



02 MUSCAT DAILY SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2024	PRAYER TIMINGS	Fajr	Duhr	Asr	Maghrib	Isha
		4.51am	12.18pm	3.45pm	6.24pm	7.35pm

RAMADAN AMIDST THE RUBBLE OF GAZA

Muscat - These days, Muslims around the world are celebrating the fervent spirit of the holy month of Ramadan like a dear guest that comes only once in a year. However, people in Gaza are living under a pall of gloom, with constant shelling and death everywhere.

This has not prevented them from trying to appreciate the

blessings of Ramadan by decorating their tents as their homes lay in rubble.

During Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food and drink from dawn until sunset and then families come together to enjoy iftar that women lovingly prepare at home. Unfortunately, houses no longer exist in Gaza. There are no food and drinks as a result of Is-

rael's aggression in the Gaza Strip.

Houses have fallen on the heads of Palestinians in Gaza, and no one has stopped the war of starvation and obstruction of the arrival of humanitarian supplies, which has entered its sixth month.

Those who are not martyred or injured as a result of the



(Photos: Belal Khaled)

bombings, sickness and hunger are taking their lives slowly.

According to Integrated Food

Security Phase Classification Famine Review Committee - a panel of independent international food security and nutrition experts, including members of the United Nations - 80% of the population of Gaza is classified as experiencing 'a situation of disaster and famine due to hunger', while Unicef reported that 31% or one in three children under two years of age in the northern Gaza Strip suffer from acute malnutrition, a staggering escalation from 15.6% in January.

"We are now competing with animals for fodder," said an old man from Gaza, reflecting the inhuman oppression faced by people on the strip. He appeared hungry and exhausted like the rest of the Palestinians who resist in Gaza.

Hunger in northern Gaza has reached such a point that some people go days without a single meal, and if they eat, their choice is animal feed. On February 28, a two-year-old child, Khaled Hijazi, died in Kamal Idwan Hospital after his stomach couldn't handle animal feed.

According to Metras, a platform to create research-oriented content on Palestine and its resistance, 'Every day, hospitals in Northern Gaza and Rafah receive dozens of cases afflicted with food poisoning with a considerable number of these requiring ICU treatment. Doctors in the north attribute cases of food poi-

soning to people consuming large quantities of herbs and weeds, such as hibiscus and spinach, which are contaminated with remnants of explosive residues. The famine in the north has forced people to eat fodder, spoiled canned goods and rotten

vegetables like potatoes.'

The month of Ramadan is characterised by its spiritual resonance, in which people draw closer to God seeking forgiveness, acceptance and winning paradise. Muslims are encouraged in Ramadan to visit relatives and strengthen relationships.

Palestinians in Gaza Strip, from north to south, are deprived of everything because of the bombings by the occupation forces since last October. Homes and mosques have been destroyed, and families have been separated; some are in prisons, others dead or wounded, and many displaced.

During Ramadan, mosques are usually filled with prayers, obeisance and religious sessions, but Gaza is deprived of even hearing the call to prayer. Palestinians are not able to enjoy the spirituality of this month that emanates from mosques. According to the Gaza government media office, Israeli attacks have completely destroyed 223 mosques and partially destroyed another 289 since October 7, 2023.

Palestinians in Gaza hear the sound of death more than the sound of life. The spirituality and tranquility of Ramadan will be absent in Gaza as long as the Israeli aggression continues.

(Contributed by Ruqaya al Kindi, Bachelor in Journalism and Electronic Publishing, SQU)



Hunger in northern Gaza has reached such a point that some people go days without a single meal, and if they eat, their choice is animal feed

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OCO gives RO60,000 to Fak Kurbah

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO) has contributed RO60,000 to the 'Fak Kurbah' programme run by Omani Lawyers Association for the release of individuals imprisoned for insolvency.

In a statement, Fak Kurbah, emphasised the importance of charitable work in restoring hope in the families of those sentenced to jail in financial, civil, commercial or labour litigations.

'Oman Charitable Organisation donated RO60,000 to the Fak Kurbah programme for the release of a number of persons imprisoned in various gover-



(Supplied photo)

norates,' it stated.

Now in its 11th edition, Fak Kurbah conducts its activities under the theme 'Because we believe everyone deserves a second chance'. This year, more than ten government institutions and private sector companies have announced their support to Fak Kurbah within their social responsibility programmes.

Omani Lawyers Association aims to address around 1,500 cases this year, highlighting its commitment to promoting justice and aiding those in need with the help of the Omani community.

Since its launch in 2012, Fak Kurbah has facilitated the release of over 5,890 inmates, including 925 last year.



Oman LNG, Germany's SEFE sign gas supply deal

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman LNG has finalised a sale and purchase agreement (SPA) with Germany's SEFE Secure Energy for Europe to supply 0.4mn metric tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) annually to the European nation.

The SPA was signed on the sidelines of the Berlin Energy Transition Dialogue 2024 under the auspices of H E Eng Salim bin Nasser al Afi, Minister of Energy and Minerals. The agreement follows a prior commitment wherein Oman LNG signed a binding term-sheet agreement to supply SEFE with 0.4mn metric tonnes per annum of LNG starting in 2026.

The deal marks a milestone in the strategic energy partnership between Germany and Oman, as SEFE is the first German company to purchase Omani gas.

This strategic partnership re-



The agreement was signed on the sidelines of the Berlin Energy Transition Dialogue 2024

flects a significant step forward in bolstering the LNG supply chain, emphasising Oman LNG's commitment to meeting SEFE's energy needs, Oman LNG said in a statement.

By entering into this SPA, Oman LNG not only reinforces the sultanate's reputation as a re-

liable LNG provider but also demonstrates its adeptness in efficiently managing business operations to deliver secure and sustainable energy to global customers.

Hamed al Naamany, Chief Executive Officer of Oman LNG, said, "The agreement marks a

Hydrom, VNG to study green hydrogen supply chain

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom) and the German gas infrastructure company VNG have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to study the commercial feasibility and establish an integrated Omani-German supply chain for green hydrogen and ammonia.

An Omani delegation led by H E Eng Salim bin Nasser al

Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, was on a visit to Germany. The two sides discussed the needs of the energy market in Germany, developments in green hydrogen and energy solutions, in addition to a number of topics of common interest.

The visit witnessed the signing of several agreements between Omani and German companies in the field of delivering green hydrogen to refining stations in Germany, in

addition to a letter of intent to supply green hydrogen.

An MoU was signed to explore the possibility of a long-term agreement where Germany will purchase green hydrogen and ammonia from the sultanate.

VNG, headquartered in Leipzig, is a strong group of companies active in the gas and gas infrastructure sector with about 20 subsidiaries in Germany and Europe.

pivotal moment for both Oman LNG and SEFE, symbolising a profound step towards enhanced collaboration. The SPA stands as a testament to the mutual benefits derived from this partnership.

For Oman LNG, it signifies access to new markets, technological advancements from Germany,

and broader economic growth opportunities. Meanwhile, SEFE gains a reliable and trusted energy supplier, strengthening its position in the European market."

Furthermore, this strategic partnership with SEFE serves to fortify Oman's ties with Germany, contributing significantly

to energy security initiatives, opening up new opportunities for Oman LNG in the German market and beyond, underscoring its dedication to fostering growth and collaborative endeavors to enrich Oman's economy.

Dr. Egbert Leage, CEO of SEFE, said, "SEFE is very proud to

continue its path of increased cooperation with Oman and to be the front-runner among German companies in importing energy from the country. This partnership diversifies our portfolio and supports our goal to provide Europe with a secure energy supply. We look forward to this being the first of many agreements and also developing a trusting partnership in the hydrogen economy in the medium and long term. Oman is making impressive progress with its ambitious hydrogen strategy."

As an integrated midstream energy company headquartered in Berlin, SEFE ensures the security of energy supply in Germany and Europe and drives the green energy transformation. The company is active in trading and portfolio management, sales, transportation, and storage of energy and has its strongest presence in Germany and the UK.

Oryx Fund pays highest ever dividend to investors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Bank Muscat's Oryx Fund continues to reward its investors with a growing stream of dividend distributions and capital growth. The fund's management approved a record high dividend distribution of 72bz per unit to be paid to the unitholders for the financial year 2023.

This marks the highest cash dividend ever paid by the Oryx Fund, underscoring the investor-focused approach adopted by the fund. With consistent dividend distributions, the fund has maintained its track record of increasing dividends every year.

Bank Muscat Oryx Fund delivered 29.2% return for the year 2023, compared to a 6.2% return by its benchmark S&P GCC Index

In addition to regular income distributions through dividends, Oryx Fund has also rewarded its investors with attractive capital appreciation. It delivered a return of 29.2% for the one-year period ending December 31, 2023, compared to a 6.2% return by its benchmark, the S&P GCC Index.

Primarily investing in stock markets in the GCC region, Bank Muscat Oryx Fund boasts a consistent and proven track record of generating attractive returns over its 29-year history. It stands as one of the largest funds in the GCC region within its category and is regulated by the Capital Market Authority.

The Oryx Fund offers daily liquidity with no minimum holding period, allowing investors to sell their investments at any time and receive cash funds in their bank accounts within three days. The fund's NAV is published daily on Bank Muscat's website and the Muscat Stock Exchange's website, enabling investors to track the value of their investments daily.

Schneider, Positive Zero to advance decarbonisation in Oman and UAE

Dubai, UAE - Schneider Electric, a global leader in energy management and automation, and Positive Zero, a decentralised decarbonisation infrastructure business headquartered in the UAE, signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to drive the development of sustainable energy solutions in the UAE and Oman.

This collaborative effort aims to accelerate the adoption of clean energy technologies and propel the transition toward a net-zero future in the region, according to a press release.

As part of the agreement, Schneider Electric and Positive Zero will collaborate on various initiatives to advance decarbonisation-as-a-service programmes across the UAE and Oman. This includes exploring synergies across distributed microgrid projects, clean mobility solutions, energy efficiency, and sustainability.

David Auriau, CEO, and Co-founder of Positive Zero, said, "Schneider Electric, one of the leading players worldwide, and Positive Zero are both positioned to address a new energy land-



scape, which is decentralized, flexible, and connected. This collaboration represents a strategic alignment of our shared vision for decarbonization and sustainability. Positive Zero is dedicated to pioneering innovative solutions that contribute to a cleaner and more sustainable world, and our cooperation will accelerate this movement in the commercial and industrial sectors."

Amel Chadli, President of Gulf Countries at Schneider Electric, said, "We are looking forward to the outcomes of this collaboration with Positive Zero. It underscores another important step for Schneider Electric's journey

and commitment toward accelerating the energy transition in the region and empowering organizations and communities to embrace sustainable energy solutions."

In December 2023, BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, announced its commitment to invest \$400mn in Positive Zero through a diversified infrastructure fund.

The opportunity for advancing comprehensive corporate sustainability programs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is significant. According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) October

2023 insight report, 'Closing the Climate Action Gap,' only 12% of businesses in MENA have committed to net-zero targets, and just 6% have published clear roadmaps to achieve those goals.

The report asserts that the GCC countries have more resources and lower costs to reduce carbon emissions using energy efficiency and solar power solutions, giving the region significant advantages over comparable countries in North America and the European Union.

Meanwhile, a January 2024 report by SkyQuest Technology forecasts that the global Energy-as-a-Service market will exceed \$112bn by 2030, with an annual average growth rate of 9.1% between 2023 and 2030. This includes the adoption of distributed energy resources like off-grid solar power and mobile battery storage, microgrid technologies, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) for predictive energy analytics, and other green and sustainable solutions.

Tender

Oman chamber of commerce and industry would like to announce the following public tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Fees (irrevocable)	Specialized companies	Deadline for Obtaining Documents	Deadline for Tender submission
3/2024	Appointing a consultant to evaluate the digital transformation project of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry	100 /-R.O for all companies. 25/-R.O for companied holding Riyada	Companies specialized in information and communication technology	7 February 2024	Before 12 pm 14, April 2024

Companies may obtain the tender documents from the Administration Department at the Second Floor of the chamber's Headquarters in Ruwi , during the official working hours against the payment of tender fees.

Tender Terms:
Provide valued CR,OCCI membership and taxation certificate .
Interested companies should enclose their bids a 1% Bank guarantee/ certified cheque of proposal value issued by one of the banks operating in Oman valid for 120 days from the deadline of submitting the bids addressed in the name of **Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry**. The bids without this temporary guarantee will not be considered.
The bids should be submitted in red waxed envelopes addressed to - Head of main tendering Committee, OCCI, written outside the Number and title of the Tender. No indication about the bidder is allowed on the envelope.
Offers should be deposited in the tender box kept at the Administration Department in the Second floor of OCCI Head office.
OCCI is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bids. It has the right to accept or reject any bids without showing reasons.

