

HM issues Royal Decree on Oman Botanic Garden

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq issued Royal Decree No 25/2023 on amending provisions of Royal Decree No 6/2006 on Oman Botanic Garden, on Tuesday, reading as follows:

Article 1 states that the texts of Articles 1 and 3 of Royal Decree No 6/2006 will be replaced with the following:

► The zone of which dimensions are demarcated in the chart attached to this decree will be a nature reserve under the name 'Oman Botanic Garden'. It will be affiliated to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

► Within the context of Oman Botanic Garden, the Minister of Heritage and Tourism will exercise all powers stated in the Law on Nature Reserves and Wildlife Conservation. The minister will issue the regulations/bylaws and decisions necessary for the implementation of this decree through coordination with the authorities concerned.

Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

ONA

Oman - Rising star among ME travellers' favourite destinations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

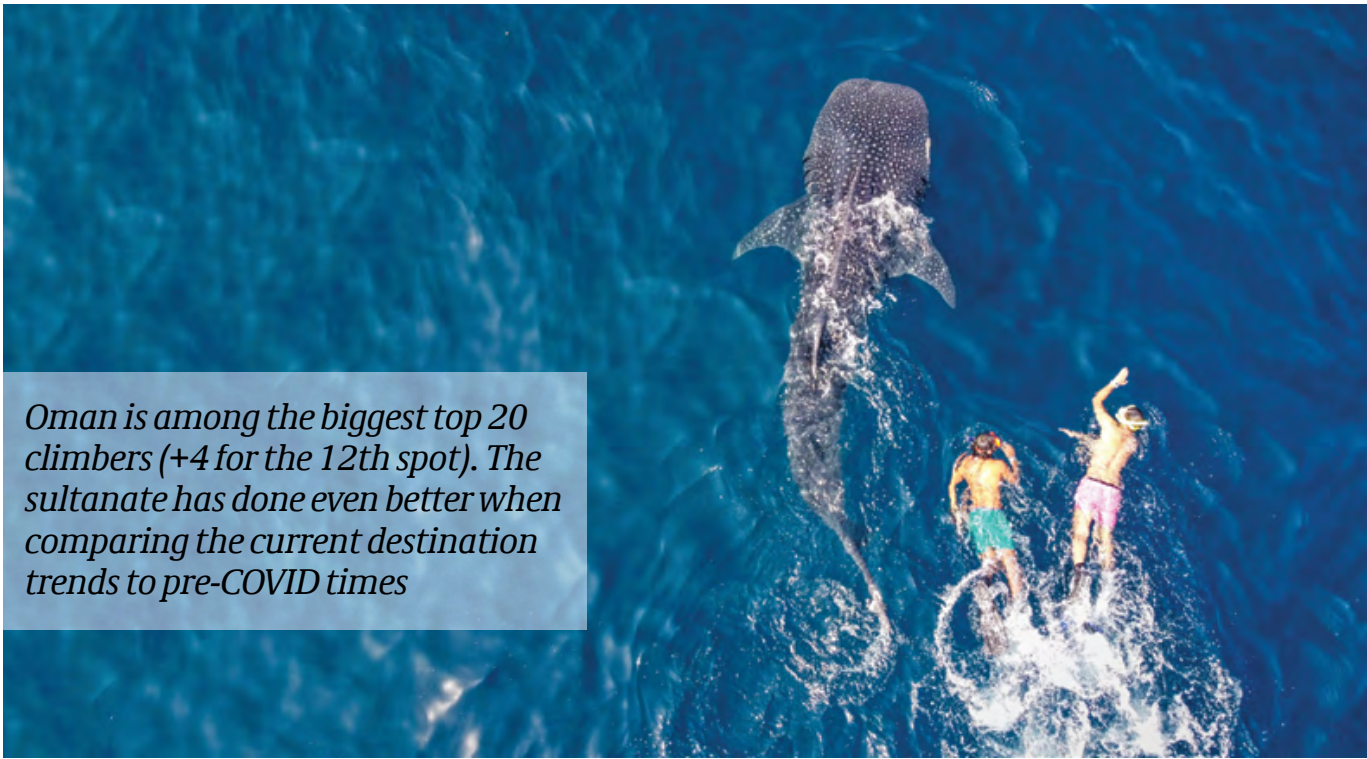
The sultanate's popularity as a tourist destination among Middle Eastern travellers is growing. Oman has jumped four places to rank 12th in the 'Top 50 Destinations Globally for Middle East Travellers' list.

Developed by Wego, the largest online travel marketplace and travel app for flight bookings and searches in the Middle East and North Africa, the 'Middle East Traveller Destination Leaderboard' for the first quarter of 2023 showcases the relative popularity of global destinations with Middle East travellers.

The data to determine the destination rankings was compiled from tens of millions of searches made in the first quarter of 2023 by Wego users.

The biggest climbers among top 20 are Oman (+4 for the 12th spot) and Sudan (+5 for the 20th spot), the travel company stated.

Oman has done even better when comparing the current destination trends to pre-COVID times. 'Several Asian countries lost positions as they faced stricter COVID policies. These



Oman is among the biggest top 20 climbers (+4 for the 12th spot). The sultanate has done even better when comparing the current destination trends to pre-COVID times

are mostly countries in Asia such as China (-11 spots), Japan and Vietnam (each -9 spots), Philippines (-8 spots), Malaysia (-7 spots) and Indonesia and Singapore (each -4 spots).

'On the other end were countries within GCC who had more accommodating social and travel policies during the pandemic.

Qatar and Oman, each went up by +8 spots and Bahrain by +5 spots among others.'

Egypt retained its position as the top destination for international travel for MENA travellers in Q1 2023, followed by Saudi Arabia. Rounding out the top three is India.

Looking at a decade worth of

travel data, regional travel destinations are growing faster than long-haul. Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and USA dropped out as top ten destinations while Kuwait, Pakistan and Jordan are now among the top ten destinations for MENA travellers.

The UK remains the dominant European destination for Middle

East travellers. This summer, Georgia and Azerbaijan are expected to challenge the UK once again as Arab travellers look to replace the Gulf summer heat with a more moderate summer.

'One dynamic change we have seen among European markets has been Italy, which has steadily climbed up through the ranks

from No 8 spot in early 2022 to currently battle with Germany for the No 2.'

Among the ME destinations, most countries have retained their rankings during the second quarter of 2023. KSA and Egypt continue to dominate the top two spots with UAE firmly in third.

While most Asian destinations retained their relative positions among each other, Asia's drop in popularity versus the rest of the world continues to be the most noteworthy affect of the pandemic. 'As China and the rest of Asia finally ease social and travel restrictions, Wego projects that Asian countries are going to bounce back and reclaim their 2019 positions.'

Mamoun Hmedan, CCO and MD for MENA and India at Wego, said, "We're excited to share our MENA destination report for this quarter. Our data shows that Egypt remains the top destination of choice for MENA travellers for what the country offers from a mix of history, culture and adventure for every type of traveller.

"We also observe that the UK continues to rank as the top European destination out of the Middle East."



Palestinian hunger striker dies in Israeli custody

Mercury crosses 40°C in several parts of Oman; Fahud records 42°C

Our Correspondent
Muscat

It's May and summer is here without a doubt. Temperatures rose across Oman in the last few days, but come May, the mercury crossed 40°C in several parts of the sultanate.

Fahud in Qarn Alam recorded

the highest temperature of 42°C in Oman in the last 24 hours. Zaim, Sunaynah and Hamrat ad Daru recorded temperatures in the range of 41.1°C to 41.2°C, while Maqshin, Marmul and Haima all witnessed temperatures between 40.6°C to 40.9°C.

The temperature in Muscat is



expected to reach a high of 37°C on Wednesday and 38°C in Amerat, Bausher and Muttrah.

In a statement, the Met Department said that active north-westerly winds will continue to blow in the next three days, causing the rise of dust and sometimes lowering horizontal

visibility in desert and open areas.

In an advisory issued for Dhofar, the Met Department stated that there were chances of thunderstorms in Sadah, Taqah, Salalah, Mirbat, Salalah Port and Dalkhut on Tuesday.

In its forecast for Wednesday, the Met Department said it ex-

pects clear skies over most governorates with advection of medium clouds over Dhofar. 'There are chances of dust rising due to fresh winds over desert and open areas. Low-level clouds or fog patches are expected late night or early morning over parts of South Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar.'

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4 tourism projects being built in Dhofar for RO3mn



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in partnership with Dhofar Municipality and Omran Group, is implementing four tourism projects worth more than RO3mn in Dhofar.

The four projects are development of Mughsail Beach waterfront, Itlatat Hamreer, Wadi Darbat and Ain Jerziz.

Khalid bin Abdullah al Abri, Director General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar, informed that the ministry is working to exploit and develop natural sites in the governorate to capitalise on the tourist seasons of khareef and spring.

Spread over 174,000sqm, the Mughsail Beach waterfront project will see an investment of RO874,600 and include parking lots, an events and activities arena, food kiosks,

The ministry is working to exploit and develop natural sites in Dhofar to capitalise on the tourist seasons of khareef and spring

KHALID AL ABRI

restaurants, a promenade on the beach, shaded sitting areas, picnic sites, and dedicated areas for exercise.

"It will also include facilities for marine sports, an adventure park and children's games," Abri informed.

The Itlatat Hamreer project, spread over 50,000sqm, will be built at a cost of RO505,000.

Spread over 105,000sqm, the Wadi Darbat project will cost RO561,500. "It will provide a unique experience in hospitality

and entertainment and include picnic spots, cable cars and a platform to view the waterfall," Abri said.

The Ain Jerziz development project, built on an area of 40,000sqm, aims to improve public services and facilities and will include parking spaces, toilets and picnic spots.

"These projects will contribute to developing the governorate's economy and revitalising the business sector. The sites will be offered to SMEs on lease or usufruct contracts."

About other projects currently in the pipeline, Abri said the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in partnership with Dhofar Municipality, is setting up several travel oases, including the Hashir and Sadah oases. "Land has been offered for investment and implementation of the plans developed by the ministry."

First safety forum for mining sector held

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) and Oman Energy Association (OPAL) organised the first safety forum for the mining sector in the sultanate on Tuesday.

The forum was held under the auspices of H E Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Undersecretary of MEM. It was attended by over 100 executives and senior leaders representing the public and private sectors.

The main objective of the forum was to establish a strong alliance between the key parties involved in operations, management and sustainability of the mining sector. It further aimed to build commitment to comply with local laws and regulations, and step up safety leadership and the HSE culture in the mining sector by applying high HSE standards, employing advanced systems and new technologies, improving safety and worker welfare, and providing high quality training.



The event was also an opportunity to roll out occupational health, safety and environment (OHSE) guidelines - established by MEM - for mineral exploration in the sultanate.

The OHSE guidelines document was developed based on a comprehensive HSE assessment conducted at 15 mining sites across Oman, covering 37 HSE assessment criteria divided into 17 focus areas in relation to the management of HSE in mining operations.

The MEM OHSE guidelines set out critical HSE requirements for compliance by all companies involved in mining operations.

OPAL, in partnership with MEM, has achieved major improvements in HSE standardisation of the oil and gas industry, a press release stated. 'OPAL has established ten HSE standards and one guideline document for the oil and gas sector to streamline management of HSE, unification of practices and processes, as well as governance. This stan-

dardisation has contributed to a boundary-less movement of contractors and resource providers between the different operators, saving millions of Omani rials by unifying vehicle specifications, training programmes, as well as training institute requirements and trainer requirements.

'OPAL will continue to utilise its expertise to support the mining sector evolve in safety leadership and establish a strong HSE culture and HSE standardisation.'

EA continues campaign to combat invasive birds in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) has announced that it will recommence its campaign to combat invasive avian species in Dhofar after temporarily suspending it during Ramadan.

A statement issued by EA said, 'A team participating in the National Campaign to Combat Invasive Birds removed 68,284 invasive birds between December 13, 2022 and March 31, 2023.'

The national campaign was launched in the wilayats of

Salalah, Taqah, Mirbat and Sadah in Dhofar and will continue in the following months covering other governorates, including Muscat and North Batinah.

Invasive birds have a negative impact on ecosystems. These cause biological imbalance by disrupting the natural food chain.

The birds also transmit diseases, like bird flu, and destroy agricultural crops, fruits and orchards.

The authority urges all to cooperate in its campaign by not throwing leftovers in public places, keeping trash containers closed, and cleaning livestock and poultry farms periodically.

Board of Directors' Report for the three months ended 31 March 2023

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the Bank's first Quarter financial results for 2023.

Performance Summary

Our first quarter performance shows a 125.9% increase in net profit to RO12.2 M compared with RO5.4 M for the same period in 2022. This has been primarily driven by a 42.8% growth in net operating income (before Expected Credit Losses "ECL") and lower operating expenses.

Net interest income was up 60.5% to RO19.9 M for the period ended 31 March 2023 compared with RO12.4 M for the same period in 2022 mainly due to higher interest income from the favourable interest rate environment partly offset by higher interest expense on our deposits. Net fee income was RO2.0 M for the period ended 31 March 2023 compared with RO2.4 M for the same period in 2022 due to lower fees from cards.

Net trading income stood at RO1.6 M for the period ended 31 March 2023 remaining relatively flat year on year.

A net release of RO0.4 M has been reported to the Bank's ECL and other credit impairment charges compared with a net release of RO2.0 M for the same period last year. The Bank released RO0.3 M of Wholesale ECL and RO0.1 M of Retail ECL. The ECL release was driven by the improvement in the macro-economic environment.

Operating expenses reduced by 6.6% to RO11.3 M compared with RO12.1 M for the same period in 2022 primarily due to lower IT related costs.

Loans and advances to customers decreased by 11.3% to RO1,157.1 M compared with RO1,304.8 M as at 31 March 2022.

Customer deposits decreased by 1.1% to RO1,938.1 M compared to the same period last year. Our liquidity remains strong, as evidenced by an Advances to Deposit ratio (ADR) of 59.7% at the end of March 2023.

HSBC's Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) stood at 24.5% as at 31 March 2023 compared with 21.7% as at 31 March 2022.

Delivering the best customer experience

In Wealth and Personal Banking (WPB), we have seen continued momentum for the acquisition of new customers leveraging our Employee Banking Solution programme. We also launched a new Advance and Premier "New to Bank" customer acquisition campaign. We have also

continued our focus on improving customer experience and have seen further quarter on quarter improvement in our Net Promoter Score (a key indicator of customer satisfaction) as a result.

In the Wholesale business, in March 2023 we acted as Mandated Lead Arranger and Structuring Bank for the amend and extend of the USD 155 million syndicated pre-export finance facility for Mazoon Petrogas. The Facility is structured as a USD 155 million 7.5 year senior secured amortizing Pre-Export Financing term loan ("PXF") repaid by secured crude oil proceeds from an A-rated Asian oil-taker.

HSBC Oman has again been voted by customers as the leading trade finance bank in Oman and as Best Service in Euromoney's Trade Finance Survey 2023. HSBC was also voted the Best Bank for trade finance bank in the Middle East region. This award demonstrates our strong position and our ability to connect Omani businesses to trading partners around the globe and our commitment to invest in the digitalisation of our products and services.

Corporate Sustainability

In partnership with the Children First Association, we conducted a series of workshops for children aged 7 to 12 years old at the Children's Public Library in Muscat. The workshops aimed to build a creative environment where children can learn to innovate, thrive by acquiring knowledge, tap into their creativity and become responsible citizens of the world.

Similar sessions were also conducted in Masirah Island where we hosted learning sessions for more than 200 children in cooperation with the Directorate General of Education in Al Sharqiya Region.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to all our stakeholders and to the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority for their continuous support.

On behalf of the Board of Directors I would like to express my sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for his wise leadership, and we affirm our full support to the Omani government at all times.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles
Chairman

Interim condensed statement of comprehensive income for the three month period ended 31 March 2023 (unaudited)

	Three month period ended 31 March 2023	Three month period ended 31 March 2022
	RO'000	RO'000
Interest income	26,613	16,082
Interest expense	(6,721)	(3,726)
Net interest income	19,892	12,356
Fee income	3,540	3,199
Fee expense	(1,577)	(843)
Net fee income	1,963	2,356
Net trading income	1,639	1,611
Other operating income – net	250	228
Net operating income before loan impairment charges and other credit risk provisions	23,744	16,551
Change in expected credit losses and other credit impairment charges – net	428	2,033
Net operating income	24,172	18,584
Employee compensation and benefits	(5,383)	(5,354)
General and administrative expenses	(5,453)	(6,241)
Depreciation and impairment of property, equipment and right-of-use assets	(419)	(462)
Amortisation of intangible assets	(32)	-
Total operating expenses	(11,287)	(12,057)
Profit before tax	12,885	6,527
Tax expense	(668)	(1,132)
Profit for the period	12,217	5,395
Other comprehensive income / (loss)		
Items that will be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss when specific conditions are met		
Debt instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income		
- Fair value gain	58	196
- Expected credit losses recognised in income statement	59	23
- Tax expense	(9)	(29)
Other comprehensive income for the period - net of tax	108	190
Total comprehensive income for the period	12,325	5,585
Earnings per share – basic and diluted		
- for the period (RO)	0.006	0.003
- annualised (RO)	0.024	0.011

Interim condensed statement of financial position as at 31 March 2023 (unaudited)

	At 31 March 2023	At 31 March 2022	Audited At 31 December 2022
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
Assets			
Cash and balances with central banks	263,884	245,334	123,003
Due from banks	317,098	267,178	283,756
Loans and advances to customers - net	1,157,086	1,304,849	1,247,387
Financial investments	652,211	566,784	538,213
Other assets	22,499	38,755	26,304
Intangible assets	933	-	965
Property and equipment	17,418	20,273	17,689
Right-of-use assets	2,238	2,826	2,396
Deferred tax assets	1,881	2,578	1,935
Total assets	2,435,248	2,438,577	2,241,628
Liabilities and equity			
Liabilities			
Due to banks	72,934	70,258	46,702
Deposits from customers	1,938,071	1,959,520	1,765,275
Current tax liabilities	7,464	6,822	6,936
Other liabilities	59,006	59,031	61,000
Lease liabilities	2,134	2,676	2,335
Total liabilities	2,079,609	2,098,307	1,882,311
Equity			
Share capital	200,031	200,031	200,031
Legal reserve	50,448	47,777	50,448
FVOCI reserve	218	1,570	110
Retained earnings	104,942	80,892	108,728
Total equity	355,639	340,270	359,317
Total liabilities and equity	2,435,248	2,438,577	2,241,628

The interim condensed financial information were authorised for issue on 27 April 2023 in accordance with the resolution of the Board of Directors.



