

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Heavy rains in several governorates on Monday led to the tragic deaths of six individuals, including three children, while rescue operations saw more than 190 people saved from perilous conditions. The bad weather affecting many governorates, attributed to a low-pressure trough, is expected to continue on Wednesday.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) led rescue efforts, responding to over 224 reports since the onset of adverse weather on Sunday. The authority rescued individuals stranded in overflowing wadis and inundated buildings.

Late Monday night, CDAA announced that three children who were swept away in the overflowing Wadi Bani Ghafir in Rustaq were found dead.

Rescue teams of CDAA in Dhahirah managed to save one of two persons trapped in a vehicle swept away in Wadi Ghayya in Yanqul on Monday. The body of the second person was found on Tuesday morning.

The authority also reported the death of a woman following a tragic accident involving a vehicle being swept away in a wadi in Izki on Tuesday.

A police aviation unit carried out an operation to transport the body of a French woman from Wadi al Manakhar in Jabal Akhdar. A search is underway for a French man with who she was when their car was swept away on Monday.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Hammoud bin Mohammed al Mandhari, Coordinator of Relief and Shelter Sector of National Committee for Emergency Management, informed that there are a total of 229 shelters across the sultanate to provide relief in case of emergency. "All centres are ready to receive people at any time depending on the development of the weather situation."

Thirteen shelters have been activated in North Batinah and one in Buraimi. "So far, 136 citizens benefited from the shelters," Mandhari informed.

At the shelters, basic services such as food, drinks, blankets and Internet are provided.

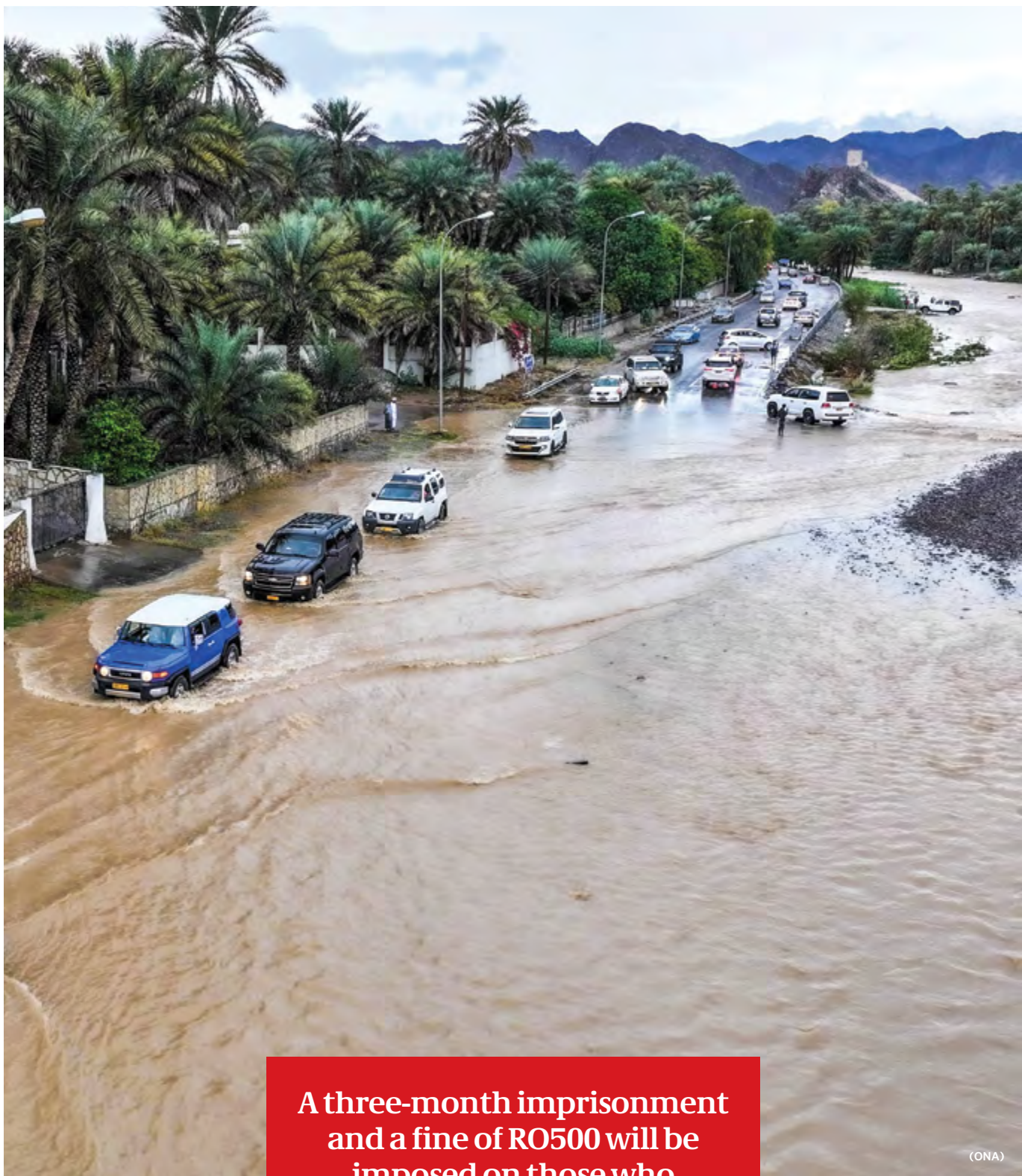
36 arrested for crossing wadis

Dakhliyah Governorate Police Command arrested 36 people for violating regulations issued to stay away from overflowing wadis. Royal Oman Police referred them to judicial authorities for legal action.

According to the Public Prosecution, a three-month imprisonment and a fine of RO500 will be imposed on those who deliberately

TRAGIC MONDAY

6 dead, over 190 rescued as heavy rains lash Oman



A three-month imprisonment and a fine of RO500 will be imposed on those who deliberately cross flooded wadis: Public Prosecution

ately cross flooded wadis.

CDAA rescued several people in different governorates who had ventured into overflowing wadis.

In North Sharqiyah, the authority rescued a person after he was stranded in his vehicle in Wadi al Batha in Sinaw.

CDAA teams also rescued

four people in Mudhaibi and two in Wadi Nabar in Liwa, North Batinah, after their vehicles were stuck in wadis.

Thirteen people in Dhahirah,

three in Dakhliyah, three in Muscat and one in Buraimi was rescued from wadis.

Rescue teams in Dakhliyah were able to rescue 50 people

after their bus was caught in a raging wadi in Manah.

Also in North Batinah, CDAA responded to a report about rising rain water in a house in the Khadraween area in Shinas and rescued a family.

In North Batinah, 107 people were taken to safety from rising water level in a medical centre.

100,000 registered jobseekers in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

There are 100,000 jobseekers in the sultanate, according to H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour.

Speaking at a panel discussion titled 'Labour, Employment, Economy and Investment' during the second edition of the Together We Progress forum on Monday, H E Dr Ba'owain said the employment sector is influenced by various economic factors. The Ministry of Labour (MoL) delegates responsibility of employment to other authorities concerned, each according to their speciality, needs and availability of resources and training programmes. "If these conditions are not met, then foreign expertise can be sought," the minister said.

H E Ba'owain informed that special committees have been formed for supervision in various sectors, including tourism, education, agriculture, transport and communications. These committees determine the required human resources and training, aligning these with existing labour market needs.

"Based on the latest statistics,



The government sector employs 190,000 citizens, while the private sector employs 253,000

H E DR MAHAD BA'OWAIN

the government sector employs 190,000 citizens, while the private sector employs 253,000. The percentage of jobseekers is 3.3%, with 100,000 individuals registered with the ministry. Of these, 80,000 have never worked before and 20,000 have previous work experience," H E Ba'owain said.

He informed that steps are underway to generate 35,000 employment opportunities in the public and private sectors, which will be announced at the annual conference of the ministry.

Continued on Page 03

Sayyid Badr writes to Turkish FM to intensify Gaza ceasefire efforts

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, sent a written message to Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, on Tuesday. The message relates to intensifying political endeavours and efforts to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and ending the brutal Israeli aggression and its illegal siege of the strip.

The message was handed over to Ahmet Yıldız, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye, when the latter received H E Saif Rashid al Jahwari, Ambassador of Oman to Türkiye, in Ankara.

Dismantling UNRWA 'short-sighted'

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) described calls to dismantle the agency as 'short-sighted' and that ending its mandate would weaken the world's ability to deal with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

This came in a statement by Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, after a meeting with representatives of member states of the United Na-



tions in Geneva on Tuesday. "I spoke with member states regarding all these calls to dismantle and end UNRWA. I warned of the impact of this; these calls are short-sighted," he said.

On Monday, he warned of the dangers of the collapse of life-saving relief activities in Gaza, stressing that these relief activities are becoming more difficult, especially in Rafah, due to the military operation underway.

He said the UN was unable, for the first time, to work with the minimum level of protection, adding that 5% of the population of the Gaza Strip - more than 100,000 people - had been killed, injured or lost in just four months, and that at least 17,000 children in the Gaza Strip - 1% of the total number of displaced people - are unaccompanied or separated from their families.

See also Page 09



Travel to UK now cheaper and faster for Omanis



NY Fashion Week - 2024 styles for fall and winter

Oman jumps 27 places to rank 11th in entrepreneurship index

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has jumped 27 places to 11th globally in the entrepreneurship index compiled by the *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2023/2024 Global Report*. This marks a remarkable improvement from its 38th position in the 2022/23 report.

The overall score for Oman increased from 4.2 in the previous report to 5.4 in 2023/2024, indicating positive developments in the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The improvement is attributed to efforts aimed at enhancing the business environment, providing incentive packages and facilities for entrepreneurs, and modernising legislation supporting

the sector.

All sub-indicators of the report showed significant improvement, particularly in crucial areas such as financing emerging projects, developing government policies that support innovation and technology, and strengthening physical infrastructure essential for the growth of emerging companies and small and medium enterprises.

Expressing her satisfaction with the achievement, Halima bint Rashid al Zaria, Chairperson of Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, attributed it to the collaborative efforts of ASMED with partners in the public and private sectors.

She emphasised the signifi-



cance of the jump in the global entrepreneurship index, stating that it reflects the commitment to fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and supporting the ambitions of Omani youth.

Halima described the progress

as a significant step towards realising the goals of Oman Vision 2040, positioning the sultanate as a leading centre on the global entrepreneurship map.

She extended her appreciation to all contributors to the en-

trepreneurship system in Oman, including the public and private sectors, entrepreneurs, emerging companies and the University of Nizwa for its active involvement in preparing the report.

The achievement underscores the commitment to encouraging entrepreneurial endeavours and strengthening Oman's global standing in entrepreneurship.

As part of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) National Expert Survey, entrepreneurship experts in participating economies were asked to provide scores for 13 GEM Entrepreneurial Framework Conditions (EFCs) which - depending on the attention policymakers give to each - can enhance or hinder new business creation.

For the third consecutive year, the United Arab Emirates topped the index with a 7.7 score, the highest ever recorded. The UAE scored highest across the entire sample of 49 economies in all but one of the EFCs (slightly behind Saudi Arabia for Ease of Entry: Burdens and Regulations).

Rounding out the top five in the index were India, Saudi Arabia, Lithuania and Qatar. Not one North American or European economy is in this illustrious group.

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor is a consortium of national country teams, primarily associated with top academic institutions, that carries out survey-based research on entrepreneurship around the world.



Travel to UK now cheaper and faster for Omanis

Muscat - The UK's Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme will open for all Gulf Co-operation Council and Jordanian nationals travelling to the country from February 22. Expansion of the scheme follows the successful launch for Qataris, who have been able to benefit since October 2023.

ETAs replace Electronic Visa Waivers (EVW) and remove the visa requirement for short stays in the UK for GCC and Jordanian nationals.

Nationals of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan can now make unlimited visits to the UK over a two-year period, or until the holder's passport expires - whichever is sooner - for £10. Previously, GCC nationals paid £30 through the EVW scheme and Jordanians paid £115 for a single-use visitor visa.

Gulf visitors are highly valuable to the UK economy, with al-

ETA will improve the experience of travelling to the UK for the thousands of visitors from the Gulf and Jordan, who represent our second largest tourism market and contribute billions to the UK economy

JAMES CLEVERLY

most 800,000 Gulf visitors spending £2bn during their stays in the UK in 2022,' a press release stated.

The ETA is part of the UK government's transformation and digitisation of its border and immigration system, enabling an increasingly seamless customer experience in the future for legitimate visitors.

James Cleverly, UK Home Secretary, said, "The ETA will improve the experience of travelling to the UK for the thousands of visitors from the Gulf and Jordan, who represent our second largest tourism market and contribute billions to the UK economy. The scheme is a vital step on our path

to cementing the UK's position as a world leader in border innovation and security."

Tariq Mahmood Ahmad, Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Commonwealth and United Nations at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, commented, "Our strong people-to-people links underpin our close partnership, and we all benefit from the boost to trade, education and tourism ties ETAs will bring."

The application process for an ETA is simple and fast to complete, with the process being entirely digital via a mobile phone app. Applicants need to provide

biographic and biometric details and answer questions on suitability and criminality. Once individuals have successfully applied, their ETA is digitally linked to their passport.

Decisions are usually to be made within three working days, however the majority are decided within hours.

Patricia Yates, CEO of VisitBritain, said, "It is great to see the ETA scheme roll out to more Gulf nationals as well as for Jordanians, making travel to the UK easier, cheaper and more accessible for them. Combined with our strong airline connections, the scheme boosts our competitive tourism offer and our welcome to visitors."

The scheme will apply worldwide to those who do not currently need a visa to visit or transit through the UK or who do not hold a UK immigration status, including nationals from Europe and America.

Study explores sustainable solution to water scarcity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An innovative research project led by Dr Tahereh Jafari, Assistant Professor at International Maritime College Oman, which is part of the National University of Science and Technology, has marked a significant milestone in the field of water desalination, wastewater treatment and bioelectricity production.

The groundbreaking research, focused on an advanced microbial desalination cell reactor, was one of the winning projects in the tenth edition of National Research Award, organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

Tahereh's research - titled *Novel two-chamber tubular microbial desalination cell for bioelectricity production, wastewater treatment and desalination with a focus on self-generated pH control* - introduces a sustainable solution to the global challenge of freshwater scarcity. The project underscores the urgent need for environmentally-friendly desalination methods.

Microbial Desalination Cells (MDCs), a key innovation of this research, offer a comprehensive approach by combining wastewater treatment with desalination and bioelectricity production, without the need for external electrical power. Tahereh's team focused on overcoming the challenges of pH imbalance and high internal resistance in conventional MDCs by designing a two-chamber tubular MDC (TTMDC) with a self-regulating pH control mechanism and optimised ion exchange membrane arrangement.

Results of the research



Dr Tahereh Jafari

The breakthrough aligns with the global search for a sustainable and affordable desalination technology, promising applications in remote areas, off-grid locations and sustainable water management

demonstrated the potential of the TTMDC design to achieve high-power output, low internal resistance and an efficient desalination rate. This breakthrough aligns with the global search for a sustainable and affordable desalination technology, promising applications in remote areas, off-grid locations and sustainable water management.

Published in the prestigious journal *Desalination*, the research underscores Oman's contribution to developing renewable energy-powered desalination technologies. Tahereh's achievement not only highlights the quality of Omani research on the global stage but also inspires further innovation in addressing critical water resource challenges.

Reflecting on her award, she said, "I believe that this award represents a significant milestone in any researcher's journey. Such recognition motivates researchers to continue their innovative efforts towards sustainable solutions, contributing significantly to addressing global challenges."

Besides Tahereh, the research team included Dr Abdullah al Mamun, Halima Khalifa Saif al Himali, Prof Mahad Said Baawain, Dr Sadik Rahman, Dr William Tarpeh, Dr Bipro Ranjan Dhar and Prof Byung Hong Kim.



Musandam Power Company SAOG

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THE COMPANY REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Musandam Power Company SAOG (the "Company"), I have the pleasure to present the Annual Report of the Company for the year ended 31st December 2023.

Musandam Power Company SAOG (the "Company") was registered and incorporated as a closed joint stock company in the Sultanate of Oman on 18th November 2014. Subsequently, the Company was converted to a joint stock company ("SAOG") and was listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange ("MSX") on 15th December 2019.

The Company is engaged in the design, construction, ownership, financing, operation, and maintenance of a dual fuel power plant (the "Plant") with natural gas as the primary fuel and diesel oil as the alternative fuel with a capacity of 120 Mega Watt (MW) located at Wilayat Bulha in the Musandam Governorate, Sultanate of Oman. The Company is selling the electrical energy generated to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (the "OPWP"). Before listing, the Company was a subsidiary of Oman Oil Facilities Development Company LLC ("OOFDC") which is owned by OQ SAOC ("OQ"), a closely held joint stock company incorporated in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Company commenced commercial operations on 17th June 2017.

Corporate Governance

The Company has a comprehensive system of internal controls in place with a clear structure, delegated authorities, and accountability.

During 2023, the Company continued to review key internal policies and procedures to ensure the highest standards of corporate governance and to ensure compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance and applicable circulars issued up to 31st December 2023 by the Capital Market Authority.

Operational Results

The operational performance of the plant during the year continued to exceed, with 99.9% plant reliability as against 98.00% planned (2022: 99.9%). The plant handled a high plant load of 85.53 MW during the year (2022: 80.22 MW). The total energy generated and delivered was 4,13,550 MWh (2022: 409,745), an increase of about 1.2% over the previous year.

