



H M emphasises on integration of SMEs with large businesses

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq held a meeting with businesspersons and owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) at Al Alam Palace on Wednesday.

His Majesty the Sultan touched on the future approaches of the State and its policies aimed at maintaining the pace of the comprehensive development process as planned in Oman Vision 2040.

Through the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan underscored his great attention, his continuous follow-up of private sector affairs and his keenness to consolidate partnerships and co-ordination between the public and private sectors in the upcoming stage.

His Majesty the Sultan underlined the importance of enhancing the role of the private sector

Commends role of private sector, business owners in meeting future aspirations of the economy

and enabling it to play its envisaged role by integrating with all components of the Omani economy and boosting the country's economic development.

His Majesty the Sultan commended the role of the private sector and business owners in meeting the future aspirations of the Omani economy, notably by supporting efforts made to establish a powerful private sector that leads a competitive economy

Stresses need to prepare business environment to be more competitive, attractive to investors

that is capable of integrating with the global economy.

This, His Majesty noted, is realised by according attention to the knowledge-based economy achieved by applying research and utilising the best technologies and innovations, namely technologies related to the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

His Majesty stressed the need to prepare the business environment to be more competitive and

Underscores significance of forging effective government, private sector partnership

attractive for investments and capable of generating more employment opportunities - an environment in which the government exercises a regulatory role aimed at achieving efficiency and successful management.

In this context, His Majesty the Sultan hailed the role of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

As part of his Royal Attention

to SMEs and start-ups, His Majesty the Sultan affirmed the significance of empowering these within the Omani economy. He laid emphasis on the integration of these businesses with large companies through innovative solutions and by offering quality business opportunities in the local and foreign markets. His Majesty expressed his appreciation of the role played by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development.

His Majesty the Sultan also lauded the role of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), which, he said, is considered the prime mover of the private sector. He touched on OCCI's new system, which was implemented after engaging a large segment of business owners and listening to their views.

Continued on Page 04

Oman targets 79% electric vehicles on its roads by 2035

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In line with Oman's commitment to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, the sultanate plans to phase out fuel-operated vehicles and ensure that 79 per cent of vehicles in the country by 2035 are electric.

This was revealed during the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology's annual media meeting held on Wednesday to unveil its plans for 2023.

H E Said bin Hamoud bin Said al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, informed that the ministry is working with car dealers to ensure 79 per cent of vehicles in Oman are battery powered by 2035.

Addressing Muscat's traffic congestion, he informed that the ministry has proposals to solve the problem. "Three alternative routes have been identified - Nakhl-Bidbid, Seeb-Bidbid and Amerat-Dima Wa al Taen. Currently we are at the stage of designing the roads."

He further informed that the cost of constructing new roads, maintenance and repairing roads damaged due to climatic conditions will be more than RO1bn in 2023.

According to the minister, tunnel-based road projects are not viable in Oman. The cost of operating the tunnels on Sharqiyah Expressway ranges between RO30,000 and RO40,000 per month.

He said that the Dibba-Lima-Khasab road will be awarded after completion of technical analysis submitted by five companies before the end of March.



Tenders worth RO230mn were awarded in 2022 and eight strategic projects will be started and completed this year

H E ENG SAID
AL MA'AWALI

H E Ma'awali added that tenders worth RO230mn were awarded in 2022 and that eight strategic projects will be started and completed this year.

The ministry seeks to enhance import and export through Omani ports by increasing the movement of goods by no less than seven per cent annually, while increasing container traffic five per cent, and improving indicators of the transport and logistics sectors, road quality and efficiency of port services.

"We are working on digitising more than 200 government services, implementing more than five projects for the National Centre for AI and Advanced Technologies, and training more than 2,000 people as part of the 'Makeen' initiative to improve digital competencies."

Overwhelming response to Al Mouj Muscat's new Business Park following launch

Al Mouj Muscat has announced that it has sold three buildings out of five of the first phase of its newly launched Business Park, which is set within Al Mouj Muscat's 18-hole oceanfront golf course offers businesses an exemplary business location unsurpassed in the Middle East. Well-placed, well-connected and with a focus on wellbeing, we will look here at the unique features that sets it apart, its investment potential, what it offers companies choosing it as a base and the impact it will have on Oman.

Flexible office space fit for all

The cutting-edge complex comprises 39,000 square meters of flexible office space making it suited to enterprises of a wide variety of sizes. There are eight buildings ranging from 3,990 to 5,320 square meters and set across two districts, three in Business Park East and five in Business Park West.

Modern and state-of-the-art, the offices will be built to exacting Grade A standards offering occupiers a premium working environment and a generous underground parking allocation of between 115 and 148 spaces per office block, one of the most generous in Muscat.

Designed to blend in

Al Mouj Muscat is committed to preserving the natural environment and this extends to Al Mouj Golf, now a multi award-winning model for environmental sustainability, and reflected in the design of the park.

A mix of low and mid-rise buildings topped by roof gardens, seamlessly



linked by trees and beautifully landscaped spaces will help them blend into their lush surroundings in line with the premier lifestyle destination's exemplary eco-conscious standards.

Space to Innovate and Reimagine Business

Inside and out, Al Mouj Business Park has been designed so people can meet, share ideas and be inspired to create new solutions. High quality interiors are matched by outstanding panoramic views across the course, out to sea and towards the majestic Hajar Mountains. Such a unique and

beautiful outlook will connect people to nature and promote a feeling of space and tranquillity, which supports wellbeing and morale.

Interior and exterior design is ideal for a positive business environment, nurturing creativity, innovation and boosting productivity.

A sophisticated eco-system of support

Companies can take advantage of Al Mouj Muscat's established meetings and events eco-system. Corporate support services can be found at neighbouring Al Mouj Golf and several

4 and 5-Star hotels including the Okura Hotel, the St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, the Kempinski, the Mysk and the Rotana.

Mixing business with pleasure

In addition to its commercial amenities, Al Mouj presents a playground of world-class leisure, entertainment and tourism options on the doorstep, perfect for client and customer hospitality and providing employees with opportunities for a healthy work life balance.

Well-connected

The business park is in an excellent lo-

The Al Mouj Business Park offers modern companies a unique combination of setting and connection which will provide unlimited opportunities for people and business. The only business park in the region to offer an ocean and golf setting, we are utilising our unrivalled understanding of people and community to create an environment where business in Oman will thrive.

NASSER BIN MASOUD AL SHEIBANI
CEO of Al Mouj Muscat

cation with extensive transport links connecting businesses readily to the region and to the rest of the world. There is immediate access onto Al Mouj Muscat's 18 November Street and the park is only 10 minutes from Muscat City Centre, 10 minutes to Muscat International Airport and 15 minutes to the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre.

Investor confidence

Through a combination of unique setting and unparalleled connections, Al Mouj Business Park will provide exceptional opportunities for people and

businesses, including investors looking for excellent returns and long-term gains. Al Mouj Muscat understands how to create a sense of space and place and is confident that its exemplary new park will appeal to companies of all sizes from across the region.

Impact on Oman

There is strong demand for Grade A office space in Oman and the Al Mouj Business Park has the capacity to accommodate up to 2000 employees across the eight buildings. Its presence will also generate additional jobs and business opportunities in support services and hospitality, which continues to build on the long-term positive impact Al Mouj Muscat has had on the country's economy over the last 17 years. A joint venture between the Oman government and Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Al Mouj Muscat drives growth across tourism, employment and development and actively contributes to economic diversification. Since 2006, it has created over 2,200 jobs, supports 150 small and medium size enterprises, and has secured more than \$884 million in foreign direct investment.

Dynamic and diverse, the Al Mouj community is now home to 8,000 residents and attracts 4.9 million annual visitors to its coastal setting, boulevard style retail and dining experiences, luxury hotels, 400-berth marina and multi award-winning golf course.

To find out more about Al Mouj Business Park visit www.almouj.com

Oman attracts RO300mn for ICT projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has attracted technology-based investments worth over RO300mn for the Green Data Centre, Semiconductor Company and Amazon Company, according to H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

He informed that the contribution of the digital economy to the GDP in 2021 was about two per cent, while the contribution of telecommunications was 1.6 per cent.

Also in 2021, mobile broadband subscribers increased to 121 per cent, fixed broadband Internet subscribers reached 75 per cent and 94 per cent of Omani families had Internet.

H E Shidhani added that Oman ranked 50th internationally in e-



This year, the ministry will establish an innovation laboratory for cybersecurity, and initiate artificial intelligence projects and programmes to combat information technology crimes

H E DR ALI BIN AMER AL SHIDHANI

government development index, 52nd in government readiness for artificial intelligence, and 53rd in network readiness in 2022.

The number of data centres and private cloud service providers in the sultanate has grown to five, while the number

of companies - No 1 category - licensed to provide telecommunications services is eight.

Mobile phone subscription

was 140 per cent, while 98 per cent of the population had 4G network and 87 per cent had 5G in 2022.

There were 40,000 workers with various kinds of specialties employed in the information and communication technology sector in the sultanate in 2022, while the percentage of graduates from universities in the sector in the academic year 2021/2022 was 18 per cent of the total graduates.

In 2022, 20 submarine Internet cables were connected to the sultanate.

“This year, the ministry will establish an innovation laboratory for cybersecurity, initiate artificial intelligence projects and programmes to combat information technology crimes, and update several laws, including the Electronic Transactions Law, the Postal Law and regulations on communications,” H E Shidhani added.

Over 1,300km of strategic road projects planned this year: MTCIT



H E Khamis al Shamakhi and H E Said al Ma'awali at the media meet on Wednesday (Supplied photo)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has announced that it will undertake several strategic road projects this year.

At a media meet on Wednesday, H E Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Undersecretary for Transport in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, informed that continuing and new road projects in 2023 will be of more than 1,300km.

The projects include the Dibba-Lima-Khasab road, completion of the Batinah coastal road (Barka- Suwaiq), the Harweeb-Al Mazyouna-Metin road, completion of the Sharqiyah Expressway project, dualisation of the Haima-Thumrait road, the Raysut-Mughsayl road and the Jaalan Bani Bu Ali-Jaalan Bani Bu Hasan road.

According to H E Shamakhi, the ministry seeks to develop Omani ports and roads in order to make the sultanate an international logistics hub.

“Ports in Oman received 9,800 ships, 5.2mn containers and 205,000 tourists in 2022, and the volume of bulk and general cargo rose to more than 90mn tonnes.”

He informed that the ministry provided more than 83,000 services through the ‘Naql’ platform, including issuing more than 30,000 new operating cards for land transport, 4,000 licences for land transport, and 15,000 permits to foreign vehicles.

H E Khamis further said that

Ports in Oman received 9,800 ships, 5.2mn containers and 205,000 tourists in 2022, and the volume of bulk and general cargo rose to over 90mn tonnes

H E KHAMIS
AL SHAMAKHI

this year, the ministry will start road projects totalling 128km, including the Aflaj road in Mudhaibi, restoration of roads like the Al Hazm-Rustaq road in Rustaq, the Tawa Ateer-Rakah-Jabjat and Aqbat al Shuwaymiyah roads in Shaleem and Hallaniyat Islands, and the Bidbid-Nizwa road, and construction of the Khor-Mughsayl bridge on the Raysut-Mughsayl road, and Wadi Afoul bridge in Dhofar.

According to H E Shamakhi, the cost of periodic road maintenance and repairs following adverse climatic conditions in 2022 amounted to more than RO250mn.

“The ministry will implement and complete over 60km of roads for logistical links, including Phase 1 of the dual carriage Empty Quarter Road, roads of the Khazaen Economic Zone, roads in Sohar, and design of the Saih al Khairat-Al Shasr road in Dhofar,” he added.

The ministry will also complete roads for tourism of over 55km in Dhofar and South Batinah, and the Jabal Shams Road.

Majlis A'Shura refers Draft Labour Law to State Council

Muscat - Majlis A'Shura referred the Draft Labour Law, which was referred by the government, with amendments to the State Council on Wednesday.

The motion aims to complete the legislative cycle according to Article No 49 of the Council of Oman Law.

The shura completed discussions on the report of the draft law that included amendments and additions to some articles to guarantee workers' rights.

The session took place under the chairmanship of H E Khalid Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis A'Shura.



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Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co. SAOG

P.O.Box: 57 , P.C: 116 , Mina Al Fahal , Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24610200, Fax: 24610201, Website: www.almaha.com.om

Chairman’s Report

Dear Shareholders,

On my behalf and the Company’s board of directors, I wish to congratulate His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik Al Said on His Majesty’s third anniversary of assuming leadership of the Sultanate and guiding us in the path of progress.

It is my pleasure & privilege to present the 19th Annual Report of your Company, together with the Audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2022, and share the highlights for the year.

The prices of crude oil -a major growth driver for the economy- have increased after the start of the Russian-Ukrain war in February last year and have remained elevated almost throughout the year. Increased crude prices have significantly boosted business activities and the economy, thereby accelerating the economic progress in the country and the region.

Your Company has strategically repositioned itself to meet the changing customer preferences in the Post Covid period, expanded the customer reach capabilities with customer-centric initiatives, and capitalized on the new business opportunities that arose during the year.

As a result, your Company has recorded an impressive performance by recording a growth of:

a) **32%** in sales (RO 492.7 million in 2022 against RO 372.5 million in 2021)

b) **124%** in net profit (RO 6.192 million in 2022 against RO 2.760 million in 2021).

	2022	2021	Inc / (dec)	Inc/(dec) %
Sales	492,731	372,484	120,247	32%
Cost of Sales	(465,237)	(350,067)	115,170	33%
Gross profit	27,494	22,417	5,077	23%
Other income	4,949	4,396	553	13%
Total expenses	(26,251)	(24,053)	2,198	9%
Net profit	6,192	2,760	3,432	124%

Earnings per share (RO)	0.090	0.040	0.050	124%
Book value per share (RO)	0.689	0.639	0.050	8%
Retained earnings (RO’000)	36,224	32,792	3,432	10%
Total equity (RO’000)	47,528	44,096	3,432	8%

HIGHLIGHTS:-

- Total sales during the year 2022 reached the record level of RO 492.7 million (2021: RO 372.5 million), an increase of RO 120.2 million, i.e., by 32%. The increase in sales is mainly attributed to the recovery in economic activities, the increase in selling prices, and the increase in fuel demand at border stations and airports.
- As a result of increased sales, net profit reached RO 6.192 million (2021: 2.760 million), i.e., an increase of RO 3.432 million (i.e., 124%) over 2021.
- Earnings per share is also increased to RO 0.090 in 2022 compared to RO 0.040 in 2021, an increase of RO 0.050 (i.e., 124%).
- Book value per share increased from RO 0.639 in 2021 to RO 0.689 in 2022, a growth of 8% due to the increase in net profit in 2022.
- Total equity also increased to RO 47.5 million in 2022 from RO 44.1 million in 2021, registering a growth of 8%.