Interested companies should submit the Tenders before 12 pm on 14 April 2024
For any inquiries please contact as on : 24763881
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No. 18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33-34-35-36-37-38-39-40-41-42-43-44-45-46-47-48-49-50-51-52-53-54-55-56-57-58-59-60-61-62-63-64-65-66-67-68-69-70-71-72-73-74-75-76-77-78-79-80-81-82-83-84-85-86-87-88-89-90-91-92-93-94-95-96-97-98-99-100-101-102-103-104-105-106-107-108-109-110-111-112-113-114-115-116-117-118-119-120-121-122-123-124-125-126-127-128-129-130-131-132-133-134-135-136-137-138-139-140-141-142-143-144-145-146-147-148-149-150-151-152-153-154-155-156-157-158-159-160-161-162-163-164-165-166-167-168-169-170-171-172-173-174-175-176-177-178-179-180-181-182-183-184-185-186-187-188-189-190-191-192-193-194-195-196-197-198-199-200-201-202-203-204-205-206-207-208-209-210-211-212-213-214-215-216-217-218-219-220-221-222-223-224-225-226-227-228-229-230-231-232-233-234-235-236-237-238-239-240-241-242-243-244-245-246-247-248-249-250-251-252-253-254-255-256-257-258-259-260-261-262-263-264-265-266-267-268-269-270-271-272-273-274-275-276-277-278-279-280-281-282-283-284-285-286-287-288-289-290-291-292-293-294-295-296-297-298-299-300-301-302-303-304-305-306-307-308-309-310-311-312-313-314-315-316-317-318-319-320-321-322-323-324-325-326-327-328-329-330-331-332-333-334-335-336-337-338-339-340-341-342-343-344-345-346-347-348-349-350-351-352-353-354-355-356-357-358-359-360-361-362-363-364-365-366-367-368-369-370-371-372-373-374-375-376-377-378-379-380-381-382-383-384-385-386-387-388-389-390-391-392-393-394-395-396-397-398-399-400-401-402-403-404-405-406-407-408-409-410-411-412-413-414-415-416-417-418-419-420-421-422-423-424-425-426-427-428-429-430-431-432-433-434-435-436-437-438-439-440-441-442-443-444-445-446-447-448-449-450-451-452-453-454-455-456-457-458-459-460-461-462-463-464-465-466-467-468-469-470-471-472-473-474-475-476-477-478-479-480-481-482-483-484-485-486-487-488-489-490-491-492-493-494-495-496-497-498-499-500-501-502-503-504-505-506-507-508-509-510-511-512-513-514-515-516-517-518-519-520-521-522-523-524-525-526-527-528-529-530-531-532-533-534-535-536-537-538-539-540-541-542-543-544-545-546-547-548-549-550-551-552-553-554-555-556-557-558-559-560-561-562-563-564-565-566-567-568-569-570-571-572-573-574-575-576-577-578-579-580-581-582-583-584-585-586-587-588-589-590-591-592-593-594-595-596-597-598-599-600-601-602-603-604-605-606-607-608-609-610-611-612-613-614-615-616-617-618-619-620-621-622-623-624-625-626-627-628-629-630-631-632-633-634-635-636-637-638-639-640-641-642-643-644-645-646-647-648-649-650-651-652-653-654-655-656-657-658-659-660-661-662-663-664-665-666-667-668-669-670-671-672-673-674-675-676-677-678-679-680-681-682-683-684-685-686-687-688-689-690-691-692-693-694-695-696-697-698-699-700-701-702-703-704-705-706-707-708-709-710-711-712-713-714-715-716-717-718-719-720-721-722-723-724-725-726-727-728-729-730-731-732-733-734-735-736-737-738-739-740-741-742-743-744-745-746-747-748-749-750-751-752-753-754-755-756-757-758-759-760-761-762-763-764-765-766-767-768-769-770-771-772-773-774-775-776-777-778-779-780-781-782-783-784-785-786-787-788-789-790-791-792-793-794-795-796-797-798-799-800-801-802-803-804-805-806-807-808-809-810-811-812-813-814-815-816-817-818-819-820-821-822-823-824-825-826-827-828-829-830-831-832-833-834-835-836-837-838-839-840-841-842-843-844-845-846-847-848-849-850-851-852-853-854-855-856-857-858-859-860-861-862-863-864-865-866-867-868-869-870-871-872-873-874-875-876-877-878-879-880-881-882-883-884-885-886-887-888-889-890-891-892-893-894-895-896-897-898-899-900-901-902-903-904-905-906-907-908-909-910-911-912-913-914-915-916-917-918-919-920-921-922-923-924-925-926-927-928-929-930-931-932-933-934-935-936-937-938-939-940-941-942-943-944-945-946-947-948-949-950-951-952-953-954-955-956-957-958-959-960-961-962-963-964-965-966-967-968-969-970-971-972-973-974-975-976-977-978-979-980-981-982-983-984-985-986-987-988-989-990-991-992-993-994-995-996-997-998-999-1000-1001-1002-1003-1004-1005-1006-1007-1008-1009-1010-1011-1012-1013-1014-1015-1016-1017-1018-1019-1020-1021-1022-1023-1024-1025-1026-1027-1028-1029-1030-1031-1032-1033-1034-1035-1036-1037-1038-1039-1040-1041-1042-1043-1044-1045-1046-1047-1048-1049-1050-1051-1052-1053-1054-1055-1056-1057-1058-1059-1060-1061-1062-1063-1064-1065-1066-1067-1068-1069-1070-1071-1072-1073-1074-1075-1076-1077-1078-1079-1080-1081-1082-1083-1084-1085-1086-1087-1088-1089-1090-1091-1092-1093-1094-1095-1096-1097-1098-1099-1100-1101-1102-1103-1104-1105-1106-1107-1108-1109-1110-1111-1112-1113-1114-1115-1116-1117-1118-1119-1120-1121-1122-1123-1124-1125-1126-1127-1128-1129-1130-1131-1132-1133-1134-1135-1136-1137-1138-1139-1140-1141-1142-1143-1144-1145-1146-1147-1148-1149-1150-1151-1152-1153-1154-1155-1156-1157-1158-1159-1160-1161-1162-1163-1164-1165-1166-1167-1168-1169-1170-1171-1172-1173-1174-1175-1176-1177-1178-1179-1180-1181-1182-1183-1184-1185-1186-1187-1188-1189-1190-1191-1192-1193-1194-1195-1196-1197-1198-1199-1200-1201-1202-1203-1204-1205-1206-1207-1208-1209-1210-1211-1212-1213-1214-1215-1216-1217-1218-1219-1220-1221-1222-1223-1224-1225-1226-1227-1228-1229-1230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Fed eyes 3 rate cuts in 2024 despite inflation

Washington, US – The US Federal Reserve policymakers suggested that they continue to see the need for three interest rate cuts in 2024, despite recent signs of resilient economic growth.

The forecast, unchanged from December, was released following a two-day meeting of the rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee on Wednesday, reflecting its confidence that inflation is coming down.

The Fed kept its benchmark interest rate on hold at a 23-year high of 5.25-5.50% as widely expected.

In its quarterly economic projections, the median forecast for the rate at the end of 2024 remained at 4.6%, meaning the central bank could carry out three quarter-point cuts from

current levels.

But the latest rate estimates for the year-end periods of 2025 and 2026 were raised to 3.9% and 3.1%, respectively, from 3.6% and 2.9% as projected three months ago.

Meanwhile, the committee foresees that the US gross domestic product, adjusted for inflation, will be up 2.1% in the October-December period as compared to a year earlier, revising upward from 1.4% in its previous forecast.

The Fed's fifth straight decision to maintain the target range for the federal funds rate, which commercial banks charge each other for overnight loans, left a first cut in borrowing costs since 2020 until possibly sometime in the second half of this year.



Fed Chair Jerome Powell

The FOMC said in a statement it "does not expect it will be appropriate to reduce the target range until it has gained greater confidence that inflation is moving sustainably toward 2%."

The unanimous decision followed earlier expectations that the Fed could begin to ease monetary policy as soon as in March after two years of rapid rate hikes to tamp down price increases.

But data showed the US economy remaining robust, with inflation picking up this year.

The US Labor Department said last week that consumer prices were 3.2% higher in February compared to a year ago.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell told a press conference that recent

strong economic data have not changed the overall story that inflation is moving toward its target on a "sometimes bumpy road."

Powell said, nonetheless, he wants to be "careful about dismissing data that we don't like." He offered virtually no hints about the timing of the first rate cut in 2024, while many economists and investors now expect it may happen as early as June.

He reiterated that Fed officials need to strike a delicate balance by avoiding cutting rates "too soon or too much," which could result in a "reversal of the progress" in taming inflation, or "too late or too little," which could "unduly weaken economic activity and employment."

[Source: Kyodo News]

GCC, Turkey to begin talks on free trade agreement



Ankara, Turkey – The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Republic of Türkiye have signed a deal to launch negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between two sides.

Turkish Trade Minister Omer

Bolat said that the pact would lead to one of the world's largest free trade areas.

In a statement, GCC Secretary General Jassem al Budaiwi said the accord to launch FTA talks 'is a demonstration of the robust

and strategic partnership between the GCC countries and Türkiye.' He added that the move showcases successful cooperation across various fields, including commerce, economics, and finance.

US Senate passes \$1.2tn spending plan, avoiding government shutdown

Washington, US – The US Senate overwhelmingly voted for a \$1.2tn spending plan to fund the government early Saturday, avoiding a shutdown and sending the measure to President Joe Biden for his signature.

The 74-to-24 vote concluded about 2am, the New York Times reported, more than 12 hours after the House of Representatives voted 286-134, to advance the 1,012-page spending bill that covers an estimated 70% of discretionary government spending.

It required a two-thirds majority and barely cleared that threshold amid strong GOP opposition.

The bill aims to fully fund the government through the end of September and is to be the final step in a drawn-out fight that has seen a government funding debate stretch almost six months into the fiscal year.

But it didn't clear the House before more than 112 Republicans, a slim majority of the GOP caucus, bucked House Speaker Mike Johnson's move to work with Democrats and voted no.

Amid the debate, according to PunchBowl news, Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene even filed a motion to vacate and remove Johnson from his position. In comments to reporters afterwards, she called the move "a warning" to Johnson.

The White House said shortly after midnight that shutdown preparations had ceased, in anticipation of the president signing the legislation later Saturday. Biden has already promised to



US President Joe Biden

sign the bill as soon as he can, with a formal statement of administration policy released Thursday urging swift passage.

"I imagine some folks here in the Capitol are past the point of exhaustion," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer noted Thursday on the Senate floor.

The bill aims to fully fund the US government through the end of September and is to be the final step in a drawn-out fight

The tight deadlines are a result of last-minute delays over funding for the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees the border.

After calls from some Republicans to use the budget process to "dismantle" Biden's border

policies, the final product is notably less dramatic, but there are some changes at the border set to be implemented. There are new resources for the US Border Patrol as well as additional detention beds run by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, among other provisions.

Other highlights of the massive bill include a cutting off of US government assistance to UNRWA, the main UN agency that provides assistance to Palestinians, amid accusations that a number of their employees participated in the October 7 attack in southern Israel.

The bill also lays out increases for Democratic priorities like federal child care and funding for cancer and Alzheimer's research.

Provision for other wings of the government — including the agriculture, commerce, and transportation departments — were already agreed to and enacted in another deal that passed earlier this month.

[Source: Yahoo Finance]



NATIONAL ALUMINIUM PRODUCTS COMPANY S.A.O.G

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 December 2023

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of National Aluminium Products Company SAOG (NAPCO), I hereby present the Annual Report containing the audited financial statements for the Year ended 31 December 2023 and an overview of the performance of the Company.

Economic environment
The global economy has been resilient, with the 2023 growth outlook slightly upgraded since last spring. But the recovery has been uneven as activity in many economies remains well below pre-pandemic trends and divergences across countries are rising. Medium-term global growth projections remain weak. Global headline inflation has declined, although in some countries it remains well above target. Core inflation has proven more persistent than expected.

Performance Review
The financial performance of National Aluminium Company Products Company SAOG (Parent Company) and Novel Aluminium Products Company LLC (Subsidiary Company), collectively represented as a "Group", during Year 2023 compared to 2022, is summarized in the table below:

	Group		Parent	
Particulars	2023	2022	2023	2022
Revenue	25,933	24,447	25,704	24,349
Net loss before taxation	(3,302)	(4,928)	(3,363)	(4,905)
Net loss after tax	(3,714)	(4,300)	(3,777)	(4,276)

The Group realized revenues of RO 25,933 million compared to RO 24,447 million during the previous year, a 6% increase amounting to RO 1,485 million. After reversal of RO 0.843 million in deferred tax assets, a net loss after tax of RO (3,714) million is reported, compared to a loss of RO (4,300) million during the previous year. This resulted from an increase in total dispatch quantity by 21% during the year compared to volumes last year and the LME price drop by 17% during the year compared to the previous one.

The company's financial performance remains affected by severe working capital constraints, significant delays in collections, the high cost of borrowing and delays in restructuring the company finances.

Future outlook
The economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are projected to grow at 3.2% in 2024, slower than the previous year, in the face of lower oil and gas earnings and a global economic slowdown, according to the new World Bank Gulf Economic Update (GEU).
The Company is exploring all options to reinstate its capital, enhance its working capital facilities and secure the raw material at reasonable cost and palatable credit terms. Management also strives to develop new markets and widen its customer base with high yield and good margin opportunities.

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

Corporate Governance:
The Board and Management maintain a high level of professionalism and integrity in all its operations and stand fully compliant with the Code of Corporate Governance.

Health, Safety and Environment (HSE)
In line with our commitment to the safety of our people, HSE policies continue to receive the highest priority in our organization and daily business activities have been carried out successfully with further improvement in lost time injury (LTI) incidents. In 2023 the Company gained ISO Certifications and we are now certified ISO 14001:2015, the international standard for environmental management system, and ISO 45001:2018, the international standard for health and safety at work which adds to our sustainable journey.

Organisation
Your Company has always paid special attention for the recruitment and training of Omani Employees and is committed to progressively attain high level of Organisation at all levels of hierarchy and skill sets within the organization.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
Social responsibility is one of the pillars that contribute to social development and strengthen the relationship between the corporate world and the surrounding society. The Board realizes this important key factor and the General Assembly supported this initiative by approving a budget of RO 1,000 of which 20% was disbursed as per Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Ministerial Resolution 205/2021 and CMA resolution 172/2021 and the balance to Oman Association for Disabled.

Acknowledgement and Appreciation
I would like to extend my deep appreciation to our honorable Shareholders and to all my colleagues on the Board of Directors for their valuable contributions as well as the Management and staff for their loyalty, hard work, dedication, and contribution during these difficult times. I also acknowledge, with sincere gratitude, the support extended by all stakeholders including, regulatory and government authorities, MSM and CMA and look forward to having the continued support from all of them.
I wish to place on record, personally and on behalf of the Board of Directors and employees, our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimour and his wise government for continued support, encouragement, and guidance for our company and wish him all success in leading Oman to achieve greater progress and prosperity.
For & on behalf of the Board of Directors
National Aluminium Products Co. S.A.O.G.