The Musandam Independent Power Plant (MIPP) experienced two shutdowns, lasting approximately 1.8 hours and 4.6 hours each, on August 27, 2023, due to technical issues within the diesel fuel system. These interruptions led to a power outage in the Musandam region. Following necessary interventions, the plant returned to normal operation and successfully restored grid power. A thorough investigation and root cause analysis were conducted, resulting in the implementation of essential measures to ensure the dependable functioning of the diesel fuel system. These measures encompassed activities such as the thorough cleaning of diesel tanks, ultrasonic inspection of tanks and pipelines, and the establishment of a dynamic maintenance plan for fuel system filters. Additionally, the company is actively pursuing further initiatives, including the physical cleaning and inspection of tanks, and an evaluation of the fuel system design to identify potential enhancements. These ongoing efforts are aimed at providing an additional layer of assurance regarding the reliability of the system.

The Company continued to maintain plant reliability and meet OETC load demand with a continued focus on excellence in Health, Safety, Environment, and Quality Management.

The Company duly met all the stringent environmental permit conditions promulgated by the Department of Environmental Conservation. All HSE activities planned were completed and all key performance indicators were achieved.

Gas available from the Musandam Gas Plant ("MGP") is not fully sufficient to cater to Musandam IPF requirements. Ministry of Energy & Minerals (MEM) through OQ arranged to supply Dolphin Gas to compensate for the gas shortage from MGP. Due to this additional gas availability, dependency on diesel is significantly reduced and the plant in future months is expected to continue to operate mostly on Gas fuel.

Financial Results

Excellent plant availability and higher power generation have consistently driven a rise in revenue compared to the previous year. However, in 2023, the company experienced no thermal efficiency gain, attributed to its decreased reliance on fuel oil as compared to 2022. Consequently, the gross profit has decreased by 15% compared to 2022. The overall operational profit of the company has decreased by RO 0.940 million compared to 2022, primarily due to the reduction in thermal efficiency and an increase in indirect costs. In 2023, the company reported a net profit of RO 1,945 million, reflecting a 27% decrease from the RO 2,647 million recorded in 2022.

The Company has duly met all its commitments under the facilities agreement. Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP) continues to settle all invoices raised by the Company as per the payment provisions provided within the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). In 2023, the company received all the amount outstanding as of 2022 from Integrated Gas Company SAOC (IGC).

Finally, the Company's operational and commercial performance during 2023 has enabled it to declare and pay an aggregate dividend of 27.6 Baiza per share (with a nominal value of the share as Baiza 100 per share). This corresponds to 27.6% of the paid-up capital of the Company. The dividends for the year are aligned with the information disclosed in the IPO Prospectus and Business Plan for the year 2023.

The share price of the Company stood at 310 Baiza per share on 31st December 2023.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The Company has actively fulfilled its social responsibilities in Musandam, demonstrating efficiency and commitment. In accordance with the directive from the Capital Market Authority, the company allocated RO 4,000 of its CSR budget to the Oman Charity Organization (OCO).

Additionally, the company played a vital role in supporting families with limited income during the Holy month of Ramadan. A dedicated campaign team visited families in Bulha to provide food donations, particularly targeting social security families.

In the realm of education, the company initiated two CSR activities. The first involved a donation to a school in Bulha for the construction of a grass playground. The second initiative included collaboration with a training institute to provide first-aid training for key individuals within the General Directorate of Education in Musandam. These endeavors underscore the company's commitment to making a positive impact in the community.

Medium-term & Outlook

The Company continuously endeavors to identify and implement areas of improvement in plant operations. All responsible measures are being taken by the management to maintain commendable operational performance during the year 2023. Any change in the power supply and demand landscape in the Sultanate has a limited impact on the financial performance of the Company since its profitability is mainly derived from the plant's availability and reliability and the fact that the plant is performing in the optimized grid.

The Company and its Operation & Maintenance Contractor are making all efforts to steadily increase Omanisation while ensuring the smooth and reliable operation of the plant. Currently, the Company is on track to meet the Omanisation commitments made to the Authority for Public Services Regulation and the Ministry of Labour. The company has achieved 91% (2022: 91%) of Omanisation at the end of the year 2023.

The Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP) has achieved a significant milestone in the implementation of the Oman electricity market which is the Middle East's first electricity spot market. This market will provide a new era of efficient and economical offered prices for the forecasted demand. The electricity market will initially be implemented in the Main interconnected System across the northern part of Oman, with prospects to expand to cover other regions over time. The Company's Power Purchase Agreement with OPWP expires in 2032. Accordingly, the spot market will have no impact on the revenue stream of the Company until the expiry of the Power Purchase Agreement.

Rains disrupt public transport, leave commuters stranded

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat residents faced significant disruptions, particularly in public transportation, on Monday.

Mwasalat bus services, a lifeline for many who rely on public transport, were suspended due to bad weather, leaving commuters stranded and highlighting the city's urgent need of an efficient public transport system.

Civil Aviation Authority had forecast rains on Monday and Tuesday affecting Musandam, Buraimi, North Batinah, South Batinah, Dhahirah, Dakhliyah, North Sharqiyah and South Sharqiyah, in addition to Muscat.

Despite the national transport company announcing a service suspension in Muscat for Monday, many passengers were unprepared, arriving at bus stations only to find these deserted.

Impact of the suspension was



particularly felt by commuters dependent on bus services for critical travel needs, such as reaching the airport.

Ibrahim Ali, a Pakistani national, expressed his concern, saying, "Oman faces a unique challenge when it comes to public transportation, as there are limited options available. The sudden suspension of bus services underscores the importance of having reliable transportation in bad weather."

Another passenger, from Bangladesh, shared his frustration, saying, "I came here to Ruwi

bus stand expecting to catch my usual bus to Seeb, only to find out that it's cancelled. This is a major inconvenience, especially when there are limited options for public transport in Muscat. Authorities need to consider essential services like transportation and healthcare during such weather events to minimise impact on the public."

The situation earlier this week, like in numerous previous inclement weather conditions, shed light on the critical need of a robust and flexible all-weather public transportation system.

Star hotels witness 23.4% revenue surge

Muscat - The sultanate's three-to-five-star hotels experienced a significant revenue increase of 23.4% in 2023, with earnings reaching RO229.2mn, up from RO185.7mn at the end of 2022.

The uptick in revenues is attributed to a notable rise in guest numbers, as reported by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The total number of guests in 2023 surged 27.1% to 2,710,169, compared to 1,629,205 in 2022, reflecting a growing interest in the sultanate as a travel destination.

Additionally, occupancy rate saw an 8.8% increase, indicating a robust demand for hotel accommodations across the country.

A detailed breakdown reveals a 10% increase in Omani guests, totalling 769,790, underscoring the local population's sustained interest in domestic travel. Guests from the GCC states rose 23.8%, reaching 198,489, while European visitor numbers surged 43.6% to 517,278, highlighting the sultanate's growing appeal on the international stage.

The Americas contributed 57,752 guests and the African continent 11,670 guests (up 29.2%). Asian visitors increased 35.2% to 297,270, and guests from Oceania jumped 133.8% to 44,726.

These numbers not only reflect the sultanate's success in implementing strategies to attract a broader spectrum of visitors but also its capacity to host an increasing number of tourists, thereby bolstering its position as a key player in the global hospitality and tourism industry.

Sayyid Theyazin directs greater engagement for transformation of youth, sports sectors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, has assured his ministry's bigger engagement with youth of the country, who constitute 19.4% of the total population in Oman.

The focus of the Minister is also on elevating the sports sector to meet the aspirations of today's youth.

H H Sayyid Theyazin made clear about his position on this sector while speaking at the 'Culture, Sports, Youth, Media and National Identity' panel discussion at the second edition of Together We Progress on Monday.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MCSY), he added, will re-evaluate the sports sector in Oman, with a spe-

cialised firm taking a supervisory role in the process. "The company will take measures to upgrade the performance of sports federations and clubs in line with public aspirations."

H H Sayyid Theyazin reviewed the sports city project to be established in the wilayat of Musanaa as per the Royal Directives.

A prestigious international company has been recruited to undertake the project, with the overall plan covering maintenance of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, he informed.

"The ministry is also considering privatisation of clubs, with plans to start with four clubs to be made affiliated to major companies. We will begin applying some standards to improve the performance of these clubs, with



emphasis on a specific activity and look out for the desired results, before proceeding with the rest," H H Sayyid Theyazin added.

During the session, the minister affirmed that good citizenship takes centre stage in national thinking and that the Sultanate of Oman adheres to its customs, history, culture and heritage.

"We were and are still open to the world and we continue to extend a helping hand and espouse friendship and peace in pursuit of what serves the interests of the Sultanate of Oman," H H Sayyid Theyazin said.

He pointed out that the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has come a long way in consolidating Omani identity, getting impetus from the country's traditions and ancient history. He explained that, within the con-

text of attention accorded to youth, an Omani encyclopedia will be launched in the near future to enlighten emerging generations.

During a dialogue session on 'Media and the National Identity', H E Dr Abdullah Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, announced the start of two strategic projects on 'soft power' that will be informed by culture, sports, media, identity and the civilisation of the Sultanate of Oman.

The aim is to raise the status of the country, highlight its history and transfer it to future generations, said H E Harrasi, adding that the Ministry of Information will launch three documentary films about Oman and its historical presence on Sunday.

The films were produced in cooperation with a global com-

pany specialised in cultural documentation.

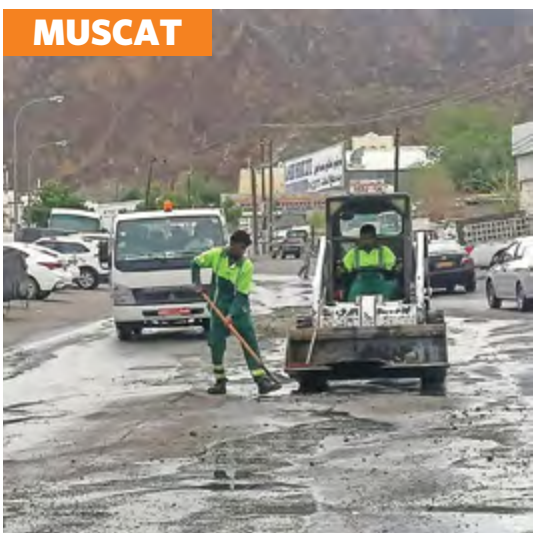
The ministry will also launch a book on Oman, he informed.

The minister laid emphasis on the importance of developing various local media institutions to keep pace with the progress taking place in modern media, including artificial intelligence.

"There is a great opportunity to invest in the media field, and the Ministry is according great attention to children and their upbringing," said H E Dr Harrasi.

He noted that examples of this attention include the establishment of Ayn Platform, Children's Supplement in Oman Arabic Daily newspaper and Children's Channel project, which is now completed and ready to be launched as soon as financial resources become available.

Municipalities mobilise teams to mitigate adverse weather effect



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat, Dakhliyah and North Batinah municipalities have ramped up their efforts on Tuesday to bring back normalcy, after severe weather conditions during the past two days threw life out of gear.

In North Batinah, the response came in the wake of a mountain collapse near the town of Al Dhuhaihar in Wadi al Sarmi, disrupting local traffic and necessitating immediate action.

According to a statement from North Batinah Municipality, emergency teams swiftly addressed the mountain collapse by clearing debris to restore traffic flow towards Al Dhuhaihar.

Additionally, efforts in Saham and Liwa involved reopening road crossings, removing fallen trees, and pumping out accumulated water following heavy rains.

Dakhiliyah Municipality has also joined the efforts, with Sulaiman bin Hamad al Sunaidi, Director General of the Municipality, reporting significant progress in reopening roads affected by the rain.

He informed that the teams have been successful in remov-



ing sand and water accumulations in various wilayats, including in Nizwa, where roads in Al Wasit area, Al Ain neighbourhood, Nizwa Market Square, Al Ghaftin area, Wardat Al Bu Saeed, and the commercial area in the village of Firq were cleared.

In Muscat, the municipality deployed field teams equipped to handle any situation arising because of the weather condition. Actions included the rapid clearance of flooded areas, ensuring the safety of rainwater drainage systems on key roads to facilitate smooth traffic, and street cleaning to remove debris.

Many precautionary measures were taken on a war footing, which included the closure of

Al Jabal Street (Amerat-Bawshar Road) to traffic in both directions and extensive cleaning of wadi streams, drainage crossings, and water channels before the weather worsened. Water pumps were distributed in areas anticipated to get heavily impacted by rainfall.

Muscat Municipality has embarked on several rainwater drainage projects across the governorate aimed at devising long-term solutions to manage water drainage efficiently and prevent damage to infrastructure and service facilities.

Communication channels were active round the clock to address citizens' and residents' concerns, with the Muscat gov-

ernorate's communications centre (1111) handling reports and coordinating with various municipal directorates and the Royal Oman Police to tackle waterlogging issues promptly.

Authorities have urged the public to remain vigilant, avoid wadi streams, low-lying areas, and beaches during such weather conditions, and to report any emergencies to the Muscat Governorate Call Centre (1111) or via official social media channels.

The concerted efforts of municipalities and related government entities underscore their commitment to ensuring public safety and minimising the impact of adverse weather on the community.

MEM signs agreements for 11 major projects of RO5mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) on Tuesday inked agreements for implementation of 11 national projects involving a total financial implication of RO5mn involving private entities.

This collaborative endeavour involves seven leading companies in the energy and minerals sector, including Petroleum Development Oman, Occidental Oman, BP Oman, OQ, Daleel Petroleum Company, CC Energy Development Company, and ARA Petroleum.

Of those 11 projects, three are said to be significant and they include Ibri Public Park Project, financing medical equipment for Khoula Hospital (Day Clinics), and Khuta 'Steps' Platform Project for vocational guidance and career counseling.

The Ibri project in Dhahirah governorate entails the establishment of a recreational area, marking a significant milestone as the first of its kind in the region. Spanning over 500,000sqm area, the park will be developed in three phases, featuring green spaces, water bodies, health paths, recreational facilities, and an open-air theatre. Emphasising

sustainability and future development, this initiative promises to enhance the quality of life for residents while nurturing community engagement.

Addressing critical healthcare needs, financing of medical equipment for Khoula aims to bolster surgical services at the hospital, enabling round-the-clock operations to accommodate a projected 10,000 surgeries annually.

The projects include Ibri Public Park Project, financing medical equipment for Khoula Hospital, and Khuta 'Steps' Platform Project

By funding essential medical equipment for the orthopedic department and ophthalmology clinic, this endeavor aims to reduce surgical waitlists, alleviate health burdens, and elevate societal well-being.

The Khuta platform emerges as a beacon of guidance, offering advanced career counseling services to students and job seekers. Tailored to bridge the gap be-

tween schools, higher education and employment, this initiative furnishes updated information on educational programmes, training opportunities, and labour market insights.

Sponsored by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals for 2024, Khuta embodies a holistic approach to empower individuals and nurture professional growth.

During the ceremony, H E Mohsen bin Hamad al Hadrami, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, expressed pride in the close cooperation between the ministry and its partners in supporting and financing community projects.

He highlighted the significant role played by these partnerships in enhancing the quality of life and achieving sustainable development goals.

This collaborative effort underscores a shared commitment to enriching communities, fostering sustainable development, and enhancing the well-being of citizens across the region.

Additionally, the ceremony featured PDO signing several agreements to finance social investment programmes in collaboration with various governmental and private agencies.

100,000 registered jobseekers in Oman

Continued from Page 01

Expat recruitment under scrutiny

MoL is actively working on a new initiative called 'Recruitment Policy', which involves a specialised team comprising representatives from various sectors. "Its primary focus is on skilled expatriate workers that Oman needs, with an emphasis on empowering local human resources. Priority will be given to local candidates

in availing opportunities. The initiative aims to establish a clear mechanism for measuring the capabilities and experiences of expatriate workers. Additionally, a regulatory process for expatriate workers in Oman is being developed," H E Ba'owain said.

H E Dr Said Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, underscored the significance of reforming the labour market, noting that the 10th Five-Year Plan adopted a set of policies and

procedures towards this ends.

He added that another issue of great importance to the government is automation of the construction sector. This, he said, is being done in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

H E Saqri also laid emphasis on the need to change certain policies pertaining to registration of visas and issuing investor visas with the aim of increasing the

number of qualified professionals in the labour market. He stressed the importance of aligning education and training with the requirements of the labour market.

H E Saqri added that provisions have been introduced in the new labour law to give workers additional rights, and link productivity, compensation and recruitment-related programmes with the objective of raising their efficiency and productivity.



Royal Oman Police

Directorate of Public Relations & Security Information

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Royal Oman Police - Directorate of Public Relations & Security Information - announces the holding of a public auction to sell used police vehicles at 4:00 pm on Sunday, 25/02/2024, at the General Department of Transport in Airport Heights.

Vehicles can be inspected during official working hours, starting from 18-22/02/2024.

The person awarded the auction must adhere to the following:

- Pay the value of the vehicles and brokerage fees (3%) electronically immediately after the auction is awarded.
- Transporting vehicles within a maximum period of three days from the date of awarding the auction, and a fine of RO 5 will be calculated for each day of delay after the specified period.
- The buyer is responsible for paying the vehicle registration fees in his name in the traffic system before receiving the vehicle.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30

4,589.80

Sensex

71,555.19

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

India

215.84

Pakistan

725.48

Bangladesh

285.14

Philippines

145.69

Sri Lanka

813.99

*Rates as on February 13

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Fitch affirms EU ratings at 'AAA'

Fitch Ratings said Monday it affirmed the ratings of the EU and European Atomic Energy Community, Euratom, at "AAA" with stable outlooks.

The affirmation of ratings and stable outlooks reflect member states' strong commitment to provide financial support to the EU, the rating agency said in a statement.

The EU's "AAA" rating is resilient to its debt increase since it is matched by a significant increase in resources from the member states, it said, adding the rating approach for Euratom is aligned with that of the EU.

The agency, however, warned that an actual or projected decline in the additional contributions from member states could lead to a negative rating action or downgrade.

Oman to raise RO100mn via development bonds

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's government plans to raise at least RO100mn through this year's first issuance of government development bonds. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO), on behalf of the Ministry of Finance, announced the 69th issue of the government development bonds.