SEGMENTS PERFORMANCE:-

- **Retails Segment**

The retail sales segment is the primary revenue driver, accounting for almost 71% of our business in 2022.

A new fuel station was opened during the year, bringing the total number of service stations to 239. In addition, the Company opened new convenience stores and other service centers to enhance the retail sector’s business, develop non-fuel revenues, and meet the increasing demand for these services.

Retail sales witnessed a remarkable improvement this year compared to the previous year. Sales volume has increased by 21% due to the increased sales in border fuel stations and the gradual increase in demand as many supporting businesses gradually returned to normalcy. Further, the successful Khareef season also boosted sales performance during the period.

In Dec 2022, your Company has successfully opened its first branch in Dammam, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to construct and operate fuel stations in the country and participate in the growing retail market in the Kingdom.

- **Commercial segment:**

The commercial segment is the second-largest business for the Company, accounting for about 17% of the total revenue in 2022. This sector is very competitive in the prices offered to customers, and diesel fuel is the main product of this sector. Commercial sales are highly affected by infrastructure projects, oil extraction, and power production, which require high efficiency in delivery.

The sales volume of this sector has decreased by 7% compared to the previous year due to the decrease in demand by power-generating companies. However, despite the decline in power sector sales in general, the other sectors witnessed a remarkable improvement during the year, such as oil and gas and infrastructure.

- **Aviation segment**

Aviation sales volume has increased significantly by 91% compared to last year as the tourism & hospitality industry returns to more pre-pandemic. Oman Air and other major airlines have resumed their services to many destinations, contributing significantly to the sales growth during the year.

The Company also won the prestigious contract with Oman Airports to manage the fuel farm at Muscat International Airport for five years starting from January 1, 2023, which reflects confidence in the Company’s operational and technical capabilities to manage international aviation operations.

- **Lubricant segment**

Despite the challenging external environment, the lubricants segment witnessed positive growth due to improved marketing tools and expanding the Company’s business in this sector to other countries.

- **NFR (Non-Fuel Retailing) segment**

Non-Fuel Retailing continues to be a high-priority area. The Company focuses on redesigning convince-stores and constructing/developing commercial buildings in the fuel outlets to fully capitalize on the growth opportunity it offers to support our retail business.

DIVIDEND:-

In line with our consistent dividend policy of maintaining a sustainable dividend payment, the Board of Directors has recommended a cash dividend of Bz \$5 (2021: Bz \$40) per share, amounting to RO 5.865 million (2021: RO 2.760 million) representing 85% (2021: 40%) of share capital, subject to the approval of the shareholders’ Annual General Meeting to be held on 21 March 2023.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE:-

Our corporate philosophy on Corporate Governance has been to ensure fairness to the Stakeholders through transparency, full disclosures, empowerment of employees, and collective decision-making.

The Corporate Governance Report highlighting these endeavours has been incorporated as a separate section, forming part of the Annual Report.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:-

Your Company is committed to the communities around it and through various CSR programs. During the past year, the Company launched many programs within the social responsibility framework and supported several charitable institutions and non-profit organisations serving the country.

QHSE:-

The Company is committed to conducting business with a robust Quality, Health, Safety, and Environmental conscience, ensuring sustainable development, safe workplaces, and enrichment of the quality of life of its employees, customers, and the community as a top priority. Compliance with Quality, Health, Safety, and Environment systems, procedures, and laws is monitored at the unit, division, and corporate levels. The QHSE activities of the Company are reviewed periodically in Board meetings.

The achievement of Quality (ISO 9001), Health & Safety (ISO 45001), & Environment (ISO 14001) certificates are a witness of consciousness on all levels of the importance of commitment to the guidance of the Quality, Health, Safety & Environment. In addition, during the year, Quality, Health, Safety & Environment audits were carried out at various offices, projects, operations, and locations.

Various training programs were conducted across the corporation covering Quality, Health, Safety, and Environment -related topics.

FUTURE OUTLOOK:-

Risks still surround the global economy, which has not yet recovered from the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. These risks increased after the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in February 2022. This war affected the demand and supply balance for essential commodities such as energy and food. In addition, Central banks are also trying hard to curb inflation by raising interest rates.

The Sultanate’s Government has built its budget for 2023 on the basis that the average price of oil per barrel will be \$55. The Sultanate’s budget also aims to achieve economic growth of 3%, keeping inflation prices within reasonable limits through continued government support for fuel, energy, and other basic commodities and raising interest rates.

Despite the geopolitical and economic risks, expectations indicate that the average global oil price in 2023 will be above \$80 per barrel. In addition, the government’s efforts are continuing to control inflation through its support for essential commodities, and it is also continuing to implement the fiscal balance plan. Accordingly, the Company will take advantage of emerging opportunities in the changing business environment per its strategy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:-

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

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

Dr. Saif Salim Saif Al-Harathi
Chairman
16 February 2023

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

	2022 RO’000	2021 RO’000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	28,191	28,648
Investment properties	494	541
Right-of-use assets	6,368	4,074
Contract assets-non current	3,085	3,353
Deferred tax assets	2,741	2,722
	<u>40,879</u>	<u>39,338</u>
Current assets		
Inventories	3,824	3,878
Trade and other receivables	69,647	58,412
Contract assets - current	1,952	1,952
Bank balances and cash	35,241	32,906
	<u>110,664</u>	<u>97,148</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>151,543</u>	<u>136,486</u>
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	6,900	6,900
Legal reserve	2,300	2,300
Special reserve	2,104	2,104
Retained earnings	36,224	32,792
Total equity	<u>47,528</u>	<u>44,096</u>
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Lease liabilities – non current	6,163	3,174
Contract liabilities – non current	-	785
Employees’ end of service benefits	235	199
	<u>6,398</u>	<u>4,158</u>
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	51,342	42,851
Short term borrowings	42,900	42,000
Lease liabilities – current	720	1,156
Contract liabilities – current	1,462	1,343
Income tax payable	1,193	882
	<u>97,617</u>	<u>88,232</u>
Total liabilities	<u>104,015</u>	<u>92,390</u>
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	<u>151,543</u>	<u>136,486</u>
Net assets per share (RO)	<u>0.689</u>	<u>0.639</u>

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

	2022 RO’000	2021 RO’000
Revenue	492,731	372,484
Cost of sales	(465,237)	(350,067)
GROSS PROFIT	27,494	22,417
Other income	4,949	4,396
Operating and administration expenses	(24,649)	(23,208)
OPERATING PROFIT	7,794	3,605
Finance income	1,422	1,985
Finance costs	(1,899)	(2,283)
PROFIT BEFORE INCOME TAX	7,317	3,307
Income tax expense	(1,125)	(547)
PROFIT AND TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	6,192	2,760
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	<u>0.090</u>	<u>0.040</u>

Note:

The complete report is available in Muscat Stock Exchange website and Company’s website.

The complete report will be sent to any shareholder who requests them either in Arabic or English as required within 7 days of receipt of the request.

The request should be sent to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at the above mentioned address.

Oman participates in G20 meeting of anti-corruption group in India

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Audit Institution (SAI), is taking part in the first Anti-Corruption Working Group Meeting (ACWG) of G20, which began in a northern Indian city on Wednesday.

During the three-day event at Gurugram, over 90 delegates from 20 members countries, ten invitee countries and nine international organisations will engage in detailed deliberations on strengthening international mechanisms to curb corruption.

G20-ACWG meetings have one Chair (Presidency country) and one co-chair country.



The co-chair for the G20-ACWG 2023 is Italy. Oman's participation in the

G20 meetings for this year comes to enrich the fields of knowledge through the ex-

change of expertise and experiences among the participating countries, in addition to high-

lighting Oman's efforts in the areas that will be addressed by the group.

The ACWG is discussing many topics, including international cooperation in combating corruption and economic crimes, recovering stolen assets and addressing the role of integrity in the specialised authorities concerned with preventing and combating corruption.

A number of working groups within the G20 are participating in the meeting, covering various fields such as finance, energy transitions, trade and tourism, health, sustainable agriculture and food security, as well as education, combating terrorism and corruption.



MoHERI holds scientific sessions, competitions at Muscat book fair

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) is organising several scientific and interactive sessions at its corner in the 27th Muscat International Book Fair, which is currently being held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

The ministry's exercise in the book fair is focused on highlighting important scientific concepts in research and innovation through a series of scientific sessions, research lectures and introductory meetings about its research and innovative projects and programmes.

Additionally, it is holding various competitions and presenting success stories of Omani researchers and innovators, with the aim of promoting a culture of research and innovation in the various segments of society through the ministry's participation in this important cultural event, MoHERI stated.

During one of those sessions, Muneer bin Nasser al Battashi from the Oman Virtual Science Library (Masader) gave a presentation at the Ahmed Bin Majid Theatre on Masader.

Masader is an electronic library that allows its subscribers to access different types of electronic information sources at any time and from anywhere, through thousands of scientific sources in global research systems.

Ali bin Abdullah al Maskari, Director of the Research and Innovation Capacity Building Department, introduced visitors to the efforts made in building research and innovation capabilities. He talked about a number of programmes and initiatives and their importance in enhancing the capabilities of the Omani youth.

In another session, Dr Issa bin Salem al Shabibi and Aisha bint Hareb al Bahari from the Research Programmes Department gave two presentations on the Block Funding Programme, through which the ministry seeks to enhance Omani research production and its subprogrammes: Research Grants (RG), Graduate Research Grants (GRG), and Undergraduate Research Grants (URG).

A session on the Strategic Research Projects Programme (SRPP) was also held at the fair. This national programme is directed at the government sector.

Oman, UAE hold discussions on environmental issues

Muscat - Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) held an official session of talks on environmental issues, in Muscat on Wednesday.

The sultanate was represented by the Environment Authority, while the UAE was represented by the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment. The session dealt with means of enhancing the cooperation in various environmental fields and exchanging views on environmental issues, as well as unifying environmental stances before the COP28 conference.

The Omani side was led by Dr Abdullah Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, whilst the Emirati side was led by Maryam Mohammad al Mheiri, Minister of Climate Change and Environment.



During the session, the two sides discussed plans to combat plastic pollution and refrigerant gases. The two sides also viewed

the experience of wind energy and electric energy, in addition to devising the necessary mechanism for activating research be-

tween the two countries in the field of fish farming and marine fisheries, as well as exchanging expertise and best practices,

among other topics of concern.

The session was attended by a number of officials from both sides.

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Fun Fair for children with disabilities begins today

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Association for Children with Disabilities will host the fifth edition of its Fun Fair from March 2 to 4 at Azaiba Rehabilitation Centre on 18 November Street.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, H H Sayyida Hujaija Jaifer al Said, Chairperson of the association,



said, "The fair will be held from 4pm to 10pm and will include games, art and crafts, classic cars, pony rides, bike rides, food trucks, ice cream parlours and other attractions."

According to H H Sayyida Hujaija, several companies will set up stalls to sell products for children. "Funds collected during the event will be donated to centres of the association. We

have set RO1 as entry fee."

H H Sayyida Hujaija called on families to attend the fair with their children and enjoy the fun-filled atmosphere and the recreational activities.

The association has about 450 children - aged five to 14 - in nine centres in the wilayats of Seeb, Barka, Musannah, Azaiba, Quriyat, Jalan Bani Bu Hasan, Dhank, Yanqul and Saham.

H M emphasises on integration of SMEs with large businesses

Continued from Page 01

His Majesty underlined the importance of enabling the OCCI to play its role as a representative of the private sector and achieving its objectives in a manner that enhances its growth and augments its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP), notably in the sectors of economic diversification.

Within the context of His Majesty's interest in everything that would contribute to strengthening the national econ-

omy, special importance was accorded to SME business owners' benefiting from the infrastructure, facilities, stimulating economic packages, and many other programmes offered by the government, including the promotion of local content of Omani industries and other incentives and programmes.

At the conclusion of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan underscored the significance of forging an effective partnership between the government and pri-

vate sectors, so that the private sector can play its desired role in implementing projects and investments that contribute to economic diversification, the growth of GDP and the creation of employment opportunities for citizens.

His Majesty the Sultan wished all success in their endeavours to realise the good of this dear country.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Bilal bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Chairman of the Su-

pervisory Committee for the Start-ups Programme, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Chairman of the Financial and Economic Committee of the Council of Ministers, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Dr Mahad bin Said Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, and Halima bint Rashid al Zar'ee, Chairperson of ASMED.

ابدأ يومك بلذة!

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Omani businesses prepare for tax developments

Our Correspondent
Muscat

This week EY held 'Reshaping the Future of Tax 2023 - Oman' seminar to address key tax topics relevant to businesses operating in the sultanate. The event provided the latest updates on the local, regional, and global tax environment, tax policies, recent tax trends across the MENA region with a focus on the GCC, as well as sustainability.

At the seminar, EY global and regional tax leaders discussed how the future of tax is being reshaped and the growing significance of tax in Oman.

Ahmed al Esry, EY MENA tax leader, said, "The tax landscape in the MENA region is constantly evolving as tax increasingly becomes an important source of revenue for governments as they seek to diversify their sources of income and as an important policy tool to drive changes in the economy. This makes it critical for all businesses in Oman to be up to date with their operating models and regularly review how the function is complementing their finance procedures to ensure they are thoroughly prepared ahead of any government announcements and can maintain compliance."

The recently announced 2023 National Oman Fiscal Budget mentioned 11 per cent of the GDP being accounted as the tax revenue, highlighting the importance of multiple income streams to support the country's transition to a non-hydrocarbon



driven economy.

In addition to key Oman tax practices, the seminar attendees went over general recent tax trends across the MENA region, tax policy evolution, VAT developments, the introduction of the UAE corporate tax and transfer pricing developments.

The tax seminar saw the participation of over 150 chief financial officers, tax directors, tax and finance managers, lawyers, and business owners.

Alkesh Joshi, Oman tax leader and EY MENA energy and sustainability tax leader, said, "Businesses in Oman are aware that they need to stay up to date on tax directives but may not realise how quickly the changes will come and the impact they will see on their transactions. In addition, with any new tax regulations comes challenges around the interpretation of various pro-

visions and data transparency."

