

Royal Decree ratifies Oman, Kazakhstan agreement

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued Royal Decree No 12/2023 ratifying an agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on establishing the Oman-Kazakhstan Joint Committee, signed in Muscat on February 1, 2023.

Article 1 ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of publication.

ONA

OIA companies sign pacts worth over RO1bn for research and development

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Agreements worth over RO1bn were signed on Monday by companies under the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and others to promote cooperation in research, development and innovation.

The signings took place on the sidelines of an event that saw the launch of four programmes by OIA to enhance in-country value (ICV).

Asyad group signed two agreements, one with Rihla to initiate a digital database project in which a data warehouse will be developed with analysis capabilities using the latest technologies in data science.

Asyad's second agreement was signed with German University of Technology (GUTech) to develop a technology that helps in reducing emissions from cargo ships by capturing and liquefying carbon dioxide and facilitating its storage and transportation.

Nama Holding signed 12 contracts with local companies for projects worth over RO1bn covering three key areas - supply of cables and conductors, supply of electric switches, and supply of low-voltage substations.

Fisheries Development Oman announced a cooperation with Khat al Wusta International Company to establish a manufacturing plant for fish container boxes using international standards to meet the existing demand of the group and local market, while building capacity to

expand into regional market. The cost of the first phase of the project is estimated at about RO500,000.

OIA has launched several programmes, initiatives and policies to enhance ICV. Additionally, the authority issued a package of supporting measures for SMEs, including sourcing purchases not exceeding RO10,000 from SMEs holding the entrepreneurship card, and allocating ten per cent of its purchases to SMEs, exempting these from tender fees and granting them a preferential percentage of ten per cent in procurements and contracts ranging between RO10,000 and RO50,000 in materials and services.



(Supplied photo)

Programmes launched to raise local production

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) launched four programmes to enhance in-country value (ICV) as part of its 'Qimam' project on Monday.

The programmes have been launched following Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to increase local content and in an effort to empower the private sector to facilitate its role in leading the Omani economy in line with the priorities of Vision Oman 2040, as well as supporting SMEs.

The launch was attended by

The authority is committed to empowering the private sector, enriching local content, and developing and incentivising SMEs

NASSER AL HARTHY

Abdulsalam al Murshidi, President of OIA, and several government and private sector officials.

Nasser al Harthy, Deputy President for Operations at OIA, said that the authority is committed to empowering the private sector, enriching local content, and developing and incentivising SMEs. To this end, it established a dedicated direc-

torate to manage all matters related to ICV, research, development and innovation, as well as social investment in OIA and its companies.

Al Mutasim bin Said al Sariri, Director of ICV at OIA, informed that the four programmes are Mandatory List of Products and Services; Vendor Development; Ringfencing of Products and

Services; and Research, Development and Innovation Guidelines.

Mandatory List Programme

The programme includes services and products that OIA companies are required to purchase and supply from local companies. Initially, the list, which is to be updated regularly, consists of 76 products and 25 services. "This contributes to supporting the local market, giving it priority to compete for opportunities, and encouraging it to manufacture products instead of importing," said Sariri.

Vendor Development Programme

The programme aims to enhance and develop the capabilities of local companies, including SMEs, in new fields. The programme enables OIA companies to work closely with local companies in order to build and develop solutions. "The programme is expected to improve the performance of suppliers in the local market, encourage innovation and enhance their competitiveness, as well as upgrade the capabilities of the Omani workforce."

Continued on Page 02

No intention to adopt 4-day workweek: H E Ba'owain

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dashing hopes of many who wished Oman adopted a four-day workweek, H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, has clarified that there is "no intention" to do so.

Much deliberation has taken place on the four-day workweek in Oman following several countries' trials with the same. A four-day workweek pilot in the UK was so successful that most firms say they won't go back to the old schedule, while 15 per cent of employees who participated said "no amount of money" would convince them to return to working five days a week.

Replying to a Majlis A'Shura member's question, when he was hosted by the shura on Monday, H E Dr Ba'owain said, "There is currently no intention to expand or increase the number of official holidays."

The shura member had asked if the official working days would be reduced to four.

In reply to a question on rais-



H E Dr Mahad Ali Ba'owain

ing the minimum wage to RO500 with government support, and to provide salaries to jobseekers until they are employed, the minister replied, "Various studies have been conducted on the prospect of raising the minimum wage. We carried out a study in which inflation and other factors were taken into account. It has been submitted to the Council of Ministers and we are awaiting a decision."

The minister informed that in addition to the Draft Labour Law referred to the Council of Ministers, the Public Service Law will "soon" be approved. "Our numbers are transparent and always

published, and we accept criticism, opinions and cooperation," he said, referring to the data on jobseekers and employment.

The two-day session will discuss the minister's statement, which will include topics of legislation and laws for both private and public sectors, the ministry's policies and plans during the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), and employment in public and private sectors, besides training and rehabilitation efforts.

As many as 85,444 jobseekers were registered by end of 2022, H E Dr Ba'owain informed. "The total number of employees in the civil service sector has reached 168,985, with Omanisation rate of 88.6 per cent."

He added that the number of employees in commercial businesses was 1,722,697 in 2022, of which 340,619 were expats.

The budget for training associated with employment in public and private sectors was RO24mn. "A total of 34,334 citizens were employed in 2022 - or 156 per cent of the target in the government and 117 per cent in the private sector."

Bilarab Award winners to be announced today

Muscat - H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said will preside over the closing ceremony of the second edition of the Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design on Tuesday.

The winner of a design competition for Oman's pavil-

ion at Expo 2025 Japan will also be announced at the ceremony.

A statement issued by the office of the award said, 'This edition of the award involves designing the Maritime History Museum to be built in Sur, South

Sharqiyah.' Three winning projects will be honoured at the event.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has provided coastal land for the Maritime History Museum project measuring 14,154sqm.

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Chief Guest
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For further details, please contact: Crowe Mak Ghazali LLC, Auditors and Business Advisors
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Oman, India hold political talks

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India held a session of political talks on Monday.

The Omani side was headed by H E Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, while the Indian side was headed by Ausaf Sayeed, Secretary of Consular, Passport, Visa and Overseas Indian Affairs.

During the session, the two sides underscored the advanced relations and the importance of enhancing these in

all spheres. They also touched on exploring business and investment opportunities.

Further, the two sides discussed several consular matters and reviewed Oman's participation as a guest of honour in the G20 meetings headed by India this year.

The session was attended by H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, Sheikh Hamad Saif al Rawahi, Head of International Cooperation Department, and several officials from both sides.

ONA

Sustainability Week to highlight commitment to green economy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With an aim to discuss a more sustainable way to produce energy in the country and preserve the environment, the Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) will take place from March 12 to 15 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

The second edition of the event is expected to witness over 80 exhibitors and 7,000 attendees alongside more than 100 expert speakers and 450 conference delegates.

Addressing a press conference at Crowne Plaza Muscat on Monday, Dr Ali al Rajhi, Director General for Planning and Studies in the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of OSW's Steering Committee, said, "With humanity making stellar advancements in technology, driving rapid developments in every key sector, it has become



even more critical that we make concerted efforts to implement transformational processes in everyday practices so we can operate in harmony with nature."

He said every action aimed at promoting sustainability, however small or large, if steered in the right direction, has the potential to have a significant global impact that will contribute towards protecting communities and preserving the environmental ecosystem.

Hosted by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals with Petroleum Development Oman as the organiser, OSW is dedicated to

enhancing the future of energy, power, water, waste and the environment. 'This is strongly aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and further reiterates the country's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Bringing together policy-makers, sustainability experts and industry leaders, OSW seeks to engage influential national development stakeholders and position Oman as a country that implements sustainable practices in every sector,' organisers said.

Rajhi added that OSW seeks to be a platform that advocates sustainability by facilitating

meaningful dialogue between leaders who have the capacity to lead change, promoting the cross-sharing of technical expertise and resources, and encouraging a business and community-wide shift towards adopting a sustainable lifestyle. "It also reaffirms Oman's commitment to transition to a green, circular economy," he said.

OSW will include a series of activities that foster knowledge sharing through high-level discussions with leading experts and educational programmes.

The International Sustainability Resources and Technology

Conference organised by Oman Environmental Service Holding Company (be'ah), and programmed by Economist Impact, will take place on March 13 and 14 at OCEC. Additionally, a C-level thought leadership Gala Summit, organised by Society of Petroleum Engineers, will be held on March 15 and 16.

A key highlight of the event is the OSW Talks, to be held from March 13 to 15. As part of OSW Talks, Oman Shell will host the Shell NXplorer Programme on March 15 showcasing ten innovative projects created by students from ten schools in Oman.



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UBHAR GCC FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2022

The Chairman's Report For the period ended December 31st, 2022

On behalf of the Fund Management Body Members, I am pleased to present the financial results of Ubhar GCC Fund for the period ended December 31, 2022.

A summary of financial results is as follows:

Figure 1:	For the period ended 31 December, 2022	For the period ended 31 December, 2021
	(OMR)	(OMR)
Total Income	(316,103)	1,480,115
Total Expenses	(189,754)	(290,442)
Profit (Loss) for the Period	(505,856)	1,189,673
Profit (Loss) per Unit	(0.102)	0.237

Fund Performance:

For the period ended December 31, 2022 the performance of Ubhar GCC Fund is as follows:

Figure 2:	December 31, 2022	December 31, 2021
Net Asset Value (OMR)	5,161,433	6,121,545
Number of Outstanding Units	4,967,556	4,936,687
Net Asset Value per Unit**	1.039	1.240
UBGCC Fund Performance for the period	(8.22)	23.08%
Benchmark Performance for the period	(7.15)	31.43%

* NAV per unit for 2022 is after cash dividends

**NAV per unit for 2021 is after cash dividends and bonus units

Market Performance:

After the strong performance of the market at the beginning of 2022, GCC markets corrected sharply on the back of oil price retreat, geopolitical tension and continued monetary tightening. Despite most of GCC markets finishing the year with positive returns, the pressure on the heavyweight Saudi market in addition to the Qatari market, led the S&P GCC Index to end the year with a negative return of 7.15%. Saudi Tadawul and Qatar Exchange closed the year with negative returns of 7.12% and 8.13%, respectively, while Abu Dhabi was the top gainer registering 20.30% returns, followed by Muscat Exchange which registered returns of 17.63%.

Figure A: Index Returns

Index	YTD (December 31, 2022)
Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange	20.30%
Muscat Stock Exchange	17.63%
Bahrain Bourse	5.45%
Dubai Financial Market	4.39%
Boursa Kuwait	3.53%
Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul)	-7.12%
S&P GCC Index	-7.15%
Qatar Exchange	-8.13%

GCC markets saw a correction after the first half of 2022, as Brent oil prices plummeted by 25.17% in the second half of the year, adding to the pressure imposed by the global geopolitical tensions and the monetary tightening. Global markets registered big losses in 2022 leading the MSCI World Index to plunge by 19.5%, as the Russian-Ukrainian war and the Chinese lockdowns continued to weigh on the global supply chain, and central banks across the world are acting rapidly to curb inflation.

On the regional economic front, Saudi Arabia reported its first budget surplus in nearly 10 years at SAR 102bn, supported by revenues from rising oil prices. The Saudi government approved a budget of SAR 1,114bn for 2023 and is expecting a total revenue of SAR 1,131bn. However, as per IMF, the Kingdom is expected to witness a slowdown in real economic growth from 8.5% to around 3.5% on account of lower comparable oil prices. On the other side, the non-oil growth is expected to stay robust on account of diversification initiatives taken by the government.

In UAE, the economy is set to have a growth of 6.5% in 2022 and 2023 driven by new socio-economic programs and new expanding economic sectors. UAE markets continued to witness the listing of new companies as a decent number of IPOs took place. A total of 13 companies were newly listed in UAE (7 in Abu Dhabi and 6 in Dubai), including DEWA – the biggest IPO since Aramco – and Borouge which is the largest ever IPO in Abu Dhabi.

Qatar also approved the state general budget for the next fiscal year of 2023 with an expected fiscal surplus of QAR 29bn, which is up by 16.3% from the previous year. The budget forecasts revenues to increase to QAR 228bn (USD 62.6bn), while expenses are expected to reach QAR 199bn (USD 54.6bn).

Oman is also expected to register its first budget surplus in more than 10 years, as the sultanate posted a surplus of OMR 1.2bn in the first 10 months of 2022. On the other hand, Oman is expected to report a budget deficit of OMR 1.3bn or 3% of its GDP in 2023, as per the official announcement. The projected deficits reflect an uncertain global economy combined with the persisting financial and economic challenges such as higher interest rates, inflation, and the threat of looming global recession.

On the sectoral outlook, the regional consumer sector is likely to provide earnings potential in 2023 as spending stays robust post full re-opening of the economies. Consumer product price hikes seen in 2022, citing higher inflation, may be not reversed, and passed on in 2023, thereby resulting in higher margins. The cement sector in Saudi Arabia is also projected to benefit from the continued ambitious mega

projects. Other sectors to watch are real estate, especially in UAE, the health care sector, and the banking sector in KSA which will be driven by Vision 2030 related projects and mortgage growth.

On the global front and for the year 2023, the IMF upgraded its global growth forecasts and is now expecting a growth of 2.9%, 20 bps higher than its earlier forecast back in October 2022, with China being a major contributor to the global growth, as IMF is forecasting China's GDP growth to increase from 3% in 2022 to 5.2% in 2023, as the economy reopens.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Fund Management Body, I extend my thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq bin Taimur for his government's progressive policies and constant encouragement to the financial services sector.

I also take this opportunity to thank the members of the Fund Management Body for their valuable time and guidance, the CMA, MSM & MCD for their support and cooperation, the fund manager and service providers for their efforts and you, our valued unitholder, for your continued support and trust.

On behalf of the Fund Management Body

Chairman

February 23rd, 2023

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income

	31 December 2022 RO	31 December 2021 RO
INCOME		
Dividend and interest income	155,828	194,180
Net realized gain on investments at fair value through profit or loss	236,519	915,622
Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss	(708,651)	354,581
Interest income	87	9,674
Other income	114	6,058
	(316,103)	1,480,115
Expenses		
Management fee	88,340	88,834
Brokerage commission	58,212	50,691
Administration and custodian service fee	21,694	35,762
Fund Management Body fee	6,000	6,750
General and administration	15,508	12,375
Performance fee	—	96,030
	189,754	290,442
Net (loss) / profit and total comprehensive income for the period / year	(505,856)	1,189,673
Net (loss) / profit per unit	(0.102)	0.237

Statement of financial position

	31 December 2022 RO	31 December 2021 RO
ASSETS		
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	4,912,341	5,783,010
Cash and cash equivalents	265,145	566,342
Other receivables	2,776	10,710
Total assets	5,180,262	6,360,062
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Accruals and other payables	18,829	111,740
Amount due to brokers	—	126,777
Total liabilities	18,829	238,517
Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders	5,161,433	6,121,545
Net asset value per unit	1.039	1.240

For more information please contact:

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Tel: 24 949 032/030, Fax: 24949099, Email: ubhargocfund@u-capital.net, website: www.u-capital.net



Syrian Ambassador values Omani support following earthquake

Muscat - Idris Maya, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, has thanked His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for the humanitarian assistance provided to the Syrian people to overcome impacts of the earthquake, which hit Syria on February 6.

He further said that Syria values Oman's solidarity with the country.

The ambassador asserted that the visit of Syrian President Bashar al Assad to Oman and his meeting with His Majesty the Sultan is affirmation of the deep, bilateral relations between the two countries.

He described Omani diplomacy as 'distinguished' and aimed to strengthen Arab solidarity, particularly in light of the

The Syrian-Omani Business Council could play an active role in enhancing bilateral relations and joint trade exchange

IDRIS MAYA

current regional and international developments.

He added that President Assad's visit was in line with Oman's endeavours to reunite the Arab world.

