

First geological heritage park planned in Hajar Mountains

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has announced plans to create Oman and the Arab world's first geological heritage park in the Hajar Mountains, a move aimed at preserving the region's geological diversity and promoting awareness on geological conservation.

The initiative, revealed during a workshop titled 'Meteorites in Oman and Combating their Illicit Trade' on Sunday, seeks to attract tourists with an interest in geological features while highlighting the importance of protecting such natural heritage.

The workshop served as a platform for discussions on preservation of meteorites and the fight against their illegal trade. H E Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, emphasised the ministry's commitment to establishing the geopark. "We are collaborating with relevant authorities on this project. Our goal is to register it with Unesco



next year," he stated.

The workshop saw the participation of experts and specialists in the field, including Prof Beda Hoffmann from Natural History Museum of Bern, Switzerland, who shared scientific insights on meteorites. It underscored the significance of scientific, educational and regulatory measures in preventing fraud, illegal trade and other illicit practices related



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H E SALIM MOHAMMED
AL MAHROUQI

to meteorites.

A highlight of the ministry's efforts includes a collaboration with Natural History Museum of Bern and Curtin University of Australia, with support from Omantel, to monitor meteorites entering Oman's atmosphere. The initial results, announced in October last year, marked the successful documentation and monitoring of the first meteorite

- Al Khadhaf - entering the sultanate's atmosphere in real time.

The ministry and its partners have successfully documented over 7,340 meteorites in Oman.

Ria bint Mohammed al Kindi, Director General of Museums, spoke on the workshop's role in enhancing awareness among tourist companies about the importance of preserving meteorites.

"The ministry is committed to continuing efforts to improve follow-up and protection efforts through research, monitoring, documentation and temporary exhibitions of meteorites," she said.

"This workshop is part of our wider goals to build national capacities in preserving cultural heritage and combating illegal trafficking."

The geological heritage park project represents a significant step towards promoting Oman's natural wonders and contributing to the global effort in geological conservation and education.



H M RECEIVES MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT OF SOMALIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq received a written message from President Dr Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of the Federal Republic of Somalia on Sunday. The message dealt with bilateral relations and was handed over to Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, when he received Ali Mohamed Omar, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Somalia (ONA)

Oman named guest country at SPIEF 2024



H E Hamood bin Salim al Tuwaih, Ambassador of Oman to Russia, with Anton Kobyakov, Advisor to the Russian President, at a meeting recently

Moscow, Russia - Oman will be the guest country at Russia's St Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) in 2024 set to take place from June 5 to 8.

Guest country status at the forum includes a whole range of opportunities at business and cultural programme events. Over the last 24 years, the forum has become a leading global platform for members of the business community to meet and discuss the key economic issues facing Russia, emerging markets and the world as a whole.

The invitation was confirmed by H E Hamood bin Salim al Tuwaih, Ambassador of Oman to Russia, at a meeting with Anton Kobyakov, Advisor to the Russian President, recently.

"In recent years, Qatar, Egypt and the UAE have all served as guest countries at SPIEF, and in 2024 the honour is being con-

ferred on the Sultanate of Oman. I have no doubt that Oman's participation in SPIEF will spark an increase in trade and economic relations between our countries and make it possible for forum participants and local residents to learn more about the venerable history, traditions and culture of Oman," Kobyakov said.

He added that despite the current geopolitical situation, Russia continues to develop mutually beneficial relations with the Arab world. "Nowhere is this more apparent than in the participation of Arab leaders in SPIEF, the Russia-Africa Summit, and high-level summits in the UAE and Saudi Arabia."

During the meeting, the parties discussed matters related to preparing for the event and strategies for how to most effectively position Oman within SPIEF 2024.

Oman ranks 70th in Corruption Perceptions Index

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) shows that only 28 of the 180 countries measured by the index have improved their corruption levels in the last 12 years, and 34 countries have significantly worsened.

Despite progress made across the planet in criminalising corruption and establishing specialised institutions to address it, corruption levels remain stagnant globally, the index report stated.

The index ranks Oman 70th, one place down since 2022 with a score of 42/100, while in the GCC, UAE is the top ranked country at 26th, followed by Qatar (40th). Saudi Arabia is ranked 53rd, Kuwait 63rd and Bahrain 76th.

For over a decade, most Arab states have failed to improve their positions on CPI and 2023 is no exception, Kinda Hattar, Regional Advisor for Middle East and North Africa, Trans-

National committee meets to review competitive reports of 2022, 2023

Muscat - The National Competitiveness Committee held its first meeting of 2024 headed by H E Dr Saeed bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, on Sunday. It reviewed the decisions of the committee for the years 2022 and 2023, and developments in the *Future of Growth Report* (formerly the *Global Competitiveness Report*), in which the evaluation methodology and structure of the report were changed. The meeting also reviewed the Corruption Perceptions Index 2023.

