

Organ donation acceptance grows, transplants up 7.4%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Acceptance of organ donation is growing in the sultanate with more people benefitting from transplant surgeries. According to Saud bin Amer al Nadhri, Director General of Health Services in South Sharqiyah, 347 organ transplant surgeries have so far been conducted in Oman.

Twenty-four organ transplant surgeries were performed in 2022, 7.4 per cent more than 2021.

According to the Ministry of Health (MoH), 323 organ transplant procedures were performed in the sultanate till the end of 2021. A total of 7,092 people, from various walks of life, had registered on the Shifa app for organ donation by the end of 2022.

The Directorate General of Health Services in South Sharqiyah, in cooperation with the National Programme for Organ Transplantation, organised an awareness campaign on the importance of organ donation in Sur on Tuesday.

During the campaign, Nadhri informed that the total number of organ transplants carried out in the sultanate since 1988 is 347, of which 325 were kidney transplants and 22 liver transplants.



Organ donation sends out a humanitarian message – of saving human lives. It is a service provided by the donor to end the suffering of a patient who has been in pain for years

SAUD BIN AMER AL NADHRI

According to Nadhri, the campaign aims to educate community members about the importance of organ donation, whether in life or death, “as human beings are the only source of organs”.

Nadhri said, “Organ donation sends out a humanitarian message – of saving human lives. It is a service provided by the donor to end the suffering of a patient who has been in pain for years.”

He added that organ donations are carried out according to controls and procedures deter-

mined by medicine, law and the sharia.

In an effort to establish guidelines for transplantation of human organs and tissues, MoH issued a decision in March 2021 to develop a national programme to regulate human organ and tissue donations.

The programme is contributing to scientific research and implementation of a technical committee’s recommendations to regulate the practice of human organ and tissue transfer and transplantation.

CAA launches phone weather alert service

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To ensure weather alerts reach people as quickly as possible, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) - in cooperation with the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) - launched an early warning broadcast service for weather conditions via mobile phones on Wednesday.

With the new service, citizens and residents will be warned about inclement weather conditions through messages.

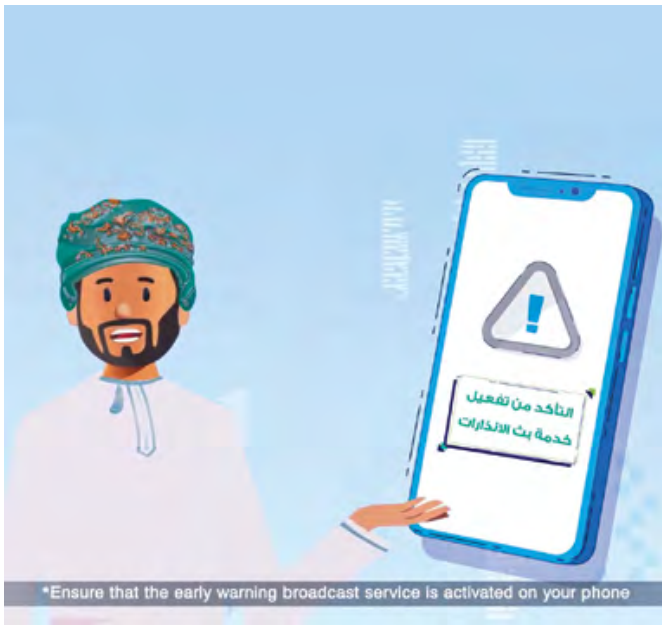
A video issued by TRA said, ‘The service will send a warning message to subscribers’ phones in a particular area using mobile communications networks to alert about emergencies, which is in line with international standards.’

These customised messages will have a distinctive tone when delivered.

‘An emergency can occur at any time, therefore you should be attentive to any weather alert on your phone to protect yourself and your family in a time of crisis,’ CAA stated.

The most important feature of the service is that the messages are automatic and supported by all generations of devices, including 5G.

‘All phones in Oman should be able to receive the warning messages in all modes - includ-



An emergency can occur at any time, therefore you should be attentive to any weather alert on your phone to protect yourself and your family in a time of crisis

CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY

ing silent mode - and several consecutively,’ TRA stated.

More information on the service is available at <https://bit.ly/3SUPASx>

Earlier this year, CAA launched a programme called ‘Muzn’ aimed at developing alerts, meteorological services, early warning and improve systems and devices in the National

Multi Hazard Early Warning System.

Oman launched the National Multi Hazard Early Warning System in 2015, implemented with the technical support of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of Unesco, designed to respond to natural hazards, including tsunamis, cyclones and flash floods.

Crucial that Ukraine grain deal is extended: UN chief in Kyiv

Kyiv, Ukraine - UN chief Antonio Guterres said in Kyiv on Wednesday that it was crucial to extend the international accord that allowed grain exports to resume from war-torn Ukraine.

Russia’s invasion last February saw Ukraine’s Black Sea ports blocked by Moscow’s warships until a deal last summer allowed for the safe passage of exports of critical grain supplies.

The deal, which will automatically renew on March 18 unless Moscow or Kyiv object, was inked by Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the United Nations last July.

“I want to underscore the critical importance of the rollover of the Black Sea Grain Initiative on March 18 and of working to create the conditions to enable the greatest possible use of export infrastructures through the Black Sea,” Guterres said during a visit to Kyiv.

Ukraine President Volodymyr



Antonio Guterres

Zelensky said it was “critically necessary for the entire world” to renew the deal.

The deal has made possible the export of 23mn tonnes of grain from three separate Ukrainian ports, Guterres said.

“It has contributed to lowering the global cost of food and has offered critical relief to people, who are also paying a high price for this war, particularly in the developing world,” the UN chief said.

AFP

DANGER LURKING



Germany’s Jens Cullmann won the title of World Nature Photographer of the Year at the World Nature Photography Awards with this image titled ‘Danger in the mud’ taken in Mana Pools National Park, Zimbabwe (Supplied photo)

GOLF DIPLOMACY

Oman Golf Trophy strengthens Oman-Italy relations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Golf Trophy concluded at Al Mouj Golf in Muscat on Tuesday, with Barbara Morati claiming the women’s and Enrico Bardazzi clinching the men’s title.

In a message at the closing ceremony of the tournament at Royal Opera House Muscat, Foreign Minister H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi said that he was delighted to join the grand finale.

“When the idea for this tournament was first proposed, we immediately embraced it, be-



cause of the various opportunities it presented, especially in connecting people from Oman and Italy. We were also keen to host our Italian friends here, where businesspeople, government officials and golfers could connect, learn from each other and discover the potential for further partnerships and ex-

We rely on the people we host, such as yourselves, to spread the word. To encourage others to come and experience Oman for themselves

H E SAYYID BADR AL BUSAIDI

change.”

H E Sayyid Badr added that Oman is known as a land of peace and neutrality, principles which align closely with the spirit of sportsmanship. “But we always consider it the highest compliment when told that we are also known for our hospitality. I hope that you have had a chance to

experience such hospitality, and that it has shown that Oman is also an open country for tourism, business and investment.”

According to the minister, diplomacy comes in many forms and embracing a more holistic approach to foreign policy is not only more effective, but more enjoyable. “We seek to continue

expanding our relations across the globe, translating such relations into more business engagements, trade and cultural exchange. Golf has been one way to achieve this.”

H E Sayyid Badr added that the tournament is testament to the strong friendship between Italy and Oman and to collaboration between business leaders, governments and friends.

“As you may know, Oman is blessed with highly educated youth, with rich natural resources, including wind and solar energy, minerals and plenty of land and coast line. Our

maritime history means we have strong cultural links with our neighbours bordering the Indian Ocean, from the east coast of Africa to South East Asia.

“Omanis are known for being perhaps a little reserved when it comes to promoting our country. We rely on the people we host, such as yourselves, to spread the word. To encourage others to come and experience Oman for themselves.”

Oman’s culture, he added, has been enriched by centuries of engagement with people from around the globe.

See also Page 09



Islamic banking growth to continue on rising demand



International Women's Day: Women march on

Shaza Hotels plans Mysk Muttrah in Muscat

Muscat - Shaza Hotels, a hotel management company dedicated to offering Arabian hospitality, has announced its ambitious expansion plans in the region, including one in Muttrah in Muscat.

The upcoming hotels include Mysk The Palm Jumeirah, Mysk Jeddah, Mysk Madinah, enhancing the Mysk Retreats portfolio including Mysk Nomads and Mysk Najd al Meqsar Village (both under Sharjah Collection by Shurooq), and Mysk Muttrah Collection in Muscat, among others.

According to the initial plans,



(Image for illustrative purpose)

The group is aiming to take its Shaza & Mysk portfolio outside the GCC region, including the US, Turkey and Egypt

the new Muscat property will be a boutique hotel in the old town of Muttrah.

The group is also aiming to take its Shaza & Mysk portfolio outside the GCC region, including the United States, Turkey,

Egypt and Levant.

The group recently held its annual meet in Dubai with partner in key GCC cities. The event brought together industry players and major stakeholders to pave a stronger relationship and bonding for the coming years.

"We are delighted with the success of our annual Partner Meet 2023, which was a valuable opportunity for us to meet and engage with our key partners after the pandemic," said Shaji Abu Salih, Corporate Director of Business Development at Shaza Hotels. "It was important for us to rekindle these relationships

and show our appreciation for their support over the past year and to enhance our future bond with our trade partners and stakeholders," he underlined.

At the event, Shaza Hotels entered into a brand-wide agreement with WebBeds, one of the largest travel trade partners in the world, to agree on brand wide pricing and distribution globally for all Shaza & Mysk Hotels.

"We are also extremely happy for concluding the master agreement with WebBeds at this occasion, which definitely would enhance our reach and presence in global markets," he added.

CPA opens Arab forum for small consumers

Our correspondent Muscat

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) on Wednesday opened Arab forum titled 'Small Consumer and Sustainable Consumption' as a part of the Arab Consumer Protection Week from March 8 to 14.

The forum was held under the auspices of H E Sayyid Mohammed Sultan al Busaidi, Deputy Chairman of the

Supreme Judicial Council.

The forum on small consumer aims to shed light on the reality of legislations related to the small consumer, and to benefit from the local and international experiences in the field of developing the authority's services towards this category of consumers.

"The week will include many diverse activities that shed light on the young consumer with the aim of instilling a safer consumer

culture among young people," said Salim bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA).

The selection of the 'young consumers' to be the main focus of the week for this year came in view of the intellectual and technological challenges facing them and affecting their social and economic behaviours.

The authority launched Small Consumer App to serve young consumers better.

Over 250 participants to attend Oman Real Estate Expo on Sunday

Our correspondent Muscat

The 18th edition of the Oman Design and Build Week (ODBW) incorporating Oman Real Estate Expo (OREX) is slated to begin at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Sunday under the auspices of H H Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs.

One of the most anticipated events in the building, construction, design and real estate industry, the event will host 250 exhibitors representing different countries, and will include more than ten pavilions.

The purpose of this event is to enhance communication with industry owners and manufacturers, integration with suppliers and distributors.



It serves as a platform for manufacturers to display building materials and provide solutions to architects, consultants, contractors, distributors, purchasing managers and decision makers.

The OREX programme will include 11 dialogue sessions with the participation of over 30

speakers and representatives from over 30 governmental and private institutions.

It targets real estate developers, brokers, financial and legal service providers, and those interested in the field of real estate development.

Discussions and deliberations will be held to shed light on

investment opportunities in Oman, enhance complementary communication between sectors, enable partnership with partners in the real estate sector, exchange views and experiences for the development of the real estate sector, in addition to enriching common topics in the same industry.

OREX will offer an ideal platform for companies to present their expertise and solutions to the emerging market.

The Oman Design and Build Week aims to enrich common topics in the industry, and present building materials and solutions to architects, consultants, contractors, distributors, purchasing managers, and decision makers. It seeks to accelerate business growth and announce many mega projects in line with the economic growth plans in the Sultanate of Oman.

OPINION

SALEH MIRI, MUSCAT DAILY COLUMNIST, IS AN ARCHITECT WHO CAME TO OMAN IN THE EARLY 1980S

In the universe there is one jewel, where life exists, a planet known as the 'Earth', with 71% covered by oceans, and the 30% remaining where around 8 billion people live. This jewel has its own rules, like any unique object.

Plants - mainly trees - dominate life on Earth: They account for more than 82% of biomass.

In the second place is the life we cannot see: Tiny bacteria sum up to 13%.

Whilst our perceptions are often focused on the animal kingdom, it accounts for only 0.4%. Humans account for just 0.01% of biomass, so we would need about 70 trillion of us to match the Earth's collective biomass.

Living in a society has globalised caused nationalities and races to blend together and form a unity of both culture and traditions.

The people need to abide by nature's rules, protecting the environment, the traditions and the species, which are alive on it. The fossils of a lady named Lucy, which were discovered in Hadar, Ethiopia, were found to be 3.2 million years old.

Why are we trying to be different? History has shown that the famous empires



ONE PLANET ONE LIFE

which started one day, disappeared centuries after, such as the Roman Empire, the Ottomans, the Greek Empire, the Persian Empire, the Chinese Han Empire and so many others. No one leaves this life with bags of money or jewels. Why are we so selfish?

The recent conflicts on our planet such as the Ukraine war, the Taiwan conflict, the impact of Iran's upheaval, the instability in Afghanistan demonstrate that we did not get the message. Success comes when it provides solutions for all. Collapse of any part of the planet, damages the entire world's population. Failure to understand this will affect all of us and there cannot be any winner. Do we have

the right to use our advantages against others? Who gave us this right? Our leaders need to emphasise the message to their people. There is only one single planet and no one, has the right to destroy it. We have to respect the planet, its components: nature, animals, mines, climate and the seas and oceans. We are only temporarily here, the vegetation, the animals, the atmosphere, the mountains all exist for a while only, and often longer than humans.