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Opening up a world of opportunity

SAYYID FAHD RECEIVES PALESTINIAN MINISTER



H H Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received Dr Rula Maayah, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities of the State of Palestine. H H Sayyid Fahd affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's continued support for the Palestinian cause and all efforts aimed at restoring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The meeting dealt with bilateral relations between the two countries and means of promoting these, particularly in the areas of heritage, tourism and museums. It also discussed the latest regional and international developments (Supplied photo)

Citizen killed in drifting accident in Dhahirah

Our Correspondent Muscat

Royal Oman Police (ROP) has arrested a driver for endangering his own and the lives of others on a public road in Dhahirah. A statement issued by ROP said, "Dhahirah Governorate Police Command arrested a driver for endangering his life and the death of a passenger in his vehicle when it overturned in a drifting accident. Legal procedures are being completed against the driver by the Directorate General of Traffic."

In February, ROP released a video of a drifting accident in which two people were seriously injured by a citizen in North Batinah. Experts and racing drivers have time and again called for tougher penalties in the sultanate for such offences. Speaking to Muscat Daily, Ali al Barwani, former CEO of Oman Road Safety

Association, described the practice as "widespread" despite efforts exerted by ROP and several campaigns to spread awareness on the risks involved. "I believe harsher punishment will limit these activities and prevent tragic accidents."

According to racing driver Ali al Balushi, Oman Automobile Association has a dedicated track with safety and security standards for drifting and organises championships throughout the year.

"There are a few who do not adhere to the safety standards and engage in drifting in public places, which causes fatal accidents. I urge the Omani youth to visit Oman Automobile Association, learn about its programmes and competitions, participate in these and abide by traffic laws."

ROP called on all to adhere to traffic rules and regulations and make all roads safe for users.

be'ah receives 30% more waste during Eid break

Muscat - Environmental Services Holding Company in Oman, be'ah, collected over 30,000 tonnes of waste during the recent Eid al Fitr holiday from April 21 to April 24. This was part of be'ah's efforts to handle large quantities of waste quickly and dispose of it according to set environmental, health and safety standards by transporting it to engineered landfills.

Yaarub al Sulaimi, Acting Municipal Solid Waste Sector Strategies Manager at be'ah, said, "The company co-operated with waste management service providers in various governorates to implement a strategic plan in order to manage the expected large amounts of municipal solid and slaughter waste received during the Eid holiday."

be'ah designated specific locations for collection of slaughter waste, known as skip locations, factoring in population density and accessibility to these sites by citizens.

Additionally, be'ah increased the frequency of waste collection in all governorates. To ensure public health and safety, slaughter waste was transported to engineered landfills daily and continuously throughout the Eid holiday.

be'ah informed about locations of garbage bins through links on various social media platforms, allowing all segments of society to access the information.

According to Sulaimi, the company increased working hours of transfer stations and landfills to support waste collection operations in all governorates.

The engineered landfills received more than 30,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste from across the sultanate. The average total waste received per day during Eid al Fitr was more than 7,000 tonnes, accounting for an increase of 30 per cent compared to the daily waste received during regular days.



2 pacts to boost Oman-Palestine ties

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the National Museum, and the State of Palestine signed two agreements to showcase their history and culture through exhibitions and museums on Tuesday.

The first pact is for organising an exhibition and activities for 'Oman Day' and the second agreement provides for the establishment of a special corner about Palestine in the National

Museum to highlight its history, civilisation and cause.

Coordination will take place later between the two sides regarding the venue and timing of the Oman Day exhibition.

The pacts were signed by Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of National Museum, and Rula Maayah, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities of Palestine, in the presence of Dr Tayseer Ali Farhat, Ambassador of Palestine to Oman.

On the occasion, Moosawi said, "The museum seeks to

National Museum seeks to highlight the historical relations between the two countries

JAMAL AL MOOSAWI

highlight the historical relations between the two countries in addition to achieving cooperation in the museum and cultural fields."

Regarding establishment of the Palestine corner in National

Museum, he said that "it is affirmation of what is stipulated in the policies of the National Museum to enhance international cooperation through the exchange of objects and exhibitions".

The Palestinian minister stressed on the importance of her visit to Oman, which comes within the framework of strengthening cooperation between the two countries in the fields of tourism and cultural heritage.

She expressed her appreciation for the great welcome and interest she received from Oman,

"which is an honest expression of the strength of the relations between the two countries and the supportive stance pursued by the sultanate under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the Palestine cause and its people, who continue their struggle until their legitimate rights are achieved".

On his part, Farhat said, "We look forward to developing cooperation and exchanging experiences with Oman in the field of antiquities, museums and tourism cooperation."



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Chairman's Report

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the interim unaudited Financial Statements for the three months period ended 31 March 2023.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE (RO'000)

I am delighted to report that your Company has performed exceptionally well capitalising on the new business opportunities that arose during the period, despite the challenging economic conditions.

	Jan-Mar 2023 (RO'000)	Jan-Mar 2022 (RO'000)	Increase	Increase %
Sales	120,871	99,908	20,963	21%
Cost of Sales	(114,420)	(94,381)	20,039	21%
Gross profit	6,451	5,527	924	17%
Other income	1,827	1,588	239	15%
Total expenses	(6,673)	(6,195)	478	8%
Net profit	1,605	920	685	74%
Earnings per share (RO)	0.023	0.013	0.010	74%

Highlights:

- Our revenue for Jan-Mar 2023 amounts to **RO 121 million, a 21% increase** from the same period previous year (about RO 100 million) – registering a growth of about RO 21 million. This growth can be attributed to expanding our operations and diversifying our product portfolio.
- Our net profit for Jan-Mar 2023 amounts to **RO 1.6 million**, a 74% increase from the same period last year (RO 0.9 million) – registering a growth of about RO 0.7 million. This demonstrates our commitment to cost management and operational efficiency.
- Earning per share (EPS) for the period stood at **Bzs 23**, a 74% increase from Bzs 13 from the same period last year.

MARKET SEGMENT PERFORMANCE:

Our marketing strategy has been focused on strengthening our brand, improving our customer experience, and expanding our reach. We have launched several successful marketing campaigns that have helped us to increase our market share and customer engagement. Additionally, we have invested heavily in technology to improve our customer experience and offer innovative products and services.

- Retail segment**

This segment continues to remain the top priority and the chief revenue earner for the Company.

During the period of January-March 2023, this sector witnessed a significant improvement compared to the same period in 2022, as sales increased in the majority of retail stations as a result of lifting restrictions on movement. Additionally, retail fuel stations near the borders contributed to the increase in sales due to price differences.

The success of **Fuely**, the onsite fuel delivery solution, which has gained wider popularity, has also contributed to the growth of the retail segment. The growth of "**Fuely**" demonstrates your Company's "differentiation competency," i.e., ability to provide an innovative & unique value proposition to our customers.

- Commercial segment**

The growth in this fiercely competitive segment continues to be challenging due to low demand from many business and service units in the power sector resorting to the use of Gas in replacement of Gasoil. However, the increase in the bunkering business and delivery of additional fuel products to the Duqm Refinery has also contributed to the growth of the commercial segment.

Going forward, increasing government spending and foreign investment in the country's various infrastructure projects are expected to drive business growth in this segment.

- Aviation segment**

Aviation Segment has also recorded significant growth with the growth of the Tourism & hospitality industry. As a result, aviation fuel sales to Oman Air and other major airlines have registered a huge growth during the period.

Moreover, your Company's recent success in securing a prestigious contract with Oman Airports to manage the fuel farm at Muscat International Airport for five years, effective from January 2023, has added a new dimension to the Company's competitive advantage. This achievement is expected to enhance the Company's market position and improve its ability to compete effectively in the industry.

- Lubricant Segment**

Lubricant Segment has also improved its performance during the period with the wider acceptance and popularity of the Al Maha brand lubricants both in the local and export market.

- Non-Fuel Revenue (NFR) Segment**

One of the promising activities on the diversification of our business beyond traditional fuel retailing is the significant inroads made in Non-Fuel Retail (NFR). Your Company has expanded the customer reach capabilities with customer-centric initiatives and strategic focus & expansion in the Non-Fuel Retailing NFR activities, which helped to achieve additional financial revenues.

QUALITY, HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT (QHSE)

Quality, Health, Safety, and Environment are the cornerstone of the company's operations to ensure the continuity and growth of our business without risks, which made the challenge of achieving the goal of zero Lost Time Injuries is not impossible to achieve, and this was achieved through raising the efficiency of employees, continuous training and effective management.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Your Company has demonstrated its commitment to social responsibility by undertaking several initiatives aimed at improving people's lives in the areas of education, health, and the environment within the surrounding communities. In addition, the Company has provided support to numerous charities and non-profit organizations that serve the country, highlighting its active involvement in giving back to the community. Additionally, we have continued to work towards reducing our carbon footprint and promoting sustainable practices by installing fuel vapor capture in the major stations we operate.

DIVIDEND DISTRIBUTION

Your Company continues its high dividend policy thereby delivering high value to the shareholders and investors. In the Annual General Meeting of the Company held on March 21, 2023 the shareholders approved a cash dividend of 85 baisa per share (85% of share capital) totalling RO 5.865 million for the year ended December 31, 2022, which was fully paid before the end of March 2023.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

With the continued high oil prices due to the tightened global oil supply and continued geopolitical risk due to the political conflicts happening around the world, it is expected that oil and gas prices to remain elevated for most of 2023.

Oman's economy is expected to grow by above 4% this year, supported by higher oil and gas prices, continuing reform momentum, and investment projects.

The increase in key repo rate by 25 bps to 5.5% in March 2023, mirroring the US Fed's move, may lead to a decrease in borrowing and investment, slowing down economic growth.

As we move forward, we remain committed to delivering value to our shareholders, customers, and other stakeholders. We will continue to focus on growth, innovation, and excellence in all our operations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On behalf of the Board of Directors and executive management, I take this opportunity to express our most sincere gratitude and loyalty to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq** and his efforts toward a prosperous Oman.

We thank the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, OQ Refineries, our shareholders, customers, the officials of the Capital Market Authority, the Muscat Stock Exchange, and Muscat Clearing & Depository Company for their valuable support and co-operation. We also appreciate the dedicated and committed service of our staff members.

Dr. Saif Salim Saif Al-Harhi
Chairman

Interim condensed statement of financial position at 31 March 2023

	31-Mar-23 RO'000 (Unaudited)	31-Dec-22 RO'000 (Audited)
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	28,767	28,191
Investment property	482	494
Right of use asset	6,097	6,368
Contract assets	2,986	3,085
Deferred tax assets	2,749	2,741
Total non-current assets	41,081	40,879
Current assets		
Inventories	3,777	3,824
Trade and other receivables	66,908	69,647
Contract assets	1,952	1,952
Bank balances and cash	56,153	35,241
Total current assets	128,790	110,664
TOTAL ASSETS	169,871	151,543
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	6,900	6,900
Legal reserve	2,300	2,300
Special reserve	2,104	2,104
Retained earnings	31,964	36,224
Total equity	43,268	47,528
LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Lease liabilities	5,851	6,163
Employees' end of service benefits	243	235
Total non-current liabilities	6,094	6,398
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	47,991	51,342
Short term loan	68,933	42,900
Lease liabilities	729	720
Contract liabilities	1,448	1,462
Income tax payable	1,408	1,193
Total current liabilities	120,509	97,617
Total liabilities	126,603	104,015
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	169,871	151,543
Net assets per share (RO)	0.627	0.689

Interim condensed statement of comprehensive income for the three months period ended 31 March 2023

	Three months ended 31 March	
	2023 RO '000 (Unaudited)	2022 RO '000 (Unaudited)
Revenue	120,871	99,908
Cost of sales	(114,420)	(94,381)
Gross Profit	6,451	5,527
Other Income	1,491	1,119
Operating and administration expenses	(5,905)	(5,491)
Operating Profit	2,037	1,155
Finance Income	336	469
Finance costs	(561)	(501)
Profit before income tax	1,812	1,123
Income tax expense	(207)	(203)
Profit and total comprehensive income for the period	1,605	920
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.023	0.013

Note: The complete report is available in Muscat Stock Exchange website and Company's website.
The complete report will be sent to any shareholder who requests them either in Arabic or English as required within 7 days of receipt of the request. The request should be sent to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at the above mentioned address.



INTERVIEW

SHELL OMAN MARKETING COMPANY
WINNER: FUEL STATION AND LUBRICANTS CATEGORIES

2022
OMAN'S MOST TRUSTED BRAND AWARDS

Our Correspondent
Muscat

SHELL OMAN

Meeting customer needs with high-quality products and services

Shell Oman Marketing Company, a leading fuel marketing firm in the sultanate, has won Oman's Most Trusted Brand 2022 in fuel station and lubricants categories. In an interview with *Muscat Daily*, Dr Mohammed al Balushi, CEO of Shell Oman Marketing Company, talked about Shell Oman's approach to maintaining its brand value and consumer trust. He discussed the company's commitment to providing high-quality products and services, exceeding customer expectations, and maintaining the highest standards of health and safety.

Shell Oman Marketing Company was voted by public as Oman's Most Trusted Brand in fuel stations category for 2022. How has Shell Oman maintained its brand value and consumer trust over the years, and what strategies have been implemented to ensure brand consistency?

At Shell Oman, we understand that maintaining our position as a leading fuel marketing company requires more than just having service stations in every area. We are committed to providing our customers with the best quality products and services. We are working tirelessly to ensure that we are not only meeting but exceeding customer expectations, while ensuring that our operations demonstrate the highest standards of health, safety, security and environment (HSSE) as well as ethics and compliance.

To maintain the trust of our customers, we have implemented various measures to ensure that our fuels and other products and services are of the highest quality. In terms of customer service, we place great emphasis on providing a positive experience for our customers through our 'People Make the Difference Real' program. This program ensures that our staff members are well-trained and knowledgeable, and our stations are transformed into destinations that offer a range of products and services to meet our customers' diverse needs in a safe, clean and well-maintained environment. Furthermore, our ongoing promotions and offers help us maintain brand loyalty, providing an all-round service to our customers.

Can you describe Shell Oman's approach to customer service and how it contributes to your brand's success?

We believe that being customer-centric is essential to our success as a brand. We have implemented an approach centred on the needs of our customers. This means that we prioritise understanding their preferences, concerns, and feedback, so that we can provide them with the best possible experience. We invest heavily in R&D to develop new and innovative products that meet the evolving needs of our customers, and that explains that over the years Shell Oman has been a pioneer in the Omani market for introducing new products and services and many times creating a need in the market. For instance, in 1996 Shell Oman launched the first 24-hour convenience store in Oman under Shell Select brand. In the same year, we were the first fuel marketing company to launch differentiated fuel formula in the Omani market. Our recent launches include our Shell V-Power differentiated fuels and our new Shell Café coffee brand.

Efficiency is another critical component of our customer service approach. We understand that our customers lead busy and fast-paced lives and do not want to waste their time waiting in long queues or dealing with inefficient processes. Therefore, we have designed our processes to be as streamlined and efficient as possible, to ensure that our customers can get in and out quickly. Friendliness is also essential to our approach to customer service. We believe



We are determined to meet the evolving needs of our customers while contributing towards a more sustainable future

DR MOHAMMED AL BALUSHI
CEO, Shell Oman Marketing Company

that creating a friendly and welcoming environment is key to building long-lasting relationships with customers. Our staff members are trained to be polite, courteous, and approachable, and we encourage them to go beyond to make our customers feel valued.

We use customer feedback to continuously improve our services. We understand that customer expectations are constantly evolving, and we need to keep up with these changes to remain competitive. Therefore, we regularly seek feedback from our customers to understand their satisfaction levels and identify areas for improvement.

All of this has been critically instrumental in forging long-lasting relationships with our customers in the sultanate. As we move forward, we hope to expand our network, to power more journeys, and to cater to individuals across the length and breadth of the country.

How do you plan to continue building and evolving Shell brand in the future to maintain its position as a leader in fuel marketing industry?

To continue building and evolving the Shell brand in the future, our clear focus is on innovation and sustainability. We aim to provide our customers with cutting-edge products and services that meet their evolving needs and contribute to a more sustainable future. Moreover, we are working towards smart service stations. Recently we announced the smart service station concept. This makes Shell Oman the first fuel marketing company in Oman to plan to implement these state-of-the-art modular service stations and which hopefully will come into implementation in the near future.

We are also working towards the green mobility and have taken steps in that direction. For instance, last year we inaugurated our first electric vehicle-charging unit in Oman at the Al Bandar Service Station in Seeb. Our commitment to adapting to the changing customer needs is an example of the steps we are taking to play our role in providing more cleaner energy solutions. This comes in line with Shell's powering progress strategy, and the priorities and pillars of Oman Vision 2040.