The National Competitiveness Office works to



H E Dr Saeed al Saqri

follow up and improve international indicators in coordination with concerned authorities in an effort to achieve good ranks in international reports, which contributes to raising Oman's stature globally.

The meeting also discussed progress of the Business Readiness and Economic Freedom Team, which is led by the National Programme for Investment and Export Development - Nazdaher, and touched on outputs of the health workshop, which aimed at addressing the mechanism for calculating health indicators.

parency International, said.

"Corruption continues to hinder citizens' access to essential services, including health and education, and in many cases, even threatens their right to life. With only seven years to go to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the Arab states struggle to fulfil their commit-

ments to justice and human rights. This is due to the absence of proper infrastructure and national integrity systems. The Arab states have an average score of 34 out of 100, demonstrating the long road ahead in assuring integrity and justice throughout the region," she said.

The CPI ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public-sector corruption according to experts and businesspeople. It relies on 13 independent data sources and uses a scale of zero to 100, where zero is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

Most countries are largely

failing to stop corruption - over 80% of the world's population lives in countries with CPI scores below the global average of 43. In addition, the top 25 countries in the index make up just over ten per cent of all people. Corruption therefore remains a challenge that directly or indirectly harms most people.

For the sixth year in a row, Denmark tops the ranking, with a score of 90. Finland and New Zealand follow closely with scores of 87 and 85, respectively. Norway (84), Singapore (83), Sweden (82), Switzerland (82), the Netherlands (79), Germany (78) and Luxembourg (78) complete the top ten this year.

Meanwhile, countries experiencing conflict tend to score worst. This year, Somalia (11), Venezuela (13), Syria (13) and South Sudan (13) are at the bottom of the index. Yemen (16), Nicaragua (17), North Korea (17), Haiti (17), Equatorial Guinea (17), Turkmenistan (18) and Libya (18) are the next lowest performers.

UNGA calls member states for UNRWA financial, political support

New York, US - Dennis Francis, President of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), has urged UN member states to offer urgent financial and political support to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as it faces the "most serious ever" humanitarian crisis.

In a letter to Commissioner-General of the Agency Philippe Lazzarini on Saturday, the UNGA President expressed dismay at the deteriorating humanitarian disaster in Gaza Strip due to the Israeli military offensive.

Francis considers UNRWA an indispensable lifeline for millions of Palestinians, noting that they, particularly the children, have depended heavily on the assistance and services provided by the agency over the past 75 years.

Francis's letter comes in reply



UNRWA is an indispensable lifeline for millions of Palestinians, particularly the children

DENNIS FRANCIS

to a letter addressed to him two days ago by Lazzarini who said, "The agency has reached breaking point, with Israel's repeated calls to dismantle UNRWA and the freezing of funding by donors



With aid coming in trickles, food is running low and famine is looming in Gaza, according to UNRWA

at a time of unprecedented humanitarian needs in Gaza."

Commissioner-General cautioned that the agency's ability to fulfil the mandate given through General Assembly resolution

302 is now seriously threatened.

"In just over four months in Gaza, there have been more children, more journalists, more medical personnel and more UN staff killed than anywhere in the

world during a conflict. Over 150 UNRWA premises have been hit by bombardment or shelling, killing over 390 people, and injuring over 1,300," Lazzarini said.

Many reports of UN premises

being used by Hamas combatants or by the Israeli army are circulating on social media, he regretted. "The last remaining hospitals are collapsing, and doctors amputate children's limbs without anaesthetic, which puts pain at a new level for children, their parents and medical personnel. UN experts say famine is imminent," Lazzarini ended.

Hostage deal

The US, Egypt, Qatar and Israel have come to an understanding of "basic contours" of a hostage deal for a temporary ceasefire in Gaza, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told CNN on Sunday. The deal is still under negotiation, said Sullivan, who added that there will have to be indirect discussions by Qatar and Egypt with Hamas.

See also Page 09



Aussies beat New Zealand in third T20 to sweep series



2024 Travel trends - As you like it



Restrooms can be installed, not civic sense

Oman’s stunning natural beauty is well known and attracts tourists from around the world. Recognising this potential, the authorities have adopted several measures to improve facilities and make travel comfortable for tourists. Muscat Municipality installed 12 public restrooms in Seeb and Quriyat beaches earlier this month. Which other places need such facilities and services and what can be done immediately to reduce littering on beaches? Here’s what *Muscat Daily* readers said –

Sarojini Gopal
Homemaker

It’s a welcome move to install public restrooms. Unfortunately, common sense and civic sense cannot be installed.

