



H M concludes fruitful visit

Discusses cooperation to serve Oman-Kuwait ties and meet aspirations of the two peoples

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq returned home on Tuesday after a two-day state visit to the State of Kuwait.

The visit was made in response to an invitation by Sheikh Meshal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, who led the farewell ceremony for His Majesty the Sultan.

Following his departure, His Majesty the Sultan sent a cable of thanks to Sheikh Meshal expressing his sincere appreciation to the emir for the warm welcome and hospitality.

Earlier in the day, His Majesty the Sultan and Sheikh Meshal held a fraternal meeting at His Majesty's residence in Bayan Palace.

During the meeting, the two leaders continued discussions on bilateral cooperation between the two countries to serve the fraternal relations between the Omani and Kuwaiti peoples and meet their aspirations for further prosperity, progress and welfare.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nuamani, Minister of Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi,



Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, President of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of

Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Dr Saleh bin Amir al Kharousi, Ambassador of Oman to Kuwait.

From the Kuwaiti side, it was attended by Sheikh Sabah Khaled al Hammad al Sabah, Head of Mission

of Honour, and Dr Mohammed bin Nassir al Hajri, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Salam Museum visit

On Tuesday morning, His Majesty the Sultan visited Al Salam Palace Museum in Kuwait City where he was received by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah Mubarak al Sabah, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, Sheikh Muna al Jaber al Abdullah al Sabah, Head of Centre for Historical Documents and Amiri Diwan Museums and Libraries, and Supervisor-General of Al Salam Palace Museum, and other Kuwaiti officials.

His Majesty the Sultan toured the museum and listened to a technology-enhanced briefing about its artefacts and manuscripts that highlight important aspects of the history and civilisation of Kuwait.

His Majesty the Sultan viewed exhibits in the main halls showcasing

salient features of civilisations and events that took place in Kuwait, represented by a diverse range of antiques.

At the end of the tour, His Majesty the Sultan signed the VIP Visitors Book, in which he expressed his delight at visiting Al Salam Palace Museum, as well as his admiration for the precious archaeological collections and antiques showcasing the historical legacy of the State of Kuwait and its deep-rooted culture.

He thanked those in charge of the edifice for their efforts in perfectly documenting Kuwait's history, following which he accepted a commemorative gift from the museum's officials.

During the museum visit, His Majesty the Sultan was accompanied by Sheikh Sabah Khaled Hamad al Sabah, Head of Mission of Honour, and members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty. ONA

UN Secy-Gen in Muscat as focus turns to Rafah

Muscat - António Guterres, Secretary-General of United Nations, arrived in Muscat on Tuesday for a three-day official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

Upon arrival at Muscat International Airport, Guterres was received by H E Sheikh Khalifa al Harthy, Undersecretary for Political Affairs in Foreign Ministry; H E Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, Permanent Representative of Oman to United Nations; and several Foreign Ministry officials.

Later in the day, Guterres visited the Youth Centre in Muscat, where he was briefed on the centre's work, its mechanism of functioning and the activities it undertakes.

US\$2bn for Gaza

The UN Secretary-General arrived from Kuwait where he attended a conference of international donors, which pledged over US\$2bn in aid to Gaza.

The conference, organised by International Islamic Charitable



António Guterres with H E Sheikh Khalifa al Harthy in Muscat on Tuesday

Organization (IICO) and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), announced that the funds would be dispersed over two years, with the possibility of an extension.

The initiative is designed "to mobilise efforts to support life-saving humanitarian interventions in the Gaza Strip, and to support the prospects for early recovery for the population," said Bader Saud al Sumait, General Manager of IICO.

It would be applied on five different tracks — "life-saving interventions, shelter, health, education and economic em-

powerment" - Sumait said as he read the conference's final statement.

Guterres urged an immediate halt to the war, the return of hostages held in Gaza and a "surge" in humanitarian aid to the besieged Palestinian territory.

450,000 displaced from Rafah

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees said on Tuesday that 450,000 people have been forcibly displaced from the city of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip since May 6.

Oman calls for Palestinian state recognition in UN address

New York, USA - The Sultanate of Oman has affirmed that achieving an end to the conflict in the Middle East requires the establishment of a Palestinian state with full and unlimited membership in the United Nations. This, it stressed, is not only a strategic necessity for the next stage but also a global demand supported by the international community.

Counsellor Sayyed Ahmed bin Hamoud al Busaidi, a member of Oman's permanent delegation to UN in New York, delivered this message during a speech before the UN General Assembly during the tenth emergency special session of the assembly.

Oman called on the Security Council to reconsider its stance on granting Palestine full membership in the UN. It argued that rejecting such a request undermines security and peace in the Middle East and globally. Oman also criticised the Security Council for its perceived double standards on the Palestinian issue, which it believes harms the



Sayyed Ahmed al Busaidi

council's credibility.

Oman welcomed the overwhelming majority vote by members of the UN General Assembly on a resolution supporting Palestine's right to full UN membership. It highlighted the global majority's call on the Security Council to recognise Palestine as a practical step towards the two-state solution and a just peace, in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions.

Expressing deep concern over ongoing military escalations by Israeli forces and atrocities against civilians in Gaza and other occupied Palestinian territories, Oman warned of the

catastrophic consequences of such actions, particularly the recent military operations in Rafah. It cautioned against further conflict and tension in the region.

Oman reiterated its support for peace efforts and the two-state solution, emphasising safe coexistence. It firmly rejected any project that does not contribute to a just and comprehensive peace or provide a permanent solution to the Palestinian issue. The sultanate affirmed its support for the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people, including their right to full UN membership.

Additionally, Oman aligned itself with statements made by other delegations, including those of the United Arab Emirates (on behalf of the Arab Group), the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation), and the Republic of Uganda (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), all of which supported Palestine's right for full UN membership.



02

Rihal third fastest-growing tech firm in Middle East



08

Trump authorised hush money payment: Ex-lawyer



16

I have faith in music and humanity: Alexey Botvinov

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Rihal 3rd fastest-growing ME tech firm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Deloitte Middle East has released the third edition of the Middle East Technology Fast 50 list, ranking Oman's Rihal as the third fastest-growing tech startup in the region, thereby consolidating its status as a leading technology company.

Deloitte reported that all companies on the list across various technology sectors in the Middle East and Cyprus - including software development, fintech, media, entertainment, artificial intelligence and other key areas - experienced rapid growth over the last four years.

Cyprus-based fintech company Capital.com claimed the top spot for the third consecutive year with an astounding 4,411% growth, followed closely by Salla, an e-commerce company based

in Saudi Arabia with a growth of 3,550%.

Rihal outperformed its peers on the list with a remarkable 2,441% growth, reflecting strong customer trust and the high quality of its innovative projects. Specialising in digital transformation services and efficient database management, Rihal supports government entities in their digital transformation by digitising services, automating internal processes, and enhancing efficiency, development and quality.

Rihal has served various government and private entities for over five years, offering these a broad range of services. These include process automation as an initial step towards digital transformation, AI solutions for complex problems, data management for accurate and readily available data, software engineering to convert customer needs into seamless technical software solutions, and IT-enabled resource management to equip companies with technical resources.

Rihal has also launched tech products like Jadawal, Eysal, Has-sad and Iqraa to help companies and organisations streamline their operations using data and AI for increased efficiency. These achievements affirm Rihal's excellence in technology, showcasing Omani expertise and its prominent regional standing. This success contributes positively to the growth of Oman's tech sector and boosts the nation's economy, knowledge and innovation.

Scott Whalan, Deloitte Private Leader, said, "The start-up community proves to be resilient time after time. It is inspiring to witness the remarkable accomplishments of this year's applicants, a true testament to a bright future filled with growth. We are proud to support and be part of an innovative ecosystem."



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MERA holds exhibition to enhance pilgrims' knowledge on haj

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA), through its Department of Women's Education and Guidance, inaugurated the 'Nusuk' exhibition along with the activities of the 'Little Haj' for its tenth annual edition on Tuesday.

The event, hosted at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, serves as a preparatory platform for over 14,000 pilgrims expected to embark on the haj to Mecca this year. The exhibition, spanning five days and split into morning and evening sessions, is strategically designed to augment pilgrims' understanding and execution of haj rituals.

"Nusuk aims to simplify the haj rituals for pilgrims and enhance the quality of services to enrich both their religious and cultural experiences," a spokesperson for MERA stated.

The initiative underscores a commitment to comprehensive educational outreach, involving various interactive and visual sessions.

Central to the exhibition are six distinct sections focusing on haj rituals, religious edicts (fatwa), health, social responsibilities, the Omani Haj mission, and special provisions for non-Arabic speaking attendees. These sections provide crucial insights and guidelines, from safety measures and disease prevention tactics to a deeper spiritual understanding of the pilgrimage.

"The exhibition is not just about learning the rituals but also about preparing the pilgrims psychologically and spiritually for the journey ahead," explained the spokesperson.

This holistic approach aims to ensure that every pilgrim is well-informed, safe, and spiritually ready for the transformative experience of haj.

Municipality warns against random waste dumping

Muscat - Muscat Municipality issued a stern warning on Tuesday against random disposal of waste in public areas.

The civic body stressed on the detrimental impact of this practice on the environment and soil. 'Such careless dumping leads to pollution, disfigurement of public spaces, and the accumulation of dirt and dust, accompanied by unpleasant odors.'

Highlighting the cascading negative effects, the municipality underscored how random waste disposal creates breeding grounds for insects and attracts stray animals, necessitating substantial human and financial resources for cleanup efforts.

The types of waste contributing to this issue range from construction debris such as broken bricks and cement bags to various materials such as stones, wood, metals, and car tyres.

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ORIGIN 1

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Nama Group and its subsidiaries - Nama Supply, Nama Distribution and Nama Dhofar Services - unveiled several initiatives aimed at enhancing electricity services in the sultanate at an annual media briefing held on Tuesday.

Among the key initiatives introduced is the 'Fixed' service, which offers subscribers the convenience of allocating a predetermined monthly amount for their

electricity bills throughout the year. This initiative provides financial predictability and stability, ensuring no disconnection of service due to accrued dues, regardless of actual consumption. Subscribers can sign up for this service free of charge through the Nama website or application.

Additionally, Nama announced that the smart electricity meter project is 45% complete with efforts ongoing to include all electricity accounts.

Youssef al Mahrouqi of Nama

The smart electricity meter project is 45% complete. The project is expected to initially benefit around 1.5mn subscribers. At the end of 2022, smart meters made up 25% of the total number of electricity subscribers

Supply highlighted the comprehensive services accompanying the smart meter project, including options for prepaid bills, deferred payment and instant billing services.

The smart meter project is expected to initially benefit around 1.5mn subscribers, with an annual increase of 3%, aligning with Oman's vision for innovation and digitalisation. At the end of 2022,

smart meters made up 25% of the total number of electricity subscribers, accounting for more than 300,000 meters.

In preparation of summer of 2024, Nama has deployed 240 emergency and maintenance teams across the sultanate, ensuring the availability of electrical equipment necessary for maintenance and emergencies.

Additionally, the company remains committed to Omanisation with 60% of emergency and maintenance teams comprising

young and qualified Omani cadres.

Salem bin Saeed al Kamani, CEO of Nama Supply, reiterated the company's commitment to providing high-quality services while enhancing partnerships with various segments of society and institutions. This involves field visits and engagement with official and local community entities.

Alaa bin Hassan al Lawati, CEO of Nama Distribution, highlighted efforts to ensure network

reliability through the reinforcement of electrical stations and lines, along with the development of preemptive plans to handle summer-related outages. Ongoing studies on smart electrical grid projects were also presented.

Ali bin Issa Shammam, CEO of Nama Dhofar Services, affirmed the company's readiness to meet the rising demand for electricity and water in the governorate, particularly in anticipation of the upcoming khareef season.



Our Correspondent

Muscat

South Batinah signed seven agreements worth over RO2.3mn in wilayats across the governorate to boost local economy and foster diverse investment opportunities.

Masoud bin Saeed al Hashemi, Governor of South Batinah, signed the agreements with local firms tasked with executing these projects on Tuesday.

An Official from the Governor's Office informed that the first agreement, valued at RO71,280 involves a 772sqm plot in Khafdi Square of Rustaq.

A vegetable vending site spread over 6,979sqm in the Al Iraqi area, also in Rustaq, will be developed through the second agreement valued at RO426,840.

The third contract will see investment of RO1,746,000 for development of a 15,000sqm plot of land in the Bab al Dhafur area of Nakhal, while the fourth agreement, valued at RO30,600, is for a 2,048sqm plot of land in Al Malada Square in Musannah.