The size of the new development bonds issue stands at RO100mn with an option to exceed the announced amount (greenshoe option), with a maturity period of three years, as per the CBO's statement.

The issue will be open for subscription from February 15 to February 22, 2024, while the auction will be held on February 25, 2024. The settlement date for the issue will be on Tuesday, February 27, 2024.

The bonds will carry an annual coupon rate of 4.9%. Interest on the new bonds will be paid semi-annually on August 27 and February 27 every year until the maturity date on February 27, 2027.

Investors may apply for these bonds only through the competitive bidding process and may submit bids through commercially licensed banks operating in



The bonds issue will be open for subscription from February 15 to February 22, while the auction will be held on February 25. The settlement date for the issue will be on February 27

sent by the Ministry of Finance. These bonds can be used as collateral to obtain loans from any local commercially licensed bank and can also be traded at prevailing market rates through the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

The details of the allotted bonds will be recorded in the register maintained by the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCD). Therefore, investors must provide the same bank account details registered with MCD to ensure the smooth processing of their bids and the receipt of coupon payments and principal amounts on their scheduled dates.

Furthermore, investors with applications of RO1mn and above may submit their bids directly to the CBO at their discretion, after endorsement from their banks.

The prospectus and application forms for the government development bonds can be obtained through the CBO's official website (www.cbo.gov.om) and its social media accounts.

The 69th government development bonds issue is open to all investors, residents, and non-residents, irrespective of their nationality.

The government development bonds represent direct and unconditional obligations of the government of Oman, repre-



Omantel's sukuk issue gets 'BB+' rating from Fitch

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings has assigned Oman Telecommunications Company's (Omantel) \$500mn senior unsecured trust certificates a final 'BB+' rating with a Recovery Rating of 'RR4'.

The sukuk was issued through the trustee, Otel Sukuk Limited (OSL). Oztel Holdings SPC Limited (Oztel) will act as guarantor to all of Omantel's obligations under the transaction documents. The instruments were priced at 5.375% maturing in January 2031. The ratings are in line with Omantel's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) and senior unsecured rating, Fitch said in a statement.

The rating agency said that the trust certificates' rating is aligned with the IDR of the ultimate parent and guarantor. 'This reflects Fitch's view that default of these senior unsecured obligations would reflect a default of Omantel in accordance with the agency's rating definitions,' it said.

According to Fitch, the sukuk instrument ratings are linked to Omantel's ratings due to its role as a seller under the purchase agreement, obligor, and service agent.

Fitch has given no consideration to any underlying assets or any collateral provided, as it believes the trustee's ability to satisfy payments due on the certificates ultimately depends on Omantel satisfying its unsecured payment obligations to the trustee under the transaction documents.

In addition to Omantel's propensity to ensure repayment of the sukuk, in Fitch's view, Omantel is required to ensure full and timely repayment of OSL's obligations, due to its various roles and obligations under the sukuk structure and documentation.

Aluminium Recycling Forum kicks off today

Muscat - The first of its kind B2B event, the 'Aluminium Recycling Forum 2024: Forging the Future,' hosted by Sohar Aluminium, commences today under the patronage of H E Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, at the JW Marriott Hotel in Muscat.

Dedicated to advancing the aluminum recycling industry, the forum, supported by the Environment Authority, will attract over 100 participants. It will feature several thought-provoking presentations, discussions, and keynote speeches from industry pioneers such as the International Aluminium Institute, exploring the latest trends, challenges, and business opportunities in aluminum recycling, including for SMEs, sustainability practices, and the impact of technological advancements.

Key players from the industry, including government institutions, private companies, waste management representatives, along with aluminum recyclers, will participate in the forum.

Eng Said bin Mohammed Al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium Company, said, "The forum aims to bring together aluminum industry players in

Aluminium Recycling Forum 2024 will feature several thought-provoking presentations, discussions, and keynote speeches from recycling industry pioneers

Sohar Aluminium is pioneering several initiatives aimed at increasing the company's recycling efforts to meet decarbonisation targets and achieve net-zero neutrality. This is in line with Sohar Aluminium's ESG Strategy intended to maximise all available opportunities to continue being at the forefront of driving sustainable practices.

Madayn drives industrial innovation through Intaj Suhar for Manufacturing

Muscat - The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), through the Industrial Innovation Academy, is dedicated to fostering industrial innovation and applied research while reinforcing national capabilities in the industrial sector. This involves focusing on downstream production from existing key industries; identifying, developing, and incubating industrial investment opportunities; transforming them into value-added opportunities with quality capabilities, products, and services while leveraging automation and Industry 4.0 technologies.

Intaj Suhar for Advanced Manufacturing, overseen by the Industrial Innovation Academy, stands as one of the initiatives supporting the manufacturing sector, fostering innovation, driving advanced industries forward, and promoting economic diversification in line with Oman Vision 2040.

"The company, which is based at Sohar University in Al Batinah North Governorate, functions as a factory for molds and spare parts with the goal of mass production to achieve cost reduction, enhance production output, and target local and international markets," said Majid al Hinai, Ex-



ecutive Director of Intaj Suhar for Advanced Manufacturing. Hinai pointed out that the company currently comprises three centers, namely, Plastic Technology Center, Manufacturing Tools Center (Dies and Molds), and Advanced Manufacturing Center.

"Intaj Suhar's objectives include developing technological skills and capabilities; prototyping, product and tools designing and manufacturing; advanced training and HR development; enhancing ICV and promoting economic diversification; fostering job creation; and providing

one of the key contributors to the advancement of the manufacturing and innovation sectors."

Intaj Suhar is equipped with advanced facilities for training Omani cadres on Computer-Aided Design/Computer-Aided Manufacturing (CAD/CAM) systems and CNC machines, with the objective of promoting knowledge and advanced technology transfer within the Sultanate.

Hinai further highlighted that the project presently employs 150 staff, with the total equipment and machine count exceeding 100. Notably, the company possesses over 25% of all CNC machines in the sultanate.

"These factors are expected to empower the local industry and uphold industrial excellence standards at both local and regional levels. This will be achieved through knowledge transfer, enhancing manufacturing quality and efficiency, developing workforce skills and technical capabilities, integrating advanced technology in production, prioritizing sustainability, and ensuring customer satisfaction by improving market responsiveness and delivering high-quality products," he added.

UAE exchange houses receive approval to raise remittance fees by 15%

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The Foreign Exchange and Remittance Group (FERG) announced that exchange houses under the jurisdiction of UAE authorities have received approval to implement an optional strategic fee adjustment, allowing for a minimum increase of 15% which typically equates to AED2.50.

This marks the first fee adjustment in five years, the decision recognises the evolving regulatory landscape and related cost increases since the previous update.

The fee increase is expected to take place for remittance services provided through physical branches, while remittances offered via mobile apps of exchange houses will most likely remain unchanged or even reduced to maintain competitiveness digitally.

FERG played a pivotal role in carrying out extensive market research and coordinating with the regulatory bodies to facilitate this crucial initiative.

The granted approval follows a detailed evaluation of the expenses associated with maintaining high levels of service standards and complying with regulatory requirements. This decision aims to strike a balance, ensuring that exchange houses remain competitive while addressing the costs.

Despite the approved adjustment, it is anticipated that the average remittance cost of sending \$200 equivalent will remain at less than 3.5%, significantly below the global average which stood at 6.2% during 2023.

WAM

MoCIIP to begin season three of Tejarah Talks on February 27

Muscat - The Oman Business Forum, in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), will hold the first session of the 2024 Tejarah Talks season, themed 'Explore. Dream. Discover,' at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on February 27.

Delving into business, investment, and employment opportunities in the tourism sector, the popular discussion



H E Azzan al Busaidi

forum will also explore trends such as astro, frontier, and eco-tourism, as well as the influence of AI, multi-generational travel, and much more.

Tejarah Talks is sponsored by Jindal Shaded, Nortel, Apex TransGulf Manufacturing, and MHD, and supported by OCEC, JW Marriott, and Oman FM. Expert panelists for this edition of Tejarah Talks are H E Azzan al Busaidi, Undersecretary of Tourism, Ministry

of Heritage & Tourism; Shabib al Maamari, Managing Director of Visit Oman; and Eng Said al Shanfari, Chief Executive Officer of OCEC. The evening's discussions will be moderated by Jamal al Asmi, Executive Producer, RealityCG.

"As Oman's tourism figures for 2023 set new benchmarks and with a raft of new accommodation options and attractions recently launched - Oman Botanic Gardens and the

Khasab Zipline amongst them - the first Tejarah Talks of 2024 looks to be particularly exciting and sure to be of interest to tourism professionals and those aspiring to join the industry, entrepreneurs, and investors. We have designed the evening to also appeal to the general public, offering insights into trends shaping vacations at home and abroad in the years ahead," explained Maymuna al Adawi, MoCIIP

Director, Public Private Partnerships and Tejarah Talks organizer.

Adawi said, "Whether you are looking to explore a business or career opportunity in tourism, dreaming about holiday possibilities, or hoping to discover what the future of travel holds, we encourage you to join us at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 27, and look forward to seeing you at OCEC."

Global interest rates expected to decline by mid-2024: IMF chief

Dubai, UAE – The World Governments Summit 2024 (WGS), which is taking place in Dubai, hosted a plenary session featuring Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

During the session on the first day of the summit, which was moderated by CNN's Richard Quest, Georgieva said that global interest rates are expected to decline by 40% by mid-2024. "We are very confident that the world economy is now poised for this soft landing that we have been waiting for," she said.

Georgieva added, "We have learned through experience that economic fundamentals matter, and in the United States they are strong. The US has deep capital markets; a very dynamic economy, particularly in new technologies; and the ability of its economy to quickly adjust, which is attractive for investments."

Responding to a question on why the United States has responded so strongly at a time of high interest rates, Georgieva stated, "The United States bene-



Kristalina Georgieva speaks during the session moderated by CNN's Richard Quest in Dubai (WAM)

fits from being a source of energy in terms of oil and gas. When the war on Ukraine began, for instance, Europe found itself in a difficult place because it was forced to move away from Russia. The United States did not face this problem at all. It became

an exporter of energy." She also cited the American government's support for families and businesses during the pandemic. In doing so, the government ensured that citizens were still able to spend, which kept the demand level and the

We are very confident that the world economy is now poised for this soft landing that we have been waiting for

KRISTALINA GEORGIEVA

labour market thriving. Georgieva praised the UAE's readiness to use artificial intelligence (AI) technologies and commended the nation for its foresight to establish a ministry for artificial intelligence in 2017 at a time of global reluctance on this matter. Georgieva said, "The shift towards AI will be similar to the Industrial Revolution in terms of scale and significance of impact." She highlighted that it will affect up to 40% of the labour market, with new jobs emerging as existing jobs either transform or disappear. Georgieva stated that an IMF report has revealed the readiness

IMF chief forecasts higher growth for Arab region in 2024

Dubai, UAE – Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), highlighted the increasing significance of the Arab region in a rapidly evolving global landscape. She projected that the total GDP growth for the Middle East region would reach 2.9% this year, surpassing the figures from 2023. Speaking on the sidelines of the pre-summit day of the World Governments Summit (WGS) 2024's Eighth Arab Fiscal Forum, Georgieva em-

phasised the enduring partnership between the Arab world and the International Monetary Fund. Despite uncertainties, "the global economy has been surprisingly resilient," IMF Managing Director added. The IMF chief also anticipated a decline in global inflation rates for 2024, while underscoring that medium-term global growth prospects remain at around 3%, compared to the historical average of 3.8%. WAM

of the UAE and Saudi Arabia for this transformation, while the majority of countries, primarily developing nations, are not. "The UAE must now lead the world in the responsible, humanity-serving adoption of AI," Georgieva stated, while also sup-

porting other countries by investing in developing nations and emerging markets. The aim, she elaborated, is to support them in benefiting from this technology, but also "managing its negative potential consequences." WAM

Bitcoin hits \$50,000 for first time in two years

London, UK – Bitcoin saw its price hitting \$50,000 on Monday for the first time in more than two years.

The price of Bitcoin rose to as high as \$50,280 during the day, while it was up for a daily gain of 4.5% near \$50,200 – its highest level since December 2021.

Bitcoin saw its value increase more than 18% in the past seven days, according to data from CoinMarketCap, a digital asset price-tracking website.

The world's biggest cryptocurrency almost touched the \$49,000 level on January 11 – the day when the US Securities and Exchange Commission approved spot Bitcoin ETFs. The move allowed investors, especially financial institutions, to trade Bitcoin without owning it.

Ethereum, the world's biggest altcoin by market cap, was up 5.6% to \$2,640 at the same time, while some altcoins saw their prices rising as much as 17%.

The recent rally also pushed Bitcoin's market value closer to the \$1tn mark, a feat that was last seen in November 2021.

Anadolu Agency

UAE is committed to work with OPEC+ to ensure oil market stability: Minister

Dubai, UAE – Suhail bin Mohammed al Mazrouei, UAE's Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, said that the ministry is currently working on upgrading the UAE's electric vehicle (EV) system by adding new stations and concluding more partnerships with major global companies to turbocharge the sector's growth.

"This will increase the number of EVs used in the UAE and reduce the carbon footprint of the transportation sector," Mazrouei told the Emirates News Agency (WAM) on the sidelines of the World Governments Summit (WGS) 2024, which began today in Dubai.

"The Ministry aims to set fair prices for the private sector to incentivise it to invest in fast-charging EV stations, establishing the UAE among the world's top countries in terms of EV infrastructure and speed of charging."

Regarding his outlook on the global oil market in light of the ongoing global shifts, he said that the UAE is committed to working with OPEC+ partners to



Global oil market is vast and involves many variables and equations, including the geopolitical situations worldwide

SUHAIL AL MAZROUEI

study the market and make decisions that will ensure the stability of the global oil market.

He noted that the global oil market is vast and involves many variables and equations, including the geopolitical situations worldwide.

Mazrouei said that the World

Governments Summit 2024 is seeing widespread global interest, as evidenced by the remarkable turnout, from heads of state and government, industry leaders and experts, high-level officials and representatives of international companies from around the world.

China's free trade partners reach 29

Beijing, China – China has signed free trade agreements (FTAs) with 29 countries and regions as of the end of January this year. According to government data, the trade value between China and these partners accounts for about a third of the nation's total foreign trade value.

The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said China made new breakthroughs in both FTA negotiations and signings last year. In 2023, the country signed FTAs with Ecuador, Nicaragua and Serbia, as well as it signed a protocol to further upgrade the China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement and made substantial progress

in early FTA negotiations with Honduras.

According to the MOC, the China-Nicaragua FTA was China's first FTA to permit cross-border service trade and investment through a negative list.

Meanwhile, in the protocol to further improve the China-Singapore FTA, both parties made commitments to open services and investments through the negative list model, which would provide bigger market opportunities for investors and service providers on both sides while also facilitating cooperation in emerging sectors such as the digital economy.

The ministry said it would continue to advance the nation's high-standard free trade networks and expand zero-tariff policy coverage for goods exchanged this year. It will strive to promote the opening up of service trade and investment using the negative list model, and expand the opening up of sectors such as telecommunications and medical care. The ministry added that it will also incorporate high-standard economic and trade rules governing digital economy, green economy, standards and certification, as well as government procurement, into its new FTA negotiations.

