

Passenger arrivals up 94%, departures up 113% at Omani airports

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The number of passengers arriving at Oman's airports increased 94 per cent in February this year compared to the same period of 2022.

Data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) shows the number of departing passengers also increased 113 per cent year on

year in February 2023.

The number of international flights (arrivals and departures) from airports in Muscat, Salalah and Sohar went up 112.4 per cent to 14,250 in February 2023, compared to 6,708 in the same period in 2022.

The total number of arrivals, departures and transit passengers was 2,231,451 in February this year.

NCSI figures indicate that the

number of arriving and departing flights (international and domestic) through Muscat International Airport increased 102.3 per cent to 14,602 - carrying 2,004,924 passengers, up 117.2 per cent - in February 2023.

Salalah Airport recorded a 38.9 per cent increase in the number of international and domestic flights to 1,482 - carrying 210,865 passengers, up 43 per

cent - in February this year.

Sixty international flights - carrying 4,277 passengers - arrived and departed from Sohar Airport in February 2023.

In the NCSI stats on nationality of travellers through Muscat International Airport, Indians topped the list of departing and arriving passengers (123,130), followed by people from Bangladesh (44,233) and Pakistan (37,130) in February.

According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), Middle Eastern airlines' January traffic rose 97.7 per cent compared to January a year ago. Capacity increased 45.9 per cent and load factor climbed 20.8 percentage points to 79.2 per cent.

International traffic increased 104 per cent compared to January 2022 with all markets recording strong growth, led by

carriers in the Asia-Pacific region, IATA stated.

"Air travel demand is off to a very healthy start in 2023. The rapid removal of COVID-19 restrictions for Chinese domestic and international travel bodes well for the continued strong industry recovery from the pandemic throughout the year. And, importantly, we have not seen the many economic and geopolitical uncertainties of the day

dampening demand for travel," said Willie Walsh, Director General of IATA.

In its *Global Fleet and MRO Market Forecast 2023-2033*, global management consulting firm Oliver Wyman noted that the Middle East remains among the fastest-growing aviation markets in the world, with the regional fleet set to expand 5.1 per cent annually over the next decade.

Humans migrated out of Africa through Dhofar

Tools dating back to first human migration out of Africa found in Dhofar

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Hand axes from the period of the first human migration out of Africa, circular burial chambers, a collection of rock engravings, and an Arabian Stonehenge are some of the unique findings reported by an international team led by the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS) in Prague.

The team successfully completed its third excavation season in Oman in March and collected samples, which are now being analysed by experts and will contribute to the reconstruction of the earliest history of the world's largest sand desert - Rub al Khali.

Czech archaeologists have been focusing on the still under-explored desert areas of Oman for a long time. More than 20 archaeologists and geologists from ten countries were involved in the excavations at two different sites.

The first expedition team was situated in Dhofar, while the second operated in Duqm.

Arabian Peninsula as a migration corridor

In the dunes of Rub al Khali in Dhofar, researchers unearthed stone hand axes that date back to the first human migration out of Africa some 300,000 to 1.3mn years ago. Due to its geographical



Archaeologists of an international team led by the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague unearthed hand axes, circular burial chambers and a collection of rock engravings in Dhofar and Duqm

The detected interactions of African and Arab archaeological cultures characterise the mobility of populations of anatomically modern humans. It will be interesting to confront these findings

VIKTOR CERNY

location, Arabia served as a natural migration route from the African cradle of humankind into Eurasia, stated CAS in a report.

Among dunes up to 300m high, the team managed to find eggshells of extinct ostriches and an old riverbed from a period

when the climate in Arabia was significantly wetter. "Our findings, supported by four different dating methods, will provide valuable data for reconstructing the climate and history of the world's largest sand desert. Natural conditions also shaped prehistoric settlements, and what we are trying to do is study human adaptability to climate change," said expedition leader and coordinator Roman Garba from the

Institute of Archaeology.

Circular burial chambers

The second expedition team operated in Duqm, focusing in particular on a Neolithic tomb dating back to 5,000-4,600 BC at the Nafun site.

"What we find here is unique in the context of the whole of southern Arabia. A megalithic structure concealing two circular burial chambers revealed the skeletal remains of at least several dozen individuals. Isotopic analyses of bones, teeth and shells will help us learn more about the diet, natural environment and migrations of the buried population," explained Alzbeta Danielisova from the Institute of Archaeology.

Not far from the tomb, there is a unique collection of rock engravings spread out over a total of 49 rock blocs, whose different styles and varying degrees of weathering provide a pictorial record of settlements from 5,000 BC to 1,000 CE. Researchers also investigated stone tool production sites from the Late Stone Age.

The research in Oman is part of a wider project by evolutionary anthropologist Viktor Cerny from the Institute of Archaeology. His research focuses on biocultural interactions of populations and their adaptation to climate change.

"The detected interactions of African and Arab archaeological cultures characterise the mobility of populations of anatomically modern humans. It will be interesting to confront these findings also with the genetic diversity of the two regions and create a more comprehensive view of the formation of contemporary society in Southern Arabia," Cerny explained.

'Oman's embassy in Sudan safe'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Foreign Ministry on Tuesday put to rest rumours that Oman's embassy in the Sudanese capital Khartoum was under siege.

A statement issued by the Foreign Ministry said, 'The ministry would like to confirm that the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Khartoum is safe and sound.'

The statement from the ministry came following reports circulated on social media stating that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of Sudan had taken control of the embassy.

The Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary RSF agreed to a ceasefire following intense negotiations, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

said in a statement shortly before the truce took effect at midnight (2200 GMT Monday).

Three previous bids to pause the conflict had failed to take hold, but both sides confirmed they had agreed to the three-day halt of armed hostilities.

However, security fears were compounded when the World Health Organization warned of an "extremely dangerous" risk after fighters occupied a Khartoum laboratory holding samples of polio, measles and other infectious diseases.

Ten days of heavy fighting until Monday - including air strikes and artillery barrages - killed hundreds of people, many of them civilians, and left some neighbourhoods of greater Khartoum in ruins.

Biden, 80, announces 2024 re-election bid

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden announced on Tuesday his bid "to finish the job" with re-election in 2024, plunging at the record age of 80 into a ferocious campaign that could set up a rematch against Donald Trump.

Launching his pitch in a video on the same date he first began his 2020 challenge against Trump, Biden said he was still fighting to save American democracy from Republican "extremists."

"When I ran for president four years ago, I said we're in a battle for the soul of America. And we still are," Biden pronounces in the voiceover. "That's been the work of my first term: to fight for our democracy," Biden says. "Let's finish this job - I know we can."

After a series of big domestic legislative wins, a strong economic recovery from the COVID



US President Joe Biden

19 pandemic, and momentous foreign policy struggles, Biden has no real challenger from within the Democratic Party.

But he will face constant and fierce scrutiny over his age.

The veteran Democrat would be 86 by the end of a second term. Even if a medical exam in February found him "fit" to execute the duties of the presidency, many including in his own voter base believe he is too old.

See also [Page 08](#)

04

Salalah Free Zone signs \$230mn investment deal

10

Kenya starvation toll climbs to 89

25 evacuated from wadi in spate as rains lash parts of Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Oman Police evacuated 25 citizens in North Sharqiyah after heavy rains caused flooding in parts of the governorate.

Moderate to heavy rains lashed several governorates in the past three days, according to Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). 'A number of wadis overflowed. There are still low clouds and fog spread over parts of the sultanate,' CAA said in a statement.

Teams from ROP were called in to evacuate 25 citizens from the Suqah area of Jabal Asswd to Ismaia in the wilayat of Dima Wa al Tain in North Sharqiyah due to overflowing wadis.

Rains caused by a low-pressure trough are likely to continue to affect the country's weather till the weekend.

On Tuesday evening, rains of varying intensity were reported from the wilayats of Ibra, Mudhaibi and Sinaw in North Sharqiyah, accompanied by hail in some villages.

In Nizwa in Dakhliyah, a wadi in spate swept away several cars, while heavy rains were reported in Amerat in Muscat, leading to overflowing wadis in the wilayat. The wilayats of Duqm and Mahut also reported light to moderate rains.

Tornadoes

According to the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority



(Supplied photo)

(CDAA), tornadoes accompanying thunderclouds were monitored in the wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in South Sharqiyah during the Eid al Fitr holiday.

74mm rainfall in Wadi Bani Khalid

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR), Wadi Bani Khalid - one of the sultanate's

most popular tourist destinations - recorded the highest rainfall of 74mm since Saturday.

Data collected from the rain monitoring stations of MAFWR from Saturday till Monday 9pm

showed that Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and Al Qabel received 73mm rainfall, followed by Al Kamil Wa al Wafi (68mm) and Ibra (40mm).

The data showed 34mm of rains in Bidiyah during the same period, 28mm in Amerat, 22mm in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, 15mm in Dima wa al Taiyen and 9mm in Sur.

Remote learning

Rains led to the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Sur announcing implementation of remote learning on Tuesday due to thunderstorms that the wilayat witnessed. 'Classes and examinations will resume on Wednesday,' it had stated on Monday.

Our Correspondent

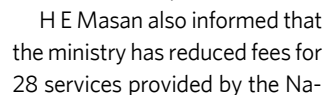
Muscat

According to H E Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, this year's celebrations are being held under the slogan 'Women and Intellectual Property: Accel-



erating Innovation and Creativity' reiterating the important role of women in building society.

H E Masan also said that the



"In cooperation with Omani Society for Intellectual Property and the World Intellectual Property Organization, the ministry will organise a celebration on May 17 to focus on recent achievements and the measures adopted by the sultanate to encourage innovators and to hail the role of women and their contributions to innovation," H E Masan said.

Rob McIntosh, CEO of MAC Global, said, "Prepare to laugh yourself silly at *Jason Manford: Live*. Set to be an unmissable evening, Manford is one of the most popular comedians on the planet and you're invited to

Manford began his career in 1999 while working at the Buzz Comedy Club in Chorlton, Manchester in the UK. At 17, when working as a glass collector, he stepped in to fill an evening set when a performer didn't show up which marked the beginning of his comedy career. Just six gigs later, he was crowned The City Life North West Comedian of the Year.

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350kg of marine debris pulled out in Quriyat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Quriyat Divers organised a coral reef clean-up campaign in Quriyat on Sunday. Eight divers participated in the clean-up activity.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Juma Khamis al Amri, head of Quriyat Divers, said, "The clean-up was held in the Al Hidab area of Quriyat. Divers worked from 3pm to 7:30pm at depths of 19m and removed 350kg of fishing nets."

Besides cleaning up, according to Amri, the initiative also aimed at spreading awareness on preserving coral reefs from

The biggest challenge that divers face while carrying out marine cleaning activities come from discarded fishing nets, which are also responsible for the deaths of many marine creatures

JUMA KHAMIS AL AMRI

pollutants and remnants of fishing equipment, preventing the dumping of waste, and encouraging volunteerism among com-



munities.

"These campaigns are ideal opportunities to make a positive change that serves the marine environment by removing marine debris that spoil the beauty of nature.

"Continuous activities of cleaning the marine environment from fishing waste contribute to increasing fish production, preserving endangered species and maintaining a clean marine environment," Amri said.

He added that the biggest challenge that divers face while carrying out marine cleaning activities come from discarded fishing nets, which are also responsible for the deaths of many

marine creatures.

According to Amri, the clean-up activity on April 23 was part of a series of campaigns Quriyat Divers is conducting in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Environment Authority and the Coast Guard. To date 23 clean-up activities have been held.

"The team is enthused to continue the important work of cleaning Oman's seas. We hope fishermen abide by fishing laws issued by the competent authorities and use modern methods of fishing and technology to preserve our marine wealth," said Amri.

School startup creates eco-friendly filament from waste for 3D printers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Three-dimensional printing is revolutionising the manufacturing industry but the use of plastic to make products is a factor that takes the sheen out of this futuristic technology. Bringing a change and further revolution to the technology in Oman is a group of students from Dohat al Adab School in Muscat that has produced biodegradable filaments, the raw material used in 3D printing, from waste organic materials and bioplastics.

The students have formed a company called ECOF and shown that innovation, with the right dose of ecological responsibility, can be used for one's own benefit as well as the good of society.



The student company won the first place in the National Olympiad for Innovations organised by the Ministry of Education and will participate in a global competition being held in the United States in May.

ECOF consists of eight students - Shadher Abdulsalam al Kharousi, Maryam Wahb al Rahbiya, Wassan Saif al Habsi, Arwa Saif al Khasibi, Quds Salim al

Maskari, Habiba al Nabhani, Dana Ibrahim al Barashdi and Fatima bu Bakr al Rawahi.

According to Eman Ali al Rahbiya, supervisor of ECOF, the idea for the product emerged from the widespread use of 3D printers leading to growing demand for plastic filaments, and a prevailing opportunity in the Middle East region owing to the fact that most companies import filaments from

China and other countries, for which customers are paying a higher price.

Talking of the challenges ECOF faced, she said the company received no financial support from the competent authorities. "We did not even receive support to access adequate laboratories and had difficulty researching the product in the initial stage."

The company is currently working on an integrated production line to manufacture the product, which will provide jobs and support the national economy.

Eman emphasised the importance of information and communication technology and artificial intelligence in promoting innovation.

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Oman Development Bonds

On behalf of the Government of Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Oman announces an issue of Government Development Bonds to be sold by auction. The 68th issue of Government Development Bonds will be issued on Thursday, 04/05/2023, carrying a coupon rate of 5.25% per annum for a maturity period of 5 years (maturing on 04/05/2028). These Bonds will be auctioned on Tuesday, 02/05/2023. Investors may apply for these Bonds through competitive bidding only.

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For any enquires:

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An investor must provide the same Bank Account details registered with MCD.

68th issue Opens on Sunday, April 16th, 2023 & closes on Monday, May 1st, 2023.

The minimum subscription amount is RO 500 and in multiples of RO 100

To view the 68th issue of Government Development Bonds, please visit the following websites:

Ministry of Finance | www.mof.gov.om

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Fak Kurbah: 811 debtors released so far

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A total of 811 debtors have been released as part of the Fak Kurbah initiative this year, according to Omani Lawyers Association.

The initiative helps raise funds to pay off debts of individuals serving sentences in insolvency cases.

A statement issued by Fak Kurbah said, "We have succeeded in releasing 811 detainees by paying all their financial obligations so far this year."

The Fak Kurbah initiative has been run by the Omani Lawyers Association since 2012.

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Salalah Free Zone signs \$230mn investment deal



Salalah Free Zone signed the agreement with Chinese silicon industry company Besto Hengda Oman (ONA)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Salalah Free Zone, a subsidiary of Asyad Group, has signed a new investment agreement for the establishment of a major ferroalloy and high-quality packaging paper production plant in Salalah.

The project will be built on an area of 300,000 square meters with an investment of US\$230mn, Salalah Free Zone announced in a tweet.

Salalah Free Zone signed the agreement with the Chinese silicon industry company Besto

Hengda Oman to set up the project.

In the first phase develop-

ment, the plant will have annual production capacity of 90,000 tonnes of ferrosilicon alloys.

In the first phase, the project will have annual production capacity of 90,000 tonnes of ferrosilicon alloys and 300,000 tonnes of recycled packaging paper

The output will be doubled in the second phase to 180,000 tonnes per annum, Salalah Free Zone said.