Dr. Zakia Hassan Al-Naseeb
Chairperson

Consolidated and separate statement of financial position as at 31 December 2023(Expressed in Omani Rial)

	Group	Parent Company		
	2023	2022	2023	2022
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	10,331,218	10,746,918	10,327,720	10,742,263
Intangible assets	46,922	71,274	41,384	63,963
Right-of-use asset	945,234	949,627	945,234	949,627
Investment property	400,000	460,000	400,000	460,000
Investment in a subsidiary	-	-	31,500	31,500
Deferred tax asset	215,834	628,500	214,794	628,500
Total non-current assets	11,939,208	12,856,319	11,960,632	12,875,853
Current assets				
Inventories	2,951,717	2,402,175	2,951,717	2,402,175
Trade and other receivables	6,713,910	7,856,186	6,723,711	8,103,335
Cash and bank balances	187,232	260,688	35,351	22,341
Total current assets	9,852,859	10,519,049	9,710,779	10,527,851
Total assets	21,792,067	23,375,368	21,671,411	23,403,704
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	857,145	3,357,145	857,145	3,357,145
Legal reserve	-	1,119,048	-	1,119,048
Revaluation reserve	1,356,219	1,550,598	1,356,219	1,550,598
Accumulated losses	(4,961,121)	(5,059,685)	(4,980,091)	(5,016,392)
Total capital and reserves	(2,747,757)	967,106	(2,766,727)	1,010,399
Liabilities				
Non-current liabilities				
Non-current portion of term loan	2,620,000	-	2,620,000	-
Non-current portion of lease liabilities	1,091,107	1,068,158	1,091,107	1,068,158
Employees' end-of-service benefits	329,931	298,977	329,931	298,977
Total non-current liabilities	4,041,038	1,367,135	4,041,038	1,367,135
Current liabilities				
Trade and other payables	6,983,352	5,011,134	6,881,666	4,996,177
Current portion of lease liabilities	66,781	65,128	66,781	65,128
Bank borrowings	13,448,653	15,964,865	13,448,653	15,964,865
Total current liabilities	20,498,786	21,041,127	20,397,100	21,026,170
Total liabilities	24,539,824	22,408,262	24,438,138	22,393,305
Total equity and liabilities	21,792,067	23,375,368	21,671,411	23,403,704
Net (deficit)/assets per share	(0.321)	0.029	(0.323)	0.030

Consolidated and separate statement of financial position as at 31 December 2023(Expressed in Omani Rial)

	Group	Parent Company		
	Year ended 31 December 2023	Year ended 31 December 2022	Year ended 31 December 2023	Year ended 31 December 2022
Revenue	25,933,172	24,447,847	25,704,241	24,349,383
Cost of sales	(25,587,794)	(25,382,634)	(25,575,781)	(25,368,075)
Gross profit/(loss)	345,378	(934,787)	128,460	(1,018,692)
Other income	129,025	275,079	123,150	274,559
Allowance for expected credit losses on trade receivables	(424,451)	(957,145)	(424,451)	(957,145)
General and administrative expenses	(1,094,526)	(1,093,325)	(1,063,192)	(1,077,552)
Selling and distribution expenses	(868,013)	(811,884)	(749,288)	(728,042)
Net change in fair valuation of investment property	(60,000)	-	(60,000)	-
Loss from operations	(1,972,587)	(3,522,062)	(2,045,321)	(3,506,872)
Finance costs, net	(1,329,610)	(1,406,481)	(1,318,099)	(1,398,486)
Loss before tax for the year	(3,302,197)	(4,928,543)	(3,363,420)	(4,905,358)
Income tax	(412,666)	628,500	(413,706)	628,500
Net loss after tax for the year and total comprehensive loss for the year	(3,714,863)	(4,300,043)	(3,777,126)	(4,276,858)
Basic and diluted loss per share, as restated	(0.433)	(0.502)	(0.441)	(0.499)

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

Hongqi unveils exclusive Ramadan offer

Since its inception in 1958, the iconic Hongqi brand has epitomised luxury and prestige in the automotive industry. Recognised as the quintessential state vehicle for Chinese leaders and major national events, Hongqi has evolved over the decades, blending tradition with innovation to set new standards in automotive excellence.

In alignment with its commitment to innovation and customer satisfaction, Hongqi Oman is delighted to announce an exclusive Ramadan offer, inviting customers to experience the unparalleled elegance of Ramadan with every purchase of a Hongqi vehicle, a press release said.

The Ramadan offer presents an extraordinary opportunity for customers to indulge in luxury and sophistication. With the purchase of any 2024 Hongqi vehicle, including the H5, Ousado, HS3, HS5, or H9, customers automatically qualify for a chance



to win a lavish Hongqi H5.

In addition to the chance to win a Hongqi H5, customers at MHD will enjoy an array of premium benefits tailored to enhance their experience till April 20 - 7 years/155,000km service package, 7 years roadside assistance, 7 years unlimited mileage warranty, complimentary insurance and registration for the first year, an RO250 gift voucher, a fuel card worth RO100, and an Amouage special edition gift box for the first 50 customers. The Hongqi Ousado is available at an attractive price of RO9,900. Along with this attractive price, avail the benefits that come along with the Ramadan offer, and enjoy peace of mind on every Hongqi purchase.

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, said, "At Hongqi, we are committed to delivering exceptional experiences to our customers, blending tradition with innovation to redefine luxury."



H E Kiejoo Kim

Korean Embassy, OK Nuri host joint iftar

The spirit of the holy month of Ramadan resonated at the iftar that the Korean Embassy co-organised with the OK Nuri club at the Embassy hall on March 19.

OK Nuri - a voluntary group of Omani fans of Korean culture, stands for Oman-Korea Nuri, an Arabic word for light, a press release said.

The joint iftar was held under the theme of 'sharing and caring.' The Omani and Korean participants shared their respective food and were reminded of the messages of Ramadan.

H E Kiejoo Kim, Korean Ambassador, underscored the value of Ramadan as a time of reflection where "we pursue our collective contribution to the world."

BankDhofar hosts media dinner

BankDhofar organised a dinner event for media professionals from various media outlets in the Sultanate of Oman to enhance communication and exchange of opinions and ideas between them and the bank.

Said Juma al Busaidi, head of Marketing and Corporate Communications at BankDhofar, shared the strategic goals of BankDhofar, Initiatives and priorities for the bank and its 2023 financial results. The bank achieved its highest operating profit in the past eight years at RO76mn, while net profits reached RO38.8mn, an increase of 13.4% compared to 2022, he disclosed.

Al Busaidi explained that the bank opened 55 new branches in various states of the Sultanate of Oman during the past 18 months, bringing the total number of branches to 118 and elevating the bank to being the second largest branch network in the Sultanate of Oman. The number of offsite and onsite 24x7 banking services like ATM's/ CDM's/ MFK's also increased by 36% to reach more than 350, he said.

The bank introduced several customer-centric proposition offerings and enhancements. Based on the bank's strategy, it rolled out 'Life Cycle Banking,' a segmented approach to meet



Said Juma al Busaidi

customer needs from childhood to priority bank apart from Enterprise sales function taking bank-

the bank opened 55 new branches in various states of the Sultanate of Oman during the past 18 months, bringing the total number of branches to 118

ing to the customers doorsteps. It continues to invest in its human capital by continuous training and skill enhancement to

its workforce.

The bank prioritises technology and innovation, making it integral to enhancing customer experiences. Customers enjoy secure and user-friendly digital banking channels, with the award-winning Mobile Banking App offering exclusive services like instant transfers, cardless cash, and mobile top-ups. The bank achieved another milestone by becoming the first bank in Oman and the Middle East to install Diebold Nixdorf's RM4V Cash Recycling Engine, offering an unparalleled customer experience.

Aster's India and GCC business separation underway



Dr Azad Moopen



Alisha Moopen

Aster DM Healthcare Limited, one of the largest and fastest growing integrated healthcare providers in GCC and India, has announced that the separation of its India and GCC businesses and the proposed investment in the company's GCC business by a consortium of investors led by Fajr Capital, a sovereign-owned private equity firm headquartered in the UAE, is nearing imminent completion.

In November 2023, corporate approvals were received to separate the company's India and GCC businesses into two distinct and standalone entities to unlock long-term value. Under the separation plan, a Fajr Capital-led consortium entered into a definitive agreement to acquire a 65%

stake in the company's GCC business. The plan was approved by the Company's shareholders in January 2024, a press release said.

Dr Azad Moopen, founder chairman, Aster DM Healthcare, said, "The separation of Aster's India and GCC businesses will unlock the value and potential of both businesses and provide the needed impetus for the company to further strengthen its presence in both geographies. We are very near to closure and excited to embark on the next stage of growth."

Alisha Moopen, managing director and Group CEO, Aster DM Healthcare, added, "With most of the processes near closure and necessary approvals in place, we are almost at the closure of the transaction."

The separation of Aster's India and GCC businesses will unlock the value and potential of both businesses and provide the needed impetus for the company to further strengthen its presence in both geographies

DR AZAD MOOPEN



National Hospitality Institute hosts exclusive VIP Iftar

The National Hospitality Institute (NHI) hosted an exclusive VIP Iftar event on March 19 under the theme 'Breaking Fast and Building Bonds'.

For nearly three decades, NHI has been a cornerstone of hospitality training in Oman, setting the standard since its inception in 1995, a press release said.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of a cheque to Zahwa al Rahbi on behalf of the Chaine des Rotisseurs for her outstanding achievement in securing a place in the Chef Olympiad competition in India. Al Rahbi's remarkable talent and energy left an indelible impression on all who met her.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of a cheque to Zahwa al Rahbi on behalf of the Chaine des Rotisseurs

The culinary prowess of NHI's young trainee team was on full display, as they crafted a memorable Iftar experience.

From exquisitely presented samosas to tantalising tuna with tamarind sauce, each dish showcased their dedication to culinary excellence.

Guests were treated to an

array of salads, chicken, beef, and delectable desserts, culminating in a perfect conclusion to the evening's fast-breaking festivities.

NHI manager Rob Maclean expressed pride in hosting such a special occasion and extended gratitude to all who contributed to its success.

Mitsubishi Motors introduces new generation HEVs

Mitsubishi Motors Corporation, headquartered in Tokyo, is a global automotive leader with a heritage of over 100 years, producing some of the world's most renowned SUVs, crossovers, sedans, and pickups.

Mitsubishi Motors is also a pioneer in electric vehicle innovation – especially hybrid EVs. The company launched the i-MiEV – the world's first mass-produced electric vehicle in 2009, followed by the Outlander PHEV – the world's first plug-in hybrid electric SUV in 2013.

On February 1, Mitsubishi announced the global debut of new hybrid electric vehicle (HEV) models of the Xpander and Xpander Cross crossover MPVs. The HEV models are produced at the Laem Chabang Plant of Mitsubishi Motors in Thailand, and will go on sale shortly, a press release said.

The Xpander, launched in 2017, is a crossover MPV which combines the comfort and versatility of an MPV with the bold styling and road performance of an SUV. The Xpander Cross, launched in 2019, is the top variant on the series. The Xpander series sold over 130,000 units globally in 2022.

The HEV models combine Mitsubishi Motors' trademark electrification and all-wheel control technologies to raise the appeal of the Xpander series to another level. Newly developed based on the brand's plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs), the HEV system delivers a uniquely eco-friendly and exhilarating driving experience.

At its core, the newly developed system features EV driving, hybrid driving and regenerative braking, working together to deliver high fuel efficiency and an exhilarating drive by automatically switching to the most optimal driving mode based on driving conditions and battery charge level.



The Xpander, launched in 2017, is a crossover MPV which combines the comfort and versatility of an MPV with the bold styling and road performance of an SUV

When starting and at low speeds, the vehicle's electric motor is powered by the drive battery alone. When driving uphill or accelerating, the system switches to hybrid driving powered by electricity generated by the engine as well as the drive battery. When driving at high speeds, hybrid driving uses the

engine with assistance from the electric motor. During deceleration, kinetic energy is recovered via regenerative braking and converted into electric power, which is then stored in the drive battery.

This HEV system makes it possible to enjoy the quiet, clean ride of an EV with no fuel con-

sumption or CO2 emissions for short drives, and switch to the convenient, comfortable ride of an HEV for long drives without anxiety about battery charge.

The new HEV system combines a generator and a motor with a maximum output of 85 kW, with a 1.6L gasoline engine, as well as a dedicated drive bat-

tery developed specifically for the Xpander HEV. This allows torque to kick in swiftly when starting and accelerating, helping drivers smoothly change lanes on highways and merge after U-turns on city streets.

The newly developed 1.6Lr DOHC 16-valve MIVEC4 engine adopts a high expansion ratio cycle (Atkinson cycle) to achieve better fuel combustion efficiency while also incorporating the first ever electric water pump in a Mitsubishi engine to reduce mechanical loss. Overall, this improves fuel economy by around 10% compared to CVT models while also improving the fuel consumption by approximately 34% in urban driving according to the New European Driving Cycle (NEDC) test, and approximately 15% in urban and extra-urban driving combined.

General Automotive Company (GAC) in the authorized dealership for Mitsubishi Motors in Oman, with showrooms across the nation in Muscat, Mabelah, Barka, Sohar, Nizwa, Ibri, Sur, Jalal Bani Bu Ali, and Salalah.



Oman Flour Mills organises Ramadan football

A Ramadan football tournament for the employees of Oman Flour Mills Company (OFM) kicked off at Hilal Sports Stadium, in the Governorate of Muscat, with the participation of a number of 72 employees, forming 6 teams.

The OFM's Ramadan football tournament aims to strengthen the relationships among the company's employees, providing them with an opportunity to get together and compete in a friendly manner away from the workplace, as well as enhancing their physical aspect, showing



their talents and improving their skills in football. This football tournament is

considered as a part of the belief of the Oman Flour Mills Company in the importance of high-

lighting the capabilities and talents of its employees and developing their interests.

This tournament also comes in line with the OFM's strategy of paying attention to human resources as an integral part of its identity, while the company is keen to enhance communication between its employees and creating a work environment that stimulates creativity, and setting programmes that contributes to strengthen the moral and physical aspects - a healthy mind in a healthy body.

MSX Chairman's Dialogue hosts Dr Cook

Endeavouring to build a bridge between global and Omani stalwarts from their respective fields, Muscat Stock Exchange organised the inaugural edition of the 'MSX Chairman's Dialogue' at the MSX Investors Hall on March 21.

Mohammed Mahfoudh al Ardhi, chairman, MSX hosted Dr Bradley J Cook president of the American University of Bahrain, the first comprehensive American-model co-educational university in the Kingdom of Bahrain during the inaugural session.

The topic of the discourse was 'The Future of Higher Education in the Middle East,' and it shed light on the Current State of Higher Education. Key Trends Shaping the Future of Higher Education, Global Dynamics and



Shifting Economies, Evolving Educational Paradigms and Vision for the Future, a press release said.

Initiating the dialogue, Ardhi said higher education in the Middle East is influenced by several factors that includes technological advancements, changing de-

mographics and economic development. Technology will continue to play a key role in transforming higher education in the Middle East, he said. E-learning platforms, online courses, and virtual classrooms will become more prevalent, offering greater flexibility and accessibil-

ity to students.

The dialogue marks the beginning of a series which will host distinguished personalities from finance, academia, investing and corporate leaders. These luminaries will share their experience and learnings broadening the knowledge horizon of attending guests.

Dr Cook, who is a noted educationist with nearly 30 years of executive administrative experience in higher education, said though the current state of higher education does not look great, he had firm belief in education. Research continues to demonstrate the value of a university education due to better earning potential, increased household incomes and better health.