"It is critical that organisations have a separate tax team and an ERP system ready to address issues or discrepancies on every transaction. By ensuring that the tax function is agile and compliant, businesses will be able to more efficiently incorporate any amendments to the Corporate Income Tax Law and expansion of the Double Tax Treaty network between GCC countries," he added.

In a press statement, EY said businesses can also expect to see an emphasis on the use of technology by the Oman Tax Authority (OTA). The digitalisation of tax compliance and controversy will focus on the e-filing of returns on the OTA portal, requests for more information from taxpayers made digitally, paperless assessments by the tax authority, increases data an-

alytics, and shorter assessment timelines.

VAT journey in Oman

According to EY, the Omani tax landscape has seen several amendments to value-added tax (VAT) laws over the past 12 months. On October 15, 2022, the VAT Executive Regulations were amended, with 10 amendments to existing articles, and the inclusion of two additional clauses to existing articles.

The amendments also involved the VAT exemption of financial services, meaning businesses other than financial institutions are now eligible to exempt their sale of financial services. Furthermore, the OTA has recently requested that all large taxpayers and nonresident taxpayers submit the taxpayer checklist along with the quarterly VAT return.

MSX emerges as second best performing market in GCC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) was the second-best performing market in the GCC during February 2023 witnessing a monthly growth of 1.1 per cent to close the month at 4,753.28 points following consistent daily volatility since the start of the year.

Affected by the US rate hike fears and oil price decline, all GCC equity markets reported weak trends during February to reach multi-month lows, according to GCC Markets Monthly Report released by Kamco Investment.

The aggregate MSCI GCC Index witnessed the biggest monthly decline in five-months at 5.2 per cent to close the month at 666.75 points. The monthly decline pushed year-to-date performance in the red with a decline of 3.7 per cent.

The decline was mainly led by fears of the economic impact of multiple expected rate hikes in the US this year, especially after the release of recent economic data. Weaker crude oil prices also affected markets in the GCC,' Kamco Investment said.

However, the performance of individual markets in the GCC remained mixed during February. Dubai was the only prominent gainer with a monthly gain of 4.1 per cent. On the decliner's side, Saudi Arabia topped with a steep monthly decline of 6.4 per cent followed by Qatar and Kuwait



with declines of 3.3 per cent and 0.5 per cent, respectively.

At the MSX, all the three sectoral indices recorded monthly gains during February.

Oman's services sector index recorded the biggest monthly growth of 2 per cent in February. The growth was primarily driven by the gain in shares of utility companies including Voltamp Energy which witnessed share price growth of 20 per cent and Phoenix Power which witnessed 5.6 per cent gains during the month.

The financial sector index followed witnessing a monthly rise of 1.8 per cent while the industrial sector index registered a monthly gain of 1.6 per cent during February.

Trading activity at the MSX was mixed during February with monthly value traded recording a gain of 7.1 per cent to reach RO42.5mn as compared to RO39.7mn during January. Comparatively, total volume of shares traded at the MSX witnessed a decline of 34 per cent to 162.4mn during

February as compared to 246.1mn in January.

Omantel topped the monthly value traded chart for February with trades at RO10.2mn followed by Bank Muscat and Galfar Engineering & Contracting with total value traded at RO9.6mn and RO3.1mn, respectively.

In terms of company performance, shares of SMN Power Holding topped the gainers list with a share price gain of 27.8 per cent followed by Gulf Mushroom Products and Oman Education and Training Investment with 23.7 per cent and 20 per cent monthly share gains, respectively. Shares of SMN Power Holding gained after the company announced cash dividends of 15bz for financial year 2022.

On the decliners side, Sohar Power reported the biggest decline of 15 per cent followed by Al Batinah Power and Oman Qatar Insurance with declines of 13.5 per cent and 11.9 per cent, respectively, according to Kamco Investment data.

EU plans to extend gas consumption cuts targets

Brussels, Belgium - The EU is planning to extend its gas consumption reduction measures into next winter, the bloc's energy ministers said on Tuesday, to replenish stocks.

Confronted by soaring energy costs after Russia invaded Ukraine last year, the 27-member bloc agreed last July to reduce gas usage between August 2022 and March 2023 by 15 per cent.

The actual reduction figures have exceeded the "voluntary" target, thanks to mild weather and high prices that forced households and businesses to limit energy usage.

According to the EU statistics agency Eurostat, gas consumption in the EU fell by 19.3 per cent between August and January, compared to the same period between 2017 and 2022.

The member states "dis-



Kadri Simson

cussed extending a number of emergency measures to be able to quickly fill our gas stocks and cope with possible tensions", French Energy Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher said on Tuesday.

The EU regulation adopted last year expires at the end of March, the EU's energy commissioner Kadri Simson said late Monday, adding that the Commission considers "continuing

demand reduction a no regret option".

"It is key to ensure our preparedness for the next winter and for reaching the 90 per cent storage target by November 1," she added, a permanent EU aim for every winter.

EU member states will have to agree any new target on reduction for next winter.

Germany, the EU's biggest economy, has called for a target higher than 15 per cent.

German state secretary Sven Giegold said it was important "not only to prolong the current rules, (but) we have to get tougher, in order to send a signal to the market".

Others were more reserved. Czech Industry Minister Jozef Sikela said last year's moves were "technically not repeatable".

AFP

China's manufacturing activity records robust growth in February

China's manufacturing activity surged to its highest reading in more than a decade in February, official figures showed Wednesday, as factories began to return to normal following years of Covid-19 disruption.

The world's second-largest economy is stirring back to life after Beijing's decision in December to abruptly drop its strict health measures, which mandated strict lockdowns, travel restrictions and mass testing.

February's figures reflected the subsiding of case numbers

after a surge that began in December, coupled with the return to work after the Lunar New Year holiday.

The official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) - a key gauge of Chinese factory output - stood at 52.6 in February, compared with 50.1 a month earlier, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) announced.

The reading, the highest since 2012, surpassed expectations, with analysts surveyed by Bloomberg having predicted a much less marked increase to

50.6.

"With the effect of the holidays... and the repercussions of the epidemic fading away, the recovery of production by manufacturing companies accelerated and demand continued to rise," said NBS statistician Zhao Qinghe.

The growth trend was confirmed Wednesday by the independent PMI index by IHS Markit for China's Caixin media group, which stood at 51.6 in February, compared with 49.2 the previous month.

AFP

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FINANCIAL SERVICES COMPANY SAOG



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

After compliments,

We are pleased to present to you an overview of the audited financial results of the company for the year ended 31st December, 2022. Financial Year 2022 turned out to be one of the best years as MSX registered a gain of 17.6% for the year the stock index closed at 4857,439 points, compared to the previous year level of 4129,540 points. Trading volumes stood at 940 million compared to 818 million in 2021, an increase of 14.9% and the market capitalization of companies rose by 7.4% thereby reaching 23.74 billion riyals while it was 22.02 billion riyals a year before.

Revenue: -

Total operating income amounted to 437,214 Riyals (four seventy-three thousand two hundred and fourteen riyals) compared to 345,216 Riyals (three hundred and forty-five thousand two hundred and sixteen riyals) for the same period last year, an increase of 26%.

Net profit: -

This year's total expenses were RO 450,274 (Omani Rials four hundred and fifty thousand two hundred and seventy) compared to RO 394,046 for the same period in year 2021, an increase of 14%, and thus the losses amounted to (13,060) Riyals (thirteen thousand and sixty riyals), compared to loss of (48,830) Riyals (forty-eight thousand eight hundred and thirty riyals) in 2021, a decrease of 73%.

Shareholders' equity: -

Shareholders' equity amounted to RO 3,284,912 (Omani Rials three million, two hundred and eighty-four thousand, nine hundred and twelve) compared to RO 3,121,149 (Omani Rials Three Million, One Hundred Twenty-One Thousand and One Hundred and Forty-Nine) for the same period last year 2021, an increase of 5%.

Dear Shareholders,

The Sultanate of Oman has succeeded in benefiting from the financial savings as a result of the increase in oil prices by more than 100% compared to the price approved in the state's general budget for the year 2022, supported by the quality of government spending, in reducing the state's public debt to about 17 billion riyals. 43% of the gross domestic product by paying about 3 billion riyals. To improve the credit rating of the Sultanate of Oman a lot with a stable outlook and help accelerate the pace of economic recovery for the Sultanate.

In conclusion, we take this opportunity to thank with gratitude, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, may Allah bless and protect him. And keep citizens of this country safe and secure.

Best regards, we take

Omar bin Ahmed Abdullah Mahfoodh Al-Saikh

Chairman

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2022

	31 December 2022 RO	31 December 2021 RO
Assets		
Cash and bank balances	467,161	540,958
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	156,305	169,328
Investments at fair value through other comprehensive income	1,420,421	1,243,598
Trade and other receivables	843,480	509,005
Furniture and equipment	8,650	7,043
Intangible assets	11,172	2,481
Investment properties	1,790,000	1,790,000
Total assets	4,697,189	4,262,413
Equity and liabilities		
Equity		
Share capital	2,000,000	2,000,000
Legal reserve	-	-
Property revaluation reserve	862,859	862,859
Fair value reserve	609,400	432,577
Accumulated losses	(187,347)	(174,287)
Total equity	3,284,912	3,121,149
Liabilities		
Bank overdraft	625,593	493,278
Trade and other payables	779,842	641,893
Employees' end of service benefits	6,842	6,093
Total liabilities	1,412,277	1,141,264
Total equity and liabilities	4,697,189	4,262,413
Net assets per share	0.164	0.156
Customer securities held in trust	284,530	236,702

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2022

	Year ended 31 December 2022 RO	Year ended 31 December 2021 RO
INCOME		
Brokerage	299,749	257,740
Dividend income	77,596	16,173
Remeasurement loss on investments at fair value through profit and loss	(13,023)	-
Rental income	65,202	63,492
Other income	7,690	7,811
Operating income	437,214	345,216
EXPENSES		
General and administrative expenses	(413,211)	(357,310)
Amortisation	(811)	(940)
Depreciation	(3,425)	(3,844)
Fair value loss on investment properties	-	(10,000)
Operating expenses	(417,447)	(372,094)
Operating profit/(loss)	19,767	(26,878)
Finance costs	(32,827)	(21,952)
Loss for the year	(13,060)	(48,830)
Other comprehensive income		
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss		
Remeasurement gain on investments carried at fair value through other comprehensive income	176,823	6,132
Other comprehensive income for the year	176,823	6,132
Total comprehensive income/(loss) for the year	163,763	(42,698)
Loss per share	(0.001)	(0.002)

Zubair EDC holds Tajribati talks on sales skills

The Zubair Enterprises Development Centre (Zubair EDC) recently organised its monthly ‘Tajribati’ discussion at the Bait al Zubair museum on sales skills for entrepreneurs. The session was held in cooperation with Wejdan Development Company, in the presence of Hamad Sulaiman al Habsi, CEO of the company.

The February session of Tajribati discussed the challenges faced by sales employees in the labor market, the impact of psychological programming on sales, and the correct steps to achieve sales.

The session was presented by CEO Hamad Sulaiman al Habsi, an entrepreneur and researcher with the aim to improve Omanis’ productivity in the market.

As part of his research, he attended a number of training courses and conferences around the world in countries such as Morocco, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates.

During the session, entrepreneurs were able to ask questions and interact directly with Hamad Sulaiman al Habsi, enabling for a more engaging format.

Rawan bint Saif al Kiyumiyah, Business Analyst at The Zubair



Enterprises Development Centre, also took part in the session. Her contribution highlighted the importance of the monthly ‘Tajribati’ sessions as one of many developmental initiatives created by the Centre for Owners of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

The monthly sessions have been an opportunity for entrepreneurs to learn from industry experts on a wide range of issues, she explained, giving them first-hand experience and practical solutions. She reiterated the main objective of the centre, which is to provide a space for

entrepreneurs to have access to all the tools and methods they may need to successfully grow their businesses efficiently.

“I would like to thank The Zubair Corporation, represented by the Zubair EDC, for inviting me to their monthly Tajribati session where I was

able meet with young entrepreneurs and discuss various topics that contribute to the development and sustainability of their businesses,” the Wejdan CEO said.

The session focused on the challenges facing sales employees in the labour market, which

include competition from other companies and brands, changes in customer interests and needs, the difficulty of finding new customers and fluctuations in the economy and market.

“We also addressed the impact of psychological programming on sales, from customer’s

interactions with advertisements and marketing offers to customers buying behaviour, enabling entrepreneurs to improve their overall sales process and achieve better results. Then, the impact of psychological programming on the sales process was discussed, which relates to understanding body language and analysing customer behaviour and interaction during sales presentations to improve the process and achieve better results,” Habsi added.

As part of the session, he informed that the speakers also covered the right steps to achieve sales, which include studying the market and customers, identifying the competitive advantages of the product or service, improving the presentation of the product or service, learning techniques for effective communication with customers, knowing how to successfully manage the sales and closing process, and after the sale, paying attention to customers and following up with them.

“Overall, it was a very engaging session with passionate entrepreneurs, who were willing to develop their sales skills and build a stronger business model,” he added.

BankDhofar opens 75th branch

Reinforcing its efforts to be closer to its customers, BankDhofar recently celebrated the official opening of Wattaya branch marking the 75 branch of the Bank’s expansive branch network.

The official opening was held under the patronage of Ali bin Saeed al Sayyidi, wali of Muscat, in the presence of a number of prominent members of the society and BankDhofar executive management team.

On this milestone, Amjad Iqbal al Lawati, Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar, said, “We understand, at BankDhofar, that branches are one of the critical connection channels for customers. Therefore, as part of our strategy to be closer to our customers and provide them with a convenient banking experience, we are expanding our (BankDhofar and Maisarah) branch network across the Sultanate. Today we are glad to launch the 75th branch within our branch network, and we look forward to opening more branches throughout the year.”

BankDhofar had recently



opened service branches in various governorates across Oman, and they include branches in Al Kuwair, Al Koudh, MBD (in Muscat), Amerat, Nizwa, Ibra and Barka.

The bank is expanding its Islamic window branches as well.

Elaborating on that, Amor Said al Amri, DGM - Maisarah Retail Banking said, “At Maisarah we continue to enhance our customer-centric approach. Thus, we are expanding our branches

to be closer to our customers. Currently, we have a network of 11 branches across the Sultanate, and we aim to open more branches and guarantee the best experience for our customers from the moment they step into the branch.”

With the official opening of Wattaya Branch, the Bank expanded its nationwide branch network to 75 branches and one Corporate Centre.

With its prime location, which

is easily accessible, the branch offers a wide range of services to its customers except for cash services. The new branch is designed to provide a convenient banking experience to its customers.