The production capacity for recycled packaging paper will be about 300,000 tonnes annually in the first phase.

Salalah Free Zone, situated adjacent to the Port of Salalah, is managed and operated by Salalah Free Zone Company and is one of Oman's most important industrial hubs.

The free zone is highly competitive in the region for labour, utilities and infrastructure costs, and located in close proximity to raw material sources and emerging markets.

Salalah Free Zone provides competitive incentives that make it easier for investors and industrialists to establish projects and start operating, producing and exporting rapidly and efficiently.



Fitch revises Omantel's outlook to 'positive'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings has revised the outlook on Omantel's long-term issuer default rating (IDR) to 'positive' from 'stable' and affirmed the company's rating at 'BB'. Fitch also upgraded Omantel's senior secured instrument rating to 'BB+' from 'BB'.

Omantel's outlook revision reflects the revision of the outlook on Oman's 'BB' sovereign rating in April 2023, Fitch said in a statement.

The rating agency said that Omantel's rating is constrained by Oman's sovereign rating and it assesses the company's government linkage as strong.

"The company is 51 per cent owned by the state and our assessment of the overall links under the government-related entities (GRE) rating criteria is strong. We view the status, ownership and control factors as well as the financial implications of default as strong.

The state appoints the majority of the board of directors and has a direct influence on the

company's strategic direction. The track record of support is also strong, evidenced by Omantel's regional expansion," Fitch said.

The rating agency said it continues to assess Omantel's standalone credit profile (SCP) at 'bbb-', anchored by a strong domestic competitive position and good liquidity position in an increasingly competitive market.

Fitch noted that the sale and leaseback of Omantel's head offices and 2,519 of its mobile towers in Oman in 2022 led to significant deleveraging as proceeds were used to repay debt.

"We view passive mobile towers as non-core assets, similar to office buildings. The sale of towers to Helios Towers does not change our view of Omantel's operating risk profile but improves financial flexibility. Helios will fund the capital expenditure for 300 new sites through a build-to-suit agreement, which will expand Omantel's network reach and densify coverage in higher footfall areas," Fitch said.

The rating agency noted that mobile market competition is in-

tensifying in Oman as Vodafone Oman entered the highly competitive prepaid mobile market in March 2022.

"Oman is a mostly prepaid market, similar to other GCC markets, and 67 per cent of Omantel's mobile subscriptions were prepaid in 2022. With competition intensifying, Omantel's total mobile subscriber market share was down in 2022, although it remained the market leader," the rating agency said.

Fitch pointed out that Omantel made good progress in 2022 in transitioning prepaid customers onto postpaid contracts where average revenues per year are higher.

"If Vodafone Oman enters the postpaid market, it will put Omantel's mobile revenue under greater pressure with average revenue per user and subscriber numbers likely to fall further," the rating agency said.

Omantel maintained its leading market share in fixed-line services with shares of 71 per cent of subscribers and 82 per cent of revenue in Oman in 2022, Fitch added.

Gulf Mushroom Products Co. (S.A.O.G.)	
Report On Material Events & Significant Changes For The Period Of Three Months Ended On 31 March 2023	
MATERIAL EVENTS In the annual general meeting of the company held on 15 March 2023 the shareholders declared bonus shares at 10% (one share for every ten shares) and cash dividend at 10% (Ten Omani Balza per share).	
MATERIAL CHANGES IN FIGURES Sales - During the period the company achieved a sales turnover of RO 2,614 million compared to RO 2,469 million for the same period last year, an increase of about 6%.	
Gross Profit - During the period the company made a Gross Profit of RO 1,271 million compared to a Gross Profit of RO 1,313 million for the same period last year, a decrease of about 3%.	
Selling & Distribution Expenses - During the period the company incurred RO 187,000 as Selling & distribution expenses compared to RO 167,000 for the same period last year, an increase of about 12%.	
General & Administration Expenses - During the period the company incurred RO 338,000 as General & administration expenses compared to RO 261,000 for the same period last year, an increase of about 30%.	
Profit before tax - During the period the company earned Profit before tax of RO 541,000 compared to Profit before tax of RO 652,000 for the same period last year, a decrease of about 18%.	
Income tax - During the period Company provided Income tax of RO 82,000 compared to RO 100,000 provided for the same period last year, a decrease of about 19%.	
Profit after tax - During the period company earned a Profit after tax of RO 459,000 compared to profit after tax of RO 562,000 for the same period last year, a decrease of about 18% for above reasons.	
Chief Executive Officer	
The complete accounts of Gulf Mushroom Products Co. SAOG will be delivered to any shareholder or other interested party who requests them, in either Arabic or English, as requested, within 7 days of receipt of written request.	
M/s Gulf Mushroom Products Co. SAOG P.O. Box: 383, Postal Code: 320, Barka, Sultanate of Oman, Fax: 00968 26883955, Email: info@gulfmushroom.com	

OOMCO to develop mega service stations along Batinah Expressway

Muscat - Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) recently signed an agreement with ALWefaq Trading and Al Shidhani International to develop mega service stations along the Batinah Expressway.

At 30,000 square metres each, all three sites will be offering a one-stop shop designed around a wider variety of services that drivers need on the go, OOMCO said in a press release.

The service hubs, of which one will be located in the Wilayat of Liwa and two others in the Wilayat of Barka, will include not just fuel stations but also coffee shops, car care centres, convenience stores, shopping complexes featuring global brands and ATMs.

Tarik Mohammed al Junaidi, chief executive officer of OOMCO, said, "We are looking



forward to developing what hopefully will become convenient service hubs in Liwa and Barka. Our stations have been diversifying and becoming increasingly versatile over the past few years, offering not just premium fuel and other quality car-related services and products, but also

branded food and other convenient items as the company continues to grow beyond the pump."

From investing in cutting-edge technologies to engaging in strategic partnerships with brands, and expanding into logistics, OOMCO continues to con-

nect with its customers to meet and exceed their expectations. As part of its regional expansion strategy, not just Oman but also Saudi Arabia and Tanzania are among key growth markets for the company with more service stations becoming available to customers in all these countries.

GPCA Plastics Conference to begin from May 14 in Saudi Arabia

Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia - The Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) Plastics Conference, the leading gathering for polymer industry professionals in the region and globally, will return for another landmark edition to Saudi Arabia on May 14-15, 2023 to welcome hundreds of industry experts to Al Khobar for two days of immersive knowledge sharing, networking and best practices exchange.

Now in its 12th edition, the conference will be held under the theme 'Investing in New Value



Dr Abdulwahab al Sadoun

Creation: A Sustainable Transformation' to address some of

the most pertinent questions facing the polymer value chain in the Arabian Gulf region and beyond.

Dr Abdulwahab al Sadoun, Secretary General of GPCA, commented: "Addressing the issue of plastic waste and circularity will require an enormous effort, collaboration and investment. We would need a systems-level change to transform the global plastic economy as well as commonly proposed approaches for good global plastics governance. With the plastic value chain being one of the

most complex, knowledge sharing, education, innovation and collaboration are at the heart of creating a step change in our approach to plastic waste."

The conference will host the CIRCUL-A-THON challenge launched by SABIC and Plug and Play earlier this year to engage with creative and visionary designers in the quest to find solutions facing the future of circularity. The challenge focuses on industrial designs for real-life products having ease of reuse and recyclability of plastics throughout their life cycles.



UBS hopes to complete Credit Suisse takeover before July

Zurich, Switzerland – UBS said Tuesday it would likely complete its takeover of stricken rival Credit Suisse before the end of June, as the bank posted an underwhelming first quarter net profit of US\$1bn.

All eyes were on what shape Switzerland's biggest bank is in as it prepares to carry out its rescue merger with its closest domestic competitor.

Analysts polled by the Swiss financial newswire AWP expected UBS's first quarter net profit to tick in at around US\$1.7bn, down from US\$2.1bn a year ago.

Net income for the first quarter was reduced by an increase in litigation provisions of US\$665mn to settle an old dispute linked to the sub-prime crisis in the United States.

The bank said it was in advanced discussions with the US Department of Justice and reported progress towards settling the case.

UBS said it saw a net inflow of new money into its global wealth management division of US\$28bn, of which US\$7bn came in the last 10 days of March, following the takeover announcement.

And returning chief executive Sergio Ermotti said he would give clarity as soon as possible within the coming months on what the scene would look like for domestic banking within Switzerland.

He said any decisions would be "based on facts", saying public discussion at this stage was "totally based on emotions and in many cases, totally uninformed".

"Whatever we do has to be sustainable and viable," he stressed, in a conference call with analysts.

There are concerns within Switzerland about thousands of prospective job cuts, plus the vast size of the new bank squashing consumer and business choice – and potentially being too big for the state to rescue if it got itself into trouble.

UBS shares dropped in morning trade on the Swiss stock exchange Tuesday. Shares were down 3.9 per cent at 17.48 Swiss francs each in mid-morning trading. On March 19, the Swiss government, central bank and financial regulator strongarmed UBS into a US\$3.25bn shotgun marriage to ensure its smaller, but still "too-big-to-fail" rival, did not go bankrupt.

"We are focused on completing the acquisition of Credit Suisse, most likely in the second quarter of 2023," UBS said.

"While acknowledging the magnitude of, and complexity associated with, the integration and restructuring of Credit Suisse, we believe that this combination presents a unique opportunity to bring significant, long-term value to all of our stakeholders."

Ermotti said the transaction would help to "reinforce the

leading position of the Swiss financial centre and will be of benefit to the entire economy."

Analyst at Swiss investment managers Vontobel Andreas Venditti said UBS's investment case had "changed from a capital-generative firm with high returns of capital to shareholders, to a complex restructuring story".

"At least UBS has secured a reasonable price and significant loss protections," he added.

Credit Suisse on Monday published perhaps its final quarterly results ahead of the merger, revealing the desperate situation it was in when the takeover deal was pushed through.

The bank saw 61.2bn Swiss francs (US\$68.6bn) withdrawn in the first quarter of 2023 alone – mostly made in panic around the takeover time – following 110.5 billion Swiss francs in withdrawals in the fourth quarter last year. While Credit Suisse said those outflows had "moderated", it acknowledged they "have not yet reversed".

Credit Suisse reported deceptively-bloated net profits for the first quarter, which swelled to 12.4bn Swiss francs (US\$14bn), up from a significant loss a year earlier.

But that was largely attributed to holders of high-risk Credit Suisse debt being wiped out in the emergency takeover deal.

AFP

First Republic Bank dives on 40% drop in deposits

New York, US – Amerian bank First Republic Bank said Monday that it lost more than 40 per cent of its deposits in the first quarter this year, but added that the situation has stabilised since late March.

Its shares fell more than 20 per cent in after-hours trading, following its first earnings report since the dramatic failures of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and Signature Bank last month shone a spotlight on regional lenders and their vulnerabilities.

The collapse had sparked fears of contagion, prompting US authorities to unveil emergency measures to fortify the industry.

First Republic – which announced a major employee downsizing to cut costs – reported deposits of US\$104.5bn at the end of March, a drop of nearly US\$72bn from the level at end-2022.

"Deposit activity began to stabilise the week of March 27 and has remained stable through April 21," the bank said Monday.

"Total deposits were US\$102.7bn as of April 21, 2023, down only 1.7 per cent from March 31, 2023," it added.

The bank said this primarily reflected seasonal client tax payments that occur each April.

Like SVB, First Republic held a large percentage of uninsured deposits that are considered more prone to bank runs.

Regional banks have been under pressure since SVB's collapse, with mid-sized lenders like Comerica and KeyCorp last week signaling a weakening profit outlook as they lift interest payments to secure deposits.

First Republic has benefited from a number of emergency steps by regulators and other lenders, especially a US\$30bn in-



fusion of funds announced in mid-March from a consortium of 11 US private banks, including Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase.

On Monday, First Republic announced cost-cutting steps including a 20 per cent to 25 per cent reduction in its workforce, the condensing corporate office space and "significant" cuts in executive compensation.

The bank is also "pursuing strategic options to expedite its progress while reinforcing its capital position," First Republic said.

AFP

US debt default would trigger economic catastrophe: Yellen

Washington, US – A US debt default would trigger an "economic and financial catastrophe," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in prepared remarks Tuesday, stressing that action to raise or suspend the debt limit should be "without conditions."

Her comments at an event in Washington come as the top congressional Republican vowed Sunday to hold a vote this week on lifting the debt ceiling and curbing spending – despite President Joe Biden's calls to increase borrowing with no strings attached.

The United States hit its US\$31.4tn borrowing limit in January, prompting the Treasury to take extraordinary measures that allow it to continue financing the government's activities.

But if the debt ceiling is not raised or suspended by Congress before current tools are exhausted, the government risks defaulting on payment obligations as early as July, with profound implications for the economy.

"In my assessment – and that of economists across the board –



Janet Yellen

a default on our debt would produce an economic and financial catastrophe," Yellen said in remarks Tuesday.

Among the potential consequences she listed were higher payments on mortgages, auto loans and credit cards, while businesses could see credit markets worsen.

The federal government could also become unable to issue payments to millions of Americans including those who rely on Social Security, she said.

"This economic catastrophe is preventable," she said.

"The solution is simple: Congress must vote to raise or suspend the debt limit. It should do so without conditions. And it should not wait until the last minute," she added.

In the longer term, a default also stands to increase the cost of borrowing into perpetuity, and future investments could become more expensive.

Moody's Analytics said in a note Monday that the plan proposed by Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy to raise the debt ceiling in exchange for cuts in government spending would slow growth and cut employment.

If the draft presented by McCarthy on April 17 passed as is, it would bring a drop of 0.6 percentage points in US potential growth for 2024, and the elimination of 780,000 jobs, according to the ratings agency's research arm. Unemployment would also be set to rise.

AFP

شركة زجاج مجان ش.م.ع.ع

MAJAN GLASS

MAJAN GLASS COMPANY S.A.O.G.

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REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON THE UNAUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR PERIOD ENDED ON 31 MARCH 2023

The Board of Directors of Majan Glass Company SAOG is pleased to present Company's unaudited financial results for the period ending on 31 March 2023.

Performance overview:

Sale's revenue amounted to RO 2.999 Million showing an increase of 1.69% than the Previous Year Sales of RO 2.949 Million primarily due to an increase in Sales realizations. There was a dip in sales volume given excess inventory carryover in certain markets driven by excess ordering given supply chain issues in 2022 and expected to correct by Q2 2023.

Exports amounted to 85% of the total sales for the quarter that ended 31 March 2023

The company is still facing cost headwinds in Q1 given the global price of Raw materials and Packing materials - due to ongoing geopolitical issues, higher energy prices and tight availability due to a mismatch of supply and demand. This is expected to ease from Q2 onwards.

During the period that ended on 31 March 2023, the company faced production constraints due to some uncontrollable circumstances at the plant. This adversely affected the production capacity, sales and the bottom line. However, the company has taken immediate action to address the issue and thereby expects improvements in the coming months.

The Gross profit amounted to 237 thousand Omani riyals for the period ending on March 31, 2023, compared to a Gross profit of 411 thousand Omani riyals for the same period of the previous year 2022.

Net Loss after Tax for the current period amounts to RO 285K as against Net Loss after Tax of RO 113K for the same period in the previous year 2022.

Future Outlook:

The company is mitigating a large part of the cost increase by successfully passing on the same to its customers through suitable price increases and simultaneously improving its customer and product mix.