Tell everyone around you that we need to talk in one single voice, respect the chance that we have to live on this wonderful planet, which allows us to live on a jewel and let us all understand this, before it is too late.

Let us educate the next generation to appreciate the real values of life and the planet we are lucky to live on.

War, famine, discrimination, pollution and wastefulness are traits humanity should leave behind before starting to think about copying itself on distant worlds. We should make human life on Earth a functioning system that works in equilibrium with its surrounding environment before we decide to colonise other planets.

ITPF annual meeting held in Muscat

Muscat - The General Assembly of the International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF) held in Muscat on Wednesday its annual meeting under the chairmanship of ITPF president Mohammed Issa al Fairouz.

The meeting discussed extension of the ITPF current Board of Directors for two years. It also reviewed several applications for joining the federation. In this context, the assembly approved applications from Tunisia, Algeria, Philippines, Indonesia, South Korea and Afghanistan to join the group.

ITPF also reviewed a proposal for public and private centres and academies for tent pegging. It also discussed re-formation of general committees.

The meeting approved the report of the Board of Directors for 2022 and endorsed a financial audit office for 2023. It ratified annual reports of the heads of committees.



Oman International ELT conference begins at Sultan Qaboos University

Muscat - The 22nd Oman International English Language Teaching (ELT) Hybrid Conference kicked off at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Wednesday.

The opening ceremony of the two-day event was held under the auspices of Sheikh Ahmed Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary General of the Shura Council.

Many academics and teach-

ers specialised in the field of ELT from Oman and abroad took part in the conference.

This year's conference - The 21st Century Language Classroom: Challenges and Opportunities - focuses on the topic of community service, in line with the goals of SQU and Oman Vision 2040.

The event also aims to create

a platform that enables English language teachers to meet with each other in person and virtually to discuss ways to improve their teaching at different stages in their careers by learning new and creative teaching methods.

Several lectures and workshops are being held on the sidelines of the conference.

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MTCIT warns legal measures against errant school bus drivers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has urged all road transport operators, including school buses, to follow the regulations under the Land Transport Law.

A statement issued by MTCIT said, 'The ministry calls on operators of land transport, especially passenger buses and student transport, to adhere to the requirements of passenger safety,

according to the executive regulations of the Land Transport Law. The ministry will take legal measures against violators.'

This follows an incident of a student falling from a running school bus belonging to a school under the Directorate of Education in Dakhliyah on February 27. Citizens and experts called for tougher measures in the sultanate after a video of the mishap went viral on social media.

A statement issued by the governorate's Directorate General of Education said it was tak-

ing measures in cooperation with the relevant authorities to ensure such incidents didn't repeat and called on school bus drivers to ensure the safety of students.

Royal Oman Police arrested the school bus driver following the incident on February 27 and legal procedures were completed against him.

Earlier on September 4, the first day of the 2022-23 academic year, a student in Mabela died when a speeding car hit her as she was getting off a school bus.

Civil defence and ambulance meet draws participants from Oman, abroad

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The First Oman Civil Defence and Ambulance Conference & Exhibition opened on Wednesday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

More than 300 participants from Oman and abroad are taking part in the two-day event organised by the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) to highlight the efforts undertaken in the sultanate to achieve the highest levels of safety and security.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Khamis Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

On the occasion, Col Abdullah Saleh al Najashi, Director General of CDAA, said that the event coincides with International Civil Defence Day, reflecting the importance of the authority's efforts in protecting lives and property of people. The event showcases the authority's contribution to development plans, while addressing accidents and crises that threaten human life, wealth and the environment.

Col Najashi pointed out that the slogan of International Civil Defence Day 2023 - Role of Technical Systems in Risk As-



The conference and exhibition highlight the efforts undertaken in the sultanate to achieve the highest levels of safety and security

essment - highlights the importance of information technology and its applications in risk management, preparedness and min-

imisation of pertinent loss, as well as evaluation of monitoring systems' capacity to tackle risks.

Sessions of the conference will deal with risk legislations and regulations, risk reduction, lessons learnt from major accidents and best practices and technical applications in the field.

The first day of the event covered seven working papers on various aspects of safety, most notably the role of legislation and technical regulations in reducing risks, integration of risk assessment and emergency operations

through technology, harnessing and using artificial intelligence techniques in risk management, and the role of modern technologies in risk management and minimisation of impacts of earthquakes.

The chief guest toured an exhibition accompanying the conference showcasing security and safety apparatus, civil defence and ambulance equipment, as well as a children's corner comprising fire extinguishers, fire blankets, first aid and training equipment.

Fishing nets cause death of Bryde's whale in Al Wusta

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A Bryde's whale, counted among the 'great whales', died in Al Wusta on Wednesday following entanglement in fishing nets.

The Environment Authority (EA) issued a statement saying that its department in Al Wusta was alerted about the Bryde's whale. 'It washed up on Kanasa beach in Mahout. The cause of death is attributed to fishing nets.'

EA's specialists took samples



and measurements of the whale to conduct laboratory tests and analyses.

Ship strikes, by-catch and entanglement in fishing nets are some of the many factors threatening whales in Omani waters.

The Bryde's whale is one of 20 species of marine mammals found in Oman's waters and is one of four species of great whales found in the sultanate - besides the Arabian Sea humpback whale, Northern Indian Ocean blue whale and sperm whale.

Bryde's whales are members of the baleen whale family and are named after Norwegian Johan Bryde who built the first whaling stations in South Africa in the early 20th century.

Bryde's whales are found in warm, temperate oceans including the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific. Some populations of Bryde's whales make short migratory movements with the seasons, while others do not migrate, making them unique among other migrating baleen whales.

Traffic violations in GCC states to be e-linked soon

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An exchange of information on traffic violations among the departments of traffic in the GCC countries will begin soon.

This was revealed during the 19th meeting of the working group tasked with linking traffic violations in traffic departments of the GCC countries held on Tuesday.

The unified system aims to



enhance standardisation and exchange of procedures among traffic agencies and help reduce accidents and violation of traffic rules in the GCC countries.

Oman leads Arab mineral resources meet in Rabat

Rabat, Morocco - The sultanate led the 29th meeting of the Arab countries' Mineral Resources Sector Advisory Committee, held at the headquarters of the Arab Industrial Development, Standardization and Mining Organization (AIDSMO) in Rabat, Morocco on Wednesday.

The meeting, held under the chairmanship of H E Dr Said Mohammed al Bar'ami, Ambassador of Oman to Morocco, saw the participation of delegates representing 19 Arab countries.

A wide range of topics were discussed during the meeting, including technical topics proposed for the meeting of Arab ministers concerned with the minerals sector and the AIDSMO programme for 2023-2024.

In a statement, H E Bar'ami affirmed the importance of boosting intra-Arab investments in this vital sector and according attention to mineral resources in efforts to diversify sources of income and increase Arab countries' competitiveness in international markets.

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Building No: 115, Plot No: 330, Block No: 146, Way No: 4202, Greater Muttrah, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24730939, Website: www.nligulf.com

Notice and Invitation to Attend the Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of NATIONAL LIFE & GENERAL INSURANCE (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Sunday at 05:00 PM on 26/03/2023, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om). If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting shall be held on Thursday at 04:00 PM on 30/03/2023, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) to discuss the following agenda:

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agendas :

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors report on Company's activity and its financial position for the financial year ended 31/12/2022
- To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31/12/2022
- To consider and approve the Auditor's Report and the Audited Financial Statements of the Company for the financial year ended 31/12/2022
- To ratify the sitting fees paid to Directors' for attending meetings of the Board and sub committees for the previous financial year and to determine the Directors' sitting fees for the upcoming financial year (Annexure 1)
- To consider and approve the proposal of distributing RO 150,000 (one hundred and fifty thousand Omani Riyals) as remuneration for the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31/12/2022
- To notify the shareholders of the transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 31/12/2022 (Annexure 2)
- To notify the shareholders of the amounts spent for the company's social responsibilities for the year ended on 31/12/2022 (Annexure 3)
- To consider and approve the proposed allocation of RO 100,000 (one hundred thousand Omani Riyals) for Corporate Social responsibilities for the year ending on 31/12/2023
- To consider and approve the Board of Directors evaluation report for the financial year ended 31/12/2022
- To appoint statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31/12/2023 and determine their fees

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on **telephone No 95299234** or **email: hamad@nligulf.com**

CHAIRMAN
KHALID MUHAMMAD ALZUBAIR

LEGAL ADVISOR
MEHDIAL LAWATI LAW OFFICE

EXTERNAL AUDITOR
KPMG L.L.C.

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

Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
2023/MM/QS-12 (PRE/23/025)	Adobe CC Renewal	Rial 25	18/03/2023	23/03/2023	Excellent
2023/MM/HQ-5 (PRE/22/176)	Construction of Slope Protection Works on Al Jabal Road at Al Amirat	Rial 51	29/03/2023	17/04/2023	First

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically and an Electronic Bond (E-Bond) issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality, valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission.
Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Clarification and Support:
 - For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
 - For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
 - For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).

Commenting on the partnership, Doohee Lee said, "Oman's sophisticated customers have long demanded the best and

'Islamic banking windows significantly benefit from their parent conventional bank in terms of use of their existing franchise and infrastructure, making them more cost-efficient,' the rating agency added.

Note: The complete accounts will be delivered or sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them, in either Arabic or English as requested, within seven days of receipt of the request. Requests to be sent to the following address:

Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG.
P.O. BOX 207, Postal Code 134, Bareaq Al Shatti, Sultanate of Oman
Tel.: 00968 22303000, Fax: 00968 24699511

Consolidated statement of participants' revenues and expenses for the year ended 31 December 2022 (Audited)			
	General Takaful RO	2022 Family Takaful RO	Total RO
Takaful revenue			
Gross contributions	16,132,895	15,415,021	31,547,916
Contributions ceded to retakaful	<u>(5,187,008)</u>	<u>(11,774,732)</u>	<u>(16,961,740)</u>
Net retained contributions	10,945,887	3,640,289	14,586,176
Movement in unearned contribution reserve - net	(1,376,441)	(141,949)	(1,518,390)
Income from retakaful contracts	<u>306,235</u>	<u>174,854</u>	<u>481,089</u>
Total takaful revenue	9,875,681	3,673,194	13,548,875

	2020	2019	2018
Takaful expenses			
Gross claims settled	(17,909,099)	(6,118,777)	(24,027,876)
Retakaful share in claim settled	<u>8,559,523</u>	<u>5,332,374</u>	<u>13,891,897</u>
Net claims settled	(9,349,576)	(786,403)	(10,135,979)
Movement in outstanding claims reserve - net	266,643	(550,598)	(283,935)
Movement in other reserves	<u>660,132</u>	<u>(554,448)</u>	<u>105,684</u>
Net claims incurred	(8,422,801)	(1,891,449)	(10,314,250)
Other takaful expenses	(54,374)	(35,305)	(89,679)
Wakala fee expense	<u>(2,185,053)</u>	<u>(1,845,242)</u>	<u>(4,030,295)</u>
Total takaful expenses	(10,662,228)	(3,771,996)	(14,434,224)
Other income	134,452	67,438	201,890
Profit on wakala deposit	90,789	86,748	177,537
Mudharib Share	<u>(45,395)</u>	<u>(43,374)</u>	<u>(88,769)</u>
(Deficit) / Surplus from takaful operations	(606,701)	12,010	(594,691)
Hibah transaction during the year			
Hibah from Shareholders to Policyholders	<u>15,598,047</u>	-	<u>15,598,047</u>
Net surplus transferred to Participants' fund	<u>14,991,346</u>	<u>12,010</u>	<u>15,003,356</u>
		2021	
Takaful revenue			
Gross contributions	16,002,096	16,652,897	26,654,993
Contributions ceded to retakaful	<u>(7,053,462)</u>	<u>(8,494,749)</u>	<u>(15,548,211)</u>
Net retained contributions	8,948,634	2,158,148	11,106,782
Movement in unearned contribution reserve - net	250,067	(544,588)	(294,521)
Income from retakaful contracts	<u>364,134</u>	<u>146,067</u>	<u>510,198</u>
Total takaful revenue	9,562,835	1,759,627	11,322,462
Takaful expenses			
Gross claims settled	(14,388,894)	(6,738,577)	(21,127,471)
Retakaful share in claim settled	<u>7,612,342</u>	<u>5,912,647</u>	<u>13,524,989</u>
Net claims settled	(6,776,552)	(825,930)	(7,602,482)
Movement in outstanding claims reserve - net	(3,049,939)	(127,168)	(3,177,107)
Movement in other reserves	<u>351,135</u>	<u>9,771</u>	<u>360,906</u>
Net claims incurred	(9,475,356)	(943,327)	(10,418,683)
Acquisition costs amortised during the year	(1,200,806)	(346,451)	(1,547,257)
Other takaful expenses	(877,194)	23,279	(853,915)
Total fees expense	<u>(2,880,408)</u>	<u>(1,917,491)</u>	<u>(4,797,899)</u>
Total takaful expenses	(14,433,764)	(3,183,990)	(17,612,754)
Other income	221,871	-	221,871
Deficit from takaful operations	(4,649,058)	(1,424,363)	(6,073,421)

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Fed mulls bigger rate hikes to cool US economy

Washington, US – The United States is prepared to speed up interest rate hikes – and could raise them higher than anticipated – if needed to cool inflation and a strong jobs market, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said.

An “unseasonably warm” January across much of the country was likely behind the robust employment, consumer spending, manufacturing and inflation figures, which pointed to a partial reversal of earlier softening trends, Powell told the Senate Banking Committee on Tuesday.

“If the totality of the data were to indicate that faster tightening is warranted, we would be prepared to increase the pace of rate hikes,” he said.

He added that the “ultimate level of interest rates” is likely to be higher than previously anticipated as well.

Stocks fell sharply following Powell's comments, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average closing 1.7 per cent lower.

The dollar strengthened sharply against the euro and other major currencies, while the two-year US Treasury yield surged above five per cent.

