support the economy and investments*

will provide for the establishment of a honey production facility in Barka, South Batinah, spread over 12,000sqm worth RO1,250,000.

Another contract, worth RO180,000, will help consolidate soil richness in Barka on an area of more than 40,000sqm.

An agreement worth RO3mn will see plantation of 50,000 date trees of Fard, Majdol and Khalas varieties on 2mn sqm in the wilayat of Al Sunaina, Buraimi.

In Dakhliyah, an organic farming project will be set up for pomegranate production in Jabal Akhdar spread over 121,000sqm at a cost of RO294,000, while a banana plantation in Suwaiq, North Batinah, spread over 267,000sqm will be implemented at a cost of RO446,000.

The sixth usufruct contract - worth RO150,000 - is for cultivation and production of figs on an area of 64,000sqm in Sohar.

## UAE astronaut becomes first Arab to walk in space

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

UAE astronaut Sultan al Neyadi made history by becoming the first Arab to perform a spacewalk on Friday.

He completed a seven-hour spacewalk, after exiting the In-

ternational Space Station with his American colleague Stephen Bowen.

The duo carried out two crucial tasks during their maintenance assignment, including preparing a structure on the station's exterior for a future solar array installation.



Sultan al Neyadi

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, hailed the historic week the UAE has had in space exploration.

"With this week's new discoveries by the *Hope* probe, the

achievements of the *Rashid* rover mission, and Sultan al Neyadi's first ever spacewalk by an Arab astronaut, the UAE continues to make a meaningful contribution to space exploration and advancements in science," Sheikh Mohammed tweeted.

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# S Batinah tourism to get boost with eight guesthouses

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

To improve lodging facilities in the tourism sector in South Batinah, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is overseeing development of eight guesthouses in the governorate.

Dr Al Mutasem Nasser al Hilali, Director of the Heritage and Tourism Department in South Batinah, said that the ministry is encouraging citizens to invest in heritage and green guesthouses as part of its efforts to add value to the tourism sector in the sultanate.

He added that the eight guesthouses constitute 21.6 per cent of the total accommodation available to tourists being imple-

*Of the eight, four are in the wilayat of Barka, three in Nakhal and one in Rustaq. Currently there are 21 guesthouses in the governorate*

mented in the governorate.

Of the eight, four are in the wilayat of Barka, three in Nakhal and one in Rustaq.

According to Hilali, currently there are 21 guesthouses in the governorate.

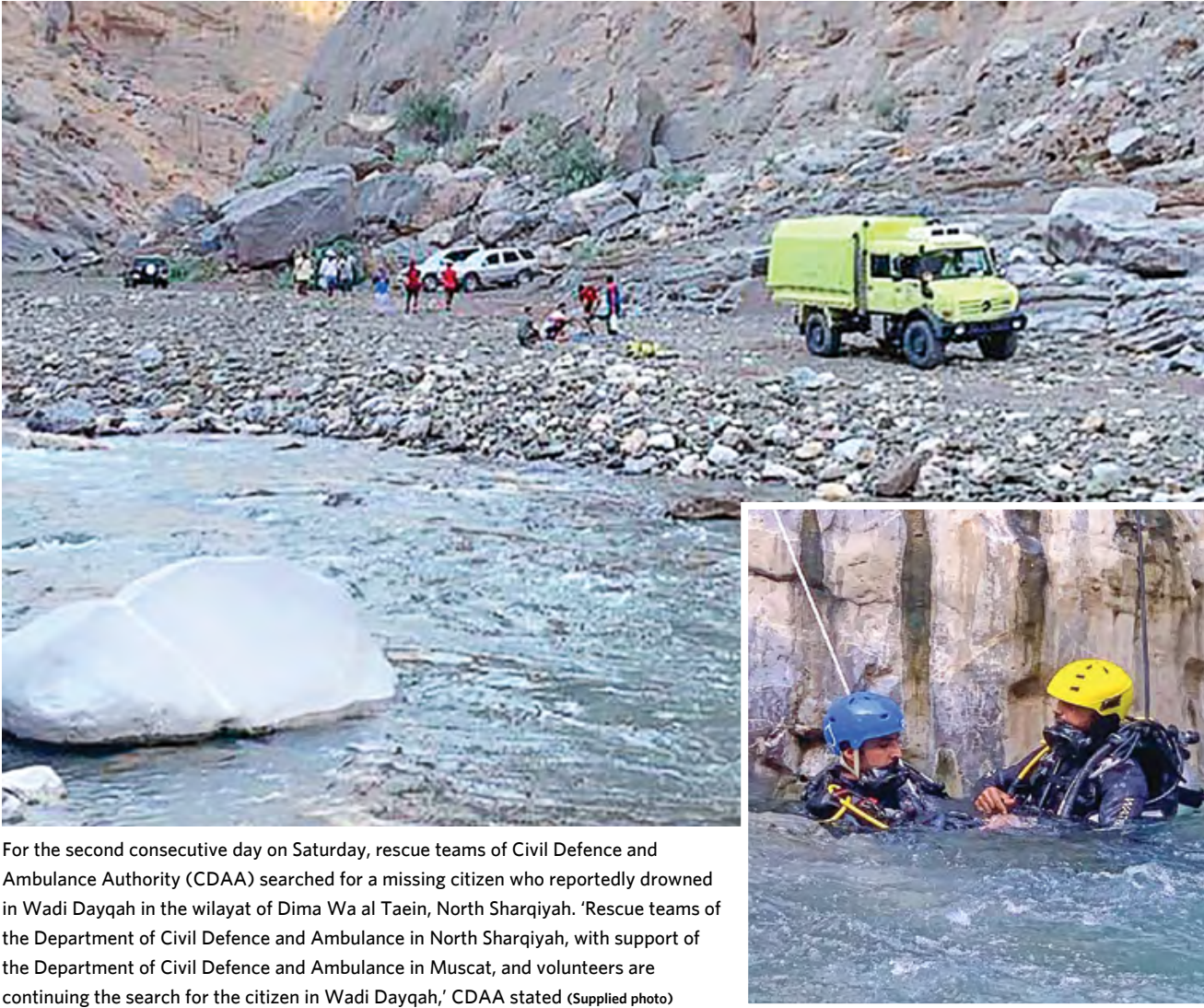
The ministry issues licences to encourage Omani investors

set up medium and small projects – such as guesthouses – to boost the tourism sector.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) has also allocated three sites for establishment of waterfront projects in the governorate as part of its efforts to stimulate the economy and attract investments.

An official at MHUP stated that the ministry has marked a number of investment sites to support development projects in the governorate. “These include the construction of three waterfront projects, of which two – spread over 10,990sqm and 222,441sqm – are in the wilayat of Barka, while the third will be in Mussanah on an area of 180,425sqm.”

## CDAА CONTINUES SEARCH FOR CITIZEN IN WADI DAYQAH



For the second consecutive day on Saturday, rescue teams of Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAА) searched for a missing citizen who reportedly drowned in Wadi Dayqah in the wilayat of Dima Wa al Taein, North Sharqiyah. ‘Rescue teams of the Department of Civil Defence and Ambulance in North Sharqiyah, with support of the Department of Civil Defence and Ambulance in Muscat, and volunteers are continuing the search for the citizen in Wadi Dayqah,’ CDAА stated (Supplied photo)

## Musandam Municipality to build Al Halla Park

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Musandam governorate is currently seeing implementation of several development projects.

An official at Musandam Municipality has stated that the civic body is working on developing projects that serve the economic, tourism and social sectors of the

governorate. Chief among these is an extensive development plan for Al Halla Park in the wilayat of Khasab.

Spread on an area of 16,673sqm, the park will include entertainment facilities, such as a children’s play area, a gym and green spaces, besides toilets and a prayer hall for men and women.

According to the Musandam

Municipality official, the project aims to stimulate domestic tourism, and create recreational outlets for families and job opportunities for the youth.

“Some of the other development projects underway include a Kumzar village, construction of a floating pier in Khor Najd, the Khorsham mountain pass project, and a

waterfront project in the wilayat of Dibba,” he added.

Meanwhile, Musandam Carnival, which was held at Bassah Beach in Khasab, concluded on Friday witnessing a significant turnout of over 13,000 visitors.

The carnival included entertainment activities for all family members - games, performances and eateries.

## Use one WhatsApp number on up to 4 devices

Muscat - WhatsApp has rolled out an update for both Android and iOS operating systems allowing users access to a single WhatsApp number on multiple phones.

Earlier, the Meta-owned platform only allowed linking mobile phones to desktops and laptops but there was no official way to use the same WhatsApp account on two phones.

The latest update has created a buzz among its users.

The announcement was made via WhatsApp’s official twitter handle.

‘Link up to four other devices to your account so you can easily switch between phones without signing out and pick your chats up right where you left off,’ it said.

Commenting on the update, Tariq Hilal al Barwani, IT expert, said, “I think this is indeed a very good move from the company. There are several professionals who have a wide range of devices like smartphones, tablets



and laptops and this facility will help them stay connected. I don’t see any challenge regarding security as the user needs to have authentication which itself is a highly secure measure.”

Here is a step-by-step guide to how to use the same WhatsApp account on multiple phones.

Step 1: Make sure you have the latest version of the app on both primary as well as secondary phones.

Step 2: Open WhatsApp on your secondary phone. Choose your language and click on ‘Agree and continue’ to move to the login screen.

Step 3: You will be prompted to enter your mobile number. Instead of entering the number, click on the ellipsis icon (three dots) at the top right. Then, select the ‘Link to existing account’ option. You will see a QR code on your mobile screen.

Step 4: Now open WhatsApp on your primary phone and search for the ‘Linked Devices’ option and click the ‘Link a Device’ button to open the scanner.

Step 5: Scan the QR code on your secondary device and successfully log into WhatsApp.

You will now be able to use the same WhatsApp number on both the devices. If you lose Internet access on one device, you will be able to use WhatsApp on the other one without interruption.

However, iOS is not supported yet as a secondary device.

MATT DAMON BEN AFFLECK JASON BATEMAN MARLON WAYANS CHRIS MESSINA WITH CHRIS TUCKER AND VIOLA DAVIS

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| Tender Title           | : Baked scrap bunker in paste plant, anode area.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| Document Issue Date    | : 8 May 2023                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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# Oman to be host nation of ITB Berlin in 2024

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and ITB Berlin have announced that Oman will be the official host country of the world's leading travel trade show in 2024.

"ITB Berlin is an important platform to showcase the wide variety of offerings of Oman's growing tourism industry," said H E Salim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

"We are pleased that in 2024, Oman will be the host nation and we are committed to offer an impressive and lasting experience at the event covering all possible senses and expectations," he added.

The minister signed a declaration of intent during an informal ceremony at ITB Berlin 2023 to



be host nation of the 2024 edition.

Following signing of the agreement, David Ruetz, Senior Vice-President of Messe Berlin, said, "Oman has had a strong representation at ITB Berlin for many years and we are very im-

pressed by the tourism attractions and diversity this travel destination has to offer.

"With the sultanate, we are delighted to have secured such an attractive partner for next year's show."

As the official host nation of

ITB Berlin 2024, Oman will organise the opening ceremony on March 4 at CityCube Berlin, among other events. From March 5 to 7, Oman will present trade visitors a wide variety of programmes and numerous events.

## MoSD to host first forum on persons with disabilities at OCEC on Monday

Muscat - The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), in partnership with Oman Energy Association, will present the first edition of Persons with Disabilities Forum on May 1 under the slogan 'Incorporation and Empowerment'.

The three-day forum seeks to promote and empower people with disabilities. It will explore ways to utilise their capabilities and skills, with the primary objective of integrating them into society.

Details of the forum were unveiled during a meeting held at the National Centre for Autism on Thursday, in the presence of H E Sheikh Rashid Ahmed al



Shamsi, Undersecretary of MoSD.

Hamoud Murdad al Shabibi, Director General of Persons with Disabilities Affairs, informed that MoSD accords great attention to persons with disabilities. "This interest stems from a conviction in the great

role that persons with disabilities can play in sustainable development of the country. The forum also aims to enhance social protection for persons with disabilities and activate their role in society."

Shabibi pointed out that the forum, which will be held at

Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), will be attended by representatives of more than 65 public and private local and international establishments and civil society institutions. It will address the subject of employment of persons with disabilities, among others.

## 66 aflaj in S Batinah maintained, restored at a cost of RO582,000

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is continuing to restore and maintain 66 aflaj in South Batinah at a cost of RO582,000.

Ahmed Ibrahim al Esayi, head of Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in South Batinah, informed that the department has formed a team to survey aflaj affected by Cyclone Shaheen in October 2021 in the governorate.

The directorate continues to maintain 39 aflaj in the wilayat of Rustaq, 20 in Al Awabi, six in Nakhal, and one in Wadi al Ma'awil. It is also undertaking maintenance of 39 damaged wells, including one in Rustaq and five in Al Awabi at a total cost of RO36,668.



According to Esayi, the aflaj project aims to support farmers and improve irrigation facilities. "Aflaj are a traditional water source on which Omanis have depended for irrigation for ages. Aflaj types vary according to the geological and hydrological characteristics of an area."

He explained that the directorate has drawn up an action plan to study investment sites in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the availability of water in these

sites. "Wells will be dug in these sites which will contribute to the establishment of projects."

He further explained that the directorate has prepared advisory studies to select sites for dam construction in different locations of South Batinah, in addition to maintaining the governorate's dams according to the ministry's plan.

Based on MAFWR data, Oman has 4,112 aflaj spread over its governorates.

## 681 water licences issued in March

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

A total of 681 water licences were issued in March 2023, according to statistics released by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

In a statement, MAFWR said, 'The licences issued include requests for registering wells, dams and aflaj, for drilling wells, and development projects in various governorates.'

According to MAFWR data, the maximum number of licences - 152 - were issued in Dakhliyah, followed by 139 in Dhahirah, 113 in North Sharqiyah, 69 in North Batinah, 95 in South Batinah, 29 in South Sharqiyah, 51 in Buraimi, 24 in Muscat, two in Musandam, three in Al Wusta and four in Dhofar.

### HILAL ONLINE

**HILAL TARIQ AL BARWANI** IS A YOUNG COMPUTER ENTHUSIAST WHO ENJOYS WRITING AND SPEAKING ON COMPUTERS AND TECHNOLOGY

## Avoid public charging stations

Imagine you're at Mall of Oman. You've just watched the highly awaited threequel of Creed, and you're looking for a place to dine to end your night. However, when you open your phone, you see nine missed calls from your mother. She seems worried or angry! You suddenly start panicking because you realise that you only have two per cent charge left in your smartphone. After some time, you find a charger plugged into one of the charging ports, and lucky for you, it's a charger compatible with your phone!

You decide to plug it in and wait some time for it to get some power so you can call your mother. After some time, you plug it out, and you're looking for the phone app in a hurry and dialing your mother's number. However, your phone starts getting inappropriate pop-up ads, and it heats up quickly and becomes overloaded with background applications slowing it down. This is an example of a juice jacking attack.

Juice jacking is a type of cyber attack in which a hacker infects and steals information from a device by taking advantage of a public charging station. What they do is replace the original charging cable installed by the public place with a malicious cable that looks like any ordinary cable with data transfer functionality to instal a bunch of malicious software directly into the user's device without the knowledge of the user.

Being a victim of a juice jacking attack has numerous dangerous consequences. For ex-



ample, the hacker could steal personal information like contacts, emails, messages and even passwords! The hacker could also instal certain malicious software in your device to slow it down or to simply spy on everything you're doing. Another major consequence is that the hacker could cause your device to be 'bricked', meaning that it would be completely locked

or unusable, which causes all your important data like photos and messages to be locked away if not backed up.

You've seen how easy it is for an attacker to access your information and hack you through a juice jacking attack. However, it is easy to avoid being a victim of such attacks. Firstly, and most obviously, avoid using public charging stations so you won't be a victim of a juice jacking attack. However let's say you are in a situation where you really need to charge your device in a public place. In that case, use your backup charging adapter and cable which you must have with you at all times.

Or better still, purchase a power bank! And let's say you forgot your own charger and need to power up using a public wire, in which case you should power off your device while charging, because even if the wire is malicious, it will prevent installation of any type of malware when your phone is powered off. It would simply charge your device with no data transfer.

In conclusion, juice jacking attacks are on the rise. So I decided to write on it. You can defend yourself from cyber attacks. See you in two weeks with another interesting topic!

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Press & Publishing. The writer can be reached at hilal@tariq.net

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MOH No: 658/2023

# Omani banks' Q1 profits jump 26% to RO118mn

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Total net profits of the banks listed on Muscat Stock Exchange grew by 26.2 per cent to RO118.5mn during the first quarter of 2023 compared to RO93.8mn in the same period of last year.

The preliminary quarterly financial results announced by the banks on the Muscat Stock Exchange indicated an increase in the profits of all the listed banks.

Bank Muscat recorded the biggest profit of RO51.3mn in the first quarter, registering a growth of 6.3 per cent over RO48.2mn net profit recorded in the first quarter of last year.

National Bank of Oman's net profit jumped 40 per cent to RO14.3mn in the first quarter of 2023 compared to RO10.2mn in the same period of last year.

Sohar International Bank recorded a net profit of RO13.3mn this year compared to RO8.5mn in the first quarter of last year, a growth of nearly 56 per cent.

BankDhofar's net profit grew



Total assets of eight banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange increased to RO37.6bn as of March 31, 2023 from RO36.1bn a year ago

by 41 per cent to RO10mn in the first quarter of 2023 compared to RO7mn in the same period of 2022. HSBC Bank Oman's net profit surged by 126 per cent to RO12.2mn in the first quarter of 2023 from RO5.4mn in the same period a year ago.