BankDhofar customers may access financial services through its branches network across the Sultanate, in addition to a wide network of ATMs, CDMs & FFM around the Sultanate that work round-the-clock with high efficiency.

ahlibank to manage Abraj IPO; to offer subscription at mobile app

In line with the bank’s focus on further strengthening its investment banking franchise, ahlibank has been appointed as the issue manager for the Initial Public Offer (IPO) of Abraj Energy Services, the largest IPO in the sultanate in over a decade.

The company has appointed ahlibank, EFG-Hermes UAE Limited, and National Bank of Oman as joint global coordinators for the IPO, with ahlibank also acting as the collecting bank for the IPO.

ahlibank adopted a novel and unique approach in carrying out the subscription operations through the use of the latest digital self-services. The bank provided self-subscription to the IPO through its mobile app and has become the first bank in the sultanate to provide 1:1 financing option service digitally, and thus support individual investors to increase their investment in the IPO.

Abraj, a fully owned oil

drilling company of OQ (a global integrated energy company with roots in Oman), offered 49 per cent of its share capital, amounting to 377,398,000 shares at a price band of Bzs 242 to Bzs 249, when it opened its initial public offering on February 20.

The company is expected to raise up to RO93.97mn in the IPO at the highest end of the price band.

Highlighting ahlibank’s role as the issue manager, Hanaa al Kharusi, Senior General Manager, Wholesale Banking, ahlibank, said, “This marked a new phase for ahlibank as Abraj appointed ahlibank to lead manage its IPO, which on listing would be among the top ten companies on the Muscat Stock Exchange in Oman. As the joint global coordinator and issue manager, ahlibank was at the forefront to ensure the IPO was successful and fulfilled the objectives which OQ and OIA

intended to achieve at the commencement of the IPO journey. Our team of qualified experts was at hand to fulfill all the responsibilities as issue managers, and to mitigate any challenges that may have occurred during the IPO process.”

According to her, the IPO is an opportunity to generate investor interest and deliver on the bank’s transformation strategy in the market, with the IPO remaining open for large investors until March 2, and for small investors until March 1.

“This is a momentous occasion for ahlibank; as it is in line with ahlibank’s digital transformation strategy, we are the first in the sultanate to provide financing through ahlibank mobile app. The IPO further strengthened the local investment market and enhanced private sector contribution to the national economy. It is an exciting phase in our young banking journey,” she added.



Muscat Call Centre trains officers

As an attempt of Muscat Municipality to speed up the process of terminating communications, specialists of Muscat Call Centre on Wednesday organised a training workshop on new mechanism of resolving communications received by the service directorates in Muscat.

The workshop targeted a number of employees of the municipality in its various service sectors, in the presence of general managers of the relevant directorates across Muscat, and liaison officers in the communi-

cation centre, at the Hilton Muscat Hotel.

The workshop was held to provide participants with a set of knowledge, science, and best practices in order to increase the satisfaction rates of beneficiaries of the services provided by various entities.

It also offers to build bridges of cooperation between the centre and the directorates of Muscat Municipality to ensure the completion of transactions accurately and quickly, a goal that everyone should achieve to de-

velop performance as the basis for achieving the satisfaction of beneficiaries of services.

During the workshop, several topics were reviewed, including the mechanism for managing complaints and communications, starting from the beneficiary to the third support line, and the mechanism for escalating complaints.

A brainstorming session was held and ideas were presented from participants in finding best practices to escalate outstanding communications.

BMW XM launched for 1st time in Middle East

BMW Group Middle East launched the BMW XM for the first time ever in the region, in partnership with its official importers across Middle East.

Revealed at an electrifying event in Dubai, the XM represents a fresh interpretation of the Sports Activity Vehicle (SAV) created out of the ground-breaking fusion of the high-performance BMW M and progressive plug-in hybrid technology.

The first BMW M original since the BMW M1, the all-new BMW XM is the automotive group’s latest offering in celebration of BMW M’s 50th anniversary, featuring the newly developed M HYBRID drive system, an extravagant design and progressive luxury ambience.

Ideally suited for the terrain and the driving conditions in the Gulf and the Middle East, the BMW XM comes with 4WD Sand mode, conceived specifically for navigating terrain on and off the road.



Commenting on the launch, Dr Hamid Haqqarwar, Managing Director BMW Group Middle East, said, “We are thrilled to launch the all-new BMW XM here in the region. This model is truly made for the Middle East, with the all-new M xDrive system ideal for navigating this region’s terrains.

“Our clients have been requesting a luxury M Sports Activity Vehicle and we’ve answered them with the BMW XM. Since announcing the XM last year, we’ve seen incredible interest in the region and are expecting the model to be highly successful in the Middle East. We are confident that the BMW

XM will open up the M experience to new target groups in the high-performance segment.”

The M HYBRID drive system in the BMW XM delivers an overall output 653 hp and is underpinned by a high-revving V8 engine with cutting-edge M TwinPower Turbo technology.

The 4.4-litre engine is assisted by an electric motor integrated into the eight-speed M Steptronic transmission, delivering a maximum overall torque of 800 Nm.

The BMW XM sprints from 0 to 100km per hour in 4.3 seconds, accompanied by an energy-charged soundtrack amplified by hexagonal dual tailpipes arranged one above the other for the first time on a BMW M model. Uniquely, the BMW IconicSounds Electric developed in a collaboration with Hollywood music legend Hans Zimmer creates a suitable backing track for the electric motor’s power delivery.

Erdogan says May election to go ahead despite Turkey quake

Istanbul, Turkey - President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday ruled out any delay in elections after the devastating quake that killed tens of thousands in Turkey, saying the vote would push ahead on May 14 as planned.

After the massive 7.8-magnitude quake that killed more than 45,000 people in Turkey, speculation mounted on whether the polls - which could keep Erdogan's Islamic-rooted government in power until 2028 - would be able to proceed.

Last month, Erdogan declared a three-month state of emergency across 11 quake-hit provinces, and the region is still suffering from strong tremors that make the likelihood of campaigning in the area extremely unlikely.

But Erdogan told his ruling party lawmakers in the Ankara parliament that 'Turkish' people will do what is necessary on May 14.' A delegation from Turkey's Higher Election Board started a mission on Monday to the quake zone to report on the voters' situation and election security.

Erdogan's government has come under fire for failing to deploy sufficient humanitarian aid and relief teams in several loca-



Turkish President and Leader of the Justice and Development (AK) Party, Recep Tayyip Erdogan attends his party's group meeting at the Turkish Grand National Assembly in Ankara, Turkey, on Wednesday (AFP)

tions in the days following the earthquake.

Survivors in several provinces told AFP they had to pull out people with their bare hands, and complained of the absence of help in initial days.

Erdogan has acknowledged some 'shortcomings' immediately after the disaster, but

blamed severe weather conditions and damaged roads.

"There were shortcomings, disruptions and delays but we... rushed to help earthquake survivors with all our might," he said on Wednesday.

"We are not hiding behind excuses," he added.

The catastrophe struck just

as Erdogan was gaining momentum and starting to lift his approval numbers from a low reached during a dire economic crisis that exploded last year.

The quake affected 14mn people in Turkey, and caused tens of thousands of buildings to collapse.

It has caused more than

US\$34bn in damage to the country, the World Bank said on Monday, adding that the estimate does not account for the costs of reconstruction that were 'potentially twice as large'.

Opposition parties have criticised Erdogan's handling of the disaster and accused him of failing to prepare the quake-prone country for a catastro-

There were shortcomings, disruptions and delays but we... rushed to help earthquake survivors with all our might

RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN

phe. "We know that some are rubbing their hands, waiting for the state and the government to fall under the ruins," Erdogan said.

Unable to agree on a candidate for more than a year, Erdogan's opponents were planning to pick a name on Thursday.

AFP



Haydar Karar is seen working at a carpentry shop, where he has been working since age eight, in the capital Baghdad on January 31 (AFP)

Wars, poverty fuel spike in Iraqi child labour

Baghdad, Iraq - Haydar Karar spends eight hours a day tidying a carpentry shop and lugging wooden beams, forced like many other Iraqi children into work by poverty and conflict.

Now 13, Karar has been working with his carpenter uncle in the capital Baghdad since the age of eight, his childhood marred by the troubles that have ravaged his country. "I was expelled from school because of a fight," he said. "The school didn't want to take me back."

His family had decided to find work for him 'to build my future and marry me', added the petite boy, who works from 8am until 5pm every day with a one-hour lunch break. He leans over a wooden armchair to sand it, and then moves around metal trestles before carrying large planks of wood about twice his size.

Karar's weekly pay, the equivalent of less than US\$20, covers his own needs as well as those of his sister. They both live with another uncle. Children in Iraq work as apprentice mechanics and rubbish collectors, in shisha cafes or hair salons, and washing car windows and selling paper tissues by the roadside.

"Child labour is constantly rising," said Hassan Abdel Saheb, in charge of the portfolio at the Iraqi labour and social affairs ministry, citing 'wars, conflict and displacement'. Despite its oil riches, nearly one-third of Iraq's 42mn inhabitants live in poverty, ac-

cording to the United Nations.

The country has struggled to regain stability after decades of war and a brutal campaign against the Islamic State (IS) group, which Baghdad declared defeated in late 2017.

Iraq still suffers from instability coupled with endemic corruption, and crumbling infrastructure and public services.

Abdel Saheb noted a rise in child labour - officially banned by law before the age of 15 - 'specifically in provinces that had been invaded by IS'.

Employing children is punishable by prison time or a fine, he said, but 'with many families left without a breadwinner, mothers have been forced to let children work'. The labour ministry official said a study conducted by his office showed a rise in child labour in the northern provinces of Kirkuk and Nineveh - whose capital Mosul was once a militant stronghold - as well as Baghdad itself.

To counter that trend, the government distributes aid to some of Iraq's poorest families, with monthly allowances of between US\$96 and US\$250, depending on the number of children.

Miguel Mateos Munoz, spokesman in Iraq for the UN children's agency UNICEF, said poverty and 'economic inequality' are among key factors contributing to the rise in child labour in the country.

AFP

Gas attacks on Iran girls' schools: Over 100 hospitalised

Tehran, Iran - More than 100 students were hospitalised in Iran after a new spate of suspected gas attacks on girls' schools on Wednesday, media outlets in the Islamic republic reported.

Hundreds of cases of respiratory distress have been reported in the past three months among schoolgirls across Iran, in what one government official has said could be an attempt to

force the closure of girls' schools. At least 10 girls' schools were targeted in the latest suspected attacks on Wednesday, seven of them in the northwestern city of Ardabil and three in the capital Tehran, media reported.

The incident in Ardabil forced the hospitalisation of 108 students, all of whom were in stable condition, said Tasnim news agency, which also re-

ported poisonings at three schools in Tehran.

Citing parents, Fars news agency said students at a high school in the capital's western neighbourhood of Tehransar had been exposed to a toxic spray. It did not elaborate.

Fars said the security forces had detained three people in the first reported arrests over the wave of suspected poisoning attacks on girls' schools.

Since the outbreak of the mysterious poisonings in November, almost 1,200 students have required hospitalisation for breathing difficulties, a lawmaker said on Wednesday.

They included nearly 800 in the holy city of Qom, south of Tehran, and 400 in the western city of Borujerd, said Zahra Sheikh, spokesperson for the Iranian parliament's health committee.

Health ministry tests on the substance found at the schools in Qom detected traces of nitrogen, which is mainly used in fertilisers, the parliament's website said. The poisonings have provoked a wave of anger in the country, where critics denounced the silence of the authorities in the face of the growing number of affected schools.

AFP

Iran has uranium particles enriched to nearly bomb grade, says IAEA

Vienna, Austria - The UN nuclear watchdog confirmed on Tuesday it had detected particles of uranium enriched up just under the 90 per cent needed to produce an atomic bomb.

"Discussions are still ongoing" to determine the origin of these particles, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a confidential report seen by AFP.

The report said that during an inspection 'on 22 January 2023, the agency took environmental samples... at Fordow (sic) Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP), the analytical results of which showed the presence of high enriched uranium particles containing up to 83.7 per cent U-235'.

"These events clearly indicate the capability of the agency to detect and report in a timely manner changes in the operation of nuclear facilities in Iran," it continued. Asked about the presence of the particles, Iran said that 'unintended fluctuations' during the enrichment process 'may have occurred'.

Last week, Iran claimed it had not made any attempt to enrich uranium beyond 60 per cent.

"The presence of a particle or particles of uranium above 60 per cent in the enrichment process does not mean enrichment above 60 per cent," said the spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran,



Behruz Kamalvandi.

Iran has been enriching uranium well over the limits laid down in a landmark 2015 deal with world powers, which started to unravel when the United States withdrew from it in 2018. The deal was designed to give Iran much-needed sanctions relief in return for curbs on its atomic programme.

On and off negotiations between world powers to return to the deal started in 2021 but have stalled since last year.

Tehran visit

The IAEA report comes as the head of the UN's nuclear watchdog, Rafael Grossi, is expected to visit Tehran 'in the coming days', following an official invitation by the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. 'In recent days, we have

had constructive and promising discussions' with the IAEA delegation that was already in Iran to investigate doubts about its nuclear programme, AEOL spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi said on Monday.

"It is hoped that this trip will form the basis for greater cooperation and a clearer horizon between Iran and the IAEA," he added. Tehran has repeatedly insisted that it is not planning to build a nuclear bomb.

In the report, the IAEA said that Iran's estimated stockpile of enriched uranium had reached more than 18 times the limit set out in the 2015 accord between Tehran and world powers.

It estimated Iran's total enriched uranium stockpile was 3,760.8kg as of February 12, an increase of 87.1kg compared to

the last report in November. The limit in the 2015 deal was set at 202.8kg of uranium.

Wake-up call

The IAEA has repeatedly warned it has lost its ability to fully monitor Iran's programme since the Islamic republic started to restrict its access in February 2021.

Iran's stockpile of uranium enriched to 60 per cent stood at 87.5kg, up from 62.3kg, the report said.

Iran now also has 434.7kg of uranium enriched up to 20 per cent, up from 386.4kg in the November report.

Regarding the particles enriched to 83.7 per cent detected in Iran, Kelsey Davenport, expert from the Arms Control Association, said that 'even if it is accidental, it is no less worrying'.

'This should be a wake-up call' for the international community, she said in a recent online briefing, calling on the United States and Iran to define a new strategy to defuse the crisis.

On Sunday, CIA director William Burns said Iran's nuclear programme was advancing at a 'worrisome pace'.