An agreement worth RO28,440 will develop a

The agreements are in various sectors and aim to establish commercial and industrial ventures across different regions of South Batinah

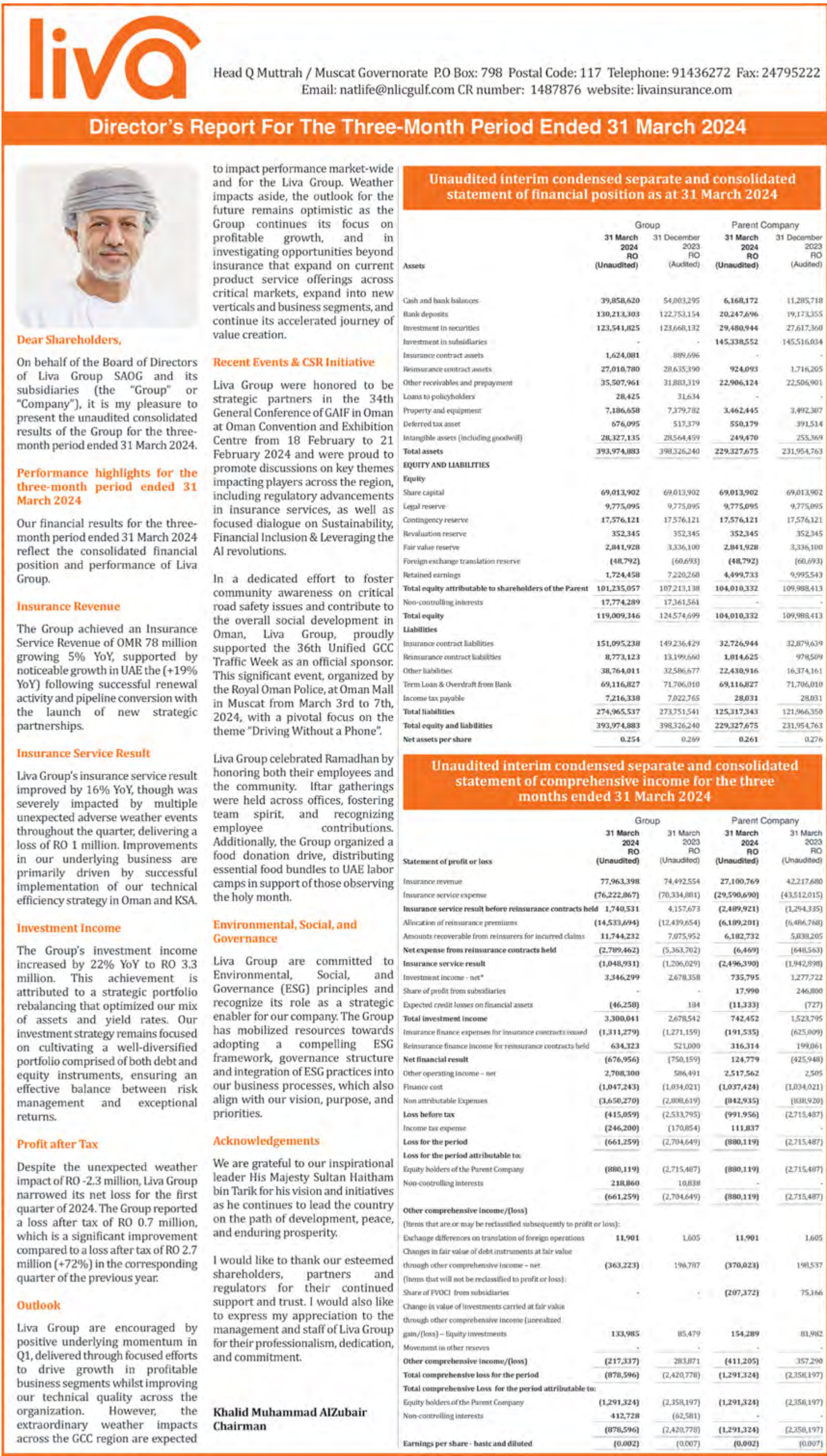
1,000sqm plot of land in Al Wasiit Square in Wadi al Ma'awil.

The sixth agreement involves expansion of Nakhal Industrial City with an investment of RO20,880 in a 1,073sqm plot of land.

Through the seventh agreement, an investment of RO20,880 will develop a 980sqm plot of land in the Saqsuq area of Barka.

The agreements are in various sectors and aim to establish commercial and industrial ventures across different regions of South Batinah.

According to the Governor's Office, the agreements are expected to catalyse economic growth and generate employment opportunities.



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BRIEFS

Islamic finance industry to reach \$5tn by 2025: ISDB

Islamic finance offers a reliable financing option with its asset-based approach that mitigates risks, the head of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group recently said.

Speaking at the bank's annual meeting in the Saudi capital Riyadh, Mohammad al Jasser said the Islamic finance sector is expected to reach a size of \$5tn by 2025.

The Islamic finance industry has been has seen remarkable growth in recent years, expanding in size, liquidity, and sophistication, he said.

Sukuk is one of the fastest-growing asset classes within the Islamic finance industry, he stressed. Sukuk is an Islamic financial certificate, similar to a bond in Western finance, which complies with Islamic religious law.

Standard Chartered Bank forecasts further upside for Oman's credit rating

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In its latest Global Focus report for Q2 2024, Standard Chartered Bank projects continued improvement in Oman's credit rating, citing a series of consecutive upgrades in recent years.

'Currently rated BB+, up from B+ in 2021, Oman is poised to regain its investment-grade rating as a result of a continued reduction in its debt-to-GDP ratio, enhanced fiscal performance, and a commitment to medium-term reforms,' Standard Chartered said in a press statement on Tuesday.

Standard Chartered anticipates a further decline in Oman's public debt to 34% of GDP by the end of 2024, supported by sustained twin surpluses. External debt repayment is expected to amount to 5% of GDP in 2024, potentially covered by fiscal surplus proceeds or refinancing options.

As per the bank's estimates, Oman's inflation is forecasted to decelerate further from 1.0% in 2023, with growth in the non-oil sector (70% of real GDP) picking up to 2.5% in 2024, driven by



Oman's steadfast reforms pave the way for an imminent return to investment-grade rating, fueled by a robust economic trajectory and strong non-oil growth

HUSSAIN AL-YAFAI

sectors such as tourism, manufacturing and trade.

The commitment to reforms underscores Oman's medium-term outlook, with structural changes aimed at improving the business environment, attracting foreign direct investment, and

executing IPOs. Standard Chartered projects a policy rate of 5.5% by the end of 2024, consistent with its latest US Fed rate forecasts.

Hussain al-Yafai, CEO of Standard Chartered Oman, said, "Oman's steadfast reforms pave the way for an imminent return to investment-grade rating, fueled by a robust economic trajectory and strong non-oil growth."

Oman Tax Forum reviews tax developments, modern systems

Muscat - The Oman Tax Forum, organised by the Tax Authority in cooperation with EY, kicked off on Tuesday under the patronage of H E Nasser Khamis al Jashmi, Chairman of the Tax Authority. As many as 300 individuals representing major companies operating in Oman attended the forum.

The forum opened with a speech delivered by Said Ahmed al Shanfari, Director General of the Second Directorate General of Taxes on behalf of the Tax Authority. He affirmed that the Tax Authority always seeks to strengthen ties and community partnerships. Shanfari stated that this forum is one of these partnerships aimed at exchanging experiences and opinions to enhance the development of the tax system in Oman and meet the desires of taxpayers.

The vision and mission of the Tax Authority were also introduced during the forum.

Three working papers were reviewed during the forum. The first paper was presented under the title 'The Most Important Updates to Tax Practice,' during which global and regional tax trends and developments, Gulf initiatives, and international commitments were discussed. The first paper also addressed the 'Main Challenges Regarding Tax Practices in the Sultanate of Oman'.

The second paper was presented under the title 'Developments in Indirect Taxes and Electronic Invoicing'. This paper reviewed the most prominent updates in the field of applying indirect taxes in the GCC states, updates to VAT and excise tax in Oman, as well as the tax departments in taxable institutions and how taxes are managed. The second paper discussed the rapidly changing e-invoicing tax landscape, and electronic invoicing systems.

The third paper was presented under the title 'Transfer Pricing and BEPS 2.0 Rules,' and discussed transfer pricing developments across the MENA region, transfer pricing developments in Oman, as well as combating tax base erosion and profit shifting as the second pillar, and the developments of the second pillar for GCC countries.

The forum concluded with an exchange of views and proposals to develop tax work by taking advantage of modern systems.

ONA

INTERVIEW

REBECCA OLSON, CEO OF OMAN AMERICAN BUSINESS COUNCIL

Unlocking opportunities for Omani exporters in US market

Gulam Ali Khan
Muscat

In a world where international trade plays a pivotal role in economic growth, Oman stands as one of the select few nations with a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States. Recently celebrating its 15th anniversary, the US-Oman FTA marks a milestone in bilateral relations between two countries. The Oman American Business Council (OABC), the official affiliate of the US Chamber of Commerce in Oman, has launched new services to empower Omani companies to utilise the US-Oman FTA and unlock trading opportunities.

In an interview with Muscat Daily, Rebecca Olson, CEO of OABC, sheds light on practical strategies to maximise the benefits of the US-Oman FTA. She discusses OABC's new initiatives aimed at facilitating Omani exporters' access to the US market and highlights key opportunities.

What ambitious plans has OABC outlined for the year ahead - any new emphasis on exports from Oman to the US?

For many years, people have been saying that the US-Oman FTA is underutilised and that people are not aware of the FTA. In some respects, we absolutely agree. The sky is the limit with the FTA, and sadly, we have not yet begun to reach its full potential. In partnership with Oman's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the US Embassy in Muscat, OABC has created high-quality videos, published guides and papers, and held awareness events. However, we now aim to go beyond merely discussing the incredible unique opportunities the FTA provides and instead, focus on practical actions.

The US has only 20 free trade agreements, and it seems unlikely that they will be signing more any-

time soon. Duty-free access for Omani exporters to the world's largest market is an incredible opportunity, provided people understand how to export to the US. So, with that said, we have ambitious plans this year - launching not one, but three new services for companies and individuals interested in utilising the FTA: Gateway USA, US Export Compass, and US-Oman Import Easy.

How do you propose to facilitate Omani companies who are interested to export to the US market?

We recognise the immense potential for Omani businesses in the American market. To bridge the gap, we have launched the three new programmes mentioned earlier as part of our commitment to trade development, and expanded our team. We have brought Harshal Dutia onto our team, who brings over eight years of experience in this field. Harshal will work hands-on with companies, assisting them in thorough market research to identify product-market fit. He will provide guidance to companies on communication with US companies, marketing techniques and materials, finding buyers, utilising the quick shipping routes from Oman to the US, as well as regulations and certifications required for the US market.

Additionally, under the programme, we will facilitate and support participation in trade shows and industry events in the US and across the MENA region to connect Omani businesses with potential US buyers and distributors.

Can Oman also serve as a channel for exporters from other countries to access the US market? Are any particular countries currently in focus?

It definitely can be. Although the regulations for exporting from Oman under the FTA are stringent and depend on several factors. The most important factor being that the goods should be 'Made in Oman'. In case



The US has only 20 Free Trade Agreements, and US-Oman FTA is one of them. Duty-free access for Omani exporters to the world's largest market is an incredible opportunity, provided people understand how to export to the US

REBECCA OLSON

raw materials are imported into Oman, there should be a certain amount of value addition in Oman to qualify the goods as 'Made in Oman' to utilise the FTA. This presents an opportunity for companies in other countries to use Oman as a gateway to process or assemble their goods in Oman for export to the US. We see significant potential for Indian companies to utilise this opportunity when the Oman-India FTA is in place.

ity, plants, and processes, along with quick shipping lines to the US.

The Omani fresh and processed foods industry has not yet penetrated the US market extensively. There is significant demand for food items such as dates and flour, in which Oman has amazing products and brands. The Omani seafood industry is already exporting a few domestic varieties of fish to the US. With the government and private sector contributing to aquaculture and fish farming, there is a lot of potential to export these to the US.

When it comes to success stories, there are some clear models: Made in Oman plastic products are used in tens of thousands of hospitals and other facilities throughout the US. Interestingly, Amouage has set up a standalone store, following quick growth in the US market. Other high-quality Omani products like honey could be marketed carefully to the luxury segment.

What are the key benefits that Omani exporters can expect when trading with the US, and have there been any new legislation on both sides to facilitate smooth trade?

The first and most important key benefit Omani exporters have is the FTA. They have an advantage that companies from only a few other countries possess. It gives them a price advantage at the first step of doing business. Secondly, the US market has a massive consumer base with diverse spending habits. Finding demand for niche products which Oman offers is much easier in a market like the US.

Are there any trade shows in the US lined up in the coming months wherein Omani companies can participate to showcase their products?

Yes, there are several upcoming trade shows where Omani companies can participate to showcase their products. There is IDDBA (International Dairy, Deli, Bakery Association) in Houston, Texas, in June where Omani flour mills and processed food manufacturers can participate. There is the American Food and Beverage Show in September in Miami, where all fresh foods, processed foods, and seafood suppliers can attend. This is one of the largest food and beverage expos in the US. Then there is Aluminum USA in May in Tennessee and Metalcon in October in Tennessee, where Omani metal processing and manufacturing companies can participate.

There is also a world-famous seafood expo in Boston each March, and the private label show in Chicago in November. This is a great place for exporters who want to sell a large volume of products to buyers but are not needing their specific brand to appear on the packaging. Let Walmart or Costco re-label as Kirkland or some other brand and distribute throughout their outlets. We recommend setting up meetings on either side of a trade show and using it as a base to then reach more buyers on the same trip. OABC can help Omani companies with this.

Does the US have any specific guidelines for Omani exporters regarding acquiring due certification or other logistics for long-term associations?

Yes, the USA has regulations in place for most products. Products require specific certification relevant to the US. These regulations can be from federal agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for food and medical products, and others from individual states as per their regulations. The US has a risk-based approach where higher-risk products have stricter certification requirements. It is advised to Omani companies to understand the US standards for their products, ensure their supply chain is in place along with their logistic partners for efficient deliveries and cost-effectiveness.

Biden unveils historic wave of tariffs on Chinese imports

Washington, US – The White House formally unveiled a sweeping array of new tariffs on Chinese goods Tuesday that will raise duties on \$18bn in Chinese imports.

The long-awaited announcement will touch an array of sectors, with steel to semiconductors to medical products feeling new duties as soon as this year.

Electric vehicles are a key focus of the announcement, with duties there set to quadruple in 2024 from 25% to 100%. The actions also notably do not include the lowering of more than \$300bn in Trump-era duties on China. Biden largely re-upped former President Donald Trump's policy — and added new tariffs on certain sectors on top.

"The President is taking a tough, strategic approach combining investment at home with enforcement against China in key sectors," national economic advisor Lael Brainard said ahead of the news.

Biden's top economic aide also drew a sharp contrast with Trump's trade record in her comments to reporters. She said Trump's moves in office "did not deliver" and that his current 2024 campaign trail promises would spike inflation.

Most of the new tariffs announced this week could be felt quickly and are set to be implemented this year. Others – such as new duties on semiconductors and batteries – are set to phase in more slowly, in 2025 and 2026.

In total, the sweeping White House announcement Tuesday will impose increased duties on Chinese steel, aluminum, semiconductors, electric vehicles, batteries, critical minerals, solar cells, ship-to-shore cranes, and various medical products.

New trade war?

Tuesday's announcement is the culmination of a two-year government review of the so-called "Section 301" duties on China that were first imposed in the Trump administration.

The announcement also sets



US President Joe Biden

Most of the new US tariffs announced this week could be felt quickly and are set to be implemented this year. Others – such as new duties on semiconductors and batteries – are set to phase in more slowly, in 2025 and 2026

up a marked contrast between how trade policy may look in 2025 depending on which man wins.

These new muscular tariffs from Biden still are a contrast with what is promised by his White House challenger.

Trump is proposing historically high new tariffs, including a 60% tariff on imports from China. His allies say that sharp hike will allow US manufacturing to grow in the US, but it's an idea often criticized by some economists and trade experts as being too blunt.

But Biden's aggressive posture

on the topic also promises to ratchet up tensions between the world's two largest economies.

China's Foreign Ministry responded to advance reports of today's news by charging Biden with politicizing trade and adding that "China will take all necessary measures to defend its rights and interests."