Xinhua

FINCORP AL AMAL FUND			
AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023			
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2023			
Dear Unit holders, On behalf of the Investors' Committee, I hereby present to you the audited financial results of Fincorp Al Amal Fund (AIGF), for the year ended December 31, 2023.			
Fund Performance			
Figures in OMR	31-Dec-23	31-Dec-22	
Fund Income	873,095	(832,221)	
Fund Expenses	166,432	122,110	
Net Profit / (Loss)	706,663	(954,331)	
Figures in OMR			
Net Asset Value	4,598,221	4,237,976	
Units Outstanding	4,259,249	4,591,948	
Net Asset Value per unit	1.080	0.923	
Fund Performance (net of fees)	16.98%	-16.98%	
MSCI ACWI	20.09%	-19.80%	
Market 2023 Performance			
Following a weak fall and a low point in late October, stocks rallied in November on Federal Reserve indications that current rates are at or near the end of the current rate-hiking cycle. As December month ended, indications were that inflation was in a sustained retreat. The rate of inflation reached to near to half levels in 2023 from approximately 6.5% in December 2022 to 3.4% in December 2023 as measured by the Consumer Price Index. The resilience in the domestic jobs market led to healthier consumer spending which fuelled better than expected economic growth. As a result, both stock prices and long-term interest rates reversed the direction, and we experienced one of the most powerful rallies in Global Markets. However, China continued to be a drag on broad Emerging Markets performance. During Q4 2023, MSCI ACWI increased by 10.64%, Nasdaq up by 13.56% and S&P 500 up by 11.24% primarily attributed to Fed's acknowledgement of a path of rate cuts for the coming year. Growing excitement that central banks will cut interest rates sooner in 2024 than previously expected, resulted in an overall positive market sentiment. On the parallel basis, S&P GCC Composite increased during the Q4 2023 by 5.80% led by an incline of 5.85% registered in the month of December 2023 largely on account of outperformance of Saudi Stock Market.			
Dividend			
Considering the profits for the year, Fund proposes a cash dividend of 75 bz subject to the approval of the unit holders in the Annual General Meeting.			
Market Outlook			
Equity market has shown an impactful rally in November & December this year was largely driven by easing inflation, a resilient economy, strength in Artificial Intelligence sector, robust consumer spending and the prospect of lower interest rates. The Federal Reserve's signal that it will make three quarter-point cuts to the benchmark rate next year could add more fuel to the broader market's momentum in 2024. Inflation has fallen across the Developed Markets & Emerging markets after energy and food price drops, and the easing of supply chain disruption. Asia's growth should outperform that of developed markets owing to the export tailwind and stable domestic demand. China plus one theme, a business strategy to reduce dependence on China could benefit other emerging Asian economies such as India, Vietnam, Thailand, among others. Furthermore, Growth in the GCC countries remained remarkably resilient regardless the global economy experienced a slower growth rate, high interest rates, inflation and geopolitical tensions in 2023. The 2.8% contraction in oil sector activities in 2023, resulting from the successive oil production cuts by OPEC+, was largely offset by expansion in the non-oil sector. The fall in oil prices in 2023 has prompted OPEC countries led by Saudi Arabia to cut production. The lower supply along with higher demand generated by economic growth is expected to support oil prices in 2024.			
Pivotal scenarios which are on the radar			
+ Oil Sectors play through supply & demand (amidst of geopolitical wars) + Interest rate developments (possibly in Q1 or Q2 2024) + Corporate Earnings & Infra Developments for growth boost to Global Economy			
Investment Strategy			
Decisions of central banks about when and how quickly to start cutting interest rates will be one of the main dynamics for the global economy on the cards in the coming year. With forecast of interest rate cuts in 2024 & soft-landing scenario, we would build position in manufacturing/industrial well-positioned companies' stocks as they would unlock growth opportunities to accelerate earnings due to policy easing and post-pandemic supply chain improvements. Altogether, we would remain cautious yet optimistic to utilize volatility to hold investments in fundamentally quality names with revenue diversification & valuable appreciation.			
We look forward to further strategizing in the upcoming quarters on two main themes of investing into the manufacturing sectors of the equity markets being the under-performer during 2023 and offers a value investment going forward.			
In our view, Non-energy sectors have a significant up-side potential to drive overall growth with expansion of the Energy Sector for GCC Countries going forward. Tourism and renewables sectors will remain a key for diversification. This is broadly in line with a stable fiscal outlook.			
In Conclusion			
The Investors' Committee would like to express its appreciation and gratefulness to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and the Omani Government for providing a secure and stable economic environment focused on driving growth and continued prosperity for all.			
The Committee also wishes to thank the Capital Market Authority and Muscat Securities Market for their sustained and continued efforts in building a vibrant capital market and the management team for their diligence and dedication in managing the fund successfully in a challenging economic environment.			
On behalf of the Investors' Committee, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the unit holders for their continued support and confidence.			
On Behalf of the Investors' Committee			
Aymen bin Hamed Al Busaidi Chairman			
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION			
	31-Dec-23 RO	31-Dec-22 RO	
ASSETS			
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	4,470,182	3,793,820	
Receivables	213,262	359,440	
Cash and cash equivalents	185,159	108,484	
Total assets	4,868,603	4,261,744	
UNITHOLDERS' FUNDS			
Fund capital	4,259,249	4,591,948	
Retained earnings/ (accumulated losses)	338,972	(353,972)	
Total Unitholders' funds	4,598,221	4,237,976	
LIABILITIES			
Current liabilities			
Redemption payable	177,370	-	
Payables	5,550	6,858	
Due to related parties	87,462	16,910	
Total liabilities	270,382	23,768	
Total unitholders' funds and liabilities	4,868,603	4,261,744	
Net asset value per unit	1.080	0.923	
STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME			
	31-Dec-23 RO	31-Dec-22 RO	
INCOME			
Dividend income	134,582	79,970	
Realised gain / (loss) on sale of investments at fair value through profit or loss	331,788	(231,451)	
Unrealised gain / (loss) on investments at fair value through profit or loss	397,504	(699,390)	
Interest income	3,740	1,905	
Redemption charges	870	1,665	
Foreign exchange gain (net)	4,611	14,380	
Other income	-	700	
Total Income	873,095	(832,221)	
EXPENSES			
Management, performance, custodian, and fund administration fees	(117,141)	(85,601)	
General and administration expenses	(12,490)	(17,260)	
Brokerage commission expenses	(3,701)	(9,849)	
Investors' Committee's meeting attendance fees	(8,100)	(9,400)	
Investors' Committee's remuneration	(25,000)	-	
Total Expenses	(166,432)	122,110	
Net profit/ (loss) and total comprehensive income for the year	706,663	(954,331)	
Net profit / (loss) per unit	0.156	(0.202)	
Note: The complete accounts, either in Arabic and English as requested, will be sent by mail within 7 days of request to any unitholder who requests the Fund at the address: PO Box 782, PC 131, Sultanate of Oman, Tel : +968 24822327, Fax : +968 24822390			
P.O. Box 782, PC 131, Sultanate of Oman, Phone: (968) 24822327, Fax: (968) 24822390, E-mail: fincorp@fincorp.org, Website: www.fincorp.org			
FINCORP The Financial Corporation Co. SAOG			
ادارة الأصول وساطة تمويل الشركات والاستشارات بحوث Asset Management Brokerage Corporate Finance and Advisory Research			

Abraj showcases innovation and strategic growth at IPTC 2024

Abraj Energy Services, Oman's leading provider of oil and gas services, is participating in the ongoing International Petroleum Technology Conference (IPTC 2024, being hosted by Aramco in Al Dhahran, Saudi Arabia).

The event, which opened on Monday, marks a pivotal moment for Abraj as it showcases its leadership, innovation, and strategic partnerships in the oil and gas sector.

With a commanding 28% share in Oman's drilling market and over 15% in key well services as of 2023, Abraj Energy Services has solidified its position as a leader in the industry.

"Our participation at IPTC aims to exchange knowledge with the industry leaders in the energy sector. Hence, it aligns with our strategic expansion and growth plans for the regional and global markets," said Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services.

"Our exceptional market share, international alliances and partnerships, and operational excellence demonstrate our dedication to superiority and strategic vision. We're not just meeting industry standards; we're redefining them," he added.

Abraj's strategic partnerships with Saudi Arabian Chevron, Kuwait Gulf Oil Company, and TotalEnergies for drilling services in early 2023 clearly indicate the company's aspirations to extend its regional presence and contribute towards energy security



and economic growth at both local and global levels.

"Our human capital and industrial resources support our vision to be the energy market leader for our services. We are committed to adapting to environmental and innovative ad-

vancements to revolutionise the sector," Hamhami concluded.

Abraj's commitment to excellence and efficiency is reflected in delivering more than 250 wells per year within the performance targets of our clients while maintaining unparalleled safety per-

formance for over ten years.

"Our prequalification as an operator for Aramco and entry into the Saudi market is a significant strategic achievement for Abraj, strengthening our competitive advantage in the region," said Salah al Harthi, Business De-

velopment Director at Abraj.

Abraj's innovative approach is evident in its introduction of Integrated Fracturing services, a first in the MENA region by a local company, and its active participation in research and development. These efforts under-

score Abraj's commitment to pioneering solutions that address the industry's evolving needs. Abraj Energy Services continues to lead in operational excellence, innovation, and sustainability, setting the standard for the future of the energy sector.

Oman-France Clean Energy Forum to be held on Feb 22

As part of the ongoing French Weeks 2024, the Omani French Friendship Association (OFA) is organising a forum on clean energy on February 22.

The Oman-France Clean Energy Forum will take place at Crowne Plaza OCEC from 8am, followed by lunch at 12.30pm, the organisers informed.

"We are thrilled to announce the participation of leading companies in the clean energy sector. Additionally, we are honoured to have H E Salim Nasser al Afri, Minister of Energy and Minerals, in attendance to deliver the opening speech," they added.

French Ambassador H E Veronique Aulagnon will attend the conference as guest of honour. The conference will focus on how to strengthen the bilateral dialogue between France and Oman, while accelerating the energy transition. Several recognised experts from France and Oman will share their views on the clean energy sector.

The forum will tackle three main topics, viz, clean energy supply chain in Oman context; legislation and certification; and financing of large clean energy projects.

Anyone interested to attend, may contact Myriam Elias, the manager and coordinator at OFA, through omani.french.friendship@gmail.com



Sayyid Ahmed al Busaid

Al Busaidy, Mansoor Jamal & Co expands partnership

Leading Omani law firm, Al Busaidy, Mansoor Jamal & Co (AMJ), has appointed Sayyid Ahmed Said Hilal al Busaid as a new partner in its Corporate, Commercial and Regulatory Department.

Sayyid Busaid has a broad range of experience in corporate commercial, regulatory advisory, Capital Market and Mergers & Acquisitions and advises his clients across a wide-ranging spectrum of sectors.

"We are delighted to welcome Sayyid Ahmed al Busaid into our partnership," said Mansoor Jamal Malik, managing partner.

"His appointment to the partnership is a testament to the success we have had in advisory work on all regulatory matters. This demonstrates our commitment to support fast-paced economic growth and development in Oman. It boosts our capability to respond to the business community's need for quality legal services at a time of increasing complexity and sophistication of transactions, products and the developing regulatory framework."

OSHRM organises its 7th annual conference in OCEC

The seventh annual conference of the Omani Society for Human Resources Management (OSHRM) began at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center in Muscat on Tuesday under the aegis of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, the Governor of Muscat.

The conference is the largest gathering of national and international human resources experts, a release stated.

By organising this conference, the association seeks to support the government's efforts in devising solutions related to human resources and bringing in the best international practices.

As well as keeping pace with technological developments that



enable strategic decision-making, talent management, and support of innovation.

The meeting addressed a number of topics, most notably are the leading the artificial intel-

ligence revolution and its impact on the future of jobs, artificial intelligence ethics, and the role of governance and policies in the age of artificial intelligence, a release stated.

Amitabh Bachchan inaugurates Kalyan Jewellers' 250th global showroom

Kalyan Jewellers, one of the largest and most-trusted jewellery brands recently announced the launch of its first showroom in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India which was inaugurated by the company's brand ambassador Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan.

The opening ceremony marked the momentous milestone of the company's 250th showroom globally, a release stated.

T S Kalyanaraman, managing director of Kalyan Jewellers along with the executive directors Rajesh Kalyanaraman and Ramesh Kalyanaraman were present at the inauguration.

The new showroom promises a luxurious shopping experience with an extensive array of exquisite jewellery designs in a world-class ambience.

The city of Ayodhya came to a standstill as crowds jostled to catch a glimpse of the iconic superstar.

"I am thrilled and honoured to



The new showroom promises a luxurious shopping experience with an extensive array of exquisite jewellery designs in a world-class ambience

be part of the grand celebrations marking the launch of Kalyan Jewellers' 250th showroom globally," said Bachchan, while addressing a huge crowd.

With a rich legacy spanning over three decades, Bachchan said, Kalyan Jewellers has consistently redefined the jewellery industry through pioneering ini-

tiatives. "It fills me with pride to be associated with this iconic brand for over a decade. The jewellery brand is firmly grounded on the pillars of trust, transparency, and customer-centricity. I am confident that the patrons here will warmly embrace and wholeheartedly support this distinguished jewellery brand."

Talking about the 250th showroom launch, Ramesh

Kalyanaraman said, "As we inaugurate our 250th showroom, we extend gratitude to our customers, partners and employees, who have been an integral part of this three-decade long journey that has been marked with trust and transparency. Their unwavering support has been integral to our remarkable three-decade journey, characterized by principles of trust and transparency. This significant milestone not only reflects our commitment to crafting exquisite jewellery but also emphasises our dedication to fostering enduring relationships with patrons nationwide. At Kalyan Jewellers, we have made significant advancements in building a holistic ecosystem, ensuring a service-backed shopping experience for our patrons. As we move ahead, our customer-centric approach remains key to our continued growth, building upon the very essence that defines our brand."

He further added, "Considering the prominence of Ayodhya,

we have introduced curated designs as part of our temple jewellery collection - Nimah. This enhanced Nimah collection, is a celebration of our rich heritage, cleverly reimagined through contemporary designs, adorned with precious stones. The revamped collection pays an ode to the timeless narratives of Indian mythology. We believe this upgraded collection will seamlessly complement our existing brand portfolio, resonating widely, especially among our clientele."

The showroom will stock Kalyan's popular house brands, including Muhurat (Wedding Jewellery Line), Mudhra (Handcrafted Antique Jewellery), Nimah (Temple Jewellery), Glo (Dancing Diamonds), Ziah (Solitaire-like Diamond Jewellery), Anokhi (Uncut Diamonds), Hera (Daily Wear Diamonds), Rang (Precious Stones Jewellery), and the recently launched Lila (Coloured Stones and Diamond Jewellery).

INEOS Grenadier-a rugged revolution for off-road excellence in Oman

MHD Automobiles LLC has introduced the INEOS Grenadier - one of the most celebrated off-road capable SUVs - to Oman's dynamic and adventurous market.

'INEOS Grenadier will redefine the off-road experience for enthusiasts and explorers alike by combining rugged resilience with cutting-edge engineering,' MHD stated.

INEOS Grenadier is inspired by iconic off-road vehicles of the past while incorporating modern technology. Its design pays homage to classic 4x4s, blending

The Grenadier is not just a vehicle; it's an embodiment of our dedication to providing the Omani market with a resilient and trustworthy companion for every adventure

MOHSIN HANI AL BAHRANI

timeless aesthetics with state-of-the-art technology, setting a new standard in the world of adventure.

"Today marks a significant milestone as we proudly introduce the INEOS Grenadier in Oman," said Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles LLC.

"With its unparalleled off-road capabilities, rugged design, and commitment to reliability, the Grenadier is not just a vehi-



cle; it's an embodiment of our dedication to providing the Omani market with a resilient and trustworthy companion for every adventure."

The vehicle has been engineered to conquer any terrain, from the challenging dunes of the Wahiba Sands to the rugged

mountains of Jebel Shams. Its versatile design ensures optimal performance in diverse conditions, making it the perfect companion for Oman's varied landscapes.

Built with a robust ladder-frame chassis and advanced suspension, the INEOS Grenadier

promises durability and reliability. The vehicle's high ground clearance and approach/departure angles enhance its off-road capabilities, making it a true off-road champion.

The vehicle boasts of a powerful drivetrain, ensuring ample torque and horsepower for tack-

ling steep inclines and challenging landscapes. Whether navigating rocky trails or sandy expanses, this vehicle delivers a performance that meets the demands of Oman's diverse terrain.

'The Grenadier might be rugged, reliable, uncompromising 4X4. But it is also so much

more. It is comfortable. It's versatile. It's balanced to drive both on road and off,' the company asserted.

Inside, the Grenadier offers a thoughtfully designed and comfortable cabin. With ample cargo space and intelligent storage solutions, it caters to the needs of

adventurers who require both functionality and comfort on their journeys.

The vehicle incorporates cutting-edge technology, including advanced safety features, a user-friendly infotainment system, and connectivity options. This ensures a seamless and enjoyable driving experience, both on and off the road.

The introduction of the INEOS Grenadier witnessed the presence of Willeke and Alexander, a Dutch couple currently embarking on an extraordinary journey from the Netherlands to Australia in their Grenadier XO.

Making a stop in the scenic landscapes of Oman, they shared their experience, stating, "As we traverse the globe, our priority is comfort on every terrain, a quality the INEOS Grenadier delivers effortlessly. With its authentic old-school design and a best-in-class engine, we are assured that we won't find ourselves stranded in any remote corners of the world during our travels."

Their stories can be followed on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/exploersoverland/>).

"We believe the INEOS Grenadier will set new standards, redefine exploration, and truly resonate with those who seek excellence in their off-road journeys," CEO Mohsin Hani al Bahrani added.

Meethaq Islamic Banking offers world-class services

Meethaq Islamic Banking, from Bank Muscat, solidifies its dedication to financial inclusion with a progressive savings account. This account is designed to provide customers with a range of sharia'a compliant product and services, aligning seamlessly with Meethaq's ongoing commitment to excellence.

Meethaq encourages customers to open a savings account that cater to various customer segments, including the elderly who can conveniently receive their social benefits while enjoying an array of various advantages. Demonstrating leadership in customer-focused solutions, the savings account helps customers achieve their long-term objectives and also



contributes to fostering a robust savings culture in Oman.

Key features of the Meethaq savings account include a competitive rate credited to the cus-

tomers' account on a monthly basis, no minimum balance requirement for profit eligibility, free life Takaful for customers maintaining an average balance

of RO30,000, no minimum balance fee and Debit Card with a daily cash withdrawal limit of RO600 on local ATMs.

Moreover, customers benefit

from the convenience of managing their accounts seamlessly through 24x7 electronic banking services, enjoy global purchases at millions of Visa endorsed shopping outlets, pay bills for electricity, water, telephone, internet and school fees.

Opening a Meethaq account is a hassle-free experience, supported by a straightforward documentation process and the flexibility of multiple currencies, including Omani riyal, US dollar, UAE dirham and Great Britain pound. The account is based on the mudarabah contract, a form of sharia'a compliant partnership. All Meethaq products undergo a rigorous sharia'a compliance review and certification by the Sharia'a Supervisory Board.

Ooredoo named 'Best CSR Initiative Oman 2024' at Global Business and Finance Magazine Awards

Ooredoo has won Best CSR Initiative Oman 2024 at the Global Business & Finance Magazine Awards, in recognition of its digital entrepreneurship training programmes - Springboard and SpringForward and their women's incubators.

These initiatives embody the company's commitment to young, local talent and provide the skills required for participants to become future business leaders and business owners, which aligns with Oman's Vision 2040 to diversify the economy and foster the growth of SMEs and SoHos.

Ooredoo has provided professional development opportunities for over 10,000 Omani women through their incubators.

And both Springboard (for women) and SpringForward (for men and women) connect individuals with professionals to unlock their potential and learn valuable skills to help achieve their personal and professional goals.

SpringForward was launched in 2018 after the success of Springboard; delivered by licensed trainer and head of CSR at Ooredoo, Ayesha al Shoiily.

The programmes develop

It has been awarded in recognition of its digital entrepreneurship training programmes and their women's incubators

Ford's genuine parts key to stress-free experience

Ford vehicles are renowned for their attractive designs, inspiring safety features, advanced technology and dependability which makes them a popular choice for a wide base of customers.