Iran has 'advanced very far to the point where it would only be a matter of weeks before they can enrich to 90 per cent, if they chose to cross that line', Burns told broadcaster CBS.

AFP



The National Detergent Co. S.A.O.G.

P.O.Box 3104, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of oman

INVITATION TO ATTEND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of The National Detergent Co. SAOG takes pleasure in inviting the shareholders to attend the Company's 43rd Annual General Meeting to be held on Thursday, 16/March/2023 at 5:00 PM at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Qurum - Mandaloun Hall and through virtual electronic platform and in case the quorum of the meeting is not complete, a second Annual General Meeting will be held on 23 / March /2023 to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Directors' Report for the year ended 31 December 2022;
- To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the year ended 31 December 2022;
- To consider Auditors' Report, approve and adopt the Company's financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2022;
- To ratify the Directors' sitting fees paid for the year ended 31 December 2022, and to approve the sitting fee for the next year 2023;
- To disclose and approve the contracts and transactions entered into by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2022 (in line with the list sent to the shareholders along with the notice);
- To approve contribution as part of the social responsibilities for the financial year ended 31/12/2022;
- To consider and approve a proposal to donate an amount of RO. 10,000/- (Rial Omani Ten Thousand only) towards social responsibilities for the financial year ending 31/12/2023;
- To appoint Statutory Auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2023 and fix their remuneration;
- To appoint an independent expert to evaluate the performance of the Board for the financial year ending 31/12/2023;

Under the statute of the company, shareholders have the right of appointing, in writing, a proxy to attend the meeting and vote on his/her behalf, wherever necessary.

In case of enquiry, please contact
Mr. Nasser Al Rawahi, Tel: 24493824-92869333

Chairman of the Board of Directors	Auditors	Legal Advisor
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Nigeria ruling party candidate Tinubu wins presidency in disputed election

Lagos, Nigeria - Ruling party candidate Bola Tinubu won Nigeria's highly disputed week-end election on Wednesday, securing the former Lagos governor his life-long ambition of the presidency of Africa's most populous democracy.

With President Muhammadu Buhari stepping down after two terms, many Nigerians hoped Saturday's vote would usher in a leader capable of tackling the country's widening insecurity, economic malaise and growing poverty.

Tinubu, candidate for All Progressives Congress (APC) party, won 8.8mn votes against 6.9mn for opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Atiku Abubakar and 6.1mn for Labour Party's Peter Obi, according to final results.

The Independent National Electoral Commission, or INEC, confirmed Tinubu as president-elect after he also secured the required 25 per cent of votes in two-thirds of Nigeria's 36 states and capital.

Supporters packed into the APC party campaign headquarters in Abuja, dancing to



Ruling party candidate Bola Tinubu, addresses supporters in Abuja on Wednesday (AFP)

Afrobeats music to greet Tinubu, who arrived wearing a pale blue traditional robe and red cap.

"This is a serious mandate - I hereby accept it. To serve you... To work with you and make Nigeria great," Tinubu said as supporters cheered 'Jagaban', a local chieftain title.

"I appeal to my fellow contestants to let us team together.

It is the only nation we have. It is one country that we must build together."

Even before the final tallies, though, Labour and PDP had already called for the vote to be cancelled, alleging massive manipulation of the results. It was not clear whether they would take their case to court.

Tinubu, 70, a long-time polit-

ical kingmaker who ran on his experience as Lagos governor from 1999 to 2007, campaigned saying 'It's my turn' to govern Africa's largest economy.

He promised 'Renewed Hope' but faced questions from rivals over his health, past graft accusations and ties to Buhari, who many critics say failed in his promise to make Nigeria safer.

"He has done it before, and we know that he will do better than what he did in Lagos," said supporter Adenike Mutiat Abubakar, 43. "He's the man of the people, so that's why everybody wants him."

Tight race

The election was a tight race for the first time since Nigeria ended military rule in 1999, after a third challenger Labour Party's Obi, 61,

thugs, while technical hitches disrupted the uploading of results to INEC's central website, fuelling concerns over vote rigging. "The election is irretrievably compromised," Labour Party chairman Julius Abure told reporters on Tuesday. "We demand that this sham of an election should be immediately cancelled."

INEC introduced biometric voter identification technology

This is a serious mandate - I hereby accept it. To serve you... To work with you and make Nigeria great. I appeal to my fellow contestants to let us team together

BOLA TINUBU

Blinken urges Uzbekistan to address human rights

Tashkent, Uzbekistan - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday pressed Uzbekistan's leaders to address human rights as they pursue nascent reforms, on a trip to woo Central Asia amid tensions with Russia.

A day after joining counterparts from all five former Soviet republics in Central Asia in Kazakhstan, Blinken held talks in Uzbekistan, with US officials seeing the two countries as especially eager for closer ties.

Blinken was meeting Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who has pledged economic reforms as well as a limited political opening since succeeding the autocratic Islam Karimov in 2016.

Opening the day of talks, Blinken said that he would discuss Mirziyoyev's reforms and praised the 'dynamic relationship' with Uzbekistan.

Blinken spoke to Foreign Minister Bakhtiyor Saidov about increasing US investment, State Department spokesman Ned Price said, while the two officials also discussed neighbouring Afghanistan, where Uzbekistan



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks with students at Uzbekistan State World Languages University in Tashkent on Wednesday (AFP)

assisted the United States in its two-decade war.

Blinken 'also urged the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the safeguarding of media freedom and transparency', Price said.

Mirziyoyev last month said that officials were pressing him 'to restrain the media, but I'll never do this'. But rights groups say the media is still heavily controlled despite some loosening, and that critics of the government still face jail.

Uzbekistan also saw deadly unrest last year sparked by planned reforms that would have

undermined autonomy in the impoverished Karakalpakstan region, prompting a rare backtracking by Mirziyoyev.

But US officials have also praised Mirziyoyev's government for a sweeping effort to eliminate forced and child labour in the cotton industry.

Blinken a day earlier pledged another US\$25mn to help reduce Central Asia's economic dependence on Russia, which has long been the dominant player in the region but whose invasion of Ukraine has rattled other former Soviet republics.

AFP

New Cyprus president sworn in

Nicosia, Cyprus - Nikos Christodoulides was sworn in on Tuesday as the eighth president of the republic of Cyprus, pledging to tackle illegal migration and combat corruption.

The former foreign minister, 49, has also vowed to break 'the deadlock' that has left the eastern Mediterranean island divided for decades.

Christodoulides beat communist-backed career diplomat Andreas Mavroyiannis in a run-off vote on February 12.

It was the first time a president had been elected without the support of the two largest parties, DISY and the communist AKEL, which means he has minority support in parliament.

During his investiture speech before parliament on Tuesday, Christodoulides promised to deliver a society of equal opportunities. "The fight against corruption and favouritism will be key points of my administration," he said.

A passports-for-cash scandal tainted the previous government led by Nicos Anastasiades, who served 10 years.

"The goal is better schools, greener cities, more quality



Cyprus' President-elect Nikos Christodoulides (left) shakes hands with outgoing-President Nicos Anastasiades in Nicosia on Tuesday (AFP)

health services," the new leader said.

He has vowed to tackle illegal migration in the European Union member whose population is 915,000.

It had the bloc's second-highest intake of new asylum seekers per population in October, according to EU data.

Christodoulides called illegal migration 'one of the most pressing challenges', and said his efforts would focus on 'speeding up the processing of asylum applications to increase returns'.

He committed to sticking by reforms begun by the previous government, and said reforming

the legal system was a 'major challenge', including shortening notoriously lengthy judicial procedures. Turkey invaded and occupied the northern third of the island in 1974 in response to a Greek-sponsored coup, but talks aimed at resolving the division have stalled since 2017.

The new president said the continued division 'does not allow conditions of peace and security'. Christodoulides has already been criticised for falling short of his promises for a gender-balanced cabinet.

Of the 11 full cabinet posts, three are held by women.

AFP

Britain's Prince Harry loses home on royal estate

London, UK - Prince Harry and his wife Meghan are being evicted from their home on the British royal family's Windsor estate, leaving them without a UK base, reports said on Wednesday.

Frogmore Cottage, which they refurbished at a reported cost of £2.4mn (US\$2.9mn), had been a wedding present from the late Queen Elizabeth II in 2018.

It has now been offered to Prince Andrew, King Charles III's disgraced brother, reports in the *The Sun* and *Daily Telegraph* said. Harry and Meghan, also known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, were reportedly told to vacate the property in January just days after the publication of the prince's tell-all memoir *Spare*.

Charles, who has long favoured a slimmed down monarchy, is currently undertaking an overhaul of funding.

A possible axing of Andrew's £250,000-a-year grant could see him forced out of his current residence, the 30-room Royal Lodge, also on the Windsor estate, due to its massive upkeep costs. Harry and Meghan moved to California in 2020 after dramatically quitting royal life.

Since then, they have taken part in a string of projects - from an interview with Oprah Winfrey to a Netflix documentary - airing grievances about their experiences as members of the British royal family.

Harry's autobiography *Spare* smashed sales records when it was published in January, but also saw his popularity ratings slump.

Andrew was forced out of public life over his friendship with the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Last year Andrew settled a US civil case for sexual assault with accuser Virginia Giuffrè.

Buckingham Palace declined to comment on the reports. A representative for the Sussexes was not immediately available.

AFP

Trump, Haley to lock horns at US conservative forum

National Harbor, US - Former US president Donald Trump and his one-time ally Nikki Haley are to give dueling addresses this week as thousands of conservatives gather outside Washington to vet Republican hopefuls weighing bids for the White House.

A national showcase for established big hitters and rising stars alike, the four-day Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) starting on Wednesday bills itself as the 'largest and most influential gathering of conservatives in the world'.

An array of right-wing A-listers - including Brazil's recently defeated leader Jair Bolsonaro - are expected to address the convention, although many potential 2024 candidates are staying away.

Trump's keynote speech on Saturday is likely to reprise the

'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) agenda that swept him to power in 2016, taking in border security, gun rights, 'woke' indoctrination and other 'red meat' conservative issues.

Haley, Trump's former UN ambassador, is expected to make the case that the 'Grand Old Party' (GOP) needs a new generation of leaders, unencumbered by the taint of recent election failure and able to inspire new voters as well as turning out the base.

'Balancing act'

"Nikki Haley has to negotiate the very thin line between differentiating herself from Donald Trump and still appealing to - or not alienating herself from - his supporters, who still constitute the vast majority of CPAC activists and GOP primary participants," said Margaret Susan Thompson,



This file photo shows US President Donald Trump shaking hands with Nikki Haley, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, in the Oval office of the White House on October 9, 2018 (AFP)

a politics and history professor at Syracuse University.

"This is a challenging balancing act, indeed. So far, she seems

to be focusing on age but, given the older-skewing GOP/MAGA base, she needs to be very careful here."

Trump declared his candidacy three months before Haley's mid-February launch but his campaign has been criticised for

inertia, lack of a clear political vision and the constant drip-drip of scandal. The maelstrom of controversies encircling the former president - from poor performances of major Trump-backed candidates to multiple investigations closing in on him - has raised questions over his viability as a Republican totem.

"So far, most of his rallies and speeches have looked backward, focusing on the 'stolen election' and so on, rather than on what he intends to do in the future," said Thompson.

"In my view, it is not a way to expand his base of support."

Nevertheless Trump's persistent polling strength has confounded his critics and he remains the comfortable frontrunner, towering over rivals like Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and former vice president Mike Pence. CPAC delegates will hear

from more than 100 mostly pro-Trump speakers, including former cabinet secretaries, several Republican senators and numerous far right members of the House of Representatives.

But much of the party firmament, including DeSantis, Pence and the congressional and national committee leaders, are declining to make the pilgrimage to the National Harbor.

"DeSantis is stiffing CPAC because he knows Trump owns the space," said Rick Wilson of the Lincoln Project, a group of anti-Trump conservatives who claim a share of the credit for the Republican leader's defeat in 2020.

The absence of many big names comes in the wake of CPAC organiser Matt Schlapp recently denying allegations of sexual battery against a Republican campaign staffer in Georgia.

AFP

Ukraine war set to divide G20 FMs' meeting

New Delhi, India - Top US diplomat Antony Blinken was due in New Delhi on Wednesday alongside Russia's Sergei Lavrov for a G20 meeting, with Ukraine and tensions with China set to overshadow attempts by host India to forge unity among the world's top economies.

Blinken said he had no plans to meet the Russian foreign minister face-to-face at the summit, but Thursday will be the first time the two men have been in the same room since a G20 meeting in Bali last July. "If Russia... were genuinely prepared to engage in meaningful diplomacy necessary to end the aggression, of course we'd be the first to work to engage, but there's zero evidence of that," Blinken told reporters in Tashkent while en route to the summit.

Lavrov arrived late on Tuesday in India - which has not condemned the war - and will use his G20 attendance to lay into the West, according to the Russian foreign ministry.

Western countries want to 'take revenge for the inevitable disappearance of the levers of



Russian FM Sergei Lavrov meets with Turkish FM Mevlut Cavusoglu on the sidelines of the G20 FMs' meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday (AFP)

dominance from its hands', the ministry's English-language statement said. "The destructive policy of the US and its allies has already put the world on the brink of a disaster," it added.

'Spy balloon'

The US Secretary of State also said he had no plans to meet Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang on the sidelines of the of

the two-day G20 gathering in New Delhi. Blinken had a fiery encounter with top Chinese diplomat Wang Yi last month in Germany after the United States shot down a suspected Chinese spy balloon over its east coast on February 4.

The incident led Blinken to nix a rare trip to China, slamming the 'unacceptable violation of US sovereignty and international

law' which 'must never again occur', the State Department said. Beijing, which has also been angered by Washington's stance on Taiwan, denies it uses spy balloons and says the craft was for weather research.

Wang 'urged the US side to change course, acknowledge and repair the damage that its excessive use of force caused to China-US relations', state news

agency Xinhua reported.

'Material support'

Blinken also warned Wang against providing 'material support' to Russia's faltering war effort, as is speculated in Washington. Beijing denies any such intention.

Xinhua quoted Wang last week as saying China was willing to 'strengthen strategic coor-

dination' with Russia after meeting Lavrov and President Vladimir Putin in Moscow.

Blinken was also expected on Friday to meet his counterparts from the Quad group, which in-

The G20 comprises 19 countries and the European Union representing around 85% of the World's economy and two-thirds of its population

19 countries and the European Union, representing around 85 per cent of the world's economy and two-thirds of its population.

India wants to use its G20 presidency this year to focus on issues such as alleviating poverty and climate finance, but the Ukraine war and its effects are set to dominate the agenda.