Chance of bigger hike

The US central bank has already raised its benchmark lending rate eight times since early last year, as it contends with inflation that remains stubbornly above its long-term target of two per cent.

It raised rates last month by a quarter percentage point to 4.50-4.75 per cent, its highest level since the global financial crisis.

Powell's comments raise the likelihood of the Fed lifting rates by 50 basis points at its next



Fed chief Jerome Powell

meeting this month, Evercore ISI economists Krishna Guha and Peter Williams wrote in a note to investors.

“We must accept that this option appears to be somewhat more live than we had previously

believed,” they said, though adding that a quarter-point hike was still the more likely option.

Markets are now roughly evenly split on the chances of a larger half-point rate hike, said Joe Manimbo, senior market an-

alyst at Convera.

Despite its forceful moves, the Fed's favored inflation measure, the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, rose slightly to reach an annual rate of 5.4 per cent in January.

Core PCE inflation, which excludes volatile energy and food prices, also rose 4.7 per cent.

At the same time, the labor market remains “extremely tight,” with close to two jobs available for every one unemployed person in December, Powell said.

US job creation surged in January, with employers creating more half a million new jobs and driving the unemployment rate to its lowest level since the 1960s.

A strong labor market supports incomes and, in turn, demand.

“To restore price stability, we

will need to see lower inflation in this sector, and there will very likely be some softening in labor market conditions,” Powell said.

Debt ceiling pressure

At Tuesday's hearing, Powell also faced questions about ongoing negotiations between the Biden administration and Republicans in Congress over raising the debt ceiling.

“Whatever else may happen Congress really needs to raise the debt ceiling,” Powell said, adding to calls for the two sides to come to an agreement.

The United States hit its US\$31.4tn borrowing cap in January, kicking off frantic talks between Congress and the White House to raise the limit and allow the US to meet pre-existing spending commitments.

Republicans in Congress have asked for spending cuts in ex-

change for their support, while the Biden administration has said it wants to separate any talks over the upcoming budget from the debt limit vote.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office warned last month that the country risks defaulting on its debt as soon as July if an agreement is not reached.

Powell's appearance comes shortly after the US central bank released a semiannual report on monetary policy, which pointed to a tight labor market, robust job gains, historically low unemployment and elevated nominal wage growth.

“The process of getting inflation back down to two per cent has a long way to go and is likely to be bumpy,” Powell said. “We will stay the course until the job is done.”

AFP

US energy agency revises down oil price forecasts

Washington, US – The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) revised down its 2023 forecast for global crude oil prices, citing build in global oil inventories.

In the March Short-Term Energy Outlook (STEO), the EIA revised down the price of Brent crude for 2023 to an average of US\$82.95 per barrel. In the report released in February, this figure was US\$83.63 per barrel.

The American benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), is expected to average US\$77.10 a barrel in 2023. In the report released in February, this figure was US\$77.84.

The agency pointed to build in global oil inventories for the downward price revisions. However, it said high demand for crude oil from refineries due to elevated refining margins will limit downward pressure on crude oil prices through second quarter of the year “as refiners maintain high levels of crude oil inputs to maximize distillate fuel production.”

“Russia was a key supplier of distillate fuel to Europe, and changes in distillate trade flows



as Europe reduced imports of distillate from Russia in recent months have kept distillate fuel margins well-above five-year averages,” it added.

Crude oil output in the US is predicted to average 12.44mn barrels per day (bpd) this year, up from 11.88mn bpd in 2022. In 2024, crude oil output in the country is expected to reach 12.63mn bpd.

Global crude oil production will average 101.47mn bpd this year and 103.02mn bpd next year. The US agency also forecasts that global oil demand will reach 100.90mn bpd at the end of the year and 102.69mn bpd next year, reporting a slight increase from previous forecast month.

Anadolu Agency

ECB chief vows to do 'whatever it takes' to tame inflation

Frankfurt, Germany – European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde said Wednesday she will do whatever it takes to bring down high inflation and restore price stability.

Speaking at the World Trade Organization in Geneva, Lagarde said the ECB will spare no efforts to combat the inflation lashing most of the countries in the eurozone.

“We will restore that price stability and we will do whatever it takes,” she said.

“Those that are the prime victims of high inflation are the underprivileged, the vulnerable,” she said. “It's not a pretty situation.”

Speaking alongside WTO chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala at an event marking International Women's Day, Lagarde highlighted that women were among those feeling the inflation crunch the most.

“The lowest paid, are the women.”

The ECB has raised interest



Christine Lagarde

rates at an unprecedented pace since last July to bring inflation back down to its two-percent target.

And last week, Lagarde said that more interest rate hikes might be needed in the eurozone after the half percentage point hike it has already signalled will come later this month.

“As president of the ECB, my job is rather limited, but it is critically important, and it is price stability,” she said Wednesday.

AFP

اس ام ان باور القابضة ش.م.ع.ع. SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG				
Audited Consolidated Financial Statements For the Year Ended 31 December 2022				
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT				
Dear Shareholders On behalf of the Board of Directors ("the Board") of SMN Power Holding SAOG ("the Company"), I have the pleasure to present the Board of Directors' Report for the year ended 31 December 2022.				
Corporate Governance The Company has complied with the Code of Corporate Governance and applicable circulars issued from time to time by the Capital Market Authority (CMA).				
Operations Providing a safe working environment is a key priority and the Board is pleased to share that during the year ending 2022, the Health & Safety ("H&S") performance was excellent with no Lost Time Accident ("LTA") in line with previous years. In 2022, Al Rusail power plant recorded a new milestone and clocked more than 5000 LTA free days. The commercial performance of both plants, SMN Barka Power Company SAOC ("SMN Barka") and Al Rusail Power Company SAOC ("Al Rusail"), is measured by their reliability which is the ability to deliver the declared capacity as per the contract. In 2022, the reliability at SMN Barka Plant was 97.66% (96.2% in 2021) for power and 97.41% (97.8% in 2021) for water. The reliability at Al Rusail Power Plant was 99.4% (99.9% in 2021) for the same period. The Company produced an aggregate net power volume of 2,602.12 GWh (3,702 GWh in 2021) and a total volume of 34,440,050 m³ of potable water was delivered (31,668,000 m³ in 2021). All necessary maintenance activities of key equipment were performed in accordance with Original Equipment Manufacturers' recommendations, while applying the best industry standards and practices for health & safety and maintenance during the period.				
Financial Results Total Revenues in 2022 amounted to RO 70.3 million (RO 87.1 in 2021), representing a decrease of RO 16.8 million compared to 2021. Total Revenues include fixed revenues (Fixed Capacity Fees) and variable revenues (Fuel Charge and Variable Operating & Maintenance Charge). The Company generated a consolidated net profit of RO 11.09 million during 2022 compared to a net profit of RO 9.55 million for 2021. The increase in net profit of RO 1.54 million is mainly due to the following favorable variances compared to the same period in 2021: - Lower operating costs for the year; - Reduction in finance costs following the scheduled repayments of the term loan facilities for the two project companies. The reduction in Non-Current Assets is driven by the depreciation of the plant (fixed assets). The decrease in Current Assets is due to the receipts of the finance lease and the payment received from OPWP of the outstanding Fuel Charges for the financial years 2019, 2020 and 2021 under the fuel settlement arrangement agreed with OPWP for both SMN Barka and Al Rusail plants which in turn have been used to reduce the trade and other payables under the back to back arrangement.				
Future Outlook The Company will continue its focus on H&S and maintain the excellent reliability at both plants. In terms of the latest development on the initiatives to prepare for the future of Al Rusail and SMN Barka power plants: - OPWP has provided an update for the procurement process for Power and Water for 2024 and beyond. In its letter to the Company, OPWP states that OPWP is working on the development of procurement documents related to Power and Water 2024 and intends to communicate its procurement capacity target, procurement schedule, Project timeline and other relevant information during quarter one of 2023 at most. The Company is actively engaged in making preparations for the Power and Water 2024 tender. - SMN Barka is participating in the spot market, however, such participation has no material impact on the Company's revenue until the expiry of the PWPA framework. - After the expiry of the PPA by end of March 2022, Al Rusail signed an Ancillary Service Agreement with OPWP to sell a capacity of 184.972 MW from April 2022 to October 2022. The Ancillary Service Agreement was extended again to cover the period from 1st November 2022 to 31st December 2023 which was disclosed to the market. - Al Rusail is exempted from participation in the Spot Market from 1st November 2022 as Al Rusail is under ancillary services agreement which does not require participation in the spot market as per the market rule. - For Al Rusail, Gas Turbine 1 to Gas Turbine 6, which were erected between 1984 to 1986, have retired from operation on 30th September 2021 as disclosed to the market. Al Rusail plans to sell these units and the process of sale and decommissioning for these units has been initiated. Al Rusail has appointed a consultant to assist with the sale and decommissioning process of the retired plant's equipment. The sale and decommissioning process will commence in 2023. - Since September 2021, Al Rusail power plant capacity had reduced from approx. 665 to approx. 184 MW. As a result, the contracted backup fuel oil quantities have reduced. Al Rusail has floated a tender for the sale of approx. 16 million liters of fuel oil. A sale and purchase agreement for selling the excess diesel oil has been signed with the selected bidder and the same was disclosed to the market and stakeholders. The sale of fuel oil and ownership transfer to the bidder will take place in 2023. - In terms of dividend distribution, as previously disclosed and in line with the financing arrangements during the IPO, the excess cash generated by SMN Barka is now paid to the lenders and will not flow to the Shareholders until the loans are fully settled or until the time the loans can be restructured. The P(W)PA extension for SMN Barka will be a key factor to potentially restructure the debt in the coming years, remove or defer the cash sweep and allow further dividend distribution. Al Rusail has declared a dividend distribution of RO 3 million which has been approved by the Ordinary General Meeting held on 6th December 2022. As Chairman of the Board, I would like to thank our Shareholders, not only for their confidence, but also for their continued support and for the expertise they bring into the Company. The Board of Directors expresses its gratitude to OPWP, APSR, the Capital Market Authority ("CMA") and other governmental and non-governmental bodies for their guidance and support. Finally, on behalf of the Board, I would like to extend our deep appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Government for their continued support and encouragement to the private sector by creating an environment allowing us to contribute effectively to the growth of the Sultanate of Oman.				
Dr. Abdullah Al Yahya'e'y Chairman of the Board				
SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG, P.O. Box 121, Postal Code 134, Sultanate of Oman, Qurum Building, Building No.1022, 1st Floor, Office No.15, Way No. 1013, Al Qurum – Muscat. Tel. +968 2493 5800, Fax: 2493 5830, E-mail: info@smnpower.com, www.smnpower.com				
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022				
	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	2022 RO '000	2021 RO '000	2022 RO '000	2021 RO '000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	-	-	130,523	139,459
Right-of-use-assets	-	-	297	285
Long-term prepayment	-	-	-	27
Investment in subsidiaries	27,405	27,405	-	-
Goodwill	-	-	14,952	14,952
	27,405	27,405	145,772	154,723
Current assets				
Inventories	-	-	2,984	2,901
Trade and other receivables	50	54	8,367	44,069
Finance lease receivables	-	-	-	316
Fixed term cash deposits	3,000	-	6,711	7,390
Cash and bank balances	60	24	8,950	3,067
	3,110	78	27,012	57,743
TOTAL ASSETS	30,515	27,483	172,784	212,466
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	19,964	19,964	19,964	19,964
Statutory reserve	6,655	6,522	6,691	6,691
Retained earnings	3,790	923	53,126	42,036
Hedging reserve	-	-	(178)	(2,560)
Net equity	30,409	27,409	79,603	66,131
Non-current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	45,858	64,832
Lease liabilities	-	-	365	353
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	15	1,529
Provision for end of service benefits	-	-	54	84
Provision for site restoration	-	-	2,965	3,558
Deferred operating income	-	-	808	808
Deferred tax liability	-	-	15,381	15,447
	-	-	65,446	86,611
Current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	14,705	13,795
Lease liabilities	-	-	52	20
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	195	1,484
Trade and other payables	106	74	9,856	41,517
Current tax payable	-	-	2,927	2,908
	106	74	27,735	59,724
Total liabilities	106	74	93,181	146,335
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	30,515	27,483	172,784	212,466
Net assets per share (RO)	0.152	0.137	0.400	0.344
STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022				
	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	2022 RO '000	2021 RO '000	2022 RO '000	2021 RO '000
Revenue	-	-	70,263	87,127
Operating costs	-	-	(52,834)	(70,819)
GROSS PROFIT	-	-	17,429	16,308
General and administrative expenses	(279)	(252)	(1,074)	(1,146)
Reversal of expected credit loss	-	-	25	453
(LOSS)/PROFIT FROM OPERATIONS	(279)	(252)	16,380	15,615
Finance charges	-	-	(3,942)	(4,637)
Dividend income	3,000	-	-	-
Other income	279	252	747	726
PROFIT BEFORE TAX	3,000	-	13,185	11,704
Income tax	-	-	(2,095)	(2,157)
NET PROFIT FOR THE YEAR	3,000	-	11,090	9,547
<i>Other comprehensive income</i>				
Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods:				
Fair value of cash flow hedge adjustments	-	-	1,494	509
Reclassification to profit or loss - gross	-	-	1,309	2,720
Deferred tax liability-current year charge	-	-	(421)	(482)
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	-	2,382	2,747
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	3,000	-	13,472	12,294
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.015	-	0.056	0.048

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Indian embassy in Muscat organises exclusive event 'The Diaspora Diva'



The Embassy of India in Muscat celebrated International Women's Day with an exclusive event titled 'The Diaspora Diva'.

More than 100 Indian diaspora women attended the function on Tuesday evening.

Divya Narang, the spouse of H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, gave the welcome address.

"International Women's Day is an occasion to celebrate the achievements of women and recognise their contributions to society," Divya Narang said, adding that the 'Diaspora Diva'

"is a tribute to the Indian women in Oman, who have significantly contributed to the country's progress and development".