'To maximise the joy of owning a Ford and making experiences memorable it is always best to choose Ford's genuine parts for maximum satisfaction,' the company asserted. 'Ford's

genuine parts are specially manufactured to keep your Ford running in the finest form, far longer than non-genuine parts. Moreover, Ford Genuine Parts are strongly recommended by Ford Motor Company,' it added.

Ford's genuine parts are designed to perfectly fit your Ford vehicle encouraging them to perform better at all times. Besides this the wear and tear compared



to non-genuine parts is much lesser, thereby giving owners multiple opportunities to save. In comparison, non-genuine parts offer temporary opportunity to save, but in the long run it turns out to be a bad choice. 'Ford's genuine parts are manufactured according to strict specifications and have undergone extensive laboratory and on-road testing,' the company added.

Sohar International receives JP Morgan's awards for Swift Fund Transfers

Sohar International, Oman's fastest-growing bank, has earned the prestigious JP Morgan Chase Bank Global Clearing Quality Recognition Awards (MT103 and MT202).

These accolades acknowledge the bank's high-quality procedures in SWIFT-based fund transfers, with nearly 99.40% of payments processed seamlessly. This recognition underscores Sohar International's commitment to operational efficiency and technological advancement

in electronic payment services for a diverse clientele, including individuals and institutions.

Commenting on this achievement, Hamood al Sawai, Chief Operating Officer at Sohar International, said, "We are honoured to receive the JP Morgan Quality Recognition Awards, underscoring our dedication to scaling up growth with excellence. This confirms Sohar International's operational excellence and high-quality services, particularly in collaboration with correspon-



dent banks. We remain committed to providing top-notch services while upholding the highest international compliance standards."

The MT103 and MT202 are Straight-Through Processing (STP) mechanisms that offer significant advantages to financial service providers. These benefits include substantially shortened processing cycles, diminished settlement risk, and decreased operating costs. These transactions make use of contemporary

electronic instruction systems like SWIFT, and each numbered Message Type (MT) is designed for a specific purpose.

Since 1997, J.P. Morgan has annually acknowledged the foremost US Dollar clearing clients who exhibit outstanding operational excellence and achieve remarkable STP results in SWIFT payments. Over the years, recipients of this prestigious accolade have demonstrated unmatched transaction-processing quality, resulting in heightened opera-

tional efficiencies, accelerated payment timelines, and substantial cost savings. To attain such a remarkable milestone, Sohar International has remained invested in state-of-the-art automation systems and modern technology platforms that seamlessly integrate with its financial processes. A dedicated workforce that undergoes continuous training and development to maintain a high level of professional competence complements this tactical approach.

Indonesia: Presidential election today

Latest polls from multiple agencies show that support for the Prabowo-Gibran pair continues to rise

Jakarta, Indonesia - Indonesia's 2024 presidential election will be held on Wednesday. The latest polls from multiple agencies showed that the support for the pair of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka continues to rise, exceeding 50 per cent, having a chance to win directly in the first round of voting. However, the other two candidate combinations were still seeking support from voters before the election campaign ended on Saturday, hoping to drag the election into a run-off.

Prabowo-Gibran pair
Indonesia holds a general election every five years to elect the president and vice president. Candidates for the posts run in pairs. The three combinations running for the 2024 election are: Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto and Mayor of Surakarta Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the eldest son of incumbent Indonesian President Joko Widodo; former Governor of Central Java Ganjar Pranowo and former Coordinating Minister of Political, Legal and Security Affairs Mohammad Mahfud Mahmodin, and former Governor of Jakarta Anies Baswedan and Chairman of the National Awakening Party Muhaimin Iskandar. Surveys from polling agencies showed that the support rate for



Staff members carry ballot boxes during the distribution of election materials ahead of general election in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Tuesday (Xinhua)

By combining the survey results, the British journal The Economist said that as of January 28, Prabowo and Gibran had an average support rate of 53%, leading by a large margin

Prabowo's combination has exceeded 50 per cent. By combining the survey results, the British journal The Economist said that as of January 28, Prabowo and

Gibran had an average support rate of 53 per cent, leading by a large margin, while that of the Anies' and Ganjar's combinations were respectively 20% and 19%.

According to the election rules, in order to be directly elected, the candidate combination must obtain more than half of the ballots in the first round of voting and secure more than 20 per cent of the votes in more than half of Indonesia's provinces and regions. If no group meets the requirements, a second round of voting will be held between the two groups of candidates with the most votes.

Adje Alfaraby, a senior researcher at the Indonesian Survey Institute, said that the support rate for Prabowo's combination continues to rise. If this trend can be maintained, Prabowo will likely win directly in the first round.

'Widodo's successor'
Prabowo is an important member of the current President Widodo's administration. He has

positioned himself as the president's successor and said that he will continue to promote Widodo's policies, thus winning the recognition of many supporters of the current administration. Meanwhile, Widodo and members of his administration were also helping Prabowo with his campaign, further increasing Prabowo's support rate. Five rounds of debates have been held ahead of the upcoming general election, with the presidential and vice-presidential candidates from the three pairs taking turns attending. The final debate on February 4 focused on social welfare, human resources, health, education and other issues. Analysts believe that compared with the other two presidential candidates, Prabowo's policy proposals are more concrete and practical, and have a certain appeal to voters. At the final debate, many cabinet members of the current administration were present to show their support for Prabowo. Almost all leaders from the nine parties of the Advanced Indonesia Coalition led by Prabowo were also present. Recently, the Widodo administration has been providing support to Prabowo's campaign. Since taking office as president in 2014, Widodo has led Indonesia to a path of steady development. Polls show that about 75 per cent

of Indonesian people are satisfied with his governance. During his working visit to Central Java a few days ago, the president dined with Prabowo at a well-known restaurant as a gesture to help Prabowo increase his exposure. **Suspense still lingers**
Although polls show that Prabowo's combination has a big lead in support rate, the first round of voting is not without any suspense. Lagging behind in the polls, Anies and Ganjar are still high-spirited. Before the campaign ended, they were conducting intensive activities across the country for the final sprint. Some well-known figures in Indonesian politics have recently come forward to express their support for the two groups. Former Trade Minister Thomas Lembong joined Anies' campaign team while the eldest son of Indonesia's founding President Sukarno stood for Ganjar. Analysts pointed out that with Prabowo currently leading the polls, Ganjar and Anies' strategy is to seek a run-off. Buhanuddin Muhtadi, executive director of the polling agency Indonesian Political Indicators, recently said that if Anies and Ganjar successfully form an alliance and integrate their supporters, Prabowo will face some new challenges. Xinhua

COP Presidencies Troika launched

Dubai, UAE - COP28 today launched a partnership with Azerbaijan and Brazil, who will host COP29 and COP30, respectively, to improve cooperation and continuity between current and future COP Presidencies, leading to increased climate action in support of 'Mission 1.5°C'. The partnership, known as The COP Presidencies Troika, marks the first time that a current COP Presidency has been formally mandated to unite with two future presidencies to foster international cooperation to stimulate ambition. Dr Sultan bin Ahmed Al Jaber, Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and COP28 President, emphasised the importance of this partnership, stating: "The Troika represents critical and unprecedented collaboration to maintain momentum, lock in continuity and anchor implementation." The Troika, which means group of three, will help to ensure the delivery of the Presidencies' collective responsibilities and



support of global priorities, which in turn will transform agreement into action by government and non-government stakeholders. Speaking at the launch of the Troika, held in Expo City Dubai, the COP28 president said: "COP28 delivered a different, groundbreaking COP that culminated in The UAE Consensus. At COP28, Parties mobilised behind historic climate action through both the negotiations and their commitments to the Presidential Action Agenda. The Troika helps

ensure we have the collaboration and continuity required to keep the North Star of 1.5°C in sight - from Baku to Belém and beyond. "The breakthroughs we all achieved at COP28 must carry forward to COP29 and 30 - in ambitious nationally determined contributions, climate finance followed through, and accelerated implementation." An agreement for the three Presidencies to work together on a 'Roadmap to Mission 1.5°C' was mandated by the UAE Consensus. Supported by all 198

Parties, this agreement must now be actioned under the COP Presidencies Troika. The agreement stated that the partnership will 'significantly enhance international cooperation and the international enabling environment to stimulate ambition in the next round of nationally determined contributions, with a view to enhancing action and implementation over this critical decade and keeping 1.5°C within reach'. WAM

Finland to 'remain calm' amid Trump's NATO rhetoric: Stubb

London, UK - Finland's president-elect Alexander Stubb said Monday that his country should stay calm despite former US President Donald Trump suggesting last week that America would not protect NATO members against a Russian attack unless they spend enough on defence, local media reported. The Nordic country should remain focused on its NATO membership following Trump's strong comments in which he warned NATO allies that he would 'encourage' Russia to attack any member of the alliance that does not meet the target of spending two percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defence, Stubb said at a press conference. "I think at this stage, it is best to remain calm and focus on building our NATO membership," said Stubb, adding US election campaigns are 'very different from Finnish elections, and the



President-elect Alexander Stubb rhetoric used is quite a lot stronger'. Trump, who remains the Republican front-runner in the 2024 US presidential race, was widely criticised for his remarks, with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg saying this 'undermines all of our security'. Finland became the 31st member of NATO last April, ending decades of military non-alignment as the result of Russia's war on Ukraine. Stubb, a pro-European and strong supporter of Ukraine, is

due to take office on March 1 and will be replacing incumbent Sauli Niinisto, known for his role in maintaining close ties with Russia. "Before Russia ends its war of aggression against Ukraine, it will be very difficult to have a relationship with Russia," said Stubb, who is known for his anti-Russian stance. A former prime minister, Stubb became the country's 13th president after defeating former Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto in Sunday's election, which is widely seen as historically the most important following Finland's entry into NATO and its strong stance against Russia. The country's accession into NATO prompted a sharp response from the Kremlin, with Russian President Vladimir Putin accusing the West of 'dragging' Finland into the military alliance and creating a rift between Moscow and Helsinki. Anadolu Agency

NZ: Trains in Auckland cancelled due to heat

Auckland, New Zealand - Commuters in New Zealand's Auckland city were faced with disruptions and travel delays as authorities cancelled multiple trains in the city due to soaring summer heat, which led to 'hot tracks', local media reported. Kiwi Rail, which owns the tracks on Auckland's Rail Network imposed speed restrictions in place as temperature of the tracks reached 48 degrees Celsius in some places leading to the cancellation of many train services, including those during peak hours, on Monday. A spokesman from KiwiRail, was cited by the New Zealand Herald as saying that

heat causes the steel in the rail lines to move if the trains pass over them too quickly. "This means trains must go much more slowly in hot conditions. Trains are often cancelled to prevent a major backlog," he said. KiwiRail general manager for metros Jon Knight was cited by the news daily as saying that the temporary speed restrictions are put in place once the steel rails reached 40C and lifted once the track dropped below this temperature. While the air temperature in Auckland was around 25 degree Celsius, the tracks were a lot hotter. ANI

Trump urges SC to block ruling in January 6 case

Washington, US - Former US President Donald Trump urged the Supreme Court to suspend the lower court ruling that he does not have presidential immunity from prosecution, CNN reported on Monday. According to the report, Trump called on the apex court to temporarily block a scathing and unanimous decision from the DC Circuit handed down last week, flatly rejecting his claims of immunity from election subversion charges brought by special counsel Jack Smith. "Conducting a months-long criminal trial of President Trump at the height of election season will radically disrupt President Trump's ability to campaign against President Biden," Trump's attorneys wrote in their request. Earlier this month, a federal appeals court ruled that the



Ex-US president and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump

former US President is not immune from prosecution in the January 6 election subversion case, CNN reported. Trump is not immune from prosecution for alleged crimes he committed during his presidency to reverse the 2020 election results, a federal appeals court said on Tuesday.

The former president argued that the conduct special counsel Jack Smith charged him over was 'part of his official duties as president and therefore shield him from criminal liability'. "For the purpose of this criminal case, former President Trump has become citizen Trump, with

all of the defences of any other criminal defendant. But any executive immunity that may have protected him while he served as President no longer protects him against this prosecution," the court stated. The ruling from the three-judge panel was unanimous. The panel that issued the ruling comprised two judges--J Michelle Childs and Florence Pan, who were appointed by Joe Biden and one, Karen LeCraft Henderson, who was appointed by George HW Bush, as reported by CNN. "It would be a striking paradox if the president, who alone is vested with the constitutional duty to take care that the laws be faithfully executed, were the sole officer capable of defying those laws with impunity," the ruling stated. The judges also rejected Trump's claim that his criminal

indictment would have a 'chilling effect' on future presidents. Trump faces four counts from Smith's election subversion charges, including conspiring to defraud the United States and to obstruct an official proceeding. The former president has pleaded not guilty. The former president, who is running for a second term in the presidential elections later this year, argued that he was working to 'ensure election integrity' as part of his official capacity as president, and therefore he is immune from criminal prosecution for trying to overturn the election results. His lawyers, too, asserted that because Trump was acquitted by the Senate, he is protected by double jeopardy and cannot be charged by the Justice Department for the same conduct. ANI



Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks at the summit in Dubai on Tuesday

Turkish President Erdogan urges to protect UNRWA

Dubai, UAE - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday urged all 'conscientious' countries to protect the UN agency for Palestinian refugees or UNRWA, which he said provided a 'lifeline for six million refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine'.

Speaking at the World Governments Summit in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, Erdogan said: "I would like to express our regret for the growing character assassinations on the United Nations Agency for Palestinian Refugees." About a dozen of its staffers have been accused of involvement in the October 7 Hamas attack on Gaza. The agency has already ordered an investigation of the allegations, but numerous countries have cut off its funding, risking a humanitarian crisis.

Looking at the deep causes of the Gaza conflict, Erdogan said: "Every step taken will remain incomplete unless an independent, sovereign, and geographically integrated Palestinian state is es-

tablished within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital."

"If Israel wants lasting peace, it must stop pursuing its expansionist ambitions and accept the existence of an independent Palestinian state," said Erdogan.

He said that Israel, viewing itself as outside international law, has maintained its policies of 'occupation, usurpation, destruction, and massacre for decades'.

"We will never leave our Palestinian brothers abandoned, helpless, or alone," he added.

Erdogan arrived in the United Arab Emirates early on Tuesday as part of a two-day visit to attend the summit.

He will address the three-day summit, with this year's theme 'Shaping Future Governments', which is bringing together state and government officials and representatives of international organisations, the private sector, academia, civil society, think tanks, the media and business-people from various countries.

Anadolu Agency

'Too many' killed in Gaza have been innocent civilians: Biden

Biden was addressing a joint press conference with Jordan's King Abdullah II at the White House

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden said on Monday that 'too many' Palestinians killed in Gaza have been innocent civilians, renewing concern over Israel pressing ahead with a military operation in the city of Rafah following air strikes.

"Too many of the over 27,000 Palestinians killed in this conflict have been innocent civilians, including thousands of children," Biden said during a joint press conference with Jordan's King Abdullah II at the White House.

Biden also noted that hundreds of thousands of people have no access to food, water or other basic services and many families have lost not just one but many relatives.

"It's heartbreaking," he said.

"Every innocent life lost in Gaza is a tragedy. Just as every innocent life lost in Israel is a tragedy as well.

"We pray for those lives taken, both Israeli and Palestinian, and for the grieving families left behind," he added.

Biden also said the US is working on a hostage deal between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas, which would 'bring an immediate and sustained period of common good to Gaza for at least six weeks, which we could



US President Joe Biden renewed concern over Israel pressing ahead with a military operation in the city of Rafah

We must urgently and immediately work to ensure the sustainable delivery of sufficient aid to Gaza through all possible entry points and mechanisms

KING ABDULLAH II

then take the time to build something more enduring'.

A major military operation should not proceed in Rafah 'without a credible plan for ensuring the safety and support of more than one million people sheltering there', he said, reiter-

ating previous US calls.

Noting that many people in Rafah have been displaced as they fled the violence, Biden said 'they need to be protected'.

"We've also been clear from the start. We oppose any forced displacement of Palestinians

from Gaza," he stressed.

Jordan's King calls for cease-fire

Jordan's King Abdullah II also expressed concern over Israel's plan to attack Rafah, saying 'it is certain to produce another humanitarian catastrophe'.

"The situation is already unbearable for over a million people who have been pushed into Rafah since the war started," he said, adding they cannot stand by and let this continue.

"We need a lasting cease-fire now. This war must end," he

stressed.

"We must urgently and immediately work to ensure the sustainable delivery of sufficient aid to Gaza through all possible entry points and mechanisms," he added.

Senate clears package for Israel

Meanwhile, the US Senate cleared a series of procedural hurdles on Monday for a US\$95.3bn aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan.

Senators voted 66-33, exceeding a 60-vote margin to send the bill to the Republican-led House.

House Speaker Mike Johnson released a statement on the Senate's 'failure to address the most critical aspect of national security supplemental legislation'.

"Now, in the absence of having received any single border policy change from the Senate, the House will have to continue to work its own will on these important matters. America deserves better than the Senate's status quo," Johnson said on X.

The measure includes US\$60bn in funding for Ukraine, while another US\$14bn would go to support Israel and US military operations in the region and more than US\$8bn would go to support US partners in the Indo-Pacific region, including Taiwan. It also allots nearly US\$10bn for humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, Israel and Gaza.

Voting no, Independent Senator Bernie Sanders said the bill provides Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu US\$10bn more 'in unrestricted military aid for his horrific war against the Palestinian people. That is unconscionable'.

Anadolu Agency

Russian shelling damages power plant, says Ukraine

Kyiv, Ukraine - The Ukrainian Energy Ministry on Tuesday said a thermal power plant in the country's southeastern Dnipropetrovsk region was 'significantly damaged' due to Russian shelling.