Last week, a meeting of G20 finance ministers in Bengaluru failed to agree on a common statement after Russia and China sought to water down language on the Ukraine war.

Hosting the G20 puts India in a tricky position, because while it shares Western concerns about China, it is also a major buyer of Russian arms and has ramped up Russian oil imports.

India has not condemned the Ukraine invasion, although Prime Minister Narendra Modi told Putin last year that this was 'not a time for war'.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he was confident India would use the meeting to 'make Russia understand that this war has to finish'.

AFP

Head-on train crash kills dozens in Greece

Larissa, Greece - At least 36 people were killed and 66 injured when two trains collided head-on near the Greek city of Larissa, authorities said, as emergency services raced on Wednesday to find survivors among the charred wreckage.

Several carriages were almost completely destroyed in the collision between a passenger train and a freight train just before midnight on Tuesday, with at least one car appearing to catch fire and trap passengers inside.

"I've never seen anything like this in my entire life," said one rescue worker, emerging from the wreckage. "It's tragic. Five



Police and emergency crews search the debris of a crushed wagon in the Tempi Valley, Greece, on Wednesday (AFP)

hours later, we are finding bodies." Several cars had overturned or caught fire when they came off the tracks in the impact, leav-

ing a tangled mess of metal and shattered glass.

A police spokesman told AFP the 59-year-old station master

had been arrested, and charges would be announced shortly. Government spokesman Yiannis Economou said the two trains

were left running on the same track for 'several kilometres'.

The passenger train, carrying 350 people, had been travelling from the capital Athens to the northern city of Thessaloniki.

Health Minister Thanos Plevris said most passengers were 'young people', with the train carrying many students returning to Thessaloniki after a long holiday weekend.

"It was a nightmare... I'm still shaking," 22-year-old passenger Angelos told AFP.

"Fortunately we were in the penultimate car and we got out alive. There was a fire in the first cars and complete panic."

AFP

Medical copter missing in Philippines with 5 on board

Manila, Philippines - A search was underway in the Philippines Wednesday for a missing medical evacuation helicopter with five people on board, authorities said.

The aircraft was flying a patient from the remote Mangsee Islands to a hospital on the western island province of Palawan, the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) said. It took off on Wednesday morning to Brooke's Point municipality, but never arrived, CAAP said.

Most of the 150km journey

is over the Sulu Sea. The Philippine Coast Guard said it had deployed a vessel to search waters between Balabac island, off southern Palawan, and Brooke's Point. The nationalities of those on board have not been released.

The helicopter was operated by the Philippine Adventist Medical Aviation Services, a non-profit organisation providing medical evacuation services in Palawan, the southern island of Mindanao and the main island of Luzon.

AFP

Ukraine says 'survived the most difficult winter' in history

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine said it had survived a months-long winter onslaught of Russian strikes on water and energy infrastructure, as it marked the first day of spring on Wednesday.

But Kyiv was under fierce pressure in the eastern town of Bakhmut while Moscow said it had downed a 'massive' barrage of Ukrainian drones launched at the Crimean peninsula, annexed by the Kremlin in 2014.

Since October Russia has been pummeling key facilities in Ukraine with missiles and



Elderly women placard a plastic sheet over a broken window after shelling in Chasiv Yar, near Bakhmut on Tuesday (AFP)

drones, disrupting water, heating and electricity supplies to millions of people.

Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Ukraine had overcome 'winter terror' brought against his country by Russian leader Vladimir Putin and hailed the first day of spring as another 'major defeat' for the Kremlin.

"We survived the most difficult winter in our history. It was cold and dark, but we were unbreakable," Kuleba said in a statement.

Aid organisations had warned

at the beginning of winter that the targeted campaign would force a new wave of migration to Europe and that Ukraine's priority would be 'survival' through the months of freezing temperatures. The Kremlin said Kyiv was responsible for civilians' suffering stemming from the massive outages because it had refused to capitulate to Moscow's war demands.

'Choke on your missiles'

But the grid has been stabilising

and Ukrainian energy provider Ukrenergo said on Wednesday there had been 'no power deficit' for more than two weeks.

"Engineers are also continuing repairs at all power system facilities that were previously damaged by Russian missile and drone attacks," it said.

The war in Ukraine has seen Europe shirk its deep reliance on Russian oil and gas amid waves of sanctions aimed at stemming Moscow's ability to fund its military through energy revenues.

"The EU also won, and contrary to Moscow's laughter, it did not freeze without Russian gas. One piece of advice to Russia: choke on your gas and choke on your missiles," Kuleba added in the statement.

The foreign minister's comments came as fighting in eastern Ukraine appears to be reaching a precarious moment for Kyiv around Bakhmut in what has become the longest and bloodiest battle of Russia's invasion.

AFP

CLASSIFIEDS

BIRTHDAY WISHES



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March 2

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‘France legend’ Fontaine dies

Fontaine found the net 13 times at Sweden 1958 to hold record for most goals at single World Cup

Paris, France - Just Fontaine, the all-time top scorer in a single World Cup finals with 13 goals, has died aged 89, his family told AFP on Wednesday.

Fontaine achieved the record in the 1958 finals in Sweden where France reached the semi-finals for the first time in their history, losing to Pele’s Brazil.

Part of a wonderful attacking trident at that World Cup alongside Roger Piantoni and Raymond Kopa, Fontaine might never have gone to Sweden at all.

Only injuries to fellow forwards Thadee Cisowski and his Reims teammate Rene Bliard saw him make the squad and then the starting line-up.

“I am saddened to hear of the passing of Just Fontaine, as will be all those who love football and our national team,” France coach Didier Deschamps said in comments published by the French Football Federation.

“Justo’ is and will remain a France legend.”

Fontaine also won four



Just Fontaine with the trophy for the 1958 World Cup top-scoring record at his home in Toulouse in July 2013

French league titles, one with Nice and three with the great Reims side of the post-war era.

He played in the Reims team that lost to the Real Madrid of Alfredo di Stefano, Ferenc

Puskas and Raymond Kopa in the 1959 European Cup final.

Reims paid tribute to their former star by posting a picture of him in the club’s colours during his playing career, calling

him an “eternal legend”.

Nice, for whom Fontaine scored 52 goals in 83 matches, said there would be a tribute to him ahead of their Ligue 1 game against Auxerre on Friday.



Just Fontaine (C) celebrates with team-mates after scoring four goals against Germany in the 1958 World Cup

Fontaine was forced to retire in 1962 at the age of just 28 after he suffered a double leg fracture.

He later moved into management, lasting just two matches in charge of France in 1967 before

leading Paris Saint-Germain to promotion to the top division in 1974 and then coaching Morocco to third place at the 1980 Africa Cup of Nations.

“A monument of French foot-

ball has left us,” PSG said in a statement. “It is a sad day for all those who love Paris Saint-Germain, a club he led into the first division 50 years ago.”

AFP

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Vanessa Bryant

LA County agrees \$29m settlement with Kobe Bryant's widow over crash photos

Los Angeles, United States - Los Angeles County has agreed to pay the widow of Kobe Bryant nearly \$29 million after first responders shared photos taken at the site of the helicopter crash that killed the NBA superstar.

Bryant, the couple's teenage daughter Gianna, and seven others were killed when their chopper smashed into a hillside near Los Angeles in January 2020. Sheriff's deputies and firefighters who rushed to the scene snapped pictures of the carnage, including the mangled remains of the LA Lakers legend and his daughter.

Bryant's widow Vanessa sued for emotional damages over the pictures, which she feared would one day surface on the internet.

Djokovic finds ‘another gear’ to down Machac in Dubai opener

Dubai, United Arab Emirates - Novak Djokovic was made to work in his first match since winning the Australian Open last month, needing three sets to move past world No.130 Tomas Machac in Dubai on Tuesday.

Undefeated so far in 2023, and carrying a 17-match winning streak coming into the UAE, dating back to last year's ATP Finals, Djokovic showed signs of rustiness in his 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/1) win over the Czech qualifier.

Djokovic, who this week has broken Steffi Graf's all-time record of 377 weeks at world number one, recently recovered from a muscle tear in his left hamstring, which he sustained in Australia on his way to a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam title.

It was an impressive performance from Machac, who was facing a top-10 opponent for just the fourth time in his career.

The two players hit a combined 78 winners during the two-hour 27-minute affair. But it was Djokovic's 28 unforced errors



Tomas was giving me all kinds of trouble, but I guess when it mattered, I found another gear

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

that at times proved costly.

“Tomas definitely didn't play

progresses, I can raise my level of tennis.”

Djokovic and Machac traded breaks in games four and five before the top seed struck again and consolidated his advantage for a 5-2 lead. It was all the Serb needed to wrap up the opening set in 37 minutes.

That didn't deter Machac, who outlasted Djokovic in a lengthy exchange to break early in the second set to open up a 3-0 gap.

The 22-year-old qualifier valiantly covered all corners of the court and benefitted from 16 unforced errors off the Djokovic racquet to force a decider against the five-time Dubai champion.

A smooth volley winner from Machac gave the Czech an early look at the Djokovic serve but the world number one survived the scare and held.

Machac received treatment for a right wrist problem mid-game at 0-1, deuce, in the final set, before successfully holding serve, but soon fell behind 1-4 to an opportunistic Djokovic.

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Foden hits double as Man City stroll into FA Cup quarters, Leicester crash out

London, United Kingdom - Phil Foden struck twice as Manchester City eased into the FA Cup quarter-finals with a 3-0 win against Bristol City, while 2021 winners Leicester suffered a shock 2-1 defeat against second tier Blackburn on Tuesday.

Pep Guardiola's side were never in danger of a giant-killing in the fifth round tie at Ashton Gate thanks to Foden's brace and a late strike from Kevin De Bruyne. Guardiola saluted the impact of England forward Foden, who is starting to recapture his peak form after an inconsistent season.

"His career was always up, up, up. This season he struggled a bit and was a bit down. But now he's back for the best bit of the season," Guardiola said. "His impact has been amazing. Football pays off when you work like he does."

City will hope for another boost on Wednesday when Premier League leaders Arsenal, two points ahead of the champions, face Everton in their game in hand.

"We're still alive in three competitions. We'll see what happens in the future," Guardiola said.

City took a seventh minute lead when Riyad Mahrez crossed



Manchester City's Phil Foden was in sublime touch against Bristol City on Tuesday (AFP)

to the far post, where Foden fired into the roof of the net.

Foden doubled City's lead after 74 minutes as Julian Alvarez flicked towards Foden, who produced another clinical finish past Max O'Leary. De Bruyne got the visitors' third from long-range in the 81st minute to ensure the smoothest of nights for the six-time FA Cup winners.

Leicester were booed off after Blackburn ended the Foxes' bid to reach a second FA Cup final in three seasons.

Brendan Rodgers led Leicester to the club's first ever FA Cup triumph in 2021, but Rovers punished woeful defending from the Premier League side to shatter their hopes of emulating that run.

With Leicester 14th in the top-flight, just three points above the relegation zone, Rodgers made six changes to the side beaten by Arsenal at the weekend and paid the price for his gamble.

"If there's anyone to blame it's me. I made the changes and sadly it didn't work," Rodgers said.

"We brought four players into the starting line up who won the FA Cup a couple of seasons ago. But they were better than us and we have to worry about that."

Rovers, into the last eight for the first time since 2015, took the lead when Tyrhys Dolan curled home from the edge of the area in the 33rd minute.

Sammie Szmodics made it 2-0 seven minutes after the break following good work by Sam Gallagher.

Kelechi Iheanacho netted from

Harvey Barnes' pass in the 67th minute, but Blackburn held on. Manor Solomon scored for the fourth time in four game as Fulham beat Leeds 2-0 at Craven Cottage to make the last eight for the first time since 2010.

Fulham took the lead through Joao Palhinha's superb 25-year curler in the 21st minute. Israel forward Solomon, on loan from Shakhtar Donetsk, finished off Leeds in the 56th minute, curling in from the edge of the area.

AFP

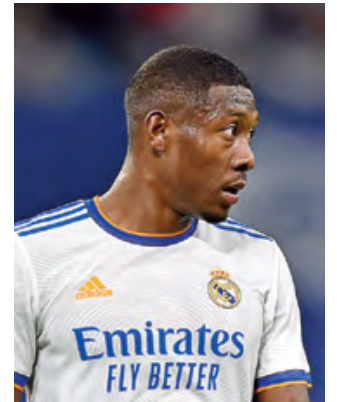
Attacked by Real fans, Alaba says Messi vote was team decision

Paris, France - David Alaba defended himself on Tuesday as Real Madrid fans turned on him after FIFA listed the Austrian as voting for Lionel Messi over Karim Benzema as player of the year.

Alaba, Benzema's team-mate at Real, faced abuse from his club's fans for putting former Barcelona star Messi first in the FIFA Best awards announced Monday. "The Austrian national team vote for this award as a team, not me alone. Everyone in the team council is able to vote and that's how it's decided," Austria captain Alaba tweeted.

Messi, who led Argentina to victory in the World Cup, romped away with the award on Monday, with Kylian Mbappe of France second and Benzema, a French player who missed the World Cup, a distant third. FIFA released a list of the top three choices by each national team captain and coach. Alaba was listed as putting Benzema second.

"Everyone knows, especially



David Alaba

Karim, how much I admire him and his performances," tweeted Alaba. "I have often said that for me he is the best striker in the world, and that is still the case. Without doubt."

Another Real Madrid player, Luka Modric, the captain of Croatia, was listed as putting Benzema first and Messi second.

As Argentina captain, Messi was listed as voting for one Paris Saint-Germain team-mate, Neymar, first and another, Mbappe second.



Noel Le Graet

Scandal-hit French football chief Noel Le Graet quits

Paris, France - French Football Federation president Noel Le Graet resigned on Tuesday following accusations of sexual and psychological harassment, bringing to an end more than a decade in charge.

The 81-year-old's resignation comes 13 days after the publication of a damning report into management practices at the FFF, but despite that it emerged that he is set to continue working for world governing body FIFA at their recently-opened office in Paris.

Le Graet's time at the helm of the federation coincided with the revival of the French men's national team, with their victory at

the 2018 World Cup followed by a run to last year's final in Qatar, which they lost on penalties to Argentina. Yet his downfall became inevitable after the report commissioned by the sports ministry delivered a stinging criticism of the veteran boss.

"Considering his conduct towards women, his public comments and the governance failings of the FFF, Mr Le Graet no longer has the necessary legitimacy to run and represent French football," the report said.