We aim to expand our electric vehicle (EV) charging network with aim to connect the main cities in Oman over the coming two years. Glob-

ally, Shell's commitment to this cause is evident from the fact that it currently operates 8,000 public chargers globally, and this is just the beginning. Furthermore, we have 90,000 chargers for use in homes and offices, and our target is to install half a million chargers by 2025 and 2.5mn by 2030. Shell's global operations span across 80 countries and we have EV charging facilities in 30 countries.

Recently, we have also introduced the Shell Go+ app for our loyal customers, which enables them to accumulate reward points for each visit. These points can be utilised to obtain special offers at Shell service stations.

By continuing to invest in these areas and our evident focus on innovation, we are determined to meet the evolving needs of our customers while contributing towards a more sustainable future.

Shell Helix has also won Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award in lubricants category. Can you tell why most people put their trust on Shell Helix when it comes to consuming lubricants?

Shell Helix has won Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award in the lubricants category, and this is demonstrative of our commitment to quality, performance, and innovation. We owe this recognition to the world-renowned Shell Helix Ultra, which caters to customers who want their vehicles to deliver optimal power and performance over time. What makes it even more exciting is the fact that Shell Helix and Shell Helix Ultra that are supplied in Oman and some regional markets are in fact made in Oman along with other Shell lubricant brands in our Shell Lubricant Blending Plant located in Mina Al Fahal. As the number one global lubricant supplier for 16 consecutive years, this award is an appreciation of the trust it evokes among users who seek products and services that carry the Shell brand name. Our products are trusted by numerous leading global original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and are designed to meet the needs of every engine. We use advanced technologies to develop lubricants that provide better fuel efficiency and engine protection. We also prioritise safety and environmental sustainability, which has helped establish trust with our customers. We have recently launched carbon neutral lubricant which is designed for ultimate engine performance and offers lower emissions and better fuel economy.

What key features differentiate Helix from some of your major competitors in the market?

Our main advantages over the competitors are our adoption of cutting-edge technologies, and our emphasis on customer satisfaction. Shell Helix gives longer lasting engine performance, Shell Helix technology is trusted by Scuderia, Ferrari and BMW M Motorsport. We allocate substantial resources towards research and development to ensure our products remain at the forefront of innovation. Our Shell Helix engine oils are designed to cater to the needs of customers, no matter what driving difficulties they may face. Many leading OEMs choose Shell Helix technology. The Shell Helix Ultra line offers a broad range of oils that suit all types of engines, ranging from the first-ever synthetic motor oil created from natural gas, Shell Helix Ultra with PurePlus Technology, to high-quality multi-grade oils suitable for regular driving situations.

How many service stations Shell operates at present in Oman? What are the future expansion plans?

At present, Shell operates over 206 service stations in Oman. We are committed to expanding our presence in the country to ensure that our customers have convenient access to our services. Our future expansion plans will be based on market demand and customer needs, and we will continue to prioritise sustainability and innovation in our operations.

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Asyad Ports reports 88% jump in 2022 volumes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Asyad Ports Company, a subsidiary of Asyad Group, recorded a robust 88 per cent growth in the volumes of goods handled at its ports during its 2022 operations.

The company's portfolio includes the management and operations of Port Sultan Qaboos, Port Suwaiq, Port Shinas, Port of Khasab and the first dry port in Oman Khazaen Dry Port.

Total handling of public goods in the ports of Suwaiq, Shinas, Sultan Qaboos Port, Asyad Duqm Terminals and Khazaen Dry Port during 2022 stood at 3.326mn tonnes, an increase of 88 per cent as against 2021 figures. More than 1.7mn tonnes bulk materials were handled, in addition to 1.6mn tonnes of general cargo and 1.462mn tonnes of livestock.

Asyad Ports reported a 15 per cent growth in its total revenues, coupled with a 15 per cent increase in net profit in 2022, compared to 2021 figures.

The number of ships moored at the company's seaports stood



4,240 ships. This affirms Asyad Ports' strategic role in contributing to the realisation of the National Logistics Strategy 2040,

namely by linking medium ports with direct commercial markets from the GCC states, Iran, Africa, India, Canada, Brazil, Australia

and Ukraine.

This is in addition to achieving food security through direct import from the countries of origin of basic commodities such as grains, livestock, fruits and vegetables—all in line with an integrated system of operational, logistical and marine solutions.

Number of ships moored at the seaports managed and operated by Asyad Ports Company reached 4,240 ships in 2022

In 2022, Sultan Qaboos Port saw the restoration of cruise activity. It received 61 cruise ships, an increase of 135 per cent compared to 2021. The cruise liners arrived with more than 149,000 tourists on board. This contributed to the consolidation of Oman's position as a preferred destination for marine tourism in the region.

MSX issues decision to transfer listing of firms

Muscat – The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has issued a decision to transfer the listing of a number of public shareholding companies from the parallel market to the regular market and from the follow-up market to the parallel market and vice versa, with effect from May 7, 2023.

The decision stipulated changes taking place in the regular market vide which the listings of Oman Flour Mills, Oman Cables Industry, Al Omaniya Financial Services, Ahli Bank, Taageer Finance and Dhofar Generating Company were transferred from the regular market to the parallel market.

This was due to the fact that these companies did not adhere to several criteria for listing in the regular market.

The decision transferred Oman & Emirates Holding Company, HSBC Bank Oman, United Finance, BankDhofar, SMN Power Holding and Al Madina Takaful from the parallel market to the regular market, due to their commitment to all conditions and criteria required for listing in the regular



market.

Meanwhile, Al Madina Investment Holding was transferred from the follow-up market to the parallel market for meeting the standard set for shareholder rights. National

Aluminum Products and Oman Fisheries were transferred from the parallel market to the follow-up market for violating the standard set for shareholder rights. ONA

'Godfather of AI' quits Google to warn of tech's dangers

Washington, US – A computer scientist often dubbed "the godfather of artificial intelligence" has quit his job at Google to speak out about the dangers of the technology, US media reported Monday.

Geoffrey Hinton, who created a foundation technology for AI systems, told The New York Times that advancements made in the field posed "profound risks to society and humanity".

"Look at how it was five years ago and how it is now," he was quoted as saying in the piece, which was published on Monday.

"Take the difference and propagate it forwards. That's scary."

Hinton said that competition between tech giants was pushing companies to release new AI technologies at dangerous speeds, risking jobs and spreading misinformation.

"It is hard to see how you can prevent the bad actors from



Geoffrey Hinton

using it for bad things," he told the Times.

In 2022, Google and OpenAI – the start-up behind the popular AI chatbot ChatGPT – started building systems using much larger amounts of data than before. Hinton told the Times he believed that these systems were eclipsing human intelligence in some ways because of the amount of data they were analysing.

"Maybe what is going on in these systems is actually a lot better than what is going on in the brain," he told the paper.

While AI has been used to support human workers, the rapid expansion of chatbots like ChatGPT could put jobs at risk.

AI "takes away the drudge work" but "might take away more than that", he told the Times.

The scientist also warned about the potential spread of misinformation created by AI, telling the Times that the average person will "not be able to know what is true anymore."

Hinton notified Google of his resignation last month, the Times reported.

Jeff Dean, lead scientist for Google AI, thanked Hinton in a statement to US media.

"As one of the first companies to publish AI Principles, we remain committed to a responsible approach to AI," the statement added.

"We're continually learning to understand emerging risks while also innovating boldly." AFP

HSBC profit rockets in Q1 on rising interest rates

London, UK – Global banking giant HSBC reported Tuesday a surge in quarterly net profit, boosted by rising interest rates and its rescue of the UK arm of failed US lender Silicon Valley Bank.

Profit after tax almost quadrupled to US\$10.3bn in the three months to March from a year earlier, UK-headquartered HSBC said, while also pouring cold water on talk of a global industry crisis.

The bank also benefitted from its reversal of a US\$2.1bn write-down that had been linked to the planned sale of its French consumer banking activities to the US fund Cerberus. That deal is now thought to be at risk of falling through.

HSBC announced a stock buy-back worth up to US\$2bn and issued a bright outlook. The optimism came despite the move by US regulators on Monday to seize the lender First Re-



public and orchestrate its sale to JPMorgan Chase.

It was the latest government intervention after the recent collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and the takeover of embattled Credit Suisse by its Swiss peer UBS.

"We do not believe there is a global banking crisis on the horizon," chief executive Noel Quinn told reporters Tuesday. "We do not believe it's global systemic issues."

He added that SVB UK, which HSBC acquired in March, was a "well run" business with a "good" quality loan book that was a

"natural fit" for the group. The acquisition had allowed HSBC to attract significant inflows, Quinn said.

Rising interest rates worldwide, aimed at fighting sky-high inflation, have weighed particularly heavily on the operations of midsize US banks, which have seen their financing costs surge.

But larger, well-capitalised banks have used their strength to reap bumper profits and revenues as they hike interest rates on loans, while at the same time offering more attractive returns on savings. AFP

Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG

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DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023

In its meeting held on 26th April 2023, the Board of Directors approved the Company's unaudited financial results for the period ended 31st March 2023.

SUMMARY FINANCIALS

In OMR'000	Quarter		3 Months	
	Q1/23	Q1/22	2023	2022
Revenue	122,791	112,068	108	122,791
Gross profit	8,234	8,378	(2%)	8,234
Adm: Other income	1,060	913	16%	1,060
Less: Selling, distribution and administrative expenses	(7,412)	(7,133)	4%	(7,412)
Less: Financing and taxation	(889)	(723)	23%	(889)
Profit and comprehensive income	993	1,435	(31%)	993

- Three Months Revenue was OMR 122,791 million, 10% higher than the same period last year.
- Three Months Gross Profit was OMR 8,234 million, 2% lower than the same period last year due to movement in aviation fuel prices compared to the same period last year.
- Three Months Profit and Comprehensive Income was OMR 0.993 million. This is 31% lower than the same period in 2022 due to lower gross profit and overall increase in direct costs.

BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Mobility Business continued its commitment towards offering world class customer experience through its excellence in ensuring HSSE, maintaining a core focus area. The business continued its focus on growing the Non-Fuel segment and expanding the Shell Solar brand footprint by converting 21 existing sites that were not under Shipped's Express brand to Shell Solar brand and commissioning new ones, bringing the total Shell Solar sites number to 45 in the country.

The company introduced its first loyalty and customer relationship (CRM) application, Shell CO₂. With this new addition the company has expanded its offerings maintaining its commitment to provide customers with a world class experience through its milestone achievement of service stations. With Shell CO₂ customers can now earn points in every visit to Shell service stations and select stores and enjoy many attractive offers. To further promote the Non-Fuel Business, a joint campaign with our telecom partner was launched offering instant rewards on customers' purchases.

Shell e-Power, our next performance fuel was recognized during the quarter and was awarded the "Top Oman Brand" in the "Fuels" category during Adam & Howard Top Oman 3rd Award ceremony. The Company also retained its position as the most trusted fuel service stations in country in the 2022 edition of Oman's most trusted brands awards.

Fuel Solutions Business continues its growth journey with steady contribution to the Mobility Business. It continues to focus on signing new customers and addressing enabling customer needs through introduction of its digitalization journey, its commitment to delivery promises, operational excellence and leveraging the Loop Management System to provide better security and transactional controls. The business launched Shell e-Power fleet card for its customers providing its fleet customers with best fueling solution with the added advantage of superior performance and ongoing cleaning technology. The launch came with a host of exciting promotional offers for the customers.

Commercial Fuels Business has achieved a year-on-year growth in volumes serving new oil and industrial and commercial clients. Nevertheless, the overall business landscape remains challenging given limited commercial and infrastructure projects. The company remains committed to support business continuity for its customers through efficient customer management, operations excellence and providing effective mobility solutions.

Marine Business continues to serve its customers at the key ports leveraging its global expertise to ensure successful delivery of its shipping solutions to its marine customers. The company's focus remains on strengthening its position and exploring new business opportunities to expand its footprint across all major ports in the Sultanate while remaining fully committed to the highest HSSE, Ethics & Compliance and operational excellence standards.

Lubricants Business continued to lead the industry locally through securing key government accounts and other customers in the B2B segment. Furthermore, the business continued to lead the B2C market in Oman with a revamped strategy supported by strong marketing campaigns designed to leverage our leading position in the Business to Consumer (B2C) market. In February and March, the business hosted several country-wide events to showcase Shell Lubricants latest technology and innovations. The events were attended by more than 400 guests and focused on the newly introduced Carat. Neutral range of products supporting our customers to meet their CO₂ emissions reduction targets. While the export business remained a challenge in the first quarter, the business was able to achieve a balanced performance by winning new clientele and tracing our customers to premium products across the sectors. The company's Lubricants blending plant witnessed a record production performance during the first quarter whilst rolling out multiple cost optimization initiatives that are expected to increase its competitive advantage on both local and international levels.

Aviation Business continued its focus on retaining and winning new key contracts at Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport, while it continues to apply efficiency and cost optimization solutions to its operations to improve its profitability and to continue serving its customers safely and reliably as commercially feasible. The business celebrated the win of Oman Air contract, the country's national carrier for a period of two years starting March 2023.

HEALTH, SAFETY, SECURITY AND ENVIRONMENT (HSSE)

The company ended the quarter with Zero Recordable Incident and Zero Loss of Primary Containment (LOPCs), a testament to its commitment to health, safety, security, and the environment.

Continuing its Green Journey of "No Harm, No Risk" and care for people and the environment, as well as in pursuit of its commitment to sustain and develop a safety culture internally and with its stakeholders, the company organized numerous safety activities for its staff, partners, and franchise employees in the first quarter including, road check, mental health and wellbeing sessions, traffic safety management for fleet service campaigns, fatigue management awareness during Ramadan for Shell staff and retailers, learn safety contractor forums, HSSE proactive training and a variety of worker welfare initiatives, such as inspections of contractor camps and accommodations.

The company launched a global initiative "Frontline Worker Education Program" aimed at enhancing contractor safety during construction activities and conducted several training sessions for workers on working at heights, the safety rules, permits to work, excavation safety, and fatigue management.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

As a responsible corporate citizen, Shell Oman Marketing Company continued to build on its strategic corporate social responsibility themes which are Environment & Energy Transition, Community Skills &

Enterprise Development and People Well-being. This is done through the delivery of its planned initiatives as well as regularly addressing requests from local entities and charitable organizations.

The Company continued its support to the Solar into Child Care Centre project that was completed in 2019, through multiple forms of improvement. In addition, special trainings by subject matter experts in solar energy solutions were delivered to the engineering team looking after the Child Care Centre from the Ministry of Social Development. Through this initiative, we aim to contribute to providing access to cleaner energy and developing the skills and knowhow of the society in this area.

The company continued to proactively collaborate with important stakeholders to deliver its social aspirations. A testament to this was partnering with Oman Charitable Organization (OCO) through providing financial support, not only in compliance with local regulations, but also, in aim to have a reliable partner who is capable of scaling up the co-sway of life-changing support within the society.

Moreover, and carrying on its annual tradition of the Ramadan food packages donation in spirit of the Holy month, the company sponsored more than 200 Ramadan boxes to be donated to families in need. These boxes were delivered in collaboration with Al Koor Association for the Blind in Baniyah North region. As part of our commitment to create in-country value through everything we do, the Ramadan boxes were procured through Omani SMEs and all the food components inside it were Made-in-Oman.

The company remains committed to playing its role and contributing to 'Powering Lives, in line with Shell's Powering Progress strategy, Oman Vision 2040 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Walid Hadi
Chairman, Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG

Muscat, April 26, 2023

Unaudited Financial Statements for the 3 months ended 31 March 2023

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE 3 MONTHS ENDED 31 MAR 2023				
	Unaudited 3 months ended 31 Mar 2023	Unaudited 3 months ended 31 Mar 2022	Unaudited 12 months ended 31 Dec 2022	Audited 12 months ended 31 Dec 2022
Revenue	122,791	112,068	499,912	499,912
Cost of sales	(114,557)	(103,690)	(464,545)	(464,545)
Gross profit	8,234	8,378	35,367	35,367
Other income	1,060	913	4,146	4,146
Selling, distribution and administrative expenses	(7,412)	(7,133)	(30,432)	(30,432)
Operating profit	1,882	2,158	9,081	9,081
Interest expense	(702)	(475)	(2,366)	(2,366)
Interest income	5	5	22	22
Profit before income tax	1,185	1,688	6,737	6,737
Income tax expense	(192)	(253)	(1,031)	(1,031)
Profit and comprehensive income for the period	993	1,435	5,706	5,706
Basic and diluted earnings per share (OMR)	0.010	0.014	0.057	0.057

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 31 MAR 2023

	Unaudited At 31 Mar 2023 OMR'000	Unaudited At 31 Mar 2022 OMR'000	Audited At 31 Dec 2022 OMR'000
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Property, plant and equipment	60,442	57,423	60,527
Right-of-use assets	38,196	28,971	38,849
Intangible assets	173	105	186
Deferred tax assets	237	42	101
Total non-current assets	99,048	86,541	99,663
Current assets			
Inventories	9,583	8,554	10,695
Receivables and prepayments	50,159	41,749	47,207
Cash at bank and in hand	6,561	17,899	6,928
Total current assets	66,303	67,892	64,830
Total assets	165,351	154,433	164,493
EQUITY			
Share capital	10,000	10,000	10,000
Legal reserve	3,587	3,587	3,587
Retained earnings	37,312	37,748	42,019
Total equity	50,899	51,335	55,606
LIABILITIES			
Non-current liabilities			
Long-term loans	-	3,334	-
Long-term lease liabilities	35,794	25,811	35,975
Deferred tax liabilities	-	-	-
Employee terminal benefits	192	286	187
Total non-current liabilities	35,986	29,431	36,162
Current liabilities			
Short-term loans	13,000	13,000	8,334
Short-term lease liabilities	2,777	2,730	2,773
Payables and accruals	61,165	56,816	60,430
Unpaid dividends	-	-	-
Income tax payable	1,504	1,000	1,176
Provisions	20	121	12
Total current liabilities	78,466	73,667	72,725
Total liabilities	114,452	103,098	108,887
Total equity and liabilities	165,351	154,433	164,493
Net assets per share (OMR)	0.599	0.513	0.593

* The complete financial statements are available from the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

* The complete account will also be sent by mail to any shareholder on request, in the Arabic & English, within 7 days of receipt of the request. The request should be sent to the Chief Financial Officer at the address shown above.