On the role of the embassies of the countries in promoting economic and investment cooperation, Maya said the two are

working to upgrade economic relations and take advantage of the capabilities and opportunities available in the two countries to achieve further economic and investment integration.

He also said the Syrian-Omani Business Council could play an active role in enhancing bilateral relations and joint trade exchange and added that the joint governmental committee between the two countries will hold its sixth meeting before the end of 2023 in Muscat.

In the cultural field, the ambassador pointed out that Oman is keen to lend support and assistance in order to restore and preserve the Syrian antiquities damaged by the earthquake that struck several archaeological sites in Damascus and Aleppo.

Programmes launched to raise local production

Continued from Page 01

Ringfencing of Products and Services

The programme aims to allocate a certain percentage of the scope of work to local companies in order to increase their market share. The programme, which targets SMEs and local companies, is expected to contribute to developing the capabilities of

local companies, creating a competitive and sustainable local market for goods and services.

Research, Development & Innovation Guidelines

The fourth programme aims to enhance the research, development and innovation eco-system in OIA companies by integrating it in their business strategies and industrial activities, with empha-

sis on certain areas, such as food and circular economy, digital transformation and artificial intelligence, and energy and decarbonisation. "This will translate into improving the efficiency of operations, adding new products and services and strategic research projects that can become viable commercial projects in the future, and making well-informed decisions based on data."

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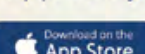
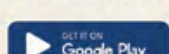
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Call for strict measures after school student falls from bus

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Citizens and experts have called for tougher measures in the sultanate after a video of a student falling from a school bus in Dakhliyah went viral on social media.

A statement issued by the governorate's Directorate General of Education said the incident of a student falling from a running school bus belonging to a school under the Directorate of Education is being investigated and that the student is in stable condition.

'The directorate is taking measures in cooperation with the relevant authorities to ensure that such incidents don't repeat and calls on school bus drivers to ensure the safety of students.'

On September 4, the first day of the 2022-23 academic year, a student in Mabela died when a



speeding car hit her as she was getting off a school bus.

The video of the incident on Monday sparked strong reactions with calls to find a way to put an end to accidents involving school buses.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Ali al Barwani, former CEO of Oman Road Safety Association, said, "The student transportation system - including drivers, passengers and the bus itself - needs to

be completely reviewed. The concerned authorities should conduct workshops to train school bus drivers. The Ministry of Education should provide surveillance cameras in each bus to monitor students in them, as well as when they get on and off the bus."

Sultan al Rawahi, a security and safety expert, said, "We should not always blame the bus driver. The Ministry of Education

We must start with the driver - their safety requirements, their training, the maximum capacity of students allowed, etc

MOHAMMED AL HARASSI

should employ a special supervisor in every bus for the safety of children of public and private schools to prevent such incidents from recurring."

Hamad al Awfi, a resident of Dakhliyah, said, "We hope there is strict action against any bus driver who does not care about the safety of students."

Another Dakhliyah resident Mohammed al Harassi said these incidents call for a thor-

ough review of the school transport system. "We must start with the driver - their safety requirements, their training, the maximum capacity of students allowed, etc."

Demanding punishment for whoever was responsible for the incident on Monday, Dakhliyah resident Bader Mohammed said, "This is inexcusable negligence. The safety of our children is the responsibility of the school for the time the children are with them."

Appalled that school bus accidents continue, Khalifa Mubarak, a citizen, said, "We should not blame the bus driver alone. All safety measures must be reviewed. Why are buses allowed to carry more students than the legally allowed number?"

Royal Oman Police arrested the school bus driver following the incident on Monday and legal procedures are being completed against him.

MHUP offers 52 plots of land for investment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To develop the real estate sector and stimulate investments, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) is offering 52 plots of land via public auction in ten governorates.

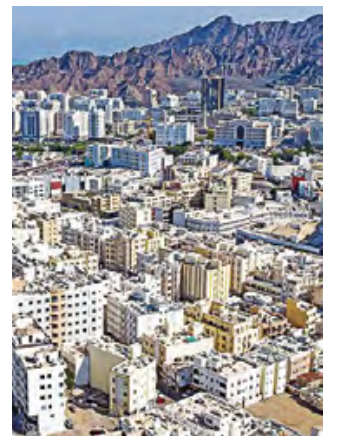
A statement issued by MHUP said, 'The ministry will offer land measuring between 108sqm to 11,832sqm under usufruct contracts through online auction.'

The land offered for investments are provided with all services and are located in areas with large population density.

Those interested in bidding must register through the electronic system - Tatwir platform - using ID number or the commercial register.

The initiative aims to support growth of the GDP, boost economic output through manufacturing, commercial and other industrial activities, fuel socio-economic development and support the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The Tatwir platform for real estate development services is witnessing remarkable activity following activation of electronic



bidding for usufruct contracts. Bidding was held for more than 200 plots of land for usufruct contracts in 2022.

MHUP has indicated that it is leveraging government land optimally and sustainably through usufruct contracts.

The collection from contract renewal fees in 2022 exceeded RO8.6mn.

In 2023, 400 plots will be offered through electronic bidding, and 250 plots for investment opportunities.

The ministry has also confirmed that it will distribute 23,000 residential land plots this year and extend housing assistance to 1,200 families.

Omani adventurer releases book on life at borders

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani adventurer Khalid Said al Anqudi has published another literary work, the latest detailing life in the border areas of more than 14 countries.

The book was launched at the ongoing 27th Muscat International Book Fair at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

A globetrotter and author of 12 books, Anqudi has also climbed 14 mountains, giving him perspective that adds to his writing.

Titled *Abir al Hudood* or *Border Crossing*, and illustrated with photographs, the book covers majestic mountains, customs and traditions of different people, and adventures of the author - from 2007 to 2022 - making it an interesting read.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Anqudi said, "I started writing this book in July last year and completed it in October. In each chapter, I give readers a peek



In each chapter, I give readers a peek into the natural treasures of three continents - Africa, Asia and Europe

KHALID SAID AL ANQUDI

into the natural treasures of three continents - Africa, Asia and Europe."

The 186-page book has ten chapters on peoples' life in border areas. "One chapter describes trekking and camping in the mountains, another is on passing

through small villages to reach a base camp." Still fresh in his mind, Anqudi recalls some hair-raising situations he encountered like they happened yesterday. "While crossing the border from Uganda to Kenya and Tanzania, the border guards stopped me on suspicion that I entered the country illegally. But fortunately, one of my friends brought papers confirming that I am a tourist."

Anqudi hopes to inspire young minds to take up mountaineering and engage in adventure sports in Oman. He believes when Omani youth venture outdoors to explore the sultanate, it will help promote the country as a tourist destination.

While a few of his books have been translated into German, he is now working on English and French translations of his books.

"I have visited 75 countries and hope to fulfil my dream of scaling the Seven Summits." To date, Anqudi has climbed 14 mountains.

Lobster fishing season to begin on March 1

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has announced that the lobster fishing season for 2023 will start on March 1.

A statement issued by MAFWR said that the season will continue for three months. "The lobster fishing season has great economic and social importance for fishermen in the sultanate. An important resource, lobsters live among rocks and coral reefs, as well as in sandy and clay environments in shallow depths close to beaches."

An official at MAFWR said, "Fishermen use cages, which have capacity to catch between

20 and 40 lobsters. In Oman, lobsters are caught in the wilayats overlooking the Arabian Sea in the governorates of Dhofar, Al Wusta and South Sharqiyah. These governorates have sites that are rich in fish stock due to the marine biodiversity of the Arabian Sea."

The official urged fishermen to adhere to the specified fishing period and to use authorised fishing traps (lobster cages) in order to preserve this national wealth and sustain stocks.

Statistics of MAFWR show that the sultanate's lobster catch in the 2020 season yielded 950 tonnes, worth RO4.1mn. Domestic consumption accounted for 597 tonnes, and the remaining 353 tonnes were exported.

Hilti Group CEO on a visit to the Sultanate of Oman

Bin Salim Enterprises LLC was privileged to welcome Mr. Jahangir (Jan) Doongaji, CEO and Mr. Joaquim Sarda, Executive Board Member, Hilti Group, from the Principality of Liechtenstein, to their headquarters at the Al-Rawahy Complex in Wattayah, Muscat on the 27th and the 28th of February, 2023.

Hilti is a world-leading provider of high quality, innovative and specialised tools, fastening systems and software-based solutions for professional users. Carbon emission, safety and productivity gains are the essential features of all the products supplied by Hilti. Bin Salim Enterprises LLC has represented the Hilti Group for almost five decades in the Sultanate of Oman.

Mr. Jan Doongaji thanked the Bin Salim Management and team for their efforts in making Hilti a force to reckon with in the Sultanate of Oman. Highlighting the relationship between the two organisations he said that this was built on very strong



Mr. Jan Doongaji - CEO



Mr. Joaquim Sarda, Executive Board Member

fundamentals, both the Groups share similar business ethics, values and customer care which have helped nurture the relationship over this long period of time. He also complimented the Country for preserving their unique culture and heritage.

The Vice-Chairman of Al Rawahy

Holdings LLC and Managing Director of Bin Salim Enterprises LLC, Sh. Is-haq H. S. Al Rawahy expressed his gratitude to Mr. Jan Doongaji for his visit and said that this only proved the strength of the bond that exists between the owners of each organisation and promised to put in all efforts to nurture this relationship.

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Indian	214.64
Pakistan	669.44
Bangladesh	276.99
Philippines	143.71
Sri Lanka	942.79

*Rates as on February 27

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

World Bank backs bankrupt Sri Lanka's private banks

The World Bank offered a lifeline to three private banks in bankrupt Sri Lanka on Monday, lending them US\$400mn to finance imports of essential food and medicines with an IMF bailout stalled.

The World Bank's private sector funding arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), is lending the trio the funds with Sri Lanka's economic crisis still rumbling on. The South Asian nation of 22mn has been enduring severe hardships since it ran out of foreign exchange to finance essential food, fuel, medicines and fertiliser in late 2021. It defaulted on its debt in April 2022. Months of protests forced the president to resign in July and the new government of Ranil Wickremesinghe sought a US\$2.9bn rescue from the IMF a month later.

But authorities say it is being held up because Sri Lanka's main bilateral creditor China has not yet provided financial assurances.

Indian firm plans battery recycling plant in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Gravita India Limited, a Jaipur, India-based leading global recycling company, is planning to establish a battery recycling plant in Oman with an initial capacity of 6,000 metric tonnes per annum (MTPA).

'Gravita India Limited is delighted to announce that step down subsidiary of the company Gravita Netherlands has executed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to establish a recycling plant in Oman. This will be Gravita's first recycling facility in the Middle Eastern market,' Gravita said in a disclosure submitted to the Indian stock exchanges.

Gravita Netherlands will be holding 50 per cent of equity with management control in the recycling project and remaining equity will be held by other partners based in Oman, the disclosure added.

'In the first phase, the battery recycling plant in Oman will be established with a capacity of 6,000 MTPA,' the company noted.

It said, 'Total investment in this joint venture for the first phase will be approximately Rs400mn (around RO1.9mn) and Gravita Netherlands will be



investing approximately Rs200mn towards its share in fixed capital and working capital as its contribution.'

In a social media post, Gravita said its project division will design and develop the plant machinery at its facility located in Jaipur and will commission the complete plant in Oman.

'This new facility in Oman is part of our vision to replicate our recycling business in different

geographies, and we are excited to expand our global footprint even further,' the company added.

Gravita said it already has similar recycling facilities in Togo, Senegal, Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Sri Lanka and India.

Gravita is a leading global recycling company with 14 eco-conscious state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities in Asia,

Africa and Central America with a capacity of 227,719 MTPA. The group is having global footprints in more than 70 countries.

'We are proud to continue our commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility through our recycling efforts. We look forward to the successful establishment of our new recycling plant in Oman,' the company added.



Oman's refinery output jumps 39% in January

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's petroleum refineries recorded a sharp growth in their production of various types of fuels as local demand improved and exports increased.

Total refinery output jumped by 39.3 per cent in January 2023 compared to the same period in 2022, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The production of M91 grade petrol rose 58.3 per cent year-on-year to 1.442mn barrels in January this year compared to the same period in 2022. Local sales of M91 grade petrol rose 21 per cent to 1.135mn barrels while its exports amounted to 198,300 barrels during the same period.

The output of M95 grade petrol also grew by 51.7 per cent to 843,900 barrels in January, the NCSI data showed.

However, local sales of M95

grade petrol decreased 3.9 per cent to 943,700 barrels while its exports amounted to 35,000 barrels during January.

Volumes of diesel production increased 26.5 per cent in January compared to the same period in 2022, reaching 2.842mn barrels. Diesel sales increased by 10.5 per cent to 1.165mn barrels while diesel exports grew 37.4 per cent to 1.718mn barrels.

In petrochemical products, polypropylene production and exports witnessed a sharp increase of 175.3 per cent and 339.7 per cent, respectively, while its local sales decreased by 41.9 per cent in January 2023 compared to the same period of 2022.

The production and exports of benzene also increased by 36.9 per cent and 111.3 per cent, respectively.

The production and exports of paraxylene jumped 111.4 per cent and 136.1 per cent, respectively, in January 2023.

UAE, Egypt and Jordan sign \$2bn deals

Amman, Jordan – Companies from the UAE, Egypt, Jordan and Bahrain signed industrial agreements with an investment value exceeding US\$2bn at the third Higher Committee meeting of the Industrial Partnership for Sustainable Economic Development.

The meeting included the signing of 12 agreements across nine industrial projects. The projects

are expected to create approximately 13,000 job opportunities and boost national GDP in the partnering countries by more than US\$1.6bn.

The Egyptian company Soda Chemical Industries announced an investment of US\$500mn to produce sodium carbonate, 'soda ash', which is the main raw material in many industries, such as the

glass and detergent sector.

UAE-based automotive manufacturer M Glory Holding announced the launch of a large manufacturing project with an investment of US\$550mn. The project will establish three electric vehicle factories with specialised production and assembly lines in the UAE, Jordan and Egypt.

WAM

OOMCO expands into Egypt market

Cairo, Egypt – Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) recently signed an agreement with Egypt's Alexandria Company for Petroleum Additives (ACPA) for the production, mixing and packaging of special oils in Egypt.

The agreement was signed in the presence of Tarek el Molla, Egyptian Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, H E Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Oman's ambassador to Egypt, and Tarik Mohamed al Junaidi, CEO of Oman Oil Marketing Company.

ACPA will act as a hub to market and sell OOMCO's lubricant oils in Africa. OOMCO also signed a memorandum of understanding with Egypt Petroleum Company for the manufacture and supply of lubricants.

The signing ceremonies took place during the Egypt Petroleum Show (EGYPS) 2023, an annual petroleum and energy event held under the auspices of Abdel Fattah el Sisi, President of Egypt.

OOMCO's expansion to Egypt will lead to more growth momentum in Africa as Oman's leading fuel marketing company is planning to maximise opportunities in the rest of the continent,



while it already operates in Tanzania.

OOMCO CEO Tarik Mohamed al Junaidi said, "Top-branded lubes have always been trending products in the oil and gas value chain, which creates room for further growth opportunities.

Our latest agreements with the Alexandria Company for Petroleum Additives and Egypt Petroleum Company allows us to further increase our regional market share, while we aim to leverage the strong trade ties between Egypt and Oman as well. Our expansion to other countries

further contributes to Oman's economic growth as we continue to do our part in fueling the development of Oman through our expansion strategy."

He added, "We participated in the Egypt Petroleum Show to not only promote our high-quality products and services, but to also discuss game-changing trends and challenges shaping the future of energy with other global industry leaders. This gathering of policy makers and various stakeholders presented an opportunity to discuss a low-carbon future involving renewables such as green hydrogens

and a more sustainable production of oil and gas."

The agreements, as well as the participation in EGYPS 2023, are further underpinning OOMCO's commitment to remain a pioneer in the area of fuel marketing.

