

QUAKE KILLS OVER 2,500

Over 1,540 people dead and 9,700 injured in Turkey

Death toll in Syria is 968 with 538 in govt-controlled areas

Quake leads to 120 aftershocks with 43 of over 4.3 magnitude

3,000 buildings collapse in seven provinces in Turkey

Diyarbakir, Turkey - The most powerful earthquake to strike Turkey and Syria in nearly a century killed over 2,500 people on Monday triggering frantic rescue efforts. The tremors were felt as far away as Greenland.

The 7.8-magnitude early morning quake, followed by dozens of aftershocks, wiped out entire sections of major Turkish cities in a region filled with millions who have fled Syria's civil war and other conflicts.

Rescuers used heavy equipment and their bare hands to peel back rubble in search of survivors, who they could in some cases hear begging for help under the debris.

"Since I live in an earthquake zone, I am used to being shaken," said Melisa Salman, a reporter in the Turkish city of Kahramanmaraş.

"But it's the first time we have ever experienced anything like this," the 23-year-old told AFP. "We thought it was the apocalypse."

The head of Syria's National Earthquake Centre, Raed Ahmed, called it "the biggest earthquake recorded in the history of the centre".

At least 968 people died in rebel and government-controlled parts of Syria, state media and medical sources said, while Turkish officials reported another 1,541 fatalities.

The initial quake was followed by dozens of aftershocks, including a 7.5-magnitude tremor that jolted the region in the middle of search and rescue work on Monday afternoon.

Shocked survivors in Turkey rushed out into snow-covered streets in their pyjamas, watching rescuers dig through the debris of damaged homes with their hands.

"Seven members of my family are under the debris," said Muhittin Orakci, a stunned survivor in Turkey's mostly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir. "My sister and her three children are there. And also her husband, her father-in-law and her mother-in-law."

The rescue efforts were hampered by a winter blizzard that covered major roads in ice and snow. Officials said the quake made three major airports in the area inoperable, further complicating delivery of vital aid.

Turkey's last 7.8-magnitude tremor was in 1939, when 33,000 died in the eastern Erzincan province.

Tremors recorded in Greenland

Monday's first quake struck at 4:17am (0117 GMT) at a depth of about 18km near the Turkish city of Gaziantep, which is home to around 2mn people, the US Geological Survey said.

Denmark's geological institute said tremors from the main quake reached the east coast of Greenland about eight minutes after the tremor struck Turkey.

A spokesman for Syria's civil defence said



(Clockwise from top) Turkish rescue workers and volunteers conduct search and rescue operations in the rubble of a collapsed building in Diyarbakir on Monday; a man looks on at search and rescue operations in Diyarbakir; and rescuers carry a body found in the rubble in Adana (AFP)



This aerial view shows residents searching for victims and survivors amidst the rubble of collapsed buildings following an earthquake in the village of Besnia near the town of Harim, in Syria's rebel-held northwestern Idlib province on the border with Turkey, on Monday (AFP)

H M condoles Syrian, Turkish presidents

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent cables of condolences to President Dr Bashar al Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Republic of Turkey following the earthquake on Monday.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt condolences to President Assad and President Erdogan, as well as the people of their countries and families of victims. His Majesty prayed to the Almighty Allah to rest the victims' souls in peace in paradise and grant their families patience, while wishing the injured speedy recovery.

In statements, the embassies of the sultanate in Turkey and Syria said they were following up on the earthquake that struck the Pazarcik district of southern Kahramanmaraş province.

The embassy in Turkey informed that it is in contact with relevant authorities to follow up on the situation of Omani citizens. The embassy in Syria informed that no Omanis were affected.

teams were scrambling to rescue trapped people. "Many buildings in different cities and villages in northwestern Syria collapsed... Even now, many families are under the rubble," said Ismail Alabdallah.

The US, European Union and Russia all immediately sent condolences and offers of help.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky offered to provide "the necessary assistance" to Turkey, whose combat drones are helping Kyiv fight the Russian invasion.

Power outages

The Syrian health ministry reported damage across the provinces of Aleppo, Latakia, Hama and Tartus, where Russia is leasing a naval facility. Even before the earthquake, buildings in Aleppo - Syria's pre-war commercial hub - often collapsed due to the dilapidated infrastructure, which has suffered due to the civil war.

Officials cut off natural gas and power supplies across the region as a precaution, also closing schools for two weeks.

"The size of the aftershocks, which may continue for days although mostly decreasing in energy, brings a risk of collapse of structures already weakened by the earlier events," said David Rothery, an earthquake expert at the Open University in Britain.

AFP

Saudi-Oman Coordination Council to meet this year

Muscat: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will hold the first meeting of the Oman-Saudi Coordination Council this year.

During his visit to Muscat on Monday, Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Saudi Foreign Minister, asserted that activating the Oman-Saudi Coordination Council represents a significant mechanism for elevating the bilateral cooperation between the two countries, particularly in fields of investment and trade exchange.

The Saudi minister described a consultative meeting he held with H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, on Monday as 'fruitful'.

In a statement to ONA, the minister said that there are developments in the investment sector following the opening of the border crossing between the two countries. He also highlighted the role of the Oman-KSA Investment Forum held in Riyadh from January 31 to February 4 in boosting trade cooperation.

Over 800,000 smart electricity and water meters installed

Our Correspondent Muscat

The percentage of electricity production from renewable sources has increased two per cent, and the net electricity production went up 7.6 per cent to 39,537 Gwh in 2022, according to Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinaï, Chairman of Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR).

The authority held an annual media meeting on Monday revealing details of its achievements in 2022. Hinaï informed that the number of accounts under the national support system increased 35 per cent to 108,000, while over 450,000 smart electricity meters were installed till the end of 2022, an increase of 84 per cent over 2021.

He added, "More than 400,000 smart water meters were installed in 2022, an increase of 24 per cent. There was a rise in both electricity subscriber accounts and water connections - 3.5 per cent and five



Power generated from alternative sources is expected to replace 30 per cent of traditional power by 2030

DR MANSOUR BIN TALIB AL HINAÏ

per cent, respectively - in 2022."

The authority is considering reviewing the fee for new water connections - currently RO700 - and dispensing with estimate readings of electricity bills soon.

In the field of renewable en-

ergy, Hinaï highlighted APSR's efforts to ensure the efficiency of energy use in government buildings and replace inefficient lighting with high-efficiency ones. "Power generated from alternative sources is expected to re-

place 30 per cent of traditional power by 2030."

Commenting on the investigation into the nationwide power outage in September 2022, he informed that it was not related to cyberattack, nor shortage of supply or generation, network planning error or any technical fault related to the safety of the electricity system.

In its plan for 2023, APSR is focused on sustainability, efficiency and credibility, Hinaï added. "This will be realised by implementing projects designed to upgrade the quality of services rendered to subscribers, amending regulations, attracting investments, developing human resources, digital transformation and achieving carbon neutrality and meeting the goals of Oman Vision 2040."

Omanisation in direct jobs in the water sector reached 98 per cent and 49 per cent in indirect jobs (contractors), while in the electricity sector it is 95 per cent in direct jobs, and 53 per cent in indirect jobs.

Oman, US review efforts to bring peace to Yemen

Our Correspondent Muscat

The US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking visited Oman on Monday to review the efforts exerted to support Yemen in reaching a political solution that achieves security and stability for the war-torn country and the region.

H E Sheikh Khalifa al Harthi, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, received Lenderking, to discuss efforts to bring peace in Yemen.

In a statement, the US Department of State informed that Lenderking is travelling in the region from February 3, with stops in Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE.

"The special envoy will continue concerted US diplomatic efforts with the UN, regional and international partners to advance a comprehensive and inclusive peace process. The UN-led truce and ensuing period of calm has led to continuing tangible, life-saving benefits to Yemenis, including reduced fighting and

"The UN-led truce and ensuing period of calm has led to continuing tangible, life-saving benefits to Yemenis"

civilian casualties, regular commercial flights, and continued fuel flow. Lenderking will urge the parties to seize this opportunity to intensify their engagement with the UN to launch a Yemeni-Yemeni political process that can durably end the war," the State Department said.

During his trip, the Special Envoy will encourage donors to give generously in 2023 to fund life-saving aid for Yemenis as part of the 2023 UN Humanitarian Response Plan.

The US is committed to supporting Yemen's peace and recovery process to enable Yemenis chart a brighter future for their country and promote justice and accountability, it added.

Phase 1 of Salalah's Al Haffa Beach Market complete

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat National Development and Investment Company - ASAAS - has announced the completion of the first phase of Al Haffa Beach Market in Salalah, including commercial shops, a promenade and a host of services and entertainment facilities.

The 14,000sqm project consists of heritage markets, restaurants, cafes and entertainment services, among others.

H E Salim bin Mohammed bin Said al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, tweeted, "Much appreciation for everyone who contributed to this project. With the completion of all its phases, it will become a tourist destination, as it lies next to architectural landmarks, including a high-quality hotel facility. The ministry will launch another project adjacent to the Al Baleed site, which will add variety to the mix of tourist activities."

The Al Haffa Beach Market project is being implemented under a usufruct agreement that the company signed with the government, which stipulates the establishment and develop-



(Supplied photo)

Much appreciation for everyone who contributed to this project

H E SALIM AL MAHROUQI

ment of a souq in the Haffa area and its waterfront.

As per the terms of the agreement, the company has developed a framework for the project that was agreed upon with the relevant authorities, including the establishment of a

heritage market inspired by the architectural style of the old neighbourhood and the market area with the aim of highlighting the historical role of this commercial area, while preserving the identity, heritage and culture of the site.

Oman to open museum on shared history with Kenya

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) will open a permanent museum-cum-exhibition of records and antiques in Lamu, Kenya, pertaining to Oman's historical presence in East Africa on Friday. The exhibits also highlight the common history shared by Oman and Kenya in the island of Lamu.

The exhibition has been curated by the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Kenya in coordination with the Kenyan Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Heritage.

The museum is an archaeological and architectural landmark.

Besides showcasing Omani



(Supplied photo)

presence in Lamu and the depth of the two countries' historical relations, the exhibition reflects the sultanate's keenness to preserve its heritage, culture and civilisation.

Through the project, NRAA seeks to raise awareness on

Oman's history and civilisation in East Africa among the local community and visitors to Lamu Island.

In 2017, NRAA restored some parts of Mombasa Fort so that it could house a permanent museum-cum-exhibition.

3 injured in gas cylinder explosion in Musannah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Three people were injured in a gas cylinder explosion in a workshop in South Batinah, according to the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA).

A statement issued by CDAA said, 'Rescue and ambulance teams in the Governorate of South Batinah were called to deal with a gas cylinder explosion in an industrial workshop in the wilayat of Musannah. Three people were hurt, with injuries rang-

ing from moderate to critical.' CDAA provided emergency medical care to the injured, and later transferred them to a hospital. It called upon all to comply with safety rules and regulations while using and storing gas cylinders.



Oman to observe Safer Internet Day today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To raise awareness on emerging online issues and current concerns with the objective of keeping school students and their guardians safe online, the Ministry of Education (MoE) will celebrate Safer Internet Day on Tuesday.

Safer Internet Day is observed in February every year.

An official at MOE said, "The ministry will celebrate Safer Internet Day on Tuesday, with the aim of spreading the culture and concepts of electronic security among school students and their parents."

He informed that the ministry will also launch a hashtag #SID2023OM on the day.

"The aim is to protect students from the dangers of the Internet and spread awareness among parents to provide a safe environment for their children when using the Internet."

According to the official, the ministry will also hold a virtual workshop through social media called 'Safe Use of the Internet'.

"Experts from Microsoft will present working papers on cybersecurity. The ministry will also publish short video clips presenting tips for safe and positive use of the Internet."

On the day, MoE, in cooperation with Middle East College, will launch a competition via its twitter account on electronic security.

The ministry urged students to participate in the competition.

Five expats jailed for making furniture with used wood

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Five expats have been jailed and fined by authorities for manufacturing furniture using old and used wood, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) stated on Monday.

The Court of the First Instance of Barka sentenced one expat to ten months jail and fined him RO1,000. The court handed ten-month jail sentences to the four other expats.

The five will be deported once they have served their jail sentences.

In a statement, CPA said, 'The Court of First Instance in

the wilayat of Barka recently issued a judicial ruling on the conviction of a number of expatriates for violating the Consumer Protection Law issued via Royal Decree No 66/2014. The accused manufactured furniture from old and used wood in a furniture shop in Barka.'

The court also revoked the company's licence and declared one more accused innocent due to lack of evidence.

CPA called upon all to abide by the provisions of the Consumer Protection Law and not compromise the safety of consumers or expose them to pests and diseases.

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SEASON 2022 -2023

Value of real estate deals rise 6% to RO2.7bn



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The value of real estate transactions in the sultanate increased six per cent to RO2.706bn in 2022, compared to RO2.552bn in 2021, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Fees collected for legal transactions amounted to RO62.6mn at the end of December 2022, compared to the corresponding period of 2021, constituting a fall of 25.5 per cent.

The value of sale contracts dropped 4.8 per cent to RO1.131bn in 2022 compared to RO1.188bn in 2021. The number of sales contracts also went down 21 per cent to 68,616 compared to 86,856 in 2021.

MHUP offers 41 plots in four governorates

Muscat - The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) is offering 41 plots of land via public auction in four governorates to develop the real estate sector and stimulate investments.

According to an official, the ministry will offer usufruct contracts for plots measuring between 150sqm to 2,000sqm through online auction.

The plots offered for investments are not restricted for any particular purpose and are located in areas with large population density.

Of the 41 plots, 17 are in Dakhliyah, 14 in Musandam, five in Dhofar and the remaining in Muscat.

Those interested in bidding must register through the Tatwir electronic platform

using their ID or commercial register number.

The plots are being offered with the aim of supporting growth of GDP, boosting economic output through manufacturing, commercial and other industrial activities, fueling socioeconomic development and supporting the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The value of mortgage contracts rose 15.9 per cent to RO1.558bn in 2022 compared to RO1.344bn in 2021. The number of mortgage contracts increased 5.6 per cent to 1,989 compared to 1,882 in 2021.

The value of swap contracts dropped 15.6 per cent to RO16.1mn compared to 19mn in 2021. The number of swap contracts also decreased 25.5 per cent to 1,309 compared to 1,758 at the end of December 2021.

The number of title deeds issued in 2022 decreased seven per cent to 233,178.

The number of title deeds issued to citizens of GCC countries increased 6.6 per cent to 884 compared to 830 in 2021.

Omran launches Najm to employ 250 Omanis

Muscat - Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) has signed an agreement with the Ministry of Labour to launch a new training-for-employment project called Najm.

The project, which operates under the #IAmTourism programme, aims to provide a platform for developing highly skilled Omani nationals in the tourism and hospitality sectors. It will train 250 jobseekers for employment at a newly established start-up company, which will develop and manage tourism-related activities across Oman to stimulate the growth and popularity of the sector.

The agreement was signed by H E Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Human Resources Development in the Ministry of Labour, and Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of OMRAN Group, with senior officials from both parties in attendance.

As part of the agreement, 250 job opportunities have been announced and applications are currently being accepted from prospective Omani candidates across the sultanate. To be eligible, candidate profiles have to meet the required criteria. The selection process will involve a personal interview and different ability tests. Following selection, 250 high-calibre Omani nationals with an entrepreneurial mindset



will be shortlisted.

These candidates will undergo six months of intensive theoretical and practical training developed in partnership with recognised and specialised institutes in the country. Upon completion of the training and certification, each of the 250 candidates will be offered full-time employment with a newly established OMRAN Group startup.

"This project will improve the labour market and its outcomes by creating new employment opportunities. The tourism industry in the country is still growing and requires the involvement of national competencies, both in terms of tour guides and hospitality," H E Sayyid Salim said.

"The tourism sector is crucial and requires proper training and qualification of national competencies to prepare them for work. This project also stimulates the work environment and the aspirations of those joining it. In

Oman, there are clear indications that the tourism sector is growing and shaping the country's future."

On the occasion, Mahrouqi said, "At Omran, we understand the significance of investing in human capital for the growth and sustainability of the tourism and hospitality industry. That's why we are thrilled to partner with the ministry to launch Najm.

"By creating a sustainable platform for employment in the tourism industry and encouraging Omani youth to pursue careers in this dynamic and fast-growing sector, the Najm project will play a significant role in supporting the objectives of the National Tourism Strategy 2040. Furthermore, Najm represents our commitment to developing the next generation of Omani talent in the tourism industry and equipping them with the skills and talent required to draw out the full potential of the destinations in which they will work."