Le Graet had already agreed in January to step down pending the outcome of the audit, which concluded that he should not return to the role.

Pogba returns as Juventus fight back to win derby

Paris, France - Paul Pogba made his first appearance of the season as Juventus twice came from behind to win the Turin derby 4-2 on Tuesday.

Earlier in the evening, Cremonese, who had not won all season, upset Roma 2-1 as Jose Mourinho received a red card, and the visitors missed a chance to finish the 24th round inside the Serie A top three.

Pogba played for the first time since returning to Juventus last summer when he came on as a 68th-minute substitute against



Juventus midfielder Paul Pogba (R) fights for the ball with Torino's Jacopo Segre (L) during their Italian Serie A match in Turin on Tuesday

Torino. Another Frenchman, Yann Karamoh, gave visiting Torino the lead after a first-minute corner.

Juan Cuadrado levelled with the help of a deflection after 16 minutes.

Antonio Sanabria restored the Torino lead after 41 minutes when he met a cross with a sharp first-time shot that surprised Wojciech Szczesny at the near post.

Danilo levelled in added time, his powerful header from a corner bouncing across the line off the post. Pogba replaced Enzo

Barrenechea with 22 minutes left. Three minutes later, Bremer gave Juventus the lead for the first time with another header from a set piece.

French midfielder Adrien Rabiot completed the scoring with 10 minutes left.

Pogba's last competitive appearance was for Manchester United in the Premier League in April. He went off injured early in the first half of a 4-0 loss to Liverpool and did not play again last season.

AFP

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ADVANTAGE AUSTRALIA

Spinner Kuhnemann takes five wickets to bundle India out for 109 on the opening day of Indore Test

Indore, India - Spinner Matthew Kuhnemann's five-wicket haul and a 60 by Usman Khawaja helped Australia grab the early advantage after they dismissed India for 109 on Wednesday's opening day of the third Test.

The tourists were 156-4 at stumps, leading India by 47 runs on a viciously turning pitch in Indore, as they look to fight back from two bruising defeats in the series.

Peter Handscomb, on seven, and Cameron Green, on six, were batting at close of play, spinner Ravindra Jadeja having taken all four Australian wickets.

The left-handed Khawaja stood out with his 21st Test half-century and a 96-run second-wicket stand with Marnus Labuschagne.

"I executed my plans, tried to score when I saw a scoring opportunity and respected the good ball. It's not rocket science, it was good to get a partnership with Marnus," Khawaja told broadcaster Star Sports.

"Felt like the start was the toughest time to bat with the new ball being inconsistent, but it was nice to get the partnership. It is not an easy wicket out there."

Labuschagne, who tops the Test batsman rankings, chopped the ball onto his stumps on nought but won a reprieve when Jadeja was adjudged to have overstepped the crease. He eventually departed on 31.

Khawaja fell with an attempted sweep, caught at deep mid-wicket after putting Australia ahead of India's first-innings total.



Australia's Matthew Kuhnemann (C) celebrates with teammates after his five-wicket haul against India on the first day of the third Test in Indore on Wednesday (AFP)

Nathan has been fantastic with me. He said 'Roll your sleeves and get into the contest, doesn't really matter you are bowling to Rohit (Sharma) or anybody'

MATTHEW KUHNEMANN

Nathan Lyon, who took three. "Nathan has been fantastic with me," said Kuhnemann. "He said 'Roll your sleeves and get into the contest, doesn't really matter you are bowling to Rohit (Sharma) or anybody, they are the best in the world in these conditions. Just worry about yourself.'"

Australia introduced spin in the sixth over to instant reward, as Kuhnemann had captain Rohit stumped for 12.

Shubman Gill, recalled in place of the struggling KL Rahul, began

to hit back with three fours but also fell to Kuhnemann, caught at slip by Smith for 21.

Lyon then bowled Cheteshwar Pujara for one with a delivery that spun hugely and stayed low.

Wickets kept tumbling as India slipped to 45-5 in the first hour of play. "It was challenging," said Indian batting coach Vikram Rathour. "But we didn't play poor or rash cricket, we just had an off day as a batting unit."

Virat Kohli looked positive in his knock of 22, but fell lbw to Todd Murphy, the third time the

off-spinner has claimed the star batsman's wicket in as many matches.

From the first ball of the day, returning left-arm fast bowler Mitchell Starc thought he had Rohit caught behind but the appeal was turned down.

Australia did not review, only for replays to show the batsman had nicked the ball. Three balls later they missed another opportunity that would have seen Rohit out lbw had it been referred to the TV umpire.

AFP

Nortje breaks stubborn West Indies partnership

Centurion, South Africa - South African fast bowler Anrich Nortje ended a period of stubborn West Indian resistance on the second day of the first Test at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Wednesday.

West Indies were 136 for three at tea in reply to South Africa's 342 all out.

Raymon Reifer and Jermaine Blackwood defied South Africa's four-pronged fast bowling attack for most of an attritional afternoon, during which only 65 runs were scored in 29 overs for the loss of Blackwood's wicket. Blackwood made 37 in a third wicket partnership of 64 with Reifer before he drove at a full ball from Nortje and was caught behind by wicketkeeper Heinrich Klaasen off an inside edge.

The left-handed Reifer showed determination and courage in making 48 not out despite being given a torrid examination by the South African fast bowlers.

Reifer and Blackwood had to rebuild after both West Indian openers, captain Kraigg Brathwaite (11) and Tagenarine Chanderpaul (22) were dismissed before lunch.

Brathwaite was bowled by Kagiso Rabada and Chanderpaul became Gerald Coetzee's first Test victim when he was caught by Senuran Muthusamy.

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Malan century gives England thrilling win over Bangladesh

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Dawid Malan scored a hundred under pressure to guide England to a thrilling three-wicket win over Bangladesh in the first one-day international in Dhaka on Wednesday.

Malan hit an unbeaten 114 off 145 balls as England reached their target with eight balls to spare after the hosts had them reeling with Jos Buttler, Jason Roy and James Vince all out cheaply.

Earlier England bowled out Bangladesh for 209 with Moeen Ali, Mark Wood, Jofra Archer and Adil Rashid each claiming two wickets and Najmul Hossain scoring 58, his maiden ODI half-century. The hosts made a decent start after electing to bat first, with skipper Tamim Iqbal making 23. But after Chris Woakes earned the first breakthrough with the wicket of Liton Das, England struck whenever a partnership was developing.

Tamim was bowled by Wood before spinners were called into action, as England got valuable South Asian practice ahead of their defence of the ODI World



England's Dawid Malan celebrates after scoring a century in the first ODI against Bangladesh in Dhaka on Wednesday (AFP)

Cup crown in India later this year. Moeen bowled Shakib Al Hasan for eight before Rashid picked up the wicket of Mushfiqur Rahim.

Najmul and Mahmudullah Riyad (31) forged a 53-run partnership for the fifth wicket before they fell in successive overs. Debutant Will Jacks claimed

the wicket of Afif Hossain three overs later to kill off Bangladesh's remaining chance of putting up a big total.

England made a poor start with the bat, with Taijul Islam picking up 3-54 and complemented brilliantly by other bowlers as Bangladesh made a match out of low scores.

Maroof steps down as Pakistan women's cricket skipper

Lahore, Pakistan - Veteran Bismah Maroof stepped down as the Pakistan women's cricket team captain on Wednesday, following a disastrous Twenty20 World Cup campaign last month. All-rounder Maroof led Pakistan for six years but failed to get the team beyond the first round at the T20 World Cup in South Africa.

Losses to arch-rivals India as well as England and the West Indies at the showpiece event - with only a consolation win over Ireland - saw Pakistan once again miss out on the semi-finals of the



Bismah Maroof

tournament won by Australia. "I feel fortunate to have led an incredible and hardworking bunch of cricketers," Maroof said

in a statement released through the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB). "It has been one exciting ride, which has been full of highs and lows," the 31-year-old added.

"I am looking forward to continuing to play as a player and playing my role for the team."

Under Maroof's leadership, Pakistan won 16 out of 34 one-day internationals and 27 out of 62 T20Is. The PCB said a new skipper will be selected before the team's limited-overs series against South Africa at home in September.

AFP



14
WINNERS
Meet the school teams that conjured up projects for sustainability in Oman



15
IN TOWN
Oman Sustainable Fair 2023 on the lawns of InterCon Muscat



16
ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

OMAN SUSTAINABILITY FAIR 2023



SUSTAINABLE
dreaming

Students from 13 schools show 'How to make Oman more sustainable' through their interesting and ambitious projects

There was an air of intrigue and inspiration on the lawns of the Hotel InterContinental Muscat which was abuzz with young energy and enthusiasm on Tuesday afternoon as ambitious teams from 13 different schools in Oman participated in the second edition of the Oman Sustainability Fair 2023.

This year's winners were British School Muscat (Most innovative idea), ABA Ecological Society (Most practical implementation), Qurum Private School (Best presentation), and The Sultan's School Eco Club (Overall winner).

The judging panel included Dr Ali Akaa, ESO Board member and head of the Human Resource Management Department at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Salalah - (Academia), Ulrich Emmer, managing director, BAUER Nimr LLC - the leading environmental turnkey solutions provider in Oman which developed the world's largest commercial constructed wetland in the sultanate, and Elayne Looker - Marine Scientist, Five Oceans Environmental Services - a specialist environmental consultancy company providing a broad range of environmental services and assistance.

"The purpose of this event was to bring awareness and promote sustainability by bringing together the Oman community. The focal point of the fair was the presentations by stu-

dent teams from 13 Oman schools on how to make Oman more sustainable,' a statement issued by the event organiser - Oman American Business Center (OABC) / AmCham Oman - said.

Marla Valdez, board member, Oman American Business Center, added, "The Oman American Business Center has been supporting the Oman business community for the past 20 years with initiatives, such as the Sustainability Fair, that generates dialogues and collaboration on the topics that matter the most. The aim of this Sustainability Fair was to bring

“It was truly inspiring to see the work done by the students, and it gives us hope to see such passionate environmental champions”
MARLA VALDEZ

together different communities for the common goal of sharing creative ideas on how to protect the environment.

"It was truly inspiring to see the work done by the students, and it gives us hope to see such passionate environmental champions.

"We also had tremendous support from the Oman business community and non-profit organisations which are working hard everyday to protect Oman and the planet through innovative ideas and awareness initiatives."

The fun event brought together the Oman community to raise awareness and promote sustainability in the sultanate. Besides an impressive display of students' projects on 'how to make Oman more sustainable', the event also featured work done by environmental organisations, the US Embassy Muscat, SMEs, and businesses.

"Move Green", a local band, entertained the gathering with inspirational renditions while several SME's showcased their sustainable products. This was the second edition of the fair which could not be held for the past two years due to the pandemic.

As the official affiliate of the US Chamber of Commerce in Oman (AmCham Oman), the OABC promotes understanding, partnerships and other matters of mutual economic interest between business communities in Oman and the United States. Formed in 2003, the OABC's mission is to foster the development of commercial activity between Oman and the United States.

The event was coordinated by Heather Redling, CEO, who has 20 years of experience spanning across 3 continents. In addition to her industry experience, Heather has taught undergraduate courses in International Business and Cross-Cultural Management at Columbia College (USA) and has been invited to speak at numerous industry conferences in the United Arab Emirates. She relocated to Oman with her family at the start of 2020 where she was providing marketing strategy and project

management to several businesses within the Badr Investment Group.

The sponsors for the event include Bauer Nimr (main sponsor) - leading environmental turnkey solutions provider in the Sultanate of Oman, Five Oceans Environmental Services (silver sponsor) - a specialist environmental consultancy company providing a broad range of environmental services and assistance to both private industry, government sectors, and NGOs, and Environment Society Oman (ESO) - the only non-profit organisation in Oman that focuses on conserving the environment.

The participating schools were ABA (American British Academy), ABQ Sohar International School, AGS (A'soud Global School), Al Sahwa Schools, BSM, Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir, The Sultan's School, The American International School of Muscat, Downe House Muscat, Muscat International School (MIS), Phillippine School, Modern International School (MISO), Qurum Private School

The companies supporting the event included be'ah (Oman Environmental Services Holding Company), Arab Lead and Three Pillars Consulting while those showcasing their work include US, Embassy Muscat, Move Green - Band, Verde and Green, YN Products, Clean up Oman, EFP (Egg carton recycling), Theresa Boshoff (recycled paper), Plasbin, and Nasser al Kindi (professional wildlife photographer).

WINNERS - See Page 14



ABA Ecological Society (Most practical implementation)



British School Muscat (Most innovative idea)



Qurum Private School (Best presentation)



The judges - (from right) Elayne Looker, Ulrich Emmer, and Dr Ali Akaa

extra-curricular

OMAN SUSTAINABILITY FAIR 2023

These are comments from the four winning teams about how they put their minds and hearts together to bring forth meaningful results in their respective team projects



OVERALL WINNER
The Sultan's School Eco Club - 'Sustainable Agriculture'

Our inspiration was the 10 million trees initiative, launched by the Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, which we first decided to support within the walls of our school. The tasks were divided based on our personal interests and previous work we had done on the projects rather than a more formal division of work. As we are all members of the school's Eco Club, we meet often and were able to work collaboratively and share ideas.

Several members were helpful, most notably Ms Deb, Ms Natalie, Ms Robin, Mr Sam and the Design Technology team. We are very grateful for all the support we received.

The overall brief was the practice of sustainability, something that we are reminded of almost daily by our involvement in the Eco Club. By connecting all the projects together, we were able to tailor them more to the overall objective of sustainability.

This project is an evolving one, and came from many hours of planning, research and collaboration over the course of three years.

Despite being passionate about the environment ourselves, our greatest challenge was convincing the broader school community to embrace the same mindset. As we are young people, sometimes we feel like our voices are not loud enough and not serious enough, but this forum gave us the opportunity to be heard.

We learnt that if you believe in yourself and your passion is strong enough, anything and everything is attainable. We have simply planted the seeds - it is in your hands to see this vision grow and flourish into reality.

MOST INNOVATIVE IDEA
British School Muscat - 'MODA (Moisture Detecting Assistant)'

MODA measures the soil moisture content of plants and regulates the water flow that is provided to the plant. We did this project completely individually, but we were briefed about this from the sustainability committee of BSM and Ms. Stammmeijer.

We aimed to find loopholes in sustainable projects already present in Oman and chose to focus on the overlooked issue of water wastage. For the fair, team members Alisha and Melody focused on the visual presentations, team members Ovia and Oliver carried out demonstrations for our audience and team member Kaamini coded and created the robot.