Net profit of Oman Arab Bank increased from RO3.5mn in the first quarter of last year to RO5.5mn this year, recording a growth of 57 per cent. Bank Nizwa reported a 5.7 per cent increase in net profit to

RO3.5mn for the first quarter of 2023 against RO3.3mn in the same period of 2022.

Omani banks witnessed growth in most of their financial indicators in the first quarter of this year.

The preliminary data indicated that the total assets of the eight banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange increased to RO37.6bn as of March 31, 2023 from RO36.1bn a year ago, recording an increase of 4 per cent.

# OETC completes projects worth RO60mn in 2022

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), a member of Nama Group, has completed six key project worth RO60mn that were planned during 2022, according to the company's annual report released on Thursday.

"OETC has continued to make progress in implementing planned projects for 2022. As planned, we have successfully completed several projects, with a total value of approximately RO60mn," Saleh Nasser al Rumhi, CEO of OETC, said in his statement in the report.

These projects are essential in enhancing the sultanate's transmission grid and aligning it with OETC's strategic and operational plans, Rumhi said. "Our aim is to ensure that the grid has the capacity and readiness to meet the increasing power demand across the sultanate. The company is committed to delivering high-quality projects that meet the business objectives within budget, and to the highest standards of quality."

As per the CEO, OETC is committed to financing its projects according to its approved plan, enabling it to expand the transmission grid and meet the increasing electricity demand. Last year, the company prepared a local financing loan of RO90mn and completed the necessary procedures the same year.

The key projects completed on schedule by OETC are: Mirbat Grid Station 132/33kV and its associated transmission lines (RO11mn cost); Wadi Bani Awf 132/33kV Grid Station and its associated transmission lines (RO15mn cost); 400/132 kV Nahadah Grid Station (RO16mn cost); Mabilla Industrial 132/133kV Grid Station and its associated transmission lines (RO8mn cost); upgrading Thumrait Grid Station transform-



ers from 2x30MVA to 2x63MVA; and the extension of OETC's main head office.

## Profits rise to RO77.6mn

According to its annual report, OETC's 2022 revenues from grid usage and connection charges amounted to RO143.33mn, a sig-

However, a decline was recorded in OETC's net operating profit after tax, which fell by 17.5 per cent to RO43.64mn in 2022 compared to RO37.15mn in 2021. The company noted that many measures are taken to mitigate this decline and drive growth in the coming years.

The carrying value of OETC's

"The company confirms its explicit commitment to the safe and stable operation of the transmission grid in such a way as to ensure continuous electricity transmission to all governorates covered by the grid," he said.

Rumhi noted that the company is currently revising its vision and mission to ensure to meet the needs of the next stage.

OETC has planned eight key projects which are expected to be completed in 2023.

The planned projects for 2023 are: Seih Al Khairat 132/33kV Grid Station and its associated overhead lines; Duqm 400/132kV Grid Station and Mahut 400/132kV Grid Station; Barik 400/132kV Grid Station and Suwaihat 400/132kV Grid Station; 400 kV overhead lines in Nahadah, Barik and Suwaihat; 400 kV overhead lines in Suwaihat, Duqm and Mahut; upgrade of Nizwa Grid Station to 220/132 kV; expansion of Airport Heights 220/132 kV Station; and regional offices in Al Buraimi, Nizwa, and Sur.

*OETC's 2022 revenues from grid usage and connection charges amounted to RO143.33mn, a significant increase of 9.8% compared to RO130.51mn in 2021*

nificant increase of 9.8 per cent compared to RO130.51mn in 2021.

This growth in revenues helped the company post a 7.5 per cent increase in total profit to RO77.67mn in 2022, compared to RO72.24mn in 2021. Its operating profit also rose 5 per cent to RO60.41mn in 2022, compared to RO57.54mn in 2021.

property, plant, and machinery amounted to RO1.516bn as of December 31, 2022, an increase of 9.2 per cent compared to RO1.389bn a year ago.

Rumhi said OETC will continue to enhance its performance technically and administratively according to its plans and strategies and in line with the next stage requirements.

# US economic growth cools in first quarter as recession fears deepen

Washington, US - US economic growth lost steam in the first quarter as gloomier business investment countered a rise in consumer spending, the Commerce Department said, while the possibility of a mild recession brews.

Consumption has provided a boost to the world's biggest economy, giving it a strong start to 2023, but recent banking sector turmoil and higher interest rates weigh on the outlook.

US gross domestic product rose at an annual rate of 1.1 per cent in the January to March period, markedly less than expected and down from 2.6 per cent in the final three months last year.

"Compared to the fourth quarter, the deceleration in real GDP in the first quarter primarily reflected a downturn in private inventory investment and a slowdown in nonresidential fixed investment," the Commerce Department said.

It added that this was partly offset by an acceleration in consumer spending and an upturn in exports.

The GDP growth figure "reflected increases in consumer spending, exports, federal government spending," along with some forms of investment, said the department in a statement.

Economic activity has been



In this file photo, the US flag flies in the foreground as containers are seen at the Port of Los Angeles, California (AFP)

easing as the US central bank rapidly hiked its benchmark lending rate to tackle stubborn inflation, while the full fallout from recent financial sector unrest - following the failures of three midsized lenders last month - is yet to be seen.

Next month, Federal Reserve policymakers are expected to unveil another quarter-point rate increase in their quest to bring inflation back in line with a lower target.

"Looking ahead, the outlook is uncertain," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief US economist at High Frequency Economics.

"Policymakers have taken ag-

gressive action to slow down economic activity and lower inflation back towards target," she added. Retail sales bounced in January, likely helped by mild weather, but Ian Shepherdson and Kieran Clancy of Pantheon Macroeconomics cautioned in a recent note that "it would be dangerous" to extrapolate from apparent strength in the first three months.

February and March figures "revealed a lack of momentum, which we expect to persist in the second quarter," they added.

In a separate report Thursday, Shepherdson said that consumption could "fall outright" should

people respond to a worsening labor market by choosing to save more.

## Banking turmoil impact

Meanwhile, banking sector stress could bring tighter credit conditions, making it harder for households and businesses to get loans.

"The economy barely grew in the first quarter, but it is likely to shrink outright in Q2 and Q3. Welcome to the recession," Shepherdson said, referring to the second and third quarters.

Recent unrest in the banking system and tighter lending standards is expected to result in a more severe recession than anticipated later this year, though this will still be a mild downturn, Ryan Sweet of Oxford Economics told AFP.

"Our business cycle indicator shows the economy lost momentum in February and is close to turning negative," he said.

While large American banks have emerged relatively unscathed from recent pressures, "the turmoil may not yet be over," said Sweet.

"The economic costs have yet to be fully felt as banks are tightening lending standards and deposits at small banks have plunged," he said.

AFP

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |  |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <div><div><div><div><div></div></div><div>شركة التغليف المحدودة (ش.م.ع.ع.)</div></div><div>Packaging Co Ltd. (SAOG)</div></div></div>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |  |  |
| CHAIRMAN'S REPORT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |  |  |  |
| On behalf of the Board of Directors, we present the Chairman's Report of Packaging Co Ltd (SAOG) for the 1st quarter ended on 31.03.2023.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |  |  |
| The 1st quarter ended with revenue of RO. 3,063,697/- and net profit of RO. 151,623/- as against revenue of RO. 2,748,528/- and net profit of RO. 32,174/- in the same period of previous year. The profit before depreciation for the period under review was RO. 303,503/- compared to profit of RO.175,508/- before depreciation in the same period of previous year. |  |  |  |
| The paper prices now have been stabilized and looks remain stable for the second quarter. We were able to increase our average sales realization resulting in profitability.                                                                                                                                                                                             |  |  |  |
| We would like to place on record our thanks to all our employees for their dedication and hard work.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |  |  |  |
| We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to all of you for the patience and confidence reposed in the company. We also thank the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Muscat Securities Market for their support.                                                                                                                       |  |  |  |
| On behalf of the Board or Directors, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty for his vision and growth-oriented policies aimed at bringing about a prosperous national economy.                                                                                                                                                                    |  |  |  |
| Chairman of the Board of Directors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |  |  |
| Note: The Complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them either in Arabic or English within 7 days of the receipt of the request at the company's address at PO Box No 2818, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman.                                                                                                                       |  |  |  |

|                                                                                                                                        |                                |              |              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Statement Of Financial Position. Current/Non Current                                                                                   |                                |              |              |
| Statement Of Financials Position Consolidated And Separate                                                                             |                                |              |              |
|                                                                                                                                        | Acutals Omani Riyal Un audited | Audited      |              |
|                                                                                                                                        | Consolidated                   | Consolidated | Consolidated |
|                                                                                                                                        | 01.01.2023 -                   | 01.01.2022 - | 31.12.2022   |
|                                                                                                                                        | 31.03.2023                     | 31.03.2022   |              |
| ASSETS                                                                                                                                 |                                |              |              |
| NON-CURRENT ASSETS                                                                                                                     |                                |              |              |
| Property, plant and equipment                                                                                                          | 5,335,947                      | 5,979,942    | 5,478,729    |
| Total non-current assets                                                                                                               | 5,335,947                      | 5,979,942    | 5,478,729    |
| CURRENT ASSETS                                                                                                                         |                                |              |              |
| Current inventories                                                                                                                    | 2,751,960                      | 1,741,186    | 3,022,364    |
| Trade and other current receivables                                                                                                    | 4,450,306                      | 3,971,429    | 3,813,348    |
| Cash and bank balances                                                                                                                 | 69,631                         | 9,380        | 14,519       |
| Total current assets other than non current assets or disposal group classified as held for sale or as held for distribution to owners | 7,271,897                      | 5,721,995    | 6,850,231    |
| Total current assets                                                                                                                   | 7,271,897                      | 5,721,995    | 6,850,231    |
| Total assets                                                                                                                           | 12,607,844                     | 11,701,937   | 12,328,960   |
| EQUITY AND LIABILITIES                                                                                                                 |                                |              |              |
| EQUITY                                                                                                                                 |                                |              |              |
| Issued capital                                                                                                                         | 3,000,000                      | 3,000,000    | 3,000,000    |
| Share premium                                                                                                                          | 90,811                         | 90,811       | 90,811       |
| Statutory reserve                                                                                                                      | 539,548                        | 539,548      | 539,548      |
| Other reserves                                                                                                                         | 634,986                        | 702,623      | 634,986      |
| Retained earnings (accumulated profit (losses))                                                                                        | 575,566                        | 624,631      | 423,943      |
| Total equity attributable to owners of parent                                                                                          | 4,840,911                      | 4,957,613    | 4,689,288    |
| Total Equity                                                                                                                           | 4,840,911                      | 4,957,613    | 4,689,288    |
| NON CURRENT LIABILITIES                                                                                                                |                                |              |              |
| Non - current Provisions for employees benefits                                                                                        | 24,474                         | 19,387       | 20,591       |
| Total non current provisions                                                                                                           | 24,474                         | 19,387       | 20,591       |
| Borrowings non-current                                                                                                                 | 648,482                        | 806,362      | 687,952      |
| Deferred tax liabilities                                                                                                               | 253,888                        | 305,458      | 243,560      |
| Total Non current liabilities                                                                                                          | 926,844                        | 1,131,207    | 952,103      |
| CURRENT LIABILITIES                                                                                                                    |                                |              |              |
| CURRENT PROVISIONS                                                                                                                     |                                |              |              |
| Trade and other current payables                                                                                                       | 3,312,234                      | 2,500,938    | 2,585,021    |
| Borrowings, current                                                                                                                    | 3,527,855                      | 3,112,179    | 4,102,548    |
| Total current liabilities other than liabilities included in disposal groups classified as held for sale                               | 6,840,089                      | 5,613,117    | 6,687,569    |
| Total Liabilities                                                                                                                      | 7,766,933                      | 6,744,324    | 7,639,672    |
| TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES                                                                                                           | 12,607,844                     | 11,701,937   | 12,328,960   |
| Number of outstanding shares                                                                                                           | 3,000,000                      | 3,000,000    | 3,000,000    |
| Net Assets per share                                                                                                                   | 1.614                          | 1.653        | 1.563        |

|                                                            |                                |              |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| INTERIM CONDENSED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, 31.03.2023         |                                |              |            |
|                                                            | Acutals Omani Riyal Un audited | Consolidated |            |
|                                                            | Consolidated                   | 01.01.2022 - | 31.03.2022 |
|                                                            | 01.01.2023 -                   | 31.03.2023   |            |
| REVENUE                                                    | 3,063,697                      | 2,748,528    |            |
| Cost of sales                                              | 2,629,119                      | 2,513,241    |            |
| GROSS PROFIT                                               | 434,578                        | 235,287      |            |
| Other income                                               | 57,774                         | 94,083       |            |
| Other expenses                                             | 1,195                          | -            |            |
| General and administration expenses                        | 150,566                        | 154,239      |            |
| Selling and distribution expenses                          | 109,512                        | 96,122       |            |
| PROFIT FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES                           | 231,079                        | 79,009       |            |
| Finance costs                                              | (52,699)                       | 46,835       |            |
| Profit(loss)/before income tax, continuing operations      | 178,380                        | 32,174       |            |
| Income tax expense, continuing operations                  | 26,757                         | -            |            |
| Net profit/(Loss) for the period                           | 151,623                        | 32,174       |            |
| PROFIT (LOSS), ATTRIBUTABLE TO                             |                                |              |            |
| Profit (loss), attributable to owners of parent            | 151,623                        | 32,174       |            |
| Basic earnings (loss) per share from continuing operations | 0.051                          | 0.011        |            |
| Total basic earnings (loss) per share                      | 0.051                          | 0.011        |            |

# Eurozone GDP grows 0.1% in first quarter

Brussels, Belgium - The eurozone economy lumbered forward in the first quarter, official data showed Friday, expanding just 0.1 per cent over the previous quarter as high inflation and interest rates weigh on activity.

Germany, the EU's biggest economy, saw growth stagnate at zero per cent over the previous quarter.

Year-on-year, Germany was the only country in the single-currency zone to record a contraction, of 0.1 per cent.

For the European Union overall, GDP expanded 0.3 per cent over the previous quarter, according to the figures from Eurostat, the EU's statistics office.

EU economy commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said the first-quarter data "is encouraging news, which shows a European economy that continues to show resilience against a challenging global backdrop".

The weak-but-positive figure for the eurozone mirrored the reading for the last quarter of 2022, which was also 0.1 per cent growth, confirming it had so far escaped recession but that high inflation was still a dampener.

Although eurozone inflation has eased somewhat, it is still 6.9 per cent on an annualised basis, more than three times the European Central Bank's target of two percent.

The ECB holds its next monetary policy meeting on Thursday, and all eyes are on it to see if it raises rates yet again, and if so by how much.

The central bank has raised



rates by 3.5 per cent since July last year and its chief economist, Philip Lane, said this week that "this is still not the right time to stop".

Eurostat's preliminary data suggested Germany was still struggling from the fallout of Russia's war in Ukraine, especially the shift away from Russian gas that has powered much of its industry.

The strongest quarter-on-quarter GDP performer was Portugal, with growth of 1.6 per cent, followed by Spain, Italy and Latvia all on 0.5 per cent. France, the second-biggest EU economy, showed growth of 0.2 per cent.

Quarter-on-quarter declines were recorded for Ireland, at 2.7

per cent, and Austria, at 0.3 per cent.

Inflation remains the bugbear in the eurozone, feeding through to higher wages that, while a short-term fillip, could give the ECB more reason to tighten monetary policy further.

Another worry is slowing growth in the United States, where a similar debate is raging over the impact further rates rises could have.

For the eurozone, ING Economics called it "a race between two opposing drivers: the positive momentum in industry and wage increases against the impact of monetary policy tightening and a looming US recession". AFP



## UNITED GCC FUND



### Chairman's Report

Dear Investors,

It is with great pleasure that I announce the United GCC Fund's performance for the first quarter of 2023. Our fund delivered a remarkable 4.69% return in Q1 2023, surpassing the S&P GCC Index benchmark by over 700 basis points. It's also my pleasure to note that we have distributed dividends to our valued clients for the twelfth consecutive time.

The global stock market began the year on a high note, fueled by speculation that the Federal Reserve would pause its actions. However, the rapid rate increases by the central bank revealed vulnerabilities in the banking system, resulting in the collapse of SVB bank and sparking fears of contagion. Despite these challenges, central banks responded swiftly, joining forces to bolster dollar liquidity, stabilize the financial system, and restore market confidence. The Swiss government and regulators also facilitated the acquisition of Credit Suisse by UBS, reassuring investors and demonstrating the central banks' dedication to managing the crisis. Consequently, the MSCI World Index experienced gains during Q1 and rose by 6.84%, and the MSCI Emerging Index climbed by 3.54%.

In terms of oil, Brent closed by -7.15% lower at \$79.77/barrel. Recession fears, US reluctance to replenish the SPR, and strikes in France, which could affect demand, contributed to the decline in oil prices during the quarter. However, as we draft this report, OPEC+ has announced an unexpected cut in oil production by over 1 million barrels, signalling OPEC+ is targeting a USD 80/bbl price floor, which is favorable for the region. Furthermore, expected Chinese demand may tighten the market in the second half of the year, potentially supporting further upward risk to oil prices.

As of Q1 2023, regional markets displayed mixed performance, with Dubai's leading the pack with a gain of 2.68%, followed by Saudi Arabia and Oman with gains of 1.07% and 0.2% respectively. While Abu Dhabi saw the largest decline (-7.17%), followed by Qatar (-4.39%), Kuwait (-3.13%) and Bahrain (-40%).