The company is also aggressively pursuing cost savings initiatives to reduce Operational expenditure and structural costs. The demand for glass packaging is expected to substantially improve in the coming months in its key markets and the company has a healthy order book status.

Acknowledgment:

On Behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Bin Taimour and his Government for their continuous assistance and generous support extended to the industry. We pray to the Almighty Allah to bestow His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Bin Taimour with the best of health and long life to lead the country to the path of prosperity.

On Behalf of the Board of Directors,

Talal Issa Mohammed Al Harasi
Chairman
Dated: -19 April 2023

Statement of Comprehensive Income for Three months period ended on 31ST MARCH 2023 (UNAUDITED):

	31st March 2023 RO ' 000s	31st March 2022 RO '000s
Sales	2,999	2,949
Cash Cost of Sales	(2,574)	(2,261)
	425	688
Cost of Sales - depreciation	(188)	(277)
Gross Profit / (Loss)	237	411
Other income	17	25
Expenses		
Administration and general expenses	(434)	(461)
Finance charges	(89)	(82)
Depreciation	(7)	(6)
Profit /(Loss) Before Tax	(276)	(113)
Deferred / Income tax for current year	10	-
Net Profit / (Loss)	(286)	(113)

Statement of Financial Position as at 31st March 2023 (UNAUDITED):

	31st March 2023 RO ' 000s	31st March 2022 RO '000s
ASSETS:		
Non-current Assets		
Property, Plant & Equipment	3,305	3,741
Capital work in progress	-	-
Fixed Assets	3,305	3,741
Deferred tax asset	368	709
Total Non-current assets	3,673	4,450
Current Assets		
Inventories	3,668	3,886
Trade & other receivables	3,386	3,631
Bank balances & cash	50	139
	7,104	7,656
Assets held for sale	-	-
Total Current assets	7,104	7,656
Total Assets	10,777	12,106
Current Liabilities		
Term loan / Bank overdraft - current portion	3,205	3,371
Trade & other payables	4,071	4,083
Employees and Directors' Payables	610	604
	7,886	8,058
Non-current Liabilities		
Term loan	2,032	2,032
	2,032	2,032
Total Liabilities	9,918	10,090
Net Assets	859	2,016
Shareholders' equity		
Share capital	4,202	4,202
Statutory reserve	1,273	1,273
Retained earnings	(4,616)	(3,459)
Total shareholders' equity	859	2,016

Notes:

1. All amounts are in RO '000s.
2. Previous year figures are regrouped /rearranged wherever required.
3. The complete Financial statements of the Company would be made available to any shareholder or interested party on request in Arabic or in English within 7 days from the date of request. The request applications can be sent on the above mentioned address.

OTC brightens Salalah with LED displays

Around the world, telecom towers are typically static, practical structures that exist only to support mobile transmission equipment. Until recently, this was the case at Oman Tower Company (OTC), which provides infrastructure to wireless telecommunication service operators and government entities in Oman on an 'open access' basis.

To add value to its telecom tower near the Clock Tower, a landmark of Salalah, the country's second largest city, OTC decided to equip it with a huge LED display, which would broadcast community messages and adverts.

Besides creating a new revenue stream for the company, the goal was to convert the tower into a local attraction, and a revenue-generating asset for the company.

The timing of the project was also critical, with a requirement to install the new screens ahead of the 52nd National Day.

"With close collaboration between the Hikvision MENA team and our LED manufacturing operations team, we knew we could deliver the screens on time, and Oman Tower put all of their trust in us to make it happen," said



Mohammed Nadeem, Business Development Manager for Hikvision in Oman.

The Hikvision team wasted no time, rapidly planning and designing a visually striking LED solution comprising two giant, high-resolution LED screens.

These were made to measure based on the physical shape, characteristics, and measurements of the Salalah telecom tower.

The larger of the two screens mounted on the tower (which measures 41.47sqm) shows

video and still adverts and community messages in vivid colour, 24 hours a day. The smaller screen (5.5sqm) displays time and weather information for city residents.

The Hikvision LED screens are both equipped with dual power

supplies, ensuring that they continue to function in the event of a technology fault. They also have dual network cards for continuous broadcasting of community messages and adverts.

In line with OTC's requirements, the LED screens were in-

stalled in time. "Hikvision was able to plan, design, build and deliver the solution within an extraordinary tight project timeframe," said OTC Managing Director Majid al Kharoosi. "It really was an impressive effort and we greatly appreciate the effort

and collaboration involved."

The LED screens are now regarded as an impressive feature in Salalah's cityscape, converting the telecom tower into a much-commented local attraction. "The screens are unique and grab the attention of anyone nearby by the telecom tower," Kharoosi pointed out. "As a local talking point, they add vitality to the local area, but also demonstrate our technology innovation and leadership - and bring new value to our brand."

The screens also promise to deliver reliable service, thanks to Hikvision's ruggedised LED technology. "In Salalah, we experience heavy rain for three months of the year, mixed with brackish water from the nearby Gulf of Oman - a weather phenomenon known locally as 'Khareef'. The Hikvision screens are built to withstand these harsh weather conditions, and are also shock-resistant, which means they will continue to perform at their best long into the future."

OTC converted its Salalah site from a static structure into a revenue-generating asset for the company. "Advertising revenues are now contributing to our bottom line," Kharoosi admitted.

Bank Muscat receives prestigious awards from EMEA



Khalifa al Hatmi

Adding further to its successful record over the past four decades, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has been once again recognised for its leading services.

The bank recently won two prestigious awards from EMEA Finance, for Best Asset Manager in Oman and Best Local Investment Bank in Oman.

Mohammed Sultan al Habsi, Chief Representative, UAE Representative Office, Bank Muscat, received the awards at the ceremony held in Dubai attended by senior bankers from the region. The awards commended Bank Muscat's excellent performance and innovative solutions that



helped the bank maintain its leadership in both local and regional markets.

Speaking on the occasion, Khalifa Abdullah al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager - Investment Banking and Capital Markets, Bank Muscat, expressed his happiness with the continuous success that the bank is achieving year after year, which confirms the success of its strategy in providing customer-

centric financial and investment services for customers.

"These awards reflect the consistency of the bank's performance and give us motivation to continue this hard work and enhance the bank's pioneering role in the banking sector in Oman," Hatmi further said.

"We aim to provide specialised solutions to accommodate the unique needs of our customers by focusing on inno-

vation, agility and trust in all the new services and facilities provided. We thank all customers for their continuous trust in the services that Bank Muscat is constantly developing," he added.

Bank Muscat has long-standing experience in asset management and investment banking services and its performance has been commended by the global banking community in the past. The bank offers a wide range of

asset management options including investment funds in the Sultanate and the GCC region.

The bank also manages private equity funds and real estate funds in the sultanate and in the wider GCC region. The bank's portfolio management service enables the bank to meet the diverse needs of its large family of customers.

Bank Muscat has a successful track record of providing innova-

tive and customised financing solutions to suit the unique requirements of its customers.

In 2022, the bank successfully advised on multiple transactions spanning across various sectors including telecom, financial services, utilities and supplier financing, which resulted in fundraising in excess of RO800mn.

Bank Muscat is the largest asset manager in Oman and a leading asset manager in the GCC region, with approximately US\$2.5bn of Assets under Management (AUM) and has proven track record of successful operations for almost 29 years.

It offers tailored investment solutions across asset classes including equity, fixed income, real estate and private equity investments. Similarly, the bank is also a market leader in corporate finance and advisory solutions encompassing corporate finance, project finance, debt capital markets, debt refinancing and restructurings, IPOs, structured financings, quasi-equity financings, private placements, as well as mergers and acquisitions in the sultanate.



Ooredoo adds sparkle to Eid festivity

Adding a little sparkle to everyone's Eid al Fitr this year, Ooredoo provided Kiswat Al Eid in the form of gift vouchers, games and other presents for less privileged families in South Sharqiyah.

The meaningful community-based initiative involved a team of dedicated volunteers that co-operated with the local Ja'alan Bani Bu Hassan Charity Team to hand out the gifts.

The initiative was part of the 19th Ooredoo Goodwill Journey, which is the company's flagship Corporate Social Responsibility initiative. Held every year since 2005, it provides communities with sustainable support, donations and smiles.

Qatar unifies 'Tourist Visa' processes on Hayya Platform

Qatar Tourism has launched the Hayya Platform in a new form, inviting tourists who currently need a visa to Qatar to enjoy the country's famously warm Arabian hospitality and diverse touristic offering.

Taking place with immediate effect, the launch of the well-known Hayya Platform, which allowed the entry of over a million visitors during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022TM tournament, and its application via smart phones, will become the single portal for all tourist and business visas to Qatar, a release said.

"This will unify visa processes for tourists, GCC residents and companions traveling with GCC citizens (whom are issued an 'Authorisation Electronic Travel' permit)," it added.

The latest development reflects Qatar's keenness to continue its investment in the tourism sector, which forms an important pillar to the economy,

and reflects the longer-term strategic vision to position the country as the leading tourism destination in the region.

Tourists who require a visa to enter Qatar can apply through the Hayya Platform at www.hayya.qa, or through the application on their smart-phones, and visit Doha, the Arab Tourism Capital of 2023.

In addition, Hayya holders will enjoy seamless travel and connectivity into Qatar as Hayya will be enabled for e-gate entry at Hamad International Airport. For those entering Qatar via land at the Abu Samra border, the Hayya Platform will provide a pre-registration option for faster entry for vehicles, making the start of a weekend getaway or longer stay in Qatar even smoother and more enjoyable.

For GCC nationals, the Platform provides an option to apply for an entry permit for companions. The Hayya Platform also

provides further services that help round out a visitor's stay, including maps, transportation options, offers and current events.

"Qatar's national tourism strategy seeks to welcome over six million visitors a year by 2030," said Akbar al Baker, chairman of Qatar Tourism and Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive.

According to him, Qatar is considered the most open country in terms of visa facilitation in the Middle East and the eighth most open globally, with more than 95 nationalities granted visa on arrival. "We are pleased that the latest developments will further cement Qatar's position as a leading tourism destination."

Hayya Platform CEO Saeed Ali al Kuwari said the re-launch of the platform in its new form today is an extension of the strategic vision that the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy had previously developed.

What is seizure? Understanding epilepsy and its warning signs

As a specialist neurologist, I believe that awareness is crucial when it comes to epilepsy and its various forms of seizures.

I would like to share some important information about the condition, its symptoms, and warning signs, as well as how we can best support those who are affected by it.

Epilepsy is a neurological disorder that affects an estimated 50 million people worldwide - which means that it is more common than one might think. It is characterized by recurrent seizures, which occur when there is a sudden surge of electrical activity in the brain. These seizures can last from a few seconds to several minutes and can affect people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds.



Dr Hemant Joshi
Specialist Neurologist
Aster Al Raffah Hospital, Sohar

There are several different types of seizures that can occur in people with epilepsy, but the most common ones are called focal seizures and generalized seizures. Focal seizures begin in a particular

area of the brain and can spread to other parts, while generalized seizures affect both sides of the brain from the start.

Although seizures can be scary to witness, there are some important things to keep in mind when supporting someone who is experiencing one. One of the most important things to do is to remain calm and make sure the person is safe. If possible, gently guide them away from any objects or obstacles that may cause harm.

It's also essential to keep track of the length and type of seizure, as well as any unusual symptoms that might accompany it. This information can be helpful to medical professionals when diagnosing and treating the condition.

While there is currently no cure for epilepsy, there are many treatments available to help manage the condition, including medication and lifestyle changes. In some cases, surgery may also be an option to remove the affected area of the brain. It's important to work closely with your medical team to find the treatment plan that works best for you.

In conclusion, increasing awareness of epilepsy and its warning signs can go a long way in improving the lives of those living with the condition. Understanding the various types of seizures, knowing how to support someone during a seizure, and seeking the right medical care are all crucial steps towards managing epilepsy and reducing its impact on daily life.

Technology to find focus at Arabian Travel Market

Representatives from more than 80 of the world's leading travel technology companies are preparing to exhibit at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2023, which will take place at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from May 1 to 4.

Over 2,000sqm of exhibition space will be dedicated to industry technology during the 30th edition of ATM, representing a 54.7 per cent increase in sector participation compared to last year's show. ATM 2023's Travel Tech space will also be supplemented by a brand-new Sustainability Hub, which will shine a spotlight on the latest environmentally responsible travel trends and innovations.

The ATM Travel Tech Stage sponsored by Sabre, will host a



selection of in-depth panel discussions that will explore how modern innovations such as artificial intelligence, big data and Web3 are enabling seamless operations, professional development, payments, accessibility,

sustainable travel and enhanced customer experiences.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said, "My colleagues and I are delighted to see such strong representation from travel tech-

nology professionals at this year's show. Encouraging innovation is especially pertinent to ATM 2023 as it is a crucial component of our theme, 'Working Towards Net Zero'. It is essential for our industry to support and

invest in the most promising technologies today in order to build a better and more sustainable travel sector for future generations."

Sponsored by Sabre, the ATM Travel Tech Stage will host a se-

ries of innovation-centric discussions and events throughout the show. The first session, 'Technology: The Enabler of Sustainable Travel', will see industry experts discuss how online tools are making it easier for consumers to mitigate their environmental impact when purchasing and planning trips. Moderated by Shashank Nigam, Founder and CEO of SimpliFlying, the panel will feature insights from Tom Kershaw, Chief Product and Technology Officer at Travelport; Lucas Bobes, Group Environmental Officer and Head of ESG Reporting at Amadeus; and Carlo Olejniczak, Vice President and Managing Director of EMEA at Booking.com.

The ATM Travel Tech Stage will also provide the backdrop for

a selection of other panels, including 'The Main Trends Impacting Travel in 2023 and Beyond'. In partnership with Sabre, this session will explore the ways in which our industry has harnessed innovation in the wake of the global pandemic, as well as how technology is likely to drive further advancements over the coming years.

To be moderated by Abdul Razzaq Iyer, Vice President - Middle East at Sabre, speakers will include Andy Finkelstein, SVP - Global Agency Sales & Delivery at Sabre; Jason Hooper, Head of Digital Solutions at Dnata; and Dean Wicks, Chief Flights Officer at Wego.

ATM 2023 will feature a Sustainability Hub for the first time in the show's history.



BMW Oman awards top performers

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, recently hosted its annual iftar and award ceremony for 2023, honouring top performers and talents from across the company and celebrating a stellar year for BMW in the Sultanate.

The annual iftar and award ceremony gathered employees of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles to celebrate the company's top performers for 2022 as well as employees who have been certified by BMW, being recognised for their contribution to the importer's progress.

The gathering was not only a celebration of achievements but also a tribute to those who have dedicated more than 15 years for the company, as they were bestowed with the Long Service Award.

Commenting on the occasion, Rachid Zamani, managing director of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, said, "The annual iftar and award ceremony is a lovely

occasion at Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, where the entire team comes together as one family to celebrate the company's success.

"Every year, the company employees demonstrate outstanding commitment to the business and our cherished BMW customers. I am deeply pleased to note that 2022 was a highly successful year thanks to everyone's efforts."

Zamani continued, "The time-honoured iftar gathering of the entire team is also an occasion not only to reflect on the spirit of the holy month but also to bond together as a team. As a company that is deeply committed to the holistic wellbeing and development of its employees, Al Jenaibi International Automobiles takes immense pride in promoting the values of community, camaraderie and caring among all its employees - setting the foundation for them to achieve excellence in customer satisfaction and performance."