Bank Muscat showcases its services at forum for disabled

The first Forum for Persons with Disabilities organised by the Ministry of Social Development has been witnessing a large turnout of visitors from government and private institutions, non-governmental associations, persons with disabilities and their families, school students and services centers working for the welfare of persons with different types of disabilities.

The attendees also visited the Bank Muscat stall in large numbers to learn more about the banking services and facilities provided to this important segment of society.

During the event, which is taking place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from May 1-3, bank employees introduced visitors to many services tailored specifically for the benefit of the disabled as well as job opportunities at the bank for disabled persons.

They also took the time to explain more about how the bank is utilising modern technology to provide better services. The bank's participation highlights its pioneering role and its keenness to support Oman's Renaissance by integrating different segments of society in playing their role in strengthening the national economy.

On this occasion, Hamza Abbas al Ajmi, Deputy General Manager - Credit, Bank Muscat, said, "Bank Muscat participation in this forum highlights its leading role in enabling the disabled to play their part in society and underscores the initiatives implemented by the bank. The bank will continue to develop and offer new services and products for



the welfare of the disabled at all its branches across the sultanate.

"It may be noted that Bank Muscat has a number of achievements to its credit in this regard including the launching of the first ATM in Oman for persons with visual disabilities, on the premises of the Al Noor Association for the Blind. It has also been taking great effort to ensure that its staff are trained in Arabic Sign Language and available at different branches to better serve customers with hearing and speech impairments. The bank also continues to partner with associations serving the disabled by providing assisting de-

vices to those in need."

As part of its keenness to provide banking services and facilities to different segments of society, the bank organised sign-language training for more than 200 of its employees in cooperation with the Omani Association for the Hearing Impaired. Bank Muscat continues to be keen to strengthen its pioneering corporate social responsibility in this area.

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

University.

It has also supported the Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre and the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Children with Disabilities.

These efforts are a part of the bank's initiatives in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility in helping persons with disabilities to integrate into society and contribute to the development of the country.

As part of its continued efforts to provide enhanced banking services to persons with disabilities, the bank is comprehensively upgrading 11 conventional banking branches and 9

Meethaq Islamic branches across the Sultanate of Oman.

Also, its m-Banking app has been updated to allow screen reading in Android and iOS, which can assist persons with visual disabilities. Bank Muscat is also implementing best practices on social media, promotional campaigns and emailers including describing images and videos with alternative text.

Hence people with disabilities can easily identify the published multimedia. This reflects the bank's keen efforts to create a convenient and accessible environment for the disabled in Oman.



Bank Nizwa ties up with Buna for global payments

Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic bank and most trusted in Oman, has announced a partnership with Buna, a cross-border payment system fully owned by the Arab Monetary Fund.

This collaboration will enable Bank Nizwa to provide its customers with seamless payments in both Arab and international currencies, within a safe, risk-controlled and transparent environment.

Buna currently facilitates payments in four Arab currencies; the UAE Dirham, Saudi Riyal, Jordanian Dinar and Egyptian Pound, as well as two international currencies, the US Dollar and the Euro. It is worth highlighting that Buna is actively working towards expanding its services to include more Arab currencies in the near future.

Through this alliance, Bank Nizwa aims to expand its payment capabilities by leveraging Buna's digital platform, offering its clients faster, safer and more cost-effective payment solutions. This partnership aligns with Bank Nizwa's digitalisation strategy, which focuses on using digital innovations to deliver cutting-edge financial services

and support the economic and financial integration of the Arab region.

"Our partnership with Buna demonstrates Bank Nizwa's unwavering commitment to driving innovation and digitalisation in the financial industry," said Khalid al Kayid, the Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa. By leveraging Buna's state-of-the-art digital platform, he affirmed that the bank would be able to provide its customers with a seamless cross-border payment experience, whilst also unlocking new avenues for growth and strengthening investment ties with our global trading partners.

"The collaboration aligns with our digitalisation strategy, which focuses on harnessing the latest advancements in payment technology to deliver innovative financial solutions. At Bank Nizwa, we are dedicated to providing innovative and efficient financial services that cater to the unique needs and preferences of the people," the bank CEO explained.

Bank Nizwa's pact with Buna underscores its commitment to supporting the economic and financial integration of the Arab region.

New India Assurance undertakes blood donation drive in Muscat

As part of the national and social responsibility, New India Assurance organised a blood donation drive in Muscat

The drive was undertaken in association with the Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) of the Ministry of Health at the company's head office on April 26, said a press release.

V V Raghavan, COO, The New India Assurance Co Ltd, led the blood donation drive by being the first donor and followed by the staff and their family members.

'It was a successful drive, unique for the event was the active participation and volun-



tary blood donation by the female staff members,' the press release further said.

'New India would like to thank all the volunteers who

donated the Blood and specially the medical team of the Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) of the Ministry of Health,' it added.

Muscat Municipality celebrates labour day

Muscat Municipality celebrated the International Labour Day on May 1, in recognition of the efforts and contribution of its labour force for the improvement of service work in various municipal sectors.

A number of sports events, such as cricket, volleyball, tug-of-war, marathon and table tennis, were organised at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat's prominent neighbourhood Bousher. Eight teams involving 30 players, under two administrators for each team, participated in various events, a release stated.

The total number of municipality workers is 1,631 of which 33 per cent are employees.

The percentage of Omani workers is 15, while the rest are expatriate workers.



Of the total workforce, 95 per cent are in public services among whom 48 per cent are in techni-

cal services, while others are in the service sector.

Statistics indicate that the av-

erage service of an Omani worker is 11 years, while it is 14 years for a non-Omani.

Amouage adds two sparkling new attars - Amber Sogara, Santal Sohar

In 2021, Chief Creative Officer Renaud Salmon reintroduced the world of Amouage attars to an expectant public with six new treasures. In 2023, he adds two more exquisite creations to the collection.

"As with the previous attars," Salmon explains, "I took my inspiration from my extensive journeys around Oman, connecting both scents with specific points on the map of the country. I feel this is Amouage's way of showing the deep respect we hold for Oman's extraordinary heritage, and also of highlighting the many riches this land has always had to offer to travellers. I am proud and excited to share these two new points on our fragrant map of Oman."

Amber Sogara

From a distance, it is invisible - perfectly concealed by the colours and textures of the rock face. But those who travel closer are treated to a wholly unexpected sight: A small cluster of flat-roofed, stone houses that look as though they have been sliced out of the side of the mountain. This is the village of Al Sogara.

Inspired by Al Sogara - this tiny location around 200km away from Muscat - Renaud Salmon and Élise Bénat crafted an attar that is equally at home in all eras.

The village has been largely untouched by the outside world for centuries, and in a similar manner, Bénat's composition



presents tones and inflexions that hint at the romance of bygone years, while remaining

rooted in the present. Opening with an unexpected flourish of aldehydes - materials

that lend scents a luminous, sparkling quality - Amber Sogara entices all those around it with a

sensual, scarlet rose, a seductive jasmine, and an all-enveloping base of warm, animalic ambrette.

Santal Sohar

Located in the north of Muscat, Sohar occupies a unique position in the region's heritage.

Historically one of the busiest and most important ports in the area - a hub for the trade of spices, frankincense and, most notably, sandalwood - it was a crossroads for a colourful array of peoples and cultures.

With this setting in mind, Renaud Salmon and Karine Vinchon-Spehner created Santal Sohar, an evocation not just of the goods that made their way through the town, but of the

spirit of openness and generosity that is invariably extended to all whose journeys bring them here.

At its beginning, Santal Sohar presents an unusual, part-herbaceous, part-floral blend of basil, rose and petitgrain, obtained by distilling all three ingredients at the same time. Their effect conjures not just the alluring pull of a sea breeze, but the coast upon which the waves crash.

The attar's mid-section is an expertly balanced kaleidoscope of spices: Cardamom, cloves and cinnamon. Beneath all these lies a flawless sandalwood, deepening the composition with its meditative personality. Santal Sohar is the scent of travelling without losing sight of one's own essence.

Big data transforming hospitality: Experts at ATM

Big data is having a transformative effect on hospitality across the Middle East and beyond. However, leading hoteliers speaking on the opening day of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2023, which will run at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) until Thursday, emphasised that human intervention remains essential if owners and operators wish to derive genuine value from the information being gathered.

'Hospitality Debate: What More Can Big Data Unlock?' featured a range of expert insights into the power of data to improve guest experiences within the Middle East's hospitality sector.

Moderated by Paul Clifford, Group Editor - Hospitality & Design at ITP Media Group, the session saw Chris Hartley, CEO of Global Hotel Alliance; Tommy



Lai, Chief Executive Officer at General Hotel Management Pte Ltd; Sandeep Walia, Chief Operations Officer - Middle East at Marriott; and Nicolas Huss, CEO of Hotelbeds, take to the ATM

Global Stage to share their views. Commenting on advancements in the hospitality sector's data capabilities over the past decade, General Hotel Management Pte Ltd's Lai said, "It used

to be you'd need a lot of people for analysis, but now, you can collect data and AI will decipher it for you. Big data and AI are evening the playing field between small groups and larger

brands." Speaking on the importance of interpretation, Marriott's Walia said, "This technology can help guests to narrow down the hotels they would like to stay in,"

noting that big data - when used in combination with AI - can help to identify the best options for customers.

"But ultimately, guests have to connect with us to make the

booking, so the balance between AI and the human touch is equally important and can't be forgotten."

Reiterating the importance of quality over quantity, Global Hotel Alliance's Hartley said, "Acquiring data is one thing but that isn't 'big data'. It's what you do with the data that's critical. We've known for years, for example, that credit card companies have a huge amount of data on spend - way beyond the hotel. This tells you a lot more about the customer than they might reveal to you during a one-off stay."

Hotelbeds' Huss agreed but warned that an ethical approach is essential in order to realise the full potential of this information. "I think there are several rules," he said.



Football icon Messi in Riyadh on family vacation

Argentinian football icon Lionel Messi and his family are in Riyadh, enjoying the world's most exciting new family-friendly destination, a release stated.

This is Messi's second vacation in Saudi, having visited Jeddah with friends last year. This time Messi is joined by his family who are delighted to be spending time with each other on a getaway packed with fun family activities and attractions from cultural and historical gems to immersive outdoor experiences and time in the city's modern entertainment districts.

The Messi family are not alone in discovering the magic of Saudi Arabia. Celebrities such as Cristiano Ronaldo and Alicia Keys, amongst many others, have been spotted in Saudi with their families, making it one of the most vibrant new family-friendly destinations in the world.

The family spent the first day of their holiday visiting an au-

thentic Saudi farm, away from the fast pace of the city. The family witnessed a palm weaving demonstration against the backdrop of majestic palm trees - a symbol of prosperity in Saudi. The kingdom's palm trees produce over 1.5mn tonnes of dates annually, which are a central part of Saudi cuisine.

The Messi family enjoyed playing and feeding the Arabian gazelle. The graceful animal is part of an ambitious rewilding programme, reintroducing Arabian Gazelles, Oryx and the Arabian Leopard at wildlife reserves across the kingdom.

Whilst Saudi is known for its majestic desert, the Rub' Al Khali, the kingdom has a diverse landscape that can be enjoyed year-round, from the Unesco-listed oasis of Al-Ahsa, to the pristine coral reefs of Saudi's 1,700km long Red Sea coast, which can be enjoyed by divers and cruise liners, and where the

first of 16 luxury hotels will be opening later this year. Saudi also offers the cool, green highlands of Asir where the locals holiday in the summer. The warm Saudi welcome, known as Hafawa, makes it a perfect destination for families. Riyadh, home to around 8mn people, is also one of the Top 50 Safest Cities in the World according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, making it an ideal destination for families to explore and enjoy.

Messi's visit with his wife and children is giving a global platform to the potential of the market and encouraging people to discover the authentic home of Arabia. The family's experience will be shared with Messi's over 450mn followers worldwide, showcasing the best of Saudi.

With a record 93.5mn visits last year, Saudi has emerged as one of the most dynamic and diverse, year-round destinations in the world.

Apparel Group's TOMS Middle East marks World Earth Day

In alignment with its new global impact strategy, Apparel Group's TOMS Middle East, the original One for One company, hosted a shoe recycling event at their store in Dubai Mall to celebrate World Earth Day.

TOMS Middle East believes that 'doing good, is good for business'. Hence their mission is to prioritise environmentally friendly initiatives so that they become their sustainable business best practices.

An important part of being in business to improve lives means taking good care of the place we all call home, and we're committed to doing our part. They believe that progress starts on the ground, through efforts led by those at

the heart of a community. With the belief that sustainability is a collective responsibility, TOMS continues to take a holistic approach with ethical and eco-conscious practices throughout the business.

TOMS is a footwear and lifestyle brand using business to improve lives. Since 2006, our community has impacted 100mn lives through supporting the work of non-profit organisations around the world.

"We believe in a future where all people have a chance to thrive, that's why we are committing to supporting grassroots good, and the people working to build a more equitable tomorrow. Because we believe in a future where all people have a chance to thrive,

our support is focused on boosting mental health, increasing access to opportunity, and ending gun violence - all elements we know to be essential for progress to take root," the group stated in a press release.

Apparel Group is a global fashion and lifestyle retail conglomerate residing at the crossroads of the modern economy - Dubai. Apparel Group caters to thousands of shoppers through its over 2,025 retail stores, while employing over 20,000+ multicultural staff.

Apparel Group owes its amazing growth to the vision and guidance of its dynamic founder and chairwoman Sima Ganwani Ved.



NATIONAL ALUMINIUM PRODUCTS COMPANY S.A.O.G

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of National Aluminium Products Company SAOG (NAPCO), it gives me great pleasure to present you the 1st Three Months Report containing the unaudited financial statements for the quarter ended 31 March 2023 and an overview of the performance of the Company.

Economic environment
The consistent geopolitical instability in Europe, particularly "Ukraine vs Russia" remains the top-cited threat to global economy, second the weak order and demand growth were a cause of concern, and more over the worldwide inflation has overtaken the causes besides it Supply chain disruptions rising interest rates making things more complicated, the affects of above- mentioned crises quite visible on raw material prices and on liquidity availability.

The GCC current capacities in Aluminium extrusion remains far from high utilizations. The reduction in the mega scale and large projects in the GCC was the main contributor to the drop in capacity utilizations. The drop in production levels the tight liquidity conditions is adding further burden.

Performance Review
The financial performance of the National Aluminium Company Products Company SAOG (parent company) and Novel Aluminium Products Company LLC (subsidiary company) collectively represent as a "group" during the 3 Month 2023, as compared to 2022, is summarized in the table below:

Summary of Income Statement				
Particulars	Group		Parent	
	2023 Q1	2022 Q1	2023 Q1	2022 Q1
RO in 000's				
Revenue	8,703	7,612	8,608	7,612
Net loss before taxation	(511)	(583)	(563)	(573)
Net loss after tax	(427)	(497)	(478)	(487)

The group realized revenue and other income of RO 8,703 million as compared to RO 7,612 million during the previous year which is RO 1.091 million (14.33%) high and reported a net loss after tax of RO 427k as compared to RO 497k in the previous year.

The company's profitability was mainly affected by the below key drivers:

- Due to Gradual recovery of the company current Utilization of Capacity was 60%
- Increasing competition due to additional capacities in the neighboring countries which affected the metal margin.
- Consistent liquidity condition in the GCC market has stressed the operations of the company and resulted in significant delay in collections.

Future outlook
The Aluminium market is expected to register fluctuating growth trends in the long term, while inflation and supply chain concerns are expected to continue in 2023.

Shifting consumer preferences in a projected economic downturn scenario, amendments to industrial policies to align with growing environmental concerns, huge fluctuations in raw material costs triggered by prevailing geo-political tensions, and expected economic turbulences are noted as key challenges to be addressed by the Aluminium industry players during the short and medium term forecast.

The company is exercising all available options by effectively utilizing the operational resources, cost curtailment initiatives and improving efficiencies to sustain operating margins. Your company has extended its export market to overseas countries where the margins are higher, and the payment terms are more sustainable. This shall reflect as an enhancement in the operating margins and reducing the cash flow cycle. NAPCO will remain keen to meet all the challenges ahead to enhance the Company's image and financial strength to generate returns on the shareholder's funds.

Compliance with internal regulations and control system:
The Company is committed to maintain a high standard of internal regulations and control system commensurate with the size and nature of the operations. A manual of financial authorities approved by the Board is in place, which specifies authority levels for various day to day operations. The system of internal control is monitored regularly by the Board, its Committees, Management, Internal and external auditors for its compliance.

Acknowledgement and Appreciation
I would like to extend my deep thanks to our honorable shareholders and to all my colleagues on the Board of Directors for their valuable contributions. I would also like to thank the Management and staff for their loyalty, hard work, dedication, and contribution in the achievement of our goals and acknowledges, with sincere gratitude, the support extended by all the investors, clients, vendors, banks, regulatory and government authorities, MSM and CMA and look forward to having the continued support from all of them.