2 platforms launched to follow up on govt projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Secretariat General of Tender Board launched two new platforms - Amana and Adaa - and two initiatives to promote work culture and boost performance of government employees.

The Amana platform will follow up on the performance of government projects at all stages; Adaa will collect data of valid contracts and purchase orders for government procurement.

The platforms were introduced at the Tender Board's annual gathering held at Diplomatic Club on Monday. The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Dr Said Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

On the occasion, H E Saqri said, "Restructuring will play a significant role in raising the competence of the Tender Board and the government's projects and procurements. The developments include the creation of a local content directorate, a government procurements directorate and a project follow-up directorate."

According to Badr Salim al Maamari, Secretary-General of Tender Board, the value of tenders and associated works awarded by it was valued at more than RO497mn in 2022. These were distributed across five sectors - health, roads and airports, education and information technology.

He pointed out that the Tender Board's plan in 2023 focuses on three main objectives - developing national capacities and employment, fiscal sustainability and achieving high quality in terms of tenders, projects and government procurements.

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Muscat	26	17
Abu Dhabi	29	16
Doha	24	15
Kuwait City	19	10
Manama	21	15
Riyadh	22	9

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	5.28am
Sunrise	6.45am
Duhr	12.26pm
Asr	3.38pm
Maghrib	6.01pm
Isha	7.13pm

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Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender return date
PRE-23-26	Prequalification of Maintenance of Roads in Muscat Governorate 2023	21/02/2023
PRE-23-29	Prequalification of Development of one way road system in Al Khuwair	21/02/2023

Tender Conditions :-

1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).

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Dated this 7th day of February, 2023



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MARKET WATCH

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Sensex60,506.90

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)	
Indian	215.10
Pakistan	715.73
Bangladesh	277.48
Philippines	142.52
Sri Lanka	949.77

Rates as on February 06

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

DP World handles 79mn TEUs in 2022

DP World Limited handled 79mn TEU (twenty-foot equivalent units) across its global portfolio of container terminals in the full year 2022, with gross container volumes increasing by 1.4 per cent year-on-year on a reported basis and up 2.8 per cent on a like-for-like basis.

During the fourth quarter of 2022, DP World handled 19.5mn TEU, up 2.4 per cent on a like-for-like basis.

2022 gross volume growth was broad-based, with Asia Pacific, Middle East & Africa, Australia, and Americas regions all delivering like-for-like growth. Jebel Ali has handled 14mn TEU in 2022, up 1.7 per cent year-on-year.

GCC banking sector outlook 'cautiously' optimistic: S&P

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Relatively tighter local monetary policy conditions and lower economic growth will lead to a decline in lending growth for GCC banks, S&P Global Ratings said in a new report.

'We expect GCC banks' asset quality indicators to deteriorate only slightly because of slowing growth and higher interest rates,' said S&P Global Ratings said in the 'GCC Banking Sector Outlook Cautiously Optimistic' report.

S&P expects GCC economies to slow in 2023 due to lower oil production volumes, while higher interest rates are also likely to dampen non-oil growth. There is some upside from China's relaxation of zero-COVID restrictions and moderating headline inflation, however.

Although GCC banks have absorbed the impact of the pandemic, they also continued to build provisions and write off non-performing loans to make space for new ones, the rating agency noted.



It said that profitability has recovered to pre-pandemic levels in most GCC countries thanks to higher interest rates and stable cost of risk.

'Meanwhile, banking sector efficiency remains strong, but inflation will increase operating costs,' the rating agency added.

S&P pointed out that the lower global liquidity is likely to have a limited impact on GCC banks because of their strong net external asset positions or limited net external debt positions. Qatar is more vulnerable than

According to S&P, GCC banks' capitalisation levels will continue to support their credit-worthiness in 2023 and 2024.

'Banks stepped up their additional Tier 1 issuances (both conventional and Islamic) in the past few years to benefit from supportive market conditions. As interest rates increase, we may see lower issuance and potential decisions to not call hybrids approaching their first optional call date,' the rating agency said.

GCC banks, S&P said, are mainly funded by domestic deposits, which have proved stable through different cycles. Deposit growth was insufficient to finance lending growth in some countries, particularly in Saudi Arabia, where the central bank intervened to alleviate the pressure, the rating agency added.

S&P expects Brent oil price to average US\$90 per barrel in 2023 and US\$80 per barrel in 2024. The rating agency, however, said that the production cuts are likely to result in lower economic growth in the GCC region.

Oil prices rise over positive China demand outlook

Muscat – Oil prices increased marginally on Monday over positive demand projections in the world's largest oil importer, China.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$80.15 per barrel in early morning trade in London, up 0.3 per cent from the closing price of US\$79.94 a barrel in the previous trading session.

Brent crude futures rose 37 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to US\$80.31 a barrel at 1218GMT, while US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures slipped 13 cents or 0.2 per cent to US\$73.52.

According to media reports, the head of the International Energy Agency, Fatih Birol, stated in an interview on Sunday that China is expected to account for roughly half of the growth in global oil demand this year.

He suggested that if China's demand continues to rise, major oil exporters may reconsider their production policies. "If demand goes up very strongly, if the Chinese economy rebounds,



then there will be a need, in my view, for the OPEC+ countries to look at their (output) policies," Birol was quoted as saying.

Prices came under pressure as a result of demand concerns and market uncertainty, which were exacerbated by the EU ban on Russian seaborne oil products, which took effect on February 5, along with a global price cap to put additional pressure on Moscow's revenue stream.

A price cap of US\$100 per barrel on premium Russian oil products such as diesel and a US\$45 per barrel on discounted products like fuel oil also came into effect on Sunday.

Agencies

THE FINANCIAL CORPORATION Co. SAOG AND ITS SUBSIDIARIES

Board of Directors' Report

Dear Shareholders,

We present the audited financial results of The Financial Corporation Co. SAOG (FINCORP) (The Group) for the year ended 31 December 2022.

FINANCIAL RESULTS

Group earned a total operating income of RO. 333,533 compared to RO. 377,306 during the year ended 31 December 2021. Investment Income dropped from 860,987 for the year 2021 to a loss of RO 89,390 for the year 2022.

There was a Net loss of RO 337,823 from the Associate versus a profit of 339,940 for the same period last year.

Net Loss for the year 2022 stood at RO. 541,438 compared to a Net profit of RO. 733,045 for the year 2021. Majority of the loss occurred from the investments being a troubled year by geopolitical conflicts and fear of recession owing a very high inflation around the major economies of world.

A summary of the financial results is tabulated below.

DETAILS	31-Dec-22 (in R.O)	31-Dec-21 (in R.O)	Variance %
Operating Income	333,533	377,306	-12%
Investment Income	(89,390)	860,987	-110%
Total Income	244,143	1,238,293	-80%
Operating Expense	(466,544)	(519,760)	-10%
Operating (Loss)/Profit	(222,401)	718,533	-131%
Share of profit from associate	(337,823)	339,940	-199%
Other Income/(Expense)	18,915	(2,819)	771%
Net (Loss) / profit before taxes	(541,309)	1,055,654	-151%
Taxation	(129)	(322,609)	-100%
Net (Loss)/ profit after taxes	(541,438)	733,045	-174%
(Loss)/profit per share (RO)	(0.008)	0.010	-174%

MARKET OUTLOOK

Forecasts for the GCC region in 2023 are more upbeat, with GDP growth expected at 3.5% this year especially when world output is expected to add 1.7% while advanced economies to contribute only 0.5% as per the World Bank. The region is likely to benefit from its relative stability in contrast to economic uncertainty elsewhere. Purchasing Managers' Indices (PMI)

for the non-oil sector remained into growth space for most of 2022 which is likely bring to diversification and reduce economies' oil dependence.

Oil prices are likely to sustain between USD 75 – 95 per barrel. The gradual and steady recovery of China coupled with reversal of zero-covid policy is likely to boost energy demand, partially offset by slowdown in global economic activities. Oil exporters may witness some challenges largely on account of implementing OPEC+ production cuts to stabilize oil prices at higher prices despite weakening overall demand.

GCC region does face some serious risks in relation to liquidity squeeze. The unparalleled speed of increase by the US Fed to tackle their inflation has been broadly mirrored in the GCC countries that maintains pegged exchange rate has put significant pressure on the market liquidity, especially in the Saudi Arabia. The sharp and swift increase in interest rates has resulted into rapid rise in lending that has not been matched by deposit growth, which is very much unusual for a period of high oil prices.

DIVIDEND POLICY

The Company follows a prudent and conservative dividend policy in order to achieve its long-term objective to provide sustainable economic value to its Shareholders..

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) AND ESG

The Company is committed to contributing to the environment and local communities.

CHANGES TO TOP MANAGEMENT

During the year top management has been revamped. Key positions with right skill have been filled. This will contribute to the company's growth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq for his wise leadership and progressive vision that continues to lead the country along the path of growth and prosperity.

We wish to extend our appreciation to all officials and staff of the Muscat Securities Market, Capital Market Authority and Muscat Clearing and Depository Company for their valuable co-operation and support.

Finally, we wish to thank all our staff for their spirited contribution for holding on during these times, shareholders for their faith, and our esteemed clients for the confidence, trust and support extended to FINCORP.

Mohamed Darwish Al Khoori

Chairman of the Board

Consolidated Audited Financial Statements For The Year Ended 31 December 2022

Statement Of Financial Position As At 31 December 2022.

	31-Dec-22 RO	31-Dec-21 RO
ASSETS		
Cash and bank balances	1,535,154	1,483,417
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	3,758,372	3,830,006
Trade and other receivables	752,786	688,807
Investment in an associate	1,567,141	1,989,866
Deferred income tax asset	78,367	78,496
Property and equipment	5,547	16,398
Investment properties	270,000	270,000
Total assets	7,967,367	8,356,990
LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	899,349	727,436
Provision for taxation	7,614	7,614
Provision for end of service benefits	36,698	56,796
Total liabilities	943,661	791,846
EQUITY		
Equity attributable to owners of the parent		
Share capital	7,002,996	7,002,996
Legal reserve	929,392	929,392
Accumulated losses	(908,682)	(367,244)
Shareholder's equity	7,023,706	7,565,144
Total liabilities and equity	7,967,367	8,356,990
Net assets per share	0.100	0.098

Statement Of Comprehensive Income For The Year Ended 31 December 2022

	31-Dec-22 RO	31-Dec-21 RO
INCOME		
Brokerage commissions (net)	168,966	113,040
Management fees	120,140	244,494
Investments net gain /(loss):		
- unrealised	(314,207)	621,295
- realised	95,697	131,574
Dividend& other income	143,321	107,708
Margin Fees	30,226	20,182
Gross income	244,143	1,238,293
Expenses		
General and administrative expenses	(454,165)	(504,310)
Depreciation	(12,379)	(15,450)
Operating expenses	(466,544)	(519,760)
Operating (Loss) / profit	(222,401)	718,533
Finance income	665	692
Finance costs	(68)	(1,389)
Finance income – net	597	(697)
Reversal of allowance for expected credit loss (net)	18,318	27,878
Income from associate	(337,823)	339,940
Net loss from change in fair value of investment property	-	(30,000)
(Loss) / Profit before tax	(541,309)	1,055,654
Taxation	(129)	(322,609)
(Loss) / Profit for the year	(541,438)	733,045
(Losses) – Profit per share	(0.008)	0.010

Complete accounts for the group/parent company will be sent to any investor/user of this financial statements upon request within 7 days from the date of receiving the request

Fitch affirms OETC ratings at 'BB+'; outlook stable

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings has affirmed Oman Electricity Transmission Company's (OETC) long-term issuer default ratings (IDR) and senior unsecured rating at 'BB+'.

The outlook on OETC's ratings is stable, Fitch said in a statement. Fitch assesses OETC's standalone credit profile (SCP) at 'bb+'.

The rating agency said its view is supported by OETC's strong business profile, which will remain commensurate with the rating under Price Control 6 (PC6).

'The SCP reflects OETC's dominant market position as the natural monopoly national transmission system operator within a supportive regulatory framework, stable earnings profile and Ebitda fully generated from regulated electricity,' Fitch said.

It said that, based on its criteria, OETC can be rated up to one notch above the sovereign rating of Oman (which is BB with stable outlook).

Fitch expects OETC's business profile to remain stable under PC6, which covers 2023-2026 period.

The rating agency views the regulatory framework as supportive, compared with most emerging-market peers, underpinning OETC's SCP.

'Oman has an independent,

consultative and transparent system with a revenue-cap methodology based on prior regulatory standards in the UK. Revenue generated by OETC is subject to price controls, which are set by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR),' Fitch noted.

Fitch forecasts OETC's total capital expenditure (capex) at RO641mn in 2022-2026, leading to cumulative negative free cash flows of almost RO323mn and expected net debt of RO967mn at end-2026 (from RO772.5mn expected at end-2022).

The main capex projects include the first phase of the North-South Interconnector project (completion in 2023) and phase two of the project, which is due to start in 2024 with capex of almost RO159mn.

The project is considered strategic by the government.

Fitch noted that OETC's full capex plan under Price Control 6 has been approved by the regulator and will be part of the regulated asset value.

'The majority of capex is for expansion and less than five per cent is for maintenance. OETC's available cash position and the term loan of RO90mn borrowed in 2022 will be sufficient to cover its capex for 2023-2024,' the rating agency said.

Fitch applies its government-related entities (GRE) rating criteria to OETC's rating, as the Omani government continues to have sufficient control over OETC through involvement in and influence over its strategic, operational and financial activities, while it controls 51 per cent of OETC through Nama Holding.

Iraqi Kurdistan suspends oil exports through Turkey after quake

Arbil, Iraq – Iraqi Kurdistan said it was suspending oil exports through Turkey as a precaution after a deadly earthquake rocked its northern neighbour and Syria before dawn on Monday.

"Due to the earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria, and to ensure the safety of oil exports and prevent any undesirable incidents, oil exports through the pipeline connecting the Kurdistan region to Turkey have been suspended," the Kurdish ministry of natural resources said in a

statement.

The autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq usually exports around 450,000 barrels of oil a day through Turkey.

It has continued to pump oil out of the country despite the federal authorities demanding a halt to the trade.

"The Kurdistan Regional Government confirms the halt of oil exportation through #Turkey's Ceyhan due to the #earthquake that struck several areas in the country," tweeted Lawk Ghafari,

head of foreign media relations in Kurdistan.

"The exportation will resume after careful inspection of the pipelines finalised."

A 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit southern Turkey and neighbouring Syria on Monday, killing more than 1,000 people and causing widespread damage, with tremors felt as far away as Egypt and Iraq. It was followed by a second earthquake of magnitude 7.5 a few hours later.

AFP

Renault and Nissan boards approve 'rebalanced' alliance

London, UK – French automaker Renault and Japanese partner Nissan said on Monday they were opening a “new chapter” in their tension-marred alliance as they signed a deal to reboot their 24-year relationship.

The “rebalanced” partnership approved by their boards will end Renault’s dominant position, reducing its stake in the Japanese firm from 43.4 per cent to 15 per cent, the same size as Nissan’s share in its French counterpart.

The agreement includes Nissan taking a stake of up to 15 per cent in Renault’s new electric vehicle venture Ampere, the companies said in a joint statement.

They also announced joint projects in Latin America, India and Europe for the production of vehicles ranging from pick-up trucks to SUVs and electric cargo vans.

The alliance began in 1999, when Renault rescued Nissan from bankruptcy. They were joined by Mitsubishi Motors in 2016, when Nissan took a 34-per cent stake in its struggling Japanese rival.

Tensions erupted in 2015



(From left) Nissan CEO Makoto Uchida, Renault chairperson Jean-Dominique Senard, Mitsubishi Motors CEO Takao Kato and Renault CEO Luca de Meo pose at the end of a press conference in London on Monday (AFP)

when the French state increased its stake in Renault. It was later reduced and an agreement was reached to cap the government’s ability to interfere in the alliance’s affairs.

The union was shaken again by the 2018 arrest of Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn, who claimed the charges against him were intended to prevent him from

bringing the Japanese and French automakers closer together.

The Renault board approved the overhaul on Sunday while Nissan signed off on it on Monday, a week after the agreement was announced, following months of painstaking negotiations.