"On the night of February 13, one of the thermal power plants in the Dnipropetrovsk region was fired upon. As a result of the shelling, a large-scale fire occurred, which the emergency services managed to put out in just a few hours. After the inspection, significant damage to the equipment was found," the ministry said in a statement.

The power units of the plant were turned off, the statement said, adding that the station was unloaded and stopped producing electricity.

It further said that an overhead power line was also discon-



A thermal power plant in the country's southeastern Dnipropetrovsk region was 'significantly damaged', Ukrainian Energy Ministry said on Tuesday

nected, leading to short-term power outages for consumers.

"Currently, the liquidation of the consequences of the fire and clarification of the extent of damage is underway," the statement noted.

Dnipropetrovsk Governor Serhii Lysak also reported on Telegram that an energy facility in the region was attacked, resulting in a fire that was later extinguished.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's Air Force claimed that it downed 16 Russian drones amid an attack over the country's Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions.

Russia and Ukraine have exchanged accusations over airstrikes against each other that have intensified since late December.

Anadolu Agency

Israeli shelling kills 5 fighters in Lebanon

Beirut, Lebanon - Five more fighters from Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad were killed on Tuesday from Israeli shelling in southern Lebanon, the groups confirmed.

In a statement, Hezbollah mourned the loss of three of its fighters, saying they were killed 'on the road to Jerusalem', referring to the Palestinian struggle for freedom. With the latest casualties, the death toll of Hezbollah fighters killed since October has risen to 193.

The Islamic Jihad also confirmed the killing of two of its fighters, who it said were on a mission to southern Lebanon.

Israeli army started shelling the towns of Tayr Harfa, Aita al-Shaab, Rameh and others on the outskirts.

Tension has flared along the border between Lebanon and Israel amid intermittent exchange of fire between Israeli forces and Hezbollah, in the deadliest clashes since the two sides fought a full-scale war in 2006.

The border tension comes amid an Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip following a cross-border attack by Hamas on October 7.

Anadolu Agency

Azerbaijan carries out 'revenge' against cross-border fire by Armenia

Istanbul, Turkey - Baku early on Tuesday said it carried out a 'revenge operation' in response to a cross-border fire by Armenia a day earlier, injuring one Azerbaijani serviceman.

"As a result of the operation, the combat post of the Armenian Armed Forces near the Nerkin-And settlement of Gafan district, where our soldiers were fired upon yesterday (Monday), was completely destroyed, and the combat positions were silenced," said a statement by Azerbaijan's State Border Service.

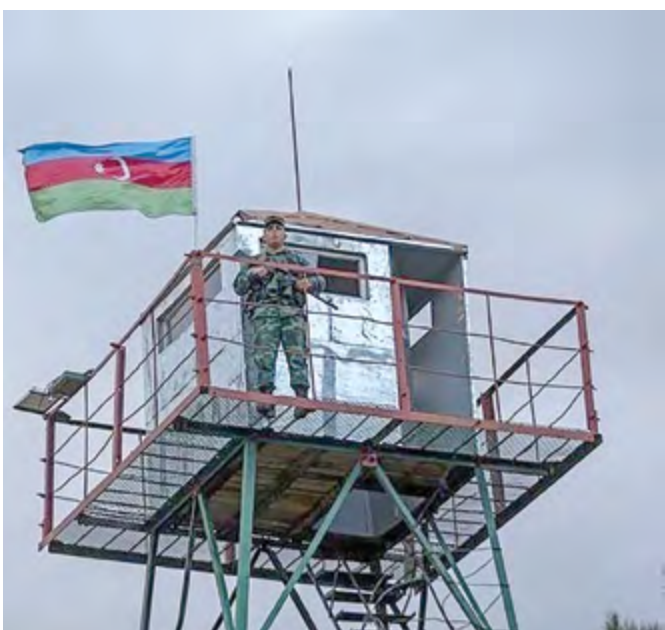
There are reports of serious casualties among the personnel of the destroyed combat post,

the statement noted, saying: "Every provocation of the Armenian side aimed at aggravating the operational conditions at the Azerbaijan-Armenia conditional state border will be answered with more serious and decisive measures from now on."

"The military and political leadership of Armenia is fully responsible for the incident," it added.

The Armenian Defense Ministry said four of its servicemen were killed and one injured.

Earlier, the Azerbaijani Defence Ministry also said its military positions in the country's northwestern Tovuz district



were fired on by Armenia late on Monday.

The operation came as Azerbaijan's State Border Service said on Monday that one of its soldiers was injured due to shots fired by Armenian forces toward the country's southwestern Zangilan district.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry defined the cross-border fire as a 'serious blow' to the peace process between Baku and Yerevan, saying such actions, in light of the stable situation in the region over the last four to five months, 'blatantly contradict' Armenia's peace messages.

"Moreover, such a provocation that was undertaken ex-

actly in the territories observed by the European Union Mission in Armenia raises serious concerns about the aims and purposes of this Mission," it added.

Relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia have been tense since 1991, when the Armenian military occupied Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan, and seven adjacent regions.

Azerbaijan liberated most of the region during the war in the fall of 2020, which ended with a Russian-brokered peace agreement, opening the door to normalisation.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

Chaos at Shambhu border as farmers march towards Delhi

Ambala, Haryana - The Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border witnessed chaotic scenes on Tuesday as the protesting farmers marching towards Delhi attempted to break police barricades.

Farmers were seen attempting to remove the cement barricade with their tractors as they tried to cross the Shambhu border. The police fired tear gas to disperse the protestors at the Shambhu border as they tried to breach the mutli-layered barricades.

The police have deployed concrete slabs, iron nails, barricades, barbed wires, police and paramilitary personnel at Kurukshetra in Haryana in view of the 'Delhi Chalo' march by the farmers. On security deployment at the Jharoda border, DCP Dwarka Ankit Singh said: "Section 144 CrPC is imposed in the city, tractor trolleys are not allowed in the city. Social media monitoring has also been done. Drone is an effective tool for security monitoring, we will use it."

Earlier in the day, Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee General Secretary Sarwan Singh Pandher said that all efforts were made in the meeting to find a solution to avoid a confrontation with the government adding that they anticipated a positive result.



Farmers are seen running after police personnel fire teargas shells at Shambhu border in Ambala on Tuesday (ANI)

Police fired tear gas to disperse the protestors at Punjab-Haryana border as they tried to breach the mutli-layered barricades

Union Minister Arjun Munda, in response to the farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march, emphasised the

necessity of time and deliberation to address the concerns raised by the farming community.

"We care about the interests of the farmers. It is not our concern if someone is doing politics over this issue. We have always been ready for talks and discussions and we are ready to do everything possible to find a solution to this issue."

Arjun Munda is among the team of ministers holding talks with the farmer leaders that also includes Food and Con-

sumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal, MoS Nityanand Rai and Punjab Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal.

The farmers have put forth 12 demands before the central government for which they're marching to Delhi.

The protest this time has been called by Sanyukt Kisan Morcha and Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee led by farmer union leaders Jagjeet Singh Dallewal and Sarwan Singh Pandher.

According to the protesting

farmers, the centre promised them better crop prices after which they ended the 2021 protest.

They are demanding to enact a law guaranteeing a minimum support price (MSP) for all crops, as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission report.

They are also demanding a complete debt waiver and a scheme to provide pensions to farmers and farm labourers.

The farmers have also urged to scrap the Electricity Amendment Bill 2020 and are demanding to reintroduce the Land Acquisition Act of 2013, ensuring consent from farmers and compensation at four times the collector rate.

Further, they are demanding to punish those involved in the Lakhimpur Kheri killings.

An appeal to provide 200 days of employment per year and a daily wage of Rs 700 under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) linking it with farming has also been made by the farmers.

Also, a demand to provide compensation to the families of farmers who died during the protests in 2021 and a job for any family member has been put in place.

ANI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a meeting with UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in Abu Dhabi, UAE on Tuesday (ANI)

PM Modi holds talks with UAE president

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan held a bilateral meeting, and several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were exchanged in their presence here on Tuesday.

"We have met five times in the last seven months, which is very rare. I have also got the opportunity to come here seven times... the way we have progressed in every field, there is a joint partnership between India and UAE in every field," said Modi during the meeting with the UAE president.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, and Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra were among the Indian delegations present in the meeting.

Earlier, upon his arrival at airport, Modi was welcomed by UAE President Al Nahyan. He also received a guard of honour.

Ahead of his departure, the prime minister took to social media platform X: "Eager to meet my brother, @Mohamed-BinZayed. Over the next two days, I will be visiting UAE and Qatar to attend various programmes, which will deepen India's bilateral relations with these nations."

Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal took to X, emphasising that Modi's first leg of the visit in the UAE will entail engagements with UAE leadership and community members, and the inauguration of BAPS Hindu Temple in Abu Dhabi. This visit marks the third by the PM to the Gulf country in past eight months, as per a statement by the Ministry of External Affairs Minister.

Apart from meeting with the UAE president Modi will also attend the World Government Summit 2024.

ANI

Open to have meeting with Kerala government, Centre informs SC

New Delhi - The Centre on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court that it is open for a meeting with the Kerala government to discuss the financial issues.

Attorney General R Venkatramani apprised the bench of justices Surya Kant and KV Vishwanathan that the Union Government is open to the meeting with the Kerala Government. AG Venkatramani also submitted that it came after giving due regard to suggestions made by the court regarding the meeting of the Centre and the state government.

Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal for Kerala Government apprised the court that a delegation from Kerala can arrive on Wednesday and the meeting could take place. AG assured to arrange the meeting.



A view of the Supreme Court of India building, in New Delhi (ANI)

The court asked the Centre and the State governments to identify the issues of discussion among themselves. The court posted the matter for further hearing next week.

Earlier in its affidavit, the Ker-

ala Government said that Central Government accounts for approximately 60 per cent of the total debt or outstanding liabilities of India.

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

Kerala's financial health and debt situation have attracted adverse observations from successive Finance Commissions as well as the CAG and it is one of the most financially unhealthy states as its fiscal edifice has been diagnosed with several cracks. The AG said in a note submitted before the court.

ANI

THE BURNING TRAIN



People try to douse a huge fire that broke out at a train coach stationed at Pune Railway Junction yard, in Pune on Tuesday (ANI)

Pakistan: Candidates of former PM Khan to merge with 2 other parties

Karachi, Pakistan - Independent winning candidates backed by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party of incarcerated former Prime Minister Imran Khan will merge with two religiopolitical parties to claim stakes in federal and provincial governments, the PTI announced on Tuesday.

Party spokesman Rauf Hassan told a news conference that candidates supported by his party will 'form a coalition' with Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen, a Shia Muslim political group, at the federal level and in Punjab province.

It will also merge with the mainstream religiopolitical party Jamaat-e-Islami in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Hassan added.

In general elections last week, no single party in the South

Asian nation was able to win enough seats to form a government on its own, triggering a flurry of coalition talks between the sides.

In the overall results of February 8 general elections, independent candidates, mostly backed by Khan's PTI party, won the majority of seats - 101 - in the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament.

However, they do not have the required numbers to form a government on their own.

The two other main parties, ex-Premier Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) have started talks for a possible coalition government.

They won 75 and 54 out of the 266 direct National Assembly seats, respectively.



The National Assembly has a total of 336 seats, with 60 reserved for women and 10 for religious minorities.

These are proportionately

distributed among parties according to their election performance. Any party that wants its leader as prime minister will need 169 votes in the house.

A party requires 169 seats to form the government with a simple majority, which is currently impossible for any of the mainstream parties without the

support of smaller groups.

To form the central government, the PML-N is trying to woo the MQM-P, a regional party mainly based in the country's commercial capital Karachi, which has 17 lawmakers in the new parliament.

province.

In Balochistan particularly, a coalition government is usually formed with the help of multiple smaller parties.

However, in southern Sindh and northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provinces,

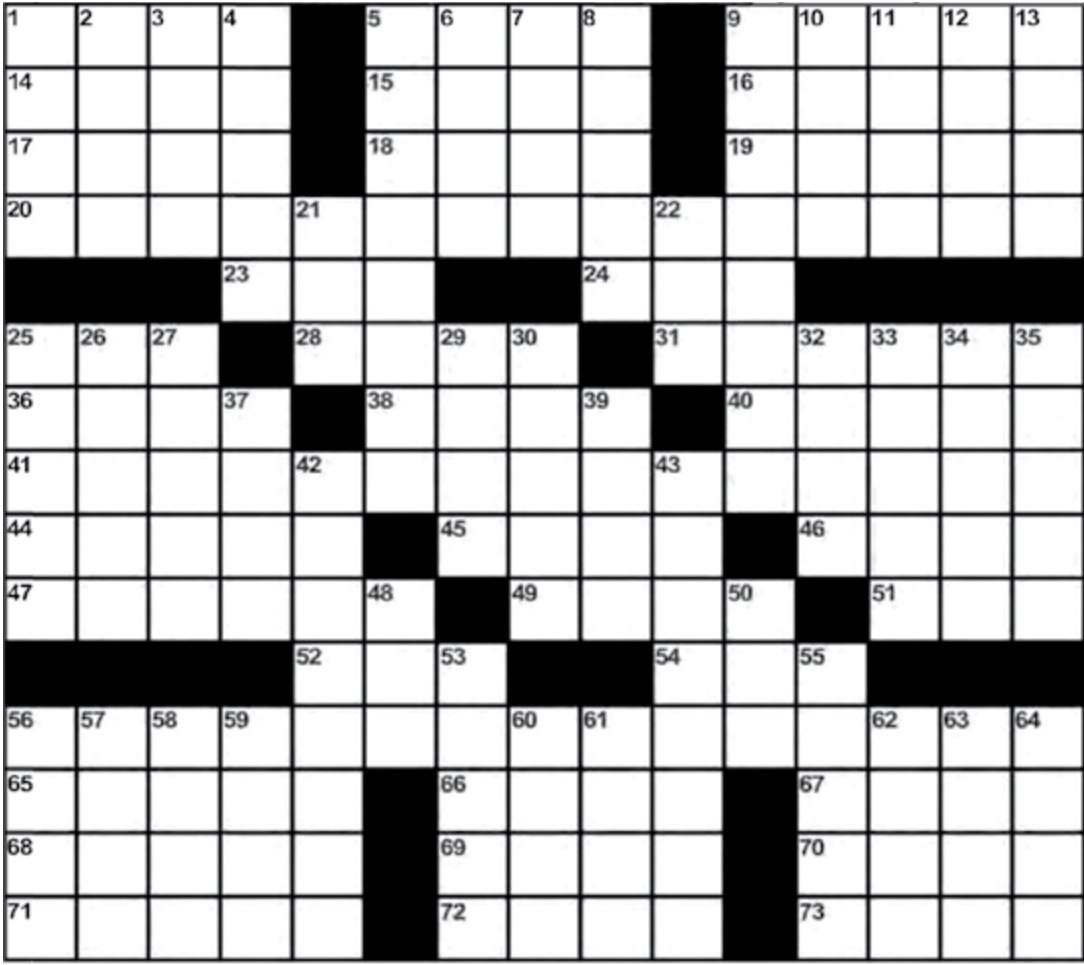
Two other main parties, Nawaz Sharif's PML-N and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's PPP have started talks for a possible coalition government

JUI, a mainstream religiopolitical party, and PML-Q, a splinter faction of PML-N, have won only four and three seats in the National Assembly, respectively, but their votes will still be decisive for the formation of governments, mainly in the southwestern Balochistan and Pakistan's largest Punjab

the PPP and the PTI-backed independents are in a comfortable position to form the provincial governments for a fourth and third consecutive term, respectively. In KP, PTI affiliates have won a two-thirds majority, but need to join a party to form the government.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) _ sapiens
 - 5) Applaud
 - 9) Asparagus unit
 - 14) Homecoming guest, briefly
 - 15) Make over
 - 16) Prefix for "sonic" or "violet"
 - 17) Part of a Monopoly set
 - 18) Bun warmer
 - 19) Maple bar or apple fritter
 - 20) President who was the son of a president
 - 23) Break bread
 - 24) Ages and ages
 - 25) What a pilot might announce, briefly
 - 28) Classroom assistant
 - 31) Rub the wrong way
 - 36) Drop, to an editor
 - 38) Congers
 - 40) Police car's alarm
 - 41) President on the \$1,000 bill
 - 44) Like a vampire's face, stereotypically
 - 45) Sky box?
 - 46) Dietary, in ads
 - 47) Supplies with better weapons
 - 49) Dress in India
 - 51) Affirmative action?
 - 52) When dark comes o'er the land
 - 54) Museum exhibit
 - 56) President associated with peanuts
 - 65) Dickens' Heep
 - 66) Eight, on a sundial
 - 67) Jason's mythical ship
 - 68) Chop finely
 - 69) Occasional needle point?
 - 70) Barristers' accoutrements
 - 71) Walkways
 - 72) Dispatch, as a dragon
 - 73) Misplace
- DOWN**
- 1) Muslim pilgrimage
 - 2) Varied assortment
 - 3) Scads
 - 4) Signs of things to come
 - 5) Raker of chips
 - 6) Jeans name
 - 7) Yemeni port
 - 8) Explorer_ de Leon
 - 9) Ethiopian's neighbor
 - 10) Fail to tread lightly
 - 11) Volcano in Sicily
 - 12) Calla lily family
 - 13) Things to exterminate, to many
 - 21) Sine_ non
 - 22) Hither companion
 - 25) Painter Degas
 - 26) Far from long-winded
 - 27) Hello or goodbye
 - 29) Dealer's handful
 - 30) Clothing designer Perry
 - 32) Place for dead presidents?
 - 33) Coach
 - 34) Slow, musically
 - 35) Broke off
 - 37) "Be it_ so humble ..."
 - 39) Words before "date" or "trap"
 - 42) Entangles, as in a net
 - 43) Truthfulness
 - 48) Observe
 - 50) Nest egg feature
 - 53) Church parts
 - 55) It's a drag in fishing circles
 - 56) Checkers maneuver
 - 57) Opera highlight
 - 58) After-dinner confection
 - 59) A head
 - 60) 100 dinars
 - 61) "Mona_"
 - 62) Small band
 - 63) Baker's dozen?
 - 64) Gift on "The Bachelor"

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

If you think you can make peace between two people who've been bickering a lot lately, you're probably right. You can see through their bluster and you know that deep down inside they really like and respect each other. Now all you have to do is to convince them of this. Believe it or not, your word carries a lot of weight with each of them. So step in and say something today. Don't worry about being told to mind your own business. They are looking for a referee.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Amplifying the volume of romance in your life can be easy if you admit that romance doesn't just relate to a love relationship. Romance exists wherever there is beauty, wherever there is music, and wherever there are two people laughing at a private joke. You need to adjust your vision to include a wider view of what is romantic. Then you will start to see romance a lot more often. Cherish the way you relate to the world. Smell the roses. You're rushing around too much to notice the magic.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

There is a lot of genuine goodwill coming your way today, and it's going to give you the perfect happy little boost to start some new projects. You've got the spark and the attitude to get into planning a party, putting together a group outing, or just getting back to a hobby you haven't been able to enjoy for a while. People will put a smile on your face, even the grouchy ones who usually make you roll your eyes. You're seeing the best in everyone and they're still seeing the best in you!