I wish to place on record, personally and on behalf of the Board of Directors and employees, our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Taimour and his wise government for continued support, encouragement, and guidance for our company and wish him all success in leading Oman to achieve greater progress and prosperity.

For & on behalf of the Board of Directors
National Aluminium Products Co. S.A.O.G.

Dr. Zakia Hassan Al-Naseeb
Chairperson

Condensed interim statement of financial position As of 31 March 2023

	Group Unaudited period ended 31 March 2023 RO	Audited year ended 31 December 2022 RO	Parent Unaudited period ended 31 March 2023 RO	Audited year ended 31 December 2022 RO
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	10,663,154	10,746,918	10,658,789	10,742,263
Intangible assets	65,264	71,274	58,396	63,963
Right-of-use asset	940,497	949,627	940,497	949,627
Investment property	460,000	460,000	460,000	460,000
Investment in subsidiary	-	-	31,500	31,500
Deferred tax asset	712,893	628,500	712,893	628,500
Total non-current assets	12,841,808	12,856,319	12,862,075	12,875,853
Current assets				
Inventories	2,598,094	2,402,175	2,916,228	2,402,175
Trade and other receivables	11,051,202	7,856,186	6,638,409	5,517,222
Amounts due from related parties	-	-	4,694,710	2,586,113
Cash and cash equivalents	366,607	260,688	23,916	22,341
Total current assets	14,375,903	10,519,049	14,273,263	10,527,851
Total assets	27,217,711	23,375,368	27,135,338	23,403,704
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity:				
Share capital	3,357,145	3,357,145	3,357,145	3,357,145
Legal reserve	1,119,048	1,119,048	1,119,048	1,119,048
Revaluation reserve	1,502,003	1,550,598	1,502,003	1,550,598
(Accumulated losses)/retained earnings	(5,437,611)	(5,059,685)	(5,446,022)	(5,016,392)
Total equity	540,585	967,106	532,174	1,010,399
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Lease liability	1,068,158	1,068,158	1,068,158	1,068,158
Employees' end of service benefits	292,425	298,977	292,425	298,977
Total non-current liabilities	1,360,583	1,367,135	1,360,583	1,367,135
Current liabilities				
Lease liability	65,128	65,128	65,128	65,128
Borrowings	16,041,778	15,964,865	16,041,778	15,964,865
Trade and other payables	9,209,637	5,011,134	9,135,675	4,996,177
Total current liabilities	25,316,543	21,041,127	25,242,581	21,026,170
Total liabilities	26,677,126	22,408,262	26,603,164	22,393,305
Total equity and liabilities	27,217,711	23,375,368	27,135,338	23,403,704
Net assets per share	0.016	0.029	0.016	0.030

Condensed interim statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the period ended 31 March 2023

	Group Unaudited period ended 31 March 2023 RO	Parent Unaudited period ended 31 March 2022 RO	Unaudited period ended 31 March 2023 RO	Unaudited period ended 31 March 2022 RO
Revenue	7,748,984	6,339,466	7,653,811	6,339,466
Scrap sales	947,994	1,252,924	947,994	1,252,924
Cost of sales	(8,287,664)	(7,293,243)	(8,284,749)	(7,289,781)
Gross Profit	409,314	299,147	317,056	302,600
Other income	5,701	27,951	5,814	27,951
Expenses:				
General and administrative expenses	(300,110)	(280,332)	(291,644)	(278,369)
Selling and distribution expenses	(290,950)	(211,052)	(261,554)	(206,705)
Allowance for expected credit losses	(29,074)	(46,350)	(29,074)	(46,350)
Net finance costs	(305,795)	(372,262)	(303,216)	(372,262)
Loss before tax	(510,914)	(582,898)	(562,618)	(573,126)
Income tax	84,393	85,974	(84,393)	85,974
Loss for the period	(426,521)	(496,924)	(478,225)	(487,152)
Other comprehensive income for the period				
Total Comprehensive loss for the period	(426,521)	(496,924)	(478,225)	(487,152)
Basic loss per share	(0.051)	(0.059)	(0.057)	(0.058)

NOTE
The Company does not have items under other comprehensive income.
Certain comparative figures have been reclassified to confirm to presentation adopted in these financial statements.
The complete accounts will be sent to any shareholder who requests them either in Arabic or English as required within 7 days of receipt of the request.

Gordon Lightfoot, Canadian folk legend, dead at 84

Washington, US - Canadian singer and performer Gordon Lightfoot, who rose to international fame as a folk music star in the 1960s and '70s, died on Monday. He was 84.

"Gordon Lightfoot passed away this evening in a Toronto hospital at 7:30 pm (2330 GMT)," a post on his official Facebook page read, as obituaries started pouring in from the Canadian press.

The immediate cause of death was not made public. "More info to come," read the post.

Lightfoot, born in Ontario, made his performing debut in 1943, at the age of five, singing 'I'm A Little Teapot' at a local church Sunday school, according to his website.

He later found himself immersed in the Canadian and American folk scene, amid contemporaries like Joni Mitchell and Neil Young.

While he is known as a folk and folk-pop star of the late 20th century, Lightfoot's popularity - and continued songwriting - meant he was touring internationally until just last month. In April, the singer canceled his 2023 tour dates, citing unspecified health issues.

Lightfoot's songs - dealing with everything from a failed marriage to the beauty of the Canadian countryside - were covered by artists including Elvis Presley, Harry Belafonte, Bob Dylan and The Grateful Dead.

The singer, known for hits such as 'The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald,' 'Early Morn-



This file photo shows Gordon Lightfoot at Songwriters Hall of Fame Annual Induction and Awards Ceremony in New York on June 14, 2012 (AFP)

ing Rain,' and 'If You Could Read My Mind,' was often hailed as a modern-day poet in his native Canada.

Dylan once called Lightfoot one of his favourite artists, saying 'I can't think of any (songs) I don't like'.

Lightfoot, on the other hand, was more reserved about his talents, once telling Canadian paper *The Globe and Mail*: "Sometimes I wonder why I'm being called an icon, because I really don't think of myself that way."

But his modesty was to no avail.

"He is our poet laureate. He is our iconic singer-songwriter," Geddy Lee, the lead singer of Rock band Rush, told a 2019 documentary about Lightfoot.

Lightfoot 'was hailed as Canada's folk troubadour for his soulful music and stirring lyrics', broadcaster CBC wrote in its obituary.

Lightfoot is survived by his third wife, Kim Hasse, according to music publication Billboard.

AFP

'Shakahola massacre': Kenyan pastor to face terrorism charges

Malindi, Kenya - A Kenyan pastor who appeared in court on Tuesday will face terrorism charges over the deaths of more than 100 people found buried in what has been dubbed the 'Shakahola forest massacre', prosecutors said.

The deeply religious Christian-majority country has been stunned by the discovery of mass graves last month in a forest near the Indian Ocean coastal town of Malindi. Self-proclaimed pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie, who set up the Good News International Church in 2003 and is accused of inciting followers to starve to death 'to meet Jesus', appeared in the dock in Malindi.

The small courtroom was packed with relatives of victims as Mackenzie, dressed in a pink and black jacket and brown trousers, was brought in by about half a dozen police officers along with eight other defendants.

After a brief hearing, the case was moved to the high court in Kenya's second-largest city of Mombasa, where the suspects will face terrorism charges, prosecutor Vivian Kambaga told AFP.

"There is a court (in Mombasa) that is gazetted to handle cases under the prevention of terrorism act," Kambaga told a magistrate during the hearing in Malindi, asking for the case to be moved to the high court.

Ezekiel Odero, a wealthy and high-profile televangelist, is also expected at the high court in Mombasa following his arrest in Malindi on Thursday in connection with the same case.



Self-proclaimed pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie (right), who is accused of inciting cult followers to starve to death 'to meet Jesus', talks to his lawyer Elisha Komora at the court in Malindi on Tuesday (AFP)

The deeply religious Christian-majority country has been stunned by the discovery of mass graves in a forest near coastal town of Malindi

A total of 109 people have so far been confirmed dead, most of them children.

The first autopsies from Shakahola were carried out on

Monday on nine children and one woman. They confirmed starvation as the cause of death, though some victims were asphyxiated, the authorities said.

'Vulnerable followers'

Odero is suspected of murder, aiding suicide, abduction, radicalisation, crimes against humanity, child cruelty, fraud and money laundering.

The prosecution is seeking to detain him for a further 30 days, citing credible information linking the corpses exhumed at Shakahola to the deaths of several 'in-

nocent and vulnerable followers' from Odero's New Life Prayer Centre and Church.

Cliff Ombeta, one of Odero's lawyers, told reporters upon arrival at the court that there was no evidence connecting the pastor to the Shakahola discoveries.

"Evidence must be brought. It is a case where you must prove," he said.

A crowd of Odero's supporters gathered outside the court, singing and praying, while some were in tears.

In addition to the terrorism charges prosecutors plan to file, Mackenzie stands accused of

murder, kidnapping, cruelty towards children among other crimes in court documents seen by AFP.

The former taxi driver turned himself in on April 14 after police acting on a tip-off first entered Shakahola forest, where some 30 mass graves have now been found.

Prosecutors have linked Odero and Mackenzie, saying in court documents that they share a 'history of business investments' including a television station used to pass 'radicalised messages' to followers.

In his filing to the court, Odero said he wanted to 'strongly disassociate' himself from Mackenzie and disagreed with his teachings.

Questions have been raised about how Mackenzie, a self-styled pastor with a history of extremism, managed to evade law enforcement despite his prominent profile and previous legal cases. The horrific saga has seen President William Ruto vow to intervene in Kenya's homegrown religious movements, and thrown a spotlight on failed efforts to regulate unscrupulous churches and cults that have dabbled in criminality.

This week Ruto will set up a task force on how to govern religious activities in Kenya, home to about 4,000 churches, Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki said on Monday.

He said the government must 'make sure we don't infringe on the sacred right of the freedom of worship, opinion and belief'.

AFP

Japan PM Kishida to visit South Korea next week

Tokyo, Japan - Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will visit South Korea next week, Japan's foreign ministry said on Tuesday, as the two US allies pursue warmer ties.

Kishida will hold talks on Sunday with President Yoon Suk Yeol on the first trip to South Korea by a Japanese premier since 2018.

It comes after the leaders agreed to end tit-for-tat trade curbs at a March summit in Tokyo, de-escalating a bitter dispute over Japan's use of wartime forced labour.

Japan's foreign ministry and the South Korean presidential office both confirmed the May 7-8 trip after Kishida told reporters that it was being arranged.

He called the visit 'a good opportunity to hold a candid exchange of opinions over accelerating Japan and South Korea's relationship, and the rapidly changing international situation'.

Kishida, who is on a tour of four African nations and Singapore, added that his trip to South Korea would 'give momentum to 'shuttle diplomacy' between the neighbours.

The two leaders had pledged in March to restart regular mutual visits, a practice suspended for over a decade, and Kishida has invited Yoon to the G7 summit in Hiroshima later in May.

"Through Prime Minister



Japan's PM Fumio Kishida (AFP)

Kishida's visit to Korea, shuttle diplomacy between the leaders will begin in earnest," South Korea's presidential office said in a statement.

Often-testy relations between the countries deteriorated after South Korea's Supreme Court in 2018 ordered Japanese firms to compensate victims of forced labour in World War II.

But Yoon, who took office a year ago, has been keen to end the spat and form a united front against regional challenges including North Korea. Earlier this year, Seoul announced a plan to pay those affected without Tokyo's involvement.

In further efforts to thaw ties, Japan's trade ministry said last week it had started the process to add South Korea back to a so-called 'white list' of trusted trade partners, having downgraded it in 2019.

AFP

'GOLDEN WEEK' IN TOKYO



Domestic and international tourists sit outside on a 'water bus' at the start of the 'Golden Week' holidays as the boat cruises down the Sumida River in Tokyo on Tuesday (AFP)

Officials hunt 'killer' of 5 Texas neighbours

Houston, US - A vast search was underway in Texas on Monday for the man suspected of shooting dead five neighbours, including a nine-year-old boy, after they asked him to stop firing his rifle in his yard late at night.

The FBI in Houston said that more than 250 law enforcement officers from a dozen agencies were 'actively searching' for the man, Francisco Oropesa, a 38-year-old Mexican national.

Oropesa is accused of attacking his neighbours on Friday night in the small town of Cleveland, in southeastern Texas, after they allegedly asked him to stop shooting his semi-automatic AR-15 because the noise was keeping a baby awake.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott offered a US\$50,000 reward for information leading to the capture of Oropesa, who he said was 'in the country illegally'.

The short statement by Abbott, a Republican, also referred to the suspect as having 'killed five illegal immigrants', sparking



Francisco Oropesa

immediate criticism on social media over his focus on the victims' immigration status.

"Five human beings lost their lives and Greg Abbott insists on labeling them 'illegal immigrants'," tweeted Julian Castro, the former Democratic mayor of the Texas city of San Antonio.

On Monday, Abbot's office walked back his comments, saying in a statement carried by US media that 'one of the victims may have been in the United States legally'.

The victims were originally from Honduras.

Abbott also said he would 'continue working with state and local officials to ensure they have all available resources to respond to this horrific crime'. "Our hearts go out to the families and loved ones of the five victims that were taken in this senseless act of violence," he added.

CNN reported that Oropesa had been deported from the United States at least four times since 2009, citing a source from US immigration authorities, adding that his current immigration status was unclear.

Greg Capers, the sheriff of San Jacinto County, where the shootings took place, said his thoughts were with the slain 'little boy', whose age was previously stated as eight. "I don't care if he was here legally," Capers told reporters over the weekend. "I don't care if he was here illegally. He was in my county. Five people died in my county and that is where my heart is."

The FBI offered an additional US\$25,000 reward for Oropesa.

Capers described a horrifying scene when the authorities arrived at the victims' residence after receiving a call about 'harassment' around 11:30pm on Friday. Bodies were strewn from the front door to an inside bedroom, where two deceased women were found lying on top of two traumatised children who survived the massacre.

"In my opinion, they were actually trying to take care of the babies and keep them babies alive," Capers told ABC's Houston station KTRK.

All the victims had been shot 'from the neck up, almost execution style, basically in the head', the sheriff said.

Several residents were in critical condition with multiple gunshot wounds.

Capers said the suspect 'had been drinking' and allegedly told his neighbours 'I'll do what I want to in my front yard'.

AFP

Palestinian hunger striker dies in 3-months Israeli detention

Arraba, Palestinian Territories - A Palestinian hunger striker died in Israeli custody on Tuesday, nearly three months after being detained over his ties to the Islamic Jihad fighter group, drawing Arab condemnation of Israel and rocket fire from Gaza.

The death of Khader Adnan was swiftly followed by three rockets fired by Gaza fighters, which ‘fell in open areas’, the Israeli army said. It reported no casualties.

Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh described the death of Adnan, who was arrested in the occupied West Bank, as a ‘deliberate assassination’.

“By rejecting his request for his release, neglecting him medically and keeping him in his cell, despite the seriousness of his health condition,” the premier said in a statement.

Israel’s prison service announced the death of a detainee who was affiliated to Islamic Jihad.

He was ‘found early this morning in his cell unconscious’, the prison service said in a statement.

Adnan, 45, was the first Palestinian to die as a direct result of a hunger strike, according to the Palestinian Prisoners’ Club.

Other Palestinian detainees have died ‘as a result of attempts to force feed them’, the advocacy



People hold portraits of Khader Adnan, a Palestinian Islamic Jihad fighter who had been on hunger strike in prison for nearly three months, during a rally following the announcement of his death in Gaza City on Tuesday (AFP)

group’s director, Qaddura Faris, said.

Adnan’s death.

The Arab League said

cally practised by the Israeli occupation authorities’,

Israel’s far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir said prison officials decided to close cells to ‘prevent riots’.

“The directive to the prisoner service is zero tolerance towards hunger strikes and disturbances in security prisons,” he said in a statement.

‘Pay the price’

A senior Israeli official described Adnan as ‘a hunger striker who

refused medical attention, risking his life’.

“In recent days, the military appeal court decided against releasing him from detention solely on the merit of his medical condition,” said the official, who requested anonymity because they were not authorised to speak publicly to the media.

Adnan was described by the official as an ‘operative’ of Islamic Jihad, who was facing charges related to his activities within the fighter group.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since the Six-Day War of 1967 and its forces regularly detain Palestinians, who are subject to Israeli military courts.

Islamic Jihad, which is considered a terrorist organisation by the European Union and the United States, warned Israel will ‘pay the price for this crime’.

“The free hero, Khader Adnan, died as a martyr in a crime committed by the enemy in front of the world,” the fighter group said in a statement.

Israel’s prison service said Adnan was in jail for the 10th time and his wife, Randa Mousa, previously told AFP her husband had carried out multiple hunger strikes in detention.

Family against Gaza rockets

Speaking on Tuesday, Mousa said: “We will only receive well-

wishers, because this martyrdom is (like) a wedding, a (moment of) pride for us and a crown on our heads.”

But she cautioned fighters against launching a violent response. “We don’t want a drop of blood to be shed,” she told journalists in the family’s hometown of Arraba in the northern West Bank.

“We don’t want anyone to respond to the martyrdom. We don’t want someone to launch rockets and then (Israel) strikes Gaza,” she said.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Israeli army reported a shooting targeting Israeli vehicles near Tulkarm in the northern West Bank.

In his final message, Adnan said he was ‘sending you these words as my flesh and fat has melted’.