Analysts have described the rebalancing of the deal as a way

to build confidence between the two carmakers, especially after the fallout from the Ghosn scandal.

“We must build a strong culture of transparency and respect,” Nissan chief executive Makoto Uchida said at a press conference held on neutral ground in London. The Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi alliance –

which today counts 375,000 employees worldwide – was the world’s top carmaker by sales in 2018 but has since fallen behind Toyota, Volkswagen and Hyundai-Kia.

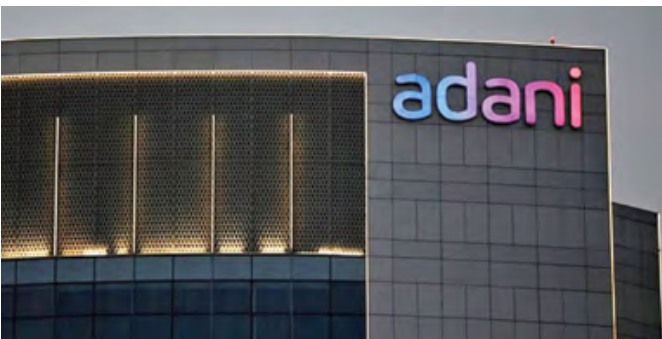
“The basis of this deal is that we are reactivating business operations like at the beginning of this alliance,” Renault CEO Luca de Meo said in English.

“We will be consistent, result focused, generous and fair, as we have been on our side” of the negotiations, he said.

Monday’s statement said the overhaul would “open a new chapter” for the alliance.

“This far-reaching programme paves the way for a renewal and strengthening of the 24-year partnership, creating a new agile spirit and harnessing the pioneering technologies of all three Alliance members,” the statement said. Renault will not immediately sell the remaining 28.4-per cent stake in Nissan, instead transferring the shares into a French trust because their current market value is lower than that registered in Renault’s accounts.

AFP



Adani promoters to prepay \$1.1bn loans to release pledged shares

Ahmedabad, India – Adani Group on Monday announced that its promoters will prepay US\$1.114bn for the release of share-backed loans ahead of maturity in September 2024.

This, the group said, is in continuation of the promoters’ assurance to prepay all share-backed financing and also is in light of recent market volatility.

With the repayment of the mentioned amount, the following Adani Group listed company shares shall be released in due course: (a) Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd: 168.27mn shares, representing 12 per cent of the promoters’ holding (b) Adani Green Energy Limited: 27.56mn shares, representing 3 per cent of promoters’ holding (c) Adani Transmission

Limited: 11.77mn shares, representing 1.4 per cent of promoters’ holding.

Since January 24 following the Hindenburg Research report which accused the Adani Group of “brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud” the Group companies shares have been facing intense selling pressure.

Investors dumped more Adani stock on Monday as India’s opposition staged protests calling for a full inquiry into allegations of major accounting fraud at the country’s biggest conglomerate.

The group owned by tycoon Gautam Adani has lost around US\$120bn in value since the claims were levelled by short-seller US investment group Hindenburg Research on January 24. Agencies

Stock markets mostly slide on US rate-hike fears

London, UK – Stock markets mostly slid and the dollar firmed Monday after a forecast-busting US jobs report fanned expectations of more Federal Reserve interest rate hikes to cool sky-high inflation.

Adding to the downbeat mood were geopolitical concerns after the United States shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon that had floated across the country for days.

Equity market rallies enjoyed through January have largely stopped as investors contemplate an extended period of high borrowing costs aimed at bringing inflation down from multi-decade highs. London’s benchmark FTSE 100 index, however, struck an all-time high Friday, with analysts saying bad news, such as expectations of UK recession throughout this year, was priced in.

The British capital’s top index has benefitted also from some strong company earnings, including record profits from energy giant Shell, and renewed investment from abroad amid pound weakness.

But it was down almost one percent near midday on Monday. “Having hit a new all-time high..., the FTSE 100 opened the new trading week with a hang-



London Stock Exchange's FTSE 100 index has benefitted from some strong company earnings

over,” noted Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell.

“Throwing cold water over the party were stronger than expected jobs figures in the US, something closely monitored by the Federal Reserve when making interest rate decisions.”

Eurozone stock markets fared worse, as did leading indices in Asia.

A softer tone from the Fed regarding its monetary tightening campaign had allowed market participants to entertain the possibility of a pause to rate hikes, or even a cut, later in the year.

But that optimism was dealt a heavy blow Friday by data showing more than half a million new jobs were created in the United States last month, nearly double the December figure and far more than the 188,000 ex-

pected.

Government figures also showed unemployment fell to the lowest level since 1969. The reading showed the world’s biggest economy remained strong despite almost a year of rate hikes and soaring prices, indicating the Fed still had plenty of work to do to rein in inflation.

“We are concerned that on the back of this kind of jobs report, it definitely holds the Fed to a higher-for-longer path,” said Lisa Erickson at US Bank Wealth Management.

All three main indices sank Friday on Wall Street, with the Nasdaq down more than one percent as tech firms took a hit after disappointing earnings from giants Amazon, Apple and Google parent Alphabet.

AFP

Dell to cut 5% of its global workforce

Washington, US – American computer firm Dell said Monday that it will lay off some five per cent of its global workforce, or around 6,650 employees, the latest casualties of a job-slashing wave hitting the US tech sector.

The cuts follow similar steps by tech giants Microsoft, Facebook owner Meta, Google-parent Alphabet, Amazon and Twitter as the industry girds for economic downturn. But “market conditions continue to erode with an uncertain future,” said Dell Technologies vice chairman Jeff Clarke in a memo.

AFP

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FINCORP AL AMAL FUND

AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2022

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, 2022.

Fund Performance		
Figures in OMR	31-Dec-22	31-Dec-21
Fund Income	(832,221)	1,691,005
Fund Expenses	122,128	(324,631)
Net (Loss) / Profit	(954,349)	1,366,374

Figures in OMR	31-Dec-22	31-Dec-21
Net Asset Value	4,237,976	5,669,135
Units Outstanding	4,591,948	4,837,436
Net Asset Value per unit	0.923	1.172
Fund Performance (net of fees)	-16.98%	19.24%
MSCI ACWI (*)	-19.80%	-
S&P GCC Composite Price Index	-	31.45%

(*) Beginning 2022, the Benchmark of the Fund was changed to MSCI ACWI which is a global index and one which represents the investing universe of the Fund.

Market 2022 Performance
Global markets witnessed a relief rally during the fourth quarter notably in the months of October and November primarily attributed to US CPI readings coming in better than anticipated declining to 6.5% as compared to high of 9.1% registered in June 2022, market favored US Midterm results and prospects of China's reopening putting a curb to zero-covid policy. The Fed's pace and intensity to tighten monetary policy is likely to slow down going forward with another 25 bps in February and March FOMC meet as downward trend on inflation emerges.

During Q4 2022, MSCI ACWI increased by 9.40% led by an incline of 7.60% in the month of November. On contrary, S&P GCC Composite declined during the Q4 2022 by 6.28% led by a correction of 4.69% registered in the month of December 2022 largely on account of poor prospects of oil demand sustainability and concerns over global economic slowdown realises.

Market Outlook
The World Bank in its January 2023 publication has negatively revised the GDP growth for almost all major economies signally slowdown of economic activities across the world. The market themes of 2022 namely inflation, potential economic recession and disturbed asset prices are expected to continue to be around as we head into 2023. But the story of mentioned elements can be different as equities are forward instruments and the fast-paced monetary tightening undertaken by the Fed has begun to show results with CPI on a downtrend, reduced capital expenditures, weaker spending, lowering consumer confidence and layoffs across major tech names (yet job market remains extremely hot with unemployment at a record low of 3.5% and jobless claims below normal average). Corporate earnings could be a key focus for investors in 2023 but also a potential instigator of volatility. As the economy slows, earnings will likely come under pressure where we anticipate corporate profits should hold up better than during past downturns.

The three shortlisted parameters identified for market bottoming process are well into favorable territory for equities:

1. Inflation on a downtrend (CPI at 6.5% vs 9.1% high)
2. Weakening of dollar (Dollar Index at 101.7 vs 114.75 high)
3. Lower 10-year bond yield (Yield at 3.48% vs 4.23% high)

Improving prospects of China's reopening and economic rebound could also act a critical catalyst. The overall decline in valuations for the year 2022 for global equities provides a potential buffer which should support positive returns once the inflation moderates sustainably, and central banks pivot the monetary tightening.

Forecasts for the GCC region in 2023 are more upbeat, with GDP growth expected at 3.5% this year especially when world output is expected to add 1.7% while advanced economies to contribute only 0.5% as per the World Bank. The region is likely to benefit from its relative stability in contrast to economic uncertainty elsewhere. Purchasing Managers' Indices (PMI) for the non-oil sector remained into growth space for most of the 2022, which is likely bring to diversification and reduce oil dependence. However, GCC region does face some critical risks in relation to liquidity squeeze. The sharp and swift increase in interest rates has resulted into rapid rise in lending that has not been matched by deposit growth, which is very much unusual for a period of high oil prices.

We continue to remain vigilant and cautious until clear signs of stable macroeconomic and geopolitical environment emerge ensuring sufficient diversification between growth and defensive allocation.

Investment Strategy
The investment strategy focuses on capitalizing high earning growth opportunities in fast-growing and vibrant economies while ensuring portfolio resiliency through sufficient defensive allocation. Since the overall global economic outlook remains gloomy while being highly exposed to geopolitical externalities, the strategy remains to invest companies that has geographically diversified revenue streams to manage the externalities efficiently.

Only countries with high stability and low political risk will be looked upon. In the long run, the fund's strategy will aim to capture capital appreciation from investing into global growth opportunities as well as value and income opportunities in GCC.

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

Ayman bin Hamed Al Busaidi
Chairman

P.O. Box 782, PC 131,
Sultanate of Oman, Phone: (968) 24822327,
Fax: (968) 24822390, E-mail: fincorp@fincorp.org,
Website: www.fincorp.org

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	31-Dec-22 RO	31-Dec-21 RO
ASSETS		
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	3,793,820	5,520,597
Receivables	359,440	166,999
Cash and cash equivalents	108,484	178,402
Total assets	4,261,744	5,865,998
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Amounts due to related parties	16,910	187,437
Accruals and other payables	6,858	9,426
Total liabilities	23,768	196,863
Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders	4,237,976	5,669,135
Net asset value per unit	0.923	1.172

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

	31-Dec-22 RO	31-Dec-21 RO
INCOME		
Dividend income	79,970	136,862
Net realised (loss) / gain on investments at fair value through profit or loss	(231,451)	385,691
Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss	(699,390)	1,130,992
Interest income	1,905	383
Redemption charges	1,665	17,288
Foreign exchange gain (net)	14,380	19,789
Other income	700	-
Total Income	(832,221)	1,691,005
EXPENSES		
Management fees	29,388	41,328
Administration fees	24,047	33,814
Advisory fees	24,047	33,814
General and administration	17,260	24,432
Brokerage commission expenses (transaction cost)	9,849	10,021
Investors' Committee's meeting attendance fees	9,400	11,700
Custodian service fees	8,119	9,251
Performance fees	-	90,271
Investors' Committee's remuneration	-	70,000
Total Expenses	122,110	324,631
Net (loss) / profit and total comprehensive income for the year	(954,331)	1,366,374
Net (loss) / profit per unit	(0.202)	0.212

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



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Owners praise INFINITI QX60

INFINITI QX60 has already set a high bar for family SUVs with generous features which complements its serene interior and sleek exterior. The seven-seater luxury family SUV - INFINITI QX60 offers a confident and responsive performance.

Given its immense power and capability, aspiring owners might be surprised to learn that the Infiniti QX60 is also quite fuel efficient, a press release said.

Salim al Shukaili, who is a recent owner, said, "Infiniti QX60 is as much a powerful performer as it is a premium and advanced crossover. QX60 is powered by a 279-horsepower 3.5ltr V6 engine teamed with an all-new 9-speed automatic transmission. This makes it the perfect car ever."

A senior spokesperson at Infiniti Oman said, "Infiniti QX60 is impressive outside, its interior is serene and is full of technology that takes the stress out of driving, all of which allow its owners to conquer life in style."

Nasser al Alawi said, "Infiniti QX60 features intuitive tech-



nology and impressive driveline dynamics. It features Infiniti's InTouch 12.3-inch interactive

display touchscreen for infotainment with wireless Apple CarPlay and USB-based An-

droid Auto compatibility. An available 12.3-inch dynamic metre display in front of the

driver renders beautifully crisp information such as speed, navigation information and more,

and can be paired with a sharp 10.8-inch head-up display which provides vital informa-

tion to the driver while keeping their eyes on the road. In the centre console, an available wireless charging mat, large enough to support an iPhone Pro Max, makes keeping devices connected and charged easy."

Appreciating the model's advanced safety features, Jamil al Mamri said, "Active safety features such as Rear Automatic Braking, Predictive Forward Collision Warning, and Forward Emergency Braking with Pedestrian Detection are available on the QX60. Adaptive front lighting and auto-leveling headlights are available to light the road ahead brilliantly. The smart rear view mirror provides an unobstructed view behind the QX60 when passengers or cargo obstruct rearward vision."

Observing that powertrain delivers a responsive drive that's quiet, confident, and poised, Abbas al Balushi said, "With three-rows, Infiniti has paid careful attention to ensure the driver and passengers ride in the utmost comfort."

Lifelong learning – a pathway towards clinical excellence

Oman International Hospital (OIH) has started a Med Academy, a 10-year project powered by Siemens Healthineers.

The overall goal of Med Academy is promoting technical and clinical know-how of OIH employees aiming to increase skills leading to the provision of the best healthcare, in line with the highest quality standards worldwide, a press release said.

The project includes onsite and online training sessions, e-education platforms, preceptorships, and symposiums. And it will be used as the foundation for the process of accreditation of the hospital.

Oman International Hospital was founded in 2021, in collaboration with an experienced European hospital management group (IGHS) and composed of three diverse shareholders - Oman Brunei Investment Company, Suhail Bahwan Group, and Idealmed Global Healthcare



Services (IGHS).

Marcelo Pereira, CEO of OIH, said, "With the assistance of a network of highly devoted and

skilled medical professionals, renowned international doctors, sophisticated medical equipment, and cutting-edge technol-

ogy in streamlining, OIH is committed to providing world-class treatment to citizens of Oman as well as the expatriate populace."

Bank Muscat's Green Sports offers support to sports teams

Bank Muscat has announced that the bank will continue to accept applications for the 2023 edition of its landmark Green Sports programme till February 18.

As in previous years, in 2023, too, 20 sports teams from different governorates will be provided support in one of the four categories available, including greening of football fields with natural grass or synthetic turf, installation of floodlights, and water desalination equipment, a press release said.

The aim of the long running programme is to help provide suitable infrastructure that can help Omani youth develop their talents, create local community bonding and contribute to the socio-economic development of the sultanate.

Green Sports has brought about a tremendous positive change in Oman's sports infrastructure since its launch in 2012



and benefitted Omani youth teams across different governorates in Oman. Keeping in mind the importance of submission of all the required documents, the bank has requested all youth teams who would like to apply for Green Sports support to submit their applications through the link specified below, well ahead of the deadline.

Teams should go to:

<https://techgurusales.com/green-sports/green-stadium-participation-form-terms.aspx> and complete the application form electronically. All applicants should be able to showcase their positive impact and contributions to the local community.

(Teams may email GreenSports@bankmuscat.com, or call 24801200/24801625 for more

Obaidani to head International Socca Federation in M E

After the successful participation of the sultanate during the past years in the Socca World Cup 'Six a Side football', and the active role in developing the sport for the corporate sector and amateur teams at the local and Middle East levels, Waleed bin Juma al Obaidani, has been appointed president of the International Socca Federation in Middle East region, and a member of the Executive Board.

The announcement of Obaidani's appointment was made in Birmingham, on the sidelines of the annual meeting of the member states joining the Federation, with the presence of more than 80 members representing their countries from different continents of the world.

The participants discussed the developments related to the organisation of the fourth edition of Socca World Cup, which is scheduled to be held in June in the city of Essen, in Germany, with the participation of 44



Waleed al Obaidani

countries, a press release said.

"We have long sought to develop sports activities for the amateur and corporate sectors in the Sultanate of Oman by introducing periodic local competitions that qualify for international championships that have contributed to make an impact on the interest in this sector in Oman. Our annual participation in Socca World Cup comes as an extension of this trend which would achieve many goals that contribute to the development of football for companies and amateurs," Obaidani said.