The event's highlight was a panel discussion moderated by Divya Narang, in which three panelists participated. The panelists included Vaishali Jesrani, the Oman Women's Cricket Team captain; Lakshmi Kothaneth, a senior journalist; and Papri Ghosh, principal of Indian School Al Ghubra. The panel discussion focused on various aspects of women's role in society, including in sports, education, and journal-

ism. The panelists shared their experiences and discussed the challenges and opportunities for women in Oman.

A specially curated exhibition of artwork by diaspora women added colour to the event. The artwork showcased the creativity and talent of Indian women in Oman.

Tarini Agrawal, Poornima Subramanian, Naina Purecha, and Dr Kavitha Ramakrishna exhibited exquisite artwork.

The incredible 'Yarn Knot Alone Muscat' team exhibited products like beanies, blankets, and knitted breasts used by lactation consultants, which they

make and distribute to four major government hospitals in Muscat.

A mesmerising Kathak performance by the 'Leelangkika' group, representing womanhood in all its forms, provided a visual treat to the audience.

The event was a celebration of women's empowerment and their contributions to society. The Embassy of India in Muscat is committed to supporting women's rights and promoting gender equality. The 'Diaspora Diva' was a step towards achieving this goal and inspiring women to reach greater heights in their respective fields.

Qatar Airways cargo celebrates with all-female freighter flight

Qatar Airways Cargo celebrated a landmark flight on Sunday as its scheduled Boeing 777 freighter from Doha to Shanghai was operated entirely of a crew of made up of women.

From the ground staff overseeing and handling the cargo, to the flight deck crew operating the flight, this is the first time a Qatar Airways Cargo freighter aircraft has operated with an all-female crew and all-female ground staff.

Captain Sarah Abigail Comerford from United Kingdom, First Officer Edith Mala Diop from France and First Officer Hedfa Mohammed Al Marri from Qatar operated the flight. The Boeing 777 freighter departed Doha with 100 tonnes of cargo destined for Shanghai.

Guillaume Halleux, Chief Officer Cargo at Qatar Airways Cargo, said, "I am proud to have such a diverse workforce within Qatar Airways Cargo. We are committed to promoting gender diversity and that women are equally represented in our workforce, which is why we can proudly say we have almost 50 percent of women in various age groups and roles working globally for Qatar Airways Cargo.

"Women not only promote inclusivity and diversity in the workplace, they also bring in creativity and success to a business. Our success as the



Qatar Airways freighter QR8960 operated from Doha to Shanghai on March 5, managed entirely by female crew and female ground staff

world's leading air cargo carrier is due to the hard work and talent of all our employees and this includes the female staff we are so proud to have within our business."

Elisabeth Oudkerk, Senior Vice President Cargo Sales and Network Planning added: "As a woman who has worked in the industry for over 20 years, I am proud to see the great strides females have made in the field of aviation and air cargo. It is an industry that has so many opportunities and so many varied roles, I encourage any woman looking for a career in this industry to pursue their dream."

To celebrate the special occasion and the contributions and achievements of women worldwide, several female staff

from Qatar Airways Cargo participated in a group photo session donning purple vests and expressing their solidarity with women all over the world. The colour purple represents justice and dignity and is associated with International Women's Day.

Embrace Equity is the theme for 2023 International Women's Day. Equity recognises that each person has different circumstances, and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome. International Women's Day serves as a reminder of how much progress has been made while also highlighting the work still left to be done for the advancement of women worldwide.



شركة المغليفات الصناعية المرنة (ش.م.ع.)
Flexible Industrial Packages Co. (SAOC)

lot no: 225 / 226, Road no: 21, Russay Industrial Estate, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.Tel: +968 24446121, Email: info@fipco.net

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agenda

The Board of Directors of Flexible Industrial Packaging Company SAOC is pleased to invite all Shareholders to attend the company's Annual Ordinary General Meeting, which will be held on Monday 27/03/2023 at 10:00am, in the head quarter of Mohammed Al Barwani Company in Al azaiba. If the quorum not satisfied a second Annual Ordinary General Meeting will be held on Thursday 30/03/2023 , in the same place and at the same time to discuss the following Agenda:

- 1- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' report for the financial year ended December 31, 2022.
- 2- To consider the Auditors' Report and to approve the Financial Statements Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account, for the financial year ended on December 31, 2022.
- 3- To approve the sitting fees of the Board meetings paid to the Board members for previous financial year ending on 31/12/2022, and to determine the sitting fees for the next fiscal year ending on 31/12/2023 (As per Attachment).
- 4- The appointment of the Auditors for the Company for the financial year ending December 31, 2023, and determine their fee.

Shareholder would have access to reports, documents and statements relating to the agenda items of the Annual General Meeting during the official business hours at the Company's head office, according to the Company's Articles of Association, each shareholder is entitled to authorize in writing any other person to attend the meeting and to vote on his/her behalf on the decisions of the general meeting

The shareholders are requested to arrive a half an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

For further information please contact Mr. Ahmed Sulaiman Al Amri on telephone No. 24446121

Chairman

Auditor,

Legal Adviser,

Visit Oman ties up with Mastercard for travellers to discover Oman

At this year's ITB Berlin taking place from March 7 TO 9 at Messe Berlin, the Sultanate of Oman's travel booking gateway 'VisitOman.om' has announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Mastercard, a global technology leader in the payments industry.

Visit Oman's signing of the MoU represents another milestone for tourism in the sultanate, as it will serve to promote Oman as a travel destination to billions of Mastercard cardholders across the globe.

The collaboration will enable Visit Oman to engage with Mastercard's world-class programs in order to further its vision to be an extensive digital travel booking gateway that connects global



and regional travellers to unlimited discovery in Oman.

Powered by Mastercard's proprietary priceless platform, the collaboration will promote the sultanate as a preferred tourism destination across key

source markets to drive inbound tourism by creating differentiated experiences for cardholders across the globe.

The collaboration will further enable Visit Oman to plan, execute and improve its campaign

reports through increasing transparency on tourism trends, anonymised traveller profiles, and economic impact through Mastercard's Data Insights capabilities.

Speaking about the new announcement, Shabib al Maamari, Visit Oman's Managing Director, explained, "Our signing of this new agreement with Mastercard is an exciting development for both Visit Oman and the Omani tourism industry - as it further enhances our mission to build strong, strategic, and commercial partnerships in target markets, and with Omani suppliers, to deliver one connected booking platform that is designed to enable the unlimited Omani traveller experience."

University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Sohar celebrates graduation of new batch

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Sohar celebrated the graduation of 177 students from the College of Computer and Information Sciences (Computer Networks, Software Development, Data Management, and Information Technology Security) and the College of Engineering and Technology (Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and Chemical Engineering).

The event was held under the patronage of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of



North Batinah and in the presence of Dr Saeed bin Hamad al Rubaie, President of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences.

Dr Awad bin Ali al Maamari, Dean of the University of Tech-

nology and Applied Sciences Sohar Branch, delivered the university's speech. "The University of Technology and Applied Sciences was able to overcome the occasional health situation that afflicted the world during the

past two years, by developing scientific programs and applications that enabled it to complete education to the fullest, through the establishment of electronic educational platforms and channels, and training teaching and administrative staff to cooperate with them," he read.

He also expressed the university's desire to apply its academic and administrative policies and processes, in accordance with quality standards and the requirements of institutional academic accreditation.

Deadly Jenin raid: Israeli forces kill 6 Palestinians

Jenin, Palestinian Territories - Israeli troops on Tuesday killed six Palestinians in Jenin including an alleged man accused of killing two Israelis, the latest deadly raid in a surge of violence in the occupied West Bank.

The Palestinian health ministry said six men had been killed, one aged 49 and the rest in their 20s, in clashes that the army said included soldiers launching shoulder-fired rockets amid ferocious gunfire.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, called the use of rockets in the Jenin refugee camp - the scene of frequent clashes in the northern West Bank - an act of 'all-out war', Palestinian news agency Wafa reported.

Witnesses said Israeli troops entered the camp and surrounded a house as a group of fighters fought back, with the army reporting 'explosive devices and blocks' were hurled at their soldiers. An AFP photographer saw thick plumes of smoke rising from the building.

The Jenin Brigade, a fighter group in the camp, said on one of their Telegram channels that their gunmen fought 'violent clashes' with Israeli forces.

Among those killed was Abdel Fatah Hussein Khroushah, 49, who the Israeli army called an operative from the Islamist movement Hamas and accused of killing two Israeli settlers in the Palestinian town of Huwara on February 26.

At least 26 Palestinians were wounded during Tuesday's raid, the Palestinian health ministry



The sister of Abdel Fatah Hussein Khroushah, a 49-year-old Palestinian, reacts by his body at a hospital in Nablus in the occupied West Bank on Tuesday (AFP)

The Palestinian health ministry said six men had been killed, one aged 49 and the rest in their 20s, in clashes

said, three of them with serious injuries. The army said two soldiers were lightly wounded.

Sirens rang out on Tuesday night in Nir Am, a small Israeli town just a few kilometres from the Gaza Strip, after a rocket was fired from the Hamas-controlled territory, the Israeli military said.

"A rocket launch was identified which seems to have ex-

ploded inside the Gaza Strip," the army said in a brief statement.

'Dangerous escalation'

It is the most recent in a string of fatal military operations in the Palestinian territory, which Israel has occupied since the Six-Day War of 1967.

After fighting stopped, an AFP journalist who entered the wreckage of the house where Khroushah had been saw blackened walls riddled with bullet holes and entire walls blasted down. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a video message troops had 'eliminated the abhorrent terrorist', referring to Khroushah.

"Our brave soldiers acted with surgical precision in the heart of

the murderers' lair," Netanyahu added. "Whoever harms us will pay the price."

The Palestinian presidency spokesman Abu Rudeineh said Israel was 'responsible for this dangerous escalation which threatens to inflame the situation and destroy all efforts aimed at restoring stability'.

Last month, Israeli and Palestinian officials pledged in a joint statement to 'prevent further violence' and 'commit to de-escalation' following talks in neighbouring Jordan. On Tuesday, Jordan foreign ministry spokesman Sinan Majali condemned what he called Israeli 'aggression', warning it 'will lead to further deterioration (and) widen the cycles of violence'.

AFP



Afghan women 'most repressed in the world', says UN mission

Kabul, Afghanistan - Afghanistan under the Taliban government is the 'most repressive country in the world' for women's rights, with authorities effectively trapping women and girls in their homes, the United Nations said on Wednesday.

About 20 women held a rare demonstration in a Kabul street on Wednesday, calling on the international community to protect Afghans, AFP journalists witnessed. The Taliban government adheres to an austere interpretation of Islam and has imposed a slew of restrictions on girls and women since seizing power in August 2021.

"It has been distressing to witness their methodical, deliberate, and systematic efforts to push Afghan women and girls out of the public sphere," Roza Otunbayeva, head of the UN mission in Afghanistan, said in a statement marking International Women's Day. The UN mission said the crackdown was a 'colossal act of national self-harm' at a time Afghanistan faces some of the world's largest humanitarian and economic crises.

Taliban authorities have removed women from all but es-

sential government jobs, or are paying them a fraction of their former salary to stay at home.

Women are also barred from going to parks, funfairs, gyms, and public baths, and ordered to cover up in public - ideally with a burqa. But the biggest crack-down has been on teenage girls

United Nations to take a decisive and serious decision concerning the fate of the (Afghan) people," one of the protesters at the Kabul rally read from a statement.

No country has officially recognised the Taliban government as Afghanistan's legitimate rulers, with the right to education for women a sticking point in negotiations over aid and recognition. More than half the country's 38mn people are facing hunger and nearly four million children suffer from malnutrition, aid agencies say.

The crisis was compounded late last year when the Taliban leadership banned Afghan women from working with NGOs, forcing several aid agencies to suspend their vital work.

Foreign aid has also declined dramatically since Afghanistan's assets were frozen by the United States after the Taliban returned to power, further aggravating the crisis. Alison Davidian, the United Nations' special representative for women in Afghanistan, said the implications of the government's policies 'impacts all Afghans and will resonate throughout generations'.

AFP

It's distressing to witness deliberate, and systematic efforts to push Afghan women and girls out of the public sphere

ROZA OTUNBAYEVA

and university students, with the authorities banning them from secondary schools and higher educational institutions.

Some women have staged sporadic protests against the bans - risking arrest, violence and social stigma for taking part - but authorities usually disperse them swiftly.

"The time has come for the

Four dead in latest Egypt train crash

Cairo, Egypt - A train crash in Egypt killed four people and injured more than 20, officials said on Wednesday about the latest in a series of deadly accidents blamed on ageing infrastructure and mismanagement.

The train overshot the station and ran into the buffers at the end of the track after passing through a stop signal, in the Nile Delta city of Qalyub north of Cairo, the National Railways Authority said.

"That led to the derailment of the locomotive and the first carriage," it added in a statement.

Pictures from the scene showed emergency crews overnight using a crane to lift the derailed coach that appeared to be partially crumpled.

Egypt's health ministry later gave the final toll of four killed and 23 injured, doubling the number of dead that had been announced overnight.

Families of those killed in the latest train tragedy will receive compensation worth 100,000 Egyptian pounds (around



A crane is deployed to lift a derailed train at the scene of a railroad accident in the city of Qalyub in Nile delta region on Tuesday (AFP)

US\$3,000), said the solidarity ministry.

A similar amount will go to those seriously injured, a statement said.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has vowed to hold to account those responsible for recurrent deadly rail accidents in Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country.

In April 2021, Transport Minister Kamel el-Wazir fired the rail authority's head following uproar

over mismanagement of dilapidated train lines.

The sacking came after two train accidents within less than a month that killed more than 40 people.

Egypt's worst railway tragedy occurred in 2002, when a fire ripped through a train killing more than 370 people just outside Cairo.