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You've been excited about a new project or goal you want to get started on, but you haven't started it even though you've been talking about it for a long time now. People are starting to wonder if you're someone who follows through with their promises. It's time to get going and put your energy into making your ideas a reality. Put things in motion today. Because if you don't, you could get a reputation for being flaky. Don't risk it.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A friend may be experiencing some family problems right now, but helping them solve them is not your obligation. Do not encourage them to tell you all about it, because it's none of your business. Even if you think you know exactly what they need to do to get out of this mess, bite your tongue and let them deal with it on their own. Get involved and you could end up regretting it. There are details you are not aware of, so just stay out of it.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Creating new things will bring you an exceptional level of satisfaction today. You don't have to literally build something. Just use your mind and hands to create something that is unique to you. Cooking, painting, knitting, writing, even doing a few repairs around the house would be a great way to keep your mind and your body active. By tonight, you will find a great deal of satisfaction in seeing what you can accomplish all on your own.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Finding a balance in your life requires you to make a sacrifice from time to time, but when you give a little bit, you also get a bigger sense of ownership in the larger plan. Today, take another look at an argument you recently had with a loved one. You'll quickly see how the rift was caused by each person being too rigid and unwilling to see the other side of things. Call or message that person today and let them know that together you two can create a plan of action that will keep you both happy.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Try to be more expressive today in how you dress, how you speak, and even how you move. If you need some inspiration to do so, spend some time exploring different forms of art. You might even try one of them. You won't be a master right away, but learning a new creative skill will ignite your imagination in a very exciting way. Surrounding yourself with the people you love is another way to get your creative juices flowing. Their energy will give you unique ideas.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your friends are not always easy to please, and right now it might be starting to feel like you can never do right in their eyes. But you are giving too much, working too hard, and caring more than you need to. It's time to take stock of things. Ask yourself if it's really worth it to work so hard to read their minds. Then do what you want to do. Are these constant power struggles really the way you want to live your life with this person? Get it all out in the open and talk today.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Working with others could be very rewarding for you today, and it could result in some significant emotional growth. The conflicts between other people around you will bring out your inner diplomat and enable you to exercise your exceptional nurturing skills. You'll be the one to make people see the best in each other. You want to take care of your friends, which is a compassionate instinct you should cultivate by leading more groups.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Don't get frustrated if your matchmaking efforts haven't gone the way you wanted them to. If people get caught up in the moment and a few sparks of romance blow into something significant, that's wonderful, but if they don't, you can't force it. So try not to take things personally if the perfect meeting you had planned turns out to be nothing more than one bad date. They know you were trying to help and they appreciate it. From now on, step back. Let them find their own match.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The drama in a coworker's private life is leaking into your relationship with them. It's going to start complicating things today, especially if this coworker has power over you. This could be a tricky situation to maneuver around, but you can do it. You've got the charm, you've got the tact, and you've got the good reputation required to get your stuff done without having to get them involved. Let them do their own thing. Decide not to count on them.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The islands of Kos, Leros, Nisyros, Patmos and Rhodes are in what sea?

A. Caribbean

B. Caspian

C. North

D. Mediterranean

2. A club in central London called "The Night Tripper" that opened on 23 December 1966 later changed its name to what?

A. The UFO

B. The Ad Lib

C. The Marquee

D. CBGBs

3. How many ounces are there in 8 lbs?

A. 128

B. 108

C. 112

D. 120

Answers: 1.D 2.A 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

O	E	P	D
N	I	Y	G
G	S	I	N
A	Y	L	I

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

REDEMPTION SONG

Cancer survivor Haller emerges as hero as Ivory Coast beat Nigeria in fitting end to Cup of Nations

Abidjan, Ivory Coast - Sebastian Haller scored the winning goal nine minutes from the end as hosts Ivory Coast claimed a third Africa Cup of Nations title with a 2-1 victory over Nigeria in the final at the Alassane Ouattara Stadium in Abidjan on Sunday.

It was a triumph born from adversity as the Ivorians had scraped out of their group following two defeats, including a humiliating 4-0 loss to Equatorial Guinea, before finding their form in the knockout rounds with a never-say-die attitude that led them to the title.

William Troost-Ekong's header gave Nigeria a first-half lead as he rose to meet Samuel Chukwueze's flick-on from a corner, but Franck Kessie equalised just past the hour-mark after being left unmarked at the back post from a set-piece.

The Ivorians had to come from behind several times in the tournament and did it again when Haller steered Simon Adingra's cross into the net, much to the delight of his rookie coach Emerse Fae, who had started the tournament as assistant to Frenchman Jean-Louis Gasset, who was sacked after the pool stage.

The month-long tournament set new standards and had many thrilling matches, starting with a series of dramatic upsets and culminating in victory for the hosts.

The defeat to tiny Equatorial Guinea in the last group match was the biggest shock in 34 editions of the Cup of Nations,



Ivory Coast players celebrate with the Africa Cup of Nations trophy

It was a triumph born from adversity as the Ivorians had scraped out of their group following two defeats, including a humiliating 4-0 loss to Equatorial Guinea, before finding their form in the knockout rounds

stretching back more than six decades.

It left Ivory Coast on the brink of elimination but they squeezed through as lucky losers into the knockout stages, sacked their coach, altered the line-up and slowly built momentum.

"After that slap, it was difficult but it helped us come back even stronger to take our second chance and show everyone that we were the best," said Ivorian midfielder Seko Fofana.

The tournament seemed destined for a showpiece finish, having started with shock results that saw several heavyweight con-

tenders tumble out early as unfancied teams proved more than competitive at the 24-team tournament.

The Cape Verde Islands, the smallest of the countries competing, eliminated Ghana early on and came within a penalty shootout of a semi-final place.

Equatorial Guinea's exploits were also extraordinary and their 34-year-old captain Emilio Nsue, who plays for a third division club in Spain, ended as the tournament's top scorer.

There were many headline players too but two of the biggest endured disappointing tournaments.

Egypt forward Mohamed Salah limped out with a hamstring injury, Sadio Mane went home after the last 16 as holders Senegal were dumped out and Morocco, who reached the World Cup semi-finals 14 months ago, were eliminated at the same stage, again failing to live up to their status as pre-tournament favourites.

The Cup of Nations has always been a colourful spectacle, and often enlivened by controversy on the field or rioting off it but many times also pilloried for the poor standard of matches. Past tournaments too have seen empty stands for matches not involving the hosts.

But the Ivory Coast, who put back the timing of the tournament six months to avoid the rainy season in west Africa, changed that perception, helped by a high quality of pitches and good attendances at most matches.

"With the image we showed today, Africa must be proud," said Ivory Coast captain Serge Aurier after Sunday's final. "We have progressed, whether it be the teams, the stadiums, the living environment."

Chelsea rally to beat Palace

London, England - Chelsea came from behind to beat Crystal Palace 3-1 thanks to added time goals from Conor Gallagher and Enzo Fernandez in the Premier League at Selhurst Park on Monday.

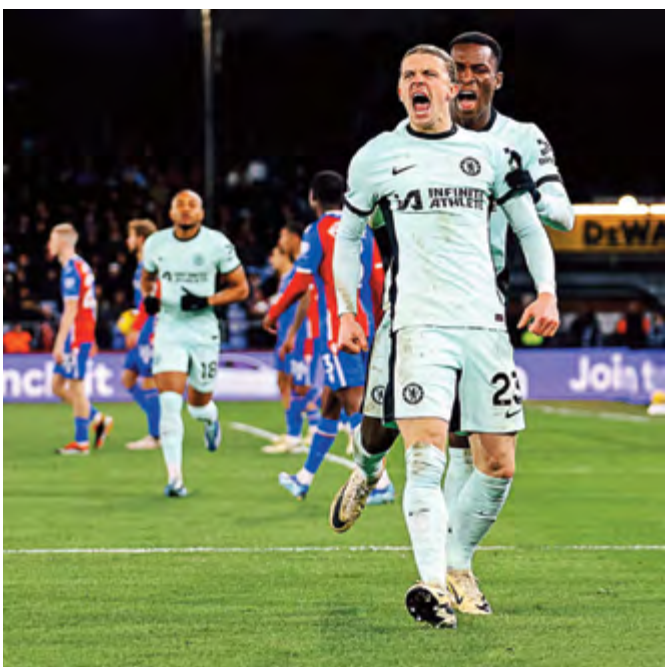
Gallagher put the visitors 2-1 up with his second goal of the match before Fernandez sealed the win as Chelsea rallied to secure the points that took them up to 10th in the standings.

The result adds to the pressure on Palace boss Roy Hodgson, whose side have not kept a clean sheet in 13 league matches. They sit 15th on 24 points, five points above the drop zone.

It was a tale of two halves for Chelsea who went into the break a goal down after a superb Jefferson Lerma strike on the half-hour had given the struggling hosts the lead.

"We saw two different sides. In the first half we were so flat and I was so disappointed. In the second half much better and I am very pleased with how we finished the game," Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino told the BBC.

Gallagher's first goal against



Chelsea's Conor Gallagher celebrates after scoring against Crystal Palace

the club where he had a spell on loan in 2021-22 came two minutes after the break as he neatly side-footed Malo Gusto's cross from the right high into the net.

The England midfielder struck again in the 91st, also the product of an attack down the right as he slotted Cole Palmer's cross into the bottom corner from the edge of the area.

Another Chelsea counter attack, and another Palmer assist, saw the visitors seal the points in the 94th through Fernandez.

The third goal "led to an aggravated defeat but I don't think that's a fair reflection on the way the game was played.

"I think we deserved to come off with at least one point," said Hodgson.

Mbappe available for Sociedad match

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappe sat out Paris St Germain's Ligue 1 game at the weekend, but their top scorer is set to return for the Champions League last 16 tie with Real Sociedad, manager Luis Enrique said on Tuesday.

Mbappe, who has scored 30 goals in 29 games this season, was an unused substitute in Saturday's 3-1 win over Lille, a precaution taken after he took a knock to his ankle three days previously in another 3-1 win, over Brest in the Coup de France.

The French forward has played the full 90 minutes in all six Champions League games this season for PSG and that doesn't look like changing when they host the Spanish side in Wednesday's first leg.

"When a team has a player like Kylian Mbappe, of course we know that the more he plays the better, because we all benefit from that," Luis Enrique told a press conference.

"There is no doubt about it. He could have played (on Saturday) if it had been a final, but it wasn't, it was not worth the risk. Kylian Mbappe is available, just like the other players."



PSG's Kylian Mbappe during a team training session on Sunday

The manager could afford to rest Mbappe in the league, where PSG now have an 11 point advantage at the top over Nice, and have gone 16 games unbeaten, but in the Champions League it hasn't all been plain sailing.

PSG finished second in their group behind Borussia Dortmund and lost to Newcastle

United and AC Milan. They are also without a win in their last three games in the competition, a sharp contrast to Real Sociedad.

Real may be struggling domestically, seventh in LaLiga, but they topped their Champions League group, which included Inter Milan, and are undefeated in Europe this season.

"Real Sociedad have a tight defence in the Champions League, they don't give the ball away easily. We have to press them aggressively," Luis Enrique said.

"They are certainly one of the best teams in the competition, that is why they qualified as group winners. They were in a group with last year's finalists."



Abdullah al Rawahi (L) and Ata al Hmoud

Oman Rally Team's Al Rawahi and Al Hmoud face first JWRC test

Umea, Sweden - The Oman Rally Team duo of Abdullah al Rawahi and Ata al Hmoud are set to take part in this year's five-round FIA Junior World Rally Championship (JWRC) and the opening round sees them heading to Scandinavia for this weekend's world-famous Rally Sweden.

The only traditional snow rally in the WRC calendar moved north to the city of Umea in 2022 and the crew will tackle 18 special stages in a traditional winter wonderland with snow-covered

Sweden is a new challenge for us, snow. We actually had a test day in Norway last week. It went really well. Obviously, it is new terrain. Our aim is to do our best...

ABDULLAH AL RAWAHI

stages and the use of studded tyres a necessity.

Drivers traditionally lean their cars against the snow banks to obtain the best line through the fast-flowing forest stages. The

tyres provide remarkable grip but drivers must adjust their driving style and braking points accordingly in the sub-zero temperatures.

All crews taking part in the

JWRC use identical M-Sport Poland Ford Fiesta Rally3 cars running on Pirelli tyres. The series is open to drivers under the age of 29 who have not competed as a Priority 1 driver in a WRC event.

Al Rawahi said: "Sweden is a new challenge for us, snow. We actually had a test day in Norway last week. It went really well. Obviously, it is new terrain. Our aim is to do our best in this rally. There is going to be very challenging competition in the JWRC. We are aiming to finish all

the rallies to gain experience. If we do an amazing result, then that is a bonus. The first year is about learning the stages and learning the car. I think we will be quite comfortable. I am very excited to be honest to be racing in the World Rally Championship."

Co-driver Al Hmoud said: "It is fantastic that Abdullah is participating in this category. It is good for him to go outside the Middle East to compete with others and to see new stages. It is an excellent step for him."

HEARTBREAK IN ABU DHABI

Al Zubair, Schiller and Liu fall short in bid to win Asian Le Mans Series titles

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed trio of Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair, Germany's Fabian Schiller and China's Anthony Liu were not able to challenge for the overall titles at the final pair of four-hour races of the 2023/2024 Asian Le Mans Series at Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina circuit last weekend.

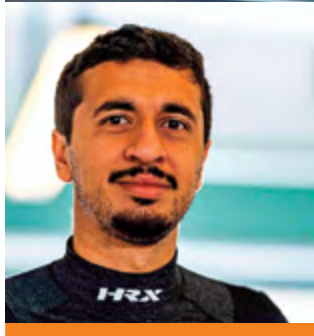
After qualifying their Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo in a superb pole position, they finished the first race in 10th and then lost an early lead in the second red-flag interrupted encounter and eventually reached the chequered flag in eighth after a drive-through penalty.

Al Zubair said: "It was a very unfortunate weekend finishing P10 and P8 in the races after starting on pole and second place and feeling like we had a really good set-up with the car. Everyone was feeling good. I think with the championship on the line there were a few mistakes made by the team.

"Also, Anthony, my teammate, made a mistake in the race which cost us a penalty. Taking that into account, coming back from the penalties and all, it was not so bad. With our goals, which he had to try and win the race, it



The Al Manar Racing Mercedes in action at Yas Marina



With our goals, which he had to try and win the race, it was difficult to accept. We just prepare again, come more prepared

AL FAISAL AL ZUBAIR

was difficult to accept. We just prepare again and hopefully come more prepared for the next one."

Liu moved ahead of the rest of the GT field at the start of Sunday's second race and held a tiny advantage over Alex Malykhin in the Pure RACING Porsche before the race was red-flagged after a two-car accident at turn 11. The Al Manar Mercedes was down in fourth behind Pure RACING, Opti-

mum Motorsport and Saintéloc Racing.

After a substantial delay to remove debris from the trackside area, racing resumed with just under two hours of the race remaining. Liu pitted in a packed pit lane and Schiller took over but the car was down in 15th with 1hr 40min remaining. However the crew incurred a drive-through penalty for a pit lane infringement. Schiller slipped to 17th and

then moved up to 13th with 80 minutes to go before climbing to 10th as the race approached the three-hour mark.

Al Zubair took over for the final stint, managed to get into the top 10 and moved up to eighth but that left the team short of the position needed to challenge for the overall GT Team and Drivers titles.

Leipert Motorsport won the second race from Triple Eight

and the Pure RACING trio of Klaus Bachler, Joel Sturm and Alex Malykhin, clinched the championship in their Porsche 911 GT3 R, despite an accident in race one.

Liu took the wheel from pole position for the first stint in the opening four-hour race and reached the half-hour mark in second behind Christopher Haase in the Saintéloc Racing Audi. The Chinese driver slipped

down to third behind the Pure RACING Audi as his stint progressed but moved back into second around the 90-minute mark.

The car had slipped down the running order as far as 16th before Al Zubair took over for the second stint. Luca Stolz had pushed the Triple Eight Mercedes into the lead from the Saintéloc Racing Audi and Optimum Motorsport's Tom Gamble in a McLaren.

Hamilton can bring something extra to Ferrari, says Fernando Alonso

London, England - Fernando Alonso can see Lewis Hamilton bringing some extra fight to Ferrari when the seven-times world champion joins Formula One's most successful team in 2025.

The 42-year-old Spaniard, now at Aston Martin, spent five seasons at Ferrari from 2010-14 but was unable to deliver a championship to Maranello.

Ferrari have not won a title since the constructors' in 2008, with Kimi Raikkonen the last driver to take a title in 2007.