Pakistan School Muscat holds annual Sports Gala

Pakistan School Muscat held its annual Inter House Sports Gala - 2022-23 on its grounds on February 2 and 3.

Sanam Qadri, Defence Attache, US Embassy, graced the occasion as chief guest while Capt Hamid Sheraz, Defence Attache, Embassy of Pakistan, was the guest of honour and Mian Muhammad Riaz was a special guest, a press release said.

At the outset, Gul Rahim, central co-ordinator, Pakistan School Muscat, administered the oath



to all the participating athletes clad in red, blue, green and yellow, representing Johar, Iqbal, Jinnah and Sir Syed houses respectively.

The Junior Wing performed a fascinating drill under the guidance of Sanya Mirza, central coordinator of Junior Block. This was followed by a well organised march-past as house captains lead their teams, holding aloft their respective house flags. The various track and field events were held subsequently.

Sultan Market launched in Amerat Al Nahdah locality

Sultan retail chain launched their re-branded 'Sultan Market' grocery and convenience store in the burgeoning suburb of Amerat Al Nahdah on January 26.

The launch took place under the patronage of H E Mohammad Bin Hameed al Ghabshi, Wali of Amerat, and in the presence of a number of Sultan's top management and as-

sociated personnel, a press release said.

Sultan Market's launch in the heart of Amerat Al Nahdah represents another milestone in the retail brand's evolution as a trusted and iconic name in the Sultanate of Oman's supermarket and convenience store landscape. It is the retail chain's second store in Al Amerat and the eighth outlet in Muscat.

The Sultan Market concept is designed to elevate the shopping experience through a value-focused customer journey catering to a large community of diverse cultures and backgrounds. Furthermore, Sultan Market promises an experience that builds on community in a friendly and attractive environment, and that brings customers together to

shop in a large-scale store that offers an assortment of ethnic ranges for all their household needs. Sultan Market customers can enjoy easy access to fresh foods, and see the latest assortment of products and eye-catching displays.

Fawaz Fouad Diab, general manager, said, "This launch of our new Sultan Market in the rapidly-developing Amerat Al

Nahdah neighbourhood is another 'first' for the Sultan brand. As a retail concept, Sultan Market will shift its focus to being more of a market-style supermarket, with an emphasis on fresh goods and fresh produce delivered daily to the store by local suppliers - for the people of Amerat Al Nahdah. This will come in addition to the usual high-quality grocery items.

SOTC, Khimji's to host consumer roadshow

SOTC Travel, a leading omni-channel travel and tourism company announced its first physical consumer roadshow in Oman since the pandemic with a host of products specially tailored for its customers.

The holiday roadshow is scheduled for February 11 at Khimji's House of Travel, Next to Oman Air Office, in Ruwi, Muscat, a press release said.

The location for the roadshow at the head office of Khimji's House of Travel has been chosen with care for convenient access. The weekend has been selected to offer families the convenience to walk-in at leisure and plan their holidays together with the company's experts present on-ground to guide/assist."

Daniel D'souza, president and country head - Holidays, SOTC Travel, said, "It is exciting to be back in Oman. SOTC has always received strong support from



this market, and this being our first physical roadshow since the pandemic, our team of experts are excited to meet and interact with customers in-person once

again to understand their holiday requirements. We are positive, this roadshow will help us reestablish our customer connect in this high potential mar-

ket. To delight them, we have created a portfolio of interesting itineraries that are wide ranged and cost effective simultaneously for our customers in

Oman."

Cashio Vettom, GM, Khimjis House of Travel, added, "The objective is to re-engage. Travel has slowly traversed back to the

pre pandemic scenario and travelers are now open to group travel. We are getting many queries for summer and therefore, to support our customers

looking at group holidays with the fulfillment of Indian meals, SOTC's holiday roadshow has been organized."

The company's product range includes a diversity of holiday options to delight consumer segments across Gen Z/new age travelers, millennials/young professionals, multigenerational families, and couples/honeymooners. In addition to special group tours (accompanied by an experienced Tour Manager), the holiday portfolio includes personalised tours for a group of friends/extended family, individual/solo trips and customised options, specially designed based on the customer's unique preferences.

Popular destinations include Europe, USA, Australia - New Zealand, South East Asia's Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Vietnam and Cambodia; also Japan and South Korea.

Oman team wins Omantel Country Pairs Betterball



Ras Al Hamra Golf Club in partnership with Omantel hosted the Omantel Country Pairs Betterball last weekend.

The fact that each team is made up of players from the same nation distinguishes this golf competition from others. The monthly competition featured 19 teams in the course, a press release said

When all of the results were

in, the UK team of Paul Brotherton and Joe Watson and the Omani team of Salim Al Harthy and Hisham Al Siyabi were tied. The total was 46 for both teams. The Omani team, however, prevailed after the final countback with 18 points versus the UK teams' 16 points.

With 45 points, the United Nations team of Christophe Perringard (France) and Robbie

Joseph (USA) got the third place.

Ras Al Hamra Golf Club is the oldest golf club in Oman. Originally a sand course, it was redesigned by Graham Marsh Golf Design and opened as a floodlit grass course in November 2014. Supported by a strong member base as well as home to several local golf societies, Ras Al Hamra Golf Club puts a spotlight on all who visit.



ISG shines at CBSE swim meet

The skillful swimmers from Indian School Al Ghubra won seven medals at the CBSE National Swimming Competition held between January 21 - 24 at Genius School, Rajkot (Gujarat).

The ISG swimming sensation,

Nitish Sai Harinath of class 8, impressed the spectators with high agility as he swam his way to win two gold medals in the 50m Free style, and 50m Butterfly stroke in the Under-14 boys Category. Avighna Chin-

thala won a silver medal in the 100m Back stroke and two bronze medals in the 50m Freestyle and 50m Back stroke, respectively.

The girls U14 Relay Team bagged two silver medals in two

different relay events - 4x100m Freestyle Relay and 4x100m Medley Relay.

The Relay team comprised Avighna Chinthala, N Haripriya Satish, Jia Parijat Singh, Evani Joshi and Aditi Bhakat.

FDO launches new brand to enhance investment

Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) has launched its new brand aimed at the enhancement of the investment opportunities in the fishing industry and for a prosperous economic future for the Sultanate of Oman.

The new logo embodies an abstract representation of multiple water layers and a perspective of sea and ocean waters in addition to Polaris abstraction as an indication of the Omanis' ancient maritime history, thriving fishing industry, and significant business relations, a press release said.

"We unveil our new logo, priding ourselves on the achievements made in the fishing industry, including the thriving fish farming industry, diversified production, boosted returns as well as capability and competency building. Again, we promise more achievements and progress," said Eng Nabil bin Salim al Bimani, FDO's GCEO.

"We unveil our new logo

to reinforce our strategic orientation for the period 2023-2026 based on three main pillars - the reinforcement of infrastructure, the diversification of the investment products, and the enhancement of the return on products. We found plenty of investment opportunities for the expansion of the commercial fishing fleet, the farming of new species of marine organisms in Oman, and the development of fish value added products," Bimani added.

The new brand will be promoted by hard work for developing the commercial fishing sector and sustainable fish farming as well as FDO's acquisition of eight group companies operating in the integrated solutions in the fisheries sector. In the fish farming sector, the company works with the group companies for the development of the fish farming projects in several locations within the sultanate.

Jotun M E launches 'Stories: Colour Design' collection



The new Global Colour Card for 2023, Stories: Colour Design by Jotun presents a palette of expressive, hopeful shades. They are purposely designed to inspire a creative ambience in homes.

The 21 colours featured are timeless and not trend driven, but chosen for their positivity, honesty and versatility. In their unique way, they introduce an element of joy into the home, a press release said.

Lisbeth Larsen, Global Colour manager at Jotun, said, "Colour has an amazing power both to

express how we feel about our lives and to shape it. For many people, now is a time for reflection, and thinking about what we value. Colour can be a brilliant way of expressing those values, and reminding us of them, day by day."

Of the 21 shades featured in this year's Colour Card, nine are new to the Jotun collection. Jotun's dedicated colour technology lab in close collaboration with Larsen and her team, has created and developed a unique palette of colours ranging from

smooth warming neutrals to natural, calming greens and rich, statement reds.

The new colours have been divided into groups of seven, along with existing shades from the Jotun archive to create three perfectly blended colour collections. These unique collections capture different moods and modes of expression, enabling people to easily combine complementary and contrasting shades within each collection. This creates coherent interiors that tell stories about the home.



Indian School Muladha holds scouts camp

An annual Scouts and Guides camp was organised in Indian School Muladha on January 26 and 27. The two-day camp was inaugurated by Syed Salman, vice chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools Oman.

The event was also attended by Musthafa Madathodiyil, president School Management Committee (SMC) and other members of the SMC. The chief guest, Salman wished the scouts and guides a fruitful camp filled with adventure, activity and fun.

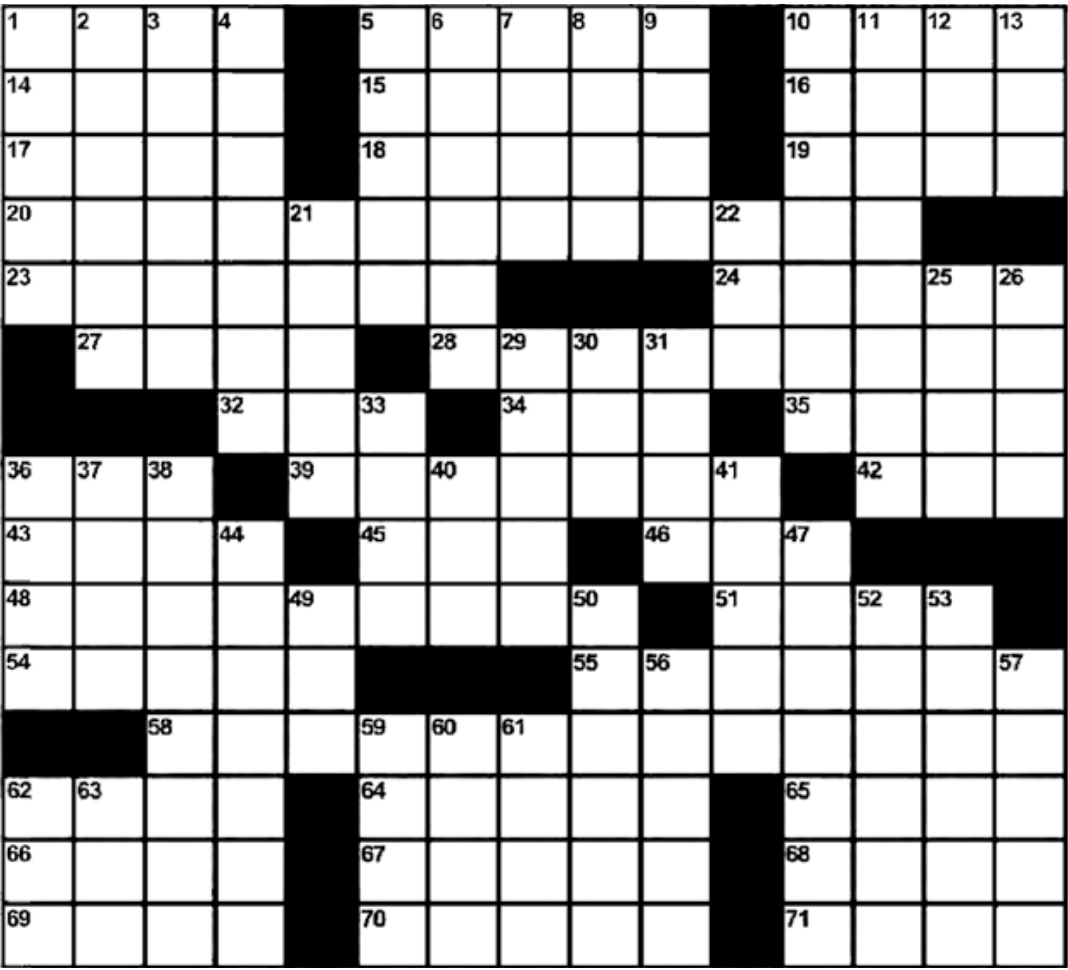
A total of 118 scouts and guides attended the camp. It was followed by sessions on the history of scouts and guides, and vi-

sion and mission of the movement. The scouts and guides practised various knots in the camp. It was followed by sessions on leadership, whistle and hand signals, claps, songs, estimation, use of compass and directions.

In the art and craft session, students learned to make best out of waste. In the evening, students presented a camp-fire programme based on the scouting and guiding principles.

In the closing ceremony, Parveen Kumar, principal congratulated the students and teachers and honoured them with gifts and certificates.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Big name in cosmetics
5) Home of a steak-order business
10) Drummer Ulrich
14) "Molto ..." ("Very good," in Verona)
15) Copperhead weapon
16) Farm call
17) Arch type
18) Miserable feeling
19) Light black
20) Parental spider?
23) High school class
24) Ab strengthener
27) Work as a tracer
28) Soldier
32) Center of a ball, briefly
34) Elementary particle
35) Bros, for instance
36) Problem of the middle ages?
39) Cultivation place
42) You might put a lid on it
43) Corker
45) Football propeller

46) Standings stat
48) Bad thing for an NFL receiver to have
51) Do, for example
54) En_ (as a big group)
55) Market before supplying
58) Lawn moistener
62) "Great lake" for sailing
64) Cheerleaders' skirts
65) "What've you been_?"
66) Bank claim
67) Agent of entrapment
68) Chick's sound
69) "Beetle Bailey" creator Walker
70) Some school mos.
71) Some injections

DOWN

1) Dornjicle
2) They're unlikely to bring home the bacon
3) Antsy
4) Razed
5) Track shapes
6) Large unit of resistance
7) Soon, to a bard
8) _ Kong (Chinese city)

9) _ nitrate (Chemical reagent)
10) Open galleries
11) Runway, of a sort
12) Biochemistry abbr.
13) Blue hue
21) "Omigosh!"
22) Ballpark fig.
25) Convex shape
26) Head-turning summons
29) Assisted
30) Wealthy Brit, slangily
31) From scratch
33) carotene
36) Big loser's nickname?
37) Distinctive atmosphere
38) More glistening
40) Long, long time
41) Luncheonette kin
44) Like a nest egg
47) Great meals, in London
49) The other woman
50) Support for a fracture
52) Crow's home, once (Var.)
53) Click beetle
56) Breaks

57) Parkinson's drug
59) Little devils
60) World's longest river
61) Kjnd of sack?
62) Stately tree
63) Brazilian port, for short

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Try to be first today. Be the first person to the office or classroom, the first person to offer a kind word to a distressed person, the first person to call a spade a spade, even the first person to post a comment on a social media post! You'll get a certain little rush out of beating everyone to the punch. Your competitive energy hasn't had any place to show its stuff lately. The act of being first today will keep you satisfied for quite a while.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

A caustic remark that you recently overheard wasn't actually about you like you thought it was, so don't worry about your reputation! It's still as stellar as it deserves to be, especially to those who matter most. Plus, you can't be friends with everyone, so why even care if you happen to hear some negative feedback? What's important is that you're friends with the people who deserve your time. The fact is some people in your life don't deserve to be there.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Sometimes the biggest problems are caused by the smallest things. If you're hoping for a worry-free day, you need to pay attention to the details and minuscule components of your routine. Also watch out for unedited comments coming out of the mouths of friends or coworkers. They could finally be saying what they really feel instead of what they think you want to hear. Handle it with your usual aplomb without getting defensive. You don't want things to backfire on you.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

A confusing yet charming person could come into your life today, and they'll have lots of sweet talk for you. However, their flattery could cause you to ask questions instead of blush. This is a good sign. It means they can offer you more than just an ego boost. Engage with them and find out who they really are and what they're all about. Don't just stick with talking about the weather. The two of you have something in common.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your pending travel plans might have to get revised slightly when you come across some news. Last-minute changes are required. This one small snag could leave you feeling rushed if you don't check in with your traveling companion to find out what they think about it. They will know how to say what you need to hear to relax about the whole thing. As long as you expect the best possible outcome, things will go in your favor more times than not.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

It's nice to be good, but isn't it so much more fun to be bad? You deserve a little silly distraction, especially now when you've been itching for some shenanigans to add some spice to your life! Go ahead and let your mischievous side come out to play for a little while. As long as you're not hurting anyone's feelings or doing any damage, you have a green light for fun times. Play a few practical jokes. Do some goofy teasing. Have a ball!