Sona Gold and Diamonds opens 2nd store in Oman



Sona Gold and Diamonds, a leading name in fine jewellery, opened its second store in Oman. The grand opening event took place on April 19 at Oman Avenues Mall, ground floor, near Lulu exchange, and witnessed a great turnout of jewellery enthusiasts from all over Muscat.

K V Mohanan, managing director of Sona Gold and Diamonds, along with managing partners Sona Mohan, Vivek Mohan, and Shyam Mohan, were present at the event, along with Omani sponsor Qasim al Ajmi and country head Anoop. Shakir, General Manager, Al Ghubra, and Aswanth, Commercial Head of Lulu group also graced the occasion with their presence.

"We are thrilled to open our second store in Oman, and we are grateful for the overwhelming response from our customers on the opening day. Our aim is to provide our customers with a unique and luxurious shopping experience, and we believe that our new store will enable us to do just that," said K V Mohanan.

The store offers a wide range of gold and diamond jewellery, crafted to perfection by skilled artisans. Customers who visited the store on the opening day were treated to a 20 per cent discount on gold making charges and a 60 per cent discount on diamond jewellery (except nose pins) along with attractive gifts for each purchase.

 The National Detergent Co. S.A.O.G. P.O.Box 3104, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of oman			
REPORT OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR THE THREE MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 31ST MARCH 2023		UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION At 31 March 2023	
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am happy to present the unaudited interim results of the Company for the three months period ended 31 March 2023.			
Results for the period			
During the period, the Company has achieved sales revenue of RO 5,600,752 (31 March 2022 RO 5,492,591). There is a growth in the value sales by 2% compared to the last year corresponding period.			
The company exercised control over costs including materials cost during the last year, which has contributed in improving the profitability of the company compared to last year's corresponding period.			
The Profit before tax for the period is RO 177,662 compared to RO 10,816 in the corresponding period of last year.			
The Company's flagship brand BAHAR is maintaining its market position in Oman. The sales is grown in both Oman as well in Export markets during the period.			
Omanisation			
The Company's efforts to improve the Omanisation at various levels of the organization including the senior and middle levels, with adequate training inputs, continued during this period. The Omanisation percentage was maintained at above 46%, including senior levels of the Company.			
Compliance with Internal Regulations and Control System			
The Company has in place an internal control system, commensurate with the size and nature of its business. The Company utilizes the services of an internationally reputed audit firm, for conducting periodic internal audit and the Audit Committee reviews the accounts at regular intervals. The Company complies with all the local laws and regulations.			
Future Outlook			
The company had faced many challenges during the last year including unprecedented price increase in raw and packing materials which had adversely contributed to the company's profitability. During the current year the company is aiming for better control over material prices as it has started softening, which will have a positive impact on the company's profitability for the current year 2023.			
The company is focusing on launching a few new products on the markets to increase its product portfolio and aiming for more sales from the new products.			
The outlook for the company during the year 2023 seems to be positive both in terms of revenue and profitability.			
Acknowledgement			
On behalf of the Board of Directors and myself, I thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said for his continuous support and encouragement to the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman.			
I would like to express gratitude to all the Ministries for their cooperation. I would also like to thank all the shareholders for their confidence reposed in the Board of Directors, the Auditors for their cooperation and support and our employees for their dedication and efforts.			
Mohamed Abdul Hussain Baqer Al Lawati Chairman, Board of Directors			
Note: 1. The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder on request either in Arabic or English within 7 days of receipt of the request. 2. Shareholders and investors are advised to read the full financial statements. 3. Certain comparative figures have been reclassified in order to conform to the presentation for the current period.			
UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME For the period ended 31 March 2023			
	Three months period ended 31 Mar 2023 RO	Three months period ended 31 March 2022 RO	
Revenue	5,600,752	5,492,591	
Cost of sales	(3,966,507)	(4,254,899)	
Gross profit	1,634,245	1,237,692	
Selling and distribution expenses	(1,050,501)	(872,770)	
Administrative and general expenses	(325,433)	(298,966)	
Other operating income	4,674	29,757	
Profit from operations	262,985	95,713	
Finance costs	(84,979)	(86,501)	
Foreign exchange gains/(loss)	(344)	1,604	
Finance costs -net	(85,323)	(84,897)	
Profit before tax	177,662	10,816	
Taxation	(26,649)	(1,622)	
Profit and total comprehensive income for the period	151,013	9,194	
Basic earnings per share	Bzs 8	Bzs 0.46	

Biden to run for re-election next year at record age of 80

Washington, US - President Joe Biden announced Tuesday he is running for re-election in 2024, plunging at the record age of 80 into a ferocious new White House campaign 'to finish the job'.

'Every generation has a moment where they have had to stand up for democracy. To stand up for their fundamental freedoms,' Biden wrote on Twitter, along with a video.

'I believe this is ours. That's why I'm running for re-election as president of the United States. Join us. Let's finish the job.'

After a series of big legislative wins and momentous foreign policy struggles in his first two years in office, Biden has no real challenger from within the Democratic Party.

But in a campaign that may result in a rematch of the 2020 election against Donald Trump, he is expected to face constant and fierce scrutiny over his age.

The veteran Democrat would be 86 by the end of a second term. Even if a medical exam in February found him 'fit' to execute the duties of the presidency, many including in his own voter base believe he is too old.

An NBC News poll released over the weekend found that 70 per cent of Americans, including 51 per cent of Democrats, believe he should not run.

Sixty-nine per cent of all respondents who said he shouldn't run cited concerns over his age as a major or minor reason.

Biden likes to answer those concerns by saying, 'watch me' -



US President Joe Biden speaks at the House Democratic Caucus Issues Conference in Baltimore, Maryland (AFP)

meaning that voters should focus on his policy wins at home and his marshaling of an unprecedented Western alliance to help

many season.

Trump, despite becoming the first former or serving president to be criminally indicted - and

the man who defeated him last time around.

'With such a calamitous and failed presidency, it is almost inconceivable that Biden would even think of running for reelection,' he said in a statement.

The most likely Republican challenger to the 76-year-old Trump, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, presents a similarly right-wing figure, though starkly younger at 44.

'Rebuilding the middle class'

Biden will underline his foreign policy credentials on Tuesday when he meets with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, who is starting a state visit to the

White House.

Like in 2020, Biden's video message framed his election bid as a fight to save American democracy from Trump and increasingly far-right Republicans. However, he also stressed his message of restoring an economy with heavy focus on the manufacturing base and jobs for the middle class.

Later Tuesday he was scheduled to deliver an economic address to a union conference being held in Washington.

While not a campaign event, the scheduled theme - 'how his investing in America agenda is bringing manufacturing back, rebuilding the middle class, and creating good-paying union jobs' - was set to be at the heart of the Democrat's 2024 message.

Bland but comforting

Biden's approval ratings have not topped 50 per cent for more than a year and a half.

However, he has consistently over-delivered when it matters. Supporters say the Democratic Party's surprisingly strong performance in 2022 midterm congressional elections validated the Biden brand.

And while Biden may seem bland in comparison to Trump, he would bank on his moderate, old fashioned image being the secret weapon needed in an increasingly extreme era.

"My dad had an expression," Biden often says. "Joey, don't compare me to the Almighty. Compare me to the alternative." AFP



Myanmar military chief Min Aung Hlaing (right) meets with former United Nations secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, in Naypyidaw on Monday (AFP)

Former UN chief Ban urges Myanmar junta to end violence

Bangkok, Thailand - Former UN chief Ban Ki-moon on Tuesday urged the Myanmar military to halt violence in the conflict-racked country and engage with its opponents to end the bloody crisis.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi's government in February 2021, sparking fighting across swathes of the country and tanking the economy.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis have stalled, with the junta ignoring international criticism of its brutal crackdown on dissent and refusing to engage with its opponents.

The military 'must take the first steps', Ban said following a two-day trip to Myanmar where he met junta chief Min Aung Hlaing and senior military officials. Ban also said the National Unity Government (NUG) - a shadow administration dominated by lawmakers from Suu Kyi's party which is working to overturn the coup - must be part of any 'lasting solution'.

The military has shown no willingness to engage with its opponents, including the NUG,

which it has designated as a 'terrorist' organisation.

Rights groups accuse the junta of massacres, torching villages and using air and artillery strikes to punish communities suspected of harbouring its opponents.

A military airstrike on a village in a resistance hotspot this month killed more than 170 people, according to media and locals. The junta justified its power grab with unproven allegations of fraud in 2020 polls won resoundingly by Suu Kyi's party, and has promised to hold fresh elections.

"Holding elections under current conditions risks further violence and division, and the results not being recognised by the people of Myanmar," Ban said.

The statement made no mention of whether Ban had sought a meeting with Suu Kyi, who is currently serving a 33-year jail term following a series of closed-door trials that rights groups say were a sham. Ban's visit made the front page of the state-backed *Global New Light of Myanmar* on Tuesday, which did not mention his calls for dialogue and a halt to violence.

AFP

Colombian migrants shot dead in Mexico

Zacatecas, Mexico - Four Colombians were killed and four others injured when the vehicle they were driving in Mexico to the US border was fired upon by a suspected criminal group, officials said on Monday.

The attack occurred on Sunday morning in the municipality of Villa de Cos in the north-central state of Zacatecas, according to a statement by local authorities. "An organised crime group attacked a vehicle that was traveling on the federal highway... there are four people who lost their lives," it said.

A source from the state prosecutor's office, who asked not to be identified because he was not authorized to speak to media, said the victims were originally from Colombia, and were said to be related to each other. Among the injured were two girls.

One of the survivors told police they were trying to reach the northern border to cross into the United States.

The authorities became aware of the attack when one of the survivors, accompanied by the two girls, came to ask for help from regional security forces.

The motive for the attack, according to authorities, was presumed to have been to steal the van in which the Colombians were traveling. They refused to obey the armed men who ordered them to stop.

AFP

French court halts expulsions from Indian Ocean island slum

Mamoudzou, France - A French court halted the controversial clearance of a slum due on Tuesday aimed at expelling migrants from its Indian Ocean island territory of Mayotte - a plan that has sparked clashes between locals and security forces and sparked tensions with neighbouring Comoros.

The operation, called Operation Wuambushu ('Take Back' in the local language), aims to expel migrants from urban slums on Mayotte to improve living conditions for locals in France's poorest department.

Some 1,800 members of the French security forces have been deployed for the operation, including hundreds sent from Paris, with young locals and police



People wait outside as a meeting continues between people threatened with eviction and associations, in the context of a possible rehousing procedure, at an elementary school in Majicavo on Monday (AFP)

clashing in the district of Tsoundzou outside the main town of Mamoudzou since Sunday.

AFP journalists reported

clashes outside slums in Mayotte's main city on Tuesday. Baricades of tyres and dustbins lined the road and protesters

threw stones at police, who fired tear gas.

A court in Mamoudzou on Tuesday stopped the clearance of one slum located at Koungou near the capital at the last minute, saying the action had no legal foundation and threatened public liberties.

The local administration said it would appeal.

Locals feted the court decision stopping the evacuation, which was due early Tuesday.

'I am overjoyed'

"I am overjoyed, we went to court and we won," exulted Mdohoma Hadja (33) raising her arms to the skies.

Comoros, whose three islands lie to the northwest of Mayotte,

said on Monday it had refused to allow a boat carrying migrants from the island. Most of the illegal migrants being deported are Comoran.

It also said it had suspended passenger traffic at a port where deported migrants usually land.

The plan is for those without papers to be sent back to the Comoran island of Anjouan, 70km away from Mayotte.

"We will not stop the operations... to fight against delinquency and unsanitary housing, with their consequences on illegal immigration," the most senior Paris-appointed official on Mayotte, Thierry Suquet, told reporters.

He said he hoped to 'quickly resume' boat deportations to

Anjouan and hoped the standoff would be resumed through 'dialogue'.

Intense negotiations between Comoros and France in recent weeks had raised the possibility of a last-minute deal.

But Comoros' leader Azali Assoumani - who has held the rotating presidency of the African Union since February - said he hoped the operation would be abandoned, admitting Moroni didn't have 'the means to stop the operation through force'.

In 2019, France pledged €150mn (US\$161mn) in development aid as part of a deal to tackle human trafficking and ease the repatriation of Comorans from Mayotte.

AFP

Venezuela's Juan Guaido expelled from Colombia

Bogotá, Colombia - Colombia expelled leading Venezuelan opposition figure Juan Guaido on Monday, hours after he arrived in Bogota for a conference on his crisis-torn country.

Neither Guaido, recognised in 2019 by more than 50 countries as Venezuela's de facto leader, nor Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro were invited to attend the event.

The conference, organised by Colombia's President Gustavo Petro, seeks to restart negotiations between Venezuela's government and the opposition that began in Mexico City in 2021 but reached a deadlock in November. Venezuela's opposition, backed by many countries including the United States, did not recognise Maduro's 2018 re-election in a vote widely dismissed as fraudulent.

The next year, Washington ramped up sanctions against



A file photo of Venezuela's National Assembly leader Juan Guaido (AFP)

Caracas, which were first imposed in 2015 over the brutal repression of anti-government protests. Last month, a Venezuelan official said free presidential elections in 2024 were dependent on the lifting of sanctions.

Colombia's foreign ministry

said Guaido, who arrived in Bogota in an 'irregular manner', was taken to the capital city's El Dorado airport for a "departure on a commercial airline to the United States during the night".

"The ticket had already been purchased by him," the state-

ment added.

Under Petro's predecessor, right-wing president Ivan Duque, Colombia had been Guaido's main regional backer, breaking diplomatic ties with Maduro's government.

I have just arrived in Colombia, in the same way as millions of Venezuelans before me - on foot

JUAN GUAIDO

The left-wing Petro reversed this decision, taking up instead a leading role in a process aimed at ending Venezuela's crisis through negotiations.

Calls for protest

Guaido said in a statement he

had walked across the border from Venezuela to Colombia.

'I have just arrived in Colombia, in the same way as millions of Venezuelans before me - on foot,' he said.

'I hope the summit can guarantee that the Maduro regime will return to the negotiation table in Mexico and that a credible timeline can be agreed upon for free and fair elections to be held as a solution for the conflict.'

Guaido later posted a video on Twitter that he appeared to have filmed from inside a plane.

"After 60 hours on the road to get to Bogota, escaping the persecution of the dictatorship, defying the Maduro regime, they are taking me out of Colombia," he said.

Even though he was not officially invited to attend the conference, Guaido had hoped to hold talks with visiting officials

on the sidelines of the meeting.

The conference is set to bring together nearly two dozen delegations from countries in Latin America, North America and Europe in an attempt to unfreeze negotiations between the government and opposition.

Guaido has also called for a protest to be held on Bogota's Plaza de Bolivar square, a short walk from the palace where the conference will take place.

Guaido, who led a symbolic 'interim government' from 2019 until January this year, has rejected calls by Colombia's Petro for sanctions against Venezuela to be lifted.

Venezuela's divided opposition voted to disband its symbolic 'interim government' in January and replaced Guaido as the head of a parallel congress made up of opposition lawmakers.

AFP

Turkey detains 110 pro-Kurdish suspects

Diyarbakir, Turkey - Turkey on Tuesday detained at least 110 pro-Kurdish activists, journalists and lawyers in raids conducted just three weeks before a knife-edge vote that could extend President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's two-decade rule.