The regional IPO boom remains robust, with sustained interest in recently listed IPOs and a projected increase in offerings this year. Moreover, political risks have receded, as Saudi Arabia has commenced talks with Iran and Syria, potentially leading to the reopening of embassies and consulates between the countries. We believe these recent initiatives will significantly reduce geopolitical risk while attracting tourists and foreign investors to the region.

Saudi Arabia has announced the first batch of Shareek program projects, totaling \$51 billion out of the intended \$1.3 trillion, in line with Vision 2030. This move illustrates the nation's commitment to diversifying away from a hydrocarbon-centric economy and promoting private sector investments by providing incentives like government off-take agreements and access to government loans or financial support. The government projects that the Shareek program's initial phase will generate over SAR 466.83 billion in GDP growth by 2040 while creating 64,451 jobs during the same period.

Looking ahead, the recent market correction has made valuations in the GCC area reasonable. Nonetheless, Q1 earnings will play a critical role in guiding us for the upcoming period. Our mix of equity holdings is well-positioned to capitalize on the current macro themes and from a bottom-up perspective as well. We have confidence in our disciplined investment approach and in-depth understanding of the GCC region, which will enable us to successfully navigate the prevailing market conditions.

Once more, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all our clients, investors, and stakeholders for placing their trust in us. Your faith inspires us to excel in our performance.

Yours sincerely,

Yours sincerely,  
Mustafa Ahmed Salman  
Chairman – Management Body, UGCC Fund



### Unaudited condensed interim statement of Comprehensive Income for the three-month period ended 31st March 2023

|                                                                                                                                           | Three months ended 31st Mar 2023<br>RO<br>Unaudited | Three months ended 31st Mar 2022<br>RO<br>Unaudited |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Income</b>                                                                                                                             |                                                     |                                                     |
| Interest income                                                                                                                           | 599                                                 | 258                                                 |
| Dividend income                                                                                                                           | 206,964                                             | 181,203                                             |
| Fair value change on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss                                                                | 584,406                                             | 2,182,077                                           |
| Realised gain/(loss) on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss                                                     | 44,065                                              | 363,891                                             |
| Foreign exchange (loss)/gain                                                                                                              | 2,868                                               | 1,773                                               |
| Other income                                                                                                                              | -                                                   | -                                                   |
| <b>Net investment income/(loss)</b>                                                                                                       | <b>838,902</b>                                      | <b>2,729,203</b>                                    |
| <b>Expenses</b>                                                                                                                           |                                                     |                                                     |
| Management fees                                                                                                                           | (38,035)                                            | (42,525)                                            |
| Custody and administration fees                                                                                                           | (6,656)                                             | (7,442)                                             |
| General and administrative expenses                                                                                                       | (67,677)                                            | (72,059)                                            |
|                                                                                                                                           | (112,368)                                           | (122,025)                                           |
| <b>Profit and total comprehensive income/(loss) for the period and increase/(decrease) in net assets attributable to the unit holders</b> | <b>726,534</b>                                      | <b>2,607,177</b>                                    |
| <b>Profit/(loss) per unit</b>                                                                                                             | <b>0.062</b>                                        | <b>0.227</b>                                        |

### Unaudited condensed interim statement of Financial Position at 31st March 2023

|                                                            | As at 31st March 2023<br>RO<br>Unaudited | As at 31st December 2022<br>RO<br>Unaudited |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>ASSETS</b>                                              |                                          |                                             |
| Cash and cash equivalents                                  | 1,333,701                                | 714,966                                     |
| Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss      | 14,716,944                               | 17,327,082                                  |
| Other receivables                                          | 136,653                                  | 80,902                                      |
| <b>Total assets</b>                                        | <b>16,187,298</b>                        | <b>18,122,950</b>                           |
| <b>LIABILITIES</b>                                         |                                          |                                             |
| Payables and accruals                                      | 346,475                                  | 73,056                                      |
| Net assets attributable to unitholders                     | 15,840,823                               | 18,049,894                                  |
| Total liabilities and assets attributable to unitholders   | 16,187,298                               | 18,122,950                                  |
| <b>Net assets attributable to the unitholders per unit</b> | <b>1.342</b>                             | <b>1.524</b>                                |

To get the complete financials kindly contact us on : 24763300  
Or email us on : info@usoman.com

For subscription details please contact UGCC Fund@ 24763362 or  
email ugccfund@usoman.com

Send your comments to [muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om](mailto:muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om)

# CONDOLENCES

Maqbool Hameed Al Saleh,  
Chairman, OHI Group of Companies,  
members of the board, management team and employees  
extend their sincere condolences to

**H.E. Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al-Busaidi**  
on the passing of his mother.

May Allah rest her soul in peace, and give the family the strength to  
overcome such a profound and irreplaceable loss.

# Bank Muscat to take part in forum for disabled

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced its participation in the Forum for Persons with Disabilities, to be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from Monday to Wednesday.

The forum, which is being held under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Development, will see the strong participation of several leading government and private sector organisations. Also present will be a number of local and regional organisations working for the welfare of persons with different types of disabilities, technical institutions and manufacturers of various assistive devices.

During the forum, Bank Muscat will highlight its pioneering role in empowering persons with disabilities through various services and initiatives for this important segment of society.

The event aims to enhance the status and role of persons with disabilities by providing them with opportunities to showcase their abilities and talents. In particular, the forum will highlight the importance of modern technologies, which can assist persons with disabilities to lead as normal a life as possible.

It will also bring to the fore the role of the family in supporting persons with disabilities through early intervention and the need for promoting accessibility by a society that cares and empowers the disabled socially and economically.



A number of presentations and works by persons with disabilities will also be displayed at the forum for the benefit of the large numbers of visitors.

Visitors to the exhibition will have an opportunity to learn more about the different facilities provided by Bank Muscat to persons with disabilities through its dedicated stall. In particular, visitors can learn about the job opportunities available to persons with disabilities as well as specially designed inclusive features and services.

It may be noted that Bank Muscat has a number of achievements to its credit in this regard including the launching of the first ATM in Oman for persons with visual disabilities at the premises of the Al Noor Association for the Blind.

The bank's participation at the forum comes as part of its keenness to enhance financial inclusion as part of its overall strategy to support Oman's renaissance.

Bank Muscat has also been taking great effort to ensure that staff trained in sign language are available at different branches to provide banking services to serve customers with hearing and speech impairments. The bank also continues to partner with the Omani Association for the Hearing Impaired by providing assistive devices to those in need.

The bank has also previously provided wheelchairs and electrically operated beds to the disabled and Braille Sense devices and special laptops to students with visual disabilities at Sohar University.

It has also supported the Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre and the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Children with Disabilities. These efforts are a part of the bank's initiatives in the field of social responsibility projected to improve the facilities provided to the persons with disabilities and help them to integrate into society and contribute to the development of the country.

The bank is comprehensively upgrading 11 conventional banking branches and 9 Meethaq Islamic branches across the Sultanate of Oman so as to provide enhanced banking services to persons with disabilities. Also, the m-Banking app has been updated to allow screen reading in Android and iOS to assist persons with visual disabilities.

# Bank Nizwa joins SIPTT for spread of education

Bank Nizwa - the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman - recently inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Specialised Institute for Professional Training of Teachers (SIPTT).

This reflects the bank's intention to develop the educational infrastructure in Oman and improve its efficiency to meet current demands.

The agreement was signed by Khalid al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa on behalf of Bank Nizwa and Intisar Ambosaidi, GM of the Institute represented SIPTT during a signing ceremony held at the head office of Bank Nizwa in the presence of several officials on both sides.

As per the MoU, Bank Nizwa will sponsor the honouring ceremony for the 'Enrichment and Upgrade' initiative, through which outstanding teachers, educational districts, and technical schools will be recognised.

In addition, the bank will conduct a workshop on Islamic banking so that trainees at the institute can gain a more thorough understanding of this sector.

"We support social responsibility activities that contribute to change for the betterment of individuals by providing a positive and sustainable impact, guided by sharia'a when giving back to Omani society," said Khalid al Kayed after the signing ceremony. Throughout its history, he asserted that the bank made efforts to develop national competencies in tandem with the education sector's objectives of Oman Vision 2040.



"As part of our commitment to support such meaningful initiatives, we are pleased to cooperate with the Specialised Institute for Professional Training of Teachers (SIPTT). This partnership enables Bank Nizwa to advance sustainable development in the country by building qualified competencies that drive change and create a stable knowledge-based economy."

Intisar Ambosaidi of the Institute expressed happiness in partnering with Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic financial institution in the sultanate with a long history of providing innovative and advanced services.

"The bank has been working tirelessly to support the education system and improve its efficiency in the country," he acknowledged, while pointing out that the partnership "represents the desire of both parties to leverage their capabilities to support the sultanate in improving the quality of education".

"Our goals should align with

the country's future vision for the education sector and the country as a whole," he reminded.

SIPTT prepares and qualifies educators for the teaching profession whilst encouraging them to be self-motivated and confident. Further, it ensures that teachers deliver the right messages and information to both children and adults. In addition, the institution aims to highlight the critical role educators play in society's development.

By forming partnerships with a variety of institutions and coordinating with all segments of society, Bank Nizwa adheres to its social responsibility.

Additionally, the bank recognises that such targeted projects contribute to the country's comprehensive development by strengthening the educational sector. Moreover, Bank Nizwa strives to instil a culture of responsibility and social giving among its employees to produce positive and sustainable results for the community.

# Firstpass: Oman's first unified platform for patients launched

Firstpass - the first unified patient experience and engagement platform, launched in the Sultanate of Oman, in partnership with Vectramind Corporation, as it is designed to focus on patients' interaction and experience at every touch point of their journey that starts long before they need care, and continues long after their clinical interactions are over.

The Firstpass, launched by Oman Data Park (ODP) in partnership with Vectramind Corporation, is the sultanate's first IT-managed and cloud services provider and includes different dimensions which focuses on providing patient convenience, speed in caregiving, attention to patient preferences, easy access to medical information, self-service, system capable to capture real-time feedback and integrated with EMR systems as required.

Firstpass offers a variety of features, that focuses in improving patient experience at every touch point across the care continuum, to improve the overall patient satisfaction, which leads to better medical outcomes, patient retention, improve patient referrals, optimize the use of facilities and return on investment.

In his statement about the launch of this health platform, Eng Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park, said, "We are pleased to launch the Firstpass -Unified Patient Experience & Engagement Platform, which is built on agile modeling that simplify the transformation of the health services sector towards a sustainable sector in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution."

He emphasized those capabilities of Oman Data Park to provide the best levels of cloud services, relying on team of specialized experts at ODP, which is the Sultanate's first IT-managed and cloud services provider.

Al-Wahaibi added: "This platform also constitutes a quantum leap in the healthcare sector as it focuses on achieving the five principles of patient care, which include providing opportunities for patients to speak to experts regarding the disease they suffer from, by logging to <https://www.omandatapark.com/nebula-firstpass> empowering patients and let them be part of the decision making process for their treatment and procedures, establishing trust and communicate with empathy, reducing waiting time during their visit and asking them for their feedback, treating patients with respect and personalize their care experience, and to be transparent in sharing information to patients and his/her family".

C P Vinodh, Director for Healthcare solutions at Vectramind believes that 'understanding patient experience is a key step in moving toward patient-centered care that is respectful of and responsive to individual patient preferences, needs and values'.

The system powered by AI and Machine Learning, the platform enables patients to have a smooth journey when at hospital with lesser wait-times and hospital management and staff to be able to take right decision at the right time to ensure their patients concerns if any are addressed immediately.

# Deloitte announces Technology FAST 50 rankings

Deloitte Middle East has released the results of the second edition of the Middle East Technology Fast 50, the list of fastest-growing technology companies in the region. The program recognizes technology companies based on revenue growth over the last four years.

In this edition of Technology Fast 50, Deloitte Middle East received applications from companies providing products and services across Software, FinTech, Media & Entertainment, and other sectors. The ranked technology companies by the program this year achieved an average growth of 277 per cent, generating around US\$800mn in total annual revenues during 2021-2022, highlighting their significant contribution to the sector and the broader economy.



David Stark, Deloitte Private Leader said, "It is exciting to see the pool of companies participating in this year's program with regional entrepreneurs exploring a wide variety of fields and developing innovative solutions that address different business challenges. The second edition of Fast 50 is a great showcase of Deloitte's commitment to supporting the technology sector

which is more vital than ever for the region's economic development."

The top ranked company of the second edition of Technology Fast 50 is FinTech company, Capital.com, which exhibited 2,210 per cent growth. The companies ranked second and third were Jordan based FinTech company, Dinarak, and the United Arab Emirates based Media &

Entertainment company, Brandipplr, who have showcased 820 per cent and 816 per cent growth respectively. Other companies who had participated in the first edition and have made it to this year's list are Justlife, Softline, Urban Point, SignalGenerix, HyperThink System, Playkot and Aditess.

As part of the Technology Fast 50 programme, Deloitte also provides the Rising Star accolade, dedicated to companies that show great potential, but have been trading for less than three years and don't meet the ranking criteria. The Rising Star list featured the UAE based EdTech company, Englease, and Sure Payment, the Saudi Arabian Fintech company.

The program also grants the Impact accolade for companies

that have an Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) element at the heart of their mission. Leading the Impact ranking in the second edition is the Oman based 44.01, which eliminates CO2 by turning it into rock. In second and third position came respectively the Lebanon based non-profit organization, CodeBrave.

The second edition of Technology Fast 50 also features a section covering Companies to Watch, which recognises the innovation and achievements of some businesses who are leading the way but do not meet the program's criteria yet. The top two spots in this category were claimed by Saudi based EdTech company Algooru and the UAE based EdTech company, Allinners.

# 'Helping Hands' company inks deal with Mazoon Dairy

'Helping Hands', an Omani catering company focused on re-defining the catering industry, has been chosen as Mazoon Dairy's new catering partner.

Under the agreement signed by Ashish D Sampat, Manager, from 'Helping Hands', and Rashid Khalfan al Maqbali, Administration and Facilities Manager from Mazoon Dairy, 'Helping Hands' will provide three meals per day at Mazoon Dairy's premises in Sunaynah.

Meals will be prepared at 'Helping Hands' dedicated kitchen on site and dispatched to Mazoon Dairy in temperature-controlled cabinets and trucks. The meals will be planned and prepared in a manner that they cater to the dietary and nutritional requirements of the different nationalities working at Mazoon Dairy.

Commenting on the agreement, Ashish D Sampat of 'Help-



ing Hands' said, "The food services market within the corporate world is growing in the sultanate, as more and more companies look to balance taste and quality with affordable and diverse menu options.

"We are honoured to have been selected as Mazoon Dairy's catering partner, and look forward to a mutually beneficial

partnership experience."

Rashid al Maqbali of Mazoon Dairy said, "We have significant requirements for high-quality food catering services that meet the needs of our large and diverse workforce.

As part of our In-Country Value program, we are pleased to have signed this agreement with 'Helping Hands' and rein-

force our commitment to support local businesses and the growth and diversity of the sultanate's food industry by encouraging procurement of locally made food through domestic suppliers."

Serving Arabic and Asian cuisines, 'Helping Hands' will meet the dietary needs of Mazoon Dairy employees and con-

tractors. Under the contract, three meals - breakfast, lunch and dinner will be served to employees and contractors. During Ramadan, five meals will be served, including suhoor and iftar.

Established in 2009, 'Helping Hands' is part of the trusted Khimji Ramdas (KR) Group, and has earned a reputation for providing quality food and service inspired by flavours from around the world at exceptional value.

From contract catering for a large facility to corporate packages for a special meeting or event, 'Helping Hands' delivers variety, taste, quality and affordability.

Aligned to the sultanate's Vision 2040, the company works with local suppliers and encourages the use of made-in-Oman products, thereby supporting the growth of the national food industry.

# Oman Sail CEO named one of best Arabian CEOs

Dr Khamis al Jabri, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Sail, has been named in the top rated 100 Arabian CEOs of the year by the G2T Global Awards.

Dr Jabri joins a group of leaders from across the region, representing a diverse variety of sectors including energy, industry, tourism, education, food production, health and sport.

The announcement was made at the official G2T Global Awards ceremony that took place in Marrakech, Morocco on Thursday, a release said.

Since taking office in 2020, Dr Jabri has successfully led Oman Sail to a number of notable achievements. These include enabling Oman Sail to deliver socio-economic benefits for Oman through community programmes, the investment in sport development and attracting international events to be hosted in Oman.

Dr Jabri played an instrumental role in leading the sailing teams to continued excellence and success as well as enhancing community programmes that introduce the sport of sailing to wider audiences.

Several national, regional, and prestigious international events in Oman since 2020, such as the Youth Sailing World Champi-



onship in 2021 and the RS Venture Connect World Championship in 2022 - the first-ever exclusively para-sailing event to be staged in Oman.

Moreover, Dr Jabri's leadership enabled Oman Sail to share its expertise with the sporting community, joining hands with World Athletics and Oman Athletic Association to bring the World Race Walking Team

Championships 2022 and with the International Table Tennis Federation and Oman Table Tennis Federation to host the World Veteran Table Tennis Championships 2023 in Muscat.

"It is a huge honour to be included in this year's Best 100 Arabian CEOs and join a group of dynamic, innovative, and high-achieving leaders from across the region. This is an achievement to

be shared throughout the organisation because without the tireless efforts of the dedicated team at Oman Sail we would not have accomplished the feats we have over the past year," Dr Jabri said at the ceremony in Morocco.