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

People with some huge personalities are coming into your life right now, and if you let them, they will really keep you busy! Balancing boring tasks like paying the bills with fun tasks like checking out the hottest new restaurant will be easier than you think. Little pockets of free time in the middle of your day will help you get stuff done before you run out to have some fun. This rush of activity will keep your heart beating and your smile shining bright.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You should take the loudest voice in the room seriously today. This brash person will tell you something no one else has the guts to say. The rest of the gang is busy shutting things out in order to keep pretending reality is exactly what they want it to be. You might want to dislike the obnoxious personalities in your life right now, but not all of them deserve your negative feelings: This particular loudmouth could prove to be a real lifesaver. Overall, though, you should watch out for indulging yourself too much.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Do you have unfinished business with one of your old relatives? Think about it. Does a forgotten birthday or belated wedding present come to mind? Make sure you're up to date with family members. Call a sibling or parents who can help you solve this puzzle and advise you on correcting any problem situations. Whoever is waiting to hear from you has a longer memory than you do, but they also have a huge heart. Don't worry about anger or hurt feelings. They just want to hear from you!

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

When was the last time you hosted a dinner party? Your creativity could use a nice workout, and the kitchen can be a great place to start. Even if you're not thrilled by the idea of cooking for your friends, you could use a nice, relaxed evening with people you love. Eating always adds to the mix. An alternative option would be to organize a potluck so everyone gets involved. Pick a food theme, crank up the music, and you have a wonderful party on your hands!

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You need to slow down your speedy pace today or you could miss some important revelations. Watch those smaller events and little comments. They have the biggest, most important messages to deliver now. Big things get attention, but they're also big distractions. Try to find an hour or two of free time later today. This flexible time will come in handy, enabling you to follow every one of your whims without hesitation.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Someone you have a soft spot for is putting you to the test right now. You have a lot of patience, and they're all too aware of it. It's not that they're taking advantage of you; it's just that they're not taking your deadline requests seriously enough. If they keep stalling for time, pressing them to hurry up could only trigger a power play, so be careful. You don't want to make them think that they're not meeting your expectations. Just keep waiting.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Cape Enniberg in the Faroe Islands and Thor Peak in Canada are known for their what?
A. Lava lakes
B. Tabletop plateaus
C. Abundant tropical growth
D. Sheer high cliffs

02. What is the language system known as "ablaut"?
A. Inflection which indicates tense or person
B. An accent over a vowel which changes the sound
C. A vowel change that changes the meaning of a word without sub. tentially changing it other-wise
D. Using extended synonyms

03. Who played "One Punch Mickey" in the 2005 film "Snatch"?
A. Charlie Sheen
B. Robbie Williams
C. Johnny Depp
D. Brad Pitt

Answers: 1.B 2.C 3.D

KIDS COLOURING

BOGGLER

S	O	T	J
A	E	I	M
O	U	L	A
D	K	A	R

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Rushdie releases new novel, six months after knife attack

London, UK - Six months after being stabbed, British author Salman Rushdie on Tuesday publishes his new novel *Victory City*, an 'epic tale' of a 14th-century woman who defies a patriarchal world to rule a city.

Written before the US knife attack that nearly took the Indian-born author's life, the novel purports to be a translation of a historical epic originally written in Sanskrit.

The much-anticipated work tells the tale of young orphan girl Pampa Kampana who is endowed by a goddess with magical powers and founds the city, in modern-day India, of Bisnaga,

which translates as Victory City.

Rushdie, 75, will not promote his 15th novel due to his physical condition, although his agent Andrew Wylie told *The Guardian* that his 'recovery is progressing'.

He was attacked as he was about to speak at a conference in Chautauqua in upstate New York, near Lake Erie, on August 12. The author had lived in hiding for years after Iran's first supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini ordered his killing for what he deemed the blasphemous nature of *The Satanic Verses*.

The stabbing suspect, Hadi Matar, a 24-year-old from New



Salman Rushdie (AFP)

Jersey with roots in Lebanon, was arrested immediately after the attack and subsequently pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Words 'the only victors'

Rushdie, a naturalised American who has lived in New York for 20 years, lost the sight in one eye and the use of one hand, Wylie said in October.

The attack shocked the West but was welcomed by extremists in Muslim countries such as Iran and Pakistan.

While not personally promoting the book, Rushdie has begun to communicate via social network Twitter, most often to share press reviews of his new novel.

Several events are also planned to accompany its re-

lease, including a conference with writers Margaret Atwood and Neil Gaiman that will be broadcast online.

An icon of free speech since he was subjected to the fatwa that forced him into hiding, Rushdie is still an outspoken defender of the power of words.

His new work follows a heroine on a mission to 'give women equal agency in a patriarchal world', according to publisher Penguin Random House's summary. The book tells the tale of Pampa Kampana's creation of a city and of its downfall.

"Over the next 250 years, Pampa Kampana's life becomes

deeply interwoven with Bisnaga's, from its literal sowing from a bag of magic seeds to its tragic ruination in the most human of ways: the hubris of those in power," it added. The novel concludes with the statement: "Words are the only victors."

A 'triumph'

US author Colum McCann wrote in *The New York Times* that his friend Rushdie was saying 'something quite profound' in *Victory City*.

"He's saying, 'You will never take the fundamental act of storytelling away from people.'"

"In the face of danger, even in the face of death, he manages to say that storytelling is one currency we all have." *The Atlantic* magazine called it a 'triumph' - not because it exists, but because it is utterly enchanting. "When you think about it, Rushdie's novels are a miracle," it added.

Born in Mumbai in 1947, Rushdie published his first novel *Grimus* in 1975, and gained worldwide fame six years later with *Midnight's Children* which won him the Booker Prize in the UK. *Victory City* will be released in the US on Tuesday and the UK on Thursday.

AFP

Israeli forces kill five Palestinians

Hamas confirmed its fighters were among the dead, while Israeli forces reported no casualties

Jericho, Palestinian Territories - Israeli forces on Monday killed five alleged Palestinian gunmen in a raid in the occupied West Bank, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, after a days-long search for suspects in a shooting near Jericho.

Hamas Islamists confirmed its fighters were among the dead, saying in a statement the Gaza-based group was mourning members of its military wing killed 'in an armed clash with the Zionist occupation'.

The early morning Israeli raid came amid a spike in Israeli-Palestinian violence and after days of what Jericho authorities have described as a 'siege' on the city since the shooting attack late last month.

Netanyahu said the assailants were killed by agents from the Shin Bet domestic security agency and soldiers.

Israeli forces 'took out five of those fighters, two of them who had tried to carry out the attack' on January 28, the premier said.

An Israeli security official, requesting anonymity as they were not authorised to speak to the media, told AFP the army was



Palestinian protesters burn tyres to block a road leading into Jericho in the occupied West Bank, on Monday, following a raid in town by Israeli forces (AFP)

holding the bodies of the Palestinian dead.

Both Israelis and Palestinians have used the remains of people killed in clashes or attacks as bargaining chips throughout the conflict.

The army said in a statement 'a number' of armed men were killed in a gunfight during the raid on the Aqabat Jabr refugee camp

at the entrance to the city, which lies close to the Jordanian border.

It reported no casualties among the Israeli forces.

An AFP photographer saw bullet holes covering the metal door of a wooden hut in the camp, while blood soaked into the floor inside.

Young Palestinians set tyres ablaze to block a road leading

into Jericho, while shops and schools were shut as residents observed a general strike after the raid.

Jericho 'siege'

The Palestinian health ministry said one person remained in critical condition after being shot in the head by Israeli forces.

Violence is rare in Jericho, a

popular destination for tourists who are drawn to the ancient city's religious and cultural sites.

Israel said Monday's raid had targeted 'the Hamas fighter squad that carried out the shooting attack' on January 28, when according to the army two armed men approached an Israeli settlement restaurant near the Palestinian city.

One of the gunmen had opened fire at the restaurant but his weapon jammed after firing just one bullet that did not hurt anyone.

Since the two suspects fled the scene, the army has reinforced its presence around Jericho and carried out extensive searches at checkpoints.

AFP

Mali junta expels UN mission's rights chief

Bamako, Mali - Mali's ruling junta said on Sunday that it was expelling the head of the human rights division of MINUSMA, the United Nations mission there, giving him 48 hours to leave the country.

The decision comes after a Malian rights activist last month denounced the security situation in the country in a speech to a UN gathering, and accused the regime's new Russian military partners of serious rights violations.

The foreign ministry had declared Guillaume Ngefa Atonodok Andali, head of MINUSMA's human rights section, persona non grata, said a statement issued by government spokesman Colonel Abdoulaye Maiga.

"This measure comes after the destabilising and subversive actions of Monsieur Andali," added the statement, which was also read out on national television news.

Andali had taken it upon himself to decide who were the representatives of civil society, ignoring the authorities and national institutions, the statement added.

"Andali's bias was even more evident during the last review of the United Nations Security Council on Mali," the statement added.

AFP

Pope: Critics 'exploited' predecessor's death

Aboard The Papal Plane - Pope Francis said on Sunday that some sectors of the Catholic Church had 'exploited' the death of his predecessor Benedict XVI to criticise his own papacy.

Benedict resigned as pontiff in 2013 but, up until his death on December 31, he remained a figurehead for some conservative members of the church who oppose Francis' more liberal outlook.

"Some stories going around, that Benedict was embittered by what the new pope did, are 'a game of telephone'," (lost in translation), Pope Francis told reporters on his plane back from South Sudan.

"In fact, I consulted Benedict on some decisions to be taken. And he agreed, he agreed. I believe that Benedict's death has been exploited by people who want to add grist to their mill.

"And those who exploit such a good person, such a man of God... well I would say they are unethical people, they are people belonging to a party, not to the



Pope Francis (AFP)

Church."

He did not name anyone, but Benedict's closest aide, Georg Gaenswein, published a book after his death and gave media interviews revealing tensions between the former pontiff and Francis. In particular, Gaenswein described Benedict's dismay at the decision by Francis to relax restrictions on the use of the traditional Latin mass.

Francis said he remained sanguine about his critics - 'these things will fall on their own' - but said he wanted to stress that the ex-pontiff 'was not embittered'.

AFP

Cyprus presidential vote goes to a second round

Nicosia, Cyprus - Cyprus's former foreign minister Nikos Christodoulides faces career diplomat Andreas Mavroyiannis in a second round of presidential elections next week after neither secured a majority of the vote on Sunday.

The winner needs 50 per cent plus one to succeed two-term President Nicos Anastasiades.

Pre-poll favourite Christodoulides is leading a close-fought contest with 32.04 per cent of the vote, followed by Mavroyiannis with 29.58 per cent. "Today, Cyprus spoke. It spoke clearly," Christodoulides said late on Sunday. "I'm ready to take on this great responsibility."

"I remain true to my position for a government of broad acceptance. We don't rule anyone out," he said.

Averof Neofytou's future as leader of the governing conservative party DISY looks shaky after he trailed in third place with 26.11 per cent of the vote.

Despite being endorsed by the incumbent, the seasoned politician is the first DISY candi-



Nikos Christodoulides, gestures as he gives a statement to the media, in his office in the capital Nicosia, on Sunday (AFP)

Cyprus spoke clearly. I am ready to take on this great responsibility. I remain true to my position for a government of broad acceptance

NIKOS CHRISTODOULIDES

date not to progress from the first round in the party's history.

The interior ministry said on Sunday's turnout was 72.03 per cent, from an eligible electorate of more than 561,000, including 10,346 Cypriots abroad.

Analysts said Mavroyiannis, a 66-year-old technocrat backed by the communist party AKEL, had surprised observers on Sunday by squeezing out Neofytou, 61, and closing the gap with the 49-year-old centrist-backed

Christodoulides.

Cypriots turned out in large numbers for an election in which the focus was on corruption and the economy amid deadlock over the island's long-standing division. Even before polling stations opened, Christodoulides was seen as the favourite.

"If he goes to the second round, he is predicted to win," said Andreas Theophanous of the Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs.

Tackling corruption

Voters appeared concerned about a cash-for-passports scandal and the pressures of irregular migration on public resources, while the issue of the island's decades-old division remains at an impasse. Cyprus has been split since 1974, when Turkish forces occupied the island's northern third in response to a Greek-sponsored coup.

"I expect the next president to do something about corruption and to settle the Cyprus question," said civil servant Andreas Georgiadis, 29, after voting in the

capital Nicosia.

The centrist parties that back Christodoulides take a tough line on reunification talks, but his rivals were seen as less hawkish.

Mavroyiannis backer AKEL champions reconciliation with the Turkish Cypriots, and Neofytou is seen as a pragmatist and 'dealmaker'.

"We got more votes than the previous general election, but it wasn't enough," Neofytou told supporters after the results came through. Mavroyiannis meanwhile remained upbeat ahead of next Sunday's run-off.

"We achieved our target... we are on the right track," he told supporters in Nicosia.

Analysts say campaign pledges to root out corruption and improve the economy are key issues for the electorate.

"Corruption is at the core of the discussion, the economy and daily life. The Cyprus problem is a secondary issue," said Giorgos Kentas, associate professor of international politics at the University of Nicosia.

AFP

UK faces biggest round of health service strikes

London, UK - Nurses and ambulances staff stepped up their demands for better pay on Monday to combat the UK's cost of living crisis with their biggest round of health service strikes.

The stoppages - part of a wave of industrial action across the UK economy - will see nurses and paramedics take action on the same day for the first time.

Nurses say their wages have failed to keep up with inflation over the past decade, leaving them unable to pay their bills amid spiralling fuel, food and housing costs.

They warn that qualified nurses are quitting in droves due to the financial pressures resulting in understaffing that endangers patient care.

"We're run off our feet 24/7, breaking our backs doing the jobs of three people," said trainee nursing associate Victoria Busk who works on a trauma ward at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, central England.

"I love my job, I love the work I do, making a difference to patients. But I can't imagine doing this until I'm in my 60s," she said.

Last week, half a million people including teachers, transport workers and Border Force staff at UK air and seaports also stopped work over pay.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) union said Monday's strike would affect nurses in around a third of hospital trusts



Healthcare workers hold placards at a picket line outside The Walton Centre in Liverpool, north-west England, on Monday (AFP)

in England and most of Wales.

'Sympathy'

The ambulance staff strike would only affect England, however, after paramedics in Wales called off their planned action following an improved pay offer.

Health minister Maria Caulfield, who is also a nurse, said she sympathised with striking health service staff but ar-

gued that big pay hikes could not be afforded.

"I'm an RCN member myself, so I sit in both camps, if you like. Absolutely, I have a lot of sympathy," she told GB News.

"But we also have a responsibility to the taxpayer... we just can't afford inflation-busting pay rises that the unions are currently demanding."

British Prime Minister Rishi

Sunak has called for pay rises to be 'reasonable' and 'affordable', warning that big pay awards will jeopardise attempts to tame inflation.

Health Secretary Steve Barclay earlier urged unions to call off Monday's action.

"The Governor of the Bank of England warned if we try to beat inflation with high pay rises, it will only get worse and people would

not be better off," he said.

"I have held constructive talks with the trade unions on pay and affordability and continue to urge them to call off the strikes."

But the Unite union general secretary Sharon Graham accused Barclay of 'not telling the truth' as neither he nor Sunak had been are prepared to discuss pay.

AFP

Beijing says second balloon spotted flying over Latin America is Chinese

Beijing, China - Beijing confirmed on Monday a balloon spotted flying over Latin America is Chinese, while the United States worked to recover what it claimed was an unmanned spy craft it shot down at the weekend.

China has expressed fury at Washington's decision to shoot down a device that it insists was an unmanned weather surveillance aircraft that had veered off course last week.

That balloon sparked outrage in the United States, which accused China of an 'unacceptable violation' of its sovereignty and prompted Secretary of State Antony Blinken to call off a planned trip to Beijing.

Beijing acknowledged on Monday that the latest balloon, spotted by US and Colombian officials flying over Latin America at the weekend, was also Chinese.

Its foreign ministry said the device was of 'a civilian nature and used for flight tests'.

"Affected by weather forces in addition to its manoeuvrability being limited, the airship deviated greatly from its expected course, and accidentally entered Latin American and Caribbean airspace," spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing.

That statement came three days after what the Pentagon characterised as another Chinese spy balloon had been seen across Latin America.