Police said their 'counter-terror' operation was conducted simultaneously in 21 provinces, including Diyarbakir, the Kurdish minority's unofficial capital in Turkey.

State media said police held people suspected of financing the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) or roping new members into the outlawed group.

The PKK has been proscribed as a terrorist organisation by Ankara and its Western allies for waging a decades-long armed struggle for greater autonomy in Turkey's southeast.

The Anadolu state news agency said the detained included people suspected of fomenting nearly 60 street protests since 2017.

The operation also involved suspects who allegedly transferred money to the PKK from municipalities held by the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP).

The Diyarbakir bar associa-



People walk past billboards - displaying the portrait of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan with slogan 'For Turkey's century; the right time, the right man' - ahead of the May 14 presidential and parliamentary elections, in Ankara (AFP)

tion said the number of detentions could be as high as 150.

These include 20 lawyers, five journalist and three theatre actors', it said.

Turkey's MLSA human rights

organisation said the journalists worked for the pro-Kurdish Mesopotamia News Agency, which has been banned in Turkey over its alleged terror links. The raids were believed to

be the largest since 108 suspects were arrested in a similar operation in 2020.

The arrests are likely to add pressure on the HDP ahead of the May 14 election, widely

viewed as the most important in Turkey's post-Ottoman era.

Turkey's top court is winding down hearings against the HDP that could see it banned over alleged terror ties.

Prosecutors are zeroing in on alleged financial support the PKK receives from the HDP, which Er-

The raids are believed to be the largest since 108 suspects were arrested in a similar operation in 2020. The arrests are likely to add pressure on the HDP ahead of the May 14 election, widely viewed as the most important in Turkey's post-Ottoman era

The HDP called Tuesday's raids an 'operation to steal the ballot box and the will of the people'.

It accused Erdogan's ruling party of targeting 'lawyers who will protect the ballot box and journalists who will inform the public' about government attempts to manipulate the vote.

Polls show Erdogan running neck-and-neck or losing to joint opposition candidate Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

Erdogan's control of parliament through an alliance between his Islamic-rooted party and a far-right group is also under threat.

The HDP will not field a presidential candidate in the election or run under its own party banner in the parliamentary portion of the vote. It will instead field its parliamentary candidates under the lists of a new group called the Green Left Party, which supports Kilicdaroglu.

The measures are designed to shield the party in case it is banned before the vote.

The supreme court has the option of either banning the HDP or barring some 550 of its top members from politics for five years.

AFP



Pedlars offer snacks for sale to people aboard a bus at the Multaga rest-stop near Ganetti in Sudan's Northern State on Tuesday (AFP)

Sudan evacuations intensify as ceasefire largely holds in Khartoum

Khartoum, Sudan - A US-brokered ceasefire between Sudan's warring generals was largely holding in the capital on Tuesday as foreign nations stepped up efforts to evacuate their nationals from the chaos-torn nation.

But security fears were compounded when the World Health Organization warned of an 'extremely dangerous' risk after fighters occupied a Khartoum laboratory holding samples of polio, measles and other infectious diseases.

Ten days of heavy fighting until Monday - including air strikes and artillery barrages - have killed hundreds of people, many of them civilians, and left some neighbourhoods of greater Khartoum in ruins.

Bewildered civilians were seen walking down one street in Khartoum North where almost all buildings were bombed out and smoke was rising from scorched ruins, in unverified video posted on social media.

Much of the city of five million has seen a reduction in fighting, witnesses said, since foreign governments have scrambled road convoys, aircraft and ships to get their nationals out since the weekend.

Britain, which has thousands of citizens in Sudan, announced 'a large-scale evacuation' from Tuesday, with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak saying 'priority will be given to the most vulnerable'.

Little was known about the security situation in remote areas of the poverty-stricken nation, after Darfur in particular has seen heavy fighting in recent days and

the looting of aid depots.

Thousands of Sudanese have tried to flee to Egypt, and the United Nations warned it was bracing for an exodus of up to 270,000 refugees to Sudan's even poorer neighbours Chad and South Sudan.

Mass exodus

At least 459 people have been killed and more than 4,000 wounded in the fierce fighting across Africa's third-biggest country, according to UN agencies.

More than 4,000 people have fled Sudan in foreign-organised evacuations that began on Saturday, including by sea to Saudi Arabia and by aircraft to Jordan and Cyprus.

The Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) agreed to the ceasefire 'following intense negotiations', US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement shortly before the truce took effect at midnight.

Three previous bids to pause the conflict had failed to take hold, but both sides confirmed they had agreed to the three-day halt of armed hostilities.

The RSF tweeted that 'this ceasefire aims to establish humanitarian corridors, allowing citizens and residents to access essential resources, healthcare and safe zones, while also evacuating diplomatic missions'.

The army pledged it would abide by the ceasefire on condition its rivals did so, in a statement on Facebook.

AFP

Iran charges two actresses for not wearing headscarves

Tehran, Iran - Iran has charged two prominent actresses for publishing pictures of themselves flouting the country's dress code for women, just weeks after announcing a crackdown on breaches, local media reported.

Police in Tehran have referred the case against Katayoun Riahi and Pantea Bahram to Iran's judiciary, accusing them of 'the crime of removing the hijab in public and posting photos on the internet', the Tasnim news agency said late Monday.

If prosecuted, the pair could face fines or prison terms.

Earlier this month police said they would begin using 'smart' technology in public places to crack down on women defying Iran's compulsory dress code.

Last week, photos of Bahram (53) went viral after she posed without a headscarf at a film screening, while Riahi (61) posted several photos taken in public places around Tehran in which



Women walk along a street in Tehran on April 19 (AFP)

she did not wear a headscarf.

The requirement for women to wear the headscarf in public was imposed shortly after the Islamic revolution of 1979.

The number of women in Iran defying the dress code has increased since a wave of protests following the September 16 death in custody of Kurdish-Iranian Mahsa Amini (22) for allegedly breaching it.

On April 16, authorities said they had closed 150 commercial establishments whose employees were not complying with the

dress code.

Bahram and Riahi have won several awards at Iran's leading cinema event, the Fajr International Film Festival.

In November, Riahi was released on bail after more than a week's detention for posting photos to Instagram in solidarity with the Amini protests, showing herself without a headscarf.

She was the first Iranian actress to post such images on social media in support of the protest movement.

AFP

Guinea-Bissau joins UN human rights accord

Dakar, Senegal - Guinea-Bissau has become the first country outside of Europe to join an international agreement on government accountability, human rights and the environment, the United Nations announced on Tuesday.

The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters - also known as the Aarhus Convention - 'protects every person's right to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being', UN said.

It gives citizens the right to participate in decision-making in environmental matters and 'acknowledges that we owe an obligation to future generations', its website says.

The convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers are 'the only legally binding global instruments on environmental

democracy', it says.

Guinea-Bissau, a country of around two million, acceded to the convention on April 4, bringing the total number of parties to 47.

It is the first country 'outside the pan-European region' to do so, Olga Algayerova, the executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), said.

"Guinea-Bissau hopes to take advantage of the instruments of the Convention to fight climate change (and) promote its biodiversity... allowing public participation in decision-making as well as access to justice when their rights to the environment are violated," Environment Minister Viriato Luis Soares Cassama said. The West African state is 'one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change', UNECE said.

AFP

Iraq's Yazidis anxiously wait for IS-abducted relatives

Sharya, Iraq - After paying nearly US\$100,000 in ransoms to free ten family members, Khaled Taalou, a member of Iraq's Yazidi minority, is still working to free other missing relatives abducted by Islamic State fighters.

Despite his efforts, five more relatives, along with thousands of other Yazidis, remain missing after being abducted by the extremists. "We are still looking. We do not lose hope," the 49-year-old said.

In August 2014, IS swept over Mount Sinjar, the Kurdish-speaking minority's historic home in northern Iraq. They massacred thousands of Yazidi men, enlisted children, and seized thousands of women to be sold as extremists' 'wives' or reduced to sexual slavery.

UN investigators described as genocide the atrocities carried out by IS.

Nineteen members of Taalou's family were abducted, including his brother and sister, along with their spouses and children. "We borrowed money



Bahar Elias (right), a 40-year-old displaced Iraqi woman from the Yazidi community, with her daughter and son at the Sharya camp in Iraq (AFP)

as we could, here and there, to get them out," the journalist and writer said.

Now displaced and living in Sharya, a village in Iraqi Kurdistan, after fleeing his home in Sinjar, Taalou has managed to free ten relatives over seven years.

Expensive releases are negotiated 'via networks of traffickers in Iraq and abroad', he said.

The latest was his brother's granddaughter in February 2022, located in a Syrian camp. He has

and the International Organization for Migration says more than 2,700 Yazidis remain missing, with some still in IS captivity while 'the whereabouts of others is uncertain'.

Bahar Elias was separated from her husband Jassem and their son Ahmed, who was barely 19 when the family was kidnapped when IS seized Sinjar.

Relatives paid intermediaries US\$22,000 to secure the release of Bahar and her three younger sisters.

Now living in a camp for displaced people near Sharya, the 40-year-old said she has her 'eyes glued to the road' in hopes that her husband and son will return. She appealed for international assistance to 'help us find a trace of our families, to find out if they are dead or alive'. Knowing their fate, she added, would allow her 'to be free from pain'.

Hussein Qaidi, head of a public office in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region working to rescue kidnapped Yazidis, said IS abducted 6,417 Yazidis from Sinjar.

More than 3,500 have been rescued in Iraq or from neighbouring Syria and Turkey.

He estimated 2,855 Yazidis remain missing and said his team works tirelessly to "gather the available information and free all the kidnapped".

Hayam was 17 when IS abducted her on August 3, 2014, along with her parents, five sisters and two brothers.

Now living in Sharya, she has managed to rebuild her life after a journey across the territory once controlled by the extremists. In an IS prison, she met Leila, a fellow Yazidi. In May 2015, Hayam was sold to a Syrian and Leila to an Iraqi.

Four months later, Hayam was given to a man from Dageshan before escaping her ordeal and reaching Iraqi Kurdistan.

She has since married Leila's brother, Marwan, and the couple and their two children have sought asylum in Australia, where Hayam has family awaiting them.

AFP

Kenya starvation toll climbs to 89

Cult leader Paul Nthenge had allegedly been telling his followers that starvation was the only path to God

Malindi, Kenya - Kenyan investigators unearthed another 16 bodies on Tuesday in a forest where a cult was believed to be practising mass starvation, bringing the number of victims so far to 89 including children.

There are fears more corpses could be found in Shakahola forest where cult leader Paul Mackenzie Nthenge had allegedly been telling his followers that starvation was the only path to God.

Children are among the latest victims of the 'Shakahola Forest Massacre', with search teams in white overalls still undertaking the macabre task inland from Malindi on Kenya's Indian Ocean coast.

The grim discovery has shocked the nation and President William Ruto has pledged a crackdown on 'unacceptable' religious movements as horrifying details unfold by the day.

Visiting the site on Tuesday, Interior Minister Kithure Kindiki warned that worse could still come.

"We don't know how many more graves, how many more bodies, we are likely to discover," he told reporters, adding the crimes were serious enough to warrant terrorism charges against Nthenge.

He said 34 people had been



Scattered clothes are seen in the forest where the remains of cult followers have been exhumed in Shakahola, outside the coastal town of Malindi, on Sunday (AFP)

We don't know how many more graves, how many more bodies, we are likely to discover... The crimes were serious enough to warrant terrorism charges against Nthenge

KITHURE KINDIKI

found alive so far in the vast forest, where police were tipped off about the cult's activities and a crime scene has been established.

"The majority of the bodies exhumed are children," a forensic investigator told AFP on condition of anonymity.

As the fatalities mounted, authorities at the state-run Ma-

lindi Sub-County Hospital warned that the morgue was running out of space to store the bodies and already operating well over capacity.

"The hospital mortuary has a capacity of 40 bodies," said the hospital's administrator Said Ali, adding that officials had reached out to the Kenya Red Cross for refrigerated containers.

It is believed that some followers of the Good News International Church could still be hiding in the bush around Shakahola and at risk of death if not quickly found.

Hussein Khalid, executive director of the rights group Haki Africa that tipped off the police, urged the authorities to send more rescuers to scour the 325-hectare area of woodland for survivors.

"Each day that passes by there is very high possibility that more are dying," he told AFP, saying 50 to 60 per cent of the victims were children. "The horror that we have seen over the last four days is traumatising.

Nothing prepares you for shallow mass graves of children."

Investigators found bodies squeezed into shallow pits - with up to six people inside one grave - while others were simply left outside on the ground.

'Unacceptable ideology'

Ruto vowed to take action against rogue pastors like Nthenge "who want to use religion to advance weird, unacceptable ideology", comparing them to terrorists.

As the investigation unfolds, questions have emerged about how the cult was able to operate undetected despite

Nthenge attracting police attention six years ago.

The televangelist had been arrested in 2017 on charges of 'radicalisation' after urging families not to send their children to school, saying education was not recognised by the Bible.

Nthenge was arrested again last month, according to local media, after two children starved to death in the custody of their parents.

He was released on bail of 100,000 Kenyan shillings (US\$700) before surrendering to police following the Shakahola raid. Nthenge is due to appear in court on May 2.

AFP

Sweden expelling five Russian diplomats

Stockholm, Sweden - Sweden on Tuesday announced it was expelling five Russian diplomats for 'activities not compatible' with their diplomatic status.

Sweden's foreign ministry said 'five officials at the Russian Embassy in Sweden are being asked to leave the country' due to activities incompatible with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

The foreign ministry did not specify the nature of the activities, but the announcement came less than two weeks after neighbouring Norway expelled 15 diplomats it described as 'intelligence officers'.

It also came as Nordic public broadcasters - Sweden's SVT, Denmark's DR, Norway's NRK and Finland's Yle - began releasing a jointly-produced investigative documentary series on Russian spying activities in the region.

Last week, SVT reported that Russia was using military and civilian ships in order to spy in Swedish waters - part of an espionage programme planning the sabotage of energy infrastructures in Northern Europe.

In April 2022, Sweden expelled three Russian diplomats for conducting 'illegal intelligence operations in Sweden'.

AFP



People spend night outside their house after a 7.1 earthquake in Muara Sikabalan village, on Siberut Island on Tuesday (AFP)

Powerful Indonesia quake sends islanders fleeing

Padang, Indonesia - A 7.1-magnitude earthquake rattled residents on islands west of Indonesia's Sumatra on Tuesday, forcing them to flee to higher ground before an hours-long tsunami warning was lifted.

The epicentre of the quake, which struck at 3.00am, was in the sea near the Mentawai islands at a depth of 15.5km, the United States Geological Survey said.

No casualties or severe damage were reported.

"The quake was so strong that we struggled to stand up and walk outside. We were struggling to get out of the house, we had to hold on to the walls," said Patriz Sanene, a 34-year-old resident of Siberut, Mentawai's largest island.

"This is the strongest quake... this year. I thought probably there will be a tsunami. Thank God there is no tsunami."

Indonesia's geophysics agency (BMKG) issued a tsunami warning that lasted around two hours after initially reporting a higher quake magnitude of 7.3.

BMKG chief Daryono, who like many Indonesians goes by

one name, told residents 'in the potential tsunami region to remain calm and avoid the shore'.