On Monday, a senior Biden official downplayed the chances of Chinese retaliation, saying the US government has been telegraphing its concerns to the Chinese for years through many channels. Of Tuesday news, this official added: "I don't think these con-

cerns will come as a surprise."

Others are less sanguine, including Ashley Craig, a D.C.-based international trade lawyer at Venable LLP.

He said this week's news means "we are looking at a further deterioration of the US/Sino trade relationship," adding "perhaps the biggest catalyst here is the presidential election cycle."

How it will affect the US economy will certainly be a focus for investors.

They need to pay attention, Interactive Brokers Chief Strategist Steve Sossnick told Yahoo Finance Monday in advance of the news. That's because "a tariff is a tax and although there's been some rhetoric that it's a tax on the foreigners, it's really a tax on the Americans."

Sossnick added he'll be watching to see if increased duties could "throw sand in the gears" of the overall US economy that

has been outperforming expectations.

New research out of Goldman Sachs economist Jan Hatzius said Trump's 2018-2019 tariffs on China led to price increases being borne "entirely" by US businesses and households.

The tariffs also enabled both domestic producers and non-Chinese exporters to the US to "opportunisticly" raise their prices as well.

Hatzius estimates that every one percentage increase in the effective tariff rate would increase core consumer prices by just over 0.1%.

"The direct impact of higher tariffs on GDP is likely to be modestly negative, with the hit to real income and consumer spending from higher prices outweighing the decline in the trade deficit, especially if other countries retaliate," Hatzius warned.

(Source: Yahoo Finance)

Fourth Qatar Economic Forum kicks off

Doha, Qatar – Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani on Tuesday patronised the opening of the fourth edition of Qatar Economic Forum, powered by Bloomberg.

The three-day forum is held under the theme 'A World Remade: Navigating the Year of Uncertainty' at Katara Towers – Fairmont Doha and Raffles Doha.

Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani welcomed the guests of the Fourth Qatar Economic Forum, stressing that the forum has become a global platform for presenting constructive ideas.

Qatar's Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani

made the opening address.

He affirmed that the State of Qatar has successfully navigated significant challenges, leading to the flexibility that characterizes its economy and positioning it competitively on the global stage, with efficient investment in natural resources and human energies.

The Emir attended the inaugural panel discussion with Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, a panel with the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda, and another panel with Prime Minister of Malaysia Dr. Anwar Ibrahim.

QNA

Moody's affirms Bahrain's B2 ratings, outlook stable

Singapore – Moody's on Tuesday affirmed the Government of Bahrain's B2 long-term issuer and senior unsecured ratings. The outlook remains stable.

The affirmation of the B2 ratings reflects Bahrain's very weak and deteriorating debt burden and debt affordability metrics, and its elevated government liquidity and external vulnerability risks, which Moody's expects to remain the key features of the government's credit profile in the foreseeable future.

'These challenges are mitigated by a demonstrated commitment of financial, economic and political support from the governments of Saudi Arabia,

Kuwait and Abu Dhabi, which the agency expects to continue to limit downside credit risks for Bahrain despite the government's lack of progress in addressing its structurally large fiscal deficits, including off-budget spending, and the resulting inability to durably arrest its rising debt burden,' Moody's said.

Moody's estimates that Bahrain's government debt reached more than 130% of GDP at the end of 2023 and will likely increase further in the coming years.

The stable outlook reflects the balance of risks at the B2 rating level.

SITUATIONS VACANT

A leading fitout and joinery company is looking to recruit the following personnel to augment its operations in Oman.

The ideal candidates would have an experience of 3 to 5 years in the relevant domain and should be in a position to join the team immediately.

- Joinery Supervisors – 2 positions
- Joinery Foremen – 3 positions
- Carpenters (Woodwork) – 5 positions
- Polishers (Woodwork) – 4 positions

Interested candidates are requested to email their latest CV's within 7 days to ask@ariesoman.com

Microsoft-Backed OpenAI Unveils Most Capable AI Model, GPT-4o

Naomi Buchanan

Microsoft-backed OpenAI unveiled its most capable artificial intelligence (AI) model yet, GPT-4o, as well as a ChatGPT desktop app and upgrades to ChatGPT's voice and video capabilities at an event on Monday.

The new model is available to paid and free users alike, with some features rolling out Monday while others are set to roll out in the next few weeks.

The announcement comes amid reports that OpenAI is near closing a deal with Apple to integrate its tech into the likely AI-focused Google I/O developer conference on Tuesday.

Open AI's 'Best Model Ever'

OpenAI's latest model GPT-4o "brings GPT-4 level intelligence to everyone, including our free users," OpenAI Chief Technology Officer (CTO) Mira Murati said at the presentation.

GPT-4o is Open AI's "best model ever" and "is available to all ChatGPT users, including on the free plan," OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said, adding that "this is



OpenAI's new model is twice as fast, 50% cheaper, has five times higher rate limits compared to GPT-4 Turbo, and supports more than 50 languages

important to our mission; we want to put great AI tools in the hands of everyone."

The new model is twice as fast, 50% cheaper, has five times higher rate limits compared to GPT-4 Turbo, and supports more than 50 languages, OpenAI said. GPT-4o is to power OpenAI's ChatGPT chatbot, as well as application programming interface (API), which allows developers to use OpenAI's models.

OpenAI is beginning the

GPT-4o rollout to ChatGPT Plus and Team users, with enterprise user availability "coming soon." The company said it is "also starting to roll out to ChatGPT Free with usage limits" on Monday.

Improved voice and vision capabilities

The new model is also set to bring improved voice and video features in the next few weeks, OpenAI said.

During the presentation,

OpenAI demonstrated ChatGPT's abilities to detect emotion through voice and video, translate in real-time, and assist with coding. Users can also interrupt ChatGPT when making requests to simulate a more natural conversation.

The voice features of ChatGPT could raise competition with other voice assistants like Apple's Siri, Alphabet's Google, and Amazon's Alexa, among others.

(Source: Investopedia.com)

صناعة قرطاسية الكمبيوتر (ش.م.م.ج.ع.) Computer Stationery Industry s.a.o.o. Board of Directors' Report for the three months period ending on 31st March 2024 On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the honorable shareholders with the un-audited results of Computer Stationery Industry SAOG and its subsidiary for the three months period ended 31st March 2024. In the initial quarter, the Group generated a turnover of Rial Omani 372k, reflecting a 12.68% decrease from the previous year's Rial Omani 427k. The Group experienced a net loss of Rial Omani 82k for the current period, in contrast to a net loss of Rial Omani 34k recorded during the corresponding period in the previous year. We anticipate that the results will improve in the second quarter, as the company has been awarded a four-year tender. The revenues from this tender will be accounted for in the next quarter, which will enhance the company's financial position. We're optimistic about Oman's improving economy, which bodes well for our business. Stable raw material prices due to supply chain improvements will benefit our printing business, enhancing our efficiency and performance. On behalf of the Board, I wish to express our highest gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman for His Majesty's wisdom and guidance which has ushered in peace, prosperity, and progress of our nation. Ammar Maqbool Al Salch Chairman Notes > 1) Previous year figures have been regrouped wherever necessary. 2) Complete Accounts are available with Capital Market Authority. However the same will be sent by mail to any Share Holder who requests them, either in Arabic or English, as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request. Request shall be forwarded to the following address: P.O. Box: 13, Postal Code: 124, Rasayl, Sultanate of Oman E-mail : info@csioops.com		
UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 st MARCH 2024		
Particulars	As on 31-03-2024 Rials	As on 31-03-2023 Rials
ASSETS		
Property Plant & Equipment	1,094,699	1,878,940
Right of Use Assets	191,678	90,319
Deferred Tax Asset	68,757	68,757
Total non current assets	1,355,134	2,038,016
Current Assets	801,726	1,119,729
Less: Current Liabilities		
Short term maturity of		
Long term Loan	40,000	--
Other current Liabilities	680,878	1,575,298
Net Current Assets	1,435,982	1,582,447
Add: Long Term Liabilities		
Bank Loans	320,000	--
Lease Liability	228,364	110,302
Total Long Term Liability	548,364	110,302
NET ASSETS	887,618	1,472,145
EQUITY		
Share Holders' Funds:		
Share Capital	1,000,000	1,000,000
Reserves & Retained Earnings	(112,382)	472,145
TOTAL SHAREHOLDERS EQUITY	887,618	1,472,145
UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE THREE MONTHS ENDED 31 st MARCH 2024		
Particulars	3 months ended 31-03-2024 Rials	3 months ended 31-03-2023 Rials
Sales	372,440	426,537
Gross Profit	44,573	110,303
Depreciation	(28,695)	(44,258)
Admin & General Expenses	(86,677)	(91,381)
Operating Profit / (Loss)	(70,799)	(25,336)
Finance Charges	(11,214)	(10,736)
Other Income	--	2,400
Balance	(82,013)	(33,672)
Prior year tax payment	--	--
Profit / (Loss) before taxation and minority interest	(82,013)	(33,672)
NET PROFIT/(LOSS) AFTER TAX	(82,013)	(33,672)

Indian schools shine in CBSE exams

India’s Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Monday announced the results of Class 10 and Class 12 exams conducted this year, with the students of Indian schools in Oman shining bright in the highly competitive exams. Close to 88% students globally cleared the Class 12 exams. The pass percentage for girls is 91.52 as against 85.12% for boys. Girls outshone boys even in Class X exams with pass percentage standing at 94.75 against 92.71 for boys. The average pass percentage is 93.60. Students of Classes 10 and 12 of Indian Schools in Oman have braved all odds to come out with flying colours.

The 2024 results of the CBSE Board have set an all-time record for the Indian Schools in Oman with an increased percentage of high achievers as compared to previous years, thereby setting another benchmark of excellence in academics.

Dr Sivakumar Manickam, Chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools Oman congratulated the students who have made their alma mater and parents proud with outstanding results.

He lauded the unflinching support of the Principals who rolled out creative measures to enhance and improve the results and the efforts of the School Managements that have made all efforts to set higher benchmark of success in the Board Exams.

“All stakeholders in education had pulled together to ensure that students did their best by providing a very positive educational environment. It is the efforts of the teachers in doing the continuous follow-up; and parents with their unstinting support that helped the students perform to their best,” said Dr Sivakumar Manickam while congratulating the students and the schools for the stupendous results.

The Oman toppers in Class 12 Science stream are as follows: The first position is claimed by Yadu Krishna Balakrishnan of Indian School Darsait with 99%. Sadiya Khatoon (Indian School Salalah) and Aman Saji (Indian School Sohar) have claimed the second position with 98% marks. The third place is also claimed by two students with 97.8% marks: Nityant Kaarthik Rao of Indian School Muscat and Ojas Pandey of Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir.

In the Commerce Stream, Gunjan Karwani of Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir (98.6%), Jamiehitesh Ramaiya of Indian School Sohar (97.4%) and Devika Balakrishnan of Indian School Al Ghubra (96.6%) secured the first, the second and the third positions respectively.

The three positions in the Humanities stream are as follows: The first position is claimed by Kiara Denise Frank of Indian School Al Ghubra with 98.6%; Bhumika Gulani and Hansi Thakur of Indian School Muscat have claimed the second position with 98%; and Rithika Chandramohan of Indian School Al Ghubra secured the third position with 97.8% marks.

Class X results of Indian Schools have been phenomenal; the toppers in Oman are as follows: In the first position are Riti Mithesh Patel of Indian School Muscat and Akshaya Alagappan of Indian School Al Maabela with 98.8%; the second position with 98.6% is claimed by three students: Bhargavi Vaidya of Indian School Al Maabela, Ann Sinu Kurian and Vishaka Rahul Shinde of Indian School Muscat. Ananditha Sashidar of Indian School Muscat has been placed in the third position with 98.4%.

Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir achieves remarkable success

PROUD ACHIEVERS OF CLASS X



FIRST
Gitanjali (98%)



SECOND
Nidhi Nihara (97.8%)



THIRD
Lenora Monis(97.4%)

Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir (ISWK) continues to set new benchmarks in academic excellence with its outstanding performance this year. The students’ remarkable achievements have ignited a wave of celebration and pride, underscoring ISWK’s commitment to nurturing and empowering young minds.

In Class XII, the ISWK students have not only excelled academically but have also surpassed previous school records, attaining centums in subjects such as Informatics Practices (8 centums), Psychology (6 centums), Chemistry (3 centums), English (1 centum) & Engineering Graphics (1 centum).

TOPPERS IN CLASS XII



SCIENCE
Ojas Pandey (97.8%)



COMMERCE
Gunjan Karwani (98.6%)



HUMANITIES
Reem Mohamed (93.4%)

In Class X exams, students scored 100% in Artificial Intelligence (6 centums) and French (1 centum).

This outstanding feat underscores the dedication and perseverance of both students and educators alike.

ISWK proudly acknowledges the top achievers in both the Science, Commerce and Humanities streams, whose stellar results serve as a testament to their hard work, determination, and unwavering focus on academic excellence.

Their achievements reflect the school’s commitment to providing quality education and fostering a culture of excellence.

Indian School Darsait celebrates triumph of grit and genius

CLASS X



TOPPER
Devika Binush Panicker (97%)

TOPPERS IN CLASS XII



SCIENCE
Yadu Krishna Balakrishnan (99%)



COMMERCE
Anushree (93.8%)

Indian School Darsait has once again demonstrated its academic prowess by achieving outstanding results this year.

As many as 134 students appeared for the Class 12 examination, of which 11.7% scored above 90%, 45.4% scored above 80% and 68.7% scored above 70%.

The school celebrated the exceptional achievements of its top performers, who have set new benchmarks of academic brilliance. Yadu Krishna Balakrishnan from the Science stream and Anushree from the Commerce stream emerged as the school toppers, securing an impressive 99% and 93.8%, respectively.

In the Science Stream, Yadu Krishna Balakrishnan of Class XII became the school topper with 99% while Suprith Amathi bagged the second position with 96.6%, and Thareesh Prabakaran secured the third position with 96.4%.

In the Commerce Stream, Anushree of Class XII, secured the impressive first position with 93.8%, followed by Abdu Samad Azeez securing the second position with 92.4% while Alan Kulangara Justin notched up the third position with 90.2%.

The Class 10 students continued the school’s legacy of excellence, achieving an outstanding 100% pass.

ISM celebrates major achievement

In a triumph that transcends mere academic success, the indomitable spirit of Indian School Muscat (ISM) students shine brightly in the corridors of the CBSE Class XII examinations.

Principal Rakesh Joshi extended heartfelt commendations to all involved for their collective triumph.