"The talent within the company creates unique opportunities to plan and lead in a variety of directions with complete confidence that the team will deliver an exceptional event," the Oman Sail CEO said, assuring that this non-profit organisation "will continue to add to our reputation as a prominent figure in the community, and our mission to rekindle Oman's maritime heritage, as we work together to develop the capacity of Omanis in sailing and para sailing, preserving the environment, teaching transferable skills and flying

the flag of Oman proudly around the world."

The Global 2T Group was founded in 2015 and has grown to become a leader in the market for tailored professional training and consultancy, specialising in market research and keeping clients ahead of the curve in order to achieve their targets.

The G2T Global Awards celebrate the achievement across the Arab world by recognising individuals and organisations, and companies that have made significant contributions to their respective industries and have had a positive impact on society.

The awards ceremony helps C-level executives build worthwhile personal and professional connections, develop partnerships, and drive economic growth across all economic sectors.

# Oman Air hosts workshop on ways to stop illegal travellers



Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, recently hosted the Emirates Regional Immigration Liaison (ERIL) team for a Documents Verification Workshop at the Novotel Muscat Airport in Oman's capital.

Organised by the airline's Security department, the event was part of ongoing cooperation between ERIL member states, airlines and key border officials, to prevent travel on fraudulent documents, deter illegal immigration and human trafficking cases, increase early intervention, and identify and respond appropriately.

During the workshop, Oman Air's Document Verification Unit (DVU) was recognised for its achievement in intercepting more than 350 cases of immigration forgery across its network during 2022, which were then transferred to the relevant local authorities.

Alauddin al Ali, Senior Manager - Airline Security at Oman Air, said, "Security is paramount to our operations as an airline and it is key for us to develop strong networks with Liaison Officers, airlines, officials and organisations like ERIL, from a range of countries. Through the

frequent exchange of information and tools, we are able to stay updated on trends and issues in security and fraud, prevent and disrupt such cases, and above all, protect the safety of our guests."

ERIL is a multi-agency group composed of representatives from all over the world, who collaborate to combat illegal migration through joint disruption efforts, information sharing, and training. ERIL member states include Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United State of America.

# Dubai's MOTF releases music video

The Museum of the Future (MOTF) has announced a special gift to Dubai and the United Arab Emirates. Through their digital channels, the museum has released a captivating music video titled *Dubai Builds the Future*.

The beautifully directed video celebrates Dubai's pioneering position in transforming challenges into opportunities for sustainable development and highlights the city's continued commitment to creating a brighter future for all, a release said.

The lyrics for the song which were written by songwriter Abdullah AlShehhi, and performed by singer Maryam Shehab, sheds light on the leading position achieved by the emirate of Dubai, and highlights how the city has demonstrated its success in tackling challenges and finding solutions by actively pursuing long-term sustainable development and comprehensive growth, whilst actively creating



and shaping a brighter future.

This vision is reflected through the development of a plethora of ambitious projects, innovative platforms and trailblazing initiatives that focus on the future, including the city's latest icon, the Museum of the Future, which has become a key pillar of the country's future, contributing to developing long-term development solutions to the challenges facing future cities.

A hub for innovation and a lab for future focused ideas, the museum provides a platform to study and anticipate the future, design its ideas and create in-depth scientific discussions about its trends in all scientific sectors.

Filmed within the Museum of the Future, the video features future generations of children marvelling at the exhibits as they are inspired to play their part in building a positive future. The video serves as a reminder that ambition is limitless and that tomorrow's generation will turn the impossible into possible.

| MANAGEMENT DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| For three-month period ended March 31, 2023 (1Q2023), the Company has recorded a profit after tax (PAT) of RO 4.54 million as compared to RO 4.33 million earned in corresponding period in 2022 (1Q2022). The profit after tax increased mainly due to lower finance cost in 1Q2023 as compared to 1Q2022.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Financial performance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Key financial performance indicators are shown below:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 1Q2023                                                | 1Q2022                                                |                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | RO million                                            | RO million                                            |                          |
| Revenue                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 18.02                                                 | 16.89                                                 |                          |
| Earning before interest & tax and depreciation allowance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 9.82                                                  | 10.18                                                 |                          |
| Profit before interest and tax                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 7.03                                                  | 7.43                                                  |                          |
| Profit after tax                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 4.54                                                  | 4.33                                                  |                          |
| Profit after tax                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Profit after tax has increased from RO 4.33 million in 1Q2022 to RO 4.54 million in 1Q2023.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| A brief analysis and characteristics of the major components of the profit or loss is presented below:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Revenue                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Power contributed 49% (excluding fuel charge), water 23% and fuel charge 28% to the total revenue. Revenue was increased by RO 1.1 million mainly due to increase in fixed capacity charge revenue and fuel charge revenue as compared to the corresponding period previous year. Fuel charge revenue increased by RO 1 million mainly due to increase in plant heat rate and increase in the gas price. Fuel charge revenue is a pass through and is calculated based on consumption of natural gas as computed by the plant's contractual Fuel Demand Model. Actual heat rate is better than the contracted Fuel Demand Model. Fixed capacity charge revenue increased mainly due to inflation indexation impact. |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Cost of sales                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Cost of sales mainly comprises depreciation of property, plant and equipment, fuel cost, operations & maintenance (O&M) cost and Long Term Service Agreement (LTSA) cost. Cost of sales increased by RO 1.55 million compared to the same period in 2022, mainly due to the higher fuel cost, LTSA cost and O&M cost. Increase in fuel cost was in line with the increase in the fuel charge revenue. LTSA cost increased due to increase in chargeable Factor Fired Hours and increase in inflation index. O&M cost increased mainly due to increase in planned maintenance of the plant.                                                                                                                          |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Net finance cost                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Finance cost decreased by RO 0.5 million in 1Q2023 compared to 1Q2022 due to the scheduled repayment of part of the term loan in line with the financing documents.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Finance income increased by RO 0.2 million due to increase in fixed deposit rates.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Income tax expense                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Income tax expenses increased due to increase in profit for 1Q2023 as compared to the corresponding period previous year.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Business outlook                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| We will remain focused on maximising shareholder returns through a continued watch on the financial and operational performance of the Company, and by minimising the impact of rising global inflation and interest rates. The Company expects to achieve its targeted results for the financial year 2023.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| statement of profit and loss and other comprehensive income for three month period ended 31 March 2023                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Unaudited For three months period ended 31 March 2023 | Unaudited For three months period ended 31 March 2022 |                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | RO                                                    | RO                                                    |                          |
| Revenue from contracts with customers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 18,022,127                                            | 16,892,013                                            |                          |
| Cost of sales                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | (10,901,241)                                          | (9,345,588)                                           |                          |
| Gross profit                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 7,120,886                                             | 7,546,425                                             |                          |
| Administrative and general expenses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | (162,695)                                             | (157,456)                                             |                          |
| Other income                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 71,172                                                | 40,046                                                |                          |
| Profit before interest and tax                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 7,029,363                                             | 7,429,015                                             |                          |
| Finance income                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 225,061                                               | 25,925                                                |                          |
| Finance costs                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | (1,906,756)                                           | (2,361,038)                                           |                          |
| Profit before income tax                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 5,347,668                                             | 5,093,902                                             |                          |
| Income tax expense                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | (804,004)                                             | (766,052)                                             |                          |
| Profit after tax for the period                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 4,543,664                                             | 4,327,850                                             |                          |
| Other comprehensive income                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Fair value of cash flow hedge adjustments - gross                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | (198,659)                                             | 2,901,243                                             |                          |
| Reclassification to profit or loss - gross                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 861                                                   | 1,029,778                                             |                          |
| Deferred tax asset on change in fair value of cash flow hedge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 29,672                                                | (589,653)                                             |                          |
| Other comprehensive (loss) / income for the period                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | (168,126)                                             | 3,341,368                                             |                          |
| Total comprehensive income for the period                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 4,375,538                                             | 7,669,218                                             |                          |
| Earnings per share:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Basic and diluted earnings per share                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 0.0048                                                | 0.0045                                                |                          |
| Statement of financial position as at 31 March 2023                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Unaudited 31 March 2023                               | Unaudited 31 March 2022                               | Audited 31 December 2022 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | RO                                                    | RO                                                    | RO                       |
| Assets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Non-current assets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Property, plant and equipment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 246,102,535                                           | 256,774,441                                           | 248,808,129              |
| Right of use assets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 640,896                                               | 667,879                                               | 647,549                  |
| Intangible assets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | -                                                     | 900                                                   | 175                      |
| Derivative financial instruments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | -                                                     | -                                                     | 29,279                   |
| Total non-current assets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 246,743,431                                           | 257,443,220                                           | 249,485,132              |
| Current assets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Inventories                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 5,604,074                                             | 5,584,930                                             | 5,519,281                |
| Trade and other receivables                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 8,719,191                                             | 8,268,919                                             | 8,403,673                |
| Current portion of derivative financial instruments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 527,592                                               | -                                                     | 376,250                  |
| Bank deposits                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 14,101,712                                            | 15,583,373                                            | 17,333,540               |
| Cash and cash equivalents                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 1,276,668                                             | 868,798                                               | 7,250,823                |
| Total current assets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 30,229,237                                            | 30,306,020                                            | 38,883,567               |
| Total assets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 276,972,668                                           | 287,749,240                                           | 288,368,699              |
| Equity and Liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Equity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Share capital                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 95,457,195                                            | 95,457,195                                            | 95,457,195               |
| Legal reserve                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 15,276,939                                            | 13,293,292                                            | 14,822,573               |
| Retained earnings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 41,242,767                                            | 29,117,368                                            | 37,153,469               |
| Hedging reserve                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 176,571                                               | (3,078,382)                                           | 344,697                  |
| Total Equity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 152,153,472                                           | 134,789,473                                           | 147,777,934              |
| Liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Non-current liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Long term loans                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 61,754,448                                            | 87,260,982                                            | 73,305,197               |
| Long term lease liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 566,631                                               | 532,071                                               | 557,568                  |
| Asset retirement obligation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 792,775                                               | 744,532                                               | 780,136                  |
| Deferred tax liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 24,746,400                                            | 24,111,034                                            | 24,814,395               |
| Deferred revenue                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 1,029,929                                             | -                                                     | 1,078,882                |
| Derivative financial instruments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 319,861                                               | 1,668,455                                             | -                        |
| Total non-current liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 89,210,044                                            | 114,317,074                                           | 100,536,178              |
| Current liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                       |                                                       |                          |
| Current portion of long term loans                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 25,973,449                                            | 27,780,298                                            | 27,780,298               |
| Current portion of derivative financial instruments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | -                                                     | 1,953,171                                             | -                        |
| Trade and other payables                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 5,521,138                                             | 5,670,251                                             | 9,002,051                |
| Current tax payable                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 4,114,565                                             | 3,238,973                                             | 3,272,238                |
| Total current liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 35,609,152                                            | 38,642,693                                            | 40,054,587               |
| Total liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 124,819,196                                           | 152,959,767                                           | 140,590,765              |
| Total equity and liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 276,972,668                                           | 287,749,240                                           | 288,368,699              |
| Net assets per share                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 0.159                                                 | 0.141                                                 | 0.155                    |

# 'A new history': Brazil president decrees six Indigenous reserves

Brasilia, Brazil - Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Friday decreed six new Indigenous reserves, including a vast Amazon territory, after a freeze in such expansion under his far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro.

Under the decrees, Indigenous people are guaranteed exclusive use of natural resources on these lands, viewed by scientists as a bulwark against Amazon deforestation - a major challenge in the fight against climate change.

They also commit the Brazilian state to protecting reserve land from intrusions of timber traffickers or illegal miners - the main contributors to forest destruction.

Lula signed the official decrees covering 620,000 hectares of land on the final day of a gathering of Indigenous people from around the country in the capital Brasilia.

"It is a time-consuming process, but we are going to make sure that as many Indigenous reserves as possible are legalised," the president said.

"If we want to achieve zero deforestation by 2030, we need registered Indigenous reserves."

Under four years of Bolsonaro, who had vowed to not cede 'one more centimetre' of land to Brazil's Indigenous communities, average annual deforestation had increased by 75 per cent compared to the previous decade.

Bolsonaro instigated policies that favoured the agriculture and logging industries, which are mostly responsible for de-



Indigenous people perform a ritual before a speech by Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva, at the Terra Livre Indigenous camp in Brasilia on Friday (AFP)

forestation.

Two of the six new reserves are in the Amazon.

The largest, named Unieuxi, was allocated to 249 members

and one in central Brazil.

Friday's announcement was made at a closing ceremony for the 19th edition of 'Terra Livre' (Free Land), a gathering of thou-

sands of Indigenous peoples from across the vast country.

"This lifts a weight from our shoulders," 44-year-old Unieuxi resident Claudia Tomas told AFP-TV. "It's the best news we

could have gotten, that our lands have been legalised. It fills us with hope."

Tehe Pataxo, 29, is still waiting for news on demarcation of his traditional land in the north-eastern state of Bahia, but said the move 'reassures us about the future of our children'.

Lula signed the decrees next to prominent Indigenous leaders such as chief Raoni Metuktire, who presented him with a traditional headdress of blue and red feathers.

According to the latest census, dating from 2010, Brazil is home to about 800,000 Indigenous people. Most of them live on reserves that take up 13.75 per cent of the national

territory.

## 'Fighting to recover'

The last declaration of a new Indigenous reserve in Brazil dates to five years ago, when then-president Michel Temer granted the Guato people rights to 20,000 hectares (some 49,400 acres) of ancestral land in the western Mato Grosso state.

Lula vowed to approve new reserves 'as soon as possible' after taking office for a third term on January 1. He had previously served as president from 2003 to 2010.

He created the country's first-ever ministry for Indigenous affairs, under Minister Sonia Guajajara.

"When they say that you occupy 14 per cent of the territory and that it is a lot, it is necessary to remember that before the arrival of the Portuguese you occupied 100 per cent," Lula said to loud cheers by the crowd who made the 'L' of Lula with an index finger and thumb.

More reserves are in the pipeline: Guajajara announced last month that 14 reserves were ready to be legalised - covering nearly 900,000 hectares in total. These included the six announced on Friday.

"We are going to write a new history, for the sake of all humanity, of our planet," Guajajara said after Friday's signing.

"We, the Indigenous peoples, represent only five per cent of the world's population, but we preserve more than 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity," she added.

AFP



US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin meets with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol at the Pentagon in Washington, DC, on Thursday (AFP)

## Kim's sister says US-South Korea plan risks danger

Seoul, South Korea - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister warned on Saturday that a US-South Korean agreement aimed at strengthening deterrence against Pyongyang will lead to 'more serious danger', state media reported.

The United States and South Korea vowed this week that North Korea would face a nuclear response and the 'end' of the leadership there should it use its own nukes against the allies, as the two countries' presidents met in Washington.

In Pyongyang's first response to the Washington summit, Kim Yo Jong said the North remained convinced that its nuclear deterrent 'should be brought to further perfection'.

"The more the enemies are dead set on staging nuclear war exercises, and the more nuclear assets they deploy in the vicinity of the Korean peninsula, the stronger the exercise of our right to self-defence will become," she said, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and US counterpart Joe Biden on Wednesday issued

what was called the Washington Declaration, bolstering the US nuclear umbrella over South Korea, which is increasingly nervous about Pyongyang's aggression. It will involve the 'regular deployment of strategic assets' including the first South Korean port visit by a nuclear ballistic submarine in decades, a US official told AFP.

The agreement, however, would 'only result in making peace and security of Northeast Asia and the world be exposed to more serious danger, and it is an act that can thus never be welcome', Kim Yo Jong said.

North Korea has defied years of punishing sanctions to continue work on its banned nuclear and missile programmes, and last year declared itself an 'irreversible' nuclear power, effectively ending the possibility of denuclearisation talks.

Pyongyang has conducted a record-breaking string of sanctions-defying launches in 2023, including test-firing the country's first solid-fuel ballistic missile - a key technical breakthrough for Kim Jong Un's military.

AFP

## Deadly crashes: US Army temporarily grounds pilots

Washington, US - The US Army's chief of staff on Friday grounded all pilots who are not involved in critical missions until they complete required training, after four helicopters crashed in a matter of weeks.

Two AH-64 Apache helicopters collided in Alaska on Thursday, killing three soldiers and injuring a fourth, while two Black Hawks crashed in Kentucky late last month, leaving nine dead.

General James McConville 'ordered an aviation stand down following two deadly helicopter mishaps that claimed the lives of 12 soldiers. The move grounds all Army aviators, except those partici-

pating in critical missions, until they complete the required training', the Army said in a statement.

"During the stand down, the Army will review the risk approval/risk management process, aviation maintenance training programme, aircrew training standardisation and management, and supervisory responsibility," the statement said. Active-duty units must complete the 24-hour stand down between May 1 and 5, and National Guard and Reserve units by May 31, it added.

There have been multiple other crashes of US military aircraft in recent years.

AFP

## Biden to meet 18 Pacific leaders in Papua New Guinea

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea - US President Joe Biden will meet 18 leaders from the South Pacific when he visits Papua New Guinea in May, a top regional diplomat said on Saturday, as the US and China vie for influence in the region.

After the end of World War II, the South Pacific was seen as a relative diplomatic backwater, but it is increasingly the arena for powers to compete for commercial, political and military influence.

Papua New Guinea Foreign Minister Justin Tkatchenko said Biden would attend bilateral talks with his hosts and is 'also having a meeting with the 18 Pacific Island leaders' from the Pacific Island Forum - a regional bloc of mostly small states that are scattered across the vast swathe of ocean.



Joe Biden is set to become the first sitting US president in at least a century to visit Papua New Guinea when he touches down on May 22 (AFP)

The prime ministers of Australia and New Zealand will be among those attending.

Biden is set to become the first sitting US president in at least a century to visit Papua

New Guinea when he touches down on May 22.