There were several aftershocks, he added.

Residents said they were jolted awake by the shaking, and rushed outside.

Sudarmono Siribere (35) said he and his family 'had to brave the pouring rain to go to higher ground'.

Footage shared with reporters by the local BNPB rescue agency showed residents holding umbrellas and wearing raincoats as they fled on foot and on scooters.

Officials said the quake was also felt in the coastal city of Padang in western Sumatra, which is around 200km from the epicentre.

Indonesia experiences frequent earthquakes due to its position on the Pacific 'Ring of Fire', an arc of intense seismic activity where tectonic plates collide.

In 2004, a 9.1-magnitude quake struck Aceh province on Sumatra island, causing a tsunami and killing more than 170,000 people in Indonesia.

AFP

Like hell: 16 killed in Pakistan munition blasts

Kabal, Pakistan - The death toll from a series of explosions caused by a fire in a munitions cache in a Pakistan police station rose to 16 on Tuesday, police said.

The explosions levelled the specialist counter-terrorism station in Kabal town of Swat Valley, in the northwestern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which neighbours Afghanistan.

Swat police said a short-circuit in a basement storing 'grenades and other explosives' was the cause of the blasts.

"It was like hell let loose on me," said Abbas Khan (21), who had parked his car near the police station.

He said a thick cloud of dust and smoke engulfed the entire area, making it difficult to breathe.

The dead included policemen, five suspected terrorists being held for interrogation, and two brothers aged four and six



Security officials and relatives carry the coffins of policemen, who were killed in multiple explosions caused by fire in a munitions cache at a specialist counter-terrorism police station, in Kabal on Tuesday (AFP)

who lived nearby, Akhtar Hayat Gandapur, the inspector general of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police, told AFP.

More than 50 people are

being treated in various hospitals for their wounds.

Gandapur ruled out the possibility of any terrorist activity.

"We have not yet found any

material or visual evidence suggesting a suicide attack but we will look into all aspects during investigations," he said.

The intense explosion rained

South Korean President's office defends his viral Japan comments

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol was in hot water on Tuesday after comments he made about former colonial power Japan not needing to 'kneel down' to improve ties went viral on social media.

Yoon, who is on a six-day state visit to the United States, has made boosting relations with Tokyo a key plank of his administration's policy as he seeks to increase regional security cooperation in the face of rising threats from North Korea.

Bilateral ties were long strained by lingering issues linked to Tokyo's brutal 1910 to 1945 colonial rule over the Ko-

rean peninsula - including sexual slavery and forced labour - even as Washington has repeatedly urged its two key regional allies to boost cooperation.

Yoon told *The Washington Post* ahead of his trip that he could not accept the idea that Japan 'must kneel because of our history 100 years ago' if ties between the two countries were to be improved.

The comments - including the hashtag #mustkneel - quickly became a top trending topic on Korean language social media and Twitter, and prompted wall-to-wall coverage in mainstream media.



S Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol

Yoon's office said on Tuesday that the president had meant 'he can't accept the claim that improving relations with Japan is impossible unless they kneel down in a time of great need for security alliance', a presidential aide told reporters, speaking on condition

of anonymity.

"It is foolish to render the entire history of exchange and co-operating - dating 1,500 years - meaningless because of an unfortunate history spanning less than 50 years," the aide said.

Seoul unveiled a plan in March to compensate victims of Japan's wartime forced labour without Tokyo's direct involvement, which has enraged some victims.

The victims and their lawyers say the Yoon government's proposal falls far short of their demand for a full apology and direct compensation from the Japanese companies involved.

Yoon's party blamed 'possi-

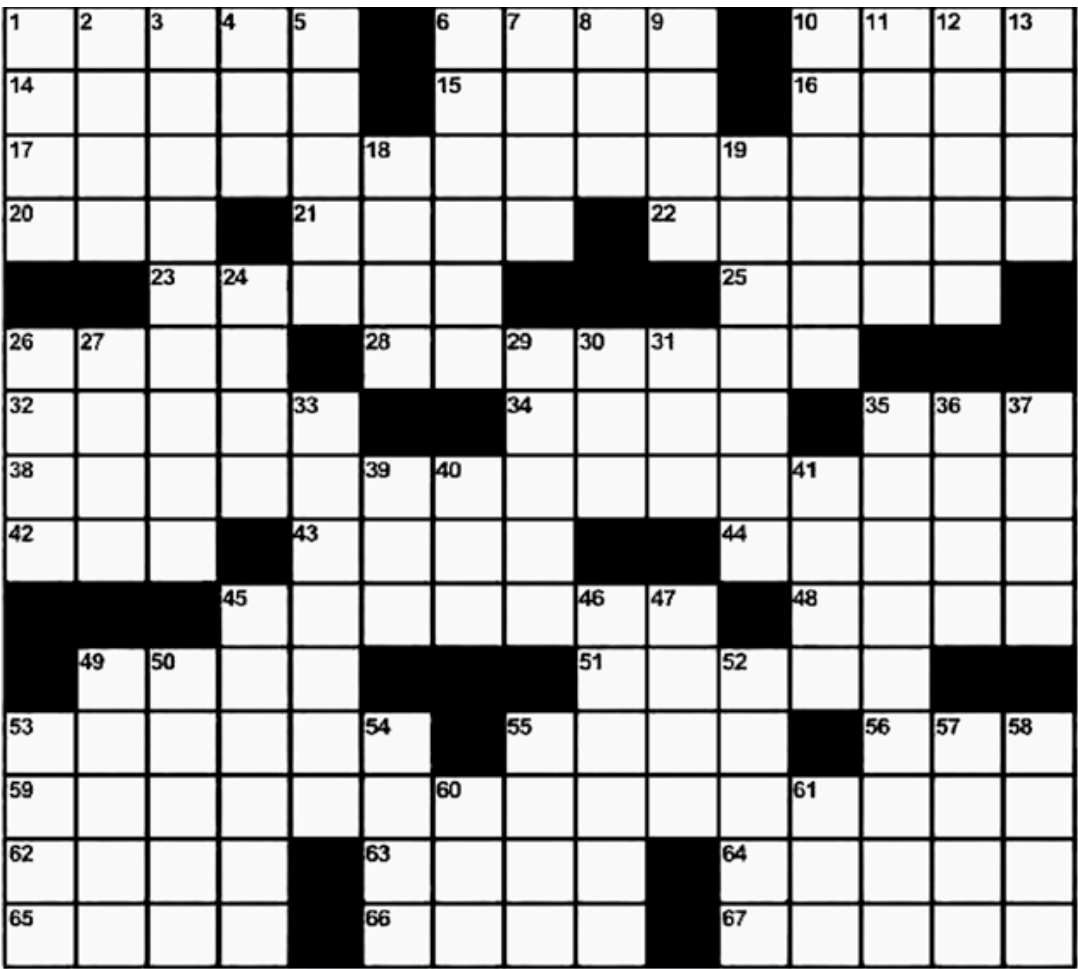
ble mistranslations' for the furor, saying the opposition had been whipping up 'anti-Japanese sentiment' without checking the president's actual comments.

The claim was widely ridiculed online, with the *Washington Post* reporter who conducted the interview posting a transcript on Twitter that appeared to show the article's quotes were accurate.

The opposition MP Park Hong-keun said Yoon's comments 'could be mistaken for that of Japanese prime minister, not that of South Korean president'.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Some bridge seats
- 6) Take an oblique course
- 10) Bayonet verbally?
- 14) Give permission
- 15) Take on a new employee
- 16) Royal sport
- 17) What flight passengers appreciate
- 20) Wahine accessory
- 21) Prerequisite for gain?
- 22) It has aces and deuces
- 23) Bob Cratchit was one
- 25) Supply the grub for
- 26) Cruising between ports
- 28) Car-polishing cloth
- 32) Clark's partner in exploration
- 34) Bowling place
- 35) Major network
- 38) Fool around in the black arts
- 42) Express with words
- 43) "With... permission ..."
- 44) Furniture store section
- 45) Failing engine sound
- 48) Camping gear
- 49) Blockhead

- 51) Procrastinator's promise
 - 53) Abominable
 - 55) Arrangement holder
 - 56) "This... shall pass"
 - 59) Do a crossword puzzle, e.g.
 - 62) Skyrocket
 - 63) Confirmation, for one
 - 64) Eminent
 - 65) Money for the pot
 - 66) Walked all over
 - 67) Cheese choice
- DOWN**
- 1) Peerage title
 - 2) Natural emollient
 - 3) Artificial channel for water
 - 4) Youngster
 - 5) Run through, as a debit card
 - 6) Abu Dhabi pooh-bah
 - 7) Clay baker
 - 8) Baseball stat
 - 9) "Came" partner
 - 10) Library patrons read them
 - 11) Heavy metric unit
 - 12) Cold
 - 13) Big cheese at work
 - 18) DEA cop

- 19) Naysayers?
- 24) Worldly rather than spiritual
- 26) Europe's high points
- 27) "... , whatever will be, will be" (song lyric)
- 29) On one's toes
- 30) More, in Madrid
- 31) Lennon's beloved
- 33) Pencil that halts bleeding
- 35) Queen of the Nile
- 36) Healthy cereal
- 37) Dermatologist's diagnosis, sometimes
- 39) Poker player's last resort
- 40) Director's cry
- 41) Pigeon's home
- 45) "Yes... Bob!"
- 46) Flying high
- 47) Foolhardy
- 49) Poison
- 50) Extract by force
- 52) Parenting challenges
- 53) Daughter of Kronos
- 54) Incriminating information
- 55) Kill, in a way
- 57) Change from a cashier, sometimes

- 58) "What are the...?"
- 60) Honorific for McCartney
- 61) Do a landscaping chore

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Are you growing so impatient with someone that you're just about to give them a piece of your mind? Take a deep breath and stop yourself. You'll have to watch out for frustration now. It could make you say things in the heat of the moment that you'll regret later. When your temper flares, there's no going back. Chances are this person is completely unaware that you're upset, so it's up to you to let them know. Be clear and polite and say what you need to say.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Easy there! Your temper is right on the edge and you need to be careful not to let it blow. Don't fly off the handle if someone looks at you funny, cuts you off in traffic, or takes that last muffin you wanted. They're not doing it to you on purpose! Yes, they're inconsiderate, and yes, they're not helping you cheer up, but that isn't their job. You have to cheer yourself up. Make a call to one of your favorite people. The sound of their voice is all you need.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

If you listen to someone reminisce about the past today, don't be surprised if you get an urge to follow suit. Your mind will wander back to the person you used to be, and you'll naturally compare that person to who you are now. The rose-colored lens of nostalgia might make you miss the life you used to have, but upon closer inspection you'll come to the conclusion that there is no other place you'd rather be than right here. It's a good feeling.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Having a strong vision for the future is important for everyone. So what's your plan for the next two decades? If that question sends cold shivers down your spine, that means it's one you definitely need to think about as soon as possible. Don't put too much pressure on yourself to figure everything right away. You'll only come up with empty goals that sound good but really mean nothing.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Change is inevitable in life, but it isn't always welcome. A new job, a new home, a new relationship, or even a new shiny gadget will affect your life in a much more complicated way than you expect. It's essential that you not overreact to any discomfort you feel about this transition. Give yourself time to get used to things, and don't jump to the conclusion that you've made a huge mistake. There's no going back. The only way is forward.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Music can help you find the inspiration and joy you're craving right now. Today is a great day to go to a concert, listen to new music, or create a new playlist, then just relax and put on your headphones and shut out the world for a while. The tunes will give you what you need: a break from the noise around you, nice company for a long plane ride, ideas about what to do next with your own creativity, or a better alternative to the sound of your own worries.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Business as usual is boring, so skip past all of your logical thinking today and focus more on creative pursuits. Instead of looking at spreadsheets or working on calculations, check out some new music or look at some art. Your gray matter needs a balanced diet just like your body does. Too much time spent dealing with facts and figures isn't good for you. Make something today, whether it's a poem, a painting, or a pastry. You might discover a new hobby in the process.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Lend your aesthetically inclined eye to a friend in need today. Someone you know well could use your help with something to do with their appearance or their home, and you've been noticing it for quite some time. Of course, you've been too kind to say anything to them, but if they start hinting around today, you should feel free to pipe up and volunteer your ideas. They'll be ready to hear what you have to say, and this project could be a great boon to your relationship.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

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



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Focus surely has its place, but that place ain't nowhere in your life today! Prepare for your mind to wander right now, because wander it will! This is a wonderful time for exploration, when your brain is coming up with all sorts of outlandish and nutty schemes that will probably never see the light of day, but that doesn't really matter, does it? Just have fun creating things: songs, poems, cocktail recipes, funny faces, rhymes, you name it.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Positive energy is flowing throughout the day today, and are you in for a sweet time! Get ready for some unexpected flirtation, like sweet gifts that are meant to turn your head and get your undivided attention. If you're in the mood for romance, this is definitely the day you've been waiting for! The stars are orchestrating quite an "accidental" meeting for you with a unique person who could turn your entire world upside down.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If you're in a relationship right now, make sure that you're still paying attention to yourself. It can be too easy (and unhealthy) to make your life all about the other person. If you aren't in a relationship right now, make sure you're making the most of your independence. Treat yourself with love and attention and maybe, if your budget allows, a few gifts. In either scenario, you have to remind yourself that you need to take care of yourself before anyone else can.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

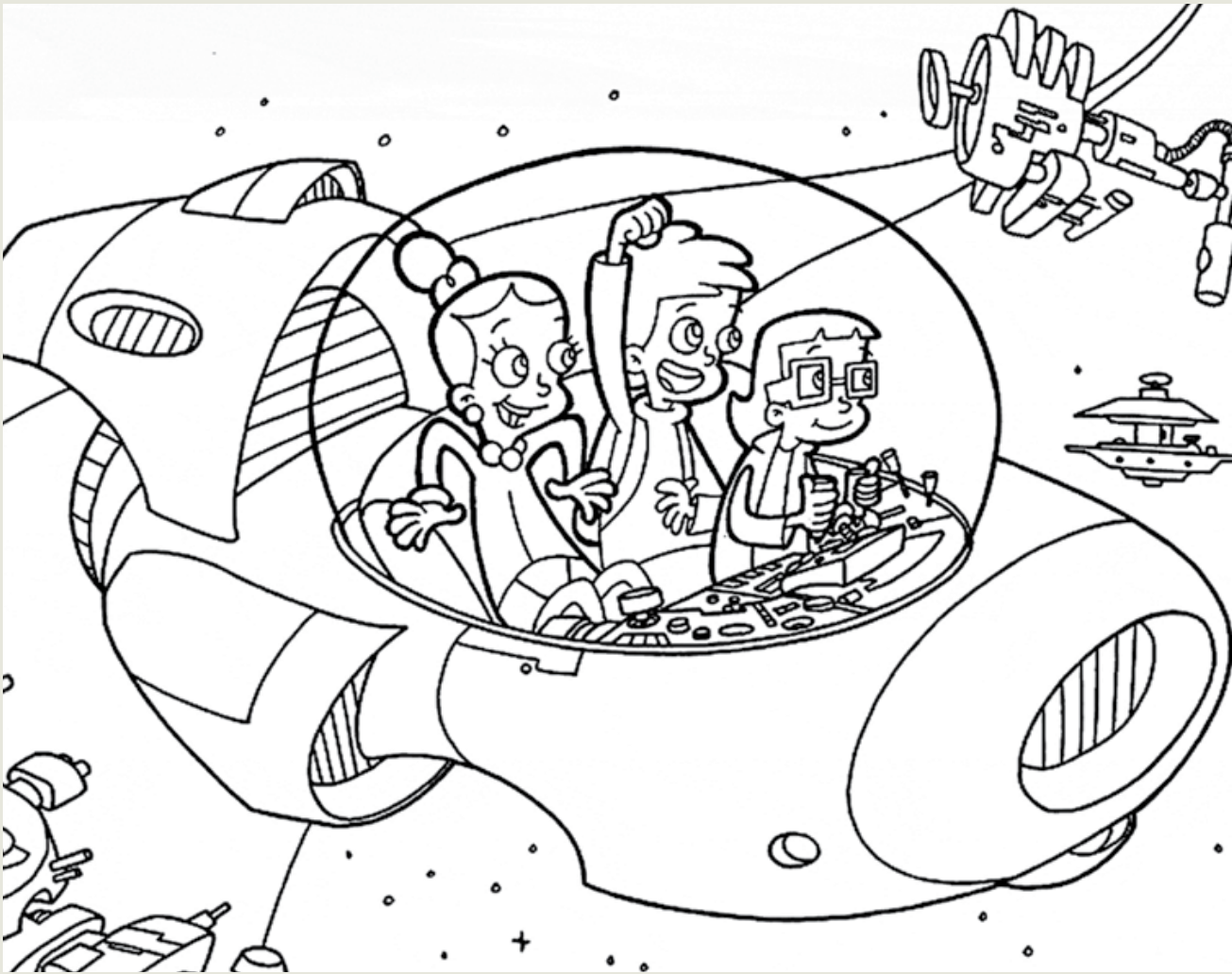
1. First human heart transplant operation conducted by Dr. Christiaan Barnard on Louis Washkansky, was conducted in
A.1967
B.1968
C.1958
D.1922