Bank Muscat, GIG Gulf launch Ramadan offer

Bank Muscat and GIG Gulf are introducing an attractive offer for comprehensive Motor Insurance plan in collaboration with Precision Tune Auto Care to commemorate the holy month of Ramadan.

Through the exclusive offer, customers can avail a cash voucher when obtaining or renewing a comprehensive insurance policy, which include a number of services such as changing engine oil and filter, checking and correcting tire pressure, cleaning air filter, washing and cleaning vehicle. The offer is valid till April 12, a press release said.

Customers can benefit from the current offer by applying through the online portal or visiting the nearest Bank Muscat branch or contacting the call centre on 24032666. Both, Omanis and expats, are eligible to benefit from the comprehensive Motor Insurance plan for either new cars or when renewing the current plan.

Abdullah Tamman al Maashani, general manager – Products, Bank Muscat, said, "We are pleased to celebrate Ramadan with our valued customers through exclusive offers to meet their needs and aspirations. We invite customers to benefit from the offer and enjoy the various benefits Motor Insurance plan offers. Through our strong partnership with GIG Gulf, which is recognised worldwide for its excellent products and services, we are happy to continue offering the best insurance services to our customers at very affordable and highly competitive premiums. We would like to extend our appreciation to the valued customers for their continuous trust on the different offers, services and facilities."

He further stated, "This

offer came in line with the exclusive Ramadaan offer the bank announced on Sayyarati Auto Finance with a special rate that starts at just 3.75% on both, new and pre-owned, cars for Omani nationals and expatriates. This year, customers will be able to start paying their installment after 2 months of loan disbursal. I would like to stress that Sayyarati has some of the best interest rates in the country, including 4% for a period up to 2 years and 4.25% for loan tenors of 3 years and 4.5% for a 4-year loan tenor." He invited customers to benefit from the exclusive features Bank Muscat's Ramadan offers provide.

Mehdi Salim al Harthi - general manager and head of

Through our partnership with GIG Gulf we are happy to continue offering the best insurance services

ABDULLAH TAMMAN AL MAASHANI

Partnerships – Oman, GIG Gulf, said, "We are delighted to continue strengthening our strategic partnership with Bank Muscat and continue introducing various offers for customers. We hope through the current offer to provide customers with added value so they can fully benefit from the comprehensive Motor Insurance package from GIG."

Some unique features of the GIG Gulf Motor Insurance plan are that customers will be able to get 24x7 roadside assistance and recovery, guaranteed repairs and extended opening hours.

TENDER NOTICE GRAND HYATT MUSCAT

Grand Hyatt, Muscat invites sealed tenders from established and reliable vendors for supply of the following items on a rate contract for the period commencing from April 1, 2024 to April 31, 2024.

Category	DESCRIPTION
Food & Beverage	Lamb/Mutton; Buffalo Meat; Poultry; Pork & Pork Products; Fish/Seafood; Fresh fruits & Vegetables Local/Imported; Frozen Food Products/ Frozen Coldcuts; Fresh Milk & Dairy Products; Ice Creams; Dry Provisions/Groceries Local&Imported Pastires Flour (Canned, Spices, Dry Fruits, Spices and Portion packs); Indian Sweets & Savoury; AssortedBreads;IndianBreads,ArabicBread,Frozenbread,Arabic-Sweet,Savoury &Snacks. Coffee/Tea; Beverages; Drinks; Sodas; Soft Drinks; Fruit Juices; Milk; Energy Drink. Soy-based Beverages;
General Items	Printing Press, Office & Computer Stationery; Cleaning Supplies; Fuel Gel& Charcoal; Flowers; Consumables & Swimming Pool Chemicals; F&B Supplies; Guest Supplies; Packaging Materials & Disposables.
Services	Freight & Courier Services (Domestic&International); Transport & Courier; Services (Staff, Cargo, Purchasing and Frozen Food Transport); Scrap Disposal; Contractors (Civil, Plumbing, Electrical, Painting, Polishing; Carpentry; Fabrication, Motor Rewinding; Decorators; Hiring of Furniture, Serial Lights, Generator Sets). Tailoring & Uniform Services.
Others	Electrical & Hardware Materials; Computer Peripherals & Printer Cartridges; Paints; Plumbing Materials; Construction Materials; Air Conditioning Spares; Refrigeration & Cooling Spares, Pool AMC cleaning

The tender is subject to the following :

- The hotel reserves the rights to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reasons whatsoever and no representation shall be entertained on this account
- Rates must be inclusive of freight and any other charges.
- The detailed tender forms can be obtained from Finance department by paying OMR 5/- (non-refundable) at the hotel between 9:00 AM and 2:00PM

Sealed tender must be addressed to the attention of :

Materials Manager
Grand Hyatt Muscat
Shaa Al Qurum DiplomaRc District
PO Box 951, Muscat 133, Sultanate of Oman
00 968 246 411 50 Telephone
00 968 246 012 23 Fax

Director of Finance
Grand Hyatt Muscat
Shaa Al Qurum DiplomaRc District
PO Box 951, Muscat 133, Sultanate of Oman
00968 246 411 32 TELEPHONE
00 968 246 052 68 Fax

Moscow terror attack: Death toll rises to 115, 11 detained

Assailants stormed Crocus City concert hall late on Friday, opened fire and set the venue on fire

Moscow, Russia - Death toll from shooting at the Crocus City concert hall in Moscow region rose to 115 as more bodies were pulled from under the debris, the Russian Investigative Committee said on Saturday.

Assailants stormed the hall late on Friday, opened fire, killing at least 115 people, injuring more than 145 others and setting fire to the venue. Parts of the building collapsed, complicating the search and rescue operation.

The terrorist attack took lives of three children, the investigative body said in a statement, noting that the figure was likely to increase.

The committee identified gunshot wounds and poisoning from combustion products as the most common causes of death.

The data on the number of injuries, meanwhile, differed. The Moscow region Health Ministry published a list of 147 people who were admitted to medical care after the incident, while Russian



A billboard displaying the image of a candle to mourn victims of a terrorist attack in Moscow, Russia, on Saturday (Xinhua)

Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said 115 people were injured, including five children. The Emergency Ministry published a list of 99 injured.

Murashko emphasised that 60 people are in a critical condition, and doctors are fighting for their lives. Hundreds of people came to medical centres to donate their blood to injured people, with the Health Ministry saying blood will be needed in coming weeks to treat burns.

11 people arrested

The Investigative Committee said it detained 11 people, including four perpetrators, in the border region of Bryansk who were heading to Ukraine.

Separately, the Federal Security Force (FSB) said it learned that a handler was waiting for the group on the Ukrainian side of the border to facilitate the passage and provide cover.

“Trying to escape, the terrorists were heading towards the

Russian-Ukrainian border, planned to cross out and had contacts on the Ukrainian side,” it said in a statement.

The FSB said the group offered resistance, but was ultimately held and was being transported to Moscow for further investigation. According to authorities a main highway leading to Ukraine was closed, and other important roads were being thoroughly monitored.

The FSB is working on identi-

fying the accomplice base of the perpetrators of the terrorist attack, said agency head Aleksandr Bortnikov.

Attack condemned

Chinese President Xi Jinping condemned on Saturday the attack in the Moscow region of Russia. In a condolence message to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, Xi said China opposes all forms of terrorism, strongly condemns terrorist attacks, and

AU urges member states to end TB by 2030

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Tuberculosis (TB) is one of the major causes of death in Africa, killing hundreds of thousands of people every year, African Union (AU) officials have said.

The member states and partners were urged to take immediate action to ensure a holistic and comprehensive TB response to end TB in Africa by 2030

The officials made the remarks at an event to mark the 2024 World Tuberculosis Day, which falls on March 24 every year to raise people’s awareness of the deadly disease, at the AU headquarters here, on the theme of ‘Yes! We can end TB’. “The statistics are sobering with Africa bearing a disproportionate burden, accounting for 23 per cent of the global TB burden and over 33 per cent of TB deaths,” said Sheila Shawa, a senior technical specialist of the African Union Commission (AUC).

Referring to a WHO report, Shawa said TB topped the leading causes of death in the continent in the following year. She said vulnerable populations such as children and adolescents can be at much higher risk especially when their immune systems are compromised by malnutrition, HIV or other chronic diseases.

Xinhua

US Senate passes \$1.2tn funding package, averting threat of shutdown

Washington D.C., US - A US\$1.2tn funding package was approved by the US Senate in the early hours of Saturday following a last-minute consensus, thereby preventing a potential partial government shutdown.

The package, which fully funds the government through September, ends a months-long fight over spending that persisted six months into the fiscal year. The legislation was approved by a vote of 74 to 24, and will now be sent to President Joe Biden to be signed into law.

“We have funded the government with significant investments for parents and kids and small businesses and health care workers and military families and so much more. Our efforts have paid off with a strong funding bill that now goes to President Biden’s desk,” Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on X. Earlier he had said that an



The legislation was approved by a vote of 74 to 24, and will now be sent to President Joe Biden to be signed into law

‘agreement to complete the job of funding the government tonight’ had been reached. “It wasn’t easy, but tonight our persistence has been worth it. It is good for the American people

that we have reached this deal.”

The bill includes money for the departments of State, Homeland Security, Defence, Labour and Health and Human Services, as well as funds for foreign oper-

ations, financial services and the legislative branch. Another package, which funds the rest of the government, was passed by Congress two weeks ago.

Anadolu Agency

Sweden reports lowest birth rate in nearly 300 years

Izmir, Turkey - There has been a downward trend in happiness in Sweden since 2010 regarding native women and women born abroad, despite the country placing fourth on the World Happiness report that was presented earlier this week.

Swedish women, on average, now give birth to 1.45 children - the lowest since measurements began in 1749.

“So far in 2024, the curve continues to go downwards,” Guadalupe Andersson, population statistician at the Statistics Sweden government agency, SCB, said in a statement.

Last year, the number of newborns was the lowest since 2003, and the number of children born per woman was the lowest ever measured in Sweden, said Andersson. And the Swedish population seems to be on the way to a new low. In January, fewer children were born than at the start of 2023, the year with the fewest



People stroll in Kungsträdgården park in Central Stockholm, Sweden

births.

The biggest decrease in child-bearing was Malmö in southern Sweden, in terms of the number of children born.

Several women said they are hesitant to become parents. Most cite the climate and unrest in the world as reasons.

“How will the children live? What will society look like?”

Sanna Tayari told SVT broadcaster. The fact that fewer children are being born has started to get attention.

In 2023, there were 26 municipalities where fewer than 40 children were born. The fewest number were born in the Dorotea municipality in the north with just eight children.

Anadolu Agency

NASA’s observatory spies supermassive black hole unlike any other

Istanbul, Turkey - NASA’s Chandra X-ray Observatory has revealed a supermassive black hole, classified as a quasar, which has confounded scientists’ expectations.

On its official website, NASA reported H1821+643, the closest quasar to Earth, located 3.4bn light-years away within a cluster of galaxies, but seemingly less active than its counterparts.

Led by Helen Russell and her team, astrophysicists scrutinising the quasar’s surroundings uncovered a surprising truth: It exerts minimal impact on its host galaxy. Quasars, voracious supermassive black holes, typically exhibit fierce activity, consuming

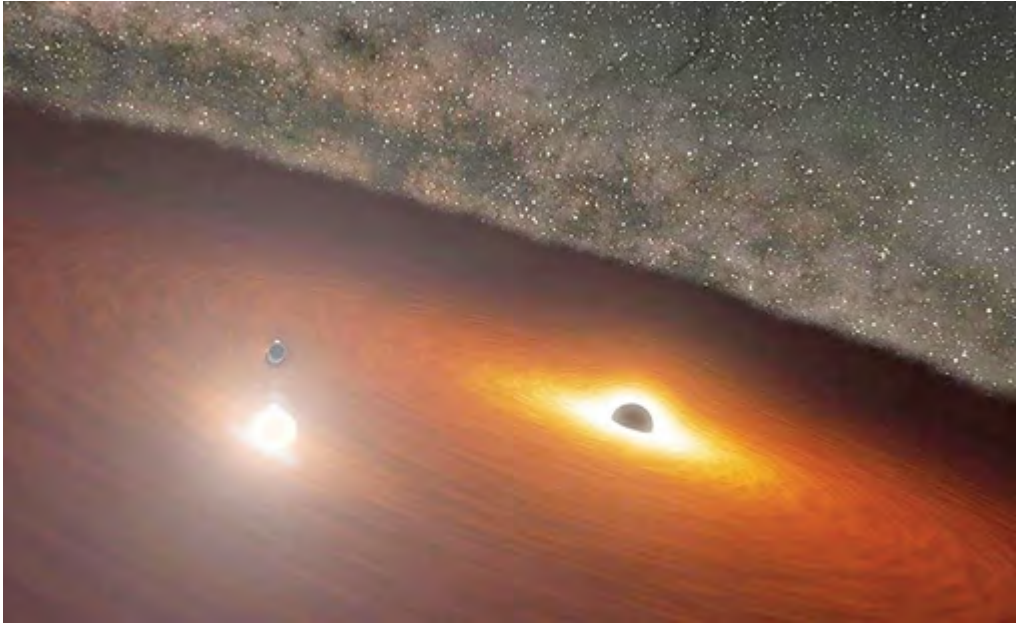
matter voraciously, emitting intense radiation as well as powerful jets, according to the US space agency.

Yet, H1821+643, despite its proximity and apparent vitality, has baffled astronomers with its lacklustre performance.

While traditional supermassive black holes regulate star formation by moderating the cooling of intergalactic gases, quasars like H1821+643 appear to defy this expectation.

However, Chandra’s discerning gaze is helping scientists study the cosmic landscape surrounding the quasar.

“The researchers carefully removed the X-ray glare to reveal



NASA reported H1821+643, the closest quasar to Earth, located 3.4bn light-years away within a cluster of galaxies, but seemingly less active than its counterparts

what the black hole’s influence is, which is reflected in the new composite image showing X-rays from hot gas in the cluster surrounding the quasar,” NASA noted.

The gas density near H1821+643’s host galaxy failed to show the expected turbulence, instead displaying calm conditions and cool temperatures, despite the quasar’s im-

mense presence. “The density of gas near the black hole in the centre of the galaxy is much higher, and the gas temperatures much lower, than in regions farther away,” NASA said.

The discovery of H1821+643 has challenged conventional wisdom, prompting a re-evaluation of cosmic forces within quasars and host galaxies.