He is also scheduled to attend a G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan and a summit of the Quad - Australia, India, Japan and the United

States - in Sydney.

US special envoy Joseph Yun this week said that the United States was playing 'catch-up' after years of relative neglect that saw China's influence soar across the South Pacific.

China recently signed a secretive security pact with Solomon Islands that could allow Chinese troops to be deployed or based there.

In March, a state-backed Chinese company won a contract to develop the international port in the capital Honiara, a major victory in Beijing's quest to gain a strategic toe-hold in the South Pacific.

The region could prove vital in any possible military conflagration over Taiwan.

"We need to accelerate our catch-up," Yun told the Hudson Institute. "Any high level engage-

ment is welcome," he said, speaking before Biden's Pacific meeting was confirmed.

"Let's face it, it is strategic competition between China and us," Yun said.

Biden's trip may also put the finishing touches on a US-Papua New Guinea Defence Cooperation Agreement that would allow more joint training and the development of security infrastructure.

Washington is working to establish a joint naval facility at Lombrum on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island.

Construction started in mid-2020, according to Australia's Department of Defence, which is also taking part in the initiative.

Four Guardian-class patrol boats are eventually expected to be based at the facility.

AFP

## New Zealand fights to save its flightless national bird kiwi

Wellington, New Zealand - New Zealand's treasured kiwi birds are shuffling around Wellington's verdant hills for the first time in a century, after a drive to eliminate invasive predators from the capital's surrounds.

Visitors to New Zealand a millennium ago would have encountered a bona fide 'birdtopia' - islands teeming with feathered creatures fluttering through life unaware that mammalian predators existed.

The arrival of Polynesian voyagers in the 1200s and Europeans a few hundred years later changed all that.

Rats picked off snipe-rails and petrels, mice chewed through all the seeds and berries they could find, leaving little for native birds to peck on.

Possums - introduced for fur-stripped trees bare. Rabbits bred

like, well, rabbits, devouring meadows and paddocks alike.

Heaping disaster upon disaster, stoats were introduced to kill the rabbits but instead killed wrens, thrushes, owls and quails.

The population of native flightless birds like the kakapo and kiwi plummeted.

The Department of Conservation estimates there are only around 70,000 wild kiwi left in New Zealand. Despite the bird being a beloved national symbol, few New Zealanders have seen one in the wild.

However, numbers are rising again thanks to more than 90 community initiatives working nationwide to protect them.

One such group is The Capital Kiwi Project, a charitable trust backed by millions of dollars from government grants and private donations.



A member of Capital Kiwi Project team holding a male kiwi after changing out a transmitter before re-release into the wild on Tawa Hill, Wellington

### Special connection

"Ever since people came to New Zealand, we have had a special connection to the kiwi," founder and project leader Paul Ward told AFP.

"They are central to Maori

myth. Our sports teams, our rugby league teams, our defence force and, even when we go overseas, we are known as kiwis.

"They are tough, resilient, adaptable, all values we think of as New Zealanders, but most of us have never seen a kiwi before."

Ward estimates wild kiwi last

roamed the Wellington area

more than a century ago.

The bid to save them required a sustained conservation effort.

The project had to first deal with the kiwi's natural enemies prowling through the undergrowth. Local dog owners were invited to sessions to teach their pets to steer clear of kiwi while out for walks.

The project also had to declare war on stoats.

An adult kiwi can fight off a stoat using its powerful legs and sharp claws but a chick has no chance, Ward explained.

The project laid a huge network of 4,500 traps over an area equivalent to nearly 43,000 football pitches on the hills surrounding Wellington.

The traps have claimed 1,000

stoats so far. After 'blitzing stoats', as Ward puts it, the predator population was low enough for the project to release the first batch of kiwi last November.

The birds were carefully transported nearly 500km (310 miles) from a captive breeding programme to a Wellington school, where they were welcomed by a traditional Maori ceremony.

Ward said that a hush came over the 400-strong crowd as they caught their first glimpse of a kiwi when the first bird was released.

### Rare sightings

"The power of that moment was palpable," he said. "Our job is to bottle that and spread it across the hills of Wellington."

Regular check-ups show that the first wave is thriving.

"Two months after we released the birds, we were ecstatic to discover they had gained weight," Ward said.

"One had put on 400 grams - that's a considerable weight gain even for a human over Christmas or Easter. There's plenty of food for them on these hillsides."

Ward said the goal is to release 250 birds over the next five years to establish a large wild kiwi population.

He wants their distinctive shrill cry to become part of everyday life on the outskirts of the capital.

"It's our duty to look after the animal that's gifted us its name," Ward said.

"As one of our volunteers said, 'if we can't look after the thing we're named after we deserve to be renamed idiots.'"

AFP

# Sudan fighting enters third week as UN says country collapsing

Khartoum, Sudan - Warplanes on bombing raids drew heavy anti-aircraft fire over Khartoum on Saturday as fierce fighting between Sudan's army and paramilitaries entered a third week, violating a renewed truce.

More than 500 people have been killed since battles erupted on April 15 between the forces of army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his number two Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

"There is no right to go on fighting for power when the country is falling apart," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told Al Arabiya television.

Burhan and Daglo have agreed to multiple truces since the war began, but none has effectively taken hold as the number of dead civilians continues to rise, thousands flee the country and those without the means to escape face an increasing struggle to survive.

The latest three-day ceasefire is due to expire at midnight on Sunday (2200 GMT). It was agreed on Thursday after mediation led by the United States, Saudi Arabia, the African Union and the United Nations.

Dozens more have died over the past week since the United States announced that the warring sides had agreed to an initial truce, on April 24.

"We woke up once again to the sound of fighter jets and anti-aircraft weapons blasting all over our neighbourhood," a witness in



People walk among scattered objects in the market of El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, as fighting continues in Sudan, on Saturday (AFP)

*We woke up once again to the sound of fighter jets and anti-aircraft weapons blasting all over our neighbourhood*

A WITNESS

southern Khartoum told AFP. Another witness said fighting

had continued since the early morning, especially around the state broadcaster's headquarters in the capital's twin city of Omdurman.

Residents across Khartoum - home to five million people - have largely sheltered at home despite supplies of food and water dwindling to dangerously low levels, and a lack of electricity. Some managed to sneak out only during brief lulls in fighting to buy desperately needed supplies.

### Trading blame

As battles raged on the ground, the two rival generals - who seized power in a 2021 coup - took aim at each other in the media, with Burhan branding the RSF a militia that aims 'to destroy Sudan', in an interview with US-based TV channel Alhurra.

Daglo denounced the army chief in an interview with the BBC, saying he was 'not trustworthy' and a 'traitor'.

Guterres threw his support behind African-led mediation efforts.

"My appeal is for everything to be done to support an African-led initiative for peace in Sudan," he told Saudi-owned Al Arabiya. The violence has so far killed at least 512 people and wounded 4,193, according to the health ministry, but the death toll is feared to be much higher.

About 75,000 have been displaced by the fighting in Khartoum and the states of Blue Nile, North Kordofan, as well as the western region of Darfur, the UN said. Tens of thousands of Su-

## Air strikes wound 3 civilians in Syria

Damascus, Syria - Three civilians were wounded on Saturday in Israeli air strikes near the Syrian city of Homs, state media reported, with a war monitor saying a Hezbollah munitions depot was hit.

During more than a decade of war in Syria, Israel has launched hundreds of air strikes on its territory, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters as well as Syrian army positions.

While Israel rarely comments on the strikes it carries out on Syria, it has repeatedly said it will not allow its arch-foe Iran to extend its footprint in the war-torn country.

"At around 00:50 (2150 GMT)...the Israeli enemy carried out an air attack with a number of missiles, from the direction of north Lebanon, targeting several positions in the vicinity of the city of Homs," state news agency SANA reported.

"Three civilians were wounded and a civilian petrol station caught fire and a number of fuel tanks and trucks were burned," it said, adding that Syrian air defences had intercepted some of the missiles.

When contacted by AFP, the Israeli military did not comment on the incident.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, said four Syrian soldiers were wounded in the strike that caused 'loud explosions as the munitions in the depot blew up'.

## Guards on yacht shoot dead Yemen coastguard, says security firm

Dubai, UAE - A Yemeni coastguard on the lookout for arms smuggling was shot dead by security guards aboard a private yacht in an exchange of fire on Friday, a maritime security company said.

Britain-based Ambrey said the vessel was a Cook Islands-flagged yacht that had departed the Omani port of Salalah before entering Yemeni waters.

United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), which provides security alerts for the shipping trade, said the vessel was fired on in the Gulf of Aden at 0300 GMT.

The agency's website said three boats carrying three to four people each carried out the 'attack' before later downgrading the event, 18 nautical miles south of Nishtun, to an 'incident'.

Authorities confirmed it as 'government agency activity', UKMTO added, without elaborating. Nishtun is a port in the southeastern province of Mahra that is controlled by the Yemeni government and allied Saudi-led troops.

The yacht's three-man security team reportedly shot approximately 150 rounds 'in return fire', according to Ambrey. "Multiple reports have confirmed the death of one Yemeni personnel member," Ambrey said in a statement, attributing 'the death to the yacht's armed security team'.

A Yemeni security official confirmed the death to AFP, saying that coastguards aboard an unflagged vessel

had approached the yacht because they wrongly assumed it was carrying a weapons shipment.

Ambrey said all personnel onboard the yacht were safe. It reported damage to passenger cabins and superstructure sustained by small arms fire.

Previous incidents have been blamed on Somali pirates but international security operations have reduced pirate attacks in recent years.

Pirate attacks fell to their lowest level in nearly three decades in 2021, according to the International Maritime Bureau. The Gulf of Aden, previously known as Africa's piracy hotspot, has been eclipsed in recent years by the Gulf of Guinea off the continent's west coast.

However, incidents continue off Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country, which has been engulfed by conflict since 2015, leaving hundreds of thousands dead and millions displaced.

In January last year, an Emirati-flagged vessel was seized in the Red Sea by Yemen's Iran-backed Huthis, who released what they said were pictures of military equipment on board.

In February this year, the US Navy displayed Iranian-made ballistic missile components and anti-tank missiles that it said were seized by Britain's Royal Navy from a vessel off Oman bound for the Huthi s. Tehran dismissed the haul as a 'fake'.

AFP

## Tunisia's Saied hails free thinking but book seized

Tunis, Tunisia - Tunisian President Kais Saied preached freedom of thought at a book fair on Friday, shortly before authorities confiscated a book comparing him to Frankenstein, its author and publisher said.

"It is important to liberate thinking because we cannot accomplish anything with rigid thoughts," Saied told reporters at the opening of the 37th Tunis International Book Fair.

Shortly afterwards, security agents ordered the closure of Dar El-Kitab (The House of Books) stand and confiscated *The Tunisian Frankenstein*, author Kamel Riahi and his publisher told AFP.

The recently published volume in Arabic depicts Saied as a



A book titled *The Tunisian Frankenstein* by author Kamel Riahi is displayed at the Dar El-Kitab book shop in Tunis on Saturday (AFP)

local version of Frankenstein, created by a people looking to reject the new political system in Tunisia after the 2011 revolution that launched the Arab Spring.

"I was told that my book had been confiscated and the publisher's stand shut down," Riahi

told AFP from Canada where he lives.

He said the authorities had been 'looking for a pretext to ban the book' since it came out.

"Security agents from the culture ministry confiscated the book and closed our stand after Saied's visit," Dar El-Kitab chief Habib Zoghbi told AFP.

His publishing house is one of the most important in the North African country.

Zoghbi said they cited 'possession of an unauthorised book' as justification for their actions.

He said the stand originally had 100 copies of the book on display.

"We sold 80 and they confiscated the rest," he said.

A video uploaded by the

publisher showed his stand covered in a black cloth, and also the booths of at least five more publishers that had closed in solidarity.

Tunisian commentator '10 Million Politicians' posted on social networks: "Freedom of thought lasted exactly 45 minutes at the Book Fair under the reign of Kais Saied."

The president won a landslide victory in a 2019 general election but assumed wide-reaching powers in a July 2021 power grab.

He has since ruled by decree, and last year rammed through a constitution that gave his office unlimited powers and neutered parliament.

AFP

## Erdogan returns from three-day campaign absence

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday appeared in public for the first time in three days after a stomach infection kept him off the campaign trail before key polls.

Smiling and dressed in a red windbreaker, the 69-year-old leader walked out on the stage of an Istanbul aviation festival and tossed out flowers to flag-waving supporters.

He arrived together with his close ally, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Libyan prime minister Abdelhamid Dbeibah.

Both countries have fought wars using Turkey's combat drones, which will feature prominently at the weekend aviation event. Erdogan had been lying low since getting sick live on television on Tuesday night.

Turkey's Health Minister Fahrettin Koca has said Erdogan is suffering from gastroenteritis. The digestive problem is



Pedestrians walk pass under a billboard with the portrait of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reading 'right time, right man' with a mosque in the background in Sanliurfa, south-eastern Turkey on Friday (AFP)

easily treated and usually clears up in a few days. But it has disrupted Erdogan's attempts to seize momentum in the run-up to Turkey's most important election in generations on May 14.

Erdogan looked healthy addressing the crowd with a microphone in his hand, describing

government efforts to help the victims of a massive February earthquake that claimed more than 50,000 lives.

But he refrained from addressing his absence or the health scare, instead proclaiming the launch of a new 'century of Turkey'.

'Hatred and grudges'

Erdogan's illness came at one of the more vulnerable moments of his two-decade rule. Most polls show Erdogan slightly behind his secular rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu in Turkey's most pivotal election of modern times.

His Islamic-rooted party's

control of parliament through an alliance with an ultra-nationalist group is also under threat.

Erdogan has a penchant for campaigning and most analysts thought he could reverse the dip in polls on the campaign trail.

He appeared in five cities over two days before getting sick on late-night TV.

Erdogan tried to compensate by appearing at events by video link, launching a nuclear power plant with Russia's Vladimir Putin on Thursday and inaugurating a bridge the next day. But the events lacked the electric atmosphere that Erdogan often generates when he speaks to adoring crowds at events aired live across the nation of 85mn people.

The rock concert atmosphere of his past campaigns has also been muted by mourning over the destruction wrought by the earthquake across swathes of Turkey's southeast.

AFP

# Pope Francis warns against indifference, listens to refugees in Orban's Hungary

Pope thanked Hungary for taking in Ukrainians despite the PM's policies against refugees

Budapest, Hungary - Pope Francis warned on Saturday against indifference while thanking Hungary for taking in Ukrainians despite the anti-refugee policies of nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

On his arrival of the three-day visit on Friday, the 86-year-old Argentine in his first speech to Orban and other government officials stressed 'the need for openness towards others', warning against 'withdrawing into oneself'.

Hungary's government - in a departure from its usual anti-refugee stand - has welcomed those fleeing the war in neighbouring Ukraine.

But activists say there is barely a support system in place, while Orban's insistence on maintaining ties with Moscow puts off Ukrainians.

Some 600 refugees - mostly from Ukraine - and poor people listened to the pope at St. Elizabeth's Church in Budapest on Saturday, while about a thousand more gathered outside.

After listening to some of their stories, including that of Oleg



Wellwishers play music as Pope Francis arrives at the St Elizabeth of Hungary Church, during a meeting with poor people and refugees, during his visit in Budapest, Hungary, on Saturday (AFP)

*We feel safe, and many people help us. I respect the pope very much because he prays for Ukraine. He wants this war to finish, and my heart is full with thanks for him*

OLESIA MISIATS

Yakovlev, a father-of-five who fled Ukraine, the pope thanked Hungary 'for having welcomed -

not only with generosity but also with enthusiasm - so many refugees from Ukraine'.

He further urged the need of 'showing compassion toward all'.

### 'Advocate of peace'

Olesia Misiats, a mother-of-three from Kiev who fled to Hungary a year ago, said she felt 'very happy' to see the pope.

"We feel safe, and many people help us," the 33-year-old said.

"I respect the pope very much because he prays for Ukraine. He

wants this war to finish, and my heart is full with thanks for him," she added.

A Ukrainian woman outside the cordoned-off church grounds, who only gave her name as Elena, told AFP that she also hoped to see the pope 'who is a strong advocate of peace'.

"We have no problems here, but obviously when you are waiting to go back, you don't im-

merse yourself too deep," the 43-year-old dancer from north of Kyiv said.

During an audience last year at the Vatican, Francis equally thanked Orban for welcoming Ukrainian refugees.

Since Russia invaded its neighbour more than a year ago, more than two million Ukrainians have crossed into Hungary, but just 35,000 have applied for the

EU's temporary protection status in the country.

That's far fewer than in other countries just west of Ukraine.

Within the EU, Hungary's prime minister is an exception in refusing to condemn Russian President Vladimir Putin by name after Moscow invaded.

He is also refusing to send military aid to Ukraine and has blasted EU sanctions against Russia - making many Ukrainian refugees feel uncomfortable.

They also face a 'demolished' refugee support system, according to the Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC) rights group.

Since 2020, after the EU forced Budapest to close controversial so-called border transit zones that Brussels called 'detention camps', Budapest only accepts asylum seekers' applications at Hungarian embassies abroad.

This has slowed the number of asylum seekers to a trickle.

Earlier on Saturday, the pope also met children with disabilities, who performed songs and said a prayer together with him.

Later in the day, he visits the Greek Catholic community.

He closes the day by speaking to an expected 11,000 youths in a stadium before having a private meeting with Jesuits. On Sunday, he will preside over an open-air mass.

It is Francis' 41st international trip since becoming pope in 2013 and his first abroad after spending three nights in hospital with bronchitis last month, fuelling concerns about his long-term health.