Egypt's 105mn people depends largely on rail transport.

AFP

Four dead in Syria drone strike: Monitor

Beirut, Lebanon - A drone strike killed four people in government-held eastern Syria on Wednesday in an area controlled by Iran-backed factions, a war monitor said.

"Four people were killed and eight wounded in a drone strike near a weapons factory belonging to Iran-backed groups and near a truck loaded with weapons," Rami Abdel Rahman of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights told AFP.

There was no immediate word on who carried out the strike in the eastern city of Deir

Ezzor or whether the dead were fighters or civilians.

The strike targeted a part of the city that is home to residences of top Iranian commanders and senior officers of Lebanon's Hezbollah movement as well as an Iranian hospital to treat cholera patients, Abdel Rahman said.

Pro-Iran factions aligned with the Syrian government, including Hezbollah, are heavily deployed south and west of the Euphrates River which bisects Deir Ezzor province.

Israel has carried out re-

peated air and missile strikes against government forces and their Iran-backed allies. A US-led coalition has also carried out strikes.

State media said a landmine planted by 'terrorists' exploded in the same neighbourhood, causing casualties.

"A number of citizens were killed and wounded when a landmine planted by terrorists exploded in the Al-Hamidiya neighbourhood of Deir Ezzor," state news agency SANA reported.

AFP



NOTICE AND INVITATION TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of SEMBCORP SALALAH POWER & WATER COMPANY SAOG (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Tuesday at 03:00 PM on 28 March 2023, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) and will be held in this location (Online). If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting General Meeting shall be held on Wednesday at 03:00 PM on 29 March 2023, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) and will be held in this location (Online) to discuss the following agenda:

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agendas :

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2022.
 - To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2022.
 - To consider the Auditor's Report and to approve the Financial Statements (Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account) of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2022.
 - To approve the proposal authorizing the Board of Directors to determine and distribute interim cash dividends to the Company's Shareholders who are registered with the MCD on the 1 November 2023 out of the retained earnings as per the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2022, provided that the amount shall not be more than Baisas 7.5 per share.
 - To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2022 and to determine the sitting fees for the financial year ending 31 December 2023.
 - To consider and approve the proposal of distributing the total sum of RO 104,455 as remuneration for the Board of Directors of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2022.
 - To disclose the transactions that the Company entered into with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2022.
 - To appoint an independent entity to evaluate the performance of the Board of directors for the fiscal year ending on 31 December 2023, and determine their fee.
 - To consider the amounts allocated and spent for the company's social responsibilities for the year ended on 31 December 2022.
 - To discuss and approve the proposed allocation of RO 60,000 to fulfill the Company's Corporate Social responsibilities for the year ending on 31 December 2023.
 - To appoint the auditors of the Company for the financial year ending 31 December 2023 and determine their fees.
- According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority , we would like to draw your attention to the following:
- Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
 - Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on telephone No 93215022 or email: tariq.bashir@sembcorp.com

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Tan Cheng Guan

Legal Advisor
Al Buisaidy, Mansoor Jamal
Barristers and Legal Consultant

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'Suppression': China pushes for self-reliance

Beijing will 'optimise its management of the whole chain of science and technology innovation'

Beijing, China - China will conduct a sweeping revamp of its science ministry and tech capabilities, pouring more resources into manufacturing and research as Beijing pushes for self-reliance in the face of foreign attempts at 'containment and suppression'.

A broad restructuring document announced by China's cabinet on Tuesday and set to be approved by the country's parliament this week will refocus the Ministry of Science and Technology's resources on coordinating scientific and technological breakthroughs.

Beijing will 'optimise its management of the whole chain of science and technology innovation', the document said, as well as set up a national data administration responsible for overseeing the digital economy.

China faced 'a severe situation of international scientific and technological competition alongside external containment and suppression', said Xiao Jie, a member of China's State Council, as he introduced the plan at a meeting of the national parliament on Tuesday.

Beijing must 'better coordinate scientific and technological capa-



China's President Xi Jinping (bottom) arrives for the second plenary session of the National People's Congress (NPC) with other Chinese leaders at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Tuesday (AFP)

bilities to overcome difficulties in key core technologies', while also accelerating 'high-level scientific and technological self-reliance', Xiao said, according to an official readout.

The parliament is expected to approve the plan at its annual national meeting - known as the 'lianghui' or 'Two Sessions' - which wraps up on Monday.

The plan will slash staffing at

the country's central state institutions by five per cent, with the freed-up headcount reallocated toward 'key areas and important work'.

It will also replace China's ex-

isting banking and insurance regulator with a new body incorporating some functions from its central bank and securities watchdog, strengthening oversight over the financial sector, al-

ready subject to a sweeping crackdown.

Self-reliance

President Xi Jinping vowed earlier this month to boost the

and lagging growth at home, Beijing is also grappling with a shift by global corporations away from Chinese factories to manufacturers in countries such as India and Vietnam.

Xi told Two Sessions delegates on Sunday that China must develop high-quality manufacturing that is 'innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared'.

This year's parliamentary meeting follows a key Communist Party conclave last year that secured Xi another five years as head of the party and the military. The Chinese leader is expected to be reappointed as president this week. Changhao Wei, a fellow at Yale Law School's Paul Tsai China Center, told AFP that Tuesday's restructuring followed 'practically an unwritten rule that this must happen at the start of each government's five-year term'.

An even broader plan is expected after the Two Sessions close next week, with Wei adding that 'it's certainly possible, and even likely, that the Party (and Xi personally) would assert more control as part of this round of restructuring'.

AFP

Beijing must better coordinate scientific and technological capabilities to overcome difficulties in key core technologies while also accelerating high-level scientific and technological self-reliance

XIAO JIE

country's manufacturing capacity, telling Two Sessions delegates 'we must rely on ourselves'.

Faced with an increasingly hostile international environment



Activists of Jamaat-e-Islami party march during a rally to mark the International Women's Day in Lahore on Wednesday (AFP)

Women rally in Pakistan after legal challenges

Lahore, Pakistan - Thousands of women took part in rallies across Pakistan on Wednesday despite efforts by authorities in several cities to block the divisive marches.

Known as the Aurat (women) March, the rallies have courted controversy because of banners and placards waved by participants that raise subjects such as divorce, sexual harassment and menstruation.

Each year some of the most provocative banners ignite weeks of outrage and a slew of violent threats.

"The whole point of the Aurat March is to demand the security and safety that women are not afforded in this country and society," said Rabail Akhtar, a schoolteacher who joined a crowd of around 2,000 in Lahore on Wednesday, which was also International Women's Day.

"We are not going to sit silently anymore. It's our day, it's our time."

City authorities had at the weekend refused to provide security, despite allowing a 'modesty' counter-march to go ahead, forcing Aurat organisers to take them to court.

Judges ordered officials to back down, with the two sides settling on a different venue.

"It's ridiculous how we have to go through the same drama every year... Why are they so afraid of women demanding their rights?" asked Soheila Afzal, a graphic designer.

In Karachi, judges dismissed a legal challenge by an individual

to ban a related rally scheduled for the weekend so that working women can attend.

In the capital Islamabad, organisers have refused to comply with orders to confine the gathering to a city park where a woman was gang raped in February. Hundreds gathered outside the city's press club but were penned in by shipping containers and police who stopped them from marching.

Many held banners in support of Afghan women across the border who have had their rights stripped away by the Taliban government.

"Women used to be quiet, but now we have women on roads talking about their rights and justice, and I think that is the change they were looking for," said 24-year-old Aisha Masood.

The Aurat March is seen by critics as supporting elitist and Western cultural values in the Muslim country, with organisers accused of disrespecting religious and cultural sensitivities.

In 2020, groups of hardline Islamist men turned up in vans and hurled stones at women participating in the Aurat March in Islamabad.

Much of Pakistani society operates under a strict code of 'honour', systemising the oppression of women in matters such as the right to choose who to marry, reproductive rights and even the right to an education.

Hundreds of women are killed by men in Pakistan every year for allegedly breaching this code.

AFP

Australia PM says to meet Biden in US, submarine deal expected

Sydney, Australia - Australia's prime minister said on Wednesday he will soon meet President Joe Biden in the United States, where they are expected to unveil a nuclear submarine deal aimed at countering China's growing assertiveness in the Pacific.

After 18 months of negotiations, it's anticipated that Australia will reveal plans to obtain eight nuclear-powered submarines, in what Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has called 'the single biggest leap' in defence capability in the country's history. The deal is part of the fledgling regional security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States known as AUKUS.

"I'll be meeting with President Biden in the United States," Albanese told reporters in Perth on Wednesday.

"We'll have further announcements about details soon about the arrangements that will be taking place."

Australia does not have the expertise to build its own nuclear subs - which have an extended range and powerful strike capabilities - and must buy them from



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (AFP)

either the United States or Britain.

Since September 2021, detailed behind-the-scenes talks have been taking place between the AUKUS partners about how to equip Australia's military with sensitive nuclear-propulsion technology.

The deal has worried some of Australia's largest regional allies, with both Indonesia and Malaysia questioning whether it could spark a nuclear arms race in the Indo-Pacific.

While the subs will be powered by a nuclear reactor, Australia has ruled out equipping

them with nuclear weapons.

It is the first time US-derived nuclear submarine technologies will be exported since the 1960s, when the United States helped Britain design its own undersea fleet. The submarine contract is worth tens of billions of US dollars, but experts say its significance goes beyond jobs created and investments pledged.

Fearsome deterrent

Nuclear-powered submarines are difficult to detect, can travel large distances for prolonged periods and can be armed with so-

phisticated cruise missiles.

That, experts say, makes them a fearsome deterrent - allowing Australia to launch strikes or counterstrikes deep into enemy territory with little warning.

Beijing has voiced deep opposition to the project, which it sees as 'dangerous' and designed to corner China.

Major questions still linger, including whether Australia will look to buy US or British submarines, where they will be built and when they will be in the water.

"The AUKUS partnership seeks to provide a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability to Australia at the earliest possible date," a Pentagon spokesperson told AFP ahead of Albanese's announcement. "Bolstering our deterrence means boosting all of our industrial bases, growing our collective capabilities, and sharing technology as never before."

The AUKUS pact also foresees collaboration between the three allies on hypersonic missiles, artificial intelligence and cyber warfare.

AFP

China mine collapse: 53 'missing or dead'

Beijing, China - The collapse of a coal mine in northern China last month left a total of 53 people 'missing or dead', a top official has said, as search and rescue work appeared to come to an end.

Dozens of people and vehicles were buried when a 180-metre-high slope gave way at an open-pit mine in the Inner Mongolia region's Alxa Left Banner on February 22. Rescue workers initially recovered six people alive, while another six were found dead, as Beijing's ministry of emergency management urged 'all-out efforts' to save 47 workers left unaccounted for.

But the head of the ministry confirmed on Tuesday that no more people had been found two weeks after the incident, adding that the focus was now on ensuring such a disaster would not happen again.

AFP

Muted response as Thai hunger strikers hit 50 days

Bangkok, Thailand - Two young protesters held under Thailand's strict royal insult law entered their 50th day of hunger striking on Wednesday, but in the run-up to a general election and with the government cracking down on dissent, the response to their marathon action has been muted.

Tantawan Tuatulanon and Orawan Phupong have been in and out of court and hospital since beginning their hunger strike on January 18 to urge political parties to support the abolition of the kingdom's tough lese majeste laws.

But with mainstream politicians focused on the upcoming polls and many activists fearful of being charged with lese majeste themselves if they voice support, even after seven weeks of hunger the pair's protest is not making waves.

"There were many people at



This file photo shows Orawan Phupong being transported to continue a hunger strike outside Supreme Court in Bangkok on February 24 (AFP)

the beginning, but as the protest continues fewer people come," said Krisadang Nootjaras, from Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR), a legal aid group that handles many royal insult cases.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, a conservative former army chief who took power in a 2014 coup, has pleaded with the women's families to 'monitor'

their behaviour.

Opposition parties have stopped short of backing Tantawan and Orawan's calls for reform, reluctant to get entangled in the highly sensitive question of the monarchy so close to an election.

And there has been little action on Bangkok's streets, which were brought to a standstill by

mass youth-led protests in 2020 and 2021 that included demands for changes to the royal insult law.

Tantawan, 21, and Orawan, 23, were freed from custody last month as their condition worsened, and they are now conscious in hospital and receiving electrolytes, Krisadang said.

They were charged in 2022 with lese majeste over two separate protests in Bangkok.

Since the protest movement erupted in July 2020, TLHR says more than 200 people have been charged under article 112 of the penal code, which orders up to 15 years in jail for anyone who 'defames, insults or threatens' the king or his immediate family.

'Repressive environment'

Rights groups say the law is abused to silence political dissent, and the sentences handed

out can be severe - one woman got 43 years in prison in 2021.

At least 17 minors are facing prosecution, and on Tuesday a man was jailed for two years for selling a satirical calendar featuring yellow rubber ducks that a court ruled was insulting to the king. "Under this repressive environment people are fearing to come out, and speak out, and demand democracy and any other causes that they want," Amnesty International researcher Chanatip Tatiyakaroonwong told AFP.

"I think that partly contributes to the overall silence that we are seeing right now."

Chanatip said the election, expected sometime in May, added to peoples' fear of a tougher government crackdown. "Many people may have this assessment and decide to refrain from speaking out further," he said.

AFP

INDIA

ED summons Telangana CM KCR's daughter K Kavitha

New Delhi, India - The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has summoned K Kavitha, daughter of Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, on Thursday to record her statement in connection with its ongoing probe of the Delhi excise policy case, sources said.

Bharatiya Rashtriya Samiti (BRS) MLC Kavitha is learnt to be asked to depose before the investigators here at ED headquarters and record her statement. As per sources, Kavitha will be confronted with Hyderabad-based businessman Arun Ramchandra Pillai, who was arrested on Monday night in the case.