Colombia's air force reported at the weekend an object with 'characteristics similar to those of a balloon' was detected and monitored until it left Colombian air space. Investigations were being conducted in coordination with other countries and institutions to establish the object's origins, it said.

Surveillance balloon

The other balloon had spent several days flying over North America before Washington said on Saturday an F-22 fighter jet had shot it down off the coast of South Carolina.

Pentagon officials had described it as a 'high-altitude surveillance balloon' and said Washington had taken steps to block it from collecting sensitive information.

General Glen VanHerck, commander of US forces in North America, said in a statement on Sunday navy personnel were 'currently conducting recovery operations, with the US Coast Guard assisting in

securing the area and maintaining public safety'.

Beijing has said the balloon that was shot down was primarily gathering weather data and that it had been blown off course. In return, it has also said the United States 'seriously impacted and damaged' relations between the two countries by shooting it down and lodged a formal complaint with the US embassy in Beijing.

China's vice foreign minister Xie Feng warned that Beijing 'reserves the right to make further necessary reactions'.

'A clear message'

Chuck Schumer, the US Senate Democratic leader, said the downing of the balloon 'wasn't just the safest option, but it was the one that maximised our intel gain'.

That was because any instrumentation on the airship was more likely to survive a water landing than if it had been shot down earlier over land. "We sent a clear message to China that this is unacceptable," he said in a statement.

Schumer said the full Sen-

It (balloon) has propellers on it. This was not an accident. This was deliberate. It was intelligence

MIKE MULLEN

ate would receive a classified briefing on February 15.

Former US Joint Chiefs of Staff chair Mike Mullen was asked on ABC News if he thought elements in the Chinese military might have launched the balloon to disrupt the Blinken visit.

"Clearly, I think that's the case," he said.

Mullen said the craft was manoeuvrable and rejected China's suggestion it might have been blown off course.

"It has propellers on it," he said.

"This was not an accident. This was deliberate. It was intelligence," he added.

Blinken's visit would have been the first to China by a US secretary of state since Mike Pompeo's in 2018.

Plans for the visit were announced after President Joe Biden held a rare summit with Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Bali in November.

AFP

Ecuador votes on extradition amid crime boom

Quito, Ecuador - Ecuadorans voted in a referendum on Sunday that will decide whether to allow extradition of citizens linked to organised crime in a country rocked by a dramatic increase in violence. No results were announced after polling centers concluded 10 hours of voting. Authorities have 10 days to count the ballots and announce results.

The extradition of Ecuadorans is prohibited by the South American country's constitution.

Conservative President Guillermo Lasso has proposed legalising it as a means of dealing with a crime wave that has claimed the lives of two candidates in local elections being held alongside the referendum.

"Ecuadorans, exercise your right to vote for Ecuador's security and wellbeing," the president tweeted on Sunday after casting his vote in Guayaquil in the country's southwest. Ecuador is sandwiched between Colombia and Peru, the world's two largest cocaine producers, and has itself become a hub for the global drug trade in recent years.

Despite not having any major



Election staffers count votes at a polling station, in Nayon, Metropolitan District of Quito on Sunday (AFP)

drug plantations or cartels of its own, nor big laboratories for refining cocaine, Ecuador is listed by the United States among the top 22 drug-producing or transit countries in the world.

Drugs produced elsewhere are shipped from Ecuador's Guayaquil port to the United States, Europe and Asia.

This has resulted in a bloody territorial war between gangs -

some with ties to Mexican cartels according to the authorities - who brutally kill each other on the streets and in Ecuador's overcrowded jails. The country's murder rate almost doubled between 2021 and 2022 from 14 to 25 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, according to official figures.

Drug seizures have skyrocketed and prison massacres have left more than 400 inmates dead

since 2021.

In neighbouring Colombia, extradition to the United States has proven to be a useful weapon against drug traffickers, though cocaine production is still booming. Allowing extradition is one of eight constitutional measures that some 13.4mn eligible voters were asked about in Sunday's mandatory 10-hour Yes/No vote.

AFP

Tycoon held over journalist killing in Cameroon

Yaoundé, Cameroon - A Cameroonian tycoon was arrested on Monday in connection with the high-profile abduction and murder of a journalist, his company and a communications ministry official said.

The journalist, Martinez Zogo, who was abducted and brutally murdered last month, was outspoken against graft and financial sleaze and had often faced threats over his work.

Jean-Pierre Amougou Belinga, owner of L'Anecdote media group, 'was arrested... at dawn', the company said.

Denis Omgba Bomba, head of the National Media Observatory, a unit attached to the communications ministry, said the tycoon was a 'suspect in the killing of Martinez Zogo'.

Zogo, 50, was the manager of the privately-owned radio station Amplitude FM and host of a daily show called Embouteillage (Traffic Jam). Amougou Belinga was one of his targets.

AFP

Emotions run high in Sweden's biggest wolf hunt

Västerås, Sweden - Hunter Lars Bjork points to fresh tracks in the snow as he lumbers through a whited-out forest in central Sweden, where the biggest wolf hunt in modern times is drawing controversy.

"We have quite a lot of wolves here, we're actually sitting in a new wolf territory where we are now," Bjork, a predator expert at the Swedish Hunters' Association, tells AFP as he settles into a small hunting lodge a few kilometres outside the town of Vasteras.

Long known as a champion of environmental protection, Sweden has paradoxically

had a centuries-long opposition to wolves, considered a plague in the 1800s with the state paying out bounties for kills as late as the mid-20th century. Still seen as a threat by farmers, the state now sanctions a limited cull of the animals every year.

This year, Sweden's hunters are allowed to kill a record 75 wolves out of an estimated population of 460, according to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency's latest inventory.

That is more than twice the number that hunters were allowed to kill last year, and the

highest number since the culls began in 2010.

A total of 54 wolves had been killed as of Sunday.

Several local authorities have already called off the hunt in their regions, and the full quota isn't expected to be reached by the February 15 deadline. Nonetheless, the wolf hunt remains a highly divisive issue, both inside and outside the Nordic nation.

After Sweden's wolves were hunted to the brink of extinction, the country declared them a protected species in the 1960s.

Wolves started reappearing

in the late 1970s and 1980s, before populations started growing in the 1990s.

As their numbers surpassed 200, Sweden began allowing licensed hunts in 2010, issuing quotas for the number that can be killed during a set period.

"The purpose is simply to limit the problems they cause out in more rural areas," 59-year-old Bjork explains.

For farmers, wolves are a menace as they occasionally attack livestock, primarily sheep. They also pose a threat to hunting dogs, used to track and drive wild game such as deer and elk.

AFP



Lars Bjork, a 59-year-old hunter who works on predator issues with the Swedish Hunters' Association, is pictured with his snow camouflage cloths, a few kilometres outside the Swedish city of Vasteras on January 24 (AFP)

World offers Turkey, Syria aid over quake

The European Union has mobilised search and rescue teams for Turkey after it requested EU assistance

Paris, France - International offers to help Turkey and Syria with rescue efforts poured in on Monday after a massive earthquake killed around 2,300 people and wreaked devastation.

European Union

The European Union has mobilised search and rescue teams for Turkey after the stricken country requested EU assistance. Ten urban search and rescue teams from various member states will support first responders on the ground, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and EU crisis management commissioner Janez Lenarcic said.

The EU's Copernicus satellite system has also been activated to provide emergency mapping services, it added. The EU is also ready to support those affected in Syria, it said.

UNHCR

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi voiced 'solidarity' with those affected in both countries, saying the UN agency was 'ready to help provide urgent relief to the survivors through our field teams wherever possible'.

India

India said it would immediately send rescue and medical teams as well as relief equipment to Turkey. Two National Disaster Response Force teams comprising 100 personnel with dog squads and equipment were ready to be flown to the affected area, the foreign ministry said. Teams of trained doctors and paramedics with medicines were also being readied. Prime Minister Narendra



People injured in the earthquake receive treatment at al-Rahma hospital in Syria's town of Darkush, on the outskirts of the rebel-held northwestern province of Idlib, on Monday (AFP)

Saddened about the loss of lives in Turkey and Syria following the major earthquake. Our thoughts go to the victims and their loved ones. We stand ready to offer our support

ULF KRISTERSSON

Modi said he was 'anguished' and 'deeply pained' by the deaths in Turkey - with whom India has frosty relations - and Syria.

Germany

Germany - home to about three

million people of Turkish origin - will 'mobilise all the assistance we can activate', Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said, after speaking with the Turkish ambassador to Berlin. Germany's Federal Agency for Technical Relief

(THW) 'can set up camps to provide shelter as well as water treatment units', she said. The THW agency is also preparing generators, tents and blankets.

A foreign ministry spokeswoman said the German government would hold a crisis meeting later on Monday with the relevant ministries to organise an aid package. Berlin will also increase its assistance to charities such as Malteser International providing humanitarian aid in northwest Syria by one million euros (US\$1.1mn), she said.

Russia

President Vladimir Putin sent messages to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, conveying Russia's condolences and offering aid. "We hope for a speedy recovery for all the injured and are ready to provide the assistance needed to overcome the impact of this natural disaster," Putin told Assad.

Ukraine

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that his war-torn

country was 'ready to provide the necessary assistance to overcome the consequences of the disaster'. The message was reiterated by Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, who said Ukraine was 'deeply saddened by the loss of life and damage' wreaked by the earthquake.

Greece

Kyriakos Mitsotakis, prime minister of Turkey's historic rival Greece, whose relations with Ankara have suffered from a spate of border and cultural dis-

putes, pledged to make 'every force available' to aid its neighbour. Mitsotakis said Ankara had already approved the dispatch of a Greek emergency rescue unit, and Athens was ready to send 'additional equipment, medical supplies, blankets, tents' depending on further Turkish requests.

NATO

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg voiced 'full solidarity' with ally Turkey, saying he was in touch with Turkey's top leadership and 'NATO allies are mobilising support now'.

Sweden

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson of Sweden, whose bid to join NATO is meeting Turkish resistance, tweeted: "Saddened about the loss of lives in Türkiye and Syria following the major earthquake. Our thoughts go to the victims and their loved ones." He sent his 'deepest condolences' to President Erdogan. "We stand ready to offer our support."

France

President Emmanuel Macron said France stood ready to provide emergency aid to Turkey and Syria. "Our thoughts are with the bereaved families," he tweeted.

Britain

"The UK stands ready to help in whatever way we can," British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak tweeted saying his thoughts were with the people of Turkey and Syria. Britain was sending 76 search-and-rescue specialists to Turkey, a minister added. AFP

Ukraine to replace defence minister after scandals: MP

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine's defence minister will be replaced by the chief of military intelligence ahead of an expected Russian offensive and following corruption scandals, a senior lawmaker said on Sunday.

"Kyrylo Budanov will head the defence ministry, which is absolutely logical in wartime," said senior lawmaker David Arakhania, referring to the 37-year-old head of military intelligence. Oleksiy Reznikov, 56, will be appointed minister for strategic industries, the lawmaker said without specifying a timeline for the planned reshuffle.

"War dictates personnel policies," added Arakhania, who is the head of President Volodymyr Zelensky's party.

"Time and circumstances require reinforcement and regrouping. This is happening now and will continue to happen in the future," he added.

"The enemy is preparing to advance. We are preparing to defend ourselves."

Reznikov said in an interview with a local news site that he had not been told about his new appointment to the Ministry of Strategic Industries.

"I can comment that this is new information for me. I did not have any conversation about the Ministry of Strategic Industries with the president of Ukraine," he said.

One of the best-known faces of Ukraine's war effort, Reznikov was appointed defence minister in November 2021 and has helped secure Western weapons to buttress Ukrainian forces.

But his ministry has been beset by corruption scandals.



Head of Ukraine's military intelligence Kyrylo Budanov (AFP)

Kyrylo Budanov will head the defence ministry, which is absolutely logical in wartime. War dictates personnel policies

DAVID ARAKHANIA

Reznikov's deputy was forced to resign in late January after the ministry was accused of signing food contracts at prices two to three times higher than current rates for basic foodstuffs.

Speaking to reporters earlier on Sunday, Reznikov said only President Volodymyr Zelensky, who last week stepped up efforts to clamp down on corruption, could decide his fate.

"The stress that I have endured this year is hard to measure precisely. I am not ashamed of anything," Reznikov said.

"My conscience is absolutely clear." AFP

Chile fire toll rises, hundreds homeless

Concepción, Chile - Forest fires have killed 24 people, injured nearly 1,000 and destroyed 800 homes in five days as a blistering heat wave grips south-central Chile, authorities said on Sunday.

Fueled by strong winds and temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit), hundreds of fires have razed some 270,000 hectares in a region about 500km (310 miles) south of the capital Santiago.

The toll increased by one since Saturday with the death of a person who was being treated for injuries in hospital, said interior ministry official Manuel Monsalve. The fatalities included one firefighter as well as two crew members of a helicopter that crashed on Friday.

Monsalve also reported 997 people with fire-related injuries, 26 of them in serious condition.

Eight firefighters are among the injured.



Chilean President Gabriel Boric (centre) during his visit to Puren, Araucania region, Chile on Sunday (AFP)

There were scenes of devastation on Sunday in areas surrounded by burning forests, with farming plots reduced to ashes, dead animals and rural people who lost everything overnight.

"It was hell," Maria Ines, a 55-year-old social worker in Santa Juana in the hard-hit Biobio region told AFP after numerous

houses were razed by the flames.

"It is a miracle that some of the houses were spared," she said, but 'now we are afraid that the fire will return.... Where will we find refuge? Where? How?'

Miguel Angel Henriquez, a 58-year-old farmer from Santa Juana in the same region, told AFP that he saw a neighbour

brave the flames to try and rescue some of his animals. "He did not come out. I yelled at him to come out of the fire, but he didn't listen." A woman from El Santo, in the municipality of Tome, described that 'most of the houses' in her settlement were burnt.

"The people did not manage to save anything, they left with what they wore, because the fire advanced very quickly."

President Gabriel Boric attended the wake of a firefighter in the town of Coronel, telling mourners: "The whole of Chile cries with you. I am here to tell you that you are not alone."

On Sunday morning, a drop in temperature promised some respite for the 5,300 firefighters deployed against the blazes.

"There is a small window of improvement in climatic conditions on Sunday and Monday," Monsalve told reporters.

AFP

India opens its largest helicopter factory

Bengaluru, India - India unveiled on Monday its largest helicopter factory, which can turn out at least 1,000 aircraft a year, as part of a defence self-reliance push to counter China's growing assertiveness.

New Delhi also announced a double-digit increase in its annual defence budget last week with an eye on its geopolitical rival, with which it shares a disputed northern border.

India is one of the largest arms importers in the world and still relies heavily on hardware from Moscow, its largest military supplier.

AFP

France: Mother, 7 children die in fire at rented home

Charly-sur-Marne, France - A mother and her seven children aged two to 14 died on Monday after a faulty dryer apparently set ablaze their home in eastern France, authorities said.

The fire, the deadliest such blaze involving children in France in a decade, broke out shortly after midnight in the rented family home in Charly-sur-Marne, a town around 80km (50 miles) east of Paris in the Champagne region.

The mother and her children suffocated from black smoke that filled their home while they were trapped in the attic, local prosecutor Julien Morino-Ros told AFP.

The origin of the fire appeared

to have been a malfunctioning clothes dryer on the ground floor of the house, he said.

Neighbours called the fire department to report the blaze just before 1am (0000 GMT).

The woman's husband, father to three of the children, was saved by a firefighter who lives nearby and who intervened before his colleagues arrived, officials said.

The father sustained serious but not life-threatening burn injuries and was taken to hospital.

According to the prosecutor, he had tried to put out the fire and told his wife and the children - five girls and two boys - to seek refuge from the flames in their converted attic on the second



Firefighters stand in front of the house after a fire broke out in the house in Charly-sur-Marne, northern France on Monday (AFP)

floor.

'We saw the horror'

But that move turned tragic as

more and more black smoke billowed up through the staircase.

Firefighters struggled to get ladders to the top windows of

the house, because of the narrowness of the street where it is located in the centre of the village of 2,600 inhabitants.

The electric window blinds were blocked shut because of a power cut triggered by the faulty appliance, further hindering the rescue effort, the prosecutor said.

The eight victims died of smoke poisoning, not burns, he added.

"I hope with all my heart that they didn't feel or see anything," said Sylvie Corre, the house owner's wife.

"We were there on the street all night and we saw the horror," she told AFP by telephone.