Anadolu Agency

Palestinian president accuses Israel of ‘deliberately causing thirst’ in Gaza

Ramallah, Palestine - Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas accused Israel on Friday of ‘deliberately causing thirst’ and spreading diseases in the Gaza Strip, according to the Palestinian news agency, WAFA.

Abbas made the remarks on World Water Day, which is celebrated annually on March 22.

“World Water Day this year comes at a time when our Palestinian people in Gaza are experiencing, like never before, the most heinous inhuman crimes of the occupation, which have claimed the lives of thousands of innocent victims, including mar-

tyrs, wounded, mostly children, women, and elderly,” he said.

Abbas added that Gazans ‘stand in long lines for hours to get a little water, under the Israeli bombardment that targets them mercilessly, deliberately causing thirst, spreading diseases and epidemics among them, especially with the malfunctioning of sewage systems and the flooding of wastewater.”

He said the Israeli aggression and deliberate destruction of the water and sewage sector in Gaza deprived residents of essential life components and exacerbated the water crisis.



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas

Abbas noted that the per capita water share in Gaza is currently three litres per day, while the minimum recommended by the World Health Organization is 120 litres and 15 litres for survival. It means that the individual’s share of water in Gaza is equivalent to 2.5 per cent of the WHO recommended level and 20 per cent of the minimum needed for survival.

He said the available water quantities in Gaza do not exceed 10 per cent – 20 per cent of what they were before the aggression, due to the damage inflicted on the infrastructure and water fa-

cilities.

He emphasised that the water issue ‘with the occupation has been going on for decades; it continues to plunder our water resources and hinder efforts to develop the water and sewage sector to achieve its strategic goal of controlling water to ensure the sustainability of its state, at the expense of our historical water rights’.

He questioned how the world can raise the slogan of water for peace while children in Gaza drink sea and contaminated water and die of thirst.

Abbas urged the international

community to immediately stop the brutal aggression against Palestinians, secure the entry of medical supplies, food and necessary items to provide water, electricity and fuel to Gaza and prevent the displacement of Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem.

He also urged the international community to stand with Palestinian people and their just rights and work to find a comprehensive solution to end the occupation and establish an independent Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem.

Anadolu Agency

‘Israel threatens to destroy Al-Shifa Medical Complex with people inside’

Gaza media office said it received testimonies from inside the medical complex

Gaza City, Palestine - The Israeli army threatened to destroy the Al-Shifa Medical Complex in northern Gaza with medical teams and patients inside, media office in the enclave said on Saturday.

“We received testimonies from inside Al-Shifa Medical Complex indicating that the Israeli occupation army threatened the medical staff and the displaced people sheltering there that it would destroy the hospital buildings with them inside,” Gaza media office said in a statement.

The army demanded that the Palestinians inside the hospital ‘head out for torture, investigation, and execution,” it added.

Israel first raided Al-Shifa hospital, the largest medical facility in the territory that houses thousands of patients and displaced people, last November, arguing that Palestinian group Hamas used it as a command centre. The latest attack began on Monday.

The media office condemned the ‘organised crime’ that the Israeli army continues to commit



The Israeli army has been carrying out an offensive in the vicinity of Al-Shifa Hospital since Monday

The Israeli army threatened the medical staff and displaced people that it would destroy the hospital buildings with them inside

GAZA MEDIA OFFICE

‘with all brutality and vengeance’. It held the American administration and the international community ‘fully responsible’ for the raids.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army on Saturday said the number of Palestinians killed in raids and attacks around the Gaza Strip’s Al-Shifa Hospital rose to 170.

The military in a statement on X said the Israeli army and Shin Bet security forces continue ‘targeted fighting’ in the area while

‘avoiding harm to civilians, patients, medical teams and medical equipment’.

Troops killed about 170 Palestinians and arrested more than 800 ‘suspects’, the statement said, claiming to have recovered weapons as well.

The Israeli army has been carrying out an offensive in the vicinity of Al-Shifa Hospital since Monday, putting the lives of thousands of patients and displaced Palestinians in danger.

Death toll climbs to 32,142

At least 72 more Palestinians were killed and 114 others injured over the last 24 hours, as Israel continues its onslaught on the besieged Gaza Strip, the territory’s Health Ministry said on Saturday.

“The Israeli occupation (forces) committed seven massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 72 martyrs and 114 injured during the past 24

hours,” a ministry statement said.

“Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them,” it added.

Flouting the International Court of Justice’s provisional ruling, Israel continues its onslaught on the Gaza Strip where at least 32,142 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, and 74,412 injured since October 7, according to Palestinian health authorities.

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Hamas, which Tel Aviv says killed nearly 1,200 people.

The Israeli war on Gaza has pushed 85 per cent of the territory’s population into internal displacement amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicine.

Besides, another three Palestinian journalists were killed in fresh Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip on Saturday, bringing the death toll to 136 since October 7, 2023, media office in the enclave said. A statement by the media office identified the slain journalists as Muhammad Al-Rifi, Abdul Rahman Saima, and Mahmoud Imad Issa.

In an earlier statement, the office said: “Israel deliberately killed journalists in Gaza in order to silence the voice of Palestinians, to hide the facts, and to prevent information from reaching the regional and international public.”

Anadolu Agency

Israel detains 15 more in West Bank

Ramallah, Palestine - The Israeli army on Saturday detained at least 15 Palestinians from areas across the occupied West Bank, including the arrest of former detainees.

According to a joint statement by the Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners Affairs Authority and the Palestinian Prisoner Society, the new arrests brought the total number of Palestinians detained by the Israeli forces since October 7, 2023 to 7,740.

The arrests mainly took place in the cities of Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Tubas, and Nablus.

During the Israeli arrest campaigns, the Israeli forces beat and abused Palestinians and damaged their homes and properties, the statement also said. According to figures by the two rights groups, the total number of Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails exceeds 9,000, including 3,500 held under administrative detention with no trial or charge.

Tensions have been high across West Bank since Israel launched a military offensive against the Gaza Strip on October 7. At least 449 Palestinians from the West Bank have been killed by the Israeli forces and settlers since then, in addition to over 4,750 others injured.

Anadolu Agency



US destroys Houthi targets in Yemen

Istanbul, Turkey - US Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Saturday that American forces destroyed Houthi targets in Yemen.

“On March 22, between approximately 4:22am and 11:10pm (Sanaa time), United States Central Command (CENTCOM) forces successfully engaged and destroyed four unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen in self-defence,” CENTCOM wrote on X.

It reported that during the timeframe, the Houthi group fired four anti-ship ballistic missiles from Yemen toward the Red Sea. There were no injuries or damage reported by the US, coalition or

commercial ships, it said.

CENTCOM said its forces conducted ‘self-defence strikes against three Houthi underground storage facilities in Iranian-backed Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen’. “Houthi attacks have killed three mariners, sunk a commercial vessel lawfully transiting the Red Sea, disrupted humanitarian aid bound for Yemen, harmed Middle East economies, and caused environmental damage,” it added.

Yemen’s Houthi group has been targeting cargo ships in the Red Sea owned or operated by Israeli companies or transporting goods to and from Israel.

Anadolu Agency

Pakistan marks national day, displays its military might

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan on Saturday celebrated its national day amid a display of the country’s military might at a parade in the capital Islamabad.

The traditional military parade, aired on the state-run Pakistan Television (PTV), was held in the Shakarparian parade ground and attended by President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, and services chiefs, while Saudi Defence Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman Al Saud also participated in the ceremony as a guest of honour.

Several units from Pakistan’s army, air force, and navy participated in the parade, with fighter jets, including JF-17s and F-16s, flying past the crowds.

The nuclear-capable missiles Shaheen I, II, and III, along with Ghouri, Babar, and Nasr missiles, were also displayed.

Contingents of Azerbaijani and Chinese militaries also took part in the parade.

The day dawned with a 31-gun salute in Islamabad and a 21-gun salute in all four provincial capitals, followed by change-of-guards ceremonies at the



Several units from Pakistan’s army, air force, and navy participated in the parade

We are a peace-loving country and responsible nuclear state. However, let me make it clear that we will not compromise on our sovereignty

ASIF ALI ZARDARI

mausoleums of Quaid-I-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of the South Asian nation, in the port city of Karachi, and the mausoleum of Allama Mohammad Iqbal, a national poet, in the northeastern city of

Lahore.

Similar ceremonies were also held in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, PTV reported.

Held annually in Lahore on March 23, the event commemorates the 1940 independence

resolution - commonly known as the Pakistan Resolution - which demanded for the first time an independent state, comprising Muslim-majority states in the then-United India under British colonial rule.

The passing of the landmark resolution subsequently led to the creation of Pakistan on August 14, 1947, marking the end of over 150 years of British colonial rule. Speaking at the ceremony, President Zardari said Pakistan wants good relations with all its

neighbours, but warned that Islamabad will not compromise its sovereignty.

“We are a peace-loving country and responsible nuclear state. However, let me make it clear that we will not compromise on our sovereignty. Our nation and our armed forces are always ready to respond to any aggression at all times. We will not tolerate any effort by terrorists or any groups to destabilise our country,” he said, adding: “Today’s parade is a reminder of our unity, strength, and pride.”

Zardari did not name any country or group but referred to his country’s tensed ties with arch-rival India and recent terrorist attacks carried out by the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a conglomerate of various militant groups, in northwestern Pakistan killing dozens of soldiers and civilians in recent months.

On Sunday night, Islamabad Air Force also carried out an airstrike inside Afghanistan after militants attacked its forces in the Waziristan region.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

Jaishankar begins Singapore visit with homage to Netaji, ‘brave’ INA soldiers

Singapore - External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar kicked off his Singapore visit on Saturday by paying homage to Subhash Chandra Bose and the brave Indian National Army soldiers.

The INA Marker in Singapore, which Jaishankar visited recognises the deep patriotism of the Indian National Army soldiers.

In a post on X, Jaishankar wrote: “Began my Singapore visit by paying homage to Netaji and the brave Indian National Army soldiers.”

“The INA Marker in Singapore recognises their deep patriotism and indomitable spirit that remain an inspiration for generations to come,” he added.

Located within Esplanade Park in Singapore, the Indian National Army monument is one of the eleven World War II historic site markers erected in 1995 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II.

It stands on the site of the original memorial- dedicated to an unknown soldier from the Indian National Army (INA)- that was destroyed after the war.

The original monument was built at the Esplanade just before the Japanese surrendered. On July 8, 1945, Bose laid its foundation stone



S Jaishankar

at the Esplanade. The words inscribed were the motto of the INA: Unity (Etihaad), Faith (Etmad) and Sacrifice (Kurbani).

When British forces returned to Singapore in 1945, the Head of Southeast Asia Command, Lord Mountbatten, ordered the original Memorial to be demolished.

Jaishankar is on an official visit to Singapore, the Philippines and Malaysia at the invitation of his counterparts, according to an official release of the Ministry of External Affairs.

The visit of the EAM spanning five days from March 23-27 will focus on enhancing bilateral relations with the three countries and will provide an opportunity for engagement on regional issues of mutual concern.

ANI

Kejriwal moves Delhi HC challenging arrest, remand

New Delhi, India - Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, on Saturday, moved the Delhi High Court, challenging his arrest and the order of remand passed by the trial court on Friday.

This comes a day after the Rouse Avenue Court sent Kejriwal to ED custody till March 28.

CM Kejriwal’s legal team said that his plea in Delhi HC stated that both the arrest and the remand order are ‘illegal’ and he is entitled to be released from custody immediately.

An immediate hearing has been sought from the acting chief justice, preferably by Sunday, March 24.

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED) arrested Kejriwal on Thursday in connection with the alleged Delhi excise policy case.

The AAP Chief was produced before Rouse Avenue Court under tight security on Friday.

While entering the court complex, Kejriwal told reporters: “My life is dedicated to the country, whether I am inside or outside the prison.”

The ED arrested Kejriwal after the Delhi High Court refused him interim protection from coercive action in connection with the excise policy case.

The case pertains to alleged irregularities and money laundering in framing and implementing the Delhi excise policy case 2022, which was later



Police personnel detain AAP supporters protesting against the arrest of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, at Shaheed park in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal’s legal team said that his plea in Delhi HC stated that both the arrest and the remand order are ‘illegal’ and he is entitled to be released from custody immediately

scrapped.

Amid continuing protests against the arrest of Kejriwal, AAP leader and minister Saurabh Bhardwaj on Saturday said all party MLAs and the councillors arrived at a consensus following consultations that the former will continue to hold the reins of the national capital despite being in ED custody.

Speaking to ANI on Saturday, Bhardwaj, who was detained along with fellow minister Atishi while leading an AAP protest in the national capital against Kejriwal’s arrest on Friday, said: “Arvind Kejriwal will do whatever people want. He has always made his decisions in public interest and considering the greater good. Before making

this decision (to run the affairs of Delhi from ED custody, he got in touch with all his MLAs, held meetings, and met the councillors. We also spoke with people in all wards. Everyone said Arvind Kejriwal should continue as the CM, as there is no rule that stops him from running the government from jail (ED custody).”

On the ongoing raids by ED at the premises of sitting MLA Gulab Singh Yadav, Bhardwaj claims the action was merely aimed at scaring the Opposition into silence.

Accusing the BJP-led Centre of putting the entire Opposition behind bars, the AAP leader

said: “People not just in the country but across the world are seeing how the BJP-led government at the Centre is busy putting the entire Opposition in jail. This country is following in the path of Russia (referring to alleged suppression of Opposition leaders in the country). Such occurrences are also commonplace in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and North Korea. Now, India is following in the same path. The largest democracy in the world is now drifting towards dictatorship, where the basic rights of people are denied and the Opposition is muzzled and suppressed.”

ANI

OPEN TO PUBLIC



Tourist clicks pictures of the blooming tulips at Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden after it has been opened for public, in Srinagar on Saturday (ANI)

Kavitha’s custody extended till Tuesday

New Delhi, India - The Rouse Avenue Court in Delhi has extended BRS (Bharat Rashtriya Samithi) leader K Kavitha’s ED (Enforcement Directorate) remand till March 26. As the BRS leader was being produced in the court on Saturday she alleged that her arrest is illegal, adding that she is going to fight it out in court.

Kavitha told reporters: “This is an illegal arrest. We are going to fight it out in court. It is a political case, a fabricated case, a false case. We are fighting it out. There is nothing new, they are asking the same things again and again.”

“Why so many arrests during election time? Political arrest? ECI should intervene,” she added after the verdict was read out.

The BRS leader was produced before the special judge



BRS MLC K Kavitha speaks to the media while being brought to Rouse Avenue Court in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

in connection with the Delhi Excise Policy case, as her ED custody ended today. The ED had moved an application seeking an extension of K Kavitha’s remand for another five days. The national probe agency while seeking further five days’ remand of the BRS leader informed the court that searches

are underway at the latter’s nephew Mekha Saran’s residence.