2. Galileo was an Italian astronomer who
A.developed the telescope
B.discovered four satellites of Jupiter
C.discovered that the movement of pendulum produces a regular time measurement
D.All of the above

3. Habeas Corpus Act 1679
A.states that no one was to be imprisoned without a writ or warrant stating the charge against him
B.provided facilities to a prisoner to obtain either speedy trial or release in bail
C.safeguarded the personal liberties of the people against arbitrary imprisonment by the king's orders
D.All of the above

Answers: 1. a 2. d 3. d

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	T	S	R
R	A	R	V
K	R	I	E
S	E	F	A

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

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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

SHOW OF PUGNACITY

Arsenal on the ropes as Man City aim for knockout blow in Premier League title race

Manchester, United Kingdom - Arsenal's trip to Manchester City on Wednesday has been circled for months as a potentially decisive date in the Premier League title race, but the Gunners must now wrestle back a huge swing in momentum towards the defending champions.

Mikel Arteta's men travel to the Etihad five points clear at the top of the table, yet many see the title as City's to lose thanks to two games in hand and home advantage in midweek.

Arsenal could have amassed an 11-point advantage in recent weeks to pile the pressure on City, as they try to balance their effort in a bid to win a treble of Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup.

Instead, Arteta's young guns have showed their inexperience of dealing with a title race in the run-in as three consecutive draws have gifted City back control of their own destiny.

Twice Arsenal blew 2-0 leads to draw at Liverpool and West Ham. On Friday, it was the league leaders' turn to produce a late fightback from 3-1 down to draw 3-3 against Southampton.

But the silence that greeted



Manchester City's Riyad Mahrez celebrates scoring against Sheffield United in the FA Cup semi-final at Wembley on Saturday. City are in contention for a treble bid and their relentless pursuit of Arsenal in the league has caused the leaders to stumble at a crucial moment.

the final whistle at the Emirates, accompanied by Arteta's head in his hands and Arsenal bodies strewn across the turf illustrated that even salvaging a point felt like defeat against a side sitting bottom of the table.

The consistent problem across all three games has been

The confidence is there, it's those moments that we need to cut back. At this level, we cannot give away the goals that we have given. It's as simple as that

MIKEL ARTETA



Arsenal's inability to defend.

William Saliba's absence due to a back injury has proved a massive blow, with the Frenchman not expected back in time for Wednesday.

"We have to look in the mirror because we gave three really easy goals away and when you do that

it's extremely difficult to win in this league," said Arteta after his side's struggles against Southampton. "The confidence is there, it's those moments that we need to cut back. At this level, we cannot give away the goals that we have given. It's as simple as that."

'It's a final'

Showing any weakness against Pep Guardiola's men in a title race is likely to prove fatal, but Arsenal simply cannot afford a similar defensive display against City's array of attacking talent.

The English champions have won all 11 of their games at the Etihad in 2023, scoring 43 goals in the process.

Erling Haaland is just two goals away from matching the all-time Premier League record of 34 goals in a season and 50 in all competitions in his first year in English football. Even when the Norwegian drew a blank in Saturday's 3-0 win over Sheffield United, Riyad Mahrez stepped up with the first FA Cup semi-final hat-trick since 1958.

As an example of City's firepower, Mahrez is still likely to drop back to the bench with the in-form Jack Grealish, Kevin De Bruyne and Bernardo Silva supporting Haaland in attack.

Haaland's arrival precipitated Gabriel Jesus' departure from City after winning four Premier League titles in the past five years. The Brazilian is one of the few Arsenal players with experience of getting over the line to win trophies and issued a rallying cry for his side to bounce back on the biggest stage.

"We have to manage ourselves to come back and be focused again and strong, because anything can happen from now until the end of the season," said Jesus.

"Even if you don't drop the points we dropped in the last games, nothing changes - it's a final. Each game is a final"



Jack Grealish

Man City's £100 million man Grealish comes good to win over Guardiola

Manchester, United Kingdom - England's most expensive ever player is beginning to live up to his price tag as Manchester City are getting the Jack Grealish they spent £100 million (\$124 million) for after a frustrating first season at the Etihad.

Pep Guardiola's men are closing in on a potential treble of Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup titles with Grealish at the heart of an upturn in form since the World Cup.

City go into Wednesday's potential Premier League decider against Arsenal five points adrift of the league leaders, but in control of their destiny thanks to two games in hand.

Despite his price tag in a then record Premier League move from Aston Villa in 2021, Grealish spent most of last season's title run-in watching from the sidelines as City held off Liverpool by

a point to lift a fourth Premier League trophy in five seasons.

Fast-forward 12 months and the England international has followed a pattern of earning Guardiola's trust after a season to adjust to his methods.

"He's playing really good this season. But at the same time, like he knows, we want more," said the ever-demanding Guardiola.

"Now he believes he is part of it. Maybe when he arrived he thought: 'I'm not good enough after the team won the Premier League.'

"Sometimes players adapt immediately, sometimes they need more time. Jack didn't come here for just one season, he's here for a long time. He's an important player for us."

On the face of it, Guardiola and Grealish do not appear likely bedfellows. The Catalan coach is known for his scrupulous atten-

tion to detail, while Grealish is one of the game's few remaining colourful characters.

The 27-year-old made headlines for his antics at City's title celebrations a year ago before embarking on a booze-filled trip to Ibiza that was splashed all over social media. More recently, Grealish confessed to ordering a five-course Chinese takeaway after every game.

Yet, Guardiola this week hailed his professionalism to ensure he is fit enough to cope with City's intense schedule.

Grealish has started all of City's last 12 Premier League games as well as all four of their Champions League matches in the knockout stage so far.

"In the back of my mind the fact that Pep is trusting me in big games helps the confidence," Grealish said last month.

AFP

Tottenham sack interim coach Stellini after Newcastle thrashing

London, United Kingdom - Tottenham sacked interim manager Cristian Stellini on Monday after chairman Daniel Levy branded Sunday's 6-1 defeat at Newcastle "wholly unacceptable".

Stellini, who was only put in charge last month after his former boss Antonio Conte left the club, will be replaced by Ryan Mason with immediate effect.

Conte's long-term assistant won only one of his four games in charge, dealing what appears a fatal blow to Spurs' chances of Champions League football next season.

Tottenham still sit fifth in the Premier League but are six points adrift of the top four and have played at least one game more than the sides directly above them.

A difficult season hit a new low at St James' Park as Spurs



Cristian Stellini

were 5-0 down after just 21 minutes.

"Sunday's performance against Newcastle was wholly

unacceptable," said Levy in a club statement. "Cristian will leave his current role along with his coaching staff. Cristian stepped in at a

difficult point in our season and I want to thank him for the professional manner in which he and his coaching staff have conducted themselves during such a challenging time."

However, the decision to replace Conte with a member of his backroom staff in the first place has opened Levy up to more criticism from fans.

"We can look at many reasons why it happened and whilst myself, the board, the coaches and players must all take collective responsibility, ultimately the responsibility is mine," Levy added.

"I met with the player committee today - the squad is determined to pull together to ensure the strongest possible finish to the season. We are all clear we need to deliver performances which earn your amazing support."

Roma drops out of Serie A top four with loss at Atalanta

Rome, Italy - Roma slid out of the Serie A top four by the slimmest of margins as they lost 3-1 to Atalanta in Bergamo on Monday.

Jose Mourinho's 100th game as Roma coach ended with a potentially costly loss. His club started the night two ahead of AC Milan on goal difference but ended it outside the Champions League spot on goals scored.

Roma host Milan on Sunday. Five days ago, Roma were comfortably third in Serie A, but then Juventus jumped to third after their 15 point penalty was suspended. On Sunday, Milan won at Lecce.

Atalanta stayed in the top-four race. They remained in seventh but are four points behind Milan and Roma with seven games to play.



Atalanta's Rafael Toloi celebrates after scoring against Roma on Monday

Atalanta took the lead with a volley from Mario Pasalic after 31 minutes. Rafael Toloi fired the second following a corner in 74th minute. Roma, who went to extra time and penalties before elimi-

nating Feyenoord in the Europa League last Thursday, showed more fight in the second half after bringing on Paulo Dybala. Lorenzo Pellegrini scored off the post in the 83rd minute, but

Roma's hopes lasted only a few seconds, however, before a handling error by Roma goalkeeper Rui Patrício presented Dutch midfielder Teun Koopmeiners with a goal.

INSTANT RETURNS

Red-hot IPL form gets Rahane a place in India squad for World Test final against Australia

New Delhi, India - Ajinkya Rahane earned a recall on Tuesday to India's squad for the World Test Championship final against Australia in June.

Indian selectors named a 15-man squad led by skipper Rohit Sharma for the title clash at The Oval on June 7-11.

Batsman Rahane, who last played a Test in January 2022, makes a comeback after an excellent showing in the IPL where he hit a match-winning 71 not out off 29 balls for Chennai Super Kings on Sunday.

The usually sedate Rahane has surprised with a newfound explosiveness and has a strike-rate of over 199 in five IPL matches this season.

T20 sensation Suryakumar Yadav has been dropped. He made the five-day team for Australia's recent visit and played his only Test in Nagpur.

Struggling batsman K.L. Rahul keeps his place after he was dropped from the XI for the final two Australia Tests.

Pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah and wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant are not included because of long-term injuries.



Ajinkya Rahane

T20 sensation Suryakumar Yadav has been dropped. He made the five-day team for Australia's recent visit and played his only Test in Nagpur. KL Rahul keeps his place after he was dropped from the XI for the final two Australia Tests

Mohammed Shami leads the pace attack alongside Mohammed Siraj, while K.S. Bharat remains the lone wicketkeeper.

It will be India's second WTC final after they lost the decider to New Zealand in the inaugural edition in 2021.

SQUAD: Rohit Sharma (capt),

Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane, K.L. Rahul, K.S. Bharat (wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Shardul Thakur, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Umesh Yadav, Jaydev Unadkat

AFP

Defending champion Jabeur to miss Madrid Open

Madrid, Spain - Tunisian Ons Jabeur will not defend her title at the WTA Madrid Open after withdrawing Monday with a calf injury.

"Further to many medical exams done, it shows that I have a small tear in my calf and I will need more time to recover," Jabeur announced.

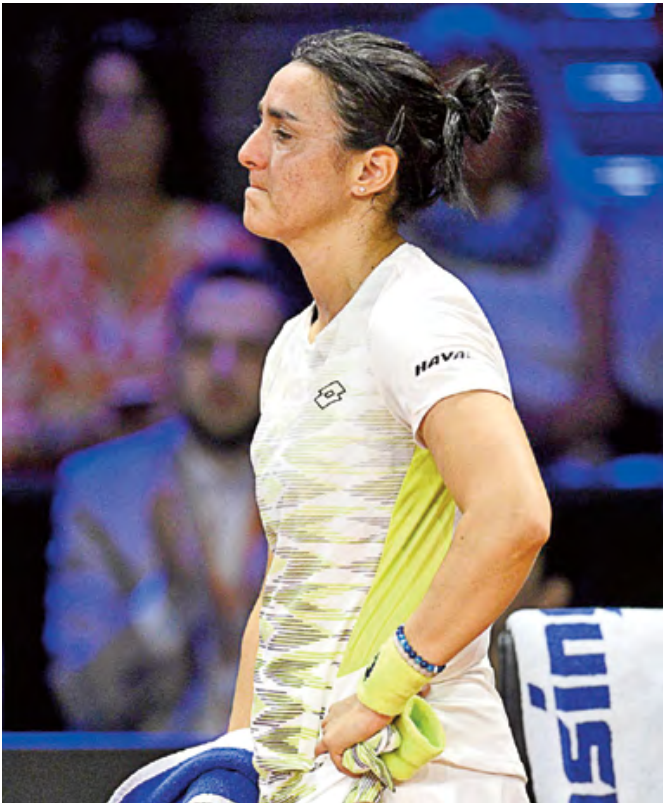
"I am sad to announce that I won't be able to compete and defend my title this year."

Jabeur, fourth in the WTA rankings, pulled out of her semi-final against reigning French and US Open champion Iga Swiatek at the Stuttgart Open on Saturday with a calf problem.

The main draw action at the Madrid Open started on Tuesday. Jabeur is the latest high-profile player to withdraw, joining 22-time Grand Slam champions Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal.

Jabeur was the runner-up at two Grand Slam tournaments in 2022: Wimbledon and the US Open.

AFP



Ons Jabeur

Chapman's century helps New Zealand end Pakistan series 2-2

Rawalpindi, Pakistan - Mark Chapman hit a maiden unbeaten hundred to anchor New Zealand's six-wicket win over Pakistan in the fifth and final Twenty20 in Rawalpindi on Monday, ending the five-match series level at 2-2.

The 28-year-old smashed a 57-ball 104 in a rearguard action to lift New Zealand from a precarious 73-4 to chase down a stiff target of 194 with four balls to spare.

"We are very happy with how we levelled the series tonight and finished the job," said Chapman. "It took a bit of adjusting in the first two games and it's great to see that it worked out well."

Mohammad Rizwan missed a century by two runs, but still guided Pakistan to a solid 193-5 in their 20 overs.

Chapman led the fightback with a match-turning unbroken fifth wicket stand of 121 off 58 balls with James Neesham, who scored a punishing 25-ball 45 not out as the duo toyed with



New Zealand's Mark Chapman celebrates after scoring a century in the fifth and final T20 against Pakistan in Rawalpindi on Monday (AFP)

Pakistan's much-vaunted bowling attack.