The Omani company is currently selling its high-quality and branded lubricant oils in 17 different Asian, Middle Eastern and Northern African countries. Meanwhile, and as part of its diversified expansion strategy, OOMCO operates service stations in not only Oman, but also in Saudi Arabia and Tanzania.

Investcorp launches its presence in Japan

Tokyo, Japan – Investcorp, a leading global alternative investment firm, on Monday announced its entry into the Japanese market with the opening of its office in Tokyo.

Furthermore, Investcorp has appointed Professor Heizo Takenaka in the role of chairman of Investcorp Japan. This comes as a major advance in the firm's global expansion which started in 2015 when executive chairman Mohammed Alardhi launched its strategic growth plan.

The opening of Investcorp's Tokyo office will allow the firm to provide global alternative invest-



Mohammed Alardhi

ment solutions in Japan, in addition to setting the grounds for Investcorp direct private equity and real estate investing in the highly attractive Japanese mar-

ket.

Investcorp's executive chairman Mohammed Alardhi inaugurated the office in Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo. The event was attended by co-CEO Hazem Ben-Gacem, Professor Takenaka, along with a number of Investcorp's partners from its Tokyo and other offices.

Alardhi said, "Following our historic achievement of surpassing US\$50bn in assets under management in December 2022, the opening of an Investcorp office in Japan is the next major milestone along our road of global growth. It will strengthen our global presence and will allow us to better serve

the needs of our clients in Japan."

He said, "We are looking forward to further expand our base of Japanese investors and bring new investment capital into the region, namely from the GCC. We are excited to work with Professor Takenaka and our growing team on the ground to develop our offerings in Japan for the benefit of our clients, partners, and other stakeholders in the country."

The Tokyo office will enable Investcorp to better respond to the growing demand in Japan for higher return investments by leveraging Investcorp's global alternative investment expertise.



Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles SAOG

P O Box : 143 PC : 118 Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Tel : 24649091- 24649093 Fax: 24649097

email : ceramics@omantel.net.om web site : alshams.org

Notice for Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles Company SAOG ("Company") is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the annual ordinary general meeting of the company, which is scheduled to be held at 3 pm on Monday , 27/3/2023, via the electronic platform to hold general meetings which can accessed through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, a second annual ordinary general meeting will be held at 3 pm on Sunday 2/4/2023 to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31/12/2022.
- To consider and approve the board of directors on the company's Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended on 31/12/2022.
- To consider and approve the Board of Directors performance report for the financial year ended 31/12/2022.
- To consider the auditor's report and approve the balance sheet and profit and loss account for the financial year ended on 31/12/2022.
- To consider and approve the proposed cash dividend to the shareholders, as on the date of the meeting, amounting to 10 baisa for each share for the financial year ended 31 /12/2022
- To approve the sitting fees of the Board and Committee meetings paid to the Board Members for the previous financial year and to determine the sitting fees for the upcoming financial year .
- To consider and approve the proposal of distributing the total sum of RO 10,000/- as remuneration for the Board of Directors of the Company for the year ended 31 /12/ 2022.
- To consider the amounts allocated and spent for the company's social responsibilities for the year ended on 31/12/2022.
- To consider and approve the allocation of an amount of RO (20,000) for corporate social responsibility programs, for the year ending on 31/12/ 2023.
- The appointment of the Auditors for the Company for the financial year ending 31/12/ 2023 and approve their fees.

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

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

For further information please contact Mr Khalfan Al Sabahi, contact phone number 25449966.

Chairman

Auditors

Legal consultants

UAE's ADNOC Gas expands IPO, seeking up to \$2.5bn windfall

Dubai, UAE - The UAE's ADNOC Gas raised the number of shares in its initial public offering by 25 per cent on Monday as it seeks to raise US\$2.5bn in what is expected to be the biggest flotation so far this year.

ADNOC Gas, an offshoot of the United Arab Emirates' Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), a major crude producer, expanded the offering from 4.0 to 5.0 per cent or 3.84bn shares.



A price range of 2.25-2.43 dirhams (US\$0.61-0.66) was announced last week, valuing the newly formed company at US\$47-50.8bn.

The final offer price is due to be announced on Friday, before the shares launch on the Abu Dhabi stock exchange on March 13.

The offering was increased "based on significant investor demand across all tranches", said a statement carried by the official WAM News Agency.

The initial three billion shares were sold within an hour when they were made available last Thursday, a source close to the company told AFP.

ADNOC Gas, formed from

ADNOC's former gas processing, LNG and industrial gas units, only became operational on January 1.

Its rapid flotation follows increased activity in the gas market following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which sent European countries scrambling to find alternative suppliers.

ADNOC Gas's parent company, ADNOC, is one of the world's biggest producers of crude and the UAE's key revenue-earner.

According to Bloomberg, only US\$1.67bn has been raised in IPOs in Europe, the Middle East and Africa so far this year.

AFP

UK, EU eye agreement over post-Brexit trade in N Ireland

London, UK - Britain and the European Union were on Monday poised to agree a crucial overhaul of trade rules in Northern Ireland, in a breakthrough aimed at resetting strained relations since Brexit.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen were set to hold "final talks" at lunchtime in the UK, in a bid to end more than a year of negotiations over the so-called Northern Ireland protocol.

Agreed in 2020 as part of Britain's EU divorce, the pact kept the province in the European single market and subject to different trade rules than the rest of the UK, angering pro-UK unionists there and eurosceptics in London.

The UK government had threatened a unilateral overhaul of the protocol unless the EU agreed to wholesale changes, souring diplomatic ties and risking a wider trade war, but that prospect now appears to be receding.

"I'm looking forward to turning a page and opening a new chapter with our partner and



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (right) talks with European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen in London on Monday (AFP)

friend," von der Leyen said as she left Brussels for Britain.

The EU chief is also set to meet King Charles III in Windsor, west of London, stoking controversy in the UK that Sunak was trying to project royal endorsement of the expected deal.

It is likely to face opposition from Brexiters, including his potentially rebellious predecessor Boris Johnson, and lawmakers representing the pro-British unionist community in Northern Ireland.

Insisting the monarch's meeting with von der Leyen was decided by Buckingham Palace, Sunak's spokesman reiterated an agreement appeared imminent.

"We believe these are the final talks and significant progress has been made over a number of weeks and months, but it is important to have these leader-level discussions for the deal to be finally agreed," he told reporters.

'Power-sharing'
Sunak and von der Leyen are

due to hold a short joint press conference in Windsor if the agreement is finalised, before the UK leader - who took power in October - makes a statement to parliament.

An agreement would end more than a year of talks between London and Brussels, under the direction of three different British prime ministers and the cloud of the war in Ukraine.

It is seen as long overdue to help stabilise Northern Ireland.

The protocol has faced staunch opposition from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the largest pro-UK party there, who argue it threatens the province's place within the UK.

The DUP collapsed devolved power-sharing a year ago, and vowed to keep blocking the functioning of the assembly until the rules are scrapped.

It is unclear if the deal - which is expected to end most checks on Northern Ireland-bound goods and limit the role of European institutions there - will satisfy the party.

That in turn could determine how Conservative eurosceptics

in London react.

Former cabinet minister and Johnson loyalist Jacob Rees-Mogg said Monday that the DUP's verdict would be "very influential" among Tory lawmakers.

"I'm not sure he has achieved the objective of getting the DUP back into power-sharing, which is the fundamental point of it," he told broadcaster ITV.

Disagreements about the protocol have dogged relations between Britain and the EU since Brexit rules came into effect in 2021 and are seen as hindering broader post-Brexit cooperation.

The UK, which is grappling with the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation and predicted to be the only G7 country to enter recession this year, is seen as eager to reset relations to boost trade.

The government in London is also under pressure to restore power-sharing in Belfast, particularly with the 25th anniversary of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement - which ended three decades of conflict - looming large.

AFP



History says Fed can't tame inflation without recession: Report

Washington, US - There is no recent precedent for a central bank successfully defeating inflation without "substantial economic sacrifice or recession," said a report presented to Federal Reserve policymakers.

The report, prepared in connection with a seminar organized by the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, came after fresh US pricing data suggested the Fed's aggressive moves thus far have been only partially successful.

The Booth analysis suggested a potentially rocky future for the US economy, which has thus far shown resilience despite aggressive Fed actions to counter inflation.

Citing historical "disinflation" cases dating back to 1950 in major economies, the report concluded that central banks "are likely to be hard pressed to achieve their disinflationary goals without significant sacrifice in economic activity."

The analysis, prepared by a team of academic and corporate economists, identified parallels between the current climate and that of the late 1970s when former Fed Chair Paul Volcker radically increased interest rates to counter soaring inflation.

As with the earlier period, the Fed in the recent episode also "fell behind the curve," the report said.

The Volcker case "shows how

costly disinflation can be once a central bank has lost credibility for controlling inflation," said the report, which also recounted the bruising consequences, including more than 10 per cent unemployment in the 1980s.

Recent robust US jobs and retail sales data do not show anything like that right now. But the Booth report predicted the Fed "will need to tighten policy significantly further to achieve its inflation objective by the end of 2025."

Philip Jefferson, a member of the Fed's Board of Governors, acknowledged the importance of looking at history, but highlighted the "unprecedented" nature of the pandemic that has made the current period distinct.

Economic models "while still useful in many respects, are going to have limited applicability," he said in prepared remarks.

Such tools "need to be used with careful interpretation and judgment when history does not speak to the current situation," Jefferson said.

"Sound decisionmaking requires that their findings be complemented with additional analytical tools, including careful scrutiny of real-time data."

A second Fed official, Loretta Mester, president of the Federal Bank of Cleveland, suggested the US central bank faces a challenging balancing act.

AFP

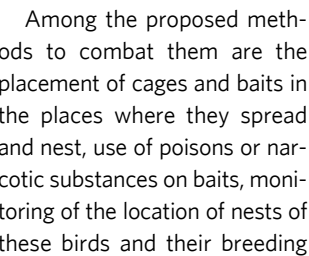
Sembcorp Salalah سيمبكورب صلالة		
Chairman's Report		
Dear Shareholders,		
On behalf of the Board of Directors (the Board) of Sembcorp Salalah Power & Water Company ("SSPWC" or "the Company"), I am pleased to present the audited financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2022.		
Financial Results		
2022 was another challenging year. The global economy experienced significantly high inflation and tightening financial conditions amidst a prolonged COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these, I am delighted to report that the Company delivered a net profit of RO 19.6 million in 2022. Operating profit was RO 31.5 million in 2022 compared to RO 32.1 million in 2021. The decline in operating profit was mainly due to an increase in operating costs. Basic Earnings Per Share was Baizas 20.6 in 2022. The Company continued to report a strong balance sheet, ending the year with net assets of RO 147.8 million.		
I invite you to refer to the Management Discussion and Analysis Report section of the Annual Report for more information on the Company's financial results.		
Dividends		
Based on availability of cashflows, the Board proposed to the shareholders to approve a total dividend of up to Baizas 7.5 per share to be paid on November 1, 2023. In 2022, the Company paid a total dividend of Baizas 6.0 per share.		
The Company follows a reasonable dividend payout policy, subject to debt repayments, working capital and operational expenditure requirements. The amount of annual dividends and the determination whether to pay dividends in any year is subject to several other factors, including the Company's business prospects, financial performance, free cash availability, covenants under the Financing Documents and outlook for the power and water sectors.		
Operations		
There is no change in the industry structure in the Dhofar region. We expect to remain as one of the key power and water producers to meet the demands of the region. We continue to strive for the highest level of plant availability and reliability, which is critical to the ongoing success of the Company. To achieve targeted plant availability and reliability, the Company completed the timely and planned maintenance of the plant, and implemented various plant improvement initiatives. In 2022, reliability of the power and water plants was 99.86% and 99.98% respectively, compared to 99.80% and 99.36% in 2021. The power plant load factor increased from 38.51% to 41.07%, mainly due to higher demand from the Local Dispatch Centre. Water plant load factor reduced from 73.41% to 58.69%, mainly due to the sharing of water demand with new plant Salalah Independent Water Project III. However, due to the take-or-pay commercial arrangement that we have with Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the plant load factor does not have a significant impact on the profitability of the Company.		
Going forward		
2023 is expected to be another challenging year considering prevailing macro-economic conditions. We will remain focused on maximising shareholder returns through a continued watch on the financial and operational performance of the Company, and by minimising the impact of rising global inflation and interest rates. The commitment to safe and reliable operations will remain the Company's top priority.		
Health, Safety, Security and the Environment (HSSE)		
The health and safety of our people as well as protecting the environment we live in is important to our business. We aim to achieve world-class health and safety performances in our daily operations and our management team is committed to continuous improvement on this front.		
Despite COVID-19, the Company successfully achieved no lost time incidents and zero incidents of environmental non-compliance. I am also pleased to report that we have set the record for the 10th consecutive year of safe and efficient operations. This is a strong testament to the commitment that our staff and contractors have in sustaining a safe culture through the strict implementation and conformance to the Sembcorp HSSE Policies and Standards.		
Caring for the Environment and Communities		
The Company recognizes the importance of being a responsible corporate citizen and is committed to caring for the environment as well as making a positive impact to the communities in which we operate. We continuously improve our waste management system and reduce carbon emissions by managing our auxiliary power consumption. The Company follows a consistent approach for charitable contributions and community investments that bring positive benefits to the local communities. In 2022, the Company contributed RO60,000 towards corporate social responsibility activities. These include donating to Oman Charitable Organisation as part of the country's charity mandate, investing in initiatives to improve public infrastructure, education and health, as well as promoting environmental awareness in Mirbat municipality.		
Corporate Governance		
The Board believes that a business built on the principles of good governance is key to our long-term success. Our Company complies with the Code of Corporate Governance issued by the Oman Capital Market Authority. More details can be found in the Corporate Governance report.		
On Record		
Sheikh Khalid Ali Al Hamoodah completed his tenure as director of the Company at the last Annual General Meeting held on March 22, 2022. On behalf of the Board, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation for his invaluable contributions to the Company.		
I would also like to thank my fellow directors, shareholders, OPWP, regulators (Authority for Public Services Regulation and Capital Market Authority), and our partners (Dhofar Integrated Services Company, The Environment Authority, Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Oman Electricity		
Transmission Company, OQ Company and other governmental and non-governmental bodies) for their guidance and support to the Company. I am also grateful to our employees and contractors for their dedication and commitment to the Company.		
Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Al Said for his wise leadership as well as his continued support and encouragement to the private sector. We will continue to work closely with His Majesty's government and remain committed to our mission to supply quality and reliable power and water of the highest standards to the Dhofar region.		
Tan Cheng Guan		
Chairman of the Board		
Statement of profit and loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2022		
	2022 RO	2021 RO
Revenue	74,176,028	72,226,284
Cost of sales	(43,331,560)	(40,402,593)
Gross profit	30,844,468	31,823,691
Other income	1,352,048	895,092
General and administrative expenses	(711,360)	(656,122)
Profit (loss) from operating activities	31,485,156	32,062,661
Finance income	333,898	97,236
Finance costs	(8,728,113)	(10,616,661)
Profit (loss) before income tax	23,090,941	21,543,236
Income tax expense, continuing operations	(3,470,277)	(3,242,580)
Profit (loss) for the year	19,620,664	18,300,656
Other comprehensive income - Net of tax		
Changes in fair value of cash flow hedges	6,764,447	5,391,081
Total comprehensive income for the year	26,385,111	23,691,737
Earnings per share:		
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.0206	0.0192
Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2022		
	2022 RO	2021 RO
ASSETS		
NON-CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant and equipment	248,808,129	259,434,928
Intangible assets other than goodwill	175	2,965
Right of use assets	647,549	674,532
Non-current derivative financial assets	29,279	-
Total non-current assets	249,485,132	260,112,425
CURRENT ASSETS		
Current inventories	5,519,281	5,461,052
Trade and other current receivables	8,403,673	19,577,001
Current derivative financial assets	376,250	-
Cash and bank balances	24,584,363	22,212,090
Total current assets	38,883,567	47,250,143
Total assets	288,368,699	307,362,568
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
EQUITY		
Share capital	95,457,195	95,457,195
Legal reserves	14,822,573	12,860,507
Retained earnings	37,153,469	25,222,303
Hedging reserve	344,697	(6,419,750)
Total Equity	147,777,934	127,120,255
LIABILITIES		
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Provision for abandonment and site restoration	780,136	732,664
Borrowings, non-current	73,305,197	100,589,975
Non-current lease liabilities	557,568	523,572
Non-current derivative financial liabilities	-	4,803,570
Deferred tax liabilities	24,814,395	23,417,106
Contract liabilities, non-current/Deferred non-current revenue	1,078,882	-
Total non-current liabilities	100,536,178	130,066,887
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other current payables	9,002,051	18,113,440
Borrowings, current	27,780,298	26,735,713
Current derivative financial liabilities	-	2,749,077
Current tax liabilities	3,272,238	2,577,196
Total current liabilities	40,054,587	50,175,426
Total liabilities	140,590,765	180,242,313
Total equity and liabilities	288,368,699	307,362,568
Number of outstanding shares	954,571,950	954,571,950
Net assets per share	0.155	0.133
Sembcorp Salalah Power & Water Company SAOG P.O. Box 1466, Postal Code 211, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: +968 2323 8510 (467); Fax: +968 2323 8512. www.sembcorpsalalah.com.om		

Despite the vital role of birds as part of the ecosystem, it has recently been noticed a number of invasive birds that have negatively affected the local ecosystem and its biodiversity by some invasive birds, namely the house crow and myna birds.