Of all the 406 students who appeared for the examination, 29.06 % of students secured an overall A1 grade.

The overall school average of 82.7 with the Humanities Stream at 84.7%, Science Stream at 82.7 %, and Commerce Stream at 80.9 % are exceedingly laudable.

In the science stream, Nityant Kaarthik Rao secured the first position with 97.8%, followed by Tessa Elizabeth James (97.4%) and Alen Jo Mathew (97.2%).

In the humanities stream, Hansi Thakur and Bhumika Gulani jointly secured the first position (98.0%), Faiza second with 97.6% and Shivi Chopra came third (97.4%).

In commerce, Jessica Joanne Pereira emerged top scorer with 95.4%, Kevin Binu Cherian second with 94.2%, and Murshida Shabab third (94.0%).

Indian School Al Ghubra goes euphoric over fantastic results

Students of Indian School Al Ghubra showcased an outstanding performance, with a total of 154 students who appeared for the Class 12 examinations in science, commerce and humanities scoring excellent results with no failures or compartments as always.

In the science stream, out of 91 students who appeared, 45% have scored an aggregate of 90% and above and 85% students scored an aggregate of 80% and above.

In commerce, out of 53 students who appeared, 40% students scored an aggregate of 90% and above and 74% students scored an aggregate of 80% and above.

CLASS X



TOPPER
Vaishnavi Sarang Joshi (98%)

TOPPERS IN CLASS XII



HUMANITIES
Kiara Denise Frank (98.6%)



SCIENCE
Noah Hansel Barboza (97.6%)



COMMERCE
Devika Balakrishnan (96.6%)

In humanities, out of ten students, 60% students scored 90% and above and 90 % students scored above 80 %.

In science, Noah Hansel Barboza came first with 97.6%, followed by Alloy Joseph Rickfin (97.4%); and Farhan Fazil Shahul Hameed and Lina Jaseel jointly coming third with 97.2%.

In the commerce stream, Devika Balakrishnan came first (96.6%), followed by Parnika Nigam and Yogesh Karthikeyan (96.4%) in the second position and Saihah Shaheed (95.8%) in the third place.

Toppers in humanities are Kiara Denise Frank (1st with 98.6%); Rithika Chandramohan (2nd with 97.8%); and Third: Evangelia Joby Mathew and Haadyah Aftab Shaikh jointly coming third (97.2%).

Class 10

The students of Indian School Al Ghubra created wonders with their performance in the Class 10 CBSE Examinations.3

A total of 218 students appeared for the Examinations. 112 students secured above 90% which is indeed a remarkable achievement and 83% of the students have scored above 80%. As expected there are no failures or compartments.

Vaishnavi Sarang Joshi is the School Topper with an aggregate score of 98%. In the second position is Shriya Narendra with an aggregate score of 97.8% and Nihaarika Manikkoth in the third position with an aggregate score of 97.4%.

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, announced its participation in the Auto Expo Oman which will be organised from Thursday to Saturday in the Used Cars Complex in the wilayat of Sohar, North Batinah governorate.

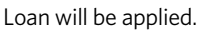
The event aims to provide a platform to showcase the latest innovations and developments in the automobile industry, as well as create a space to exchange knowledge and expertise, attracting those who are interested in the sector and enhancing the export market in the sultanate.

During the three-day exhibition, customers will be able to visit Bank Muscat's stall and know more about Sayyarati finance and familiarise themselves with the various benefits and services introduced. Customers will also get the chance to benefit

from Sayyarati auto finance offer with the best rates in the market that start at just 3.75% per annum on both new and pre-owned cars for Omani nationals and expatriates.

With this year's 'Sayyarati' offer, customers may start paying after two months of loan disbursement. It must also be noted that Sayyarati has some of the best interest rates in the country including 4% for a period up to two years and 4.25% for loan tenors of three years and 4.5% for a four-year loan tenor.

The special rates are available for Omani individuals employed in government, quasi-government, Tier 1 and Tier 2 companies and expatriates individuals employed in government and quasi-government institutions as well as Tier 1 companies, considering that all terms and conditions related to Sayyarati Auto



The 'Sayyarati' financing product features multiple advantages including enabling customers to apply for a loan up to RO60,000 for both new and used vehicles, a tenor up to eight to ten years for Omani nationals, and free third-party insurance in case of pre-owned car financing.

On this occasion, Taya Eid Bait Sabaea, Deputy General Manager - Interior Regions, Bank Muscat, stated, "Bank Muscat is keen to provide various offerings and financial facilities to enhance customer experience and enable them to benefit from the services offered. Sayyarati auto finance has been receiving good feedback due to the value-added benefits it offers. We are pleased to take part in this exhibition to meet our valued customers and introduce Sayyarati auto finance. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organizers for their support and the attendees for their interest in our services."

nity to invite our customers and people interested in cars and benefit from the special offer on Sayyarati auto finance."

Customers may apply for 'Sayyarat' financing loan online via Bank Muscat's Internet Banking and Mobile Banking platforms or by visiting the nearest Bank Muscat branch or Sayyarti Centres in Wattayah and Salalah.

Customers are also required to submit the relevant documents to process the loan facility including the ID card for Omanis, passport for expatriates, salary assignment letter, quotation/carc valuation from the approved valuator, driving licence, Mulkiya (for pre-owned cars only) and seller's ID card (for pre-owned cars only). The monthly loan instalments are automatically deducted from the customer's account once the mandate to do so is provided to the bank.

Glorious Star International, renowned for its dedication to empowering women entrepreneurs, is set to host an exciting Grand Eid Bazaar event curated to showcase the talents and products of aspiring female business owners.

Spearheaded by Minal Deora, the visionary founder of Glorious Star International, this event promises to be a celebration of female entrepreneurship and creativity in the B2C sector.

With a mission to provide a platform for women to showcase their products directly to consumers, Glorious Star International has been a driving force in fostering economic independence and empowerment.

Through innovative events and initiatives, the organization has continuously championed women's endeavours, enabling them to thrive in the competitive business landscape.

The upcoming Grand Eid Bazaar event, slated to take place at Muscat Grand Mall, Bausher on June 6, 7, and 8, will feature a diverse range of products spanning various industries including varieties of Pakistani and Punjabi dress, abaya, fashion jewellery, beauty products, kids wear, home decor, perfume, handbags and much more. Attendees can expect to discover unique offerings and connect with the pas-

sionate women behind the brands.

"We believe in the power of female entrepreneurship and the positive impact it can have on communities," says Minal Deora, founder of Glorious Star International. "Our Grand Eid Bazaar events provide a platform for women to showcase their talents, reach a broader audience, and ultimately, achieve their business goals."

In addition to browsing the array of products on display, attendees will have the opportunity to enjoy various activities planned including bubble show, magic show, cartoon characters, henna, face painting, open Mic and much more. Apart from this, the event will also witness delicious food counters from different parts of the world.

"We're thrilled to bring together a vibrant community of women entrepreneurs and other SMEs in Oman and their supporters," adds Deora. "Our goal is to foster connections, encourage collaboration, and ultimately, pave the way for greater opportunities for women in business."

With its commitment to empowering women and promoting inclusivity in the business world, Glorious Star International's Grand Eid Bazaar event is poised to be a resounding success.

Oman Arab Bank is setting a new benchmark in house financing with an unprecedented turnaround time of just 48 hours for Al Dar Housing Loan approvals, subject to complete documentation.

Designed to significantly simplify and expedite the homeownership process for both Omanis and residents alike, more families across the sultanate can now own their dream homes.

Providing flexible solutions for multi-purpose financing needs including purchase of ready and under construction properties, land, renovation and self-construction, the loans are structured to be incredibly customer-friendly, requiring minimal branch visits and providing an easy-to-navigate application process. For first-time home buyers, the Al

Dar Housing Loans offer an attractive Loan-to-Value ratio (LTV) of up to 90%, while for subsequent home purchases, an LTV of up to 80% can be availed. Competitive interest rates further add to their appeal. "Our quick and efficient approval process is a game-changer in the housing loan sector," said Khalid al Amri, Chief Retail Banking Officer at Oman Arab Bank. "Owning a home is an important milestone in a person's life and for many, a life-long dream. We understand the sense of permanence, pride, stability and security it brings and we are proud to be able to help customers turn their dreams into reality."

The Al Dar Housing Loan scheme was prominently featured at the Oman Real Estate Expo (OREX).

SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG

اسم ام ان باور القابضة ش.م.ع.ع

Unaudited Consolidated Financial Statements For the Period Ended 31 March 2024

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors ("the Board") of SMN Power Holding SAOG ("the Company"), I have the pleasure to present the Board of Directors' Report for the three-month period ended 31 March 2024.

The Company achieved the first quarter of 2024 with solid results on every aspect of the business operations. This was crowned with remarkable outcomes of receiving the letters of awards for SMN Barka Power Company SAOC ("SMN Barka") for a new Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) and a new Water Purchase Agreement (WPA) for a 8.75-Year term each as well as a new PPA for Al Rusail Power Company SAOC ("Al Rusail") for a 5.75 Year term. The PPA for Al Rusail has been signed with effective date of 20th April 2024. Similarly, the PPA and the WPA for SMN Barka have been signed and the effective dates will be disclosed to Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) once finalized and agreed with Nama Power and Water Procurement Company ("PWP").

Corporate Governance

The Company has complied with the Code of Corporate Governance and applicable circulars issued from time to time by the Financial Services Authority (FSA).

Operations

Providing a safe working environment is a key priority and the Board is pleased to share that during quarter one of 2024, the Health & Safety ("H&S") performance was excellent with no Lost Time Injury ("LTI") in line with previous years. SMN Barka power plant completed 5,996 days and Al Rusail power plant 5,519 days without LTI.

The commercial performance of both plants, SMN Barka and Al Rusail, is measured by their reliability which is the ability to deliver the declared capacity as per the contract.

In quarter one 2024, the reliability at SMN Barka Power and Desalination Plant was 98.67% (98.70% for the same period in 2023) for power and 99.53% (99.50% for the same period in 2023) for water. The reliability at Al Rusail Power Plant was 99.97% (99.95% in 2023) for the same period.

The Company produced an aggregate net power volume of 718.01GWh (710.21GWh for the same period in 2023) and a total volume of 8,597,952m3 of potable water was delivered (7,563,584 m3 for the same period in 2023).

All necessary maintenance activities of key equipment were performed in accordance with Original Equipment Manufacturers' recommendations, while applying the best industry standards and practices for health & safety and maintenance, during the period.

Financial Results

Total Revenues in the three-month period amounted to RO 15.59 million (RO 16.56 for the same period in 2023), representing a decrease of RO 0.97 million. Total Revenues include fixed revenues (Fixed Capacity Fees) and variable revenues (Fuel Charge and Variable Operating & Maintenance Charge). The Company generated a consolidated net profit of RO 2.52 million during the three-month period of 2024 compared to a net profit of RO 2.89 million for the same period of 2023.

The decrease in Profit After Tax of RO 0.38 million is mainly due to the following variances compared to the same period in 2023:

- Revenue (Decreased RO 0.96 million): This is mainly due to lower load factors for SMN Barka and Al Rusail,
- Direct costs (Decreased by 1.13 million): Similarly, this is mainly due to lower load factors for SMN Barka and Al Rusail,
- General and Administrative expenses (Increased by RO 0.41 million): This is mainly due to Power 2024 and Barka Waters 2024 tenders related costs,
- Finance charges (Decreased by RO 0.26 million): This is mainly due to lower interest costs resulting from scheduled repayments of the term loan facilities for the SMN Barka.
- Other income (Decreased by 0.42 million): This is mainly due to income from sale of fuel oil in Al Rusail being completed in March 2023.

The reduction in Non-Current Assets is driven by the depreciation of the plant (fixed assets).

The decrease in Current Assets is due to the repayment to senior debt lenders.

Future Outlook

The Company will continue its focus on HSE and maintain excellent reliability at both plants.

In terms of the latest developments, projects and other initiatives relating to the future of Al Rusail and SMN Barka power plants, the Company is pleased to announce the following:

- In February 2024, Al Rusail has obtained an interim extension of the PPA contract for two months period starting from 04th February 2024 to 31st March 2024. Subsequently, Al Rusail has been awarded a long-term PPA for 5.75 year term commencing from 20th April 2024.
- In May 7th 2024, SMN Barka also signed a new PPA and a new WPA for a 8.75 Year term each. The Company is progressing with fulfilling the conditions precedent to various project agreements including refinancing arrangements to make the PPA and WPA effective at the earliest. In the interim, SMN Barka has received an extension to 25 May 2024 as disclosed on MSX.
- With these new PPAs and a new WPA in place, SMN Barka will continue operations until December 2032 and Al Rusail will continue operations until December 2029.
- As advised previously, for Al Rusail, Gas Turbine 1 to Gas Turbine 6, which were erected between 1984 to 1986, have retired from operation on 30th September 2021 as disclosed to the market. Al Rusail plans to sell these units and the process of sale and decommissioning for these units has been initiated. Al Rusail is in process for obtaining bids from prospective buyers for purchase of Gas Turbine 1 to Gas Turbine 6. The tender for the sale of the equipment and dismantling/ decommissioning process pertaining to GT1 to GT6 units is expected to be finalized during the course of 2024.
- As previously disclosed and in line with the financing arrangements disclosed during the IPO, the cash sweep mechanism (accelerated repayment of the debt) started on 30th September 2018 for SMN Barka. As a consequence, the excess cash generated by the Company is paid to the lenders and will not flow to the Shareholders until the loans are fully settled or until the time the loans can be restructured. Due to the positive development by signing the new PPA and WPA, SMN Barka is currently working on refinancing its commercial loan. Should SMN Barka able to successfully refinance its commercial loan, taken into consideration any relevant requirements under the existing facilities agreement, this should enable the Company to make future dividend distributions subject to the availability of cash, fulfillment of loan covenants in addition to satisfying the relevant requirements of the Commercial Companies Law and other applicable legislation.

- The shareholders of Al Rusail in the Ordinary General Meeting held on 29th March 2024, approved the proposal from the board of directors to declare a total cash dividend of OMR 3 million from the audited retained earnings for the year ended 31st December 2023, which has been received by the Company.

As Chairman of the Board, I would like to thank our Shareholders, not only for their confidence, but also for their continued support and for the expertise they bring into the Company. The Board of Directors expresses its gratitude to the Authority of Public Services Regulation (APSR), PWP, FSA and other governmental and non-governmental bodies for their guidance and support.