AFP

# Afghan women protesters urge against foreign nations' recognition of Taliban

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghan women protested in Kabul on Saturday, defying a crackdown on dissent to urge foreign nations not to formally recognise the Taliban government ahead of a UN summit next week.

Since the Taliban surged back to power in 2021, protesters voicing opposition against creeping curbs on women's rights have been beaten or detained, and security forces have fired in the air to disperse some rallies.

But small groups of women have continued to stage sporadic gatherings.

On Saturday, around 25 marched through a residential area in the Afghan capital ahead of a summit in Doha that the UN says will discuss a 'durable way



Afghan women hold placards as they march to protest for their rights, in Kabul on Saturday (AFP)

forward' for the country.

"Recognition of Taliban - violation of women's rights," the women chanted during the march, which lasted no longer

than 10 minutes and passed off without confrontation with security forces.

Other chants included 'Afghan people, hostages of Tal-

iban' and 'We will fight, we will die, we will take our rights'.

No nation has yet acknowledged the government as legitimate since the Taliban returned

to power on the heels of a withdrawal from Afghanistan by US forces in 2021.

A previous Taliban government that ruled from 1996 to 2001 was only granted formal recognition by three nations - Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

Diplomats, NGOs and aid agencies are currently deeply divided over the issue.

Some believe the international community might cajole the Taliban into reversing curbs on women's rights by dangling the prospect of recognition. Others say even discussing it grants the Taliban some legitimacy at a time when they are squeezing women out of public life.

AFP



A woman walks past damaged residential buildings as she carries a child in Uman, around 215km south of Kyiv, on Friday (AFP)

## Russian strikes kill 26 including five children

Uman, Ukraine - Russian strikes battered cities across Ukraine on Friday, killing 26 people including five children, as Kyiv said preparations for a counter-offensive against Moscow's forces were nearly complete.

The deadly new attacks included a strike on a residential block in the historic city of Uman in central Ukraine, where AFP journalists saw rescue workers extracting victims' remains from a destroyed residential building.

The barrage of almost two dozen missiles ended a weeks-long pause following the repeated Russian strikes that had aimed to paralyse Ukraine's energy grid during the winter months.

On Friday evening, workers in Uman, the site of an annual Hasidic pilgrimage, pulled the body of another child from under the rubble. Authorities said Russian cruise missiles killed 23 people - including four children - in Uman.

Earlier in the day, Dmitry, a 33-year-old resident from Lugansk, an eastern city under Russian control, was looking for his children. "I want to see my children, they are under the rub-

ble," he said. Rescuers were using cranes to search for survivors among the remains of the multi-storey housing block in the city of 80,000 inhabitants.

"I've seen a lot, but I haven't lost my children before. Now I want to see my children, alive or dead," Dmitry said.

Russian missiles also hit the central city of Dnipro, already grief-stricken after a January strike on a tower block that killed more than 40 people.

Authorities said the strikes in Dnipro killed a 31-year-old woman and her two-year-old daughter while they slept.

The young woman's parents were hospitalised.

"Neighbours say that it was a quiet and kind family," regional authorities said.

Separately, authorities in the southern region of Kherson said on Friday evening that Russian forces shelled the village of Bilozerkha, killing a 57-year-old woman and wounding another three people. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky condemned the latest barrage and vowed a response.

AFP

## 'This is our reality': Ukraine artists depict the war

Kyiv, Ukraine - When Russia invaded Ukraine, artist Zhanna Kadyrova felt her work was useless. "What can you do against a tank with your art? Nothing," she said, sitting in her Kyiv studio.

But the 42-year-old changed her mind as galleries around the world snapped up her war-inspired work, raising funds to help civilians and soldiers.

The war has sparked huge interest in Ukrainian culture and contemporary artists are finding ways to highlight the horrors the country faces as well as explore ideas about its future.

Evacuating to rural western Ukraine without her usual studio and tools, Kadyrova spotted large stones smoothed by river water that resembled Ukrainian

loaves of bread.

She shaped and sliced them and placed them on a table to create an installation called Palianytsia, a type of traditional wheat bread.

The name of the loaf has sparked numerous jokey memes. It is seen as impossible for non-Ukrainians to pronounce correctly and therefore a good way to spot Russian spies.

"We came up with this project in a second, and it exceeded all my expectations. I've already had about 40 exhibitions... I've just come back from India, I've been to Thailand, Taiwan, America, Europe," Kadyrova said.

A Kyiv gallery is currently displaying her 'Anxiety' series - tapestries depicting kitsch flowers



A visitor takes a photograph of a creation made out of Russian missile fragments at the exhibition in Kyiv, on Thursday (AFP)

and cats, which she over-embroiders with air raid warnings.

The tapestries depict 'the opposite of war', she said.

"When I add the inscription

'Air Alert' to this, I get a contrast. This is our reality."

Playing with similar contrasts, an image of a ballerina printed on bullet casings is on display out-

side the National Opera of Ukraine in central Kyiv.

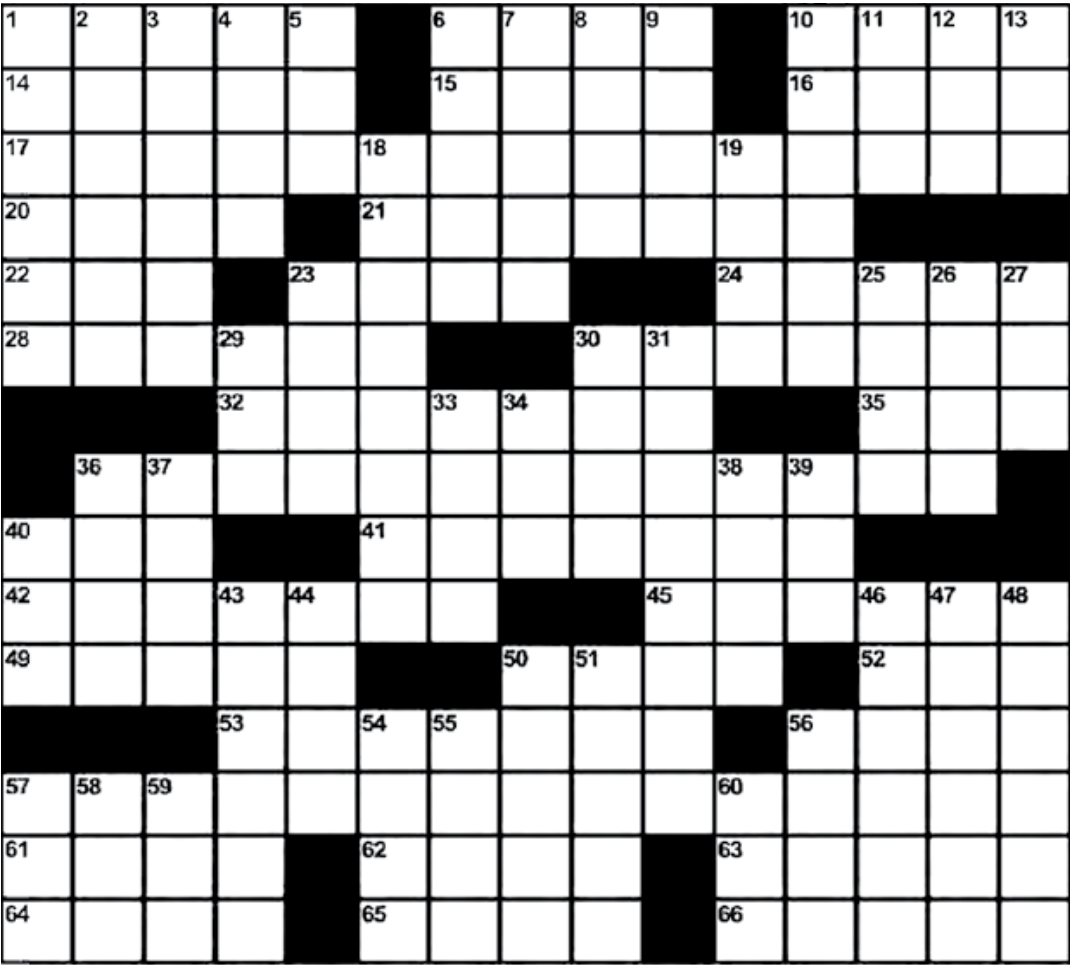
Passers-by take selfies beside the installation, called 'Unbroken Project'.

For this work, Ecuadorian Felipe Jacome, 37, photographed his collaborator Svitlana Onipko, 26, a Ukrainian ballerina now based in the Netherlands, using an UV-printer to transfer her image onto bullet casings mounted in resin.

The photographers are selling smaller versions to raise money for war orphans and supplies for the front lines and have raised 'over US\$50,000', Jacome said. "The message is immediately understood by people here," he said.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Whines
- 6) Page with views, briefly
- 10)Go for
- 14) "La Boheme," e.g.
- 15) Airport pickup
- 16) Camera diaphragm
- 17) Bats, balls, pads, etc.
- 20) Gluttony and lust
- 21) Astros' home
- 22) 4x4, for short
- 23) Bit of medicine
- 24) Medicinal plant
- 28) Indian industrial city
- 30) Rec area at a barracks
- 32) Tag anew
- 35) Workout unit
- 36) You'll find them at air-ports
- 40) Watch pocket
- 41) Like rich desserts
- 42) Grime fighter
- 45) Things to uphold
- 49) Yo-Yo Ma's instrument
- 50) Call by intercom
- 52) Chronic drinker
- 53) Largest living bird

DOWN

- 1) "Playing" critter
- 2) Arrogant and snobbish
- 3) Freetown currency units
- 4) Blunders
- 5) Gained a lap
- 6) Artificial bread spreads
- 7) Arouse, as interest
- 8) Flightless flock
- 9) "That oughta \_!"
- 10) Painter of portraits
- 11) Boiling blood
- 12) Reunion attendees, usu-ally
- 13) Suffix for the best
- 18) Sneaker feature
- 19) "Ring Around the Rosie" flower
- 23) Remnant
- 25) Standard of measure-
- ment
- 26) Denials
- 27) Guitar blaster, briefly
- 29) Part of some email ad-dresses
- 30)Art\_
- 31) In satisfactory condition
- 33) Biology lab gel
- 34) "Air" or "ami" preceder
- 36) "Hyper" ending
- 37) Genesis shepherd
- 38) Capitol Hill worker
- 39) Cold cube
- 40) TV monitor?
- 43) Warm welcomes
- 44) It may be held under-water
- 46) Inquiring
- 4 7) Type of chair or lizard
- 48) Play producer
- 50) Greedy
- 51) Molar maladies
- 54) Arduous journey
- 55) Carnival attraction
- 56) LaBeouf of films
- 57) Calendar square
- 58) A metal-bearing

- mineral
- 59) Type of cup or soldier
- 60) Common title
- beginning

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your instincts might be great for figuring out what to wear tonight, but they aren't enough when it comes to getting a handle on your finances. You need to put forth a little more effort when it comes to adhering to your budget. You might think that one or two slips here and there won't matter too much, but they add up. Before it's too late, do a detailed review of what money you have and what money you owe. You will catch things just in time if you act now.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Today, you just might discover that you and one of the big-time power players in your social group have a common goal! This is great news, because having them on your side will just about guarantee your success. This is a cause for celebration, and you should be sure to invite this new friend of yours along. Do some things over the next few days that are lavish, fun, and completely over the top. It's the perfect time for a last-minute weekend getaway.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Try to stop thinking so much with your heart! Sure, it's an important muscle, but with regard to the matters you'll be dealing with today, you need to take an analytical perspective and not an emotional one. Think things through logically and get your distance from situations or people who could upset you and distract you from thinking clearly. Once you shift your way of thinking, you'll suddenly see how much easier it is to make the decisions you need to make.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Get as involved as you can in upcoming social activities, as much as your schedule allows. Your charming personality plays a very valued role in your circle of friends, and things just aren't the same when you aren't around. They miss you and your funny remarks and want to find out what's been going on in your life. And you could use a dose of that wonderful, intense, positive energy that hanging out with your favorite people always brings to your life.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your strong desire to get closer to a new person on the scene might be misguided. Are they really deserving of your admiration? Some soul-searching could be required on this matter today. The choices you make about the people you invite into your life are important, and you need to be sure you're choosing these people based on the right reasons. Disposable friendships might give you someone to shoot the breeze with, but they offer very little value.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your creativity is quite vibrant right now. It's going to hum in your brain all day long, driving you nuts until you use it! Seek out new ways to add more color, rhyme, and dance to your life. If you do, you'll make this day a very happy one. Turn your texts into poems. Post a funny doodle on social media. Teach your dog how to tango. Express yourself in silly, uninhibited ways and before you know it you'll see the world in an entirely new way.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Are you feeling intimidated by someone whose intellectual prowess is getting a lot of attention? That's nonsense! You're just as smart as they are, albeit in different ways. It's time to understand your hidden strengths and bring them out. You have something to say that people need to listen to, but they aren't going to get the chance to hear it unless you speak up. Wait for your opening in that conversation or meeting and then take it!



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Everything in your life today is connected in some way. The world is getting smaller! This beautiful harmony will create a warm feeling inside of you all day long, and you'll love feeling so in sync with the rest of the world. This is a wonderful day for meeting people, going on a date, or starting a new job. Don't be surprised if you're able to finish other people's sentences and anticipate what they need before they even realize that they need it.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You've been feeling a stronger connection growing with one of your older relatives lately, and this is something you should explore today. Make plans for a dinner date, or phone date if they live far away, and pick their brain about some of the questions you have about your life. They might have some helpful answers. Not only have they been there before, but they know you better than you think they do. They can tell you some harsh truths about life in a way that will feel inspiring.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your brain is on a definite intellectual upswing today, so goofy sitcoms, gossip websites, and silly memes just aren't going to cut it for your hungry brain. Right now, you're eager for work. You need a challenge, and the crazier the better! Stretching your body feels good and so will stretching your mind. Hop on board with a friend or coworker's latest project, they will love your involvement and give you a nice big chunk of responsibility. This is what you've been waiting for.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Confidence is valuable, but if you're outmatched in a competition today, it's important for you to realize that your opponent just might be a stronger force than you. It sounds crazy, but it is a possibility, and it's one you should be prepared for. You might want to soften your techniques and avoid burning any bridges that you'll have to cross later. Play nice and stay respectful. Because if you don't come out of this victorious, you need to at least be liked.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Some strange and confusing communication has been going on between you and a few coworkers, and today you need to get to the bottom of it. Email is efficient and easy, but it doesn't convey tone of voice accurately. Someone is making assumptions about how someone else feels that just aren't accurate, and if it isn't nipped in the bud early enough, it could snowball into a big problem that takes a while to solve. Go for in-person communication today if you can.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. Joule is the unit of
- A. temperature
- B. pressure
- C. energy
- D. heat

Kemal Atatürk was

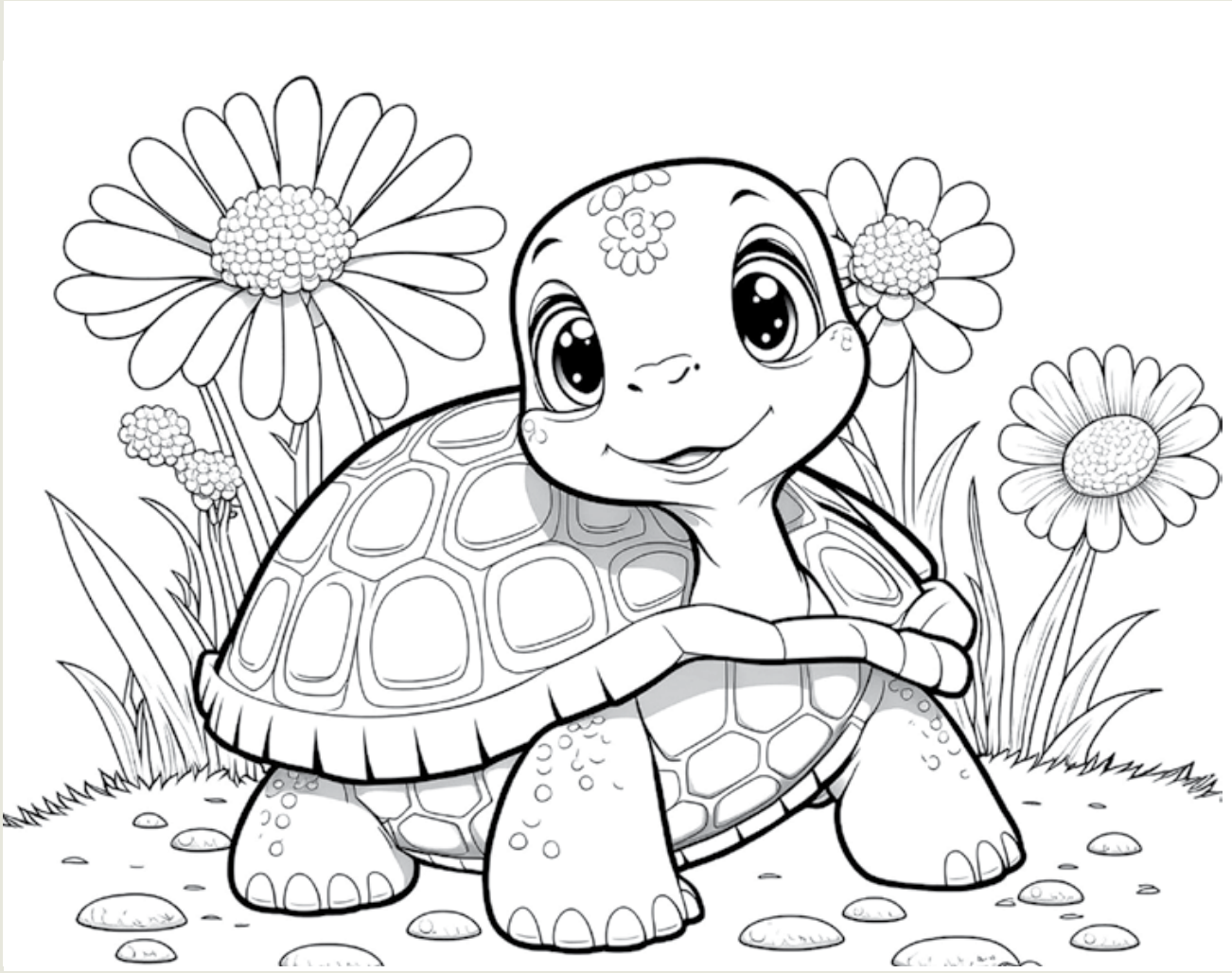
- A. the first President of Independent Kenya
- B. the founder of modern Turkey
- C. revolutionary leader of Soviet Union
- D. None of the above