AFP



Borna Coric was in great form in the decider against former US Open champion Dominic Thiem

Croatia in Davis Cup Finals

South Korea come back fom 0-2 down to stun Belgium, Finland advance

Paris, France - Two-time champions Croatia reached the Davis Cup Finals on Sunday where they were joined by unheralded South Korea and Finland.

Croatia, the champions in 2005 and 2018, were 2-0 up on Austria in their qualifier in Rijeka overnight.

Lucas Miedler and Alexander Erler then upset doubles specialists Nikola Mektic and Ivan Dodig 6-3, 7-6 (13/11) to keep Austria in the tie.

However, world number 23 Borna Coric won his second sin-

gles rubber, seeing off former US Open champion Dominic Thiem 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 as Croatia joined the 16-nation group stage of the finals in September.

"I was pretty nervous," said Coric. "But I came out on court and I was playing great tennis today."

In arguably the performance of the qualifying round, South Korea overturned a 2-0 deficit to beat Belgium 3-2 in Seoul.

Hong Seong-chan, ranked 237 in the world, clinched the deciding point with a 6-3, 7-6 (7/4)

win over Zizou Bergs, ranked 122 places higher.

"The players made history as a team. It's a dream to advance to the finals for two consecutive years," said South Korea captain Park Seung-kyu.

Nam Ji-sung and Song Ming-kyu started the South Korean fightback with a 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/5) doubles win against Sander Gille and Joran Vliegen.

Kwon Soon-woo then stunned David Goffin 3-6, 6-1, 6-3 on the back of 11 aces to level the tie.

"We had opportunities in every match but time after time we didn't succeed," said Belgium captain Johan van Herck.

Finland made the finals stage for the first time with a 3-1 win over 2016 champions Argentina in Espoo. Emil Ruusuvuori won all three rubbers he played.

On Sunday, he teamed with Harri Heliovaara for a 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 6-4 win over Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni.

The 23-year-old then fittingly secured the winning point by seeing off Facundo Bagnis 7-5, 6-1.

"It's an incredible feeling to play this kind of tennis in front of the home crowd," said world number 43 Ruusuvuori.

Three-time winners Czech Republic beat Portugal with impressive 21-year-old Jiri Lehecka sealing victory with his second singles success of the weekend, a 6-4, 6-1 triumph over veteran Joao Sousa in Maia.

The Netherlands defeated Slovakia in Groningen with Tallon Griekspoor and Tim van Rijthoven seeing off Alex Molcan and Lukas Klein 6-3, 6-3.



Alycia Parks

Parks stuns Garcia to win maiden WTA title in Lyon

Lyon, France - Alycia Parks stunned world number five Caroline Garcia to win her maiden WTA title in Lyon on Sunday, crediting her breakthrough on eating the same food every day.

The 22-year-old American, who came into the week at 79 in the rankings, claimed a 7-6 (9/7), 7-5 win over her French opponent after more than two hours on court.

"The key to a successful week for me was keeping the same routine," said Parks after the final.

"I wake up around the same

time every morning, and eat the same breakfast, same dinner. Basically just doing the same routine, try to make it a habit if it's working."

Hometown star Garcia had been seeking a 12th career title but eventually wilted under a barrage of power hitting by Parks who unleashed 15 aces in her total of 28 winners.

"It feels amazing to hold my first WTA tour-level championship trophy," Parks said.

"Words can't explain. Just last year, I was in an ITF Challenger \$60,000 final, and now I have won a WTA 250."



Alexander Zverev

Zverev slips two places in new ATP rankings

Paris, France - Alexander Zverev slipped two places to 16th in the new ATP rankings released on Monday while Novak Djokovic edged closer to Steffi Graf's all-time record for most weeks at number one.

The 25-year-old Zverev was ranked second at the end of August but is still on the comeback trail after tearing ankle ligaments during last year's French Open which kept him out of action for the remainder of the year.

He was a second-round loser at the Australian Open after which he revealed that he had had type 1 diabetes since he was three.

Last week, Zverev was told he would face no disciplinary action from the ATP after an independ-

ent investigation found "insufficient evidence" to substantiate allegations of domestic abuse.

He beat Stan Wawrinka in the Davis Cup on Friday but could not prevent his Germany team losing to Switzerland.

Frances Tiafoe and Pablo Carreno Busta both move up a place to 14th and 15th respectively.

Djokovic, who sat out Serbia's Davis Cup win over Norway, will spend his 375th week at the top of the pile.

Graf holds the record with 377 weeks as world number one in the women's game.

In the ATP rankings, players representing Russia and Belarus are banned from competing under the name or flag of their countries.

ATP TOP 10		
1. Novak Djokovic	(SRB)	7070 pts
2. Carlos Alcaraz	(ESP)	6730
3. Stefanos Tsitsipas	(GRE)	6195
4. Casper Ruud	(NOR)	5765
5. Andrey Rublev		4200
6. Rafael Nadal	(ESP)	3815
7. Felix Auger-Aliassime	(CAN)	3715
8. Taylor Fritz	(USA)	3410
9. Holger Rune	(DEN)	3046
10. Hubert Hurkacz	(POL)	2995

Becker welcomed back 'with open arms' by Germany

Wolfsburg, Germany - Boris Becker has been welcomed back to German tennis "with open arms", seven weeks after being released from a London prison.

Becker, 55, sat in the team's box during Saturday's Davis Cup loss to Switzerland in the western city of Trier, posting on Instagram on Sunday "we fought hard and left everything on the court".

The six-time Grand Slam champion, and former world number one, served eight months of a two-and-a-half year sentence in England for flouting insolvency rules.

While Becker may have only attended the weekend Davis Cup tie in an unofficial capacity, there is speculation he may return to his former role as Head of Men's

Tennis with the German Tennis Association (DTB).

Speaking with tabloid Bild, German number one Alexander Zverev said: "We (German tennis) welcome him with open arms."

Former Davis Cup captain Becker was invited by the DTB as a "friend of the team".

He was seen embracing and consoling players at the end of the tie on Saturday.

"Boris knows how it's done. It doesn't matter whether it's a player, a coach, the DTB or anyone else, he can help everywhere," Zverev said.

Davis Cup teammate Oscar Otte also lauded the presence of Becker.

"He said some really good



We (German tennis) welcome him with open arms. Boris knows how it's done. It doesn't matter whether it's a player, a coach, the DTB or anyone else, he can help everywhere

ALEXANDER ZVEREV

things to me during the warm-up. That helps enormously," said Otte.

"There's a lot of experience. We're all very happy he's back."

Becker's return comes at a difficult time for German men's tennis.

Former Wimbledon winner Michael Stich told Germany's FAZ newspaper on Sunday "we have the problem that the gap to Zverev is huge, at least in individual terms."

Zverev, a former world number two, is now 14 in the rankings while Otte is at 80 and Daniel Altmaier is ranked at 91.

From 2013 to 2016, Becker coached Novak Djokovic to six of his 22 Grand Slams.

AFP

Skipper Martinez fires Inter to Milan derby glory

Milan, Italy - Lautaro Martinez shot Inter Milan to a 1-0 derby triumph over crumbling champions AC Milan on Sunday but his team stayed 13 points behind Serie A leaders Napoli who strolled to a 3-0 win at Spezia.

Argentina forward Martinez headed home his 12th league goal of the season in the 34th minute at the San Siro to make sure that Inter remained in second place and plunge their local rivals even deeper into crisis.

Martinez has been given the Inter captaincy as Milan Skriniar wants to leave for Paris Saint-Germain as a free agent in the summer and

"Wearing the armband makes me very proud," he told DAZN.

"Ever since coming to Inter, I have tried to give my best, and this is a special game. We did it again."



Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez celebrates at the end of their Italian Serie A match against AC Milan (AFP)

A third straight league defeat leaves Milan in sixth and in a downward spiral that threatens to completely ruin a season which less than a month ago looked to be going according to plan.

Stefano Pioli's side have earned just five points from their six league matches since the World Cup and have also been knocked out of the Italian Cup and beaten by Inter in the Super Cup. Milan have to take on Tottenham Hotspur in their first Champions League last-16 tie since 2014 in less than 10 days.

Having already been thumped twice by Chelsea this season their chances of advancing in Europe also look slim.

They didn't have a single shot on target in an underwhelming derby which was largely dominated by Inter.

AFP

'MAGIC MOMENT'

Harry Kane becomes Tottenham's record scorer as Man City suffer title blow

London, United Kingdom - Harry Kane said becoming Tottenham's all-time record scorer was a "magical moment" as his 267th goal for the club sealed a 1-0 win against Manchester City that severely damaged the champions' bid to retain the Premier League title.

Kane's historic first-half strike at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium took him past Jimmy Greaves into sole possession of the hallowed record.

Greaves had held the milestone since 1970 before Kane moved level with him in his previous appearance against Fulham on January 23.

Kane's landmark moment also made him only the third player to score 200 Premier League goals after Alan Shearer (260) and Wayne Rooney (208).

"It is hard to put into words. It is just a magical moment. I was so desperate to do it with a win as well," Kane said.

"To do it in front of the home fans was a moment I will never forget."

It has been an unforgettable period for Kane, who drew level with Rooney as England's joint record scorer on 53 goals when he netted against France at the World Cup in December.

Passing Greaves had become increasingly inevitable for the prolific Kane, although ironically City could have ended his record chase if they had been successful in their attempt to sign him in 2021. However, Kane's remarkable goal feats seemed a distant dream during a difficult start to his career that featured several failed loan spells before he finally

emerged as a star.

Greaves, who died aged 81 in 2021, is regarded as one of the most natural goalscorers in football history.

For Kane to be alongside such a legendary player is a tribute to his predatory instincts and his perseverance.

"When I started playing, it was never in my imagination to score 200 Premier League goals. To be there now is just exciting," Kane said.

"Jimmy Greaves is a complete hero, one of the best strikers to play the game. To overtake him is a huge moment."

The 29-year-old's first Tottenham goal came back in 2011 against Shamrock Rovers in the Europa League.

If that was a low-key way to start an incredible career, Kane's record strike carried far more significance.

It is hard to put into words. It is just a magical moment. I was so desperate to do it with a win as well. To do it in front of the home fans was a moment I will never forget

HARRY KANE

Arsenal's shock 1-0 defeat at struggling Everton on Saturday had given City renewed hope they could overhaul the leaders.

But instead Kane's 19th goal in all competitions this season leaves second-placed City trailing five points behind Arsenal, who have a game in hand and host Pep Guardiola's men in a crucial clash on February 15.

AFP



Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane celebrates after scoring against Manchester City in their English Premier League match at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London on Sunday (AFP)

Man City charged over alleged breaches of financial rules

London, United Kingdom - Manchester City have been referred to an independent commission by the Premier League over alleged breaches of its financial rules, the English top flight announced on Monday.

The alleged breaches span a period from the 2009/10 season to the 2017/18 campaign. City were banned from UEFA competitions in February 2020 for two years by European football's governing body for "serious financial fair-play breaches" but the sanction was overturned by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

The defending champions

are alleged to have breached league rules requiring provision "in utmost good faith" of "accurate financial information that gives a true and fair view of the club's financial position". The Premier League said the accurate financial information required related to "revenue, its related parties and its operating costs".

The second set of breaches listed refers to alleged breaking of rules "requiring a member club to include full details of manager remuneration in its relevant contracts with its manager" related to seasons 2009/10 to 2012/13 inclusive.



Bayern Munich's German midfielder Jamal Musiala (2R) scores his goal against Wolfsburg in their German Bundesliga match on Sunday (AFP)

Musiala shines as 10-man Bayern go top despite Neuer row

Wolfsburg, Germany - A stunning solo goal from Bayern Munich teenager Jamal Musiala sealed a controversial 4-2 away win at Wolfsburg on Sunday, sending the visitors back to the top of the table.

The win, Bayern's first league victory in 2023, was marred by a late VAR decision to chalk off a Wolfsburg goal, which would

have made the score 4-3 with seven minutes plus stoppage time remaining.

Bayern went into the game just hours after sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic said he was "disappointed" with injured captain Manuel Neuer for putting "his personal interests above" the club.

AFP

Barca crush Sevilla to extend La Liga lead

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona stretched their La Liga lead over Real Madrid to a substantial eight points with a comfortable 3-0 win over Sevilla on Sunday.

The Catalans, aiming to win their first Spanish title since 2019, punished second-placed Madrid for their 1-0 defeat by Real Mallorca earlier on, opening up a wide gap ahead of their rivals.

After a tight first half Jordi Alba broke the deadlock before the hour mark, with further goals from Gavi and Raphinha helping wrap up the win.

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez had criticised his team in recent weeks for not killing off games after taking the lead but they did not let him down at Camp Nou.

The victory was their 10th in their last 11 league games, while Barca are now unbeaten in 15 matches across all competitions. Barcelona have conceded just seven goals in La Liga this season, with this their 15th clean sheet.

"I think we are having a very good season, we're playing well,



Barcelona's Spanish defender Jordi Alba (L) celebrates with Robert Lewandowski after scoring against Sevilla on Sunday (AFP)

letting opponents have few chances," Alba told DAZN.

"We're happy, eight points clear but there's a long way to go. It's a good distance (if we) keep going like this."

Barcelona's gameplan was initially set back when captain Sergio Busquets was forced off with

an ankle injury after just four minutes, replaced by Franck Kessie.

Jorge Sampaoli's Sevilla, 16th after a dismal start to the season, sat deep with five defenders and looked to frustrate the Catalans at every turn.

Moroccan goalkeeper Yassine

Bounou denied La Liga's top scorer Robert Lewandowski at his near post early on, while Ronald Araujo headed narrowly off-target from a corner.

Bounou flung himself full stretch to foil a vicious Lewandowski drive from distance as Barcelona struggled to forge clear chances.

Sevilla were a little fortunate to survive the first half with 10 men when Ivan Rakitic's late lunge on Araujo was only punished with a yellow card.

Lewandowski nodded wide and Raphinha headed at Bounou at the start of the second half as the team came out with renewed vigour, keen to capitalise on Real Madrid's defeat.

Alba pounced with a tidy finish after a superb assist from Kessie, who turned well and dinked the ball into the Spaniard's path.

After Sevilla shifted to a more attacking formation Raphinha teed up Gavi for the second with a raking low pass that left the youngster with a tap-in at the back post in the 70th minute.

AFP

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Abraham Ancer celebrates with the trophy after winning the PIF Saudi International in King Abdullah Economic City on Sunday (AFP)

Ancer wraps up wire-to-wire Saudi International success

King Abdullah Economic City, Saudi Arabia - Mexico's Abraham Ancer held off American Cameron Yong to secure a wire-to-wire win in the Saudi International on Sunday.

Since topping the leaderboard after Thursday's opening round Ancer's rock-solid game withstood Young's challenge and at times tough, windy conditions.

His closing two-under-par 68 left him with a 19-under par total of 261, two shots clear of Young.

As well as Young played, Ancer remarkably made just two bogeys on his way to a fourth professional win, all achieved in different countries.

Australian Lucas Herbert was third at 15-under par, with Thailand's Sodom Kaewkanjana one shot away in fourth.

Young made four birdies in his first seven holes to catch up with Ancer, who started with birdies on the first and fourth. The Mexican then made a brilliant par save on the seventh to stay level, and then scripted a two-shot swing on the eighth hole when he dropped a 30-footer birdie putt against a bogey by his rival.

Young kept battling before finally handing the consistent Ancer some breathing space with a double bogey on the 15th hole.

'OMAN CRICKET IS DOING A GREAT JOB'

South African cricket great Gary Kirsten impressed with the talent in the country

Muscat - Oman Cricket (OC) got a thumbs up from none other than a World Cup-winning coach and South African great Gary Kirsten.

Following the conclusion of the second Gary Kirsten Cricket (GKC) camp at the Oman Cricket Academy in Al Amerat on Saturday, Kirsten said that he "was really encouraged with the talent at the Oman Cricket Academy."

GKC in cooperation with OC successfully organised the second-ever camp in Oman after hosting the inaugural camp last year.

During the last few days, Kirsten and his coaching staff organised a grassroots camp besides holding a CoachEd coaches training and a high-performance camp for under-14 and under-19 cricketers. Another highlight of this edition was a talk session by Kirsten emphasising the role of parents in the success story of their children.

The South African great said: "I thoroughly enjoyed the last few days in the Sultanate of Oman. Oman Cricket is doing a great job. I was really encouraged with the talent I watched at the Oman Cricket Academy."