Earlier on Friday, the Supreme Court refused to entertain K Kavitha’s bail plea in the Delhi excise policy case and asked her to move the trial court with the direction that if the bail application filed will be decided

expeditiously.

A bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna, M M Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi remarked that it has to follow a uniform policy for all and can’t allow people to approach the top court directly for bail as they are political people. The court said that BRS leader K Kavitha could move the trial court or invoke any other remedy for the grant of bail. The court directed that if a bail application is filed then it should be decided expeditiously.

K Kavitha, through her advocate P Mohith Rao, had moved the Supreme Court on Monday challenging her arrest by an ED team on March 15 and she had been in ED’s custodial interrogation for seven days. She was arrested after a search operation conducted at her residence in Hyderabad.

ANI

Indian Navy will ensure piracy is prevented: Admiral Hari Kumar

New Delhi, India - Vowing further naval interventions to secure distressed shipping assets on the high seas, Navy Chief, Admiral R Hari Kumar on Saturday flagged concerns over the resurfacing of piracy as an ‘industry’ to gain from ‘disorder in the region’.

Addressing media persons on the completion of hundred days of naval operations against operations for anti-drone, anti-missile, and anti-piracy attacks in the Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, and Red Sea, Admiral Hari Kumar said the Navy will continue taking affirmative action to prevent such incidents, adding that ‘Operation Sankalp’, the naval operation to secure the

crew of Bulgaria-flagged merchant vessel MV Ruen, has broken the myth of short and swift operations and stressed the need for sustained interventions to ensure the safety and stability of shipping assets in the oceans.

“Piracy has resurfaced as an industry to gain from the disorder in the region. We will take affirmative action to prevent that,” the Navy chief said at the press conference on Saturday.

“Operation Sankalp has broken the myth of short and swift operations and stressed the need for sustained operations to ensure safety and stability in the oceans. The pace of operations is quite high and we have 11 submarines and 30 warships oper-



Navy Chief, Admiral R Hari Kumar

ating in different parts of the ocean to ensure coverage of all areas of interest,” Admiral Hari Kumar added.

The Indian Navy has completed hundred days of naval operations against operations for anti-drone, anti-missile, and anti-piracy attacks in the Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, and Red Sea

“We have deployed 10 warships in the entire region for anti-piracy, anti-missile, and anti-drone operations under

Operation Sankalp. The task is to ensure safety and stability for merchant vessels carrying cargo to reach shores safely. Because they are deployed there, they can respond to attacks or incidents as first responders,” the Navy chief added.

The Navy chief noted that no Indian vessels were targeted by pirates, adding that the Houthis were targeting vessels linked to Israel. “None of our Indian vessels have been targeted. The Houthis have been targeting vessels with linkages to Israel. They are also targeting ships with flags of Western countries like the UK and the US. We are getting involved because we have Indian crew on almost all

these ships,” he said.

Calling the Maritime Piracy Act 2022 a ‘great enabler’, Admiral Hari Kumar added that it has now enabled the force to visit, board and search pirated ships. “The Maritime Piracy Act 2022 has now enabled us to visit, board and search pirated ships. This act is a great enabler. In the last 100 days, we may have made at least 1000 such boardings,” he said.

“Details of the ships can be found with the automatic identification system and it is easy for Houthis in Yemen, and that is how they have been targeting the ships through missiles and drones. Drones are also being used to monitor the ships,” the

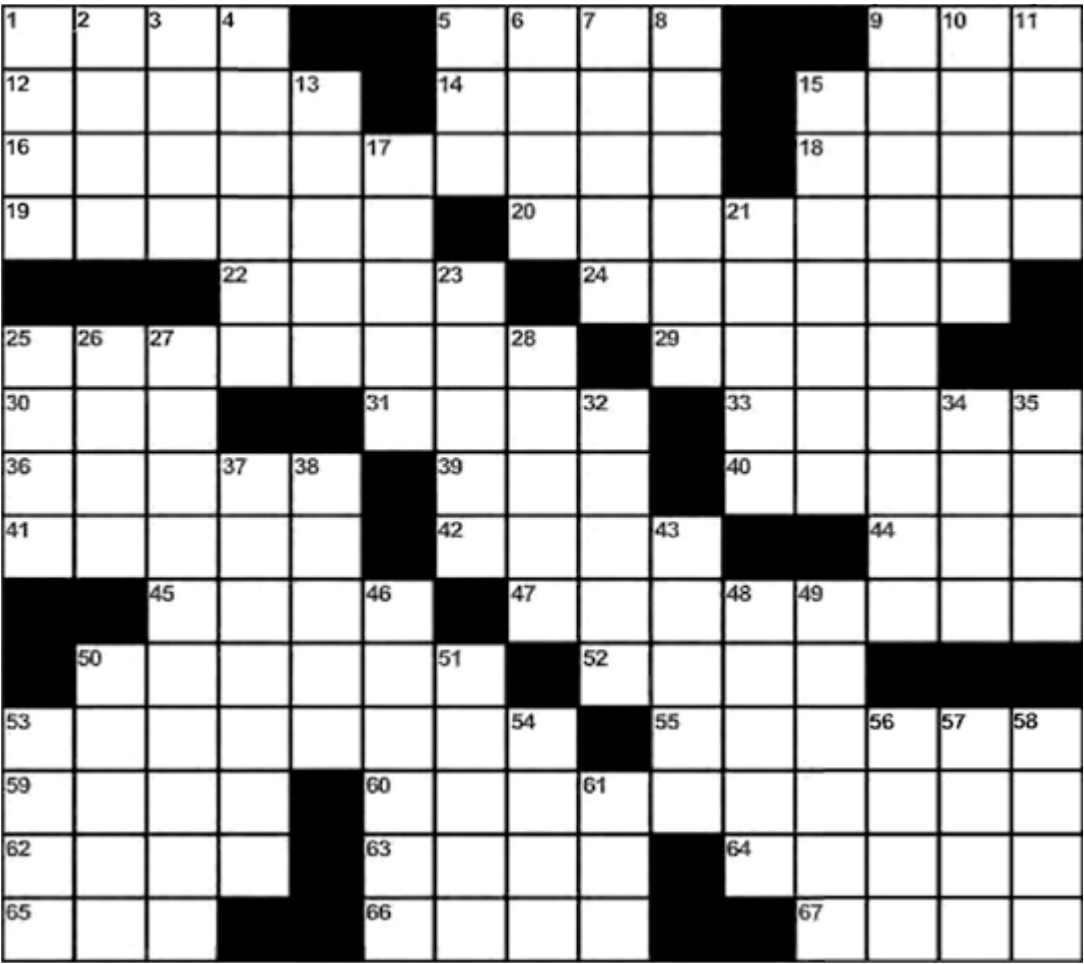
Navy chief added.

Earlier, on Saturday, as many as 35 Somali pirates, who were captured by the Indian Navy, were handed over to Mumbai Police after due formalities of Customs and Immigration.

Visuals from the Naval Dockyard, Mumbai, showed the pirates standing in a queue as Mumbai Police assigned them chest numbers. The operation involved a navy destroyer, a patrol ship, an Indian Air Force C-17 transporter flying more than 1,500 miles to airdrop marine commandos, a naval drone, a reconnaissance drone and a P-8 surveillance jet, the Indian Navy release said.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Architect's detail
- 5) Chooses
- 9) Bacon feature
- 12) Give here, give there
- 14) Length times width, sometimes
- 15) "A_ of Two Cities"
- 16) Facade
- 18) Earthen dish used by the Pueblos
- 19) Crown cover
- 20) Quagmires
- 22) "Was harsh?"
- 24) The_ Lewis Trio
- 25) Fast food condiments
- 29) Not mama
- 30) Sympathetic attention
- 31) Mail carriers have them (Abbr.)
- 33) "The Planets" composer Gustav
- 36) Overly proper person
- 39) Fury
- 40) Gambler's money
- 41) Not reactive, as some gases
- 42) Former French president
- 44) Regret
- 45) Grand achievement
- 4 7) Getaway driver
- 50) King of the hill

DOWN

- 1) Ump's call, sometimes
- 2) Eschew spontaneity
- 3) Noted first name in jazz
- 4) Type of dust or ray
- 5) Dinghy thingle
- 6) Formal high school dance
- 7) Voice higher than baritone
- 8) Ancient Persian ruler
- 9) Time waster for fire-fighters
- 10) Space between buildings
- 11) Oolong and gunpowder
- 13) Canines and molars
- 15) Pink elephant sighter

17) Bakery staple

- 21) Nannies of Nanjing
- 23) Fiber type
- 25) French military hat
- 26) Acquire through merit
- 27) Cyndi Lauper classic
- 28) Asian goat antelope
- 32) Actors Green and Rogen
- 34) Antarctic flyer
- 35) "Happy Days" type
- 37) Raincloud's warning
- 38) Student's music
- 43) Another bakery staple
- 46) Like houseplants
- 48) Prevent at the bar
- 49) Thumbed (through)
- 50) Some big horns
- 51) Madison's veep
- 53) Be an omen of
- 54) Ridge of sand created by the wind
- 56) Unit of pressure
- 57) Official language of Pakistan
- 58) Self-important
- 61) Poetic "always"

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It's important to be around people who share the same values as you right now. Your emotions are stirring around the issues and topics that mean the most to you, and if you are forced to deal with someone from the other side of things, you are likely to let your temper get the best of you. You're a passionate person, and your passions are hot right now. Walk away from people who try to push your buttons too. You don't need to get into any drama with anyone.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Unpleasant family conflicts are finally fading into the sunset now, so you can expect more harmony in your home. You might even want to integrate some of your family members into your social circle. A casual dinner party might be just the ticket to introduce everyone. Good food brings out good conversation, so pick a menu that everyone will love, or have it catered if cooking isn't your thing. When all the people who love you are in one room together, you'll feel it.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your analytical skills are adequate for any research you're doing right now in your working life, but when it comes to figuring stuff out in your love life, you can't use logic. Facts are nonexistent. You only have your gut to go on when it comes to emotions. People are too complicated to be figured out objectively, plus they are known to change their mind. If you want to unravel your feelings about someone, just let yourself feel what you feel. Don't try to tell yourself how to feel.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You need to get your new plan or project launched as soon as you can, so if you need help, you need to ask for it today. Time is of the essence. Swallow your pride and talk to that person you know could get you right across the finish line. Find out if they have the time to come to your rescue. Use your charm to get them on your side if you have to. Flattery might be your best bet, especially since this person considers you an excellent judge of character.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You will be with extremely compatible people today, but don't be afraid to disagree with them just for the sake of it. Everyone's in a good mood, so playing devil's advocate isn't going to make anyone mad. In fact, they might relish the chance to defend their position and get into a friendly debate about their views. Being in a circle of friends who always agree with each other is nice, but sometimes you need to mix it up a little bit to keep everyone on their toes.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You might be confused in your romantic relationship right now, but unfortunately there is no instruction booklet to consult. Your friends are there to offer you advice, but be careful not to take what they say literally. Every situation is different, and while what they say might resonate with you, it also might not create the same results for you that it did for them. Be faithful to yourself and what's in your heart. Ultimately, your heart will tell you what you need to do to protect yourself.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

This is a great day for action, but it isn't such a great day for deep thinking. Your brain is excellent at coming up with new schemes and plans right now, but maybe not so hot at understanding complex ideas or calculations. Mental absorption is not going to be your forte today, so it's not a great day for lectures or convoluted foreign films. You won't have the patience. Social activities are a much better option for your energy today. So get out and stir up some new adventures.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Someone who isn't exactly your favorite person in the world will do something that makes your life a lot easier today, and you need to be very vocal with your gratitude. That way, you will make it clear that you don't believe in being petty or holding grudges. Show the Universe that you know how to wipe the slate clean and make a fresh start with anyone who is willing to treat you with respect. You don't have to become their new best friend, but you do need to start over.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Your vision is sharp today, and you should keep it open all day long. Be on the lookout for minor differences that could turn into major drama if left unaddressed. Everybody else around you is a bit distracted by their work. They aren't totally aware of the stuff going on at the sidelines. But details matter, and you should pay attention to them very carefully. If you have been itching to make some changes, today offers you a great opportunity to do just that.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Staying inside your comfort zone might not seem very adventurous, but if you stick to familiar people and experiences right now, you will gain a deep confidence that could propel you into a very powerful phase of life. Try to be more receptive to the idea that something doesn't have to be new to be fascinating or instructive. You can look back and see your future. All it takes is a fresh perspective and the courage to see the value in your past mistakes.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If someone is getting on your nerves today, focus on the parts of their personality that you can understand well. There are aspects of them that you really appreciate, aren't there? Separating the good parts of people from their bad parts will enable you to keep from getting caught up in petty emotional soap operas that really don't matter in the long run. If you are forced into intense collaboration with some of these annoying folks today, keep a level head.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The line between reality and fantasy could get quite blurry today. Amazing coincidences and double takes could lead you to believe that the hands of fate are pushing you in a very particular direction. And this could be true, which is exciting. You will feel a building sense of good energy, and your task today will be to give it someplace productive to go. Get involved in a project, the more artistic the better. It's time to let your creativity run free.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Tsvetana Pironkova is involved in which sport?

- A. Cycling
- B. Soccer
- C. Tennis
- D. Gymnastics

02. Through its CEO, Pete Dcter, Pixar has won the Oscar for Best Animated Feature for several films which he directed.

Which was NOT one?

- A. Inside Out (2015)
- B. Up (2009)
- C. Monsters Inc (2001)
- D. Soul (2020)

03. Which of these is a percussion instrument?

- A. Sanshin
- B. Biwa
- C. Tsuzumi
- D. Shakuhachi

Answers: 1. C 2. C 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	E	D	I
G	A	D	I
B	N	M	N
O	Y	O	D

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

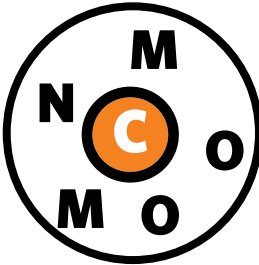
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

'I THINK MY FUTURE WILL BE RESOLVED BEFORE EUROS'

Wantaway PSG superstar Mbappe keen to represent France in Olympics

Decines-Charpieu, France - Kylian Mbappe believes he will know which club he will join next season before the European Championship kicks off in June, the France forward said on Friday.