Invasive birds are the ones that are alien to our local environment. They arrive either in cargo ships, or are supplied as ornamental birds. In many cases, the birds just move from neighbouring countries where such species of birds are widespread.

These birds have caused a disruption to the ecosystem in Oman, and created serious health and economic effects. They caused some damage to agricultural crops, attacking poultry, their young and eggs.

These birds also transmit a number of diseases such as avian influenza, salmonella bacteria, dermatitis, skin rashes and others, and also inflict damage on public properties.



Among the proposed methods to combat them are the placement of cages and baits in the places where they spread and nest, use of poisons or narcotic substances on baits, monitoring of the location of nests of these birds and their breeding

places and getting rid of them first. A layer of oil is also applied to the outer surface of the eggs or the egg hole, along with the use of firing with pneumatic weapons to get rid of these birds.

The municipality relies on the community to eliminate this bird,

by closing garbage containers, whether in residential neighbourhoods, beaches or parks, increasing the number of closed garbage containers in tourist and public sites, and developing laws to reduce the phenomenon of dumping leftovers in open spaces.



Lulu Hypermarket launched the first season of its 'World Food Fest 2023', which is a grand celebration of all the unique foods and flavours of the world. The first season of the annual food fest 2023 began on February 22 and will run till March 4.

Lulu Hypermarket launched the first season of its 'World Food Fest 2023', which is a grand celebration of all the unique foods

and flavours of the world. The first season of the annual food fest 2023 began on February 22 and will run till March 4.

The event will provide customers an opportunity to pamper their taste buds, be part of fun events and contests, as well as win amazing prizes and gift coupons.

The two-week long celebration will include special cookery contests, e-raffle promotions and celebrity visits held across all Lulu hypermarkets. Customers can also be part of other activities such as live cooking demos, free sampling sessions and food exhibitions. Special in-store sampling counters will be put up throughout the promotion for customers to sample a variety of unique food products on display.

As part of the World Food Fest 2023, Lulu will provide a chance for more than 100 customers to win amazing gifts on

purchase of their favourite food products worth RO10 from any of the Lulu Hypermarkets in Oman and Lulu online stores.

The gift items include Apple iPhone 14 PRO 128GB, Samsung Microwave Oven, Gigilli Granite Cookware set, as well as Lulu Shoppinggift Cards worth RO50. The winners are selected through a digital raffle draw.

Customers can also avail special discounts and offers on groceries, frozen products, Special imported food products, ready-to-eat items, pastries, breads, fresh food products, and more.

There will be 20 per cent off available on selected cookware sets during the promotion. Customers can also be part of a Scratch and Win contest and take home Gold bars and Gold coins worth 1 KG on purchase of Puck Products for RO3. Shoppers can also get an instant discount of 500 baisas on purchase of any Americana Frozen Products worth RO4.

There will also be a special section for combo meals and

ready-to-cook boxes for consumers who lack both the time and the inspiration for cooking, providing them the real taste of a home-cooked meal.

Shabeer K A, Regional Director - Oman, remarked, "We are extremely happy to launch the food fest every year for our customers to enjoy the world's best food, drinks and entertainment all under one roof. It is an opportunity for visitors to experience new tastes and flavours from around the globe. There is also an opportunity for baking enthusiasts to get their apron on, the flour in the bowl and start baking!"

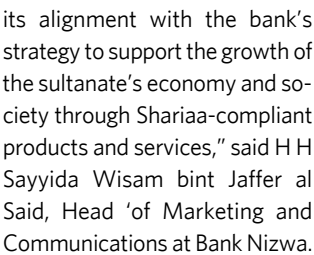
"The food fest will host celebrities showcasing some incredible talents and sharing top cooking tips with shoppers. Customers can also enjoy a variety of events and performances while sampling all the scrumptious delights of the festival. It will, no doubt, be a world of tantalising food and drink all in one festival that includes the best chefs and the best culinary delights!" he added.

Bank Nizwa, the most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, sponsored the 18th Cultural Season at Nizwa University as part of its ongoing efforts to support cultural events that promote knowledge and awareness.

Bank Nizwa, the most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, sponsored the 18th Cultural Season at Nizwa University as part of its ongoing efforts to support cultural events that promote knowledge and awareness.

The season featured a diverse range of cultural, artistic, and economic programmes, providing a platform for showcasing innovative student projects in the arts, literature and business. The event attracted a large audience of students, academics, administrators and representatives from government and private institutions both within and outside the province. Notably, senior representatives of universities and colleges in the Sultanate of Oman were in attendance.

"At Bank Nizwa, we are committed to supporting cultural initiatives that aim to enhance cooperation with various institutions in the sultanate. Bank Nizwa's sponsorship of the 18th Cultural Season demonstrates the importance of the event and



its alignment with the bank's strategy to support the growth of the sultanate's economy and society through Shariaa-compliant products and services," said H H Sayyida Wisam bint Jaffer al Said, Head 'of Marketing and Communications at Bank Nizwa.

This year's cultural season was packed with a variety of events, including the release of the National Entrepreneurship Report, an exhibition showcasing student products and companies as well as a series of hands-on workshops.

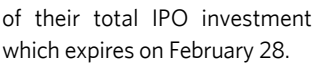
Additionally, an international

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) customers can now use their mobile banking app to subscribe digitally to the initial public offering of Abraj Energy Services Company (under transformation), a subsidiary of OQ, the global integrated energy group.

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) customers can now use their mobile banking app to subscribe digitally to the initial public offering of Abraj Energy Services Company (under transformation), a subsidiary of OQ, the global integrated energy group.

Completely paperless and without the need to physically visit a branch, customers will be able to benefit from a seamless experience instantly through a click of a button from the comfort of their home, office, or on the go.

The bank is also one of the few financial institutions that is offering customers short term loans to finance up to 50 per cent



of their total IPO investment
which expires on February 28.

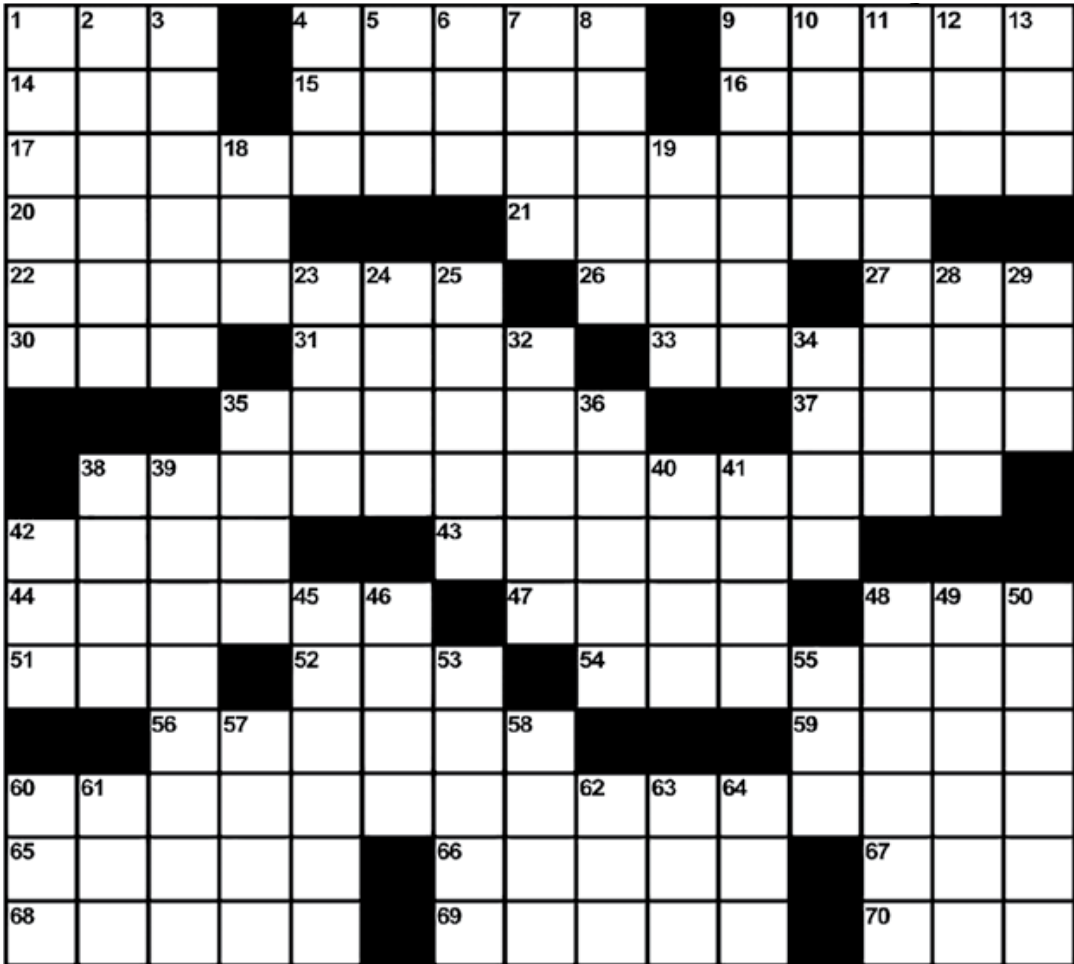
"By leveraging cutting-edge technology, we are making investing simpler, easier, more accessible and secure for our customers," said Sulaiman Ali al Hinai, General Manager - Head

of Treasury, Investment and Government Relations/Fl Bank-
ing Group at Oman Arab Bank.
"We are both proud and excited
to be supporting the government
to achieve the economic diversifi-
cation objectives of Oman Vision
2040 by providing seamless ac-
cess to market opportunities
through our mobile banking
proposition that will facilitate
greater private sector participa-
tion."

"Innovation is at the core of everything we do and is driving the acceleration and scaling of our digital transformation plan to deliver greater value to customers," he added.

شركة صناعة مواد البناء (ش.م.ع.ع) Construction Materials Industries (S.A.O.G)											
P.O. Box: 1791, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 26752247/26752287, Fax: 26750867											
BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT		STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022									
Respected shareholders of Construction Materials Industries,											
Peace, mercy and blessings of God,											
On my own behalf and on behalf of the members of the Board of Directors, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the forty-fifth ordinary Annual General Meeting of your esteemed company and I am pleased to present to you the report of the Board of Directors in addition to the annual report of the auditor for the financial year ending on 31/12/2022.											
Achievements and significant events that affected the company during the year 2022											
Despite the decrease in the rigorosness of the repercussions of the Corona pandemic in 2022 and the world breathed a sigh of relief, the industrial sector in the Sultanate still has a long way to recover. The year 2022 witnessed an increase in oil and energy prices such as fuel and electricity and an increase in the prices of raw materials used in production. The decrease in demand for the company's products of quicklime and dolomite, especially in the steel industry sector in the Sultanate, had a significant impact on the decrease in sales and profits of the company for the year 2022, and this is according to what was expected for the year.											
The decision of the Ministry of Transport to prevent the entry of land transport (empty) to the Sultanate also had a great impact on the company's inability to comply with its commitments to supply quick lime to desalination plants outside the Sultanate, and on the company's inability to achieve the agreed sales with its customers. Shutdown of some of the major steel industry producers in Sohar also had a significant impact on the company's ability to achieve its planned targets during the period.											
Sales income has been decreased by 25.35% compared to the previous year (2022: 3,017,216 OMR, 2021: 4,041,630 OMR). Year 2022 also witnessed a decrease in net profit after tax by 64.85% compared to last year's net profit (2022: 176,040 OMR, 2021: 500,798 OMR).											
The following is the geographical analysis of sales as of 31/12/2022.											
Total foreign sales, domestic sales, the statement :-											
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Particulars</th><th>Total</th><th>Export Sales</th><th>Local Sales</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Sales</td><td>RO.3,017,216/-</td><td>RO.1,756,868/-</td><td>RO. 1,260,348/-</td></tr> </tbody> </table>				Particulars	Total	Export Sales	Local Sales	Sales	RO.3,017,216/-	RO.1,756,868/-	RO. 1,260,348/-
Particulars	Total	Export Sales	Local Sales								
Sales	RO.3,017,216/-	RO.1,756,868/-	RO. 1,260,348/-								
Future Plans and Challenges for the company for the coming year:											
The company's management is still striving to advance the company to achieve the best results during the coming period, by following up on all the obstacles facing the company and working to follow up with the relevant government agencies, and the company's management is constantly striving to reduce the cost of production to increase competitiveness in the local and foreign markets through the following :-											
- Follow-up with the concerned authorities to complete all the requirements for the operation of Wadi Al-Jizi quarry in Sohar. - Follow-up with the concerned authorities to complete the procedures for obtaining the necessary permits to operate the quarry, which is located in Al-Dhahira Governorate - Wilayat Dhank. - Continuous pursuit of the development of production processes in order to reduce the cost of production. - Strive and exert effort to maintain the company's market share in the local and regional markets and work to increase them including reflected on the results of the company's business. - Steady and continuous exploration of new markets with a better profit margin. - Finding new sources of raw materials at a lower cost.											
Internal control :-											
The company has an internal control system to ensure the progress of work in accordance with the controls issued by the Authority for the capital market.											
Donations and contributions paid by the company during the year 2022											
The company is committed in implementing all environmental standards and requirements, as the company's factories are operating in line with these environmental standards and requirements. The company has also made donations and contributions to serve the local community during this year by RO.4,325/-.											
The company's contribution to serving the environment and the local community											
The company is committed to implementing all environmental standards and requirements as the company's factories are being operated in line with these environmental standards and requirements.											
The company's policy for distributing profits to shareholders :-											
The Board of Directors have recommended to the AGM 2.5% dividends for the year 2022.											
Reservations in the reports of the auditor:											
The statutory auditors (M/s. Abu Timan Grant Thornton) do not have any reservations on the company's financial report for the year 2022.											
Based on the foregoing, I am pleased and honored to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks and deep appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, may God protect and preserve him, for his high and sound guidance, care and continuous support for the advancement of the national industry to assume its rightful place among the global industries, and I also extend my sincere thanks to the various ministries and government departments in the Sultanate for their support and participation in serving this country and the dear division.											
In conclusion, I also take this opportunity to express my thanks and deep appreciation to the company's shareholders, customers, suppliers and all employees of the company for their efforts to raise the level of the company and work to achieve the best results based on the plan set for next year.											
Peace, mercy and blessings of God,											
Khalid bin Abdullah Al-Jabri Chairman of Board of Directors											
		31 December 2022 RO									
		31 December 2021 RO									
ASSETS											
Non-current assets:											
Property, plant and equipment	4,088,896	4,359,643									
Right-of-use assets	534,243	599,829									
Total non-current assets	4,623,139	4,959,472									
Current assets:											
Inventories	1,505,353	1,301,708									
Trade and other receivables	866,492	804,426									
Term deposit	500,000	150,245									
Cash and cash equivalents	564,008	808,616									
Total current assets	3,435,853	3,064,995									
Total assets	8,058,992	8,024,467									
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES											
EQUITY											
Share capital	6,250,000	8,500,000									
Legal reserve	370,078	352,474									
Retained earnings/(accumulated losses)	157,951	(2,250,485)									
Total equity	6,778,029	6,601,989									
LIABILITIES											
Non-current liabilities:											

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Karim of the Khans, for one
4) City on the Missouri
9) Folklore heavies
14) Wager
15) Twofold
16) Nigerian currency
17) Crazy, proverbially (with "has")
20) Toledo's lake
21) Having no feet
22) Knuckle under
26) Embrace
27) Finale
30) Health resort
31) Fodder holder
33) First-__ (novice jailbird)
35) Show-off scholar
37) Plural suffix with "auction" or "musket"
38) Sure thing, it's said
42) Dalai_
43) Syndicate
44) "Delicious!"
4 7) Composes
48) Ozone layer pollutant,

for short

- 51) Tokyo, formerly
52) Beaver's work
54) Toast
56) Registers, as a complaint
59) "What's gotten_ you?"
60) Backstabber
65) Flower-petal oil
66) Attack on a fort, e.g.
67) It's spotted in casinos
68) Cheese byproducts
69) Firebug's doing
70) "Go on ..."