“I pray that God accepts me as a faithful martyr,” he wrote, in a message published on Monday by the ‘Palestinian Prisoners’ Club.

Physicians for Human Rights Israel previously sent a medic to assess Adnan’s condition but said their appeals to Israeli authorities to have him transferred to hospital were refused. “Only with the means available in a hospital could he be adequately monitored and his life could be saved in case of deterioration,” the group said on Tuesday.

AFP

IN BRIEF

Israeli strikes kill soldier, damage Aleppo airport

Damascus, Syria - Israeli strikes targeted north Syria’s Aleppo province late on Monday, killing a soldier, wounding seven people and putting the area’s international airport out of service, state media reported. “At around 11:35pm (2035 GMT)... the Israeli enemy carried out an air attack with several missiles... targeting Aleppo international airport and a number of sites in the vicinity of Aleppo,” state news agency SANA said, citing a military source.

“A soldier was killed and seven people were wounded including two civilians,” SANA said, reporting ‘material losses’ and that ‘Aleppo airport was put out of service’. Officials did not immediately provide further information on when the facility was expected to reopen.

US urges Lebanon to elect president

Washington, US - The United States on Monday called on Lebanon’s parliament to elect a new president, as the country marks six months without a leader at the helm amid grinding political and economic turmoil.

“The United States calls on Lebanon’s political leadership to move expeditiously to elect a president to unite the country and swiftly enact the reforms needed to rescue its economy from crisis,” State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement.

French unions set new protest date

Paris, France - French trade unions said on Tuesday they would call new mass demonstrations against President Emmanuel Macron’s bitterly contested pension reforms next month, a day after hundreds of thousands turned out against the law.

The fourteenth day of protests will be held on June 6, the unions said, days before lawmakers debate a bill that would repeal the retirement changes forced through without a vote by Macron’s ministers. Police said almost 800,000 people turned out across France against the pension reform on Monday - the Labour Day holiday.

AFP

Taliban authorities warn UN over Afghanistan talks exclusion

Doha, Qatar - UN chief Antonio Guterres held a second day of talks with world powers Tuesday on how to deal with Afghanistan’s Taliban leaders amid warnings from the Kabul administration that the meeting could be ‘counter-productive’.

The talks in Doha were arranged by Guterres after the Taliban government banned Afghan women from working for the United Nations, prompting the world body to put its huge relief operations in Afghanistan under review.

Women are also banned from working for other NGOs, and are barred from almost all secondary and university education and most government jobs.

The talks involve envoys from the United States, Russia, China

and 20 other countries and organisations, including major European donors and neighbours such as Pakistan, but exclude the Taliban government.

“Any meeting without the participation of IEA (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) representatives - the main party to the issue - is unproductive and even sometimes counter-productive,” said the head of the Taliban political office in Doha, Suhail Shaheen.

“How can a decision taken at such meetings be acceptable or implemented while we are not part of the process? It is discriminatory and unjustified,” he said.

Meanwhile, Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi will lead a delegation to Islamabad at the end of the week for talks with Pakistani and Chinese officials,



UN chief Antonio Guterres addresses international envoys during talks on Afghanistan in Doha, on Tuesday (AFP)

the ministry said on Tuesday.

Muttaqi, who is subject to a UN travel ban, has previously been given exemptions to travel

to the neighbouring country for talks.

The UN Security Council last week unanimously condemned

the ban on its Afghan women staff, which the world body says has seriously threatened its efforts to aid the population.

Women’s groups staged

How can a decision taken at such meetings be acceptable or implemented while we are not a part

SUHAIL SHAHEEN

protests on Saturday fearing the Doha meeting could propose steps toward recognition of the Taliban administration that re-

turned to power in August 2021.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday however that ‘is not up for discussion’ at the talks, which are being held behind closed doors.

The meeting would discuss human rights, including women’s rights, Afghanistan’s governance and ways to counter terrorism and drug trafficking, Djurric said.

Guterres wants ‘a common understanding with the international community on how to engage with the Taliban on these issues’, he added.

The UN review of its Afghanistan operation is due to be completed on Friday. The world body has said it faces an ‘appalling choice’ on whether to stay in the country.

AFP

Colombia grapples with Escobar’s legacy of hippopotamus

Doradal, Colombia - In their homeland in Africa, they are responsible for more human deaths than almost any other animal, but in Colombia, hippopotami have become loved members of the local community and a tourist attraction.

However, in a town close to the city of Medellin, this legacy of the late drug baron Pablo Escobar, is increasingly posing a problem, and one that experts think may soon turn deadly.

Several months ago, one of hippos burst into a school yard in Doradal with both pupils and parents present.

“The mothers get scared when they see an animal of that size,” teacher Dunia Arango told AFP.

This time, the uninvited guest chomped at some fruit trees before moving off into the adjacent fields.

But a bloat of hippos have set up home in a lake just 20 metres (yards) from the school.

“There are about 35 children

playing that could approach them and provoke a tragedy,” said David Echeverri, an official from the local environment authority.

“While they may look very calm, at any moment, given their highly unpredictable behaviour, they can attack, as has happened before,” he added.

‘It threw me two metres’

John Aristides, 33, remembers very well that afternoon in October 2021 when he was fishing on the banks of a creek when a hippopotamus ‘lunged at me and hit me on the head with its lips’.

He slipped trying to get away and was bitten on the arm.

“It grabbed me and threw me two metres,” he added. “It didn’t tear off my arm because they have very wide teeth.”

But Aristides still spent a month in hospital recovering.

That is the closest Colombia has come to a fatal encounter but ‘if we don’t do anything, then



Hippos - descendants from a small herd introduced by drug kingpin Pablo Escobar - are seen in the wild in a lake near the Hacienda Napoles theme park, in Doradal, Antioquia Department, Colombia, on April 19 (AFP)

we expect to have thousands of hippopotami wandering around’ in the future, said Echeverri, who two weeks ago buried a hippo that had been hit by a driver.

After cocaine king Escobar was gunned down by police in 1993, his private ranch and col-

lection of exotic animals, including hippos, were left to nature in an area of abundant vegetation and where there are no predators. The hippo numbers exploded and there are now 160 of the two ton beasts wandering freely around this part of north-

western Colombia.

A study by the National University estimated that the local population of hippopotami could rise to a thousand by 2035.

Biologists say local fauna such as the manatee, classified as an endangered species by the

International Union for the Conservation of Nature, have been displaced.

Last year, the environment ministry declared hippos an ‘invasive species’, opening the door to a possible cull, one of several solutions being sought to the potentially growing problem.

‘Expensive and ineffective’

Fisherman Alvaro Diaz, 40, takes tourists hippopotamus watching by canoe on the Magdalena, the longest river in Colombia.

When he notices the hippos are bothered, he keeps his group at least 30 metres away.

“We see them very often ... we live peacefully with them,” he insisted.

Diaz believes, however, that the hippo population needs to be controlled through castrations and contraceptive devices.

The local environment body has tried both, but Echeverri claims they were ‘expensive and

ineffective’.

Echeverri says killing them ‘without pain, in a technically correct manner, is not easy either’ given that it would involve capturing and sedating them first.

In a bid to save the hippos, Antioquia state, where Doradal is, announced a plan to transport 70 hippopotami to wild sanctuaries in Mexico and India.

The plan just needs approval from national authorities in all three countries.

Echeverri believes this project is ‘possible and necessary’ given he has already led a project to capture seven hippos and send them to zoos inside Colombia.

Farmers complain of damage to their crops, but locals have grown fond of the animals.

“Don’t take them all. It’s already become our culture to live with them and it’s great to have this population with us,” said Arango, keeping one eye on her pupils.

AFP

STRIFE IN SUDAN

UN agencies warn of 'catastrophe'

Bloodshed has gripped the African nation since April 15 as tensions erupted into armed exchanges

Khartoum, Sudan - Fierce fighting between rival generals raged on in Sudan on Tuesday despite the latest truce, as warnings multiplied of the potential for a 'catastrophic' humanitarian crisis with hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Bloodshed has gripped Sudan since April 15 when tensions erupted into armed exchanges between regular army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy turned rival, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

Hundreds have been killed and thousands wounded as air strikes and artillery exchanges have gripped swathes of greater Khartoum, sparking the exodus of thousands of Sudanese to neighbouring countries.

Many more cannot afford the arduous journey to Sudan's borders, and have been forced to hole up inside the city of five million people with dwindling supplies of food, water and electricity.

"We are hearing some sporadic gunfire, the roaring of a warplane and the anti-aircraft fire at it," said one resident of south Khartoum. Other witnesses reported air strikes in north and east Khartoum.

In a Monday briefing, the top UN aid official in Sudan, Abdou Dieng, warned that the situation was turning into 'a full-blown catastrophe'.

Kenyan President William Ruto said the conflict had reached 'catastrophic levels' with the warring generals de-



A woman walks in Khartoum on Tuesday as fierce fighting between rival generals rages in Sudan despite the latest truce (AFP)

clining 'to heed the calls by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union and the international community to cease fire'.

In a virtual meeting with senior UN officials, Ruto said it was imperative to find ways to provide humanitarian relief 'with or without a ceasefire'.

Burhan and Daglo, who fell

out after carrying out a 2021 military coup which derailed Sudan's transition to elective civilian rule, have flouted multiple ceasefires, the latest a 72-hour extension agreed late on Sunday.

UN head of mission Volker Perthes said discussions involving Saudi and US mediators were underway with the rival

generals to firm up a ceasefire.

The two sides 'told us that they are ready to start talks on technical level over a ceasefire', Perthes told Saudi-owned Al Arabiya television in an interview released on Tuesday.

Relief trickles in

Foreign governments have scrambled to evacuate their cit-

izens. Over the past 10 days, thousands of foreigners have been brought to safety by air or sea in operations that are now winding down.

Russia's armed forces said on Tuesday they were evacuating more than 200 people from Sudan on four military transport planes.

Nearly 500 people arrived in

More than 430,000 have fled homes

Geneva, Switzerland - The fighting in Sudan has caused more than 330,000 people to flee their homes within the country, with over 100,000 others escaping over the borders, the United Nations said on Tuesday.

UNHCR, the UN's refugee agency, is estimating that more than 800,000 people could potentially flee to neighbouring countries as the conflict continues in Sudan between the army and a paramilitary group.

The UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) said an estimated 334,000 people had been internally displaced by the fighting, which broke out on April 15.

"Over 100,000 refugees are estimated to be among those who have now fled Sudan to neighbouring countries, including Sudanese

refugees, South Sudanese returning home prematurely, and others who were themselves refugees in Sudan," UNHCR spokeswoman Olga Sarrado told reporters in Geneva.

The IOM said in a situation report that 'the total estimate of displaced individuals across Sudan has reached 334,053'. "About 72 per cent, roughly 240,000 of these new internal displacements were reported in West and South Darfur alone," spokesman Paul Dillon told reporters.

The number of people displaced in the last two weeks 'exceeds all conflict-related displacement in Sudan in 2022', he added.

Meanwhile the UN said its 2023 aid appeals for Sudan were US\$1.5bn short and only 14 per cent funded.

AFP

Red Sea evacuations put Saudi Arabia at centre stage in crisis

Port Sudan, Sudan - The HMS Al Diriyah, a 102-metre-long Saudi warship, is typically used to escort oil tankers through the Red Sea and in training exercises with Western naval powers.

But this week the vessel carried out a different kind of mission: transporting shell-shocked civilians from conflict-hit Sudan to safety on Saudi soil.

It was part of a broader evacuation effort that has given Saudi Arabia a central role in Sudan's crisis, putting the Gulf kingdom's regional clout on display for a global audience.

As of Monday, Saudi Arabia had welcomed more than 5,400 civilian evacuees, the vast majority of them foreigners representing 102 countries on six continents.



Evacuees from Sudan arrive in Jeddah on Sunday (AFP)

I've been terribly impressed with all of their work to help evacuate people, to put their navy at the disposal of people fleeing

CAMERON HUDSON

"I've been terribly impressed with all of their work to help evacuate people, to put their navy at the disposal of people fleeing," said Cameron Hudson of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"This is an opportunity to burnish their reputation a few

hundred kilometres from Yemen, where some of their worst behaviour has played out," Hudson added, referring to the war in which a Saudi-led military coalition has killed and injured thousands of civilians in air strikes since 2015.

Some analysts warn, though, that the evacuations risk overshadowing the complex role Saudi Arabia and other outside powers have played in Sudan's turmoil, especially their support for the two generals at the heart of it.

The fighting - which has killed hundreds and wounded thousands so far - partly resulted from 'gentle hand-holding' of army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and paramilitary leader Mohamed Hamdan Daglo when

the world should have insisted on real reform, said Kholood Khair, founder of the Khartoum-based think tank Confluence Advisory.

"This is a momentary reprieve for the international community to focus on evacuations as the main story, rather than how we got here," Khair said.

"It's as if the evacuation efforts are the only story."

That's certainly the impression given these days by some Saudi media.

When state-run channels aren't filming new arrivals disembarking in the port city of Jeddah, often with a Saudi flag in hand, they're interviewing diplomats praising the Saudi navy's speedy mobilisation.

AFP

Abuse of outcast prisoners: European court fines Russia

Strasbourg, France - The European Court of Human Rights on Tuesday said Russia must compensate several prisoners belonging to an informal caste of 'outcasts' who are subject to abuse and ostracisation behind bars.

The 11 plaintiffs, all of whom have served or are serving time, said they had been placed in the category by their fellow inmates. So-called 'outcasts' are the lowest in the Russian prison pecking order, forced to live apart from others and carry out the institutions' 'dirty work', as well as being subject to sexual and other forms of violence.

The plaintiffs, who filed

complaints between 2013 and 2017, said that all of these practices were permitted and tacitly endorsed by prison staff. Based on the prisoners' testimonies and academic research into conditions in Russian prison, ECHR judges found it 'established that the applicants have been subjected to the treatment of which they complain'.

They suffered 'stigmatisation and physical and social segregation... assignment to menial labour and denial of basic needs, enforced by threats of violence and also occasional physical and sexual violence', the judges found.

AFP

US climber dies on Everest in season's fourth fatality

Kathmandu, Nepal - A US mountaineer has died on Everest in the fourth fatality on the world's highest peak this climbing season.

Jonathan Sugarman, 69, was on an acclimatisation rotation at around 6,400 metres (21,000 feet) when he died on Monday, his expedition organiser said.

"He was feeling unwell and passed away at Camp 2. Efforts are underway to bring (back) his body," Pasang Tshering Sherpa of Beyul Adventure told AFP.

"We are trying to send a helicopter but it is snowing and the weather is not favourable," he said.

Beyul Adventure is a local partner of US-based expedition

organiser International Mountain Guides, which confirmed 'with deep sorrow' Sugarman's death.

"We can confirm that this event was not the result of a climbing accident or route condition that would be of potential impact or safety concern to any other teams on the mountain," IMG chief Eric Simonson said in a statement on the company's website.

Last year, Sugarman reached Camp 3 on Everest before abandoning a climb.

This year's spring climbing season on Everest had a tragic start last month with the death of three Nepali climbers. The trio were crossing the treacherous Khumbu icefall as part of a supply mission when a block



of glacial ice fell and swept them into a deep crevasse.

Nepali guides - usually ethnic Sherpas from nearby valleys - are essential to the multimillion-dollar industry, bearing

huge risks to prepare climbing routes and carry food and equipment.

Nepal has issued 466 permits to foreign climbers, and since most will need a guide,

more than 900 people will try to summit this season, which runs until early June.

This could result in heavy traffic and bottlenecks en route to the summit, especially if there is a shorter climbing window because of unfavourable weather.

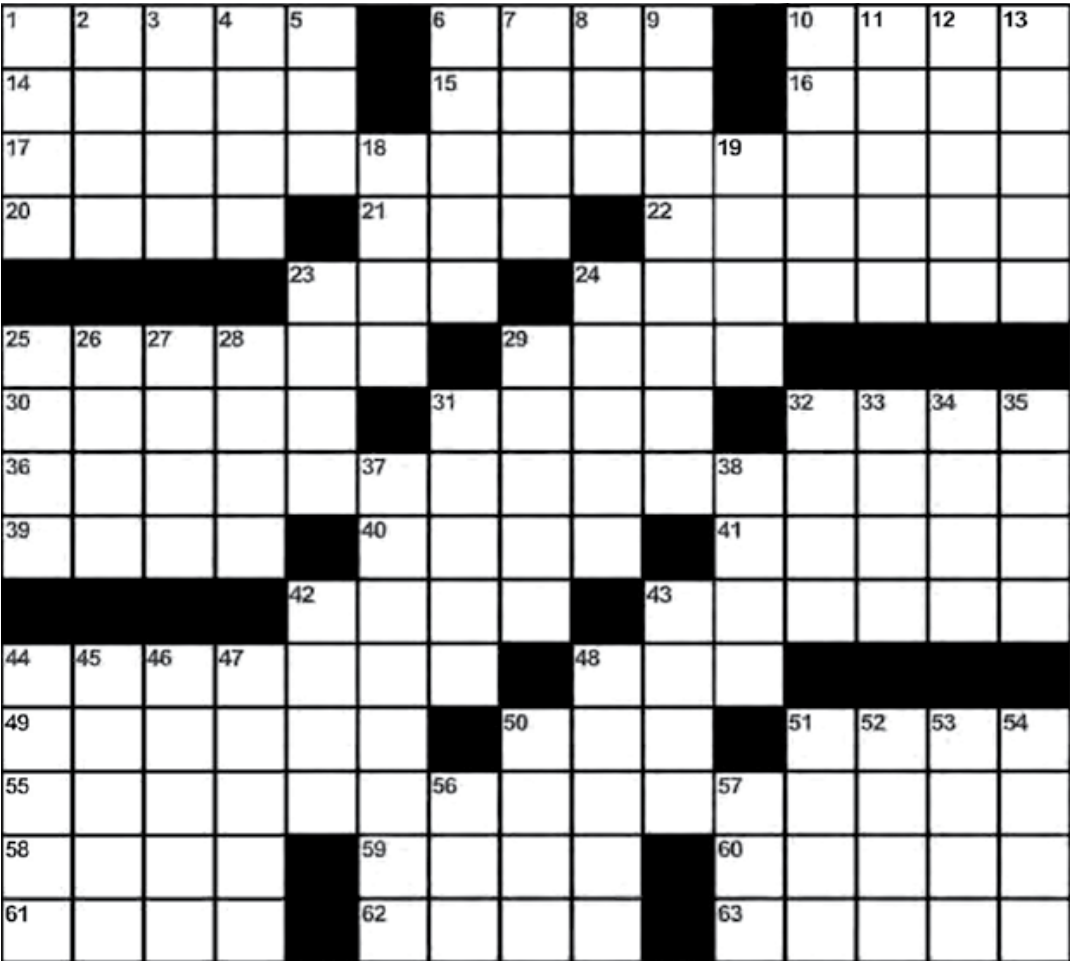
On average, around five climbers die every year on the world's highest peak.