Mbappe, who is set to leave Paris St Germain in the summer, said his focus was on representing his national team in the Euros as well as the Olympics in Paris, if he is allowed to be available for selection.

"I have still not announced anything on my future as I've nothing to announce... I've always said that when I have something to announce, I'll do it as a man," he told reporters ahead of Saturday's friendly against Germany.

"I think my future will be resolved before the Euros, yes."

Mbappe said playing in the



Kylian Mbappe

Olympics would be a dream but the decision is not up to the 25-year-old. "I always wanted to play at the Olympics and my desire has not changed... but if I'm not allowed to, then I will do as I'm told," he said.

The Olympics men's soccer tournament is played between Under-23 sides, with only three

I have still not announced anything on my future as I have nothing to announce... I've always said that when I have something to announce, I will do it as a man

KYLIAN MBAPPE

players over that age limit allowed in each squad.

France head coach Didier Deschamps said playing Germany was always an exciting affair, even in a friendly.

"It's not a competitive game but it's still a great one," he said.

"All matches are important. You're going to judge. Me and the staff will use them to get some more answers before the final list."



Gareth Southgate

England manager Southgate dismisses disrespectful links with Man Utd job

London, England - England manager Gareth Southgate said reports linking him with the top job at Manchester United were completely disrespectful and that he would only make a decision about his future after the European Championship.

Southgate is yet to agree a new deal ahead of the Euros, which will be his fourth major competition in charge of England.

"My focus is the European Championship," Southgate told reporters on Friday ahead of England's friendly against Brazil.

"If we did something, a contract here (with England) before, everybody would be saying, 'Why are you signing a contract before a Euros where you've got to prove yourself?'"

"I'm certainly not going to speak to anybody else ahead of that. I never have. I've been here eight years in the job. I wouldn't entertain speaking to anybody else when I'm in a job."

Reports in British media say the 53-year-old is among United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe's top candidates to replace Erik Ten Hag.

"There are two things from my point of view," Southgate added. "One is that I'm the England manager. I've got one job: to try to deliver a European Championship."



Ukraine players celebrate their victory against Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ukraine keep Euro hopes alive with win against Bosnia and Herzegovina

Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina - A late goal by striker Artem Dovbyk sent Ukraine past Bosnia and Herzegovina with a 2-1 win in their Euro 2024 playoff semi-final on Thursday and into a final against Iceland for a spot in the Germany tournament.

Iceland beat Israel 4-1 to book the other place in the Path B playoff final, with Albert Gudmundsson scoring a hat-trick and Arnor Traustason getting the other goal. Ukraine held more

Ukraine will host Iceland on Tuesday in Wroclaw, Poland, due to Russia's invasion of their country.

possession than the home side, and had more chances, but went down 1-0 through an own goal early in the second half when de-

fender Mykola Matviyenko sent the ball into his own net in the 56th minute.

Substitute Roman Yaremchuk restored hope for Ukraine when he levelled from close range in the 85th minute before setting up Dovbyk who sealed the turnaround win three minutes later with a header.

Ukraine will host Iceland on Tuesday in Wroclaw, Poland, due to Russia's invasion of their country.

Munoz goal helps Colombia beat Spain

London, England - Daniel Munoz scored with an acrobatic kick in the second half to give Colombia a 1-0 win in a friendly against Spain on Friday, their first win ever against the 2010 World Cup champions.

After a dull first half in which both managers rested several key players, Colombia came back with more intensity following the interval, with former Real Madrid attacking midfielder James Rodriguez coming off the bench to lead his side to their fifth consecutive win and extend their unbeaten run to 18 games.

James and jet-heeled Luis Diaz were a constant menace to a Spanish defence, with Athletic Bilbao centre-back Dani Vivian, who was making his debut with the national team, struggling to stop the talented Liverpool winger.

Diaz was unstoppable motor-ing up and down their left wing and created several chances that his team mates wasted, two of them to James who first misfired a curling strike way up the bar and later forced keeper Alex Remiro to make a brilliant one-handed save to deny Colombia the opener.

It was not until the 61st minute that they finally managed to score, with James delivering a long pass that Diaz got in stride before slicing Vivian with a fine individual play in the left channel



Colombia's Daniel Munoz celebrates after scoring against Spain on Friday

and deliver a cross to Crystal Palace defender Munoz, who netted an acrobatic volley into the top corner. Colombia kept controlling the proceeding and wasted several other chances to extend their lead against a highly changed Spain, who were left with their back against the wall.

It was Spain's first loss in one year, as manager Luis de la Fuente rested Rodri, Dani Carvajal, Alvaro Morata and several other key players in the build-up to the European Championship in Germany, which starts in June.

He handed international debuts to three players including Vi-

vian and 17-year-old Barcelona defender Pau Cubarsi, who came off the bench late in the second-half.

"We wanted them to live this experience. They are important players with a great future. They still have a long career ahead of them," De La Fuente said.



Robinho

Robinho arrested in Brazil to serve rape sentence

Brasilia/Sao Paulo, Brazil - Former football star Robinho was arrested by Brazilian federal police on Thursday to serve out a nine-year prison sentence for rape after a court decision this week authorized the transfer of the sentence from Italy.

In a statement, police said Robinho will undergo a medical examination and a custody hearing before being sent to prison.

A Milan court in 2017 found Robinho and five other Brazilians guilty of gang raping a 22-year-old Albanian woman after getting her drunk in a nightclub in 2013.

The conviction was confirmed by an appeals court in 2020 and validated by Italy's Supreme Court in 2022.

On Wednesday, Brazil's top court for non-constitutional mat-

ters upheld Robinho's rape conviction, determining he had to serve his nine-year prison sentence in Brazil.

The Brazilian court did not reopen discussions about the rape conviction, focusing only on whether the sentence in Italy was valid in Brazil.

The 40-year-old Robinho, whose full name is Robson de Souza, now resides in his native Brazil and has always denied the charges.

Robinho had previously played for clubs including Santos, Real Madrid, Manchester City, AC Milan, as well for Brazil's national team.

Apart from rare exceptions, Brazil does not extradite its citizens, so Italy requested last year that Robinho serve the prison sentence in his home country.



RUSTY RETURN

Pant back after 14-month absence but Capitals lose to Kings

Mullanpur, India - Rishabh Pant made his return from a 14-month absence but Delhi Capitals were defeated by Punjab Kings in their first match in the Indian Premier League on Saturday.

Capitals scored 174-9 in their 20 overs with Shai Hope top-scoring with 33 runs.

In response, England all-rounder Sam Curran scored 63 runs for Kings to seal the victory.

Pant scored 18 runs for the Capitals in his first game since being in a serious car accident in December 2022.

"Personally, I was pretty nervous, but you have to go through this when you enter the field," Pant told the official broadcast after the game. "But this isn't the first time you're feeling nervous. Happy about [returning to the game] but at the same time, I think we had a par score but because we were one bowler short, because of Ishant's injury, but can't do much about it."

Curran played alongside England colleagues Liam Livingstone and Jonny Bairstow for the Kings.

"I thought we did a lot well actually. Our spinners dragged it back really well and the seamers.



Rishabh Pant scored 18 runs for Capitals in his first game since being in a serious car accident in December 2022

We adapted really to the conditions, the pitch got better as the lights came on. A really good start," said Livingstone.

Much of the story for the Capitals was their inability to turn good starts into big scores. Australia openers David Warner (29) and Mitchell Marsh (20) both showed some promise, with Hope's 33 the best for Capitals.

Wicketkeeper Pant's return saw him bat fourth for Capitals. It was a slow start for the 26-year-old Capitals captain - who had suffered head, back and leg injuries in the accident - but he did go on to make 18 runs off 13 deliveries before being caught off the bowling of Harshal Patel.

Capitals lost wickets in the middle order quickly and fell from 111-4 to 147-8 at the back

TODAYS MATCHES

MATCH 04

2 PM

RAJASTHAN ROYALS VS LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

MATCH 05

6 PM

GUJARAT TITANS VS MUMBAI INDIANS



end of their innings but a 32-run cameo from impact substitute Abishek Porel, including 25 runs in the final over, set the Kings 175 to chase.

In response, Kings captain Shikhar Dhawan managed 22 runs before being bowled by the experienced Ishant Sharma. Fellow opener Bairstow fell for nine off three balls, being run out at the non-striker end by Ishant after getting a finger to the ball on his follow through.

The Kings regrouped after losing both openers in the fourth over to fall to 42-2. Prabhsimran Singh hit five fours in a quick-fire 26.



Mustafizur Rahman

Mustafizur stars as CSK start title defence with victory over RCB

Chennai, India - Chennai Super Kings, under a brand-new captain, enjoyed a winning start to their defence of the IPL title in front of a raucous Chepauk crowd on Friday night. Mustafizur Rahman, who was among four debutants for CSK, took out four of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's top five in the space of ten balls to set up an eighth successive defeat for RCB in Chennai.

Rachin Ravindra, who was playing his first IPL game, also played his part in the victory, with 37 off 15 balls at a strike rate of 246.66 on a pitch that slowed down later in the night. In his first game as CSK captain, Ruturaj Gaikwad started with a first-ball four, but RCB's Impact Player Yash Dayal cut his innings short on 15 in CSK's chase of 174.

Shivam Dube, who was working his way back from injury, replaced Mustafizur as an

Impact Player for CSK and laboured to 7 off 13 balls. But he then turned up the tempo to usher CSK home with an unbeaten 34 off 28 balls along with Ravindra Jadeja, who scored an unbeaten 25 off 17. MS Dhoni didn't get to bat in the chase, but perhaps this is what he had hoped for when he handed over the keys of the CSK kingdom to Gaikwad.

After opting to bat in what was his first IPL game as an opposition player in Chennai, Faf du Plessis dashed out of the blocks, hitting seven fours in the first three overs. He latched on to any width that Deepak Chahar and Tushar Deshpande offered, repeatedly pumping them over the off-side infield. Gaikwad got into the act and pushed extra cover back to deep cover and, on cue, Mustafizur had du Plessis holing out to Rachin Ravindra there for 35 off 21 balls.

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FROM SICK BED TO FRONT ROW

Ferrari's Sainz qualifies in second at Australian GP just two weeks after having appendicitis surgery

Melbourne, Australia - Ferrari's Carlos Sainz will start on the front row next to pole-sitter Max Verstappen at Sunday's Australian Grand Prix in a stunning return to racing only two weeks after having surgery for appendicitis.

The tough Spaniard missed the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix due to his medical issue and returned to his race seat at Albert Park this week with no training since the operation.

Though short of full fitness, he has barely put a foot wrong in Melbourne, and on Saturday might have ripped pole from Verstappen's grasp but for a relatively slow final sector on his last flying lap.

"I'm not going to lie I'm not in my most comfortable state when I'm driving out there but I can get it done," Sainz told reporters.

"And as far as I can get it done without pain obviously (there is) a lot of discomfort and weird feelings, but no pain, so it allows me to push flat-out."

Sainz was the only non-Red Bull driver to win a race in 2023 when he topped the podium at Singapore.

His fastest lap in Melbourne qualifying was a quarter of a sec-



Carlos Sainz missed the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix and returned to his race seat at Albert Park with no training since the surgery

ond shy of Verstappen's best but Sainz said he might have been faster if he weren't short of practice.

"I think nowadays you need to

be 100 per cent to beat Max and today I wasn't. And probably due to that, I missed out on pole," he said.

"I will give it my absolute ev-

erything to do it because it's been a while since Singapore, and he's been on that top step since," said Sainz.

"But yeah, if there's one week-

end where we have a good pace, it's this one. Tricky track to overtake, tricky on tyres. So who knows? I think we might have a chance."



But yeah, if there's one weekend where we have a good pace, it's this one. Tricky track to overtake, tricky on tyres. So who knows? I think we might have a chance.

CARLOS SAINZ

Sainz's team mate Charles Leclerc qualified fifth but was promoted to fourth on the grid following a grid penalty to Red Bull's Sergio Perez.

Perez was third in qualifying but will start from sixth.

Leclerc topped the timesheets in the last two practice sessions but complained of balance problems during qualifying and aban-

doned his final run in the last session.

"All in all, not a clean qualifying," he said.

"I wasn't really happy with the feeling of the car, but tomorrow it's a long race.

"There are four DRS zones and from now on I'll focus on that to try and maximise the result from where we start."

Verstappen continues domination

Melbourne, Australia - Red Bull's Formula One world champion Max Verstappen took pole position for the Australian Grand Prix on Saturday with Carlos Sainz qualifying alongside on the front row for Ferrari two weeks after undergoing surgery for appendicitis.

Verstappen's team mate Sergio Perez qualified third but will start sixth after stewards imposed a three-place grid penalty for impeding Haas's Nico Hulkenberg in the first session.

That promoted both McLaren drivers, with Lando Norris to start third and Oscar Piastri fifth behind Ferrari's Charles Leclerc.

Verstappen had bemoaned handling problems through practice but put together a sizzling lap of one minute, 15.915 seconds on a glorious afternoon at Albert Park to be 0.27 seconds clear of Sainz. It was the irrepressible Dutchman's third pole for the Formula One season and fourth in succession.

"It was a bit unexpected today in qualifying, but very happy with Q3," said the triple world champion, who won the race last year



Max Verstappen celebrates his pole position

after his maiden pole at Albert Park. "It was a bit of a tricky weekend so far but we managed to be there at the end, so very happy with that.

"(Ferrari) seem very quick, also in the long runs. So a bit of a question mark tomorrow but that makes it exciting."

It was a tough afternoon for Mercedes, with seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton

suffering his worst qualifying at Albert Park in over a decade.

Hamilton failed to make the third session of qualifying (Q3) and will start 11th on the grid, his worst result at Albert Park since qualifying 11th in the 2010 race.

The Briton was 0.77 seconds off Sainz's best (1:16.189) in Q2, and he has been outqualified in every race this season by team mate George Russell.



Enea Bastianini celebrates his pole position

Ducati's Bastianini takes pole at Portuguese MotoGP

Portimao, Portugal - Enea Bastianini took his first pole position for Ducati with a blistering display at the Portuguese Grand Prix on Saturday while teammate Francesco Bagnaia failed to secure a spot in the front row.

The pole was Bastianini's first since the Austrian Grand Prix in July 2022, with the Italian having struggled last season after joining Ducati in 2023.

"After a long time without the pole position, it's special today. It's the first one with Ducati. I'm happy because we improved since yesterday. It's only the first step, but we're happy," Bastianini said.

Bastianini clocked the best time of one minute, 37.706 seconds at the Algarve International Circuit to pip Aprilia's Maverick Vinales and Pramac Racing's Jorge Martin.