In its investigation, ED has come to know that Pillai is one of the key persons in the entire scam involving payments of huge kickbacks and the formation of the biggest cartel of the South Group.

South Group comprises Telangana MLC Kavitha, Sarath Reddy (promoter of Aurobindo Group), Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy (MP, Ongole), his son Raghav Magunta, and others. The South Group was being represented by Pillai, Abhishek Boinpalli and Butchi Babu, the federal agency investigation has revealed.

Pillai along with his associates was coordinating with various persons to execute the political understanding between the South Group and a leader of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Pillai has been an ac-



Bharat Rashtia Samithi (BRS) leader K Kavitha (ANI)

Bharatiya Rashtriya Samiti (BRS) MLC Kavitha is learnt to be asked to depose before the investigators here at ED headquarters and record her statement

complice and was involved in the kickbacks from the South Group and the recoupment of the same from the businesses in Delhi, ED investigation reveals.

The ED had earlier said that the South Group gave kickbacks of Rs 100 crore to AAP leaders.

Pillai is learnt to be a partner of 32.5 per cent in Indo Spirits, which had got an L1 licence.

Other partners include Prem Rahul (32.5 per cent) and Indospirit Distribution Limited (35 per cent). Pillai and Prem Rahul represented 'the benami investments of Kavitha and Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy and his son Raghava Magunta'.

Kavitha, who is a member of Telangana Legislative Council, was questioned by the Central

Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the same case in December last year.

ED, last year filed its first chargesheet in the case. The agency said it has so far undertaken nearly 200 search operations in this case after filing FIR after taking cognisance of a CBI case which was registered on the recommendation of the Delhi lieutenant governor.

The CBI inquiry was recommended on the findings of the Delhi chief secretary's report filed in July showing prima facie violations of the GNCTD Act 1991, Transaction of Business Rules (ToBR)-1993, Delhi Ex-

cise Act-2009, and Delhi Excise Rules-2010, officials had said.

In October, the ED had raided nearly three dozen locations in Delhi and Punjab following the arrest of Sameer Mahendru, managing director of Delhi's Jor Bagh-based liquor distributor Indospirit Group.

The CBI too filed its first charge sheet in the case early this week.

The ED and the CBI had alleged that irregularities were committed while modifying the Excise Policy, undue favours were extended to licence holders, the licence fee was waived or reduced and the L-1 licence was extended without the competent authority's approval. The beneficiaries 'diverted 'illegal' gains to the accused officials and made false entries in their books of account to evade detection. As per the allegations, the Excise Department had decided to refund the Earnest Money Deposit of about Rs 30 crore to a successful tenderer against the set rules. Even though there was no enabling provision, a waiver on tendered licence fees was allowed from December 28, 2021, to January 27, 2022, due to COVID-19.

This allegedly caused a loss of Rs 144.36 crore to the exchequer, which has been instituted on a reference from the Union Home Ministry following a recommendation from Delhi Lieutenant-Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena. ANI



Manik Saha takes oath as the Chief Minister of Tripura at Swami Vivekananda Stadium, in Agartala on Wednesday (ANI)

Manik Saha takes oath as Tripura Chief Minister

Agartala, India - Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Manik Saha, on Wednesday, sworn in as the Chief Minister of Tripura for the second consecutive term.

The swearing-in ceremony took place at the Vivekananda Maidan in Agartala. Other than CM Manik Saha, eight leaders, namely, RL Nath, Pranjit Singha Roy, Sushri Santana Chakma, Sushant Chowdhury, Tinku Roy, Bikash Debbarma, Sudhanshu Das, and Sukla Charan Noatia also took oath as ministers.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP President J P Nadda also witnessed the oath-taking ceremony.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu, Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh, and Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh ANI

Tamang were also present on the occasion.

BJP MLA Pratima Bhounmik, Rajya Sabha MP Biplab Deb, Tripura in-charge Sambit Patra, Mahesh Sharma and Mahendra Singh also attended the event.

Manik Saha, a dental surgeon, joined the BJP in 2016 after quitting Congress. He was made party chief of the state in 2020 and elected to Rajya Sabha in March 2022.

Saha, who led BJP to victory, was BJP MP until the change of guard which took place last year. In 2022, Saha replaced Biplob Kumar Deb to steer the party in the Assembly polls amid a multi-cornered contest in the northeast state.

Earlier on Monday, Saha called on Governor Satyadeo Narain Arya to stake claim to form the government in the Northeast state. ANI

Antarctic sea ice cover at record low

Paris, France - Sea ice in Antarctica shrank to the smallest area on record in February for the second year in a row, continuing a decade-long decline, the European Union's climate monitoring service said on Tuesday.

On February 16, the ocean surface covered by ice around the frozen continent shrank to 2.09mn sqkm (800,000 square miles), the lowest level since satellite records began, according to figures provided to AFP by the Copernicus Climate Change Service (CCS).

"Antarctic sea ice reached its lowest extent in the 45-year satellite data record," said Samantha Burgess, Deputy Director of CCS. AFP

Russia's Wagner group claims eastern Bakhmut captured

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russia's Wagner mercenary group claimed on Wednesday to have captured the eastern bank of Bakhmut, the industrial town in east Ukraine where fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces has raged for months.

The announcement came after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that if Bakhmut fell, Moscow would gain an 'open road' for offensives deeper into the country.

Wagner chief and Kremlin ally Yevgeny Prigozhin said on social media that his forces 'have taken all of the eastern part of Bakhmut', a salt-mining town with a pre-war population of 80,000.

The intense fighting around Bakhmut has been the longest and bloodiest in Russia's more than year-long invasion, which has devastated swathes of Ukraine and displaced millions of people.

Zelensky warned in an interview with CNN what could happen if Bakhmut falls to Russian



A Ukrainian serviceman stands in front of an anti-aircraft machine gun, in Siversk, Donbas region, on Tuesday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine (AFP)

forces.

'We understand that after Bakhmut, (Russian forces) could go further' and attack nearby cities in the Donetsk region.

"They could go to Kramatorsk, they could go to Sloviansk, it would be an open road for the

Russians after Bakhmut to other towns in Ukraine, in the Donetsk direction," Zelensky said in an interview set to air on Wednesday.

Wagner has spearheaded the attack on Bakhmut and its chief, Prigozhin, is locked in a dispute with Russia's military leadership.

Russia aims for 'further offensive'

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu told military officials during a televised meeting on Tuesday that taking control of the city would allow for 'further offensive operations' in eastern Ukraine.

Prigozhin estimated the day before that between '12,000 and 20,000' Ukrainian troops were still defending the town.

Zelensky told CNN that his armed forces were resolved to stay in Bakhmut.

"Of course, we have to think about the lives of our military. But we have to do whatever we can whilst we're getting weapons, supplies, and our army is getting ready for the counter-offensive."

Zelensky was set to meet UN chief Antonio Guterres in Kyiv as he makes his third visit to Ukraine since Russia's invasion.

Talks were expected to focus on extending a deal with Russia allowing Ukraine to export its grain. EU defence ministers were also meeting in Stockholm to discuss a plan to rush one billion euros' worth of ammunition to Ukraine as pressure mounts on Kyiv's allies to bolster supplies to the war effort.

Ukraine's Western backers warn that Kyiv is facing a critical shortage of 155mm howitzer shells as it fires thousands each

day in its fight against the grinding Russian offensive.

During a visit to Canada on Tuesday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen underscored a European resolve to ward off Russian aggression.

But a report by *The New York Times* on Tuesday claiming that US officials had seen new intelligence indicating a 'pro-Ukrainian group' was behind last year's sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipelines could raise difficult questions among the allies. "This is not our activity," Ukraine's Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov told reporters in Stockholm.

As Russia said it was closer to capturing Bakhmut, Ukraine said it had identified a soldier who had gone missing in the area being shot dead in a video that sparked outrage on social media.

The footage shows what appears to be a detained Ukrainian combatant standing in a shallow trench and smoking, and then being shot after saying 'Glory to Ukraine'.

AFP

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WPL auction changed our sport forever, says Alyssa Healy

Mumbai, India - Australia's Alyssa Healy said Wednesday that the Women's Premier League will inspire more Indian girls to take up the sport, with the Twenty20 tournament already a game-changer in its inaugural edition.

The WPL has earned India's wealthy cricket board around \$700 million in franchise and media rights, making it the second-most lucrative domestic women's sport competition globally after US professional basketball.

Some players will earn more during the three-week tournament than they normally get in an entire year after India batter Smriti Mandhana went to Royal Challengers Bangalore



Alyssa Healy (R) poses with the WPL trophy alongside Meg Lanning (L), Beth Mooney (2L), Harmanpreet Kaur (C) and Smriti Mandhana (AFP)

for \$410,000 in last month's auction.

"The Women's Premier League auction changed our sport forever. With the amount of money floating around, how could it not?," Healy, a wicket-keeper-batter, wrote in her column for Cricket Australia on International Women's Day.

"I can't believe the opportunities that now exist for us to make a living playing cricket around the world. I'm here in Mumbai for the WPL, I played in The Hundred over in the UK and a women's tournament has just been launched in Pakistan. How good is that?"

Healy captains the UP Warriorz franchise, which got the Australian for \$85,000.

"Chatting with some of the Indian players, they say that it takes young players coming into their squad a while to feel like they belong at international level," said Healy, a multiple World Cup winner and Commonwealth Games gold medalist.

"Now, they're playing in the WPL, bowling to the likes of Beth Mooney (Australia) and Nat Sciver-Brunt (England) day-in, day-out, it's scary to think how much better that will make the Indian team."

She added, "Even more importantly, the WPL will inspire the next generation of young girls in India to see a future in cricket."

"The WBBL (Women's Big Bash League) has been the envy of women's cricket for eight years now, but there's no denying the WPL will put pressure on our domestic competition."

The tournament's five debut franchises sold for nearly \$200 million -- more than the eight founding teams of the men's Indian Premier League in 2008.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has gone all out to promote the WPL, including holding a star-studded opening ceremony with Bollywood stars early this month.

The tournament currently underway in Mumbai will conclude with the final at the Brabourne Stadium on March 26.

AFP

'RUTHLESS', NOT ARROGANT

India skipper Rohit Sharma hits back at 'absolutely rubbish' criticism

Ahmedabad, India - Rohit Sharma on Wednesday angrily dismissed suggestions his India side had become overconfident, calling the criticism from former head coach Ravi Shastri "absolutely rubbish".

India will look to clinch the series against Australia with victory in the fourth Test starting Thursday in Ahmedabad and book their berth in the World Test Championship final.

The hosts took a 2-0 lead in the four-match series to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy before losing the third Test in Indore in just over two days.

Shastri accused the team of "a little complacency, a little bit of overconfidence".

Skipper Rohit hit back, saying: "Honestly, when you win two games and people on the outside feel that we are overconfident, it's absolutely rubbish, because you want to do your best in all four games."

He called his side "ruthless" more than arrogant. "Ravi himself has been in this dressing room, he knows what sort of mindset we have," said Rohit.

India lost the previous match by nine wickets on a viciously turning pitch at Indore, but the track at the world's biggest cricket stadium is expected to give the batsmen some respite.



India captain Rohit Sharma (L) speaks with team-mate Virat Kohli during a training session in Ahmedabad on Tuesday (AFP)



Australia's captain Steven Smith speaks during a press conference at the Narendra Modi stadium in Ahmedabad on Wednesday (AFP)

Australia's Smith hopes for 'bigger totals' on fourth Test pitch

Ahmedabad, India - Stand-in Australia skipper Steve Smith said Wednesday the pitch for the fourth Test looks good for batsmen and different from the usual day-one turners in the previous matches in India.

Australia will look to level the series at 2-2 in the final Test starting Thursday in Ahmedabad after they bounced back from two losses to win the third Test on a viciously turning pitch.

"It's just playing what's in front of us really, obviously the scores haven't been big throughout this whole series. India scored 400 in that first Test match and Rohit got 100 and 400 proved to be way too many," Smith told reporters.

"This wicket may be a little bit

different. Perhaps it may not spin as much from the first ball or the first day but I do think it will spin as the game goes on. So yeah, there might be opportunities for bigger totals on this wicket."

Smith was unsure of which pitch the crunch final Test would be played after the curators kept two tracks covered at the world's biggest cricket stadium.

But doubts for the visitors cleared as the day progressed on a hot afternoon in Ahmedabad.

"Yeah rocked up today and there was only one covered so yeah looks like they have chosen," said Smith.

"Looks like probably of the four wickets we've seen so far, potentially the flattest on day one."

New Zealand hope Williamson ready for Sri Lanka despite bereavement

Christchurch, New Zealand - New Zealand expect record-breaking batsman Kane Williamson will be "ready to go" when their Test series starts against Sri Lanka on Thursday, despite his late arrival because of a bereavement.

Williamson has remained at home in the build-up to attend a memorial service on Wednesday for his grandmother.

Ahead of the opening Test in Christchurch, captain Tim

Southee said the Black Caps were "feeling for Kane at the moment". Southee said that while Williamson had not been part of the team's preparations he had trained with his domestic side "so I am sure he will be hitting plenty of balls and making sure he is ready to go come Thursday".

The 32-year-old Williamson is key to New Zealand's chances in the two-Test series.

He overtook Ross Taylor to

It is a match (the win against England) that will be talked about for a long time, but they are a very humble group, now our focus will shift to Sri Lanka

TIM SOUTHEE

become their highest run-scorer in history in last month's second Test against England, when the hosts won by just one run in Wellington to draw the series.

Williamson's grandmother made headlines recently in New Zealand when she rang a radio talkshow to criticise a caller who complained the cricketer's un-

demonstrative style made him look "disinterested" at times.

"We're not a family that goes yahooping around," she said.

Speaking on the eve of the first Test, Southee said his players had moved on from the extraordinary England triumph.

"It is a match that will be talked about for a long time, but they are a very humble group, now our focus will shift to Sri Lanka," he said.