DOWN

- 1) Mother superior
2) Get ready for action
3) Infamous prison
4) __-Vwan Kenobi
5) Time div.
6) Kitchen pest
7) "Funny_ or funny strange?"
8) Beth's preceder
9) Antsy
10) Apple variety
11) Sharpshooters

12) "To_ is human ..."

- 13) Utter
18) "Hold on a_!"
19) Boxing match
23) Brought into play
24) Calf-length skirt
25) Mont or Mel
28) Uncool sort
29) Members of the AMA
32) Ready to serve, as beer
34) Authentic
35) Beseech
36) Hurled
38) Data-speed unit
39) Kill in a sacrifice
40) Sicilian peak
41) BP alternative
42) Soapmaker's need
45) Milk containers
46) O. Henry's "The Gift of the_"
48) The Great White North
49) Has a sense of belonging
50) Barred to entry
53) Bright group
55) "Dear" one
57) Approve

58) Cookbook direction

- 60) Adage
61) Mathematician's ordinal

62) "For_ajolly ..."

- 63) Diva's problem
64)_-Xers (Boomers' kids)

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You can breathe a great big sigh of relief today. That issue you were afraid would rear its ugly head at the last minute isn't going to be bothering you (at least not today). No monkey wrench is going to be thrown into any of your plans. This release of tension will certainly put a smile on your face. There is a new hopefulness in your life right now, and it's inspiring all kinds of new ways of doing things. Your flexibility is at an all-time high, so get ready to stretch!



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Touchy, touchy, touchy! The people who are disagreeing with you today aren't trying to be difficult; they're just trying to follow through on what they believe to be the right way of doing things. You owe it to them to be patient. They aren't trying to insult you. They just don't quite know how to express what they want to say in a way that isn't going to tick you off a little bit. Their clumsy articulation could come off as rude, but they're just not as good at communicating as you are. Cut them some slack.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Don't be surprised if you feel like no one in your circle of friends and associates understands where you're coming from today. They're in their own world, so if you need to find people who share your ideas, you'll need to look elsewhere. The good news is that you're sure to find some fascinating people! This is a great day to talk to strangers and find out what makes them tick. Go beyond the silly small talk and you'll really get somewhere!



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Don't be too surprised if you feel a little bit weird or out of place among the people you're with today. It's only natural for you to feel like a fish out of water during such a transitional time in your life. It's normal to have a heightened sense of how different you are from the people around you now. Just take your time, and go at your own pace. Soon enough you'll start to feel more like yourself. You'll grow more comfortable in your own skin.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

A friend's recent advice is still humming in your mind. Maybe it's something you should follow after all! Consider doing an experiment today and try out what they suggested. See how it feels for you. If you don't see any changes by the end of the day, you can go back to doing things the way you were doing them. But keep in mind that if you don't change how you approach solving a problem, you can't expect a change in the outcome.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

No one will ever do a better job of creating your future than you, so why are you modeling your decisions on someone else's? Your vision of the future has to come organically from inside you. You can't tread in someone else's footprints, no matter how deep those footprints might be. So stop looking at what other people are doing. Decide what you want and then stand firm. Pay no attention to what others are doing. You are your own person, with your own destiny.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

This day is well suited for action, but it isn't so perfect for deep thought or contemplation. Your brain is a bit sluggish when it comes to new plans right now, but your physical self is ready to get moving. A new sport or active hobby sounds like a great idea. But concentration? Not so appealing. Don't expect a lot of success in terms of understanding complicated ideas or strategies. It isn't an ideal day to take a test or write a report, so if that was on your schedule, try to move it to another day.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Adding a touch of romance to your life might not seem appropriate right now, but it might be exactly what you need. You need to smile more often! Remember that you don't have to have a love partner to get more romantic. You just have to start seeing things in a more idealistic, beautiful, and hopeful way. The rest will take care of itself. All you need to do is start to focus on the positive possibilities and the Universe will take the hint. Try it and see!



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You can make today a great day, no matter how much you might be dreading a certain assignment, event, or test that you're going to have to deal with. All you have to do is gain more control over your agenda. To do this, you should depend on your ever-reliable sense of reality. It will help you figure out what is a real problem and what is merely an inconvenience that you can ignore. Pick your battles and you'll end up in a lot fewer than you think.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Getting financially educated is about to get a lot easier. Someone you trust could turn you on to a publication or website that answers a lot of questions and helps you feel more empowered when it comes to your money. Take this seriously and take copious notes. This is an educational time for you, when you start to learn about things you never thought you'd ever have any interest in. Your brain is ready and waiting to soak up some heavy stuff, so feel free to pour it on.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

A problem could pop up around your home today. A family member might not know how to react, but you will. Take over and show them there's nothing to fear. Older, wiser relatives have a lot to offer, especially if you're starting a new relationship. Their words of compassion and wisdom are as helpful as a custom-drawn map. The ties you have with people you're related to are stronger than ever. Spend more time with the folks in your family.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today, you could gain a key insight into how you can create a healthier, happier life. Your physical health is something you can influence more than you have been. Getting active is easier than you think, and the benefits of getting off the couch more often are immense. A long lost friend could soon reappear on the scene. Things might be different for a while, but they're truly the same person they always were, which could be either a good thing or a bad thing!



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Bezique is what kind of game?

- A. Card game
B. Guessing game
C. Board game
D. Throwing game

02. What island, 1 mile from Manhattan, which has been used by the army as an isolation centre for infectious diseases (such as typhoid and TB) and as a drug rehabilitation centre, is now deserted?

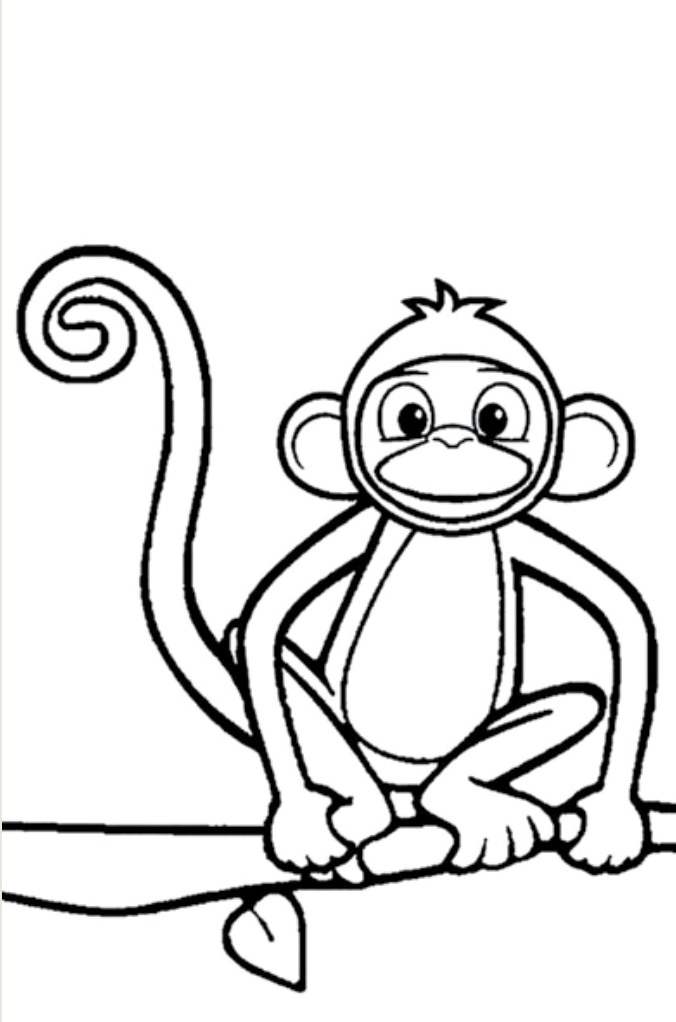
- A. Ellis Island
B. Rikers Island
C. Bedloe's Island
D. North Brother Island

03. Who defected from Russia to the West at a Paris airport on 17 June 1961?

- A. Mikhail Baryshnikov
B. Rudolph Nureyev
C. Vassily Nijinsky
D. Vera Zvonareva

Answers: 1. A 2. D 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	T	E	T
A	Y	D	R
W	M	H	I
B	A	I	E

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

Elie Rizk emphasized that the investor residency card granted by the Sultanate of Oman to foreign investors gave serious investors more reassurance and stability while this program offers incentives that contributed to increasing the numbers of those who are interested to utilize the investor program.

UN chief calls for renewal of rights declaration

Nearly 150 ministers and heads of state are due to speak at UN Human Rights Council’s annual session

Geneva, Switzerland - Respect for human rights has gone into reverse, the United Nations chief warned on Monday, calling for a renewal of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 75 years after its signing.

Pointing to the war raging in Ukraine, and threats to rights from soaring poverty, hunger and climate disasters, Antonio Guterres said the declaration was ‘under assault from all sides’.

“Some governments chip away at it. Others use a wrecking ball,” he told the opening of the UN Human Rights Council’s main annual session, describing the disregard and disdain seen for human rights around the world as ‘a wake-up call’.

He said the ‘Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered the most massive violations of human rights’ being witnessed in the world today.

“It has unleashed widespread death, destruction and displacement,” he said.

While the past century has seen astounding progress in human rights and human development, Guterres warned that now, ‘instead of continuing this progress, we have gone



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres delivers a speech during the 52nd UN Human Rights Council session, in Geneva, on Monday (AFP)

into reverse’.

Russia’s war in Ukraine loomed large over the meeting, due to last a record six weeks, with calls for unity in condemning Moscow and extending a probe into war crimes in the conflict.

The session comes just days after the one-year anniversary of Moscow’s full-scale invasion -

which UN rights chief Volker Turk warned show that 75 years after the world agreed on the universality of rights, ‘the oppression of the past can return in various disguises’.

Turk cited ‘the old destructive wars of aggression from a by-gone era with worldwide consequences, as we have witnessed again in Europe with the sense-

less Russian invasion of Ukraine’.

Following the speeches by the UN top brass, nearly 150 ministers and heads of state and government are due to speak, virtually or in person, during the first four days of the session.

Among them will be the foreign ministers of the United States, China, Ukraine and Iran.

Walkout?

Moscow will send Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov to address the council in person on Thursday.

Despite calls from NGOs, observers said it was unlikely there would be a walkout like the one many diplomats took part in when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s video played in

the council last year. Several diplomats suggested that other measures might be taken to convey their disapproval.

“We believe that Russia does not deserve to sit in the room,” Ukrainian ambassador Yevheniia Filipenko told reporters. “We will act accordingly.”

There is no shortage of other pressing human rights issues for the council to address, with the

gation into crimes committed in Ukraine since Russia’s invasion. The so-called Commission of Inquiry, which has already determined that Russia is committing war crimes on a ‘massive scale’ in Ukraine, is due to present a comprehensive report to the council in late March.

The commission must ‘continue its important work, which is of paramount importance for the principles of accountability and justice’, Filipenko told reporters on Friday.

She said her country was pushing for not only extending but also strengthening the commission’s mandate, insisting the ‘many developments’ over the past year ‘should be reflected’.

There is concern, however, that strengthening the text further could cost it votes in the 47-member council, diminishing the sense that the UN’s top rights body stands united in its opposition to Russia’s actions.

Last year, 32 council members voted to create the commission, with only Russia itself and Eritrea voting against, with 13 countries abstaining. AFP

Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered the most massive violations of human rights we witness today

ANTONIO GUTERRES

situations in Iran, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Syria and Israel on the agenda.

A long line of resolutions will be voted on during the last few days of the session, which is due to wrap up on April 4.

War crimes probe

One key resolution will be on extending a high-level investi-



Opposition protesters demonstrate against electoral reforms of the leftist ruling party at Zocalo square in Mexico City on Sunday (AFP)

Mexicans protest controversial electoral reform

Mexico City, Mexico - Tens of thousands of Mexicans protested on Sunday against an electoral reform approved by the ruling party-controlled Congress that is widely perceived as an attack on democracy ahead of 2024 presidential polls.

Political and civic organisations joined forces for the show of discontent, gathering on Mexico City’s main square, Zocalo, and in other cities under the slogan #MiVotoNoSeToca (Hands Off My Vote). Dressed in white and pink, the colours of the National Electoral Institute (INE) they say is under threat, protesters denounced the majority move by President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador’s backers to reduce the independent body’s size and budget.

“It is a setback to democracy.... This man (Lopez Obrador) wants to control the election,” protester Alejandro Rodriguez, a lawyer age 61, told AFP. “The reform attacks all our institutions, it wants to take away our freedoms,” added Feliciano Vidal, a 65-year-old independent worker.

A bill the INE says will tarnish the credibility of elections was approved in the Senate on Wednesday by 72 votes in favour to 50 against.

The legislation must now be enacted by the leftist president, who championed the change.

Former Supreme Court jus-

tice Juan Ramon Cossio, in an address to protesters on Sunday, accused Lopez Obrador of seeking to ‘appropriate the electoral system’.

Slashing staff

The presidential residence is on one side of Zocalo square, but Lopez Obrador was absent on Sunday, touring Mexico’s interior.

The bill is a watered-down version of more radical reforms he originally sought that sparked mass street protests against a perceived attack on the INE, designed to safeguard elections from political tampering. The polling agency says the bill - even the new version - endangered the electoral process.

It claims the changes would eliminate 85 per cent of its career staff, and scrap 300 district boards crucial to organising elections for the country’s 93mn voters.

The measure, says the INE, would limit its ability to monitor election propaganda or to sanction public officials for transgressions.

Lopez Obrador alleges the INE endorsed fraud when he ran unsuccessfully for the presidency in 2006 and 2012, before winning in 2018.

He argues the reform will improve the system, and has claimed the protests were being orchestrated by a group of ‘corrupt’ people who want power for themselves.

AFP

HK model murder: Ex-husband, in-laws charged

Hong Kong, China - The ex-husband and two former in-laws of a Hong Kong model were charged on Monday with her murder, after police revealed they had found more body parts during a weekend search.

Abby Choi, who had appeared in fashion magazines and attracted more than 100,000 followers on Instagram, was reported missing on Tuesday, the prosecutor told the court.

On Saturday, police said that partial remains had been discovered in the fridge and soup pots of a seaside house.

After a later examination of materials seized at the property, police uncovered what they believe to be Choi’s skull, hair and



People watch a screen on a train showing news about Hong Kong model and influencer Abby Choi, in Hong Kong on Monday (AFP)

several ribs.