3. Milkha Singh Stood \_\_\_\_ in 1960 Olympics, in Athletics.

- A. fourth in 400m final
- B. second in 400m final
- C. eighth in 50km walk
- D. seventh in 800m final

Answers: 1. C 2. B 3. A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

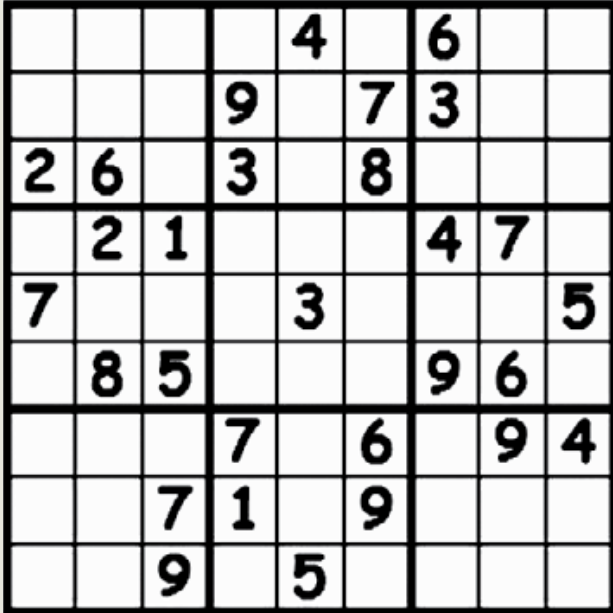


Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters.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

**Solution** 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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



WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

**Rules:** Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER



# 'EXTREMELY BITTER'

Dortmund manager Edin Terzic laments draw against Bochum as Bayern handed title advantage

Berlin, Germany - Borussia Dortmund handed the advantage in the Bundesliga title race back to Bayern Munich on Friday after being held to a 1-1 draw at lowly Bochum.

Bochum, who sit one spot and just two points above the relegation zone, scored after just five minutes, Anthony Losilla unleashing a screamer from outside the box.

Dortmund hit back immediately, Germany forward Karim Adeyemi tapping in after a length-of-the-field team move to make it 1-1. With the match winding down, Adeyemi looked to have won a penalty for the visiting side when brought down in the box by Danilo Soares, but the referee waved the incident away.

Dortmund were camped in the Bochum penalty area in the final minutes and had the ball in the net through Mats Hummels, but the linesman's flag went up immediately, with the defender standing half a metre offside.

Bayern can go one point clear in their bid for an 11th straight title by winning at home against last-placed Hertha Berlin on Sunday.

Dortmund manager Edin Terzic lamented the "extremely bitter" result as his side had a "rare chance to be so close to the championship."

Terzic said the referee's failure to check the Adeyemi penalty incident was "a key scene" in the draw, revealing to broadcaster DAZN "I begged

him to look at it."

His Bochum counterpart Thomas Letsch toasted "the style and manner the team fought" saying "that's what we need in a relegation battle."

Disappointed Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel said his side "had the title in our own hands, but couldn't make the most of it."

"We need to look forward, keep fighting and win our next game."

Dortmund came into the match knowing a win would send them four points clear.

But they arrived winless in their last five away matches in all competitions and faced a Bochum side kept out of the relegation places due to their strong home form.

Bochum made the most of a nervy start from the visitors, Losilla latching onto a poor Dortmund clearance to rocket the ball across Gregor Kobel and into the top left of the net.

Dortmund hit back 90 seconds later, Hummels curling a long pass to winger Donyell Malen on the right flank, who slipped his defender and sent the ball across.

Striker Sebastien Haller got a toe to the pass, guiding it into the path of Adeyemi, who tapped it in to level the scores.

Midway through the second half, Adeyemi went down in the box under heavy attention from Soares, but the referee waved the incident away without checking the VAR monitor.



Borussia Dortmund's Marco Reus looks disappointed at the end of their Bundesliga match against Bochum on Friday (AFP)

**German FA, referee admit crucial error**

Both the German FA (DFB) and the referee in question on Saturday admitted a mistake in not awarding the penalty to Dortmund.

Referee Sascha Stegemann waived play on and declined to use the VAR system to review the contact.

Speaking with German tabloid Bild on Saturday, Stegemann said he was "really annoyed" and "feels crappy", admitting he made a mistake on watching the footage.

*(Borussia Dortmund) had the title in our own hands, but couldn't make the most of it. We need to look forward, keep fighting and win our next game*

GREGOR KOBEL

"If I had doubts about my decision, then that would have been an option. But I didn't have that chance," Stegemann said, explaining that the VAR did not tell him to consult the screen and review the play.

"In retrospect, I have to say that I would have been happy (to award a penalty) if I had watched it again."

"With the German championship at stake, to not look at this situation, is negligent, cowardly and completely wrong."

AFP

## Stand-in goalkeeper stars as Wydad squeeze into CAF Champions League semis

Johannesburg, South Africa - Stand-in Wydad Casablanca goalkeeper Youssef el Motie starred as the CAF Champions League title-holders scraped into the semi-finals with a 4-3 victory on penalties over Simba of Tanzania.

Backed by a passionate 45,000 sell-out crowd at the Stade Mohammed V, the Moroccan outfit won the quarter-final second leg 1-0 thanks to a 24th-minute goal from Senegalese Bouly Sambou.

The result in Casablanca levelled the aggregate score at 1-1 after Simba had built a 1-0 lead following the first leg in Dar es Salaam last weekend.

El Motie, deputising for injured Ahmed Tagnaouti, saved the third and fifth Simba spot kicks taken by Shomari Kapombe and Zambian Clatous Chama while Wydad converted the four they took.

It was a heartbreaking exit for



Wydad goalkeeper Youssef el-Motie is thrown in the air by his team-mates as they celebrate winning the CAF Champions League quarter-final against Tanzania's Simba SC in Casablanca, Morocco, on Friday (AFP)

Simba, who had been given little chance of success after being paired with the three-time African champions.

Victory for Wydad means a seventh semi-finals appearance since 2016 in the premier African club competition - a remarkable

record of consistency.

They will face Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa or Chabab Belouizdad of Algeria in the semi-finals during May with the Pretoria outfit their likely opponents.

Sundowns hold a 4-1 lead when they host Belouizdad in one of three quarter-final second legs scheduled for Saturday.

A Wydad-Sundowns showdown over two legs would rekindle one of the great Champions League rivalries of the modern era.

Wydad have won four and drawn two of eight previous meetings between the clubs in the group and knockout stages.

The Moroccans forced two corners in quick succession midway through the first half and the only goal of the return match stemmed from the second set-piece. As the ball landed in the penalty area, Sambou nodded weakly goalward, but goalkeeper Ally Khatoro surprisingly failed to stop the ball landing in the corner of the net.

AFP



Zlatan Ibrahimovic

## Ibrahimovic's season at risk after calf injury

Rome, Italy - Zlatan Ibrahimovic's injury-hit season could be at an end after AC Milan said on Saturday that the Sweden international has picked up a knock to his right calf.

Milan did not specify for how long Ibrahimovic would be out but said that there a "small hope" that he could play before the end of the season, which in Italy finishes on the first weekend in June.

The veteran striker picked up the injury during the warm-up before Milan's 2-0 win over Lecce last weekend.

Ibrahimovic, a key figure in Milan's resurgence to the top of Italian football, has hardly featured for Stefano Pioli's

side all season, returning in February following surgery on his left knee in May.

The 41-year-old has only started one match for Milan all season, in a 3-1 win at Udinese in March in which he became the oldest goalscorer in Serie A history.

He isn't on the list of players eligible for Milan's Champions League campaign so he will not feature in the derby semi-final with Inter Milan next month.

Ibrahimovic's latest injury casts doubt over whether he will retire at the end of the season, with his contract expiring in June and no news regarding an extension.

AFP

## Sheikh Jassim, Ratcliffe make final bids for Man Utd

London, United Kingdom - Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad Al Thani and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe made their third and final offers to buy Manchester United on Friday.

Sheikh Jassim is in a bidding war with Ratcliffe after the pair emerged as the main contenders to buy the Premier League club from the Glazer family.

While Sheikh Jassim's latest offer is reported to be over £5 billion (\$6.2 billion), the size of Ratcliffe's improved bid was yet to be made public when Friday's deadline for the third round of bidding passed at 2100 GMT.

Sources said Sheikh Jassim's



bid for 100 percent control of the club comes with the promise of significant additional funding for transfers and infrastructure.

The spending would include either redeveloping United's out-

dated Old Trafford stadium or build a new ground, along with overhauling the club's training facilities.

Sheikh Jassim's bid also promises to erase United's \$620 million debt.

INEOS chemical company founder Ratcliffe, a boyhood United fan who failed in his attempt to buy Chelsea last year, reportedly wants to purchase a controlling stake in United of more than 50 per cent.

That would allow United's executive co-chairmen Joel and Avram Glazer to remain as shareholders with a 20 percent stake, which has raised concerns among a fanbase tired of the Americans' controversial reign.

The Glazers reportedly want a world record £6 billion fee for a sports club before they agree to sell the Old Trafford outfit, rais-

ing the possibility they might not accept either Sheikh Jassim's offer or Ratcliffe's approach.

Deeply unpopular with supporters since they saddled the club with debt in a £790 million leveraged takeover in 2005, the Glazers appeared ready to cash out at an enormous profit when they first invited external investment in November.

However, Elliot Investment Management and The Carlyle Group are among the private equity firms in the market for a minority stake that could allow the Glazers to retain control and provide the funding for investment in the club's infrastructure.

# SPA SPECIALIST

Ahmad Al Harthy makes history, becomes first Omani to take FIA WEC pole



Oman Racing with TF Sport's Ahmad Al Harthy in action at the GTE Am class qualifying on Friday

Muscat - Oman Racing with TF Sport's Ahmad Al Harthy stormed to a dominant GTE Am class pole position at Spa-Francorchamps on Friday - a landmark first qualifying topping performance from the Omani in his maiden season in the FIA World Endurance Championship. Delivering a faultless showing throughout the 15-minute session, which was red-flagged halfway through and then restarted, the Aston Martin Vantage driver shot to the top of the times with his first true flying lap, a time of 2m18.127 seconds. No sooner had Al Harthy put Oman Racing at the summit of the timesheets than the session

had to be halted due to a car off track, and so the runners all returned to the pitlane. When qualifying resumed, Al Harthy got down to business straight away and posted an improved time of 2m17.474 seconds. Extending his advantage markedly, there was still time to better it further with his final lap of the session and he duly delivered with a session best of 2m17.216 seconds. Sparking huge celebrations within the Oman Racing squad, Al Harthy's first WEC pole - the first ever in the World Championship by an Omani entrant - was achieved by a gap of almost two seconds.

The result comes as a welcome boost to Al Harthy and team-mates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood after a challenging start to the 2023 campaign, and hopes are now justifiably high ahead of the TotalEnergies 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps race in Belgium. At a track where Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS backed Al Harthy has excelled throughout his distinguished motorsport career, Oman's number one racing driver is very much looking forward to round three of the FIA WEC campaign. "I'm absolutely delighted, our



*I'm absolutely delighted, our first FIA WEC pole position and we are the first Omani entry to ever do that in the World Championship. It's a dream come true!*

AHMAD AL HARTHY

first FIA WEC pole position and we are the first Omani entry to ever do that in the World Championship. It's a dream come true! I'm delighted with how we managed to prepare ourselves for

qualifying, everything over the last two days which we have been practising worked and it was all about maximising the tyres at the right time in qualifying," said Al Harthy.

## Oman lose to UAE by 2 runs in semis on DLS method

Muscat - It was heartbreak for Oman as they narrowly lost to the UAE by two runs on DLS method in the rain-curtailed semi-final match of the ACC Men's Premier Cup at Mulpani Ground in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Saturday. In a closely fought match, where fortunes swung like a pendulum, rain stopped play with Oman needing 47 runs off 42 balls and four wickets in hand. Oman were at 190/6 in 43 overs when the downpour started, falling short of the DLS target of 193 in 43 overs. UAE will take on hosts Nepal in the final on May 1 after the hosts' semi-final match against Kuwait was abandoned. Nepal put up a total of 281/9 in 42 overs after rain forced the match to be reduced to 42-over-a-side game. Kuwait were 37/6 in 8.3 overs when rain stopped play with Nepal pacer Karan KC picking up five wickets for just 10 runs in 4.3 overs.



Zeeshan Maqsood took four wickets and scored 40 runs but still could not steer Oman home

Nepal booked the spot in the final as they had more points than Kuwait at the conclusion of the group stage. On Saturday, Oman skipper Zeeshan Maqsood won the toss

and put UAE to bat, a decision that was vindicated by the Oman bowlers, who came up with a disciplined performance to restrict UAE to 236 in 49.2 overs. Spinner Maqsood was excep-

tional as he picked four for 32 while pacer Bilal Khan continued his fiery form to claim four for 44, including two in one over, to send back Asif Khan and experienced Rohan Mustafa. The Mulpani ground was assisting the slower bowlers in a big way and Oman's off-spinner Jay Odedra kept a tight leash on the run-rate in the middle of the innings as he produced a miserly spell of 0/19 in eight overs while Ayaan Khan took two crucial wickets. Muhammad Waseem was the top run-getter for the UAE with 48 off just 31 balls while there were notable contributions from Rameez Shahzad (46), Asif Khan (34) and Basil Hameed (34). With cloudy and overcast conditions persisting throughout the day, prospects of rain interrupting play was high. Chasing 237 to win, Oman openers - Jatinder Singh and Kashyap Prajapati - began on a

positive note and scored briskly. Both looked in good nick and kept the scoreboard moving with boundaries at regular intervals. However, the introduction of leg-spinner Karthik Meiyappan swung the game in UAE's favour as he sent back the top-three Oman batters. Prajapati was Meiyappan's first of three victims in the 16th over, adjudged leg-before wicket for a 43-ball 49 that included nine boundaries. Meiyappan spun a magical web that then had Jatinder stuck in it as the star Oman batter was bowled for 65-ball 42. Oman were 98/2 in the 20th over and were soon three down in the 24th over. Shoaib Khan became the third scalp of Meiyappan to leave Oman in a spot of bother at 119/3. Captain Maqsood then dropped anchor and along with Mohammad Nadeem (24 not out) rebuild the chase with a 62-run partnership before Zahoor Khan got the crucial breakthrough.



Sergio Perez (C) who won the sprint race at the Azerbaijan Grand Prix, with second placed Charles Leclerc (L) and third-placed Max Verstappen

## Perez wins sprint race in Azerbaijan

Baku, Azerbaijan - Sergio Perez won Saturday's sprint race at the Azerbaijan Grand Prix to maintain Red Bull's perfect start to the season. Ferrari's pole-sitter Charles Leclerc took second with Max Verstappen in third to keep his lead in the drivers' championship ahead of Sunday's main event. Leclerc is on pole again for the fourth round of the season but judged on this display he will have his work cut out again to clip the Red Bulls' wings. Perez was adding the first of

six sprint races in 2023 to his win in the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, with Verstappen taking the season-opener in Bahrain and last time out in Melbourne. **Espargaro grabs MotoGP pole** Spaniard Aleix Espargaro dodged the showers on Saturday to grab pole position in the Spanish motorcycle Grand Prix at Jerez. The Aprilia rider edged Australian Jack Miller (KTM) and fellow Spaniard Jorge Martin on a Ducati-Pramac.



Russia's Daniil Medvedev returns the ball to Italy's Andrea Vavassori during their Madrid Open second-round match on Saturday

## Daniil Medvedev sees off Vavassori to reach Madrid Open third round

Madrid, Spain - World number three Daniil Medvedev saw off Andrea Vavassori 6-4, 6-3 on Saturday to reach the third round of the Madrid Open. Vavassori battled his way past Andy Murray in the first round but could not oust another former world number one in the Spanish capital. The Italian, ranked 164th, held his own against the second seed but eventually succumbed, even though his serve and volley game troubled Medvedev. "I think I played a very good match, solid, and saved some break points," said Medvedev after his first match at the tournament.

"I managed to use my opportunities, I felt good and I'm looking forward to my next matches." The Italian forced two break points in the first game but Medvedev held and the players stayed on serve until the 2021 US Open winner broke for 6-4 to take the first set. There was a brief rain delay before the second set, in which Medvedev broke to love for 5-3, sealing a fine return game with a drop shot which left Vavassori scrambling. The Russian, who often struggles on clay, clinched victory when Vavassori sent a backhand long. AFP

## India's Ashok leads LPGA LA Championship

Los Angeles, United States - India's Aditi Ashok had an eagle and four birdies in a one-under par 70 on Friday to seize a one-shot lead at the US LPGA Tour's LA Championship. Ashok, who started the day two adrift, teed off on the 10th hole at Wilshire Country Club and powered to the lead with birdies at 13 and 14 followed by a stunning eagle at the 15th, where her approach from the fairway hit the bottom of the cup without taking a bounce.