But in 2019, 11 people died, with four of the deaths blamed on overcrowding.

It is possible that climate change is exacerbating the risks, with climbers reporting widening crevasses, running water on previously snowy slopes and more glacial lake formation.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Florida metropolis
- 6) Insanity, at times
- 10) Sandwich type
- 14) Full-length
- 15) Diplomacy breakdown
- 16) Improve, as a skill
- 17) Philosophy
- 20) At a specific prior time
- 21) Smallest positive integer
- 22) Roundup rope
- 23) Piece of work?
- 24) Notched
- 25) "What a shame"
- 29) Scratching post users
- 30) Blunder
- 31) Swinging barrier
- 32) Beginner
- 36) Place for some seniors
- 39) Good, long bath
- 40) Become tiresome
- 41) Sensational
- 42) Knight fight
- 43) Off-peak calls?
- 44) Alligatorlike reptiles
- 48) Beldam

DOWN

- 1) Requirement
- 2) Creep
- 3) Advil target
- 4) Elementary particle
- 5) "What was_ think?"
- 6) Antler point
- 7) Popular board game
- 8) Immature newt
- 9) Bowl figures
- 10) Insect sound
- 11) Religious maxims
- 12) Flip one's lid?
- 13) Midler or Davis
- 18) "_ of the Flies"
- 19) They make a galley go
- 23) Be worthy of
- 24) Lecherous demigod
- 25) "_ of the d'Urbervilles"
- 26) Popular sandwich
- 27) Whale type
- 28) Library unit
- 29) Diamond unit
- 31) Highlanders, e.g.
- 32) More than a plop
- 33) Days knights flourished
- 34) Aggravate
- 35) Auto pioneer
- 37) Gradually becomes smaller
- 38) Blockage
- 42) Hawaiian tuber
- 43) Sailing vessel
- 44) Division of Hindu society
- 45) Capital of Ghana
- 46) Mythical blood of the gods
- 47) Makes irrelevant, as a debating point
- 48) Concubines' confines
- 50) Stairstep measure
- 51) Test choice, sometimes
- 52) Busy airports

NOTE PAD

P	R	O	B	E	S	H	E	A	R	S	A	D
R	E	P	A	I	S	L	E	S	C	U	R	
O	F	T	H	E	P	U	R	P	L	E	S	A
S	U	I	T	T	R	E	Y	B	U	R	M	A
I	S	M	C	A	Y	S	C	O	N	F	E	R
T	E	A	C	H	E	L	K	A	N	Y		
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R	I	C	E	R	S	M	A	N	A	O	D	E
O	S	A	K	A	S	E	G	O	S	C	A	M
T	A	K	E	C	E	N	T	E	R	S	T	A
E	N	E	L	E	A	R	N	P	A	R	E	D
M	O	S	E	R	G	O	T	A	R	T	S	Y

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Today is going to be all about speed! Whether you're ready or not, things are going to move quickly in one of your newer relationships, and you should hang on and see where it goes. Your expectations were so specific that they might not all get met in exactly the way you wanted them to, but the overall result should make you very happy. A celebration is coming in the near future that will require you to look your best.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Ready or not, you're entering an indecisive phase and picking the next project, romantic partner, or job opportunity is going to be a bit tough. There are so many good points to all of your options! But being confused isn't necessarily a bad thing. You should see it as an opportunity to learn how to appreciate all the options on the table. Enjoy the luxury of being able to process many ideas before committing to one solution.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You were confident everyone would love your idea for a group outing, so how come no one seems as excited as you are? If your social invitation isn't being greeted with all the enthusiasm you'd hoped for, just wait it out. Your friends have an awful lot going on in their lives right now. Their time isn't quite their own, and they just aren't ready to commit. You can't take this personally. Instead, ask them for an idea of a better date that would fit into their lives.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

An old friend has been behaving in some new ways, and you're confused. Their recent actions have felt out of character, but maybe they've changed. How well do you really know them any more? You two need to reconnect as soon as your schedules allow. Go for something intimate: Cook up one of their favorite meals and invite them over for dinner. Find out what's new with them and let them know you've noticed they've changed. Show them you care.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

With your cheerful energy and quick reasoning, you can turn the most apathetic group of people into an enthusiastic crowd of motivated and positive folks today! You know that despite the tough challenges your group is facing, there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. All you have to do is make sure that everyone else understands that too. Your leadership skills are finally about to get the chance to really shine, so make the most of it!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Casual conversations don't have to be vapid. That would just be a waste of your time. So make sure any small talk you're forced to have today is very brief! Don't just yak about the weather or the latest sports scores. Cut to the chase about what's really on your mind right now. Not only will it interest the person you're talking to a lot more, but it will also help you get a better handle on what has been bugging you. You have a lot to say, so why not say it already?

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Just because you have to do some work today that doesn't mean you can't have a ball while you're doing it! Let your creativity drive your day, and it will help you arrive at some amusing combinations, unusual arrangements, and interesting thoughts that will help the day go faster and be way more fun. Simple things that you do a little differently will help you have a more intriguing day.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You'll be vibing like mad off strong flirtatious energy with a surprising someone today, although nothing says that you have to take things to the next level. In fact, the stars favor flirtation more than relationships right now, so it's wise to keep things light and breezy instead of committed and long term. This is a wonderful day for a first date or a social event where you have the opportunity to connect with people in your dating demographic.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Your creativity is good for more than just writing cute little notes inside birthday cards, and today is a great day to explore its full potential. First, get some inspiration outside. Go for a walk or hike to get your blood pumping and your mind working in new directions. Then think about what interests you and intrigues you. Before the end of the day you'll have a new project in your sights. Getting started on something new is going to get you excited.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You won't be easily guided today. No voices of authority will be loud enough to crack through your brain and change your mind. You know what you want, and no one can stop you from getting it! Although this high level of determination is going to take you places, it isn't going to make you any new friends unless those friends share your same vision. Popularity is nowhere near as important as progress for you right now. Be willing to leave people behind.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

A friend or close family member could be experiencing a significant change in their income, and it's starting to show in their lifestyle choices. You're happy for them, but you can expect some jealousy to creep into your attitude when they tell you about their latest purchase. Focusing on other people's money is only going to cause you to focus on how you rate in comparison. Instead, focus on being grateful for what you have in terms of job satisfaction, health, and happiness.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You don't always need to fully understand every single detail of an idea before you can get involved with it, especially now when any risk-taking on your part is highly favored. Besides, trying to sort through all the details could confuse and overwhelm you and give you too many reasons to chicken out. Gather up all your spontaneous impulses and take that leap of faith! Not only will you land on your feet, but you are sure to build your already esteemed reputation.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Which of these was an important part in the car that travelled in time in the "Back to the Future" series of films?

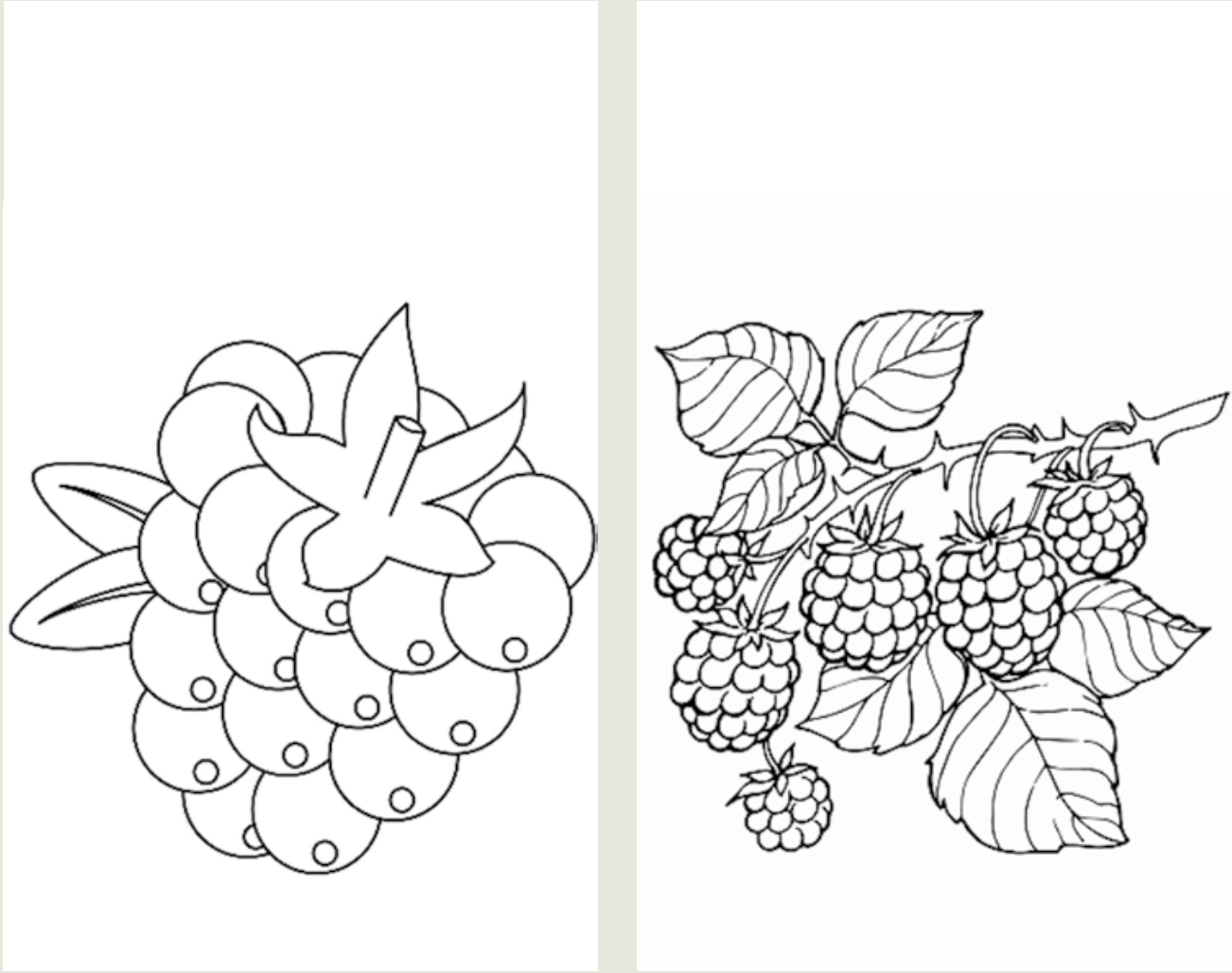
 - A. Warp drive
 - B. Flux capacitor
 - C. Difference engine
 - D. Nuclear fribulator
2. Which of these is a form of alternative medicine, first proposed by German physician Samuel Hahnemann in 1796, which uses reference books known as "repertories"?

 - A. Abroadopathy
 - B. Awayopathy
 - C. Homeopathy
 - D. Houseopathy
3. Which US President has figured on the cover of the magazine Sports Illustrated, twice?

 - A. George W Bush
 - B. Ronald Reagan
 - C. Dwight Eisenhower
 - D. Donald Trump

Answers: 1. B, 2. C, 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	S	D	E
A	A	K	E
O	N	H	N
M	Y	S	E

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

POSTPONED PARTY

Napoli to shake off title blow with one more point to go

Naples, Italy - Naples woke up on Monday still digesting the disappointment of Napoli not sealing their first Serie A title in over three decades, but knowing glory is just a few more days away.

Everything was set up for Napoli to win their third Scudetto a record-breaking six matches before the end of the season on Sunday when their closest challengers Lazio collapsed late on at Inter Milan, leaving Luciano Spalletti's side needing a win over Salernitana to seal the deal.

And when Mathias Olivera headed Napoli into the lead the city exploded in celebration, with blue smoke engulfing the Stadio Maradona and fireworks being let off outside with the rapidity of machine gun fire.

However all that joy had has to be bottled back up, ready to be unleashed at Udinese on Thursday, after Boulaye Dia's superb equaliser six minutes from the end spoiled the party and pushed Salernitana further towards safety. Fans were not too downhearted however, hardcore supporters marching back from the Stadio Maradona into central Napoli with flares lit and in fine voice, the festivities in the city only dampened by a Spring downpour later in the evening.



Napoli's Mathias Olivera celebrates with Giacomo Raspadori after scoring against Salernitana on Sunday. Napoli's joy, however, was short-lived as Salernitana equalised late in the game (AFP)

"From my point of view we've just postponed the party, I'm very comfortable with where we are in the league," Spalletti told DAZN with a wry smile.

From my point of view we've just postponed the party, I'm very comfortable with where we are in the league. All it's doing is lengthening the party

LUCIANO SPALLETTI

"All it's doing is lengthening the party." To say that Napoli are close to their goal of emulating he 1987 and 1990 triumphs led by Diego Maradona would be an understatement.

Spalletti's team, who are at Udinese on Thursday, need just one more point from their final matches to be crowned champions. And even though results have dipped, and the ferocious attacking play which bewitched Europe has become more stilted, since the March international break it is borderline impossible that Naples does not get its long-awaited party.

A 17-point lead on Lazio means Napoli could even win the league without kicking another ball, as the capital city club must beat Sassuolo on Wednesday in order to mathematically stay in the fight. But in reality the Scudetto has been a near-certainty for months, as Italy's traditional big three have failed to keep up with the runaway leaders' blistering form in the run up to and aftermath of the World Cup.

Everton rescue draw at Leicester, but Foxes climb out of bottom three

Leicester, United Kingdom - Everton's Alex Iwobi rescued a 2-2 draw against relegation rivals Leicester, but it was the Foxes who climbed out of the Premier League's bottom three after Monday's pivotal showdown.

Iwobi scored a second-half equaliser at the King Power Stadium after James Maddison wasted a chance to put Leicester 3-1 up when his penalty was saved by Jordan Pickford.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin put Everton in front with an early penalty, before Leicester hit back with goals from Caglar Soyuncu and Jamie Vardy.

Leicester, who have won one of their last 12 league games, moved out of the relegation zone on goal difference.

The Foxes, Premier League champions in 2016, are fighting to avoid playing in the Championship for the first time in nine years.

"We missed a penalty for 3-1, but also in the first half we were second best for long periods," Leicester boss Dean Smith said.

"We knew the result today



Everton's Alex Iwobi (C) celebrates after scoring against Leicester City in their English Premier League match on Monday (AFP)

would not define what happens. We came out of the bottom three, but there are still four games to go."

Everton, who last played in the second tier in 1954, remain in 19th place.

Sean Dyche's side are one

point from safety with four games left for each of the bottom five clubs. Everton narrowly escaped relegation last season under Frank Lampard, but their struggles again this term led to Dyche's appointment in January.

The Toffees beat Arsenal and

Leeds in two of Dyche's first three games, but have won just one of the 11 games since then, sparking furious fan protests against the club hierarchy.

"We held our nerve, kept trying to create things and overall it's a good performance, although

we didn't get the three points," Dyche said.

"I didn't come here for a walk in the part. I knew it was going to be a challenge. The only crime tonight was two really soft goals, but the mentality is what we want."

Despite the mutinous mood among Everton's travelling fans, they took the lead in the 15th minute.

Timothy Castagne needlessly conceded a penalty with a rash shove on Calvert-Lewin as the striker tried to control Seamus Coleman's lofted pass.

Calvert-Lewin smashed the spot-kick into the roof of the net for his first goal since October and only his second of an injury-plagued campaign.

Leicester needed a response and they delivered emphatically with two goals in the space of 11 minutes. Harvey Barnes' 22nd-minute cross was headed back across goal by Wout Faes and Soyuncu pounced with a half-volley that eluded Jordan Pickford's weak attempted save.

AFP



Bayern Munich's Serge Gnabry scores against Hertha Berlin during their Bundesliga match on Sunday (AFP)

Girona inflict Sevilla's first defeat under Mendilibar

Arsenal to 'move on to the next game with a full tilt'

London, United Kingdom - Mikel Arteta has insisted Arsenal are still contenders for the Premier League title despite slipping from the top of the table at the weekend.

Arteta's men were replaced at the summit by Manchester City following the champions' 2-1 win at Fulham on Sunday.

City now lead the Gunners by a point, with a game in hand, after winning eight successive league matches as they eye a fifth title in six years.

Arsenal, by contrast, have

stumbled in recent weeks, taking just three points from their last four fixtures.