Defending world champion Bagnaia had looked set to join Bastianini and Martin on the front row, but was bumped out of the top three by Vinales' late effort.

Six-times MotoGP champion Marc Marquez, who moved to Gresini Racing from Honda for the 2024 season, crashed early in Q2 but could race back to the garage in time to hop on a spare bike and clinch eighth place.

Sabalenka eases past Badosa it Miami

Miami, US - World number two Aryna Sabalenka made a stoic return to the court on Friday as she eased past Paula Badosa 6-4, 6-3 to reach the third round of the Miami Open just days after the death of her former boyfriend Konstantin Koltsov.

What was a long and difficult week for the 25-year-old Belarusian, who had received a first round bye, was made a little bit longer as heavy rains swept across South Florida. It delayed the start of play by just over six hours.

While not at her sharpest, the Australian Open champion made quick work of her Spanish opponent as dark clouds again threatened to halt action.

"No, I wasn't surprised at all (by Sabalenka's play)," said Badosa. "She's a very, very strong woman, strong personality, you can see it on the court. I knew she was going to play very well and I told her I wish her the best and let's see if she can go very



Aryna Sabalenka

deep in this tournament."

Sabalenka issued a brief statement on Wednesday, saying her heart was broken by the "unthinkable tragedy," but has otherwise remained out of the spotlight.

The statement also revealed that they had split up before the tragedy.

The Miami-Dade police department confirmed on Tuesday

that they had responded to a call the day before at a Miami resort about reports of a man jumping off a balcony. The police said no foul play was suspected.

Koltsov, 42, played for the Belarus national team at the 2002 and 2010 Olympics and spent parts of three seasons with the National Hockey League's Pittsburgh Penguins between 2003 and 2006.



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JOINT EXHIBITION



Treasures of Oman

A JOINT EXHIBITION AT THE SCIENTIFIC COLLEGE OF DESIGN – WHICH IS OPEN TILL APRIL 9 - SHOWCASES VARIED ASPECTS OF OMAN AND ITS PEOPLE THAT MAKE IT THE JEWEL OF ARABIA

The Scientific College of Design in Muscat is currently hosting a 15-day-long joint art exhibition – Treasures of Oman – at the Glass gallery to showcase unique works based on different colours and mediums.

This exhibition, inaugurated on March 18, will continue till April 9. It is intended to serve as a platform to foster close a close relationship between artists and art lovers in Oman as well as provide them an opportunity to interact with faculty and learn from each other's experiences in art, photography, and mixed media ventures. and other

Treasures of Oman features 40 works by 30 popular, international artists in Oman, including Michael Ra-

nola, Mona Ahmadi, Krishna S, Parul Razdan, Simran Ali, Mina Rezaee, ORachel Eapen, Aisha Dosani, Saleem Sakhi, Mohammed Rafi, Radhakrishnan, Anjali Babu, Anuradha Shanbhag, Lisa Janssens, Emerson Sumaoang, Mohammed Mehdi, Idris Thani al Harrasi, Nessie Nazerane, Soni Budhia, Kavitha Shali, Mehren July, Maryam Mottaghi, Rema Sivakumar, Naif Salim Zaid, Tatinnee Dey, Yeldo, Abolfal Hodaee and Rashmi Dauria.

The works on display include varied themes like abstracts, realism, contemporary art, besides photography, sculptures, ceramic art, and calligraphy associated with Oman.

The exhibition was inaugurated under the patronage of Dr Khamis al Balushi, chairman, Board of Trustees at Scientific College of Design, in the presence of Dr Mona Kamal Ismail, Imad

Adel, Dr Mohammedh Tarik, and Harini. It was curated by artist Rema Sivakumar.

"This has been a great experience for me to work with the head of the department, professors, students and various artists. It was a college ambience and I did feel like a student in this environment, as did the other artists who spent time observing and understanding the various works on display," Rema said.

"The dean of the college, too, expressed his happiness on the diversity of ideas on display and the great care taken to curate the exhibition which took into account the specificity of the content and the various branches of art work. He noted that the works on display were inspired by the Omani environment and Arab and Islamic culture, in addition to modern concepts and contemporary art," she added.

At the opening, the artists present shared the inspiration behind each work as well as he various techniques used, indicating their deep-rooted knowledge of their individual works.



This has been a great experience for me to work with the head of the department, professors, students and various artists. It was a college ambience and I did feel like a student in this environment

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MIND IT

Despite the economic downturn in 2019-2020, a difficult year for the Pakistani economy, the ICT sector in Pakistan has picked up and continued to grow tremendously, providing quality services at affordable prices to the public.

The World Economic Forum had ranked Pakistan among the best countries in terms of affordability of ICT services and regulators continued to play their pioneering role in the country's digital transformation while also supporting the economy.

Information technology has assumed an enabling role in the emerging dynamics of a knowledge society and knowledge economy. It is a key lever of economic development. Pakistan's IT sector has a promising future, brimming with talent, and with the potential to become the largest export industry of the country. It is carving a differentiated position as the preferred source for software developers, programmers, designers and BPO specialists. Already, IT industry is among the top 5 net exporters of the country with the highest net exports in the services industries. There is an enormous human and knowledge capital potential with 64% of 207 million in population under the age of 29 and almost 30% in the 15 to 29 age group. Pakistan is ranked 5th most financially attractive location in the world for offshore services, according to A T Kearney's Global Services Location Index

DIGITAL PROWESS OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan's IT sector has a promising future, brimming with talent, and potential to become the largest export industry of the country. It now has a mature ecosystem that can serve the needs of global entities at the lowest of costs



2019.

Several international companies including Global enterprises like Bentley, IBM, Mentor Graph-

ics, S&P Global, Symantec, and Teradata have established global consulting services centers, research & development facilities

and BPO support services centers in Pakistan.

The Government of Pakistan (GoP) continues to facilitate the

IT industry through numerous sustainable development and accelerated digitisation projects, research and innovation, soft-

ware technology parks, subsidised bandwidth, international marketing, international certifications, internships and training.

Pakistan's IT Industry has achieved robust growth metrics and counts world's largest entities among its regular clients. Pakistan's IT industry now has a mature ecosystem that can serve the needs of global entities at among the lowest of costs, nearly 70% lower than developed markets such as North America.

There are more than 10,000 IT & ITeS companies currently registered with Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) comprising of both domestic and export-oriented enterprises. There are 500,000+ English-speaking IT & BPO professionals with expertise in current and emerging IT products and technologies, and over 25,000 IT graduates and engineers are being produced each year.

The number of IT companies is expected to surge with the rise of entrepreneurship in the younger population of the country. The cellular mobile companies represent a huge market, reflecting a promising IT landscape in Pakistan. Over 85% of telecommunication infrastructure is on fibre-optic cables and internet access is available in over 2,000 cities/towns across Pakistan. Tele-density in Pakistan has crossed 79.65% with 3G/4G users totaling 85 million (40%). Broadband penetration is already over 40.95% with 87 million users.

The number of IT companies is increasing every year as the younger population prefers to run their entities instead of at-

tempting to seek public sector jobs like their predecessors. This is helped by solid support from the government and a plethora of public and private sector entities are prioritising the growth of the IT Industry.

The startup culture has come of age at a breakneck speed with success stories coming out every year. The government considers the Startup community, freelancers, developers and software, and IT students an important pillar of its strategy.

Pakistan's IT industry counts the world's largest entities among its regular clients and is providing services to 120 countries around the globe. Pakistan's IT industry is vibrant, and the industry has its interest watching association (P@SHA). Multiple entities at both provincial and federal levels are working to ensure that the industry growth is enhanced and that friction points that may impede industry growth are minimised.

Bentley, Ciklum, IBM, Mentor Graphics, S&P Global, Symantec, Teradata, and VMware had established consulting services centres, research and development facilities, and BPO support services centers in Pakistan. Pakistan became the first country in South-East Asia to have tested 5G in 2019. The developments would impact Pakistan's technology sector and other industries.

Government of Pakistan is very enthusiastic for the advancement and development of IT industry. Recently, an agreement has been signed between ministry of technology and Korea for PKR 10bn in order to establish a technology park in Islamabad. (Source: Moitt.gov.pk, invest.gov.pk)

Envisioning a future of mutual growth

AMBASSADOR'S MESSAGE ON PAKISTAN DAY

On the occasion of the National Day of Pakistan, I wish to express my best wishes and regards to the brotherly government and the people of the Sultanate of Oman, and to Pakistani residents in this beautiful country who contribute to the development and the social milieu of Oman while earning their livelihoods here.

Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who fought for provincial autonomy and rights of the Muslims of India for 31 years, which led to the creation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1947. March 23, 1940, marks the Magna Carta for the creation of Pakistan - the Lahore Resolution, which called for statehood for contiguous Muslim majority areas in the West and East of India.

Pakistan's constitutionalism is reflected in robust democratic institutions in the centre and the six regions of Pakistan, its strong judiciary and press, and a robust civil society.

The unity and federalism of Pakistan are now comparable to the best federal systems in the world. The extraordinary devotion of administrative, legislative and financial powers to the provinces and regions after the 18th Constitutional Amendment has forever fortified the hyphen that joins Pakistan's diverse political tributaries into a whole-



Pakistan and Oman enjoy great fraternal ties not only rooted in history, religion and geography, but most importantly in the warmth, respect and love between our two peoples

some and united state. This was brought about by the current ruling coalition 14 years ago.

The Kartarpur Corridor, allowing Sikhs around the world unprecedented access from India is just one symbol of Pakistan's trajectory towards tolerance, pluralism, and diverse and multiple identities. This trajectory runs counter to right wing

movements regionally and globally.

To contribute towards economic revival of Pakistan by significantly expanding the Investment pie from foreign and domestic sources, achieving macro-economic stability, bringing socio-economic prosperity and reclaiming a rightful stature among the comity of nations,

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the military leadership came together to form the SIFC, the Special Investment Facilitation Council, which aims to bring in Foreign Investment as well as act the premier economic decision making body.

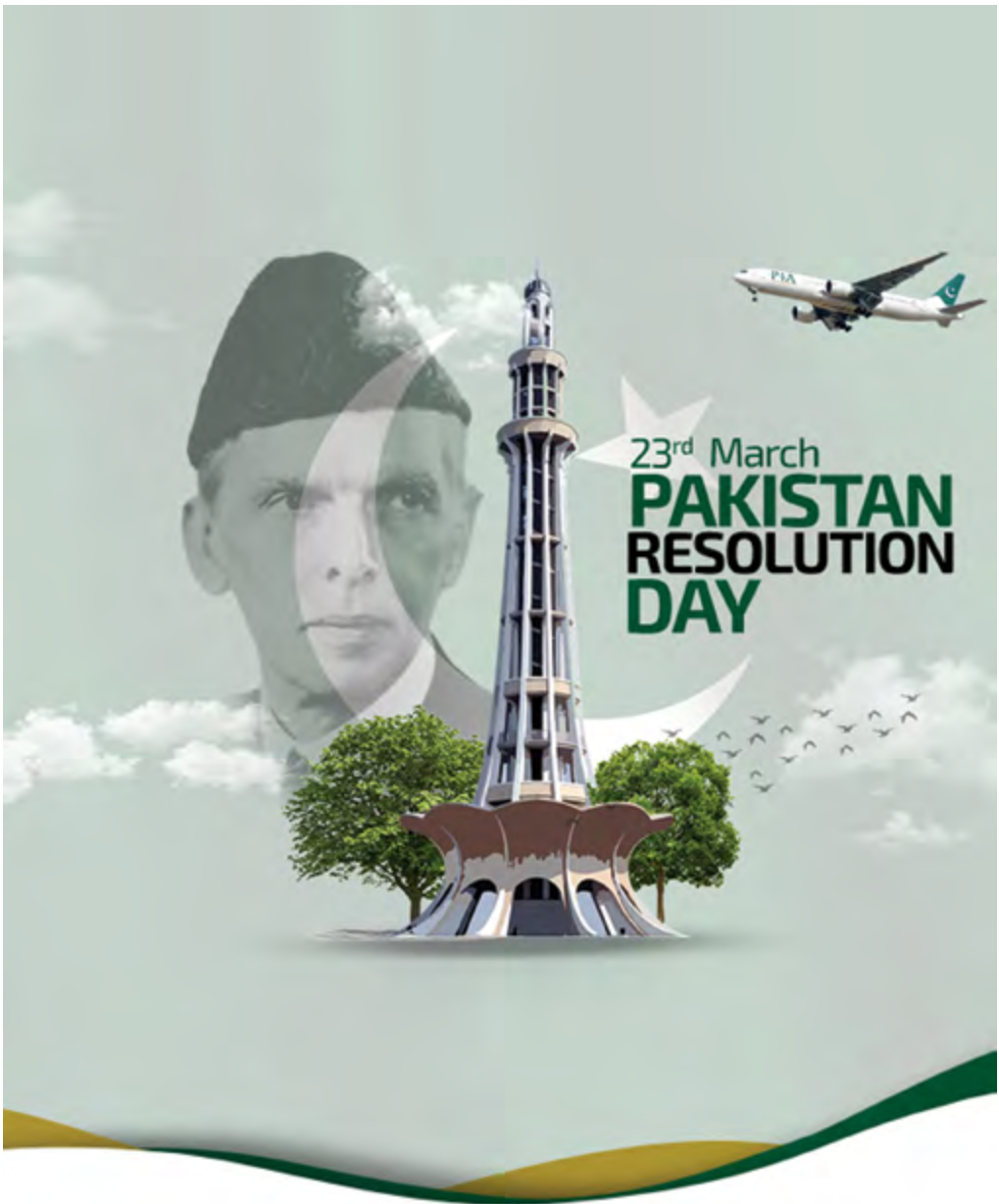
Pakistan has augmented its defence because of its geopolitical surroundings. Pakistan Army, Air force and Navy are now modernising themselves and also helping create stability in the region as well as brotherly countries in the gulf.

Pakistan and Oman enjoy great fraternal ties not only rooted in history, religion and geography, but most importantly in the warmth, respect and love between our two peoples. We have strong bilateral ties especially in political, economic and defence spheres and our two navies have very close cooperation.

In the end, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to express my best wishes for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's everlasting health and happiness and for the continued progress, stability and prosperity of the brotherly Sultanate of Oman. I thank the Government of Oman for its cooperation and all Omanis for their love and continuous support which is a manifestation of our centuries old bond. I am confident that our relations will further strengthen in times to come.

Long live Pakistan-Oman Friendship!

H E Imran Ali
Pakistan's Ambassador to Oman



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