The product was essentially a robot that could monitor the moisture levels of soil, it would help people know whether they had over or under watered their plants. Not only helping people save water from overwatering when gardening but also encouraging more people to garden, increasing Oman's greenery. We had initially thought of making a fully working prototype, including actual water tanks and the valves which would control the amount of water that flows through to the plant based on the readings from the probe. But unfortunately our time was too limited. Our product was essentially a gaze into the future possibilities of ideal, automated gardening.

We formed our team around the middle of February, giving us around 2-3 weeks to prepare. A week altogether to come up with an idea, most time being spent actually making the physical robot, with the coding and constructing being the most challenging.

Making the actual physical prototype, that we talked about during the fair, in the short period of time was challenging as the final product would've been a fully functional prototype of the product we as a team envisioned.

By looking deeper into the common issues of water wastage in Oman, we as a team gained strong value of motivation into further developing our prototype and how it could potentially resolve these issues. We highly wanted to ensure this was something that could be widely available and easily accessible for everyone in the country.

Additionally soil nutrients can be measured using



arduino based soil N-P-K (nitrogen phosphorus potassium). These sensors work on the optical principle of where the characteristics of the reflected light from the soil surface indicate the chemical properties of the soil, allowing us to create various prototypes for every region and not just for Oman.

As the world grows and evolves into Artificial Intelligence and robotics, it would be greatly beneficial for the coming generations to learn and understand

how the world sound morphs into technology. When doing so, we, as the young and growing generation, can mould and shape the way the world is growing. That's all sustainability is about. Preservation and growth.

We strongly hope that MODA will in fact be beneficial to many communities in Oman as well as other regions. Please look forward to the development of project MODA!



MOST PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION
ABA Ecological Society (EcoSoc)

This project is a club set up by Alix Dupont who became the president last year, and is presently co-leading it with Kiana Andres, in ABA. Since joining, our ambitious initiatives have resulted in the number of members to have grown from 3 to 54, which we have divided into four groups.

Our project involves the following:

Renewable Energy: Starting off with a petition, then researching renewable energy application procedures, the team followed by meeting with various solar energy companies, and finally writing a full tender (that was sent out 2 weeks ago): EcoSoc has come a long way in the process of transitioning ABA to a 60% renewable energy-powered campus. This was a fully student-led initiative that will significantly reduce the school's reliance on fossil fuels .

Recycling: Setting up a recycling system that incorporates paper, plastic, metals, batteries, and more. We have a contract with Plasbin who has placed two large disposal containers outside the main entrance of the school. This allows the ABA community to dispose of their waste safely.

Composting bins: 4 composting bins have been built (completely by students during their free time). We hope for our cafeteria to soon dispose of their day-to-day leftovers here to create natural fertilizer. We have changed the cafeteria to only sell biodegradable plastic (wrappings, straws, cutlery...).

Biodiversity: A garden was created on campus with several vegetables including tomatoes and chillies. Planting of Omani trees including Ziziphus, Moringa, Frankincense, Dodonea and Date Palms to reduce our water consumption around campus, create habitat for local fauna and maintain a green environment. In addition, all students were invited to come plant during the breaks.

New project: Green walls. We already have aquaponics on campus but would like to exponentially increase their presence so that the school's cafeteria could use them in the near future.

We were told to display environmental initiatives taken at school. I think we did very well as in our exhibition we highlighted numerous projects that are currently happening or are in progress at our school campus and within our school community.

One of the biggest challenges we faced was finding achievable ways for every student in our school to have the opportunity to participate in our events. Our aim was to engage students from any age range. To overcome this challenge, we planned creative activities like gardening during the school breaks open to all student.

By working together on these projects, we personally learned that every person, no matter their age, can have the power to have an impact on a large scale. We think, that if you see an opportunity to enact change, try it because you never know how well it could go.

BEST PRESENTATION
Qurum Private School - Zero Organic waste to Oman landfill Project (ZOOP)

We decided to target food waste as our step closer to building a greener community, as organic waste has proved to be one of the most overlooked issues in Oman with over 65% of household consumption emitting greenhouse gasses.

We assigned research work to all team members to collect enough information, and had daily meetings during break time for discussion. We also created a WhatsApp group to discuss the project. Finally, we assigned



specific tasks to each of the candidates like poster designing, brochure designing, collecting all information that had to be displayed, PowerPoint presentation, banners and the biobin model. Our amazing team worked together at school for three days to assemble everything

together.

This was mostly an independent project constructed by and created by us students alone. However, we were continuously supervised, monitored and received feedback from our lovely biology teacher, Miss Tahira.

We were given a short summary of the topic our project had to fall under, and what it required in terms of display and the need for a model. We received information that was shared via email regarding the Sustainability Fair. We held meetings under the supervision of our teacher to establish a proper plan where all participants could share their ideas and stay on the same page until our research was completed. We made many rough drafts, mind maps, and finally we did it!

We worked on this project for around 10 days in total. The decision-making process was extremely time-consuming. Finalising our poster, model, and fixing all loopholes was a challenge. Regardless, the outcome was

certainly worth the struggle, and we were able to confidently showcase our passion and dedication during our presentation!

A challenge we encountered was how to distribute tasks among participants and the assisting students. To address this issue, we appointed a leader who organised us into teams with specific objectives.

Through this friendly, dynamic, and lively fair we each were able to learn various different aspects on sustainability from every team present. Our most memorable lesson was the importance of teamwork. Teamwork showed us that despite the short time, if we work together we can reach our goal. Participating in programs such as fairs can push you to do things you wouldn't normally do. Not only will you learn time management skills, managing your schoolwork and other tasks, but also as presenters you will gain insight into how to overcome your stage fright.

take a break

IN TOWN

OMAN SUSTAINABILITY FAIR 2023



Oman Sustainability Fair 2023, hosted by OABC, saw the participation of 13 Oman schools at the InterCon lawns on February 28. Photos: V K Shafeer



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. How many wheels were there on each hansom cab, the horse-drawn taxis that used to operate in London in Victorian times?
- A. 2
B. 3
C. 4
D. 1
02. What is the only geometric shape that has infinite lines of symmetry?
- A. Dodecahedron
B. Rhombus
C. Triangle
D. Circle
03. Charlie Chaplin started filming this satire on fascism in September 1939 and released it in 1940. Which film was it?
- A. Limelight
B. Modern Times
C. Monsieur Verdoux
D. The Great Dictator

Answers: 1.D 2.D 3.C

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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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

BOGGLER

Y	E	E	E
E	I	R	D
F	I	S	J
B	D	A	M

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You're feeling a bit distracted right now, but you're worrying about things that really don't deserve all of this attention. These problems you're struggling with are molehills, not mountains. You've let little things grow into big things in your imagination, but they aren't really. So let go of all of this worry! These are things you just can't do anything about.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

If you meet with a frustrated friend today, be compassionate. Don't be disappointed if they aren't in the same frame of mind that you're in right now. You two can't always be on the same wavelength, so resist the urge to tease them. Any attempts you make to cheer them up will probably only make them feel more self-conscious.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It might be time for you to consider making a change in your career. Even if you're not feeling especially ambitious, you need to put some effort into deepening your skills, expanding your professional network, or just reminding yourself how good you truly are. The change you need could be a whole new position at work.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

If you feel like you're working really hard to help others, but no one seems to be appreciating your efforts, don't think that gives you the right to stop helping people! It doesn't. After all, if helping others were your true motivation, then recognition would be irrelevant. A good deed is a reward in itself. If that's not the case, be honest about the fact that you just want the positive feedback.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Be careful not to overreact when someone says something that sounds rude to you. And definitely don't fly off the handle or get up in their face. This is something that's none of your business, and it shouldn't take up any of your time today. If you get involved in this drama, you'll only get hit with some stray verbal bullets.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Be careful not to let your vanity get too involved in the choices you make today. If you do something just because you think it will make you look good, think again. People can quickly see through such self-centered actions, and they'll know when you're just in it for yourself. That's not who you are, so don't give them ammunition.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Before you can start doing anything today, you need to formulate a plan. No matter where you want to go with your day, you'll get nowhere without knowing how you're going to do it. Regardless of whether your hopes for the day are ambitious or not, all the details can slip through the cracks far too easily if you don't use your organizational skills to wrangle them into place.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Get more in touch with the expressive parts of yourself today. Explore new forms of art, and try your hand at one of them. You won't be a master right from the start, but just trying to express yourself in an unfamiliar medium will ignite your imagination in a very exciting way. Surrounding yourself with the people you love is another way of getting your creative juices flowing.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Thinking big thoughts is important, but if your brain is always trying to wrap itself around major, life-changing ideas, how are you going to successfully manage your day-to-day tasks? Get back to reality today. Focus on the details of living. Reconnect with that friend you haven't seen in a while. They want to know what you've been up to, and they have some exciting news to share with you.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Today is a great day to start your latest project. You don't have to roll up your sleeves and get right into the nitty-gritty of it all just yet, but you should be able to get a lot of advance work done. Do some serious research, put together a guest list, or do whatever other preparation is appropriate. You'll be able to get way ahead of the game.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Have you been treating your bank account well? Is it a bit starved for attention? Before it's too late, take a look at what's been going on with your accounts. There is a big disparity there that you need to fix. Perhaps you've been pushing your credit to the limit? If so, do yourself a favor and live your life on a cash-only basis for a while.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If you've had your fill of partying and going out every night, you'll be able to schedule some alone time soon. Make sure you have something planned so you can take full advantage of it! Do you want to treat yourself to a quiet dinner out? Stream your favorite movie and just chill at home? Splurge on a spa day? It isn't selfish to spend money on yourself.

entertainment

PUTIN DECORATES
US ACTOR SEAGAL



Russian President Vladimir Putin has bestowed a prestigious award on US actor Steven Seagal for his work on strengthening international 'cooperation', according to an official decree released Monday. In the decades since the height of his Hollywood fame, Seagal has been an outspoken supporter of Putin, who granted the 70-year-old film star citizenship several years ago. Moscow said Seagal had been given the Order of Friendship for his 'major contribution to the development of international cultural and humanitarian cooperation'.



RIHANNA TO PERFORM 'BLACK PANTHER' SONG AT OSCARS

Pop superstar Rihanna will perform at the Oscars next month, organisers said Thursday, just weeks after she made her long-awaited - and visibly pregnant - return at the Super Bowl.

The Barbados-born singer will perform her Academy Award-nominated song 'Lift Me Up' from *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* at the film industry's top awards show in Hollywood.

The song is competing with the likes of Lady Gaga's 'Hold My Hand' from *Top Gun: Maverick*, and the current frontrunner 'Naatu Naatu' from Indian crowd-pleaser *RRR*.

FRENCH DOCUMENTARY, SPANISH GIRL CLINCH TOP PRIZES AT BERLINALE

The Berlin film festival on Saturday awarded its Golden Bear top prize to a documentary by French director Nicolas Philibert and its best acting award to an eight-year-old girl in what jury chief Kristen Stewart described as a 'boundary-pushing' event.

On the *Adamant*, coming more than 20 years after Philibert's acclaimed education documentary *To Be and To Have*, is about a floating day-care centre for people with psychiatric problems on the Seine in Paris.

Thanking the jury, Philibert said, "That documentary can be considered to be cinema in its own right, touches me deeply."



NEW 'LORD OF THE RINGS' FILMS ANNOUNCED BY WARNER BROS



Multiple new *Lord of the Rings* films are on the way from Warner Bros, the Hollywood studio behind Peter Jackson's blockbuster Oscar-winning trilogy said Thursday.

David Zaslav, CEO of parent group Warner Bros Discovery, said that recently appointed studio chiefs Mike De Luca and Pam Abdy struck an agreement to make more movies based on JRR Tolkien's epic fantasy books. "Today, I'm thrilled to announce that Mike and Pam signed a deal," he said.

CHRIS ROCK LIVE NETFLIX SPECIAL TO AIR WEEK BEFORE OSCARS

Chris Rock's live Netflix special will air just a week before the Oscars, the streamer said Tuesday, raising expectations that the comedian will address the shocking moment he was slapped by Will Smith during last year's Hollywood award show.

This Saturday evening *Chris Rock: Selective Outrage* will become the first-ever event shown in real time on Netflix, accompanied by pre and post-show entertainment featuring celebrities from Jerry Seinfeld and Amy Schumer to Sir Paul McCartney and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.



'EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE' WINS (NEARLY) ALL AT SAG AWARDS

Absurdist sci-fi comedy *Everything Everywhere All at Once* continued its dominance of this year's Hollywood award shows by earning top honors from the Screen Actors Guild on Sunday.

The film about a Chinese-American family undergoing a tax audit who end up fighting a universe-hopping supervillain also won best actress for Michelle Yeoh, best supporting actor for Ke Huy Quan, and best supporting actress for Jamie Lee Curtis.

Actors Michelle Yeoh, Ke Huy Quan, Stephanie Hsu, Jamie Lee Curtis, James Hong, and cast pose with the award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture for *Everything Everywhere All at Once* during the 29th Screen Actors Guild Awards at the Fairmont Century Plaza in Century City, California, on February 26.



HOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW: **CREED III**

Genre: Drama

Starring: Michael B Jordan, Jonathan Majors, Florian Munteanu, Wood Harris, Tessa Thompson

SETTLING SCORES, AND MORE

The Creed wing of the Rocky franchise has always been about legacy. Adonis Creed's journey has been one of stepping out from shadows cast by previous generations. With *Creed III*, though, Michael B Jordan casts a shadow of his own in his directorial debut, slipping into the director's chair with the confidence of a heavyweight champ stepping into the ring. It sets us up with everything we've come to expect from the series, and knocks us out with an exciting new direction.

After dominating the boxing world, Adonis Creed has been thriving in both his career and family life. When a childhood friend and former boxing prodigy, Damian (Jonathan Majors), resurfaces after serving a long sentence in prison, he is eager to prove that he deserves his shot in the ring.

The face-off between former friends is more than just a fight. To settle the score, Adonis must put his future

on the line to battle Damian - a fighter who has nothing to lose.

The climactic match between Donnie and Dame is built on a lifetime of pent-up feelings, anger and guilt, and the sense that what needs settling is between the two of them and nobody else. Visually, Jordan takes us there in a way the franchise has never come close to.

In a franchise that's famous for sequels you didn't expect, the good news and bad with *Creed III* is that it could be a satisfying conclusion to Donnie's story. It could also be the third of what might become five or six films that start to run together after a while. Where *Creed III* should remain memorable though, is the turning point it represents for Jordan and Adonis Creed alike.

Rating ★★★★★