Finally, on behalf of the Board, I would like to extend our deep appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Government for their continued support and encouragement to the private sector by creating an environment allowing us to contribute effectively to the growth of the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr. Abdullah Al Yahya'ay

Chairman of the Board

Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2024 (Unaudited)

	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	31 March 2024	31 December 2023	31 March 2024	31 December 2023
	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	-	-	91,991	93,954
Right-of-use-assets	-	-	299	305
Investment in subsidiaries	27,405	27,405	-	-
Deferred tax asset	-	-	388	318
	27,405	27,405	92,678	94,577
Current assets				
Inventories	-	-	1,871	1,924
Trade and other receivables	19	19	8,293	8,256
Due from related parties	-	24	223	20
Derivative financial instruments	-	-	-	60
Cash and cash equivalents	3,085	46	7,310	7,910
Fixed term cash deposits	-	-	1,700	1,700
	3,104	89	19,397	19,870
TOTAL ASSETS	30,509	27,494	112,075	114,447
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	19,964	19,964	19,964	19,964
Statutory reserve	6,655	6,655	6,691	6,691
Retained earnings	3,797	797	26,277	23,575
Hedging reserve	-	-	-	51
Net equity	30,416	27,416	52,932	50,463
Non-current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	16,947	21,341
Lease liabilities	-	-	377	427
Provision for end of service benefits	-	-	63	58
Provision for site restoration	-	-	1,767	1,726
Deferred tax liability	-	-	10,416	10,449
	-	-	29,570	34,001
Current liabilities				
Term loan	-	-	17,009	17,376
Lease liabilities	-	-	76	26
Provision for site restoration	-	-	1,682	1,682
Trade and other payables	92	77	6,402	7,396
Due to related parties	-	-	767	567
Current tax payable	1	1	3,637	2,936
	93	78	29,573	29,983
Total liabilities	93	78	59,143	63,984
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	30,509	27,494	112,075	114,447
Net assets per share (RO)	0.152	0.137	0.265	0.344

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the period ended 31 March 2024 (Unaudited)

	Parent Company		Consolidated	
	31 March 2024	31 March 2023	31 March 2024	31 March 2023
	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000
Revenue	-	-	15,597	16,563
Direct costs	-	-	(11,439)	(12,577)
GROSS PROFIT	-	-	4,158	3,986
General and administrative expenses	(68)	(58)	(636)	(224)
Reversal of expected credit losses	-	-	11	5
PROFIT FROM OPERATIONS	(68)	(58)	3,533	3,767
Finance charges, net	-	-	(694)	(952)
Dividend income	3,000	-	-	-
Other income	68	61	279	707
PROFIT BEFORE TAX	3,000	3	3,118	3,522
Income tax expense	-	(11)	(598)	(624)
PROFIT FOR THE YEAR	3,000	2	2,520	2,898
<i>Other comprehensive income</i>				
<i>Items that may be reclassified to profit or loss in subsequent periods:</i>				
Net Change in fair value of cash flow hedge	-	-	(51)	319
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	-	-	(51)	319
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	3,000	2	2,469	3,217
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.015	-	0.013	0.015

SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG, P.O. Box 121, Postal Code 134, Sultanate of Oman, Qurum Building, Building No.1022, 1st Floor, Office No.15, Way No.1013, Al Qurum - Muscat.
Tel. +968 2493 5800, Fax: 2493 5830, E-mail: info@smnpower.com, www.smnpower.com

Russian president to undertake two-day state visit to China

Beijing, China - Russian President Vladimir Putin will pay a two-day state visit to China from Thursday, Beijing announced on Tuesday.

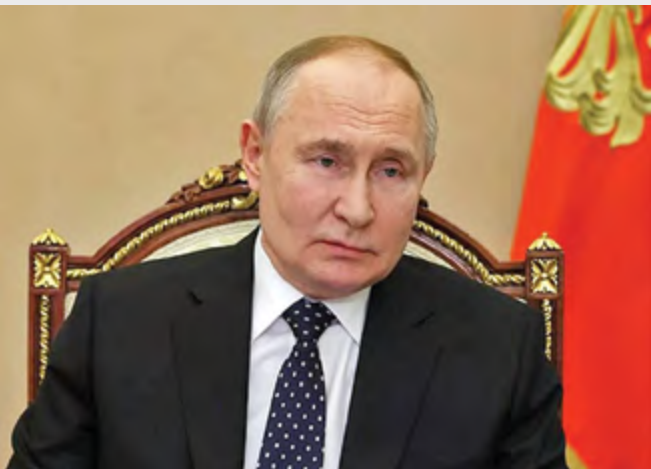
Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said Putin will undertake the visit at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

In a separate statement, the Kremlin announced that Putin will visit China at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping.

"The leaders of Russia and China will engage in detailed discussions covering the entire spectrum of their comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation. They will identify key areas for furthering Russian-Chinese practical cooperation and exchange views on pressing international and regional matters," it highlighted.

After the discussions, the heads of state intend to sign a joint statement along with several bilateral agreements, the statement added.

Putin and Xi will also partici-



Russian President Vladimir Putin

The leaders will engage in discussions covering the entire spectrum of their comprehensive partnership and cooperation

pate in a gala evening commemorating the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations and

the commencement of the Years of Culture of Russia and China.

The itinerary for the Russian president's visit includes a meeting with Premier Li Xiang of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, during which they will discuss bilateral cooperation in trade, economy, and humanitarian endeavours.

"The Russian president will additionally visit Harbin, the administrative hub of Heilongjiang Province, where he will attend the opening ceremony of the eighth Russian-Chinese Expo and the fourth Russian-Chinese Forum on Interregional Cooperation. He will also engage with students and faculty at Harbin Polytechnic University," the statement detailed.

In 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping selected Russia for his inaugural foreign visit following re-election.

Putin visited China last October when he attended the Belt and Road Initiative summit in Beijing.

Anadolu Agency

Trump authorised to pay up hush money: Ex-lawyer

Michael Cohen admitted he 'lied and bullied' on behalf of his former boss

New York, US - Michael Cohen, the former lawyer of Donald Trump's hush-money case testified against the former US President on Monday (local time) in the New York City courtroom and admitted that he 'lied and bullied' on behalf of his former boss, Al Jazeera reported.

"It was what was needed in order to accomplish the task," said Cohen, a key prosecution witness in the case on Monday, one of the most widely anticipated days in court since the start of the trial.

Prosecutors have accused Trump of falsifying business records related to hush-money payments made before the 2016 election, which he won.

The prosecution's case hinges on a US\$130,000 payment Cohen made to adult film star Stormy Daniels before the vote, in an effort to keep her from speaking publicly about a 2006 sexual encounter she says she had with Trump, Al Jazeera reported. However, the former president has denied any such encounter taking place. He also has rejected the charges against him as 'politically motivated'.

Trump continues to campaign seeking his return to the White House.

Cohen (57) testified that it was fair to describe his role as



Former US president Donald Trump

Prosecutors have accused Trump of falsifying business records related to hush money payments made before the 2016 election, which he won

being a 'fixer' for Trump, testifying that he took care of 'whatever he wanted'.

Rather than work as a traditional corporate lawyer, Cohen reported directly to Trump and was never part of the general counsel's office for the Trump Organization.

Cohen also told jurors that Trump was 'furious' that Daniels, the adult film star, was 'shopping' a story about the sexual encounter she says she had with the ex-president.

"He (Trump) said to me, 'This is a disaster, a total disaster. Women are going to hate me,'" Cohen testified. "'Guys, they think it's cool, but this is going to be a disaster for the campaign'."

This came during a critical moment for Trump's 2016 presidential campaign. An audio recording was leaked from the TV show Access Hollywood, in which Trump bragged about 'grabbing women's genitals', according to Al Jazeera.

The tape left the Trump cam-

paign scrambling to contain the damage only weeks before Election Day in November 2016.

Cohen also provided detailed testimony about the hush-money payment that he made to Daniels, which is at the heart of the prosecution's case.

Cohen said Trump urged him to delay sending payment to Daniels' lawyer until after the election, telling him that the story would no longer matter. In October 2016, with Daniels's story about to come out, Cohen said Trump told him to finally pay up.

"He expressed to me: Just do it," Cohen testified, saying Trump advised him to meet Trump Organization executive Allen Weisselberg and figure it out. But, since Weisselberg balked at

paying, so Cohen decided to come up with the money himself, Al Jazeera reported.

"I ultimately said, 'OK, I'll pay it,'" Cohen testified adding that Trump promised him, 'You'll get the money back'.

Cohen testified that - at a meeting in 2015 with Trump and David Pecker, then-publisher of the National Enquirer - the trio discussed using the supermarket tabloid to boost Trump's candidacy while attacking his rivals.

According to the testimony, Trump told Pecker to let Cohen know if he became aware of negative press that might arise, and the three men agreed that Pecker would try to suppress any such stories.

ANI



Kosovo rejects request from Patriarch of Serbian Orthodox Church to visit country

Belgrade, Serbia - Authorities in Kosovo decided on Monday to reject a request from Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch Porfirije to visit the country.

"Serbia continues to violate the Brussels Agreement, does not allow our state officials to visit Serbia, does not end its campaigns against the Republic of Kosovo in the international arena during the integration and recognition processes, and continues to use hate speech and threats against the Republic of Kosovo and its representatives. As long as this happens, we will not allow visits," said the Foreign Ministry.

The statement added that such visits will not be allowed as long as Serbia continues to prevent Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe.

Patriarch Porfirije wanted to visit the Peja Patriarchate in the west of the country.

In addition, Serbia was called to act on the principle of reciprocity regarding mutual visits.

The news was announced earlier in the day by the head of the Office for Kosovo in the Government of Serbia, Petar Petkovic.

"The Serbian Patriarch, Mr Porfirije, has always, on every occasion and in every place, with his messages, gentle words and actions called for peace and the coexistence of Serbs and Albanians in the area of Kosovo and Metohija. Unfortunately, these are values and messages that today no one in Pristina understands," said Petkovic.

The Serbian Orthodox Church said in a statement that it was 'unacceptable' that Patriarch Porfirije was not allowed to enter Kosovo.

The statement called on everyone with influence on the Kosovo issue to 'take action to stop the violation of the freedom of movement of the Serbian Patriarch, bishops and clergy and the human rights of the Serbian people in the country'.

Porfirije said the Serbian Orthodox Church 'cannot be part of any political negotiations and agreements' on Kosovo. In the negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo, the position of the Serbian Orthodox Church is part of the agreement on the path to normalisation of relations, which was reached in 2023.

Anadolu Agency

KILLER ISLAND



A view of the White Island, a volcanic island in New Zealand, which is a famous tourist attraction. On December 9, 2019, the White Island volcanic eruption killed 22 people and injured 25 others (Xinhua)

Death toll from Kenya floods climbs to 277

Nairobi, Kenya - The death toll from devastating floods and landslides in Kenya, triggered by heavy rains, has risen to 277, according to a government announcement. The update came as schools across the nation cautiously resumed classes for the second term, following a two-week delay due to the adverse weather conditions.

"Some of the schools that have been adversely affected by the heavy rains and flooding will have their opening delayed as the national and county multi-agency teams ensure that repairs are done to create a safe environment for students to resume learning," said the Ministry of Interior and National Administration in a statement issued in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.

Sunny intervals are forecast



Students are seen after school in the Mathare slums in Nairobi, Kenya, on Monday (Xinhua)

for most regions of the country over the coming week, interspersed with occasional rainfall and thunderstorms across 37 counties.

Flooding is expected in low-lying areas, riparian areas and urban areas while landslides and mudslides may occur in areas with steep slopes, escarpments and ravines, the ministry said.

Health concerns are escalating amid the crisis, with 53 cholera cases reported so far.

The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Kenya Red Cross, is trying to control cholera and other waterborne diseases in Tana River and Marsabit Counties.

Xinhua

WAR ON GAZA

450,000 Palestinians flee Rafah: UNRWA

Israeli army launched a ground attack last week in Rafah, where 1.5mn Palestinians have sheltered

Gaza City, Palestine - Israel's military offensive in Rafah city in the southern Gaza Strip has forcibly displaced around 450,000 Palestinians, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) said on Tuesday.

"UNRWA estimates that nearly 450,000 people have been forcibly displaced from Rafah since May 6," UNRWA said in a statement.

The UN agency said Palestinian families continue to flee in search of safety as Israel pushed ahead with its attacks.

"People face constant exhaustion, hunger and fear. Nowhere is safe. An immediate ceasefire is the only hope."

The Israeli army launched a ground attack last week in Rafah, where more than 1.5mn displaced Palestinians have sheltered. It also captured the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing, a vital route for humanitarian aid and the terri-



Palestinian families continued to flee in search of safety as Israel pushed ahead with its attacks

tory's only gateway to the outside world that bypasses Israel.

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip following Palestinian resistance group Hamas' cross-border attack on October 7, 2023, which killed about 1,200 people.

Nearly 35,180 Palestinians, most of them women and children, have since been killed, and over 79,000 others injured, according to Palestinian health au-

thorities. More than seven months into the Israeli war, vast swathes of Gaza lay in ruins amid a crippling blockade of food, clean water and medicine.

Israel stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). An interim ruling in January said it is 'plausible' that Tel Aviv is committing genocide in Gaza, ordering it to stop such acts and take

measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians in Gaza.

'Overwhelming medical needs'

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and 11 Red Cross National Societies combined efforts to open a field hospital in Rafah, Gaza, to help address the 'overwhelming

medical needs', the ICRC's global media team leader said on Tuesday.

"The hospital is now open today and functioning. In fact, in the days leading up to the opening today, we have had our first patients, including a first birth," Jason Straziuso told a UN press briefing in Geneva.

The 60-bed field hospital is meant to complement and sup-

port the Palestine Red Crescent Society's work as the medical and humanitarian community attempts to meet vast health needs in Gaza, Straziuso said.

According to Straziuso, the field hospital will provide, emergency surgical care, obstetric/gynaecological, maternal, and newborn care, paediatric care, and outpatient department. Mass casualty

Nearly 450,000 people have been forcibly displaced from Rafah since May 6. People face constant exhaustion, hunger and fear. Nowhere is safe. An immediate ceasefire is the only hope

UNRWA

management and triage capacities are also included.

Red Cross Societies of Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Iceland, Japan, Norway, and Switzerland are among those societies that will be able to provide medical care for roughly 200 people a day, he said. He said that the field hospital team will be comprised of around 30 humanitarian experts.

Denmark's Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said on X that more than 78,500 people are wounded in Gaza. "Need to ensure access to health care and treatment," he added.