"I hope he enjoys the experience, I think it's a very special team," double world champion Alonso told reporters ahead of Monday's launch of Aston Martin's 2024 car at Silverstone.

"It is more special when you win and that's the thing. You need to win and it's a few years already that they have a very fast car and were fighting for big things and maybe Lewis can bring that extra to fight for the championship.

"The car is there. At the end of last year even with a very dominating Red Bull car, Ferrari were still able to match the lap time



Fernando Alonso (R) with Lewis Hamilton

The car is there. At the end of last year even with a very dominating Red Bull car, Ferrari were still able to match the lap time and be faster than them in most of the qualifying.

FERNANDO ALONSO

and be faster than them in most of the qualifying. "So I think the car should be fast enough."

Hamilton's move from Mercedes to Ferrari on a multi-year

deal was announced on Feb. 1.

The 39-year-old Briton said later that driving for the Italian team would allow him "to fulfil another childhood dream."

Alonso said he had been busy training on the day the news was announced and so missed all the excitement.

"It probably was a surprise, I will not lie, but not because the change itself. Just because from the outside it seemed like he was very linked with Mercedes and very loyal to them.

"It was not his childhood dream 12 months ago, or two months ago, I guess, because it was a different dream," he added.

Alonso could now be on the list of possible replacements for his former McLaren team mate at Mercedes, with the Spaniard out of contract at the end of the season and declaring himself fitter than ever.

Asked about any direct contact with Mercedes about the seat, he said there had been "nothing at all".

Alonso did point out, however, that he was the only world champion available for 2025 on the driver market and said he would talk first with Aston Martin once he had decided whether to continue.



Amerat Royals players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Oman D10 League

Amerat Royals crowned D10 champions

Muscat - A rampant Amerat Royals emerged as deserving champions in the third edition of Oman D10 League, which concluded at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat, recently.

The title win was the first for the Royals, who displayed consistency throughout the tournament to cap their stunning run.

In an action-packed final, Amerat Royals defeated Bousher Busters by 14 runs to bring curtains down on the 11-day event, organised by Oman Cricket (OC).

Both the finalists, Amerat Royals and Bousher Busters, had

registered impressive wins in the group stage. Going into the summit clash, Royals won six of their seven league games while Busters won five. The format witnessed five teams progressing into the second round, the two teams were joined by Ruwi Rangers, Ghubra Giants and Qurum Thunders.

In the second round, Bousher Busters and Amerat Royals led the table securing three wins each to set up a title clash.

In the final, Royals' Jiten Ramanandi's all-round display stole the limelight. He slammed a breezy 46 to help his side reach 109. Fawad Ali bagged 3

wickets while Aaqib Ilyas claimed two for the Busters.

Buster's chase looked on track with Aaqib Ilyas at the crease. However, his dismissal for 39 in the seventh over proved to be the turning point. was caught in the 7th over scoring 39. Mohammed Adeeb Usmani's 26 went in vain as Ramanandi grabbed two wickets for just 12 runs to restrict the Busters to 95/4.

The title was the first trophy for Amerat Royals of the 2023-24 season, and they will hope to carry the momentum in the upcoming Super League D50.

The third edition of Oman D10 witnessed 40 matches.

Knight: India are at a disadvantage by preparing spin-friendly pitches early on

Muscat - Former England opening batsman Nick Knight believes that India are playing into the hands of England spinners by preparing turning pitches from day one.

England are the only team to win a Test series in India in the past 20 years. England won the 2012 four Test match series 2-1 under the captaincy of Sir Alastair Cook. One of the striking factors of that series win was the England spinners spearheaded

by two off-spinners Graeme Swann and Monty Panesar out-performed their Indian counterparts playing in their backyard.

The current five-match Test series is currently tied at 1-1 after two matches. Interestingly this time too, England's spin attack consisting of two debutants has out-performed the Indian spinners.

Knight, in an exclusive interview with SportsBoom.com, questions India's strategy of



Nick Knight (R) with Nasser Hussain

preparing turning pitches and at the same time highlights England's clever spin bowlers selection.

Knight highlights the complexities of playing spin in Indian conditions. He emphasised the challenge posed not just by dramatic turn and bounce, but the natural variations. England, recognising this, strategically selected taller bowlers like Tom Hartley and Shoaib Bashir to take advantage of the greater varia-

tion caused by their height.

"Spin is India's strength in Indian conditions. You sometimes have to put into the pot what the opponent's strengths and weaknesses are. I played in India enough to realise the tough bit for me playing spin wasn't the fact that the ball turned and bounced dramatically," said Knight.

"It was the fact that the natural variation, some balls would turn a bit, some balls would turn

dramatically. That's what's really hard because you can't set yourself as a batter to line up any particular ball because some will perform slightly differently.

"England have been really smart and they've worked out that if you are delivering from six foot four then that exaggeration is greater. That variation is greater than if you're bowling at a lower height because the balls won't react as much off the pitch by its nature," he said.



Carlos Alcaraz

Alcaraz would pick Paris Olympics gold over French Open crown

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Carlos Alcaraz will have the chance to win the Olympic tennis title at Roland Garros this year as well as the French Open crown and while he will be gunning for both the Spaniard said if forced to choose he would pick the Paris Games gold.

The Olympic tennis tournament will take place in July, a month after the year's second Grand Slam on the same clay-courts in the French capital.

"For me, it's a dream to bring a medal to my country and winning gold is one of the greatest things that can happen to you in the world of sport," Alcaraz told reporters in Buenos Aires, where he will defend his title this week.

"This year, if you gave me a choice, I'd say that I will keep the Olympic gold, although I would like to win both. I'm not going to lie."

The 20-year-old won the U.S. Open in 2022 and Wimbledon last year but failed to add to his Grand Slam collection last month after going out in the Australian Open quarter-finals to Alexander Zverev, who won Olympic gold in Tokyo.

While German Zverev leads their career meetings 5-3, Alcaraz said world number one Novak Djokovic and Melbourne Park champion Jannik Sinner were top of the tree.

"I think Djokovic and Sinner are the rivals to beat, there is no doubt, both for me and for everyone," world number two Alcaraz added.

"Zverev also has the winning head-to-head against me, he's a rival I have very much in my mind, but I do think that Djokovic and Sinner are at the top right now."

CAPIOT SPRINTS TO GLORY

Belgian rider takes an emotional win in Tour of Oman stage 4

Muscat - Amaury Capiot of Arkea-B&B Hotels team recorded an emotional victory as he clinched the fourth stage of the Tour of Oman 2024 on Tuesday. The Belgian sprinter clocked 2 hours 17 minutes and 35 seconds to win the stage that started in Fanja instead of Al Rustaq Fort due to the inclement weather conditions in the country and the stage finished at Yitti Hilla. Dutch rider Ide Schelling from Astana Kazakhstan team finished adrift of the stage winner while Italian rider Davide De Pretto of team Jayco Alula completed the race in third place.

Capiot came in third place in the Muscat Classic race on Friday but he managed to produce an excellent performance to be crowned the winner on Tuesday.

"I am really happy with this victory following the hard stage. The team made a great effort to end as champion. This is indeed my first triumph after six races this season and this achievement



Amaury Capiot celebrates after winning the fourth stage of Tour of Oman on Tuesday

means a lot for me as it is the first podium for me this year," Capiot said. "I took part in three European races besides the Tour of Oman. I am looking for more accomplishments in the forthcoming participations. Today's stage was shorter than I expected. It

was hard in the last 25 km and as a team, we implemented a good strategy to stay together until the last 2 to 3 km which was for me to stay in a good position for a better sprint," he added.

The battle for the general classification remains extremely

disputed, with Finn Fisher-Black (UAE Team Emirates) making the most of time bonuses through the stage to claim back the red jersey ahead of Luke Lamperti (Soudal Quick-Step) on the eve of the final stage, set to decide the overall winner on the

slopes of Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain) which will take place on Wednesday.

The peloton rolls from Fanja early morning on Tuesday for a distance of 104 km ending in Yitti Hills with a punchy route that inspires attackers. Blake Quick

(Team Jayco Alula), Rasmus Bogh Wallin (Uno-X Mobility) and Matteo Malucelli (JCL Team Ukyo) were the first riders to set off. Many riders worked hard to join them unsuccessfully. After it stayed around 15 sec, the gap reached one minute after 20km.

On the day after Paul Magnier and Luke Lamperti took the race over in Al Bustan, Soudal Quick-Step set the pace. The attackers' lead is controlled at around 2 minutes. Burgos-BH up the ante on the first ascent of the day, the mighty climb of Al Jabal Road (Bousher al Amerat), with 3.3km at 9.8 per cent. The gap was down to 5 sec as Wallin went first over the top. Lots of riders were dropped from the bunch including the green jersey owner Magnier and the golden jersey Oscar Pelegri (Burgos-BH). The Spanish rider Oscar managed to earn the golden jersey for the fourth successive time.

HE Eng Khamis Mohammed Al Shammakhi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, the chief guest handed over the awards to the top winners in Yitti Hills in the presence of Saif bin Sebaa al Rushaidi, Chairman of Oman Cycling Association, and officials.

Hard for me to get used to the tour schedule, says Raducanu after Qatar Open exit

Doha, Qatar - Former US Open champion Emma Raducanu said she would make changes to her tournament scheduling following her first-round defeat by world number 30 Anhelina Kalinina at the Qatar Open on Monday.

The 21-year-old suffered a huge dip in form the season after her 2021 Flushing Meadows triumph and then spent eight months on the sidelines during an injury-hit 2023 following wrist and ankle surgeries.

Returning to the tour last month, Raducanu lost in the second round at Auckland, the Australian Open and Abu Dhabi, before crashing 6-0 7-6(6) to Kalinina in Doha, and the Briton is now planning to head home



Emma Raducanu

after a busy period on tour.

"It's hard for me to get used to the tour schedule," world number 262 Raducanu told Sky Sports. "It's one tournament then another straight away."

"I need to schedule my tournaments a bit better and try to get more matches under my belt."

Raducanu will need to be handed a wildcard to play next week in Dubai but media reports said she would take a break before returning for Indian Wells and Miami next month.

Raducanu made 48 unforced errors in her latest defeat and said playing during the day may have contributed to her lacklustre display.

Bangladesh appoint Shanto as captain for all formats

Dhaka, Bangladesh - The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said it has appointed batter Najmul Hossain Shanto as captain in all three formats for the next year amid ongoing uncertainty over the availability of former skipper Shakib Al Hasan.

Shanto will lead the side at the Twenty20 World Cup in the Caribbean and United States in June.

The Bangladesh captaincy has been in a state of flux, with Shakib saying he would vacate the one-day international role after the World Cup. The all rounder was diagnosed with a retinal condition in his left eye last month.

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NEW
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FALL-WINTER'24 RUNWAYS

NEW YORK FASHION WEEK, SHOWCASING 2024 STYLES FOR FALL AND WINTER, HAD MANY UNIQUE PRESENTATIONS, FROM SILK-BUBBLE OUTFITS TO POWER DRESSING STYLES

As New York Fashion Week once again kicked off across Manhattan and Brooklyn last weekend, designers offered enticing twists on familiar dress codes.

Inside the neoclassical Williamsburgh Savings Bank, Peter Do rethought 'protective' fashion for his sophomore showing at the helm of Helmut Lang, sending out silk bubble wrap trousers, knit balaclavas emerging from smart suiting, weathered sand-coloured denim and soft armour in the form of slouchy puffer jackets.

Soon after, in Rockefeller Center, models pumping gourd barbells showcased Collina Strada's delightfully femme take on sports uniforms and gymwear, wearing elegantly beefed-up silhouettes — per the show notes — that included lace-trimmed boxing shorts and voluminous jackets mimicking bulging deltoids and biceps.

Then there were the designers updating American dress codes more broadly, whether in their own contexts or anew. Tommy Hilfiger's return to the runway — attended by the brand's ambassador Sofia Richie Grange, among other celebrities, and ushered in with an opening performance by Jon Batiste — showcased new takes on prep classics that



the brand itself established in the 1990s, with boxy tweed coats, varsity jackets, cashmere dresses and long, bulky scarves.

And Willy Chavarria, who previously held a top spot at Calvin Klein in addition to running his own namesake label, brought a bold vision of American power dressing to the run-

way through layers and structure, with exaggerated shoulders, sharp lapels and sweeping coats offset by ruffles and sculptural florals, all with Chicano-influenced flair.

Seated front row for both Chavarria's runway and an accompanying fashion film presentation, which spoke to community as a respite from the world's ills, were Julia Fox, Sam Smith, Dascha Polanco and Becky G.

Of course, not all designers set out to re-write the rules, with Prabal Gurung disclosing backstage that he doesn't get too preoccupied with whether his new collection will be fashion-forward. Like Chavarria, Gurung also took inspiration from community and family, mining his childhood diaries and heritage to create looks — which were richly coloured in hues of saffron and vermillion, and embellished with crystals and gold embroidery — that paid tribute to his father's family in Nepal.

"What I want to think about is like, 'Is this a story that I wanted to tell? That I feel confident about? That I can do justice?'" Gurung explained. "You can't predict what's going to be cool — I've never worried about that. I just want to share a little piece of my world."

(Courtesy: cmn.com)



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IF YOU'VE FORGOTTEN TO GET A VALENTINE'S DAY GIFT FOR YOUR LOVED ONE, SNEAK OUT TO THE HYPERMARKET TODAY AND GRAB HOLD OF SOMETHING SPECIAL TO END THE DAY ON A HIGH NOTE

Are you a romantic lover who has planned things well in advance and chalked out an itinerary to celebrate Valentine's Day in style, with your very own personal touch? If not, and someone's expecting you to bring home an expression of your love, it isn't late yet; just hop across to the nearest hypermarket and go home with an attractive package and a well-rehearsed smile!

You are not alone if you did not find time to plan out a celebration or select a special gift that reflects your personality and emotional connect with your lover/partner - most males are last-minute shoppers. With numerous departmental stores, hypermarkets and branded outlets present all over the city, your task will be quite easy even at the eleventh hour.

Before you head to the market, quickly do some mental jogging. Find out if your loved one had been longing for something special for quite some time - it might be a big hit if you go home with just that. Or think about something that both of you had been considering to buy but didn't yet - it will be well received on this day. Again, if there has been something that has been shelved because it's beyond your reach, go for it now and surprise your loved one.

Make sure to pack your gift with attractive packing paper or with some creativity (everyone enjoys the suspense of unpacking a gift) - don't hand out a shopping bag, it shows lack of interest on your part. And remember, roses, chocolates, soft toys, etc are only accompaniments, not the main course. You have to get them anyway, even though you've selected a suitable gift.

Here are some ideas to guide your purchase, within a restricted budget, yet with greater impact:

Dinnerware



You don't have to burn a hole in your wallet by buying branded dinnerware; but if your budget is robust go for it. Women love fancy dinnerware even if they have many sets at home. Most stores now have a range of attractive crockery and cutlery in a range of prices to suit all budgets.

Shopping vouchers

This should be the last option as it indicates lack of effort on your part. However, if someone loves shopping for things they way they do it, and your choices are always criticised, then this is the best option. But make sure the voucher packs a punch and is not just adequate for groceries. Vouchers to branded outlets which you usually don't visit, are also much appreciated.

Handbags

One can never have enough of these and they come in all sizes, from pouches to airport backpacks. Fanciful handbags are always welcome for special occasions while regular handbags can always serve as an option to add to the collection.



Perfumes



Perfumes are the most elegant gift and they come in small packages, indicating quality and class. But it can be tricky if you are not aware of your partner's preferences. Don't get fooled by fancy bottles and freebies, go for trusted brands and content - the smaller the bottle, the better.

Personal stereos/ear-pods

Personal stereos are a good choice for those who love music and enjoy listening to music during household chores or during a walk in the park. Go for something sleek and less cumbersome to carry. Ear-pods are also the latest craze to use along with mobile phones - they come in small, neat packs but provide a much appreciated function.

Mobile phones

You don't have to have an exorbitant budget to get a mobile phone as a gift anymore. Buy what suits your pocket as long as it has all the required features. If cost is not a factor to consider, go for the best and the latest model; otherwise get popular brands used by everyone and make sure to include a few accessories.



Diamonds

Whoa! Now we're talking big. If you want to really impress, diamonds are the best buy on Valentine's. They say, 'diamonds are forever' and they indicate unending love and affection. So, if time is a constraint but money is not, settle for nothing less than diamonds. Whatever be your choice, it will always look elegant, because the makers know their job well.



Furniture

Consider small items - a much sought after bath-stool or kitchen rack, a rocking chair for an afternoon siesta, a bamboo swing that one has always longed to install in the balcony, or even a sleek writing/laptop desk. Table/bedside lamps, mini chandeliers for the bedroom, or a revolving dining table tray are other items to consider.

Wristwatches

Women love wristwatches of different types that suit varied outfits. So, it can never be a repeat. If your partner already has fancy wristwatches, go for something formal or elegant for special occasions and vice versa. Here, too, brands matter.



Indoor plants

If the family loves indoor plants, this is an opportunity to bring in some variety either indoors or for the balcony/porch. Nurseries within the city have a good collection of saplings, you don't have to go beyond city limits or to a botanical garden. And you don't need to pack these, just get a suitable fancy pot to place it and tag on a ribbon with a bow.

Car accessories

If your partner has her own vehicle, consider sprucing it up with new accessories - seat covers, floor mats dashboard décor/perfumes, cushions and other accessories that provide a more comfortable feel within. You can even secretly do this before going out for a drive together in her car.



Staycations/Vacations

So, if your celebrations are on hold for the weekend or the nearest opportunity ahead, consider a staycation or a dream vacation that has been in the planning for long. But, don't simply convey that verbally, do the bookings and provide evidence of it in a nice envelope along with the regular accompaniments - roses, chocolates, soft toys.