"The young cricketers showed great enthusiasm and many of them displayed good potential to grow with their abilities."



Gary Kirsten speaks to participants at the camp at the Oman Cricket Academy in Al Amerat

For me as a coach from another country, it is great to watch the talent in Oman. Importantly, going forward, the cricketers are being looked after very well by Oman Cricket

GARY KIRSTEN

A total of 132 participants took part in various sessions over the five days and included 12 coaches for the CoachEd training. Twenty aspiring cricketers joined the grassroots camp while the maxi-

mum 60 attended the high-performance under-14 camp held over three days. Another group of 40 cricketers took part in the under-19 high-performance camp.

Kirsten said: "For me as a coach from another country, it is great to watch the talent in Oman. Importantly, going forward, the cricketers are being looked after very well by Oman Cricket. The cricketers can progress through such a system and it is going to make a big difference to cricket in Oman."

The coach, who was at the helm of Indian team that won the 2011 World Cup, added: "The things that impressed me among the young players were their enthusiasm and eagerness to

learn." Kirsten was briefed about the activities at Oman Cricket by Duleep Mendis, chief development officer, Evert Laubscher, OCA manager and national team trainer, and other officials.

Meanwhile, Varun Khimji, OC board advisor, said: "The partnership with GKC is a long-term one, with plans for trips to cricketing destinations abroad where Oman players are given better exposure and competition. The association with GKC is sure to benefit our boys, be it cricketing knowledge, coaching, and playing."

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LIV rebels set for legal case on DP World Tour status

London, United Kingdom - The latest battle in golf's civil war will take place off the course this week as an arbitration panel meets in London to decide whether the LIV Golf rebels are able to continue playing on the DP World Tour.

A total of 13 players are seeking clarity on their ability to participate in future events.

The case arose when players

requested releases from the DP World Tour in order to play the inaugural LIV Golf event in Hemel Hempstead last June.

Those requests were denied but the players competed in LIV's lift-off event regardless.

The DP World Tour retaliated with £100,000 (\$121,000) fines and bans from the Scottish Open.

But an appeal from Ian Poul-

ter, Adrian Otaegui and Justin Harding saw the punishments suspended pending a substantive appeal.

That allowed LIV players to continue playing on the DP World Tour, with Otaegui winning the Andalucia Masters in October.

They have since been joined by Lee Westwood, Sam Horsfield, Richard Bland, Shaun Nor-

ris, Laurie Canter, Wade Ormsby, Patrick Reed, Bernd Wiesberger, Graeme McDowell and Martin Kaymer.

The number of appellants had grown to 16, but Sergio Garcia, Charl Schwartzel and Branden Grace have since withdrawn from the case.

The case is separate to the anti-trust lawsuit between LIV and the PGA Tour in the United

States.

"The hearing centres solely on our conflicting event release regulation and our ability to enforce it," said the DP World Tour's director of communications Scott Crockett.

The LIV players argue that releases have previously been granted to play on the PGA Tour, with whom the DP World Tour have a strategic alliance.



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DR REHAN MAHMOOD
ENT Specialist
Aster Al Raffah Hospital,
Sohar

Effects of cold weather on ear, nose and throat

The sudden drop in temperature in winter with short days and longer nights work as the perfect breeding ground for germs to cause infections, allergies and sickness. It is important to know how cold weather can affect your respiratory health.

During cold weather, some people might get cold, runny nose, and cough. Besides allergies, many people experience sudden discomfort in their ears, throat and nose. There is no direct connection between cold weather and ENT issues. However, it is one of the many contributing factors that cause sore throat, ear infections, and sinus diseases.

Throat infections are triggered by various viruses. During winter, dry air and increased spread of

germs cause dry throat, causing increased irritation, and it could get worse if a person breathes through mouth rather than from nose. The symptoms include sore throat, difficulty in swallowing, with fever, body aches, and chills.

Similarly, during cold weather, many people experience runny nose. The function of the nose is to provide warmth and humidification to inhaled air. So, if cold air passes through the nose, it causes more secretions in the nose to warm the air, hence causing runny nose. Runny nose and congestion in nose can further lead to inflammation in sinuses and sinusitis.

Infections in the nose and throat can further affect the ear, as well; symptoms include pain in the ear and difficulty in hear-

ing. Ear infection is caused by bacteria in the upper respiratory tract that travels up the eustachian tube into the middle ear. Cold weather can make the symptoms more pronounced.

Also, cold weather can cause decrease in blood circulation to the inner ear, thereby further intensifying the infection, particularly in children.

So, to prevent all these issues during winter it is important to boost your immune system with an immunity boosting diet such as dry fruits, dates, green vegetables, and root vegetables. Also ensure that you are getting enough physical activity everyday. Lastly, maintain personal hygiene by covering nose before sneezing, covering ears in the morning and evening, and washing hands at regular intervals.

What is Allergic Rhinitis?

Allergic Rhinitis is a condition that creates symptoms that affects the nose. The symptoms are more pronounced after breathing in something that you're allergic to.

Symptoms

- Itchy nose, skin, eyes, throat etc.
- Sneezing
- Watery Eyes
- Runny Nose
- Polyps in the Nasal Passage
- Trouble with smell
- Nasal Congestion etc.

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KETTLEBELL SQUAT TO OVERHEAD PRESS

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, and your toes pointed forward.

With each hand, hold a kettlebell in the front-racked position. Alternatively, you can hold just one kettlebell for a single-arm kettlebell squat to overhead press variation. Keeping your back flat and core braced, bend your knees, push your hips back, and lower your body until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Pause, and then, as you return to a standing position, push both kettlebells straight up overhead in one fluid motion, locking your elbows and bringing your bicep close to your ears.



DOUBLE FRONT-RACKED KETTLEBELL SQUATS

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, and your toes pointed forward.

With each hand, hold a kettlebell in the racked position. (Hold the kettlebell by the handle in front of your shoulders so that the bell is resting on the outside of the forearm and the elbow is tucked in close to the torso.) Alternatively, you can hold just one kettlebell for a single-arm kettlebell squat variation. Keeping your back flat and core braced, bend your knees, push your hips back, and lower your body until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Pause, and then push yourself back up to the starting position.



KETTLEBELL GOBLET SQUAT

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, and your toes pointed forward.

With bent elbows, hold a kettlebell in front of your chest. Keep your elbows close to your body and avoid flaring them out. You can hold the kettlebell by the handle or the horns. Or, hold the kettlebell upside-down by the bell.

Keeping your back flat and core braced, bend your knees, push your hips back, and lower your body until your thighs are parallel to the floor. As you squat down, your elbows should move past your inner thighs.

Pause, and then push yourself back up to the starting position.



KETTLEBELL SUMO SQUAT

Stand with your feet wider than shoulder-width apart and your toes turned out about 45 degrees.

With your arms straight down in front of you, use both hands to grip the handle of a kettlebell. Keeping your back flat and core braced, bend your knees, push your hips back, and lower your body until your thighs are parallel to the floor. As you squat down, the kettlebell will hang between your legs. Brace your core to make sure that the weight does not pull your chest forward. Pause, and then push yourself back up to the starting position.

CLASSIFIEDS

BIRTHDAY WISHES



RIZWAN PATHAN
February 5

Cheers to the nights that turned into mornings and the friend that turned into family. Happy birthday to an inspiring person who is a shining example for all of us!
From, Nitin Jadhav & Family

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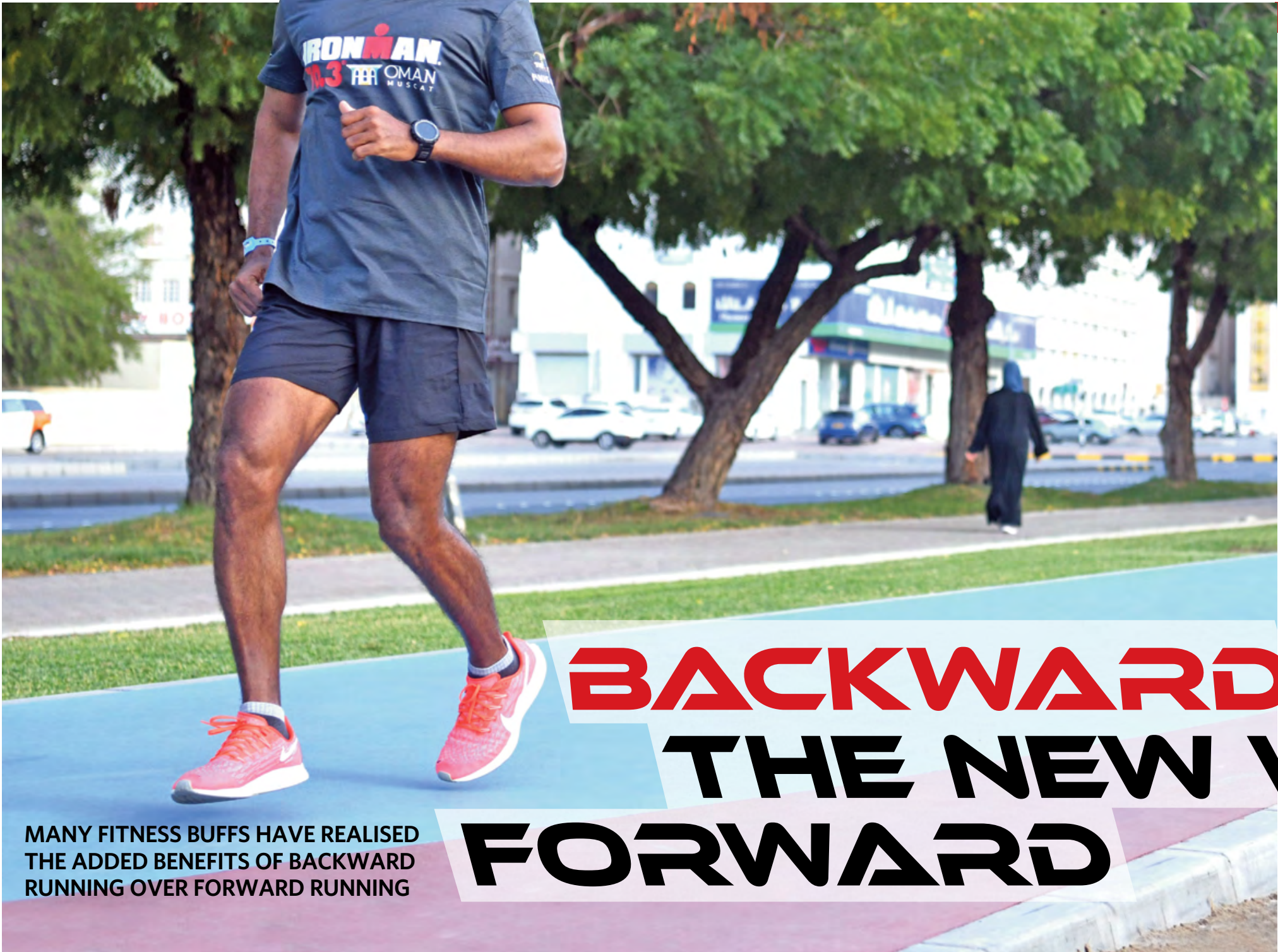
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REVERSE RUNNING

or running uphill versus downhill. A study published in 2016 in the Journal of Strength and Conditioning backs this up. Researchers found that running backwards benefited athletes by improving their running economy.

Unlike forward running, which generally uses the muscles in the front of the leg (like the quads and anterior tibialis), reverse running primarily uses the muscles of the posterior chain, especially the calf muscles and glutes. Within just a minute or two of reverse running, one can experience a burning sensation in the calves.

Running backwards may also be easier on the knees for this very reason. "In a backwards movement, the set of muscles involved in absorbing the impact in the lower level are opposite. Your lower leg muscles are doing most of the absorbing, thereby placing less stress on the knees. Reverse running will recruit lesser utilised muscles resulting in muscle growth and toning," says Ruiz.

BACKWARD THE NEW WAY FORWARD

Photo: V K Shafeer (model: Roopson)

Do you hit the jogging tracks every morning/evening for your own fitness commitment and measure your progress in terms of stamina, calories burnt, inches lost? A new way forward now may be, actually, backward!

Frankie Ruiz, a longtime cross-country running coach and chief running officer and cofounder of the Life Time Miami Marathon, explains that aside from moving in reverse, backwards running differs from regular running because it requires an entirely different combination of things to do correctly (such as form, technique,

and muscles you're engaging). In a recent article in *Everyday Health*, Ruiz points out that while the goal is still the same as forward running, the action of running backwards involves a relatively coordinated movement of the body to progress through space while at least one or both

feet leave the ground below. "Reverse running (also referred to as backwards running or retro running) is achieving the same thing but the front side of the body is facing the opposite direction," he adds. The idea has been around for years with many sports using the method as a warm-up and agility

practice. Several endurance athletes at all levels use reverse running as rehab especially after injury to the knees or hips. The stress is better distributed, so the movement is sometimes prescribed as a way to ease back into aerobic conditioning. Ruiz further explains that reverse running offers a slightly different

set of benefits than regular running, especially for those practicing forward running for a long time. While the aerobic benefits will be similar, the muscles called on to do the work will differ. A similar effect would occur if you were changing the volume or intensity of your forward running

A study published in 2012 in the Journal of Biomechanics found that reverse running reduced impact on the knees compared with running forward. (The small group of moderately active people in the study did not have any recent knee pain or injury.) In addition to utilizing different muscles than running forward, reverse running enhances balance and posture, "as it forces you to stay in a more upright position," Gardner says. As to claims that running backwards can burn more calories than forward running, Gardner says it's not so black and white.



DR GAURI AGARWAL
Specialist
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Badr SOI IVF & Fertility Centre,
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Reproductive genetics - A boon for childless couples

Combining In vitro fertilisation (IVF) with Pre-Implantation genetic screening - PGS (testing embryos from presumed chromosomally normal genetic parents for aneuploidy) and Pre-Implantation genetic diagnosis - PGD (testing embryos from parents, one or both, with known genetic abnormality) helps couples with history of multiple failed IVFs, multiple missed abortions (miscarriage) and advanced maternal age in addition to those who are suffering or are carriers of hereditary diseases like Thalassemia & Sickle Cell.

It also saves such couples from the trauma of undergoing post pregnancy screenings like NIPT and Amniocentesis, which may even lead to medical termination.

As a result, Genetic Testing has attracted scientists and institutes to bring forth advanced developments in In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) procedures. These innovative IVF solutions deliver rapid results from precious samples, avoiding the complexities that traditionally come with conventional genetic analysis tools.

PGS is used for detection of Aneuploidies, or Numerical Chromosomal Abnormalities, across all 24 chromosomes (22 autosomes and the X and Y chromosomes), like Trisomy 21

(Down syndrome) and Monosomy X (Turner syndrome), other Trisomies (having an extra chromosome), Sex Chromosomal Abnormalities, Monosomies (missing a chromosome) and Single Gene Disorders such as Cystic Fibrosis, Sickle Cell Disease and many more.

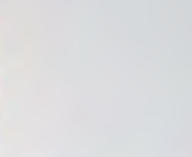
How does Genetic testing help the couple?

- **Minimising the chances of miscarriage** - Opting for the right test helps to pinpoint the reason for the pregnancy loss, and give our fertility specialists a good understanding of how to properly address and deal with the issue.
- **Cost effective** - While genetic tests are an additional cost, it can often decrease the price of a patient's IVF journey in the long run by decreasing the number of transfers necessary to conceive.
- **Successful IVF with genetic tests** - This gives our fertility doctors an insight into which embryos will be most likely to implant and develop healthily. To optimize an IVF process, one should avoid unsuccessful embryo transfers.
- **Quicker time to pregnancy** Our fertility experts can ensure that you're not spending months in the lifecycle of your IVF treatment and still end up transferring embryos unsuccessfully.
- **No doubt, no stress, less uncertainty** - A significant benefit of

genetic testing is the reduced level of uncertainty. The procedure provides patients with an ensured healthy embryo, a lower risk of pregnancy loss, and less emotional stress.

- **Minimal risk to the embryo** These tests are conducted under the supervision of expert doctors. Trophoctoderm embryo biopsy involves only the outer layer of the embryo and therefore minimises risks to the foetus
- **Genetically healthy baby** These tests assure a transfer of a healthy embryo hence conclusively assuring the couple of having a genetically normal and healthy baby.

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