The 28-year-old’s ex-husband Alex Kwong, as well as his father Kwong Kau and brother Anthony

Kwong, were charged with murder on Monday and face up to life in prison.

Choi’s former mother-in-law,

Jenny Li, was charged with perverting the course of justice by destroying evidence.

The property where police found bodily remains was equipped with an electric saw and a meat grinder that had been used to mince human flesh, according to superintendent Alan Chung.

A forensic examination found a hole at the back of the skull that could be evidence of a fatal attack.

“We believe the victim had been attacked when she was in the vehicle (that took her to the house) and that she was already unconscious when she arrived,” Chung told reporters on Sunday night.

According to police, Choi had financial disputes with her ex-husband and his family involving a luxury property.

The mother of two had divorced Kwong and remarried Chris Tam, the scion of a wealthy Hong Kong family.

Kwong, 28, was arrested on Saturday at a Hong Kong pier after what police described as a failed attempt to flee by speedboat. A fifth suspect connected to Choi’s former father-in-law was arrested on Sunday on suspicion of ‘assisting criminals’.

Chung said all suspects in the case had been arrested and the force would continue to search for missing body parts.

AFP

N Korea’s Kim opens key agri-meeting

Seoul, South Korea - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has opened a key party meeting to discuss agricultural development, state media said on Monday, following a report of ‘grave’ food shortages in the isolated country.

Normally such meetings are convened only once or twice a year, but the plenary comes just two months after a previous one, which also focused on agricultural issues.

The unusual frequency of the meetings focused on agriculture has fuelled speculation that there may be serious food shortages in North Korea now.

Kim chaired the opening on Sunday of a plenary meeting of top ruling party officials to ‘analyse and review... the programme for the rural revolution in the new era, and decide on the immediate important tasks and the urgent tasks’, the official Korean Central News Agency reported.

The participants ‘unanimously approved the agenda items and went into discussion’ on the topic, the KCNA said without giving further details.

South Korea’s unification ministry says there have been reports of starvation deaths in the North.

“We judge the food shortages there to be grave,” ministry spokesman Koo Byoung-sam



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attending the plenary meeting of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) in Pyongyang on Sunday (AFP)

The unusual frequency of the meetings focussed on agriculture has fuelled speculations of N Korea’s grave food shortages

said last week, adding Pyongyang appeared to have requested food aid from the World Food Programme.

North Korea monitoring site 38 North said it judged the cur-

rent food shortages in the country to be the worst in decades.

The Pyongyang regime was being forced to deal with ‘a complex humanitarian emergency that has food insecurity at its core’, it said in a January 2023 assessment.

An analysis of rice and corn prices globally and in North Korea show ‘significant’ price divergence since early 2021 - meaning food is far more expensive in the North - ‘signalling a breakdown’ in supply, it added.

Official denial

But a recent commentary carried

by North Korea’s main state-run newspaper *Rodong Sinmun* said the country should continue to stick to the ‘self-sufficient economy’ as part of its fight against ‘the imperialists’.

“The imperialists, under the cloak of the so-called ‘collaboration’ and ‘aid’, are clamouring as if some countries in economic difficulties could not tide over crises without their support.”

But such support are efforts to ‘make the countries their sources of raw materials and market after completely demolishing the barrier of their national economy’, *Rodong* said.

Nuclear-armed North Korea, which is under multiple sets of sanctions over its weapons programmes, has long struggled to feed itself.

It is highly vulnerable to natural disasters including floods and drought due to a chronic lack of infrastructure, deforestation and decades of state mismanagement. This has been compounded by a years-long self-imposed border closure since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, which has only recently been eased to allow some trade with neighbouring China.

The country has periodically been hit by famines, one of which in the 1990s killed hundreds of thousands of people - some estimates range into millions.

AFP

China hails ‘all-weather’ Belarus ties

Beijing, China - China hailed its ‘all-weather and comprehensive’ strategic partnership with Belarus on Monday, the day before a state visit by President Alexander Lukashenko to Beijing.

Lukashenko, who is visiting at the invitation of Chinese leader Xi Jinping, is a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and has backed Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine. Lukashenko’s three-day visit comes after China last week released a position paper on the conflict, reiterating its insistence it is a neutral party and calling for dialogue between the two sides.

“Since the establishment of diplomatic relations 31 years ago, the political mutual trust between (China and Belarus) has been continuously strengthened,” Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said on Monday. “China looks forward to working with Belarus to take this visit as an opportunity to promote all-round cooperation between the two countries.”

AFP

Palestinians count cost of Israeli reprisals in West Bank

Huwara, Palestinian Territories - Palestinians in the occupied West Bank on Monday counted the cost of deadly violence and arson by Israeli settlers targeting a town where two Israeli brothers were killed.

Dozens of Israeli settlers set homes and cars ablaze in the northern town of Huwara overnight, after a day of Israeli-Palestinian talks in neighbouring Jordan aimed at quelling a surge in violence in the Palestinian territory.

More than 350 Palestinians were injured, most suffering from tear gas inhalation, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society said.

The Palestinian health ministry said Sameh Aqtash, 37, was shot dead during an attack by Israeli forces and settlers on the nearby village of Zaatarra.

The violence came hours after two Israeli settlers - brothers Yagel Yaniv, 20, and Hallel Yaniv, 22 - were shot dead on Sunday as they drove through Huwara.

On Monday, an AFP photographer saw damaged homes blackened by fire, long lines of charred cars, burned trees and smashed windows in the town.

"They burned the cars and the houses and destroyed everything," Huwara resident Diaa Odeh said.

"Whenever we started to push the settlers back, the army was firing tear gas at us," added the 25-year-old. Wajeh Odeh, a member of the town's municipality, said 30 houses were burned and damaged while more than 100 cars were torched.

Abdel Moneim Aqtash said he and his brother were standing



An aerial view of a scrapyard where cars were torched overnight, in the Palestinian town of Huwara near Nablus in West Bank, on Monday (AFP)

They burned the cars and houses... Whenever we started to push the settlers back, the army was firing tear gas at us

DIAA ODEH

outside a blacksmith's workshop when they were attacked by Israeli settlers.

"They left the area and then came back with the occupation (Israeli) army... The army shot

my brother, not the settlers," he told AFP. The military told AFP that Aqtash 'was not shot by an Israeli soldier'.

'We want security'

Yoav Gallant, defence minister in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new right-wing coalition government, said he expected 'difficult days ahead' and had ordered troops to be reinforced.

"With this being said, I call on everyone to restore calm... We cannot allow a situation in which citizens take the law into their (own) hands," he said.

The Israeli military told AFP

no-one had been arrested over the arson or killing of Aqtash.

The search for the gunmen who fired on the two brothers was ongoing. The violence came days after Israeli forces launched their deadliest West Bank raid in nearly 20 years, which claimed the lives of 11 Palestinians in the nearby city of Nablus.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's national security minister and an extreme-right settler, said the killing of the Yaniv brothers 'must teach us that we are at war'.

"I understand the pain but we must not take the law into our own hands," he said.

The West Bank is home to about 2.9mn Palestinians as well as an estimated 475,000 Jewish settlers, who live in state-approved settlements considered illegal under international law.

Esty Yaniv, the mother of the two brothers killed, said 'instead of accompanying them to their wedding, we must bury them'.

"We love this country, we love the army, we want security, but the responsibility to guarantee security rests solely with the army," she said on Monday, in a statement from the Shomron Regional Council which administers settlements in the area.

AFP



Syria's President Bashar al-Assad (left) meeting with the Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry in Damascus on Monday (AFP)

Egypt top diplomat visits Syria for first time in decade

Damascus, Syria - Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry on Monday pledged solidarity with the Syrian people after a deadly quake that sparked rare Arab outreach, during a rare visit to the country.

The trip is the latest example of regional outreach to President Bashar al-Assad's internationally-isolated government - which was expelled from Cairo-based Arab League after Syria's conflict erupted in 2011.

He is the third Arab foreign minister to meet Assad since the February 6 quake struck Syria and neighbouring Turkey killing more than 46,000 people, after the United Arab Emirates and Jordan sent their top diplomats.

Shoukry held talks with Assad and his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mekded, and said he conveyed a message of 'solidarity and sympathy' on behalf of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi.

Cairo was ready to provide more quake relief to the victims of the quake, he told a news conference with Mekdad.

Assad thanked Egypt for its 'aid to support the Syrian government's efforts to provide relief to those affected by the earthquake', a statement from his of-

fice said.

In the aftermath of the quake, Sisi called his Syrian counterpart, in the first official exchange between the two leaders.

Egypt sent three planes and two boats loaded with humanitarian aid to the quake-hit Arab country.

Asked by reporters whether Egyptian-Syrian ties would be fully restored, Shoukry said on Monday that the purpose of his visit was 'primarily humanitarian'. The Egyptian foreign minister is also due to visit Turkey, with which Cairo has also had strained ties for a decade.

Assad has been politically isolated in the region since the start of Syria's war, which was triggered by the government's suppression of pro-democracy demonstrations.

While Cairo and Damascus have largely maintained relations during the conflict, many other Arab countries have severed ties with Syria.

But since the earthquake, the Syrian president has received calls and aid from Arab leaders, a momentum analysts say he could leverage to bolster regional support.

AFP

One killed, many wounded in fresh quake in Turkey

Istanbul, Turkey - A 5.6 magnitude earthquake hit eastern Turkey on Monday, killing one person and wounding dozens others while causing some damaged buildings to collapse, the government's disaster agency said.

The epicentre of the tremor was the Yesilyurt district in the Malatya province, which was hit by the February 6 earthquake that killed over 44,000 people in Turkey and thousands more in neighbouring Syria. "One citizen lost his

life. Some 69 were injured," Yunus Sezer, chairman of AFAD disaster agency, said in televised comments.

AFAD tweeted that 29 buildings already damaged by a powerful February 6 earthquake had collapsed.

"Our search and rescue teams were quickly dispatched to the region, and started to work," it added.

AFAD recorded almost 10,000 aftershocks after the February 6 quake.

AFP

Turkey to hold NATO bid talks with Sweden, Finland

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey said on Monday that NATO accession talks with Sweden and Finland would be held next month, after being postponed in January over a row about protests held in Stockholm.

"The meeting will be held on March 9," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told a news conference in Ankara on Monday, alongside his Hungarian counterpart.

Bids to join NATO must be ratified by all members of the alliance, of which Turkey is a member.

But Ankara was outraged by



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu (AFP)

the protests in January that included the burning of the Q'uran outside its embassy in Stockholm. In turn Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned Sweden he would not support its bid to join the Western US-led defence alliance.

Erdogan has dug in his heels heading into a close presidential election in which he is trying to energise his nationalist electoral base.

Previous two rounds of the tri-party NATO talks were attended by foreign ministry officials and focused on a specific list of Turkish demands, which include the

expulsion of dozens of mostly Kurdish suspects.

Cavusoglu said the third planned meeting would be held in Brussels.

"It's not possible for us to give consent (to a NATO bid) before Sweden fulfils its commitments" under a three-party protocol signed in Madrid in June, he said.

Cavusoglu also made it clear that Turkey looked warmly on Finland's bid.

"We may separate Sweden and Finland's membership process," he said.

AFP

Wave of support for Turkish father who lost daughter in quake

Ankara, Turkey - A photo of a father holding his daughter's hand killed in the February 6 earthquake that struck Turkey has provoked an outpouring of sympathy and support from around the world, he told AFP.

Around three weeks after the disaster that killed more than 44,000 people in Turkey and thousands more in neighbouring Syria, AFP photographer Adem Altan tracked down Mesut Hancer in the capital Ankara.

He had moved there from Kahramanmaraş, near the epicentre of the quake.

As well as his daughter, lost under the ruins of an eight-storey block of flats, "I lost my mother, my brothers, my nephews in the quake," Hancer said.

"But nothing compares to burying a child. The pain is indescribable."

The image of Hancer wearing an orange jacket against the cold and rain while holding his daughter's

hand emerging from the rubble, was published on many newspaper front pages and seen millions of times online.

It became a symbol of a disaster that devastated tens of thousands of lives, drawing special attention to his family.

Now, Turkish businessman Necat Gulseven, owner of the television channel TV100, and his wife, Ebru Yasar, a well-known singer, have offered the former baker an administrative job at the TV channel and given the family an apartment in Ankara.

Meanwhile a painting of Hancer's daughter Irmak as an angel alongside her father, donated by an artist, hangs in their living room.

"I couldn't let go of her hand. My daughter was sleeping like an angel in her bed," he recalled.

Waiting for help

Hancer was working in his bak-



Turkish father Mesut Hancer, poses and holds a painting representing him and his daughter Irmak in his apartment in Ankara on Saturday (AFP)

I couldn't let go of her hand. My daughter was sleeping like an angel in her bed... I lost my mother, my brothers, my nephews in the quake. But nothing compares to burying a child

MESUT HANCER

ery when the quake hit at 4:17am (0117 GMT).

Calling home, he found his wife and three adult children were safe at home in their one-storey house, although it was damaged as the earth shook.

But no one could reach Irmak, the youngest, who had stayed

the night at her grandmother's house.

She had planned to spend time with cousins visiting from Istanbul and Hatay.

Rushing to his mother's building, Hancer found the eight-storey block collapsed into a mound of rubble. In the middle, amid the debris of everyday life, was his daughter.

Waiting more than a day before any rescue team arrived, Hancer and other local people tried to find their loved ones under the ruins themselves, even trying - and failing - to shift concrete blocks by hand.

Unable to recover Irmak's body, he remained sat by her side. "I held her hand, I stroked her hair, I kissed her cheeks," he recalls.

Later, he saw Adem Altan taking photos of the scene.

"Take pictures of my child," he said in a quiet, broken voice.

AFP

DOMINATION

Australia beat South Africa to win Women’s T20 World Cup for sixth time



Australia's captain Meg Lanning holds the trophy as she celebrates with her teammates after they won the final T20 women's World Cup final against South Africa in Cape Town on Sunday

Cape Town, South Africa - Australia won the Women's T20 World Cup for the sixth time in the last seven tournaments when they beat South Africa by 19 runs in the final at Newlands in Cape Town on Sunday.

"It's a very special effort from this group," said Australian captain Meg Lanning after her players proved superior to a South African team that had the backing of a near-capacity crowd of about 15,000.

Opening batter Beth Mooney was named player of the match after making an unbeaten 74 in an Australian total of 156 for six.

"I walked off thinking we didn't have enough runs but maybe I was a bit hard on myself. It was a really tough wicket," she said.

Mooney said the Australian

players were proud of their dominance. "Other teams around the world are improving. We are being hunted but we want to enjoy it for as long as we can."

The defending champions

Other teams around the world are improving. We are being hunted but we want to enjoy it for as long as we can

BETH MOONEY

quickly put the pressure on the South African batters who could score only 22 runs for the loss of opener Tazmin Brits in the six-over power play.

"Our power play with the ball was excellent," said Lanning.

South Africa were never up with the required run rate and

were restricted to 137 for six despite opener Laura Wolvaardt hitting 61 off 48 balls.

Captain Sune Luus paid tribute to the Australians.

"You guys have been inspira-

'Proud of ourselves'

"I think we can be proud of ourselves," she said. "It's very exciting for women's cricket. We have to keep on growing. We set a platform and we can't go backwards."

Luus challenged South African cricket officials and the government to push for girls' cricket in schools and to improve the club and provincial system, "so we can keep knocking on Australia's door." Australia won all their six matches in the tournament to hammer home their dominance of the format. "Other teams came hard at us," said Lanning.

But she said her group of players had risen to every challenge.

"We wanted to make sure we stayed calm when the pressure was on." Off-spinning all-rounder Ash Gardner was named player

of the tournament after a series of consistent performances.

She was pushed up the batting order to number three on Sunday and gave the innings impetus by hitting two fours off Nonkululeko Mlaba in the eighth over and two successive sixes off Nadine Klerk in the following over.