"Denmark supports the Red Cross in establishing a field hospital in Gaza," Rasmussen said. Anadolu Agency

Israel, Hamas talks in limbo: Qatar PM

Doha, Qatar - Ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas have reached an impasse following the Jewish state's ground offensive on the outskirts of the Gazan city of Rafah, according to Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani.

Over the past few weeks, 'we have seen some momentum building but unfortunately things didn't move in the right direction', Sheikh Mohammed said at the Qatar Economic Forum on Tuesday. "Right now, we are in a status of almost a stalemate."

Negotiations to secure at least a pause in hostilities in the seven-month war have been deadlocked for months, with the two sides far apart on elements such as the status of Israeli troops in Gaza and the terms of a release of hostages held by Hamas and the freeing of Palestinian prisoners. International mediators include Qatar, Egypt and the US.

Israel has at the same time



There is a party who wants to end the war and then talk about the hostages and then there is a party who wants the hostages and wants to continue the war

SHEIKH MOHAMMED BIN ABDULRAHMAN AL THANI

begun what it calls a limited expansion of the military campaign into Rafah, where more

than 1.4mn Palestinians had sought refuge from the conflict and some are now fleeing.

Troops have begun to enter parts of the city, while fighting has resumed in northern areas of the enclave as Hamas starts to regroup.

The prime minister defended Qatar's decision to host Hamas's political bureau in the country, saying the Iran-backed group's presence has in the past helped mediate other hostage negotiations and keeps lines of communication open for future talks. Qatar has previously said it hosts Hamas in Doha at the request of the US.

Helping to resolve conflict is at the heart of Qatar's foreign policy, said Sheikh Mohammed, who is also Qatar's minister of foreign affairs. Still, 'our job is limited in mediation role', he said.

Israel has been critical of what it says is Qatar's reluctance to pressure Hamas to make concessions in the ceasefire talks, which aim to bring an end to a war that began when Hamas militants went on a deadly rampage in southern Is-

rael on October 7. About 35,000 Palestinians have died in the subsequent conflict, according to health authorities in Hamas-run Gaza.

About 450,000 people have left Rafah, located near the Egyptian border, in recent days, according to the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, warning those fleeing 'face constant exhaustion, hunger and fear'.

Israel has warned civilians to flee before an expected full-scale assault. The military says it needs to attack Rafah to target thousands of remaining Hamas fighters and some leaders it believes are based in the city.

Israel's invasion of Rafah has 'set us back a little bit', the prime minister said. "There is a fundamental difference between the two parties. There is a party who wants to end the war and then talk about the hostages and then there is a party who wants the hostages and wants to continue the war."

Bloomberg



'Illegal' Israeli settlers storm Al-Aqsa Mosque

Jerusalem - More than 400 illegal Israeli settlers forced their way into the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex in occupied East Jerusalem on Tuesday amid restrictions on the entry of Palestinian worshippers into the site, according to a Palestinian agency.

"Some 423 illegal settlers stormed the complex, with some settlers waving the Israeli flag," the Jordan-run Islamic Endowments Department in Jerusalem said in a statement.

"The Israeli police dealt nicely with the settlers who

waved the flag of the Israeli occupation," it added. According to the agency, Palestinian worshippers of all ages were denied entry into the mosque.

"Some Palestinian youth and women were forced out of the mosque by an Israeli officer without any apparent reason," the statement said.

There was no Israeli comment on the statement. Following calls by extremist Israeli groups, illegal settlers staged intrusions into mosque complex to mark Israel's creation. Anadolu Agency

University students in Greece join global pro-Palestine campus protests

Athens, Greece - University students in Greece have set up an encampment in support of Palestine, joining similar protests that started on campuses in the US and swiftly spread to Europe and the rest of the world.

Hundreds of students gathered at the University of Athens' main building following a call by left-wing student unions close to the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), the country's fourth largest political party, carrying Palestinian flags and banners expressing support for the Palestinian cause.

Speeches at the rally by student leaders, representatives of Palestinian student groups and

KKE General Secretary Dimitris Koutsoumpas focused on Western complicity in Israel's devastating assault on Gaza. The speakers all called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and for the international community to make a free Palestine a reality.

The protesters also announced that they would also set up an encampment in the university's main yard, right next to Panepistimiou Street, one of the Greek capital's major thoroughfares. Speaking to Anadolu, Andonis Lazos, a student at the Athens School of Fine Arts, said the protesters came out to show 'wouldn't keep silent in the face of the genocide in Gaza being



perpetrated by Israel with the support of NATO and the EU'.

"The students of Greece, like all the other students in the world, the US and the countries of Europe, are protesting because they cannot remain silent about this ongoing crime, this genocide by the state of Israel with the support of NATO, the EU and other countries of Europe," he said.

"Seeing the pictures of dead children in the rubble, mothers crying, it's truly horrific and no human with feelings can stay silent."

Katerina Andoioi, who was at the protest with her children, both university students, said their aim is to extend solidarity

to Palestinians and all other peace-loving people of the world.

Another student, who wished to remain anonymous, said the protests are not about taking sides between Hamas or Israel.

"I'm here because of what is happening in Gaza, Palestine. A genocide is a genocide," he said. Meanwhile, police on Tuesday stormed the pro-Palestinian encampment at the University of Geneva and dispersed the protesting students, according to reports. Police arrived at the campus at around 5am (0300GMT) where the protests started last week, according to the daily Le Temps. Anadolu Agency

INDIA

Modi files nomination from Varanasi, eyes third term



PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti

People of J&K want to send a message: Mehbooba Mufti

Anantnag, India - PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti said that the record turnout witnessed in the Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency indicated that people of the Jammu and Kashmir wanted to send a message to the government at Centre in Delhi.

"Polling which was held for (Srinagar parliamentary constituency) on Monday was very good as people could not exercise their democratic right to vote in the last five years. People wanted to send a message to Delhi (government at the Centre). The decisions you took following the abrogation of article 370 related to their land, state subjects and jobs were not accepted to them," Mufti told reporters here.

"I want to ask the Election Commission that polling was slowed down at places where

people had gathered in large numbers apparently to vote for the PDP," alleged the PDP leader.

On record polling in Srinagar, she said: "The kind of situation which is in Srinagar, Pulwama is also prevailing in Anantnag, Kulgam. They want to send their voice to the Parliament."

The Srinagar constituency, which saw the first general election after the abrogation of Article 370 in J-K, recorded 37.99 per cent voting, according to the Information and PR Department, Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The voter turnout in Srinagar was 40.94 per cent in 1996, 30.06 per cent in 1998, 11.93 per cent in 1999, 18.57 per cent in 2004, 25.55 per cent in 2009, 25.86 per cent in 2014 and 14.43 per cent in 2019.

ANI

Varanasi, India - Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday filed his nomination papers from the Varanasi Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh. The Prime Minister is seeking a third consecutive term from the constituency and hoping to win with a record margin.

Modi, the sitting MP and BJP's candidate, filed his nomination papers at the district magistrate's office. Varanasi will go in for polling in the seventh and last phase of the Lok Sabha polls on June 1. The counting of the votes will be held on June 4.

Modi arrived at the DM office in Varanasi clad in a full-sleeved white kurta with white churidar and blue jacket.

The PM was received by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath outside the Kal Bhairav temple. Ahead of filing his nomination, he offered prayers at Dashashwamedh Ghat on the banks of the Ganges in the temple town and boarded a cruise to the Namo Ghat.

He offered prayers at the Kaal Bhairav Temple in Varanasi and was seen performing 'aarti' at the Temple.

Modi also performed 'Ganga aarti', offering prayers to the River Ganga on the auspicious occasion of Ganga Saptami on Tuesday.

A total of 25 NDA leaders attended the filing of nomination



Prime Minister Narendra Modi files his nomination papers for the Lok Sabha elections, at the DM office, in Varanasi on Tuesday (ANI)

Varanasi is a stronghold of the BJP and Modi won the constituency with resounding majority in both the 2014 and 2019 general elections

by the prime minister, including Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP National President J P Nadda, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Chief Minister of Meghalaya Conrad Sangma were also present.

The NDA leaders including TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu, Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) na-

tional president Chirag Paswan, Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar faction) leader Praful Patel, Jana Sena Party president Pawan Kalyan, Hindustani Awam Morcha chief Jiten Ram Manjhi, president of the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party Om Prakash Rajbhar, president of Rashtriya Lok Morcha, Upendra Kushwaha, Uttar Pradesh minister and Nishad party chief Sanjay Nishad, Minister of State

for Commerce and Industry Anupriya Patel, Pashupati Kumar Paras, Bhupendra Chaudhary, RLD chief Jayant Chaudhary, Tamil Maanila Congress President G K Vasan and Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) president Dr Anbumani Ramadoss, were also present at the DM office in Varanasi.

On Monday, Modi held the 5km-long roadshow in Varanasi and he was accompanied by the Uttar Pradesh CM and BJP state president Chaudhary Bhupendra Singh.

The Varanasi seat comprises five Assembly segments, including Rohaniya, Varanasi North, Varanasi South, Varanasi Cantt,

and Sevapuri. Varanasi is a stronghold of the BJP and Modi won the constituency with resounding majority in both the 2014 and 2019 general polls.

This time he is facing Congress candidate Ajay Rai, who is the Opposition INDIA bloc's joint nominee. Though Rai, the UP Congress chief, was fielded by the Congress against Modi in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls, he finished third both times.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Modi won the seat with over 6,74,664 votes and commanded a vote share of 63.6 per cent.

ANI

SCORCHING HEAT IN CAPITAL CITY



A monkey is seen quenching its thirst on a hot summer day, in New Delhi on Tuesday. The Meteorological Department has predicted scorching heat in the capital city this week, with maximum temperature expected to reach 44 degrees Celsius by Friday (ANI)

Sixth accused held for firing at Salman Khan's residence

Mumbai, India - The Mumbai Crime Branch made its sixth arrest in the case regarding the firing at superstar Salman Khan's residence in Bandra.

The accused, identified as Harpal Singh (37), was arrested from Haryana's Fatehabad. He will be presented in the MCOCA (Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act) court of Mumbai.

As per the police officials, Harpal Singh's information surfaced during the interrogation of another accused Mohammed Rafique Choudhary. He had financed Choudhary to conduct a recce around Salman's residence.

Gangster Lawrence Bishnoi's brother, Anmol Vishnoi,

Gangster Lawrence Bishnoi's brother, Anmol Vishnoi, played a key role in motivating the shooters

played a key role in motivating the shooters. After receiving weapons delivery in Panvel on March 15, 2024, Anmol provided the shooters with the target's information, instructing them to carry out the firing at the actor's residence.

According to the information obtained from the Crime

Branch, Chaudhary had done a recce of the actor Salman Khan's apartment building on April 12 and had also made a video of it and sent it to Anmol. Shooters, Pal and Gupta, were apprehensive about carrying out the firing until Anmol reassured them that they would gain virtue by completing the task.

The two were sent to Mumbai in October last year by the Bishnoi gang. Despite multiple attempts, they were unable to secure accommodation. Finally, in March 2024, with the help of a local rickshaw driver in Panvel, they managed to rent a flat in the Harigram area.

ANI

Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif orders privatisation of all state-owned enterprises

Islamabad, Pakistan - Amid the staggering economic crisis in the country, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday announced to privatise all state-owned enterprises except for strategically important entities, ARY News reported.

Chairing a review meeting on matters related to the Ministry of Privatisation and Privatisation Commission in Islamabad, the prime minister said apart from strategic state-owned enterprises, all other enterprises, whether profitable or loss-making, will be privatised.

In the meeting, the privatisation ministry and the Privatisation Commission presented a roadmap for the Privatisation Programme 2024-29, ARY News

reported. PM Shehbaz said the government had nothing to do with running the businesses but was mandated to facilitate the investors. He viewed that the privatisation of SOEs would save the taxpayers' money to help the government provide quality services to the people.

"Government's job is not to do business but to ensure a business and investment-friendly environment," the premier said, ARY News reported.

PM Shehbaz Sharif also directed all federal ministries to take necessary action in this regard and cooperate with the Privatisation Commission.

He directed to live telecast of Pakistan International Airlines Company Limited's (PIA) privatisation



Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif

sation including bidding and other important steps. The process of privatisation of other institutions will also be broadcast live. ARY News reported that the meeting was informed about the

progress made so far for the privatisation of state-owned enterprises. It was informed that the pre-qualification process for PIA privatisation is to be completed by the end of this month.

The meeting was told that the privatisation of power distribution companies has been included in the privatisation programme 2024-2029.

It was informed that loss-making state-owned enterprises are to be privatised on a priority basis and that a pre-qualified panel of experts is being appointed in the privatisation commission to speed up the privatisation process. The meeting was attended by federal ministers Khawaja Asif, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Jam Kamal Khan, Awais Ahmed Leghari, Abdul Aleem Khan, Musaddik Malik and Ahad Khan Cheema, PM's coordinator Rana Ehsan Afzal, and relevant senior officers. A day earlier, Federal Minister for Finance Muhammad

Aurangzeb had directed all concerned ministries and divisions to submit proposals for the categorisation of their respective State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) by May 20.

The categorisation is a part of a comprehensive review of the rationale for retaining commercial functions within the public sector, according to a press release issued by the finance ministry. The Central Monitoring Unit of the Finance Division presented its ongoing work on the compilation of the Federal SOE Annual Financial Report for fiscal year 2023. The DG CMU informed the meeting that the data of all commercial entities has been obtained & collated, while the analytical work was currently

underway.

The committee was briefed on the highlights of the performance of SOEs during the reporting period. The minister noted that there were a number of gaps in the governance and financial management of companies that needed to be addressed immediately and directed that the vacancies on the BOD's should be filled without delay, ARY News reported. Last Friday, the Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCOP) approved 24 state-owned enterprises for the privatisation programme, directing the privatisation ministry to deliberate the phasing of each entity in consultation with the respective ministries.

ANI

DURAN, DURAN!

Super-sub scores twice in last five minutes to rescue Villa in thriller against Liverpool

Birmingham, England - Colombian super-sub Jhon Duran scored two late goals as Aston Villa salvaged a 3-3 home draw with Liverpool in a Monday night thriller that left them on the cusp of a place in the Champions League next season.

A match that started with Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez conceding a shocking own-goal after 62 seconds turned into a great escape, and near-win, as Duran came on to save the night with strikes in the 85th and 88th minutes.

Villa are now on 68 points with one game remaining, five clear of fifth-placed Tottenham Hotspur who have two matches still to come but must beat title-chasing Manchester City on Tuesday to stay in contention.

Tottenham end their season at bottom side Sheffield United on Sunday, while Unai Emery's side play their last game at 12th placed Crystal Palace.