"I was pretty thankful that Jimmy came out all-guns-blazing and took some pressure off me as well," Chapman said.

Chapman, whose previous highest T20I score was 83 against Scotland at Edinburgh

last year, completed his century off 54 balls with a brace off Shaheen Shah Afridi, waving his bat to an applauding dressing room.

In all Chapman hit 11 fours and four sixes while Neesham's knock was studded with two sixes and four fours as the pair combined to help give New

Zealand their 100th T20I win in 192 matches.

Shaheen had given Pakistan a superb start with the wicket of Tim Latham off the first ball on the innings and Will Young (four) off the fifth.

Chad Bowes (19) and Daryl Mitchell (15) also fell cheaply before Chapman took charge, also benefitting from a dropped catch off Shaheen on 67 by Shadab Khan at long-on.

Pakistan won the first T20 by 88 runs and the second by 38 while New Zealand took the third by four, all in Lahore. The fourth match was abandoned due to a hailstorm in Rawalpindi.

The victory and a 2-2 result is welcoming for New Zealand who were missing their top eight players including regular skipper Kane Williamson due to the ongoing Indian Premier League.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam was disappointed with the result.

"I think we were 10-15 runs short after Rizwan revived the innings."

Brilliant Butler fires Heat past Bucks, Lakers sink Grizzlies

Miami, United States - Jimmy Butler conjured a dazzling 56-point performance as the Miami Heat came from behind to shove the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks to the brink of elimination from the NBA playoffs Monday, while LeBron James led an overtime rally to give the Los Angeles Lakers a commanding series lead over the Memphis Grizzlies.

In an electrifying battle at Miami's Kaseya Center, Butler all but single-handedly led Miami to a 119-114 win that leaves the Bucks 3-1 down in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference first-round series.

In the Western Conference, the second-seeded Grizzlies are also staring down the barrel of an early playoff exit after the Lakers claimed a 117-111 victory to take a 3-1 series lead.

James finished with 22 points, 20 rebounds and seven assists and grabbed a game-tying driving layup with 0.8 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter to force overtime.

James then marshalled the



Jimmy Butler of Miami Heat exults after a point against the Milwaukee Bucks on Monday (AFP)

Lakers superbly in overtime, scoring four points to put the Lakers in sight of the conference semi-finals.

But the performance of the day came in Miami, where Butler's 56-point haul was the joint fourth-highest individual scoring total in an NBA playoff game

ever. Only Michael Jordan (63 points), Elgin Baylor (61) and Donovan Mitchell (57) have scored more in a postseason game. Milwaukee had looked to be cruising towards victory after leading from the opening seconds and keeping Miami at arm's length throughout.

Toni Nadal optimistic over Rafa's French Open participation

Madrid, Spain - Rafael Nadal's uncle and former coach, Toni Nadal, is optimistic his nephew will play at the French Open, but admitted Tuesday that the record 14-time champion will not arrive under ideal circumstances.

"Rafa is recovering, I think it won't be long before he can compete again, but in the tournament here (the Madrid Open) it could not be," Toni Nadal told Spanish public broadcaster TVE.

Rafa Nadal announced he

would not participate in Madrid last week as he continues to recover from the hip injury he suffered in January in the Australian Open.

The 36-year-old said recovery was not going as planned and he would try a new type of treatment, without setting a deadline for himself to heal, casting doubt over his participation in Paris.

He is hoping to accomplish a record-extending 23rd men's Grand Slam title at Roland Gar-



Fourteen-time French Open champion Rafael Nadal (right) along with his uncle and former coach Toni (left).

If you're lucky enough to have a good draw in the first rounds, then... well

TONI NADAL

ros, with the tournament beginning on May 28.

"Obviously he will not arrive

with good preparation, we must not fool ourselves, because, obviously, since January 10 I think, he hasn't played any matches," added Toni Nadal.

Nadal pulled out of last month's hard-court tournaments in the US, with his sights set on a return at the start of the clay-court season, but it did not come to fruition, missing the Barcelona and Madrid events as well as Monte Carlo.

"He hasn't competed for quite some time, apart from

that, before January, he didn't compete much either, but I think Rafael will pick up form soon," continued Toni Nadal.

"In a Grand Slam, it depends a lot on the draw. If you're lucky enough to have a good draw in the first rounds, then... well."

"Rafael in the second week is already a favourite, in the first week, lately maybe he is not, he was not last year in Australia, but from the second week, you say well, we can count on him."

AFP



MILLER, GILL STAR AS GUJARAT TITANS THRASH MUMBAI INDIANS



Gujarat Titans' David Miller plays a shot during his knock of 46 off 22 balls against Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. Shubhman Gill, Abhinav Manohar and Rahul Tewatia also played blazing knocks as Gujarat made 207 for 6 and then choked Mumbai with their accurate bowling to win by 55 runs (AFP)

Mark Wood to miss final stages of IPL

Mumbai, India - Mark Wood is set to miss the final stages of IPL 2023 to attend the birth of his daughter in late May, but the majority of England players involved in the competition are expected to stay in India for the whole season. Wood has missed Lucknow Super Giants' last two matches due to illness but has been a revelation for them this season, taking 11 wickets in his four appearances including 5 for 14 on his debut against Delhi Capitals. He and his wife Sarah are expecting their second child towards the end of May, and Wood will fly home at some point in the coming weeks in order to be present at the birth. At this stage, it appears unlikely that he would return to India afterwards. Super Giants play their next

fixture against Punjab Kings on April 28, before back-to-back home matches against Royal Challengers Bangalore and Chennai Super Kings on May 1 and 3. In Wood's absence, they have selected the Afghan seamer Naveen-ul-Haq. England play a one-off Test against Ireland at Lord's on June 1, four days after the IPL final, but

ESPNcricinfo understands that the ECB does not intend to pull players out of the tournament against their will, having previously indicated to the BCCI and to franchises that they would be available for the full season. The ECB has actively encouraged players to travel to India to gain experience at the IPL. ESPNcricinfo

TODAYS MATCH

MATCH 36

6 PM

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ALL-ROUND SHOW

Axar Patel helps Delhi choke Hyderabad

Hyderabad, India - Axar Patel starred with bat and bowl and impact sub Mukesh Kumar held his nerve as Delhi Capitals edged Sunrisers Hyderabad by seven runs in a low-scoring Indian Premier League battle on Monday. The left-handed Axar (34) lifted Delhi from a precarious 62-5 to 144-9 in a gritty partnership of 69 with Manish Pandey (34) on Hyderabad's home turf. Axar then returned figures of 2-21 with his left-arm spin. Fast bowler Mukesh, who came in under the new impact player rule, defended 12 off the final over to keep Hyderabad down to 137-6. It was Delhi's second successive victory after starting the season with five losses. The David Warner-led team stayed bottom of the 10-team heap. "I love it here. It's an amazing



Delhi Capitals' Axar Patel celebrates after taking the wicket of Sunrisers Hyderabad's Aiden Markram during their IPL match at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Hyderabad on Monday (AFP)

crowd. I haven't been here for a long time," Warner, after playing at his former franchise, which he led to victory in 2016, said. The Australian opener said, "To win tonight, hopefully we can

make it three in a row. We've got another against Sunrisers next." Hyderabad, led by Aiden Markram, are one place above Delhi on ninth with four points and five losses.

Delhi's South African fast bowler Anrich Nortje dented the Hyderabad chase as he bowled Harry Brook bowled for seven. Axar soon joined in to cut short Mayank Agarwal's knock on 49.

Pace spearhead Ishant Sharma and left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav picked up a wicket each to rattle the opposition middle-order before Heinrich Klaasen and Washington Sundar attempted to revive the chase. Klaasen fell to Nortje after a 19-ball 31 and Sundar, a left-hand batsman, made an unbeaten 24 but Mukesh and Delhi had the last laugh. Delhi elected to bat first but lost half their side, including Warner who hit 21, in eight overs before Axar and Pandey turned the innings around. "I ordered for coffee and I left the glass like that, when three wickets fell in one over," man of the match Axar said with a smile. "Pandey and I discussed we need to take it as deep as possible." Sundar returned figures of 3-28 with his mystery spin as he struck three times in one over including the wicket of Warner. Seam bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar took two wickets and the innings witnessed three run outs. AFP

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STAYING

SLOW DESIGN

SUSTAINABLE CREATIONS IN OSMOSIS WITH NATURE

'Slow design' was all the rage at this year's Milan Furniture Fair, featuring sustainable creations made with carefully selected and hand-crafted natural materials in sharp contrast to industrial manufacturing.

Amid the frenzied buzz of visitors stood Atsuya Nakamura, quietly sewing a leather sheath to cover part of a side table, his movements calm and precise despite the comings and goings at his stand.

He is one of some 20 craftsmen who work in a factory opened by the Ritzwell design company on a bay surrounded by lush vegetation near Fukuoka in Japan, a site designed to be 'in osmosis with nature'.

"We don't do mass production, all our furniture is finished by hand. Design and comfort are very important," Wataru Yano, Ritzwell's marketing director, told AFP.

"Our products are timeless, they last a lifetime and are passed on to the next generation. They are a synthesis of Japanese tradition and contemporary design," he said.

Among the favourite materials of this high-end brand, which promises its customers 'relaxation and calm', are solid walnut and oak, combined with thick leather and steel.

Lowering blood pressure

Nature and sustainability are also the watchwords of Finnish wooden furniture designer Nikari, located in Finland's oldest machinery workshop.

Set in the village of Fiskars, west of Helsinki, the workshop is powered entirely by water from a nearby river.

"We want to lower our customers' blood pressure and create a comfortable home where harmony and calm prevail," says CEO Johanna Vuorio.

The wood Nikari uses 'comes from Finnish forests'. "The trees grow very slowly, some are over a thousand years old. Our tables and chairs can last



A man visits the Giorgio Armani Casa furniture and furnishings showcase at Palazzo Orsini, the company's historic headquarters in Milan, as part of the Milan Design Week 2023



Visitors look at a glass table by Italian brand SantambrogioMilano at the Salone del Mobile furniture fair in Milan on the opening day of the Milan Design Week 2023 (AFP)



A woman visits the corner of Ukrainian-born designer and architect Victoria Yakusha, in Milan

for more than a century," Vuorio said.

One of the latest creations, a handmade 'century-old' coffee table, sat at the entrance to the stand, its cracks a sign of its authenticity.

"We are not looking to make easy money with cheap solutions. We produce at our own pace without rushing," she said.

The 'slow design' movement was launched in the early 2000s by the English academic Alastair Fuad-Luke. Like the equivalent 'slow food' or 'slow fashion' movements, it advocates the use of natural or recycled materials and campaigns against over-consumption.

'Beautiful, sustainable'

The concept is applied to the letter by independent designer Francesco Meda, who collaborates with several brands, including Alias and Acerbis, based in northern Italy.

"Instead of presenting, like in fashion, 20 or 30 new collections every year, and putting so many objects on the world market, it is better to make fewer, but beautiful and sustainable ones," he said.

Meda reinvents 'iconic objects created by great masters who have marked the history of design' by giving them 'a contemporary touch'.

"A quality chair can last 150 years," he said.

The iconic ash wood chair designed in 1996 by Riccardo Blumer, Laleggera, has been updated by Meda for Alias with new finishes and leather upholstery.

Another requirement is 'virtuous production processes', with everything Meda designs produced in Italy using materials sourced fewer than 150km away from the companies he works with.

Local production and artisanal heritage are also the leitmotif of Verdi, a family business from Bogota in Colombia which exhibited carpets, wall coverings and window dressings.

"Everything is made by hand. We create contemporary textiles while respecting ancestral techniques. Natural fibres are used in 95 per cent of our products," said Verdi chief executive Tomas Vera.

Fibres such as fique, which is native to the Andes, and plantain, mulberry silk or alpaca wool are combined with copper and stainless steel wires.

The decision to embrace virtuous rather than industrial production values is partly customer driven. "Consumers are much more aware, and constantly ask or check if our work is sustainable," Vera said.

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LIMA'S BALLERINAS

Fairies & Princesses



Maria Silva is leading an initiative to improve the lives of poor girls through ballet

On a barren shantytown hill in Lima, a group of girls in white leggings gamely tiptoe around a rocky, dusty path. "And onnnne, twooooo, threee, fourrr," hums the ballet instructor whose day job is selling trash.

It's not likely any of her students will make it as a professional dancer, says Maria del Carmen Silva, or La Miss, as her students call her - slang for teacher here.

Today, the teacher on the hill is more interested in healing than in the talent of her little 'fairies'.

Silva started classical dance at the age of 12, danced until she was 33 and today, at 58, she is leading an initiative to improve the lives of poor girls and teens through ballet - long associated with a demanding (thin and white) aesthetic.

We had to be 'thin, with long limbs, a small head and extremely flexible', recalls the former dancer with the national ballets of Peru and of neighbouring Chile.

Silva, who is fair haired and has light eyes and a comfortable life, began volunteering in 2010 at a public school in the very poor coastal district of Chorrillos.

There she met the girls of San

instep'.

Sadly, above all, so many could barely muster a smile, when their everyday concerns were so pressing.

"Some of the girls have their dads in jail; others have been raped or mistreated by their parents; and some have told me: my dad beats my mom," she notes sadly.

"I am from a different economic class, so I didn't even realise that they were leaving because they couldn't afford the clothes; because they don't even have water and sometimes not even anything to eat," she says.

That's when she said she had a mental breakthrough.

"I told myself: Forget about that perfect dancer, that perfect prototype, and reach out to the human being."

Now she organises some rehearsals on the hill, despite the fact that her knees already suffer from the bustle between San Genaro II, the school, and the small school that she runs in a religious complex in Miraflores, one of Lima's more affluent districts.

A different person

In that place, girls from 'both economic situations' sometimes mix and it is a collection point for donations and for the cardboard, paper and bottles that the Silva ballet recycles to raise funds for costumes.

But only a few of those who attend the Silva ballet, she points out, realise the world of dirt and poverty from which her 'fairies and princesses' emerge.

"Balance, balance, 'leap', and up and two," she croons as she guides nine schoolgirls on a busy thoroughfare.

"I try to bring beauty where everything seems ugly, a drop of light where everything is black," says Silva pointing to the group with a grimace. "Despite the dirt from home they already want to be clean, they have their hair well combed, now they don't walk with their eyes looking at the ground."

She firmly believes that her ballet heals self-esteem.

"I didn't consider myself pretty. I was very shy, didn't say anything and now I can express myself," confirms 20-year-old Maria Cielo Cardenas.

"In ballet I am a different person, I feel like a princess, especially when we have performances and we put on costumes and crowns," she says.

In January she and her partner Kerly Vera (19) won a scholarship to study dance in Barcelona.

AFP

Genaro II, a settlement 300 metres above the level of the Pacific where in the last four decades some 500 families have settled in wooden houses with corrugated metal or zinc roofs.

Rehearsing on the hill

An endless number of stairs zigzag up the hills above Chorrillos, where the poor live.

Up here, there is no drinking water, and locals are supplied by tanker trucks or public wells.

Most people in the neighbourhood eke out a living in the informal sector which in all of Peru reaches 75 per cent of the working population, the highest rate after Bolivia, according to the International Labour Organization.

Silva confesses, half ashamed, that she came to school looking for a typical dancer, but she found girls with 'short legs, flat feet or without much

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