Gardner fell to a high catch on the boundary after making 29 off 21 balls and bowled steadily to take one for 20 in her four overs.

South Africa were in a near-hopeless position when Luus was the third batter out. At that stage South Africa needed another 103 runs off 56 balls. Wolvaardt and the hard-hitting Chloe Tryon gave the crowd hope with an attacking fourth wicket partnership of 55 off 37 balls but the match was effectively over when Wolvaardt got out in the 17th over.

Stand-in Australia skipper Smith looks to salvage India Test series

Indore, India - A depleted Australia will look to stand-in captain Steve Smith for inspiration after two demoralising Test defeats in India as they try to salvage the series when the third match begins in Indore Wednesday.

Captain Pat Cummins flew home to be with his seriously ill mother after Australia's second straight loss inside three days in Delhi last week and opted not to return for the third Test, saying it was "best being here with my family".

Opener David Warner will miss the rest of the series after suffering a fractured elbow and concussion in Delhi and pace bowler Josh Hazlewood has flown home with a persistent Achilles.

India's 2-0 lead means they have already retained the Border-Gavaskar Trophy leaving Australia the task of winning both of the remaining Tests to level the four-match series.

Fit-again duo of all-rounder Cameron Green and left-arm fast bowler Mitchell Starc are likely to be recalled, though spin is sure to play a big part in

the match.

"If myself or some of the other seamers get a chance out here we will have to play an important role with the spinners to take those 20 wickets," Starc said Monday.

Smith was Australia captain between 2014 and 2018 before the "sandpapergate" scandal in South Africa ended his tenure.

He captained the team that toured India in 2017 and led from the front with his batting as Australia went down to the hosts 2-1 in a hard-fought series.

India, led by Rohit Sharma, will be looking to clinch the series and with it a berth in June's World Test Championship final at The Oval in London.

India have depended on their spin trio of Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel to rip through the Australian batters, whose attempts to counter-attack failed in Delhi as they were bowled out for 113 after taking a slim first innings lead.

AFP



Steve Smith

Isle of Man cricketers dismissed for record low score of 10

Cartagena, Spain - Isle of Man were bowled out for just 10 in an international match against Spain on Sunday -- the lowest ever total in the history of men's Twenty20 cricket.

Joseph Burrows was the Isle of Man's top scorer with four while seven men were dismissed for nought.

Left-arm fast bowlers Atif Mehmood and Mohammad Kamran took four wickets each.

Kamran's haul included a hat-trick in the third over when he sent back Luke Ward, Carl Hartmann and Edward Beard.

In reply, the Spanish side wrapped up victory off just two balls after opener Awais Ahmed smashed back-to-back sixes.

The previous lowest score in the format was Sydney Thunder's 15 against Adelaide Strikers in the Big Bash League in Australia last year.

Before Sunday, the lowest T20 international total had been 21 made by Turkey against the Czech Republic in 2019.

"Crazy, just crazy," Spain coach Corey Rutgers told

cricbuzz.com.

"Kamran and Mehmood were getting good swing and they just kept hitting pads and stumps. It just went four for four, five for five, six for six, I've never seen anything like it in my life."

Rutgers added: "Thank you to the Isle of Man guys for coming out, they brought a

It just went four for four, five for five, six for six, I've never seen anything like it in my life

COREY RUTGERS

young team and gave us some tough games. I hope they're not too demoralised but I'm sure they'll only learn from it."

There had been no hint of the drama to come when the two sides met earlier in the day.

Isle of Man made 132-8 before Spain cantered to victory by seven wickets with 45 balls remaining.

AFP

New Zealand set England 258 to win second Test after Williamson century

Wellington, New Zealand - Record-breaker Kane Williamson stroked a superb century Monday to steer New Zealand to 483 all out in their second innings and set England a target of 258 runs to win the second Test in Wellington.

Former captain Williamson hit 132 and Tom Blundell was last man out for 90 as the hosts fought back after being asked to follow on at the Basin Reserve.

England were 48-1 in their second innings at stumps after opener Zak Crawley, on 24, was bowled by a delivery that nipped back from New Zealand skipper Tim Southee.

Ben Duckett was unbeaten on 23 and nightwatchman Ollie Robinson on one, leaving England needing 210 more runs on Tuesday's final day for a 2-0 series sweep.

The tourists won the first Test by 267 runs.

"We're excited about chasing that (target) down tomorrow," said England spinner Jack Leach, who took 5-157.

"We know how we want to go about it and it's a case of us sticking to that process. We're confident."

New Zealand need nine wickets to pull off only the fourth vic-



New Zealand's Kane Williamson celebrates his century against England on the fourth day of the second Test

tory by a side following on in the history of Test cricket and square the two-match series.

"It would be pretty special," Williamson said of New Zealand's historic bid.

"It's pretty exciting going into day five and we want to make sure our bowling is on. There's all to play for."

The hosts resumed their second innings on Monday at 202-

3, still trailing by 24, but Williamson led the charge with his 26th Test century.

It fell to England's new batting star and part-time seam bowler Harry Brook to claim Williamson's prized wicket.

After grinding down England's bowlers, Williamson was finally caught down the leg side by wicketkeeper Ben Foakes off a fine edge after a sixth-wicket

partnership of 158 with Blundell.

Williamson trudged off to hearty applause from the Wellington crowd after dragging New Zealand back into the match.

It was his second standing ovation of the day, having eclipsed Ross Taylor in the morning session to become New Zealand's most prolific Test batsman with 7,787 runs.

His partnership with Blundell helped New Zealand fight back after England declared their first innings at 435-8 then scuttled New Zealand for 209, before inviting the hosts to bat again.

New Zealand can join an elite club if they win -- only England, twice, and India have won a Test after following on.

Williamson, who survived a close shout for a stumping when on 45, handed his side a fighting chance after frustrating England alongside Blundell, with support from Henry Nicholls and Daryl Mitchell before lunch.

Blundell hit Stuart Broad to the boundary as New Zealand passed 400, then Williamson also smacked England's seamer for four to bring up his hundred -- his first since scoring two tons against Pakistan in December 2022.

New Zealand folded quickly once Williamson departed and he was full of praise for Brook's bowling.

"He didn't miss his length, he was immaculate. He's a special player," Williamson said. With the former captain gone, Michael Bracewell went in sloppy fashion, run out for six as he inexplicably failed to ground his bat.

AFP

MAN UNITED CHAMPIONS

Red Devils win League Cup to end six-year trophy drought

London, United Kingdom - Manchester United clinched their first major trophy for six years with a ruthless 2-0 win against Newcastle in the League Cup final at Wembley on Sunday.

Erik ten Hag's side took control by half-time thanks to Casemiro's header and a Sven Botman own goal and held firm despite Newcastle's second-half pressure.

United's first silverware since 2017, when they won the League Cup and the Europa League in the Jose Mourinho era, was just reward for a mature display that underlined the impressive work done by Dutchman Ten Hag since he arrived from Ajax last year.

The celebrations that accompanied United's sixth League Cup triumph could be the first of many trophy parades on the evidence of Ten Hag's transformative first season.

"You have to win the first one and that is what we did today," Ten Hag said.

"We can get a lot of inspiration from this and more confidence that we can do it." "We are still at the start of restoring Manchester United to where we belong - winning trophies."

United remain challengers on three other fronts, sitting third in the Premier League and with an FA Cup fifth round tie against West Ham on Wednesday fol-



Manchester United players celebrate with the trophy after their victory in the English League Cup final against Newcastle United at Wembley Stadium on Sunday (AFP)

lowed by a Europa League last 16 tie against Real Betis in March.

After 10 years in the wilderness since Alex Ferguson retired having led them to their last Premier League title in 2013, United are finally emerging from one of the darkest period in the club's illustrious history.

United finished a dismal sixth in the Premier League last season, but Ten Hag has swiftly

You have to win the first one and that is what we did today. We can get a lot of inspiration from this and more confidence that we can do it

ERIK TEN HAG

masterminded their return to relevance

It was fitting that Ten Hag's maiden trophy success with

United came after he met Ferguson for dinner recently and with the Scot watching from the Wembley stands.

Ending United's longest trophy drought for 40 years is no guarantee of future success, but the steely Ten Hag appears capable of thriving in the unrelenting Old Trafford spotlight.

United co-chairman Avram Glazer, attending his first game since the November announcement that his family are considering offers for the club, might reconsider selling up after view-

ing what could be the start of a golden era.

Despite failing to win their first major trophy since the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup, Newcastle can also expect to feature in more showpiece occasions soon.

Newcastle have been revitalised since their takeover by a Saudi-funded consortium in 2021 and they competed gamely in their first cup final for 24 years

"We played really well between both boxes. I can't fault the players' efforts, but we didn't defend the free-kick well enough for the first goal. That's what we will regret," Howe said.

Newcastle's fanatical 'Toon Army' turned one half of Wembley into a roiling sea of black and white as they belted out songs of praise for their heroes well over an hour before kick-off.



Almeria's Rodrigo Ely (L) and Srđjan Babić celebrate at the end of their match against Barcelona (AFP)

'Worst game of season,' says Xavi as leaders Barca shocked by Almeria

Almeria, Spain - La Liga leaders Barcelona tumbled to an embarrassing 1-0 defeat at Almeria on Sunday, failing to capitalise on Real Madrid's derby draw with Atletico to extend their advantage.

El Bilal Toure's fine first half strike split the teams and earned Almeria their first ever victory over Barca, inflicting only the second defeat of the league campaign on the Catalans.

Xavi Hernandez's side still have a seven-point lead over champions Madrid, but their morale took a further blow following their midweek Europa League exit against Manchester United.

Barca face Madrid in a Clasico Copa del Rey semi-final first leg on Thursday at the Santiago Bernabeu, with their vulnerabilities starting to show.

Victory over Almeria would

have stretched their advantage in the title race to double figures, as they bid to win La Liga for the first time since 2019, but they could not capitalise on Madrid's 1-1 draw on Saturday against Atletico.

Carlo Ancelotti's Los Blancos beat Barcelona in the league in October in their first defeat and Almeria ended Barca's subsequent 13-game unbeaten league run.

"I'm very angry because I think we played our worst game of the season," Xavi told Movistar. "Above all in the first half, we couldn't move the ball around, we lacked intensity, speed, on a day where we couldn't mess up."

"We did not show the passion (we needed) to win the game. In the second half, yes, but they defended well."

Xavi, already without injured trio Pedri, Ousmane Dembele

and Ansu Fati, took a risk and rotated heavily, with Ronald Araujo, Jules Kounde, Raphinha and Alejandro Balde dropping out.

The Barcelona line-up lacked creativity on paper and so it proved, as they struggled to forge any chances of note in the first half at the Power Horse Stadium.

The lowly hosts, starting the game 19th with just one victory in their prior eight league games, were on top in the first half and went ahead through Toure's emphatic finish.

The Mali international cushioned a long ball into striker Luis Suarez's path, before spinning and breaking forward at pace.

Suarez lofted a pass over Andreas Christensen and Toure ran on to it, lashing an effort past Marc-Andre ter Stegen and in off the crossbar.

AFP

Milan up to third with Atalanta win, Inter fall further off title pace

Milan, Italy - AC Milan moved up to third in Serie A after Sunday's 2-0 win over Atalanta, drawing level on points with Inter Milan, who fell further behind runaway leaders Napoli with a 1-0 defeat at Bologna.

Stefano Pioli's side are five points ahead of fifth-placed Lazio in the race for the Champions League thanks in part to Theo Hernandez's volley crashing off the post and into the goal via Juan Musso's back in the 26th minute. A late dinked finish from Junior Messias at a soaking San Siro ensured Milan had their third league victory in a row.

"I'm counting the goal as mine. Oli (Giroud) did well to knock it down for me, I think it was a good goal," said Hernandez to DAZN.

Milan could have had more in



AC Milan's Zlatan Ibrahimovic acknowledges the crowd at the end of their Italian Serie A match against Atalanta on Sunday (AFP)

the second half of a underwhelming encounter, Rafael Leo and Messias both wasting golden chances from close range before the latter sealed the points from Leao's pass with four minutes remaining.

The hosts were also cheered by the return of France goalkeeper Mike Maignan after five months out and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who came on as a second-half substitute.

Veteran forward Ibrahimovic had been sidelined since May last year after having the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee reconstructed.

"Mike and Zlatan aren't only great players, they're leaders with so much experience and having them available makes a big difference," said Pioli.

AFP

Birthday boy Musiala helps Bayern reclaim lead

Munich, Germany - Birthday boy Jamal Musiala scored his 11th of the season as Bayern Munich returned to the Bundesliga summit with a dominant 3-0 home win over Union Berlin on Sunday.

Bayern and Borussia Dortmund now lead the Bundesliga by three points from Union.

First-half goals from Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting, Kingsley Coman and Musiala, on his 20th birthday, put Bayern into a comfortable position against the over-achieving Berliners.

A pre-match blizzard failed to cool Bayern's fluency, with the home side forcing Union into several last-ditch saves in the opening moments.

Bayern striker Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting got the home side on the scoreboard after 31 minutes, heading in a lofted pass



Bayern Munich's Jamal Musiala (L) and Union Berlin's Morten Thorsby battle for the ball during their Bundesliga match on Sunday (AFP)

from Kingsley Coman.

Union almost hit back five minutes later when Tunisia international Aissa Laidouni blasted just past the upright after a nice

pass from Sheraldo Becker.

Bayern doubled up immediately afterwards, Thomas Mueller chipping the Union defence with his back to goal to

send Coman one-on-one with Union goalie Frederik Rønnow.

The France forward rounded Rønnow and slid the ball into the net. Mueller was the provider again in first-half injury time, setting up Musiala to give Bayern a 3-0 halftime lead.

Bayern took the sting out of the match after halftime in pursuit of just their third league win from seven matches in 2023, giving away few chances to the out-classed visitors. Senegal forward Sadio Mane came off the bench in the 65th minute for Coman, his first appearance since sustaining a leg injury which saw him miss the Qatar World Cup.

Mane put Mueller through on goal just five minutes later, but goalkeeper Rønnow headed the veteran forward's shot over the bar.



'DREAM MOVE'
Oman's Al Harthy joins GTE Am class of FIA world endurance championship for 2023

Muscat - Decorated Omani racing driver Ahmad al Harthy will embark on arguably his highest profile season of competition yet this year after officially confirming a move into the globe's biggest endurance racing category - the FIA World Endurance Championship.

Revealing the full details of his 2023 campaign at the Muscat headquarters of the Oman Automobile Association on Sunday, during a specially organised event, attended by a range of dignitaries, sponsors and key partners, Al Harthy confirmed the history-making 'dream move' into FIA World Endurance where he will again race for the Oman Racing with TF Sport squad.

Al Harthy, a double Pro-Am



Class Champion and multiple race winner in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup, Pro-Am winner at the Total 24 Hours of Spa and a race winner in GTE in the European Le Mans Series, will be partnered by Charlie Eastwood and Michael Dinan.

The highly competitive trio will

share the No 25 Aston Martin GTE in the GTE Am class of FIA World Endurance, the only class for production-based cars in the prestigious championship - which will feature a total of 38 entries across all three of its classes this season. Notably, 2023 marks the 110th anniversary of the world-famous Aston

For me, this is by far the biggest challenge of my career but one I am absolutely relishing

AHMAD AL HARTHY

Martin marque.

Importantly, Al Harthy retains his incredibly supportive and very high-profile portfolio of sponsors for the coming season at world level, namely the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS.

Beginning with the Prologue test days at Sebring in the USA on

11th/12th March, the opening race of the 2023 FIA World Endurance Championship season - the 1,000 miles of Sebring - will be contested on 17th March at the renowned Florida track.

"I'm super-excited to officially confirm Oman Racing's entry and debut in the FIA World Endurance Championship in GTE Am, this is such a dream move for everyone associated with Oman Racing and the culmination of so much hard work behind the scenes with all of our amazing partners and, of course, Tom Ferrier and his team at TF Sport," said Al Harthy.