Liverpool were gifted the opener when Argentine international Martinez fumbled a tame Harvey Elliot cross, desperately clawing the ball across the line and into his own net.



Aston Villa's Jhon Duran scores against Liverpool in their Premier League match on Monday

It was the third own-goal Martinez has scored in the Premier League, more than any other goalkeeper in the competition's history.

Villa, who would have made sure of fourth place with a win, equalised 10 minutes later through Youri Tielemans on the

Belgian's return from three matches out due to injury. The joy was short-lived as Cody Gakpo made it 2-1 to the third-placed visitors in the 23rd, after a VAR check for offside, and Jarell Quansah then headed in off the post from a free kick for his first Premier League goal in the 48th.

Liverpool looked set for all three points in manager Jurgen Klopp's penultimate match, a clash that could have ended with a far higher scoreline with both sets of fans disappointed by VAR and plenty of missed chances.

"We got a bit of luck. It's been a tough few weeks with lads com-

There's some of us that have never been close to the Champions League in our life. The manager has a no-excuse mentality. People have written us off and we've floated under radar.

JOHN MCGINN

ing back and playing through the pain barrier. This place got us going," Villa captain John McGinn told Sky Sports television.

"Big Jhon is a bit nuts at times, he's a nightmare to play against.

"There's some of us that have never been close to the Champions League in our life. The manager has a no-excuse mentality. People have written us off and we've floated under the radar.

We'll have our Man City tops on tomorrow."

Diego Carlos missed a great chance for an equaliser for Villa while Ollie Watkins, who set up Tielemans goal with a pass from the byline, had the ball in the net in the first half but was ruled off-side.

Klopp bids farewell to 'absolutely insane' away fans

Birmingham, England - Liverpool's squad has shown great character this season, manager Jurgen Klopp said after the Merseysiders drew 3-3 at Aston Villa as he bid farewell to fans in his last game on the road.

Liverpool looked set for all three points in Klopp's penultimate game, leading 3-1 before substitute Jhon Duran's goals in the 85th and 88th minutes made the teams share the spoils on Monday.

Klopp was not only serenaded by the travelling Liverpool fans who paid homage to his nine-year tenure with the club but also received applause from the home crowd as he headed down the tunnel at Villa Park.

"I know it's the last time, it just doesn't feel (like) it," Klopp told reporters.

"The away fans were always absolutely insane. What they did, where they were, we asked



them to travel a lot over the years. It is a wonderful relationship."

For me, the story of the season is that the boys have (shown) really, really good character and a sensational attitude

JURGEN KLOPP

After Liverpool lifted the League Cup in February, they looked like they could win the

title but Klopp's side had their hopes shredded following a run of bad results last month.

On looking back at his season, the German manager said finishing third was still something to be proud of. "From where we came from (third place) is a statement as well," he added.

"For me, the story of the season is that the boys have really, really good character and a sensational attitude - that's why we

were here today and that's why we have now 79 points.

"I am not over the moon about it but obviously for a week or two we've had to accept we cannot be the best or the second-best team in the league, (but) that's a good basis for the future and that's all you can ask for."

Liverpool host Wolverhampton Wanderers on Sunday, which will be Klopp's last game at home at Anfield.



Layvin Kurzawa

Kurzawa to leave PSG at end of season

Paris, France - Defender Layvin Kurzawa will leave Paris St Germain at the end of the season, he said on Monday, after nine years with the Ligue 1 club.

Kurzawa joined PSG from Monaco in 2015 for 23 million euros (\$24.8 million). The 31-year-old has made 154 appearances for PSG. He played just eight minutes in one match throughout the 2023-24 season. Kurzawa was loaned out to Premier League club Fulham in the 2022-23 season after not playing for the French side for more than 11 months. He made six appearances for the English side.

"I've had some great times, as well as some tough ones," the French international wrote in a post on X. "But I want you to know that my love for Paris Saint Germain is sincere.

"I know that our relationship has sometimes been complicated, but I want you to know that I can only take back the positive and that I have been privileged to have called the Parc (des Princes) my home for all these years."

Barcelona blank Sociedad to reclaim second spot

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona reclaimed second place in LaLiga with a 2-0 home win over Real Sociedad on Monday courtesy of a Lamine Yamal first-half strike and a late Raphinha penalty.

Xavi Hernandez's side leapfrogged Girona to move on to 76 points, one clear of their Catalan rivals who dropped points in Friday's 2-2 draw at Alaves.

Real Madrid have already secured the league title, sitting on 90 points with three games left.

"There is still a long way to go. It will be a battle to the end. Girona are very strong," Barcelona defender Inigo Martinez told Movistar. "It's in our hands now. I think the team is very good. Three valuable points. We had some mistakes in the



Barcelona's Lamine Yamal celebrates after scoring against Real Sociedad

first half. In the second half I think we could have finished it off earlier."

Yamal put Barcelona ahead in the 40th minute when he slotted home from Ilkay Gundogan's pass after a quick breakaway for his fifth LaLiga goal this season.

"It was an important game to regain second place and we have to try to make it a nine-point week," the 16-year-old Yamal said referring to the upcoming games. "Real did very well in the first half but then we were able to improve."

Raphinha's penalty in stoppage time sealed victory for the hosts after a VAR review for handball, leaving the Basque side in seventh place with 54 points, one behind Real Betis in the last Europa League spot.



Kylian Mbappe (L) with Ousmane Dembele

Dembele will become the best in Ligue 1, says Mbappe

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappe has backed winger Ousmane Dembele to be a success at Paris St Germain and fill his boots after he exits the club, as he won his fifth successive Ligue 1 Player of the Year award.

Mbappe, 25, last week announced that he will leave the club at the end of the season after a seven-year stay, during which he became their all-time top scorer with 256 goals.

Mbappe's frustration lies with PSG's performances in the Champions League, a trophy they have never lifted despite huge investment in the squad. He has been heavily linked with a move to Spanish giants Real Madrid, who are in the final this year seeking a 15th European

crown. His 26-year-old compatriot Dembele joined the Parisian club, who have won 10 of the last 12 Ligue 1 titles, from LaLiga side Barcelona in August last year, signing a five-year deal.

"I have shared and played with incredible players, like Dembele who is here, he is a friend and one day he will pick up this award," Mbappe said on Monday at the award ceremony.

"I thank the club as a whole, the coach, who has helped me and trusted me, his staff, the doctors, all the people at the club, the sporting management, the president, the shareholders of the club, of course, the Emir of Qatar who came to find me at the age of 18, who has accompanied me in all my decisions..."

Raphael Varane to leave Manchester United

Manchester, England - Central defender Raphael Varane will leave Manchester United at the end of the season after three years at the Premier League club, the France international said on Tuesday.

Varane, 31, joined United in 2021 after 10 years at Real Madrid. He has made 67 league appearances for the English side



Raphael Varane

and helped them win the League Cup in 2023.

"It's been an amazing few years to play for this special club and wearing that shirt," Varane said in a video on social media.

Giroud to leave Milan

Striker Olivier Giroud announced on Monday that he will leave AC Milan at the end of the current

campaign.

The French international arrived at the San Siro in July 2021 from Chelsea and won the Serie A title in his first season for the club.

In a video shared on Milan's page on the social media platform X, Giroud confirmed his decision to leave the club but did not specify his next destination.

'HONEYMOON CONTINUES'

Carlo Ancelotti enjoying his second trophy-laden spell at Real Madrid

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti said on Monday he is looking forward to his future at the club, describing his second trophy-laden spell in charge as like a "honeymoon."

The LaLiga and Spanish Super Cup champions are in superb form as they enjoy a 28-game unbeaten run heading into Tuesday's league game against Alavés. Ancelotti's side can lift another title when they take on Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League final on June 1 at Wembley.

When asked how he is feeling, Ancelotti told a news conference: "I'm very well, better than

You [journalists] are all being too affectionate with me. But the problem is that I know that sooner or later the blows will come. But now that there are no blows, I'm enjoying it.

CARLO ANCELOTTI

ever. The honeymoon continues. I'm excited and happy with what can happen. There's no pressure in these press conferences.

"You [journalists] are all being too affectionate with me. But the problem is that I know that sooner or later the blows will come. But now that there are no blows, I'm enjoying it."

Ancelotti, 64, began this season with just a year remaining on his contract but signed a contract extension in December that will keep him at the Bernabéu until June 2026.

The Italian coach returned to



Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti celebrates with the LaLiga trophy

the club in 2021 for his second spell in charge and won a LaLiga and Champions League double in his first season back.

Madrid won LaLiga with four games to spare and are 15 points clear of nearest rivals Girona.

They have won 28 and lost just one of their 35 league games this season. Ancelotti is keen to make the most of the remaining games in the build-up to next month's Champions League final against Dortmund.

He said Tuesday's home match against mid-table Alaves was part of their preparations as they attempt to win a third trophy this season, having also lifted the Spanish Super Cup in January.

"We have to take advantage of these games in order to build some momentum," Ancelotti told reporters on Monday following Real's 4-0 victory at Granada on Saturday.

"Those who were rested against Granada will play tomorrow. We'll use it to get into a rhythm and good motivation... the aim is for the whole squad to be at full strength."

Ancelotti said the matches will give players like goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and defender Eder Militao, who have recently returned from injury, game time before the June 1 final.

"(Militao) needs to play more minutes. He's progressing very well, he's getting better every game. Hopefully he can be at his best for the final," added the Italian. "We'll make the necessary decisions the week before the final."



The UEFA will ask the captains to ensure their teammates do not encroach upon and surround the referee

UEFA: Only captains allowed to speak to referees at Euro 2024

Nyon, Switzerland - Captains will be the only ones allowed to speak to the referee and discuss a decision during matches at the upcoming European Championship in a bid to facilitate clearer communication, UEFA's managing director of refereeing Roberto Rosetti said.

If any other player is found to approach the referee showing any sign of disrespect or dissent they will be shown a yellow card,

Rosetti said. "Being a referee in the modern game is very difficult."

"The official in the middle takes between 200 to 250 decisions per match in difficult and sometimes controversial situations, under huge pressure, with each of them scrutinised and re-watched from multiple different angles by fans and pundits alike."

Rosetti said coaches and players have welcomed the new ap-

proach. "Explaining a decision with up to 22 players mobbing you is impossible for a referee. It can lead to a breakdown in communication, with the beautiful game turning very ugly very quickly," he added.

"We ask that all teams ensure their captain is the only player who speaks to the referee. We ask the captains to ensure their teammates do not encroach upon and surround the referee..."



Shakib Al Hasan

Shanto to lead Bangladesh in T20 World Cup, Shakib in squad

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh included experienced all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan in their 15-man squad for the Twenty20 World Cup in the West Indies and US in June.

The team will be led by batsman Najmul Hossain Shanto, who was named skipper in all three formats of the game this year amid uncertainty over the availability of Shakib who was dealing with an eye problem. The former captain made his comeback to T20 international cricket after a gap of nearly a year this month in the home series against Zimbabwe.

De la Fuente aims to lead Spain past RFEF woes at Euro 2024

Madrid, Spain - The way for Spain's men's team to weather the current storm around the soccer federation (RFEF) is to stick together, tune out the noise and concentrate on their performances on the pitch at Euro 2024, manager Luis de la Fuente said on Monday.

As he braces for the challenge of a tough Group B alongside Croatia, European champions Italy and surprise package Albania in Germany, De la Fuente and his players have had to deal with the furor surrounding the scandal-ridden RFEF.

With a corruption probe under way and the fallout from the unsolicited kiss former RFEF chief Luis Rubiales gave player Jenni Hermoso after Spain won the women's World Cup in Sydney last year, the government created a special committee two weeks ago to oversee the governing body until it holds new elections.

"We have to concern ourselves with purely, strictly sporting matters. Which we have enough of," De la Fuente told Reuters in a interview on Monday. "We have to focus on what we can control. This is very, very basic, but it's very real. Stick to football."



Luis de la Fuente

"I'm concerned about how the facilities are going to be, the training camp, the pitches, the travel ... And on the pitch, because the players know that we are going to be judged for what we do on the pitch."

"Everything else, all the media noise that exists around us, is not going to help us. So then we have to be totally and absolutely focused on what is, for us, the most important thing: the competition."

Regardless of the buzz around his side, which he knows will be rife, De la Fuente said it will be even more helpful to stick to a philosophy that he has always in-

sisted on - a player's character and values are as important as form and talent.

"What surprises me is that it seems exceptional, something that we should consider as natural. I prefer to work with good people. Of course, great professionals, but also good people," De la Fuente added.

"A good professional, but with doubtful human quality ... that doesn't give me security! I want people around me, good people who are willing to work, willing to sacrifice themselves for the person next to them, who are supportive ... generous."

Double faults no detriment as Gauff tries big first serve

Rome, Italy - American Coco Gauff has accumulated 35 double faults in three matches at the Italian Open, but the world number three said the technical changes to her serve only need time to settle.

A potent serve can be a powerful weapon in tennis, but U.S. Open champion Gauff has struggled with her delivery in

the clay swing, averaging almost 10 double faults in the five matches that she played on the slower surface ahead of Rome.

Gauff sent down 11 more in Monday's 5-7, 6-4, 6-1 win over Paula Badosa, but the 20-year-old said after making the quarterfinals that she was already seeing some improvements ahead of the French Open which

starts on May 26.

"I'm going big on the first serve, so I know I'm probably going to miss more. It's just finding the balance of going big but also knowing when to slow down just to get the serve in," Gauff, the 2022 Roland Garros runner-up, told reporters.

"I bet on myself to continue to go big. I know when I go big

and my serve goes in it's dangerous. Even though this tournament I want to win, I'm trying to think long-term. I don't want to lose the 120 (mph) serve by not going for it."

World number two Aryna Sabalenka famously struggled with her serve over the last few years before a stint with a biomechanics trainer turned her

weakness into a weapon, which she deployed to great effect en route to winning two Australian Opens titles.

Gauff, who is coached by Brad Gilbert and Jean-Christophe Faurel, said she was also trying to make technical tweaks.

"It's tough to do in-season and in-tournament," she said.



Coco Gauff



FROM DESPAIR TO BIG DREAMS

Dysfunctional Bengaluru come together to conjure up magic

Bengaluru, India - Three weeks ago, when Royal Challengers Bengaluru fell one short of an epic chase at Eden Gardens, they slumped to their seventh defeat in eight games. Rooted to the bottom of the 10-team table then, you didn't think a miracle was possible.