"Fifteen was really cool," said Ashok, who won her fourth Ladies European Tour title in Kenya in February but is still seeking a first LPGA tour crown. "I just holed out with, like, sand wedge from 85 yards, so that was pretty cool." Ashok said she'd debated the club with her father, Ashok Gudlamani, who is caddying for her this week, because "it was kind of an in-between number." "We were almost trying to hit the next wedge because there's

water short of the green, but I decided to hit that one a little more full, and we got the number exactly right because it landed in the hole, so we're like, OK, maybe it's not a bad number." Despite some difficulties the rest of the way, Ashok's six-under total of 136 put her one shot clear of Australian Hannah Green, Sweden's Pernilla Lindberg and American Cheyenne Knight. Green and Knight both posted two-under par 69s while

Lindberg carded a 70. After closing her first nine with bogeys at 17 and 18, Ashok bogeyed the fourth before back-to-back birdies at the fifth and sixth. Bogeys at the seventh and ninth saw her lead shrink. The only real disappointment, she said, was her bogey at the seventh, where she was hitting into the green with a wedge. "With wedge you're looking at birdie, so that was I guess giving away a shot, but apart from that, it was good," she said.

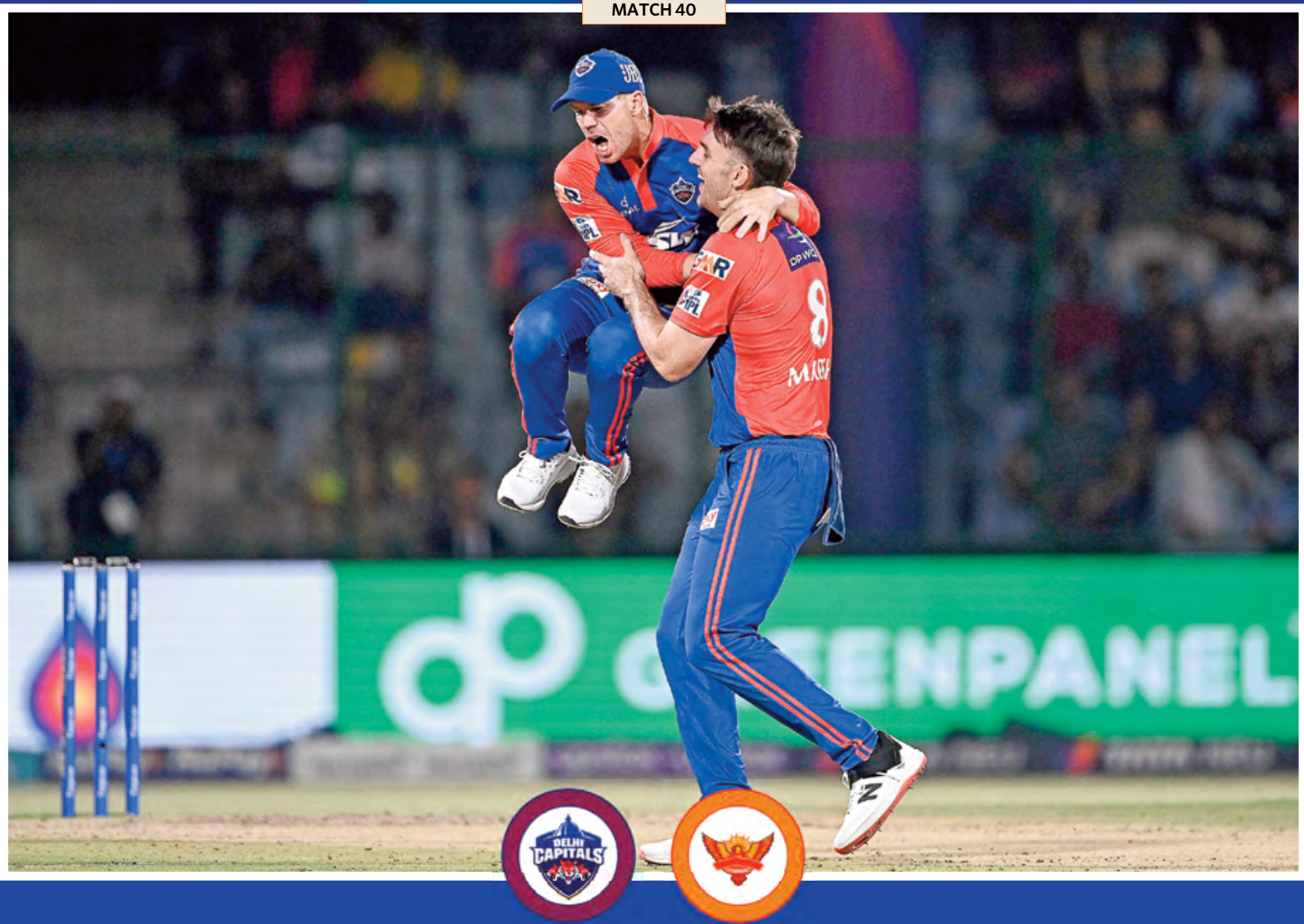
Ashok, who ended a streak of four missed cuts on the LPGA tour that dated back to last year, said she'd focus on limiting mistakes, rather than making more birdies, at the weekend. "I think five or six birdies around this place is pretty good for a round, but just trying to focus on not dropping as many shots," she said. "I think I bogeyed three par-threes, so maybe just focus on hitting the middle of the green on the par-threes and staying in position."



Aditi Ashok of India plays a shot on the 13th hole during the second round of the LA Championship at Wilshire Country Club on Friday (AFP)



MARSH’S ALL-ROUND SHOW NOT ENOUGH AS DELHI GO DOWN TO HYDERABAD



Mitchell Marsh (R) of Delhi Capitals celebrates with David Warner after taking the wicket of Sunrisers Hyderabad's Harry Brook in their Indian Premier League match in New Delhi on Saturday. Marsh took four for 27 and then top-scored with a 39-ball 63, but despite his all-round show Delhi lost by nine runs. Mayank Markande was the star of the show for Hyderabad, taking two wickets and conceding just 20 runs in four overs.

TODAYS MATCHES

MATCH 41

2 PM



CHENNAI  
SUPER KINGS



PUNJAB  
KINGS

MATCH 42

6 PM



MUMBAI  
INDIANS



RAJASTHAN  
ROYALS

Stoinis, Mayers star as Lucknow win big

Mohali, India - Marcus Stoinis and Kyle Mayers smashed 11 boundaries apiece to bring Lucknow Super Giants the second-highest team total in Indian Premier League history during Friday's 56-run demolition of Punjab Kings.

Lucknow finished on 257-5 after being sent in to bat with Mayers giving the visitors a racing start, putting on 41 runs from 21 balls with skipper KL Rahul.

Kagiso Rabada sent back the openers, with Mayers caught at mid-on for 54, but Stoinis kept up the charge with a statement knock that delivered 72 from 40.

"This wicket was so much better to bat on than the one at home," said the Australian afterwards. "We were even joking about it in the middle."

Stoinis took 22 runs off the last nine balls he faced to finish in the 19th over with six fours and five sixes.

Wrist spinner Rahul Chahar was the only Punjab bowler who managed to slow down the batting charge, conceding 29 runs in his wicketless four overs. Punjab rode Atharav Taide's 66 off 36 balls to finish at 201 runs in a brave but improbable chase.

Stoinis put an early dent in the fightback by dismissing returning captain Shikhar Dhawan (1), who was caught in the deep after miscalculating with an uppercut in the first over.

The Australian's night came to a premature end after he was hit on the hand while bowling and retired hurt, grimacing in pain.

AFP



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TITANS TAKE TOP SPOT

Noor, Little, Gill, Shankar give clinical Gujarat comfortable win

Kolkata, India - Rahmanullah Gurbaz, filling in for the injured Jason Roy, scored 81 off 39 against his former franchise Gujarat Titans, but Kolkata Knight Riders managed to score just 179, which Titans overhauled with 13 balls to spare. Titans were back on top of the table with six wins out of eight.

Gurbaz was sensational especially in his takedown of Rashid Khan, who went for 50 or more for only the second time in the IPL, but the only support he received was from Andre Russell, who scored 34 off 19 at the death. Josh Little tied them down in the middle overs, resulting in wickets, and Noor Ahmad registered the Afghan presence with 4-0-21-2, including the wicket of Gurbaz.

Shubman Gill, a former Knight

Gujarat Titans' Vijay Shankar (L) and David Miller celebrate after beating Kolkata Knight Riders on Saturday

Rider, set up the chase, and Vijay Shankar and David Miller finished it off in style after two quick wickets in the middle overs threatened to turn this into a thriller.

The match started 45 minutes late because of a brief shower. That rumble of a thunderstorm at the time of the toss made Titans change their mind and chose to bowl. The pitch was spiced up, and Mohammed Shami found seam movement. He bowled through the power-play to get the wickets of N Jagadeesan and the promoted and returning Shardul Thakur.

Even as the others struggled to hit boundaries, Gurbaz muddled almost everything and kept hitting to where the fielders weren't. He began with a pick-up pull off Hardik Pandya, and followed it up with a wristy pick-up six. The most awesome perhaps was the attack on compatriot Rashid, making room, picking his variations, and hitting him down the ground, for 30 off 11. The middle overs were unable to slow him down.

With Rashid taken for plenty, it was Josh Little who pulled things back for Titans. He just extracted extra bounce from hard lengths to frustrate the batters. His first two overs - seventh and ninth - went for just 10. At the start of his third, Venkatesh Iyer felt obliged to play a low-percentage shot, and was out lbw. In the same over, Nitish Rana found backward point with a cut.

Only a late burst from Russell kept Kolkata in the game, but he himself admitted that they were 20 short.

ESPNcricinfo





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DEPICTING WAR



Ukrainian artist Zhanna Kadyrova shows her creation with inscription 'Air alert' at her workshop in Kyiv this week (AFP)

# THIS IS THE Reality

sions to raise money for war orphans and supplies for the front lines and have raised 'over US\$50,000', Jacome said.

He watched as a pair of middle-aged men posed in front of the work, one holding a cigarette. "The message is immediately understood by people here," he said.

He added the artists wanted to display their work 'in different places in Europe and in the United States... to continue to shed light on the situation in Ukraine'.

**'Toxic ex'**

Nearby in Kyiv's PinchukArtCentre gallery, 21-year-old Maksym Khodak was participating in a show by young artists.

For his installation, the video artist persuaded two prolific TikTok bloggers to travel with him to the war-torn eastern city of Kharkiv. They spent a few days there in October, under regular shelling and with intermittent electricity and internet.

The bloggers, Roman and Viktoriya, came from western Ukraine and had not experienced such heavy fighting before.

"You know it's uncool. Lying in bed and at some point getting paranoid that you will be under shelling now," said Roman.

Made using the TikTok app, the resulting video work is displayed simultaneously on three separate screens.

Viktoriia described Ukraine's 'co-dependence' with Russia, while Roman likened it to 'a toxic ex' who is 'triggering you'.

"We don't want to have anything to do with the past," he said.

AFP

**W**hen Russia invaded Ukraine, artist Zhanna Kadyrova felt her work was useless. "What can you do against a tank with your art? Nothing," she said, sitting in her Kyiv studio.

But the 42-year-old changed her mind as galleries around the world snapped up her war-inspired work, raising funds to help civilians and soldiers.

The war has sparked huge interest in Ukrainian culture and contemporary artists are finding ways to highlight the horrors the country faces as well as explore ideas about its future.

Evacuating to rural western Ukraine without her usual studio and tools, Kadyrova spotted large stones smoothed by river water that resembled Ukrainian loaves of bread.

She shaped and sliced them and placed them on a table to create an installation called Palianytsia, a type of traditional wheat bread.

The name of the loaf has sparked numerous jokey memes. It is seen as impossible for non-Ukrainians to pronounce correctly and therefore a good way to spot Russian spies.

"We came up with this project in a second, and it exceeded all my expectations. I've already had about 40 exhibitions... I've just come back from India, I've been to Thailand, Taiwan, America, Europe," Kadyrova said.

"And, of course, after that my disappointment in art disappeared."

She talked frankly about the financial benefits, too, as she has used the money to help artists and soldiers and travelled to frontline areas to hand over aid.

"We made money like I've never made before," she said.

"We spend 100 per cent of the money we get from Palianytsia on the army."

A Kyiv gallery is currently displaying her Anxiety series - tapestries depicting kitsch flowers and cats, which she over-embroiders with air raid warnings.

The tapestries depict 'the opposite of war',



Maksym Khodak, sits in front of his installation *Unbroken Project* in the PinchukArtCentre gallery in Kyiv, this week (AFP)

she said. "When I add the inscription *Air Alert* to this, I get a contrast. This is our reality."

**Ballerina on bullets**

Playing with similar contrasts, an image of a ballerina printed on bullet casings is on display outside the National Opera of Ukraine in central Kyiv.

Passers-by take selfies beside the installation, called *Unbroken Project*.

"I think it's important to remind people that

there is still a war going on," said Nadiya, an interior designer.

For this work, Ecuadorian Felipe Jacome (37) photographed his collaborator Svitlana Onipko (26), a Ukrainian ballerina now based in the Netherlands, using an UV-printer to transfer her image onto bullet casings mounted in resin.

Onipko danced at the National Opera of Ukraine before war broke out.

The photographers are selling smaller ver-

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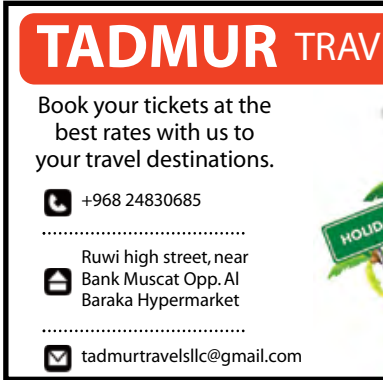




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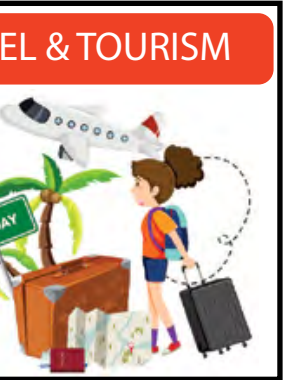
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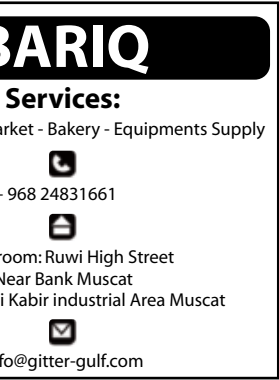


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BLACK AND WHITE

# CREATIVE CONTRAST



**Hubert Vaz**

When artists set aside their palette of colours and focus on using just black and white, the result can be magical. Using these two dynamic hues, a group of international artists in Oman have created a myriad of artistic expressions with robust interpretations that can render all other colours pale.

The Spring Salon 2023 at Matti Sirvio Art Galleria, in Jawharat al Shatti, which opened on Saturday evening, has a unique theme - Black is White, Black and White, Black or White. The exhibition was inaugurated under the auspices of Rasmia Noor Mohamed al Zadjali, of RASMA, an art and artistic lifestyle consultancy.

The exhibition features 62 artworks by 45 artists, including 16 Omani artists. The participating artists are from India, China, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Philippines, the USA, Russia, Pakistan, Korea, the UK, Germany and Finland, besides Oman.

The title initiates different approaches to the theme of black and white recalling Russian artist Kazimir Malevich's sensational 'Black Square' painting from 1915.

"In a world where black is no more black, and white is no more white, the artists are challenged to continue creating meaningful visuals," says Matti Sirvio, proprietor of Matti Sirvio Art Galleria and curator of the exhibition.

Explaining the concept and guidelines to the participants, Sirvio said, "In the aftermath of post-modernism - the precise, clear concept of truth is

still distrusted. Black and White represents to me the classical concept of human observation.

"Without a contrast nothing can be defined. Undefined meaning makes no sense. If everything is true, then nothing is true. When man proclaims his inability to differentiate black from white, boy from girl and truth from lies, he has fallen to the bottom again. It's time to go back to square one. In today's world of art, I feel the longing to go back to meaningful communication.

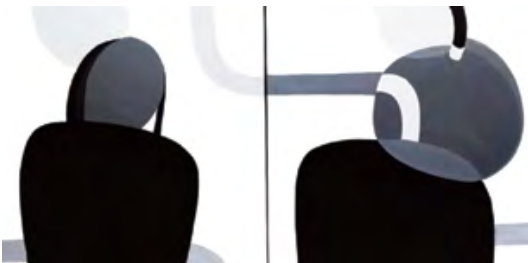
About the artists' portrayal of the theme, he said, some of the participating artists have already expressed their dilemma about the content. Others are still simply experimenting more with the visual elements without any deeper engagement with the content.

Disclosing his own understanding of Malevich's Black Square, he said it has inspired many artists the same way as Mark Rothko's or C Y Twombly's paintings inspire by their bold freedom to claim their right to be displayed.

"They will never be appreciated nor sought after by the masses. For those who hunger for the same kind of freedom they are a never-ending inspiration and joy," Sirvio observed.

When asked if he subscribed to the view that Malevich's Black Square is considered the cornerstone of abstract art, Sirvio said, "The origins of abstract art go far beyond Malevich. God breathed into the dust of the earth and made man a living soul. That is the beginning of abstract (non-material) art."

The Spring Salon will be on at the gallery till May 31.





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