AFP



Kane Williamson

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FIVE-STAR SHOW

Benfica thrash Brugge to reach Champions League quarter-finals

Lisbon, Portugal - Goncalo Ramos struck twice to help Benfica romp to a 5-1 Champions League last 16, second leg win over Club Brugge on Tuesday in Lisbon and a 7-1 aggregate victory.

Ramos, who shot to global fame during the World Cup when he was selected ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo for Portugal and netted a hat-trick against Switzerland, set up the opener for Rafa Silva.

The 21-year-old forward then produced two clinical finishes either side of half-time to ensure the two-time European Cup winners would reach the quarter-finals in consecutive seasons.

Joao Mario struck from the spot to score in his fifth consecutive Champions League match -- Portugal great Eusebio was the last player to manage the feat for the club.

David Neres added the fifth for Benfica before Bjorn Meijer netted a spectacular late consolation.

Roger Schmidt's ruthless side finished top of a group containing heavyweights Paris Saint-Germain and Juventus, and made light work of Scott Parker's knock-out stage novices.

"It's always good (to score), a striker like me makes a living from that, but the most important thing was that we won and



Benfica's Goncalo Ramos celebrates his goal against Club Brugge in their UEFA Champions League round of 16 second-leg match in Lisbon on Tuesday (AFP)

played well," Ramos told Eleven Sports.

"Whoever we get (in the next round), we will play in the same way."

Benfica have only been beaten twice all season across all competitions and dominated from the outset against the Belgian visitors.

Chiquinho, who has taken Enzo Fernandez's place in midfield after his Premier League record transfer move to Chelsea

in January, returned from injury for the hosts.

Parker picked Ukrainian striker Roman Yaremchuk against his former side, pairing him with Noa Lang to try and spring an unlikely comeback.

Joao Mario, in sparking goalscoring form this season from midfield, netted after just two minutes with a glorious, flicked finish, but the goal was ruled out for an offside in the build-up.

The Portugal midfielder was then foiled by Meijer, who hacked his goal-bound effort off the line.

Eventually the hosts took the lead at the Estadio da Luz through Silva after 38 minutes, picked out well in the box by Ramos.

Silva showed good close control to dig out some space and a deft finish to beat former Liverpool goalkeeper Simon Mignolet.

Ramos steered home the second just before the break after being teed up by Joao Mario.

He netted a brace on Friday against Famalicao to help the Portuguese league leaders maintain an eight-point advantage and was decisive in the box yet again.

Ruthless romp

Ramos surged inside from the left before firing back across himself into the bottom corner, leaving Mignolet with no chance, notching his 22nd goal of the season across all competitions.

Close behind him on 20 is Joao Mario, enjoying the best goalscoring season of his career by a distance.

The 30-year-old midfielder slashed a volley narrowly off target early in the second half.

Brugge, who have now won just two of their last 17 games, were a surprise package in the group phase and helped eliminate Atletico Madrid, but were picked apart by the Eagles.

AFP

Raja first team to enter CAF Champions League last eight

Johannesburg, South Africa - Walid Sabbar scored his first CAF Champions League goals as Moroccan club Raja Casablanca became the first qualifiers for the quarter-finals with a 3-1 win over Guinean outfit Horoya on Tuesday. Sabbar notched a brace and Mohamed Nahiri also scored as the three-time African champions maintained a perfect Group C record with a fourth straight victory.

Raja have 12 points with two group games remaining, and a six-point lead over second-placed Simba of Tanzania, who edged Vipers of Uganda 1-0 in an east African showdown. Simba have six points, Horoya four and Vipers one with all three still in contention for the other ticket to the knockout phase of the premier African club competition.

Forced to play in Bamako, the capital of neighbouring Mali, because they do not have an international-standard ground, Horoya were behind after only six minutes when Sabbar struck.

It got much worse for the Guineans when goalkeeper Moussa Camara was sent off for handling outside the box, and Nahiri scored later. Raja, who last won the Champions League in 1999, were also reduced to 10 men with Jamal Harkass red-carded before half-time.

Sabbar netted again before Pape N'Diaye scored a consolation goal for Horoya. It was the first time Raja conceded in six Champions League group and qualifying matches this season.

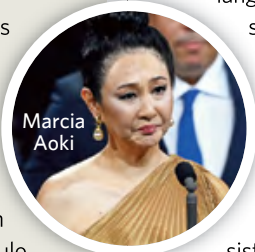
AFP

Pele's widow to inherit 30 per cent of his assets: lawyer

Sao Paulo, Brazil - The widow of late football legend Pele will inherit 30 percent of his assets, according to his will, which also mentions a woman who could be Pele's unrecognized daughter, the widow's lawyer told AFP on Tuesday.

The will states that Marcia Cibebe Aoki, Pele's third and last wife, will inherit his mansion in Guarujá, a seaside resort town south of Sao Paulo, where the couple lived, according to her lawyer Luiz Kignel.

Other assets belonging to Pele, who died after battling cancer in late December at age 82, include more real estate and a stake in the Pele brand, Kignel said, adding that a complete inventory has yet to be made.



Ten Hag sticks with Fernandes as United captain after Liverpool pain

Manchester, United Kingdom - Erik ten Hag launched a robust defence of Bruno Fernandes on Wednesday after the Manchester United captain was branded a "disgrace" for his attitude in last weekend's humiliation against Liverpool.

Fernandes was accused of giving up and showing poor body language as Liverpool scored six times in the second half of their historic 7-0 victory at Anfield on Sunday. The Portugal midfielder appeared to push one of the assistant referees and clashed with Liverpool's Trent Alexander-Arnold, leading some fans to call for him to be stripped of the captaincy.

Former United star Roy Keane called Fernandes a disgrace, but Ten Hag said the 28-year-old was the right man to lead the team and would remain skipper when club captain Harry Maguire does not play. Hailing Fernandes as an "inspiration" ahead of



Bruno Fernandes

He will learn as well because he's intelligent. I'm really happy to have Bruno Fernandes in my team and I am really happy he, if Harry is not on the pitch, is our captain

ERIK TEN HAG

Thursday's Europa League last 16 first leg against Real Betis at Old Trafford, Ten Hag told reporters: "I think he's playing a brilliant season. "He's had a really important

role in why we're in the position where we are because he's giving energy to the team.

"He's pointing and coaching players. He's an inspiration for

the whole team but no one is perfect. Everyone has his mistakes and everyone has to learn.

"He will learn as well because he's intelligent. I'm really happy to have Bruno Fernandes in my team and I am really happy that Bruno Fernandes, if Harry is not on the pitch, is our captain."

United forward Marcus Rashford also backed Fernandes, insisting he was a role model for the rest of the team.

"I love playing with Bruno, as you can imagine. He's been a good leader for us even when he's not been captain, which is always a good sign," he said.

"I don't have anything negative to say about Bruno. Like the manager said, nobody's perfect.

"Sometimes you want to win so bad you end up doing things that are a little bit out of character but, listen, 100 per cent support Bruno and am behind him."

United's shocking performance against Liverpool was especially surprising as Ten Hag's team had only just won the League Cup seven days earlier.

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Oman Golf Trophy grand finale concludes in spectacular fashion

Muscat - The grand finale of the Oman Golf Trophy concluded held on Wednesday at the stunning Al Mouj Golf in Muscat where Barbara Morati claimed the women's title with 29 points and Enrico Bardazzi took the men's honours with 32 points. Morati qualified for the final by winning at Circolo Golf Villa d'Este in Italy, which was played last October while Bardazzi, qualified for the final by winning at Circolo Golf Rapallo last November.

The Italian leg of the Oman Golf Trophy was played on seven of the most prestigious courses in Italy between September to November 2022, culminating with the finale in Muscat, with 14 of the Italian leg qualifying winners competing head-to-head for the title. The tournament reached its conclusion today after an action-packed week for the players who were treated to a tourism and investment awareness

programme to complement their golf interests in Oman. Al Mouj Golf once again glitened in the Omani sun proving a tough test for golfers for Oman's guests from Italy. Morati, who received the trophy from HE Mohammed al Wahabi, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in Foreign Ministry relished the opportunity to compete in the event. "It's been a great experience

to be a part of the Oman Golf Trophy, and have the chance to play such a fantastic golf course. The location is wonderful - on the coastline and next to the mountains. The people in Oman have been amazing. I am very honoured to be here and to experience all the destination has to offer," said Morati. Bardazzi added: "What a golf course. It was a great challenge and the people of Oman have been so welcoming. Hopefully

this can be the start of a great partnership between Italy and Oman and encourage others to come and experience the beauty of the Sultanate that we have witnessed this week." The Oman Golf Trophy, which invites Italians/Europeans to discover Oman's exclusive tourism experiences and rich business opportunities, is a unique golf diplomacy initiative aiming to promote investment and tourism opportunities in the country.



Barbara Morati

STAYING ALIVE

Chelsea see off Dortmund to reach Champions League quarter-finals

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea kept their season alive by beating Borussia Dortmund 2-0 at Stamford Bridge to progress to the quarter-finals of the Champions League 2-1 on aggregate on Tuesday. Raheem Sterling and Kai Havertz, with a twice-taken penalty, got the goals as the Blues relieved the pressure on manager Graham Potter.

third European Cup. "There was a fantastic feeling in the dressing room. We have been through a tough period and this competition means a lot for us," said Potter. "We wanted to progress and get into the last eight and it sets us up for the next few weeks." Dortmund arrived in England on the back of a 10-game winning run in all competitions. But the visitors posed barely any attacking threat in the first half bar a Marco Reus free-kick that Kepa Arrizabalaga did brilliantly to palm to safety. "We have to say, over the course of two games, Chelsea deserve to go through," said Dortmund boss Edin Terzic. "Both legs were very tight games. In this type of games inches and moments decide if you are going to the next round or not." Chances came and went frequently at the other end. Havertz smashed a volley off the inside of the post and then finally found the net via the underside of the bar only for the goal to be ruled



Chelsea's Raheem Sterling scores against Borussia Dortmund in their UEFA Champions League round of 16 second-leg match at Stamford Bridge in London on Tuesday (AFP)

We have to say, over the course of two games, Chelsea deserve to go through. Both legs were very tight games.

EDIN TERZIC



and Felix's follow-up effort was blocked on the line. Potter was uncharacteristically animated on the touchline as he constantly whipped the crowd up to keep pushing his side forward. "There is a lot of emotion in the end," added Potter. "It was tense in the end but the boys played fantastic. I am delighted for them to get the win and great for everyone here."

The home fans finally had something to celebrate three minutes before half-time. Sterling's first attempt was another one to forget as he swiped and missed Chilwell's low cross, but the England international composed himself to dribble past Reus and fire high into the net. "I had a little mis-kick with the first touch but it landed perfectly

and allowed us to build on that for our performance," said Sterling. That was just Chelsea's third goal in the last eight games. Havertz's penalty early in the second half meant Potter's men scored more than once for the first time since December 27, but the German international needed two spot-kicks to make his mark. Marius Wolf was penalised for handling Chilwell's cross after a VAR review.

Disappointed Dortmund must regroup to keep title dreams alive

Berlin, Germany - Moments after his side's controversial last 16 exit to Chelsea on Tuesday, Borussia Dortmund coach Edin Terzic gave his disappointed charges time to digest the defeat. "We're not thinking about the season right now" Terzic told Amazon Prime on the sidelines of Stamford Bridge after the 2-0 defeat saw Dortmund eliminated 2-1 on aggregate. "We're simply disappointed." Dortmund's run of 10 wins from 10 starts in 2023 had come to an end in contentious circumstances. With Chelsea up 1-0, the score tied at 1-1 on aggregate, a VAR intervention found a handball against winger Marius Wolf in the box. While Chelsea's Kai Havertz missed the spot kick, VAR again stepped in and told him to re-take it, as Dortmund players had entered the box too



Borussia Dortmund players surround referee Danny Makkelie as they protest against his decision that Chelsea's Kai Havertz should re-take his penalty during their Champions League round of 16 match on Tuesday (AFP)

early. Havertz converted the penalty at the second attempt and Chelsea held on for a 2-0 win. "The boys immediately

wanted to look at the replay of the penalty, because they hadn't seen it yet," Terzic said of the incident, which took place just after half-time but dominated

the post-match discussions. After a stuttering end to 2022, Dortmund closed the nine-point gap on leaders Bayern Munich this year and now sit just behind

the perennial German champions on goal difference with 11 games remaining. The challenge now for Terzic is to ensure the side's good form and a shot at a first league title since 2012 does not leave with it. "I don't talk about referees" Asked after the match why his side had fallen against Chelsea, Dortmund midfielder Emre Can answered simply "the referee". "The referee was very bad today... We're playing here at Stamford Bridge, maybe he's afraid of the fans." Dortmund's Jude Bellingham, ten years Can's junior, echoed his midfield teammate's sentiment. The English teenager felt the re-taken penalty was "a joke". AFP

'Special night' relieves pressure on Chelsea's Graham Potter

London, United Kingdom - Chelsea manager Graham Potter breathed a sigh of relief after his side finally delivered some return on a world record one-season spend in the transfer market on Tuesday by reaching the quarter-finals of the Champions League. The Blues overturned a 1-0 first-leg deficit by beating Borussia Dortmund 2-0 at Stamford Bridge thanks to goals either side of half-time from Raheem Sterling and Kai Havertz. Potter's job appeared to be on the line had his side exited Europe following a dreadful run of form in the Premier League and early exits from both domestic cup



Graham Potter (R) celebrates with Wesley Fofana

competitions. Chelsea's new ownership has remained loyal to the former Brighton boss despite just three wins in 16 games before Dortmund's visit. AFP

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14
BUSINESS BUZZ
The cream of business in Oman converged on the lawns of Al Bustan Palace



15
IN TOWN
Fifth Fun Fair for children and ISC Deccan Wing annual celebration



16
ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

Women were beginning to hit the streets en masse across the globe on Wednesday to defend rights that are coming under increasing attack.