Glenn Maxwell, their most prolific overseas allrounder, was woefully out of form. Their costliest pre-auction signing, Cameron Green, wasn't clear about his role. Virat Kohli, their biggest brand captain or not, was under the spotlight for his post-powerplay slowdown. Faf du Plessis, the captain, was coming to grips with the challenges of juggling retirement with three months of franchise gigs.

Andy Flower's proven track record as coach - he has won titles as a coach in the PSL, CPL, Hundred, T10 League, ILT20 - is perhaps why he was signed in the first place. But the lack of a big Indian presence in the back room left you wondering if they had tactically erred many times over by not picking Mahipal Lomror in the middle order.

Way too many pieces of the



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's miraculous turnaround has taken them within touching distance of a playoff berth

jigsaw, spread across corners RCB thought they'd never be able to access, needed to be pieced together for this dysfunctional outfit to once again compete, forget about conjuring magic.

Yet, here we are, 13 games into the league phase, beginning to wonder if the stars are aligning. Is this their year? A question asked of RCB consistently every

year pre-auction. Perhaps it wasn't a legit enough debate this year, but they've shredded that theory to bits, and how! Essentially, way too many results had to go their way, along with them winning, of course, for RCB to even be in the conversation.

Did they believe in this miracle? Their calculators, which they unfaithfully dust back to life at this

time every year, have been working overtime. There's now a realistic possibility of them securing that fourth playoff spot from under Chennai Super Kings. Or maybe with some help from Gujarat Titans and Punjab Kings, maybe they can edge out Sunrisers Hyderabad? There are so many possibilities.

Who can understate luck

TODAYS MATCH

MATCH 65

6 PM



RAJASTHAN ROYALS VS PUNJAB KINGS



amid all this? Sunday evening was meant to be a washout, one of those annual rituals that leave RCB fans tearing their hair out at times for the loss of a point, celebrating in jest at other times for salvaging one point. There was a 60% chance of thunderstorms. Three hours prior to the start, it rained in torrents for an hour.

Miraculously, it cleared up for the entire duration of the game, to give RCB a chance of playing without looking at the DLS.

Kohli was out of the blocks in a jiffy - no look six swag and all that. Keenness to prove a point to those in the box? Who knows. Perhaps it was just the feeling of being unshackled and playing with a high tempo on a surface where RCB needed the extra runs to play for the net run rate.

ESPNcricinfo

Ahmedabad washout ensures top-two spot for Knight Riders

Ahmedabad, India - A combination of lightning and rain forced the first abandoned game of IPL 2024 in Ahmedabad on Monday, and in the process confirmed two things: Kolkata Knight Riders' top-two finish in the league stage and Gujarat Titans' elimination from playoff contention.

Only a win could've kept eighth-placed GT in the hunt, but rain did not even allow for a toss. Such was the storm's intensity that some floodlights were also affected; banners in the stadium that got torn earlier ended up wrapping the floodlights in such a way that they needed to be manually removed.

GT's task was uphill anyway. With the season's lowest net run-rate of -1.063, they were only mathematically alive as even two big wins in their last two games could've still left them short. KKR were almost assured of a top-two finish courtesy their dominat-

ing net run-rate of 1.428 after 12 games, but a 19th point in their tally sealed that.

This is the first time that GT have not qualified for the IPL playoffs since they joined the competition before the 2022 season. They have a consolation game against Sunrisers Hyderabad next on May 16.

Monday's game could've given KKR a chance to ease Rahmanullah Gurbaz, the wicketkeeper-batter, into the XI. Gurbaz is the likely replacement in their XI once Phil Salt leaves to join his national team camp.

For KKR, their next aim is to finish the league stage at No. 1, something they have never achieved before.

If they beat Rajasthan Royals in their last league game on Sunday, they are assured of that. They would also be assured of No. 1 if RR fail to collect two wins in their last two matches, which includes the KKR fixture.



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BIRTHDAY WISHES


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RALPH
LAUREN

Studio show

Ralph Lauren's intimate New York show invited A-listers into his studio



Hannah Einbinder



Rebecca Hall and Morgan Spector



(from left) Nnamdi Asomugha, Kerry Washington, Glenn Close and Jessica Chastain

"T a i -
lored
a n d
t r i m
suit jackets, draped
knits, suede and
leather separates,
and bias-cut gowns
are a nod to Ralph
Lauren's most per-
sonal inspira-
tions," the fashion
label said of its lat-
est collection in a
statement.

In recent years and with the rise of social media, fashion shows have become somewhat synonymous with broad spectacle. Just take a look at any of the major European labels' catwalk showcases, with elaborate sets, custom-built tents that can accommodate hundreds of guests, and thousands of fans screaming outside for the inevitable celebrity arrivals.

The designer instead looked inward to host something a bit more private, but no less impactful - he invited less than 100 guests to his design studio, nine floors above Madison Avenue. There, the audience - which did include A-listers like Kerry Washington, Jessica Chastain, Morgan Spector and 'Hacks' star Hannah Einbinder; even low-key shows need celebrity wattage, after all - lounged on leather Mies van der Rohe-inspired chairs as the lights brightened and the proceedings began.

The salon-style show - constructed to recall a very similar runway the designer held for his first womenswear show in 1972, also in his then studio - struck a calm yet galvanising chord.

"I wanted something more intimate," Lauren, 84, said afterwards during dinner at The Polo Bar, the buzzy Manhattan restaurant his company launched in 2015.

Supermodel Christy Turlington walked first. She wore a cashmere coat, broken-in trousers and booties all rendered in a pale taupe hue. It set the tone for a colour scheme of rich neutrals, which dominated throughout. In fact, unlike Lauren's Spring-Summer 2024 show, in which Washington was outfitted, the collection featured zero bright colours - a palette cleanser, rather, by way of lush gray-browns and silvers and faded browns.

A number of looks featured western motifs, from cowboy hats to a bandana tie to aged leather jackets. The theme is on trend - in large part due to Beyoncé and her most recent album, 'Cowboy Carter' - yet Lauren has long worked western aesthetics into his brand and its ever-aspirational world-building. (Among many other touchpoints of Americana, that is, including the other big talking point of the moment: tennis.)

In a way that few can do - and in a way that Lauren has mastered, and remastered, over the years - there was also razle-dazzle woven alongside the neutrality of the collection. A number of dresses were all-over sequined or sparkled, adding a layer of tasteful, luxe glamour. Model Anok Yai's closing look hit all of the show's talking points in one - a shimmering silk dress in golden taupe, topped with a cowboy hat. At the afterparty, she wore the same look, accessorising it further with chunky metal cross necklaces.

In Lauren's words, the collection's understated colours and its luxe coziness - even with its pops of glitz - were 'non-frou'. "I wanted it simple," he explained.

At The Polo Bar, where the dinner went late, Glenn Close was sat to Lauren's left. She wore a champagne-hued Ralph Lauren jacket; he was in a cowboy shirt with black and turquoise insets. In the glow of the restaurant's rich wood panelling and golden overhead light, the scene felt briefly like a flashback. It could have been decades ago.

When asked what resonates most with Lauren these days, he said, with the wisdom of over fifty years in business to his name, 'timelessness'.

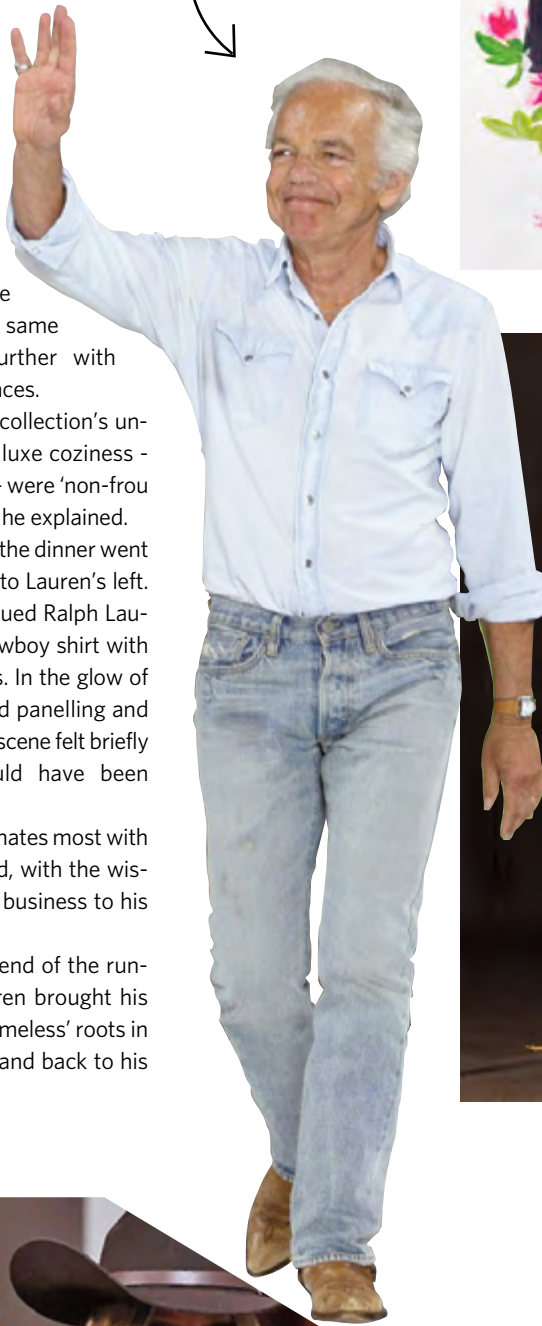
Taking his bow at the end of the runway, designer Ralph Lauren brought his latest collection back to 'timeless' roots in fashion and Americana - and back to his studio.

(Courtesy: cnn.com)



*I wanted
something
more
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RALPH LAUREN



Nicole-Miller-Resort



Jodie Turner-Smith





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Harmonies across borders

‘Every time I perform, it’s a reminder that there is still beauty and hope in the world. In spite of adversity, in spite of challenges, I have faith in music, in humanity, and in the enduring resilience of the human spirit,’ Ukrainian pianist **Alexey Botvinov** tells **Anirban Ray** in an exclusive chat

INTERVIEW: ALEXEY BOTVINOV

In the grand web of human existence, where the threads of common emotions weave patterns of joy, sorrow, and love, one universal language unites all - the language of Music.

Across centuries and continents, from the echoing premises of grand concert halls to the damp walls of prisons and the humble streets of remote villages, strings and keys have always provided solace to souls, transcending barriers of race, nationality, and creed.

Bella Ciao has been the silent companion of revolutions, while love songs of separated lovers have entertained people around the world for centuries.

Recently, these ethereal notes of this universal language found their way to the warm hospitality of Oman, as Ukrainian pianist Alexey Botvinov added a silver lining to the concluding day of the ‘Bridging Nations with Interculturality, Inclusivity, and SDGs’ art exhibition last week.

This remarkable initiative, born from a collaboration between the esteemed Academic Society Arts-Sciences-Lettres and visionary leader Madeleine ImKey, sought to empower children with special needs, foster intercultural understanding, and raise awareness on environmental causes.

In an interview with Muscat Daily, the pianist, with his aura of music, shared his opinions on art, war, hard rock, Artificial Intelligence among many other issues.

For Botvinov, whose ten fair fingers dance passionately across the ivory keys, Oman proved to be a revelation. “So far, I have performed in 47 countries in the world, Oman will be the 48th, and I am very, very impressed. People here are kind, smiling, welcoming, and respectful of artists. It’s a special place - a place that inspires, that radiates positive energy.”

As the melodies of his music filled the air, Botvinov spoke about the possibility of a harmonious fusion be-

tween Arabic and European musical traditions. “It’s a very interesting idea,” he said, reflecting on his past collaborations with Turkey and European music. For him, music transcends boundaries, serving as a bridge between cultures and civilisations. “I shall definitely try blending Arabic/Omani music with my classical notes in near future,” he said.

Amidst the cacophony of modern life, Botvinov’s reverence for classical compositions remains unwavering. “Bach’s masterpieces, in particular, hold a special place in my heart,” he confesses, with his eyes alight with passion. “They encapsulate the essence of life, the universe, and everything in between. To me, they represent the pinnacle of European musical heritage - a legacy that I am honoured to perform.”

Botvinov is the only pianist who has performed Bach’s ‘Goldberg Variations’ more than 300

times on stage in over 45 countries. Yet, Botvinov’s love for music extends beyond the confines of his classical repertoire.

“Every genre, from rock to hip-hop, possesses its own unique language,” he says. “While I have a deep-rooted love for the rock music of the ‘70s, I recognise the inherent value of all musical expressions.” For him, every musician is blessed with a language of his own that is unique.

In the era of contemporary music, however, Botvinov discerns a subtle divergence from the profound depths of earlier eras. “Modern-day musicians, like Selena Gomez undoubtedly possess talent and professionalism,” he says. “However, there is a depth, a soulfulness, present in the music of the past that seems lacking in today’s entertainment-centric culture.”

The power of music to heal and unite lies at the core of Botvinov’s philosophy. “Arts has a big power,” he affirmed, “It’s an international and universal language, understood by all. It has the ability to evoke honesty, kindness, and peace - values that transcend linguistic and cultural divides. I believe that cultural diplomacy has more power than political ones.”

As society hurtles towards an era dominated by Artificial Intelligence, Botvinov remains steadfast in his belief in the irreplaceable role of human emotion in

the creative process. “AI may streamline certain aspects of music production but it can never replicate the depth of human experience - the intricate interplay of brain, heart, and soul that defines artistic expression. Every music that has come from the forests to the mountains to the seas have been from the depths of human experiences and no technology can challenge these creativities.”

Botvinov recalled a film from Roman Polanski wherein an artist trapped in the World War tries to find answers and hope through music. He is not scared of bullets and bombs. And his possessions include tears, a coat, and a piano.

Against the backdrop of political turmoil in Ukraine, Botvinov’s music serves as a beacon of hope, a reminder of the enduring resilience of the human spirit.

“In times of adversity, music takes on heightened significance,” he observes. “It has the power to unite, to uplift, to transcend the boundaries that divide us.” In the face of war and uncertainty, Botvinov’s faith in music remains optimistic.

“Music, for me, is more than just a profession - it is a calling, a responsibility,” he affirms. “It is my hope that through my performances, I can contribute, in some small way, to the healing of our world - to the restoration of peace, harmony, and humanity.

However, people in Ukraine are reeling under severe anxiety and pain, and so, I avoid any performances or artists from Russia.”

As the interview concludes, Botvinov, lost in thought, says. “Every time I perform, it’s a reminder that there is still beauty and hope in the world. In spite of adversity, in spite of challenges, I have faith in music, in humanity, and in the enduring resilience of the human spirit.”



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