They are at least assured of a return to Champions League football after a six-season absence from Europe's leading club competition, but Arteta stressed the Gunners' squad were not satisfied with that achievement alone. Arteta now wants Arsenal, beaten 4-1 by City last week, to stage a revival when they face London rivals Chelsea at the Emirates on Tuesday.

"We have achieved what it



Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta with goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale (AFP)

was difficult to achieve and we can still achieve the Premier league because there are five games to go and a lot of things are going to happen still," he said.

"Now the title race is not in our hands anymore. What is in our hands is to try to win the games we have left and the rest is down to City.

"What we have to do is forget about what happened last week, learn from it and move on to the next game with a full tilt at home, with our people, London derby, and put things right."

Seville, Spain - Girona beat Sevilla 2-0 at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan in La Liga on Monday to give themselves hope of European football next season.

Juanpe sent the visitors in front in the first half and Taty Castellanos doubled their lead early in the second to inflict Sevilla's first defeat in the eight games since Jose Luis Mendilibar took over in March.

The Andalusian side are in the Europa League semi-finals where they take on Juventus, are 11th in La Liga, 10 points above the rele-

gation zone.

Girona, eighth, have 44 points, and are five behind Real Betis in sixth, a Europa Conference League qualifying spot.

Castellanos continued his good form after hitting four against Real Madrid last week at Montilivi as Girona routed the champions 4-2.

Athletic Bilbao, seventh, snatched a late 1-1 draw against mid-table Mallorca with Inaki Williams converting a spot-kick in the 96th minute.

AFP

A BRIDGE TOO FAR

World number two Aryna Sabalenka ends Mirra Andreeva adventure to reach Madrid quarter-finals

Madrid, Spain - World number two Aryna Sabalenka made light work of 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva on Monday with a 6-3, 6-1 win to reach the Madrid Open quarter-finals.

Iga Swiatek, top of the world rankings, followed her into the last eight with a hard-fought three set win over Ekaterina Alexandrova, 6-4, 6-7 (3/7), 6-3.

In the men's tournament world number three Daniil Medvedev beat his friend and Russian compatriot Alexander Shevchenko, while Frances Tiafoe and Cameron Norrie crashed out against underdogs.

Russian youngster Andreeva, a wildcard, became only the third 15-year-old to win a WTA 1000 main draw match when she beat 2021 US Open finalist Leylah Fernandez last week.

She went on to beat two top 20 players in Beatriz Haddad Maia and, on her 16th birthday, Magda Linette, but overcoming 2021 Madrid winner Sabalenka was a bridge too far.

"Of course I'm happy with the win, I wish I would have played at Madrid when I was 16," said Sabalenka.

"I think my first few games I was trying to adjust for her rhythm and her game, and then I kept trying to play my game, be aggressive and fight for every point."

I think my first few games I was trying to adjust for her rhythm and her game, and then I kept trying to play my game, be aggressive and fight for every point

ARYNA SABALENKA

The Australian Open champion will face Egyptian Mayar Sherif in the next round after she beat Elise Mertens 6-4, 0-6, 6-4 earlier Monday.

Sherif, 26, is the first Egyptian to reach a WTA 1000 quarter-final.

Two-time French Open win-



Aryna Sabalenka serves to Mirra Andreeva during their Madrid Open round-of-16 match on Monday (AFP)

ner Swiatek recovered from an early break by world number 17 Alexandrova to take the first set in what proved a trickier clash than it seemed on paper.

The Pole surrendered a 5-2 lead in the second and failed to convert a match point on the way to a tie-break, in which Alexandrova hit three aces to force a third set. Swiatek broke for 2-1 and held on to that advantage before breaking to love to clinch victory in two hours and 27 minutes, finishing at past 1:00 am Tuesday morning.

"(Playing so late) wasn't easy for sure," said Swiatek.

"It's tough, you have to sleep in the middle of the day to be fresh in the evening." Swiatek will face Croatian Petra Martic, who upset Czech player Barbora Krejickova 6-3, 7-6 (7/1).

Third seed Jessica Pegula beat Italy's Martina Trevisan 6-3, 2-6, 6-3 and will face Veronika Kudermetova, who beat Daria Kasatkina in a tight all-Russian battle 7-5, 1-6, 7-2 (7/2).

Maria Sakkari beat home favourite Paula Badosa 6-4, 6-4 to set up a quarter-final clash with Romanian Irina-Camelia Begu.

Medvedev through

In the men's competition second seed Medvedev, 27, edged out his friend Shevchenko 4-6, 6-1, 7-5 to reach the fourth round.

He will face Aslan Karatsev, who beat Alex de Minaur 6-3, 4-6, 6-4.

"When you win 7-5 in the third, it's always mentally a brutal match, so I'm happy that I managed to win it," said 2021 US Open winner Medvedev.

Argentine player Pedro Cachin, ranked 67th, took out world number 11 Tiafoe with a 6-1, 7-6 (7/2) victory and will face lucky loser Jan-Lennard Struff in the next round. Stefanos Tsitsipas beat Sebastian Baez 7-5, 3-6, 6-3 to progress, after needing three sets against Dominic Thiem in the previous round too.

AFP

Ice-cool Harden scores 45 as Sixers stun Celtics, Jokic downs Suns

New York, United States - James Harden scored 45 points as the Philadelphia 76ers stunned the Boston Celtics in the NBA playoffs on Monday before Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets took a commanding 2-0 series lead over the Phoenix Suns.

In a pulsating Eastern Conference duel in Boston, Harden produced a vintage performance - including a pivotal go-ahead three-pointer with 8.4 seconds remaining - to leave the TD Garden in stunned silence as the

Sixers snatched a 119-115 game one victory. The Sixers' win was achieved without their best player, injured talisman Joel Embiid, who watched from the bench after failing to recover from a knee injury.

"We're just a resilient team," Harden said. "Even without Joel, we've got the confidence to come here and win games."

"We've been doing it all year long, that's a good one for us."

Harden's points haul came from 17-of-30 shooting and in-

We're just a resilient team. Even without Joel, we've got the confidence to come here and win games. We've been doing it all year long, that's a good one for us

JAMES HARDEN

cluded seven three-pointers.

"He was awesome," Sixers coach Doc Rivers said. "Kept his cool, knew when to attack, knew when to give it up."

Game two of the best-of-

seven series takes place in Boston on Wednesday.

In Monday's other playoff game, Denver's reigning two-time NBA MVP Jokic finished with 39 points as the Nuggets

staged a fourth-quarter rally to eclipse the Phoenix Suns 97-87 and take a 2-0 series lead.

Devin Booker finished with 35 points for Phoenix while Kevin Durant added 24, but the Suns were unable to respond as Denver pulled away to outscore the visitors 27-14 in the fourth quarter. Jokic's 39-point haul included 26 after half-time as the Nuggets took control of a low-scoring contest that saw Phoenix lead by eight points in the third quarter.



James Harden of Philadelphia 76ers takes a shot against Derrick White of Boston Celtics on Monday (AFP)

Belgium's Brexel wins snooker World Championship

London, United Kingdom - Belgium's Luca Brexel became the first player from continental Europe to win snooker's World Championship as he withstood a fightback from four-time champion Mark Selby to triumph 18-15 in the final on Monday.

Brexel's victory also meant he joined Canadian Cliff Thorburn (1980), the Republic of Ireland's



Luca Brexel

Ken Doherty (1997) and Australian Neil Robertson (2010) as only the fourth modern-era world champion from outside the United Kingdom. Having overturned huge deficits to defeat both seven-time world champion Ronnie O'Sullivan and Si Jiahui in the quarter and semi-final rounds respectively, Brexel held his nerve after Selby had eroded his lead.

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ISHANT STRIKES IN LAST OVER TO HELP DELHI STUN GUJARAT



Delhi Capitals' Ishant Sharma celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Gujarat Titans' Vijay Shankar during their Indian Premier League match in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. Sharma also got the wicket of the dangerous Rahul Tewatia in the last over to help Delhi to a five-run despite Hardik Pandya playing a patient knock of 59 not out to dig Gujarat out of a precarious position.

MATCH 45

6 PM

LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

Bowlers star as Bangalore defend 126 against Lucknow

Lucknow, India - Royal Challengers Bangalore's bowlers starred to secure an 18-run victory against Lucknow Super Giants in a low-scoring Indian Premier League match on Monday.

Skipper Faf du Plessis top-scored with 44 to guide Bangalore to 126-9, a total their bowlers defended by bowling out Lucknow for 108 on a tough batting pitch.

Bangalore pace spearhead Mohammed Siraj dismissed Kyle Mayers for a duck from the second ball of the chase and Lucknow soon slipped to 38-5 with Virat Kohli taking two good catches. Lucknow's batsmen seemed to be in a hurry to get the runs as Nicholas Pooran, on nine, and Marcus Stoinis, on 13, fell to Karn Sharma's leg-spin and the innings witnessed two run outs.

Lucknow suffered an early blow when skipper KL Rahul seemed to hurt his thigh while fielding before limping off and then came into bat last.

Australia fast bowler Josh Hazlewood returned figures of 2-15 from his three overs in his first IPL appearance this season.

Bangalore, still searching for their first IPL title, moved up a place to fifth in the 10-team table with five wins in nine matches. Lucknow dropped to third.

Du Plessis, who returned to captain the side after he played as a batsman in the previous few matches led by Kohli, set up victory for Bangalore with a knock that stood out in an otherwise disappointing show by the star-studded line-up.

Du Plessis and Kohli put on 62 runs for the first wicket despite a shaky start but none of the other batsmen could survive the test of Lucknow bowlers. Ravi Bishnoi and Amit Mishra took two wickets each and Naveen-ul-Haq returned figures of 3-30.

Fiery Kohli fined again after post-match row

New Delhi, India - Indian cricket star Virat Kohli was fined on Tuesday for the second time in this IPL season after a post-match altercation with former national team-mate Gautam Gambhir.

Both were docked their entire match fee, the Indian Premier League said, while Naveen-ul-Haq was fined 50 per cent of his for breaching the league's code of conduct.

Kohli and Afghan bowler Naveen were seen having sharp words on the field during a tense match between Kohli's Royal Challengers Bangalore and Lucknow Super Giants on Monday.

Kohli, who has often run into trouble with his aggressive approach, had to be restrained by opposition batsman Amit Mishra during the match. Bangalore eventually won by 18 runs.

Afterwards, Lucknow's Kyle Mayers had to be led away from an exchange with Kohli before other players tried unsuccessfully to stop a visibly furious Gambhir, Lucknow's team mentor, from confronting him.

Kohli took to social media on



Royal Challengers Bangalore's Virat Kohli celebrates after the dismissal of Lucknow Super Giants' Ravi Bishnoi

Tuesday with a cryptic Instagram post quoting a famed Roman emperor and philosopher: "Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth. - Marcus Aurelius."

Gambhir and Kohli, who played together when India won the 2011 World Cup, had a shouting match before Bangalore skipper Faf du Plessis intervened.

nationalist ruling BJP party since retiring from cricket in 2018.

This was Kohli's second offence this season after he was fined 10 percent of his match fee for his conduct during Bangalore's loss to Chennai Super Kings last month.

Despite being one of the best batsmen of the modern game, "King Kohli" and Bangalore have never won the Indian Premier League.

He quit the RCB captaincy at the end of the 2021 season.

He went through an extended batting slump in 2021 and 2022 and lost the Indian captaincy, one of the most high-pressure jobs in world sport.

Kohli, 34, has spoken about his mental health struggles during his dry phase, including how he had been "snappy" to his Bollywood actress wife Anushka Sharma.

He has had numerous run-ins with opposing players and was once reprimanded after hitting a plastic chair with a bat following his dismissal during an IPL match.

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MASTERCHEF

THE BOWL CRITIC

The untimely death of popular Masterchef, **Jock Zonfrillo** (known for his soft-spoken, yet sharp culinary observances on television shows) has sent shock waves in the culinary world

When you watch him chomp on a contestant's dish with steely eyes that conceal either his delight or disgust, you are left groping for an answer... And when a mischievous smile slowly curls up his lips, you know that that went down well!

Popular celebrity chef, Jock Zonfrillo was not just a favourite judge of scores of contestants of various cookery shows, he was also much revered by television audiences for his tongue in cheek comments as well as expert guidance to those hoping to make a mark in the culinary world.

If you've seen him critique varied dishes by contestants on culinary shows, you'd agree, he loved intense flavours, lots of spice, and lots of stock (instead of meagre drizzles) on his plate. And contestants who took note of his preferences, knew the right way to find favour with him.

The Scottish chef was found dead at 2am Monday morning at an address on Melbourne's famous Lygon Street, after police were called to perform a welfare check. The TV personality was just 46 years old when he passed, and is survived by his third wife Lauren and his children Ava, Sophie, Alfie and Isla.

As per reports in Daily Mail Australia, Zonfrillo had been se-

cretly receiving treatment for bowel cancer since June 2021, a fact that he had cleverly kept out of media glare as well as away from his contemporaries on shows. He was slated to co-host as judge the 2023 series of MasterChef Australia along with his fellow judges, Melissa Leong and Andy Allen.

Zonfrillo had hosted a number of cooking programmes, including 'Nomad Chef', which gave an insight into cuisine in some of the world's most remote communities, as well as 'Restaurant Revolution' and 'Chef Exchange'. In 2016, he founded The Orana Foundation, with a mission to highlight the qualities of Australia's Indigenous food. And in 2018, he won the prestigious Basque Culinary World Prize for

championing Indigenous culture and culinary traditions.

Zonfrillo's most high-profile role, however, was on the Australian series of MasterChef, the incredibly popular television show that in recent years made him a household name worldwide.

It has been reported, that days before his death Zonfrillo revealed one simple wish for his life - to be with his family and pets, living a quiet life in the countryside.

"I'd love to live a super, super simple life," he had said. "A small house in the middle of nowhere with kids, pets. Just a really simple, uncomplicated life away from everyone. But still part of a community in that remoteness, I guess. Not the flashy extravagant lifestyle you'd

expect from a TV person."

Born in Glasgow in 1976, Zonfrillo had begun working in kitchens at the age 12. At 15, he became one of the youngest-ever apprentices to work at luxury Scottish resort - The Turnberry Hotel. Two years later he started working for Michelin-starred British chef Marco Pierre White at his famous Hyde Park Hotel.

Despite his burgeoning career, Zonfrillo, however, disclosed that he had become broke, homeless, and addicted to heroin in his teenage years. He documented his struggles with drug addiction in his 2021 memoir - Last Shot.

Zonfrillo had turned a new leaf in his career with a move to Australia in 2000, and went on to open several restaurants. His most successful was Adelaide's award-winning Restaurant Orana, which opened in 2013.

In 2019, he was selected among an all new host line-up for MasterChef Australia from where he made his home into millions of hearts.

When asked what people find surprising about him once they get to know him, Jock replied saying that all it takes to make him smile is a cup of tea.

"I'll always say 'yes' to a cup of tea. And, I mean, if you throw in a Tunnock's biscuit - like a teacake - I'm a very happy man," he said.



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ICONIC STYLE

A-listers from the worlds of fashion, film, politics and sports celebrated the late king of couture, Karl Lagerfeld, at the annual Met Gala on Monday, bringing their top style game to New York, oozing glamour and delivering serious baby news.

Pop superstar Rihanna showed up late as usual but shut down the red carpet all the same, tennis legend Serena Williams and supermodel Karlie Kloss debuted their baby bumps with flair, and two celebs dressed up as Lagerfeld's cat.

Oscar winners Nicole Kidman and Michelle Yeoh, singers Cardi B and Bad Bunny, WNBA superstar Brittney Griner and supermodels Gisele Bundchen and Kate Moss were also among the hundreds of invitees at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The guest list was tightly curated by Anna Wintour, the editor-in-chief of Vogue who took over the charity gala in the 1990s and transformed it into one of the world's buzziest fetes.

This year, the extravaganza - which always falls on the first Monday of May, save for a pandemic-era schedule change - celebrates Lagerfeld, and ushers in the opening of a Costume Institute exhibition dedicated to the iconic designer, who died in 2019.

'Karl Lagerfeld: A Line of Beauty' pays homage to his decades in the industry at the helm of Chanel, Fendi, Chloe and his own line, all the while molding the future of fashion.

And the celebs in attendance understood the style assignment, most of them sporting vintage looks from the elegant German-born designer - or silhouettes that reflected his aesthetic.

Rihanna was cloaked in white Valentino, with airy camellias - the flower synonymous with Chanel - adorning the hood of her cape. Her white fingerless gloves mirrored those favoured

by Lagerfeld. Underneath? A sexy fitted white gown with spaghetti straps.

Williams timed the announcement of her second pregnancy with the event, writing on Instagram: 'Was so excited when Anna Wintour invited the 3 of us to the Met Gala' (referring to herself, her husband Alexis Ohanian and their new child).

Diamonds and cats
Kidman sported a blush Chanel gown that cascaded to the floor



British model Cara Delevingne



English model Naomi Campbell



Irish actor Pierce Brosnan and his wife Keely Shaye Smith



US actress Julia Garner



Actor Jared Leto



Mexican actress Salma Hayek and her husband Francois-Henri Pinault



Barbadian singer Rihanna

in feathers - a dress she first wore in an ad for the house's iconic No 5 perfume nearly 20 years ago. "I'm so glad I'm still able to wear it," she said.

Singer Dua Lipa wore a cream-coloured Chanel bridal gown from the 1990s, accented with black stitches and accessorised with a stunning Tiffany diamond necklace she said was taken from the jeweler's vault.

Many attendees wore shades of black, white and cream, though a few pops of colour emerged. And two guests showed up as Lagerfeld's beloved cat Choupette - singer Doja Cat, and actor Jared Leto in a full furry costume.

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