"For me, this is by far the biggest challenge of my career but one I am absolutely relishing."

Ighalo scores four to take Al Hilal to AFC Champions League final

Doha, Qatar - Nigeria star Odion Ighalo scored four goals as title holders Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia blitzed Qatar's Al Duhail 7-0 on Sunday to reach the AFC Champions League final.

Former Manchester United and Watford striker Ighalo scored his first goal inside 90 seconds to set Al Hilal on the way to the final against Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds where they will seek a record-extending fifth trophy.

Mali attacker Moussa Marega also scored two as Al Duhail coach, former Argentina star Hernan Crespo, was quickly made to regret his pre-match comments that he had a "strong belief" that his side could go through.

The Duhail defence was torn apart from the start. The 33-year-old Nigerian headed into an empty goal to open the rout and had an equally easy tap-in for his second after 10 minutes. "For people watching the score must have been a surprise," said Ighalo.

"We pushed from the

"We know they are a good team and the plan was to keep pressing them high from the first minute."

Duhail's Brazilian defender Luiz Junior said the Qatari side just "switched off for 20 minutes" when Al Hilal scored four goals. "It was impossible to come back, but if we played again it would not be the same score."

Marega, who played for Porto in Europe's Champions League, was given a simple shot for the third goal in the 14th minute and soon after narrowly headed over with goalkeeper Bassam Al Rawi beaten. Put through on one of the wave of Al Hilal attacks, Marega shot the fourth goal into the corner and cleverly backheeled for Salem Al Dawsari to make the score 5-0 at the break.



first minute and got a goal and the goals just kept coming so I am very happy," added the striker who walked out with the match ball.

Odion Ighalo

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Mbappe reaches 200 PSG goals in easy victory over Marseille

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappe reached 200 goals for Paris Saint-Germain to become the club's joint all-time top scorer as the France superstar netted twice in his side's 3-0 win over Ligue 1 title rivals Marseille on Sunday.

Mbappe scored both his goals at the Velodrome from Lionel Messi assists and in between he set up the Argentine for PSG's other goal as they moved eight points clear at the top of the table.

It was a result and a performance that will erase many of the doubts about a team that had been in stuttering form in recent weeks as they outclassed their most credible domestic challengers.

Mbappe's brace took him to a double century of goals for PSG in just short of 250 appearances since signing from Monaco in 2017.

The 24-year-old therefore equals his former teammate Edinson Cavani as the club's record marksman.



Players like him are clearly motivated by stats and records. Tonight he has equalled Edinson Cavani's magnificent record and he will obviously go on to beat it

CHRISTOPHE GALTIER

"He is obviously fast but it's not just about his legs -- the speed at which he does things is out of the ordinary," PSG coach Christophe Galtier told broadcaster Amazon Prime.

"Players like him are clearly

motivated by stats and records. Tonight he has equalled Edinson Cavani's magnificent record and he will obviously go on to beat it."

Mbappe is now out on his own as Ligue 1's leading scorer this season with 17 goals and has 29

in 29 games in all competitions since the campaign began.

Messi, meanwhile, now has 12 league goals this season and has set up 12 more, and PSG did not miss the absent Neymar.

The Brazilian was sidelined after being stretchered off with an ankle injury in last week's 4-3 defeat of Lille.

The Qatar-owned club saw their injury problems continue as centre-back Presnel Kimpembe - whose season has been plagued by fitness issues -- was carried off early on after crumpling to the turf in agony.

"Unfortunately he seriously injured himself and will obviously be out until the end of the season," said Galtier, who added that it looked like an Achilles tendon injury."

PSG overcame that setback to take the lead in the 25th minute.

Mbappe darted infield from the left and broke away from the unaware Eric Bailly to latch onto a Messi pass before running through to score.



Klinsmann named coach of South Korea

Seoul, South Korea - Jurgen Klinsmann, who won the World Cup as a player and led Germany to the semi-finals as coach, has been appointed head coach of South Korea, the country's football association said Monday.

The 58-year-old will arrive in Seoul next week and be in charge for a friendly against Colombia on March 24, the KFA said, adding he had a contract until 2026.

The former Germany, Bayern Munich and United States coach succeeds Paulo Bento, who took the Koreans to the last 16 of the World Cup in Qatar, where they were beaten 4-1 by Brazil.

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Planting trees or safeguarding tropical rainforests have become popular tools for companies seeking to offset their carbon emissions and proclaim their commitment to the environment. However, recent scandals have cast a shadow over the carbon credit industry, revealing a landscape rife with opportunities for greenwashing.

Walt Disney, JP Morgan Bank and other major corporations have been accused of purchasing carbon credits from forest protection projects in areas that were not actually at risk of deforestation.

Separately, a company responsible for managing 600,000 hectares of land in the United States has reportedly earned US\$53mn over the past two years from carbon credits that did not significantly alter its forest management practices.

None of these projects sequestered carbon beyond that which would have been absorbed by trees through photosynthesis in a business-as-usual scenario.

Still, companies counted the resulting carbon credits towards their own reduction targets, allowing them to offset emissions in the carbon accounting of their operations.

Leaders and experts from around the world will gather in the Gabonese capital Libreville on March 1 and 2 for the One Forest Summit.

Co-chaired by France and Gabon, the meeting will focus on improving financial instruments aimed at protecting the world's forests.

Carbon credits are already widely used. According to various estimates, the number of tons of CO₂ they represent (with one credit equivalent to one ton) could increase tenfold by 2030, to around two billion tonnes.

"The risky aspect of the carbon credit market is that it is not self-regulating," said Cesar Dugast from French environmental consultancy Carbone 4, in an interview with AFP.

"Everyone has an interest in maximising the quantity of carbon credits. It enables the project developers to spread the total cost over a maximum number of credits, offering a lower cost to buyers. Even the certifiers have an interest in the proliferation of projects."

In mid-January, The Guardian, Die Zeit and an NGO revealed that more than 90 per cent of projects certified by leading verifier Verra for forest conservation under the UN programme to reduce deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) were likely 'ghost credits' that did not represent 'real emissions reductions'.

Verra's CEO, David Antonioli, rejected these findings, arguing that "REDD projects are not some abstract concept on a piece of paper; they represent real projects on the ground that deliver life-affirming benefits."

Carbon credits under debate

After the story came out, the price of nature-related carbon credits has dropped, according to Paula VanLaningham, global head of carbon at S&P Global.

The revelations about REDD+ projects have sparked a wider debate about the entire carbon credit system.

"Are the projects themselves a good vehicle for carbon finance in a way that actually leads to a just transition? Probably both yes and no," she told AFP.

Several independent rating agencies have since defended their methodologies, stressing the crucial need for financing projects protecting nature.

"The first issue we look at is additionality: Would the project have happened in absence of the carbon markets?" Donna Lee, co-founder of Calyx Global, an independent rating agency for carbon projects, said.

"We then look at how the baseline was set and what would have happened in the absence of the project."

The core issue with initiatives aimed at halting deforestation is the challenge of proving that deforestation would have occurred without the funding.

"We look at patterns of deforestation in the region... a lot of scientific studies show that there are certain things like roads, population, distance to the forest edge, that are often associated with deforestation," Lee said.

Above all, the companies that buy these credits should be 'more transparent' by clearly indicating where credits are sourced and how they reduce their own emissions, she said.

"We need to move from a mentality of compensating to a mindset of contributing," said Dugast from Carbone 4.

In other words, companies financing forests to offset carbon emissions is acceptable, but not as a loophole to avoid reducing their own emissions.

AFP

CARBON Credits

A contested tool to fight deforestation

This aerial photo shows an illegal mining camp, known as garimpo, during an operation by the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) against Amazon deforestation at the Yanomami territory in Roraima State, Brazil, on February 24 (AFP)



A man waters tree seedlings bought from communities in Maungu, a village some 304km southeast of Kenyan capital, Nairobi (AFP)

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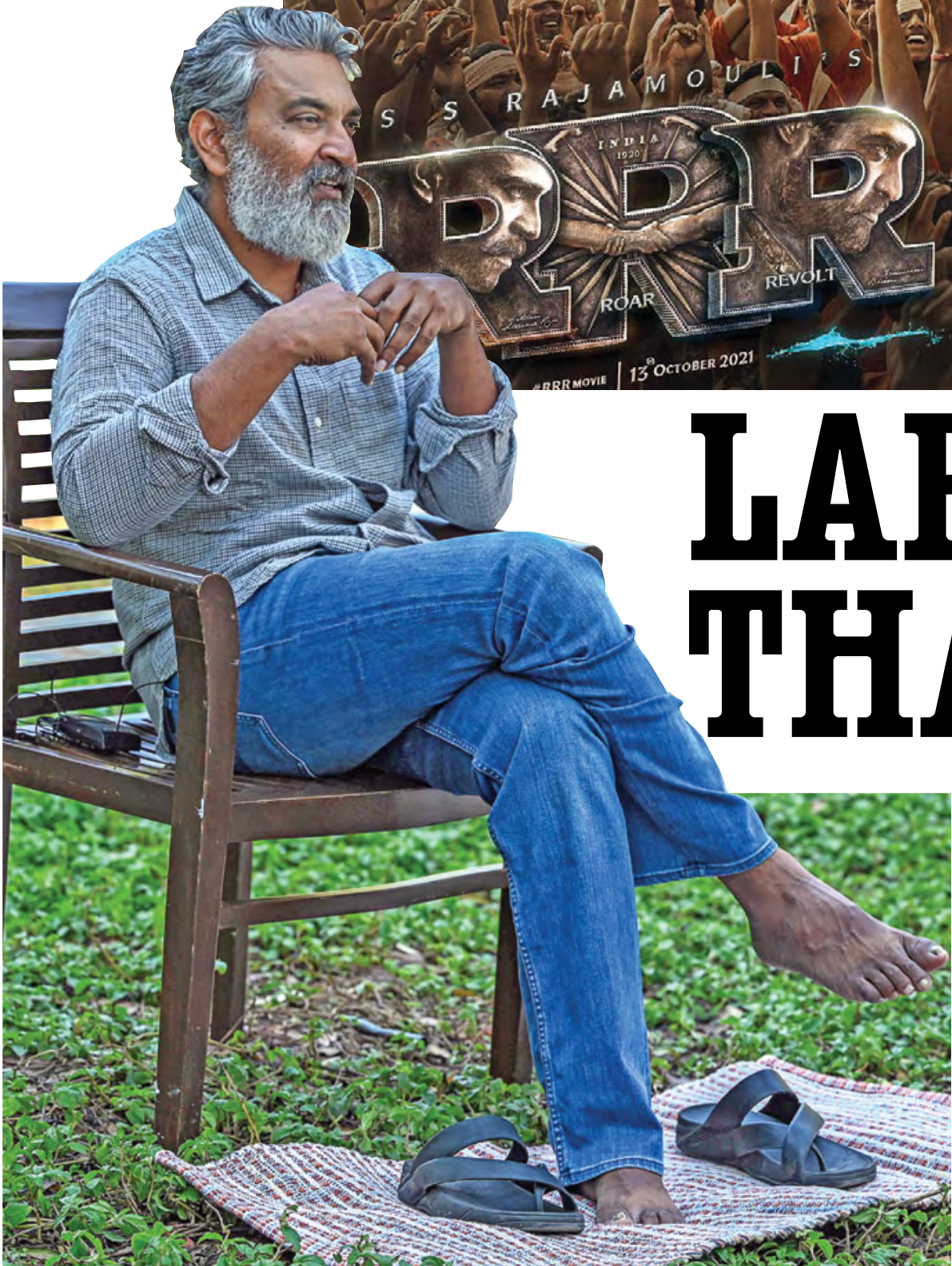
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LARGER THAN LIFE

Indian director S S Rajamouli's films are all-singing, all-dancing spectacles - and he is now a favourite to secure the first ever Oscar for an all-Indian film. His three-hour extravaganza *RRR* is a fictionalised story of two colonial-era revolutionaries, filled with large-scale, visual effects-laden action sequences and musical numbers. It has smashed box offices in India, wowed audiences from the United States to Japan, and is a front runner for the Best Original Song award at next month's Oscars, having already beaten out Taylor Swift and Rihanna for the same prize at the Golden Globes. "When I'm going to a movie, I would like to see larger-than-life characters, larger-than-life situations, larger-than-

life drama," Rajamouli told AFP. "And that's what I like to make," he said at his office in the southern city of Hyderabad. "Nothing holds the heroes back in delivering their action sequences." A word-of-mouth hit that has seen moviegoers dancing in cinema aisles, Telugu-language *RRR* has become one of the highest-grossing Indian movies ever. It has also introduced the country's lesser-known but prolific southern cinema industry to a worldwide audience. India's Hindi-language Bollywood cinema industry has long been known as the world's most productive, but international film awards beyond the festival circuit have largely remained the preserve of English-language movies. That changed when Bong Joon-ho's

Parasite swept four Oscars in 2020, including Best Film and Best Director, after decades when the plaudits for Korean cinema were confined to the critics. The only previous Indian Oscars

won were for English-language films - the 1982 British-Indian co-production *Gandhi* and 2008's Mumbai-set British drama *Slumdog Millionaire*. Now Rajamouli hopes a statuette for the dance number *Naatu Naatu* will pave the way for Indian auteurs to do the same. Shot in front of Ukraine's turquoise presidential palace - before the war - it features high-energy performances from the two leads as they confront their antagonist. "We are breaking ground, but I think we are in very, very initial, initial steps," said the 49-year-old. "If you see (South) Korea, for example, the kind of inroads that they have made... we should aspire to do that, all Indian film-makers."

'Unprecedented' Rajamouli was born in the southern state of Karnataka. His father was a scriptwriter who exposed him to the industry.

His early influences included prominent Telugu directors but he found himself drawn to epic Hollywood films such as *Ben Hur* and *Braveheart*, and is a fan of Steven Spielberg and James Cameron. Rajamouli's 2015 historical action-drama *Baahubali* - then the most expensive film made in India - made him a household name domestically, leading a wave of southern films to the top of the multilingual country's box office. The 2017 sequel was well-received, with both movies among the highest-grossing of all time in the nation of 1.4bn people, cementing Rajamouli's reputation as a blockbuster director. He was 'pleasantly surprised' by the buzz around *RRR* in the West, he said, pointing to what he called a 'lack of maximalist entertainment'. "There's a section of audiences who wanted that, a celebratory kind of engagement with the cinema." Despite appearing on Netflix only

two months after it debuted across 1,200 US theatres in March last year, *RRR* has become among North America's highest-grossing Indian films. It was 'unprecedented' and 'a total outlier', said analyst David A Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. Audiences continue to flock to packed screenings for repeat viewings - a January showing at Hollywood's historic TCL Chinese Theatre sold out in 98 seconds. Rajamouli's films have been compared to Marvel superhero movies and he said it would 'be an honour' to be asked to do one - but he worries that a major studio would want to involve itself in the production process.

Troubling undertones The accolades for *RRR* have also been accompanied by criticism of perceived troubling undertones in the film, including the promotion of nationalism and hyper-masculinity. *RRR* contains Indian mythology and nationalist fervour at a time when film-makers, mostly in Bollywood, have been repeatedly targeted by right-wingers on social media. Rights campaigners say that under nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bollywood stars are facing increased pressure - particularly minority Muslim actors like Shah Rukh Khan and Aamir Khan. Rajamouli grew up in a 'deeply religious' Hindu family but believes that 'religion essentially is exploitation'. He blames criticism of the film on the polarisation of debate in India that does not allow for a middle ground. "Any extreme point of view, I oppose," he said. "I don't have any kind of hidden agenda... I make films for people who are willing to pay their hard-earned money on the film ticket. "I like to get them entertained, make them feel dramatic about the characters, about the situations, have a good time, go back and live their lives."



I like to get them entertained, make them feel dramatic about the characters, about the situations, have a good time, go back and live their lives

S S RAJAMOULI

AFP



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