To mark International Women's Day, capitals across the world planned marches, rallies and demonstrations, including in Madrid where broad tree-lined boulevards are regularly packed with a sea of purple, a colour often associated with women's rights.

Marches took place on Wednesday in Thailand and Indonesia, where a few dozen women gathered in front of the country's parliament to urge lawmakers to pass a long-awaited bill to protect domestic workers and some chanted 'long live Indonesian women'.

With the Taliban government's banning of women from universities in Afghanistan, Iran's repression of the Mahsa Amini protests, new US restrictions on abortion rights and the Ukraine war's impact on women, there are many reasons to protest.

Global progress on women's rights is 'vanishing before our eyes', UN chief An-



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mobilising over abortion rights

In Europe, marches were held in many countries, including France, where demonstrators demanded 'equality both, at work and in life' in around 150 towns and cities, a far higher number than in previous years, organisers say.

The protests will focus on the fight against France's deeply-unpopular pension reform which critics say is unfair to women.

In London, the Madame Tussauds museum marked the day by unveiling a new waxwork of suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst, who began an intense struggle 120 years ago that won women's right to vote. Elsewhere, demonstrations have been banned.

In Pakistan, where marches are criticised for promoting liberal Western values and for not respecting religious and cultural sensitivities, organisers have had to fight multiple court challenges to press ahead with demonstrations.

And in communist-run Cuba, activists seeking permission to demonstrate were arrested earlier this year, with feminist or-

Women's rights

Women march on, despite facing threat for their rights across the globe

Global progress on women's rights is 'vanishing before our eyes'. Its being abused, threatened, and violated around the world. Women and girls have been erased from public life

ANTONIO GUTERRES

tonio Guterres warned on Monday, saying gender equality would take another three centuries to achieve.

"Women's rights are being abused, threatened, and violated around the world," he added, pointing to Afghanistan, where "women and girls have been erased from public life".

Afghan universities reopened on Monday after a winter break, but only men returned to classes with the Taliban authorities' ban on women in higher education still in force some 18 months after they seized power.

On the eve of International Women's Day, the European Union imposed sanctions on individuals and entities deemed to be responsible for violence and rights abuses against women.

The Taliban's higher education minister Neda Mohammad Nadeem was sanctioned for depriving women from university learning. The sanctions also targeted officials from five other countries - Iran, Russia, South Sudan, Myanmar and Syria.



organisations instead urging people to join a 'virtual march' on social media to raise awareness about gender violence and femicides.

The day also saw feminists mobilising opinion, in particular, over abortion rights following the US Supreme Court's decision in June to overturn the 1973 Roe v Wade decision that had guaranteed a woman's constitutional right to terminate a pregnancy. In Europe, that right has also been undermined recently in Hungary and Poland.

"We are fighting against a patriarchy... that fights ad nauseam against rights - such as the right to abortion - that we have won through struggle," read the manifesto of the Madrid march.

AFP

Members of Thai labour unions, state enterprises and women's rights activists march for maternity rights on International Women's Day in Bangkok

LET'S BE FINANCIALLY INDEPENDENT



For International Women's Day and beyond, let's all fully embrace equity and focus on women becoming financially independent. Being financially independent and embracing equity isn't just a nice-to-have, it's a must-have.

Let us focus on becoming independent, I would say financially independent. We can be anyone's daughter, sister or wife - that does not matter. As a woman we should focus on becoming financially independent because the future is always uncertain. It's not just something we say or write about. It's something we

need to think about, know, value and embrace. It's what we believe in, unconditionally. Equity and financial independence means creating an inclusive world.

When women embrace equity and financial independence, we embrace diversity, and we embrace inclusion. We embrace equity and financial independence to forge harmony and unity, and to help drive success for all. Happy International Women's Day!

Sobhi Ann John
Chief coordinator - Marketing,
Al Hayat International Hospital

MORE POWER ON ALL RUNGS



A woman is lovable an affectionate mother, a caring daughter, awesome sister, and a great loyal friend. The essence of being a woman and 'equal status' of woman is important not only on women's day - it should make each and every day precious.

Women are now getting power even in rural areas. In many countries today, women are the head of state. Education has made every woman independent and they are no longer dependent. Laws and regulations have changed to allow

more women in the workplace and to give them a comfortable environment to work in.

We should cherish each and every day as 'women's day'. Don't be afraid of anything because you are a woman, you are strong at heart, and that's your inner strength. Women are powerful and the very embodiment of supreme nature - a personification of beauty, love, purity, grace, selflessness and dignity. Happy International Women's Day

Rema Sivakumar
Artist

business buzz



OMTB AWARDS 2022



take a break

IN TOWN

JASHN E DECCAN



The Deccani Wing of Indian Social Club celebrated 'Jashn e Deccan' recently with a concert by renowned Sufi singer from Hyderabad Adil Hussain. Photos: V K Shafeer



FIFTH FUN FAIR



The Association For Children With Disability organised Fifth Fun Fair activities for children at its premises last weekend



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Who led the expedition that successfully made the first ascent of Mt Everest in 1953?

A. Colonel H C J (John) Hunt
B. Sir Edmund Hillary
C. Tenzing Norgay
D. Eric Shipton
02. A group of what is usually called a "parliament"?

A. Owls
B. Ravens
C. Crows
D. Rooks
03. What is the name of a spectacular group of six canyons in the Sierra Madre Occidental in the southwestern part of Chihuahua, north-western Mexico, a name derived from the colour of the walls?

A. Copper Canyon
B. Painted Chasm
C. Black Canyon
D. Red Gorge

Answers: 1.A 2.A 3.A

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

BOGGLER

A	E	D	E
R	D	A	D
M	R	R	I
A	D	M	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

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Things is totally in black or white today. All the issues you're looking at are clear and easy to figure out, without any confusing gray areas. This is one of those days when quick thinking is easy, and any argument you get involved in should be over as soon as you bring up your one killer point! This lack of nuance and complexity can enable you to cut through all the noise people are making.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You've been keeping things light with a potential new sweetie, but why? Ask yourself if you're feeling indecisive about how much you really want to get to know them better. If you are, then you should let them off the hook. If you don't think you want to continue, don't keep them thinking that you're interested when you're not.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Right when you're in the middle of enjoying a totally flirtatious conversation, someone or something could emerge as a dark gray cloud blocking your sunny skies. The good news is that it's only one little cloud. You can easily choose to ignore this person and just carry on with your sassy self. Now that you're aware of the chance of clouds in the forecast, you'll have to deal with it.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You are on the verge of crossing a major hurdle in a new relationship. All you need to do is say how you really feel to push things right over the edge, so now is definitely not the time to be shy! You'll need to come out of your shell and show this person who you really are if you want them to know. Step right up and make a statement about your feelings.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Socialize as much as you can in every arena today. There's always a way to connect with other people, whether you're sitting a waiting room, standing in line, or taking notes in an important work meeting. Exposing yourself to a lot of unfamiliar energy will feed your curiosity. How do other people think? Contact them.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Are you running around in a hurry at work while no one else seems to notice that the situation requires any type of hustle? You can't panic and abandon them. You'll need to stay with them if you truly want to succeed at this task. While you wait patiently for them to catch up to you, keep yourself busy by double-checking your work so far.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You can make a lot of progress toward reaching a goal today. The timing is right, and your energy is focused. Nothing can distract you from something when you put your mind to it. You just need to put your mind to it as early in the day as you possibly can. Be aggressive. Stake your claim before someone else does.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You are feeling confident and ready to take a big risk right now, but before you leap ahead, stop and think for a minute. Are you fully prepared for this gamble? What if the worst-case scenario comes true? It isn't about thinking negatively, it's about being prepared in case things don't go your way. Taking a big risk and being foolhardy aren't the same thing.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Keep busy today even if you have to resort to cleaning out closets or reorganizing your sock drawer! Serious boredom isn't a fun thing to endure, and if you don't have enough to do right now you could fall into a blue funk. You have to use your creativity in order to keep your good vibe going. Personal relationships are becoming more valuable in helping you stay happy.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

There are so many amazingly warm conversations in store for you today. Sure, you might be attracting some unusual people, but they're generally very genuine folks, and they know how to tell one heck of a captivating story! Make one casual comment early on today, and it might trigger an engrossing, charming conversation that lasts.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You have a unique power to change whatever it is that you don't like about where you are in life right now. The only thing you have to realize is that the change you want can't come immediately. Slow and steady wins the race. Your impatience is natural, but it's keeping you from seeing some viable possibilities.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today, an unexpected change or cancellation could open up your schedule and let you breathe a huge sigh of relief! You can stay busy if you want to, but did it ever occur to you that this gift of free time should be enjoyed and savored? You can't be ungrateful to fate, can you? Take some time and play today. Watch a movie, take a nap, shop, or read a book.

entertainment



John Williams

HOLLYWOOD'S MAESTRO GOES FOR MORE OSCARS HISTORY

From Star Wars to Jaws to Schindler's List, John Williams has written many of the most instantly recognisable scores in cinema history. The 91-year-old is already the oldest person to receive an Oscar nomination for a competitive award, which he earned thanks to his spare yet poignant compositions for Steven Spielberg's The Fabelmans. With 53 total nods, Williams has more Academy Award nominations than any other living person, and is second only to Walt Disney, who had 59.



Chris Rock hits back at Will Smith in Netflix livestream

Chris Rock finally hit back at Will Smith on Saturday in a brutal stand-up routine, a year after the actor slapped him in front of a global TV audience for the Oscars. The comedian came out swinging, accusing the Hollywood star of 'selective outrage' when he reacted to a jibe about Jada Pinkett Smith's shaved head, and saying Smith lashed out at a shorter man because he was annoyed his wife had cheated on him. "Will Smith practises selective outrage," Rock told an audience in a show that was recently streamed live on Netflix.

'Everything Everywhere' dominates Spirit Awards week before Oscars

Everything Everywhere All At Once swept up yet more film prizes Saturday, as it was named best feature at the Spirit Awards - one of the last major Hollywood ceremonies before next weekend's Oscars. The trippy sci-fi won in every category it was nominated, at a ceremony held in a giant tent at Los Angeles' Santa Monica beach to celebrate low and mid-budget movies. Its voters granted a whopping seven awards to the film, which was made for around US\$25mn and became independent studio A24's biggest-ever hit, with a global box office gross above US\$100mn. Seen here, US-Vietnamese actor Ke Huy Quan holds the award for Best Supporting Performance for the same film.



Cole Sprouse admits working with Lili Reinhart was 'difficult' after split

After years of staying tight-lipped about his personal life, Cole Sprouse bared all on the March 8 episode of Call Her Daddy. Of course, host Alex Cooper didn't shy away from asking Cole about his relationship with Riverdale co-star, Lili Reinhart. The two dated from 2017 until right before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Cole 'dmitted that the breakup was 'really hard' for both, him and Lili, especially since they had to continue working on Riverdale together afterwards. "I think, the work thing got difficult because it was hard to suspend the way we felt about each other," Cole shared. "It didn't afford us the luxury of distance to really overcome that. I think, we both did quite a bit of damage to each other."

COMING SOON

SAVAGE SALVATION

Sheriff Church (Robert De Niro) and Detective Zeppelin strive to keep the peace in their rough town, where residents' only two interests are - the church or oxycodone.

Genre: Action

Starring: JRobert De Niro, Jack Huston, John Malkovich

Language: English



MUMBAI THRASH GUJARAT AS BOLLYWOOD SPRINKLES STARDUST ON WPL OPENER

Mumbai Indians thrashed Gujarat Giants by 143 runs in the opening match of the inaugural Women's Premier League tournament at a packed house in Mumbai last weekend. The tournament witnessed a star-studded musical performance by Bollywood actors amid thundering cheers by fans gathered for the first-ever cricket franchise league in what experts have billed a game-changing moment for women's sport. The WPL has earned India's cricket board a shade under US\$700 million in franchise and media rights, making it the second-most valuable domestic women's sport competition globally after US professional basketball.

BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: TU JOOTHI, MAIN MAKKAAR

Genre: Romance, comedy

Starring: Ranbir Kapoor, Shraddha Kapoor, Dimple Kapadia



JUST FOOLING AROUND

Director Luv Ranjan's Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar, starring Ranbir Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor, is a film that has a mix of hot and cold sequences that make you give him a thumbs-up at times and a thumbs-down at times - the film has much to be enjoyed and much to crib about. But, if you love Ranbir and his happy-go-lucky screen presence, then this film is a cool breeze for you. The story is about Rohan Arora aka Mickey (Ranbir Kapoor), the son of rich business magnate Ramesh Arora, who lives with his family in Delhi and also has a secret profession as a break-up artist. One day, Mickey and his best friend Manu Dabbas leave on a bachelor's trip to Spain, where they are joined by Dabbas's girlfriend Kinchi and her best friend Nisha Malhotra aka Tinni (Shraddha Kapoor), a modern fun-loving woman. Mickey and Tinni crazily fall for each other and Mickey introduces Tinni to his family. However, Tinni suddenly decides to break-up with

Mickey and hires a break-up artist to separate them, unaware that Micky is actually the break-up artist where he is now assigned to break his own relationship. By now, you would've decided whether you are going to watch this or clean up your wardrobe instead. What makes Tu Jhoothi Main Makkar enjoyable is the family drama woven into a love story - an aspect most of the blockbusters of the Khans seem to be ignoring big time these days - most main actors are orphans or have estranged par-

ents who are hardly seen, obviously for the big boys of Bollywood to slurp up all the cream. The conflict point between the lead pair in this romantic comedy is relatable. Also, the humour is not forced into the script. The film does have some good songs - if you love Pritam's concoctions, that is. Though some sequences seem stretched and many monologues tend to bore, there are times when you just want to run out of the cinema for a coffee or a piddle. But, cinematography by Ravichandran is praiseworthy and use of lavish locations adds value to the whole plot.

Rating ★★★★★