Qaseem al Balushi
Salesman

I believe there is a serious dearth of basic facilities like restrooms at tourist places. Most people depend on fuel stations for these. The Riyam Trail and beaches in Qantab need basic facilities for tourists.

Mohammad al Amri
Public sector employee

The Yiti road is very scenic, especially the one to Jabal Sifah. However, there are almost no washrooms on the way, except in mosques and some supermarkets. It is high time these places were developed.

Ahmed al Hinai
Public sector employee

I suggest these facilities not only for beaches but also wadis and mountain trails. Such facilities need to be developed in most places.



William Jacob
Private sector employee

The beaches in Qurum, Azaiba, Qantab and Yiti need public restrooms

Shakila Javed
Lecturer

More public restrooms are required on Grand Hyatt beach as well as Qurum Beach..

Inge van der Wijk
Private sector employee

Individuals should take responsibility for their own litter and dispose of it properly, as they brought it with them.

Haresh Dave
Private sector employee

Public restrooms are needed in Suhar Corniche.

Zeenath
Student

Azaiba Beach should have more amenities like tables and chairs, similar to those available at Shatti al Qurum Beach.

Subbuhi Sira
Private sector employee

Installing public restrooms near wadis would be beneficial.

Syed Amir Ali
Private sector employee

The entire country needs effective solutions to overcome obstacles in solid waste management, which can only be provided by the government.

Chaamu
Fitness and nutrition specialist

Although the beach near Grand Hyatt Muscat is suitable for walks, the restroom is not usable. Regular maintenance and adding at least two restrooms would greatly enhance the comfort of visitors, including families with children, who come out for physical activities.

NEXT ON YOUR SAY

The Bausher-Amerat mountain road continues to be prone to accidents with a truck driver losing his life last week. What measures should be taken to stop loss of life on the road and what other roads need to be developed to curb accidents?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (7 /2024)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following biddings :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding description	Document fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for submission
1	1/2024	Investing of Plot No. (2939) at Wilayat Al-Amerat	150/- OMR	25/04/2024	30/04/2024	25/05/2024
2	2/2024	Investing Of Plot No. (2380) at Wilayat Al-Seeb	150/- OMR	10/03/2024	12/03/2024	02/04/2024
3	3/2024	Managing & Operating of Sales Outlet (kiosk) in Mabella South at Al Seeb	25/- OMR	10/03/2024	12/03/2024	02/04/2024
4	4/2024	Managing & Operating of a Container-style cafe at Directorate of Muscat Municipality - Seeb	25/- OMR	10/03/2024	12/03/2024	02/04/2024
5	5/2024	Constructing, Managing & Operating of Sports fields in Wady Kabeer Garden – Matrah	150/- OMR	10/03/2024	12/03/2024	02/04/2024
6	6/2024	Managing & Operating of Sports Fields (Football, Basketball, Volleyball) at Al - Mabella - Al Seeb	150/- OMR	10/03/2024	12/03/2024	02/04/2024
7	7/2024	Constructing, Managing & Operating of sports fields (Padel) in Mabella South at Seeb	150/- OMR	10/03/2024	12/03/2024	02/04/2024
8	8/2024	Managing & Operating of Skating Field at Al -Mabella - Seeb	150/- OMR	10/03/2024	12/03/2024	02/04/2024
9	9/2024	Supply, Install & Operate of a Cafe Container in Madenat Sultan Qaboos - Boshier	25/- OMR	10/03/2024	12/03/2024	02/04/2024
10	10/2024	Managing & Operating of (4) Containers Located in Plot No. (651) Phase (1) at Boshier	25/- OMR	10/03/2024	12/03/2024	02/04/2024

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bid are invited to participate as per the following procedures:

1. Company registration with Muscat Municipality have to be valid as per note number one below, to be able to get the bid document.
2. Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:
Bank Muscat 0423010702710024
3. A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, delegate name, office phone number, mobile number, email address approved by the company and commercial registration number of the company).
4. The tender document will be provided to the company via email.
5. 12:00 PM on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered, even if the fee of the document is paid.
Submitted offers must be accompanied with a bond mentioned in the tender document valid for a period not less than (90) days issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bidding that do not meet the required bond will not be accepted. Documents must be enclosed in a plain closed envelope (without any company information) and drop in the box located in building (A) in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.

NOTES:

1. Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through this email (crm@mm.gov.om).
2. If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to send their inquiries through the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om)
3. 10:00 AM on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
4. Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om

‘Sustainability is a mindset’

Hi friends,
I'm back, your old friend Hopibi!

Some of you might remember me as Oman's 'Bitter about Litter' champion. Others will get to know me better, by and by, as we continue our mission to make Oman a more environment-friendly and sustainable place to live in.

They say, sustainability is not a scientific concept, but rather a mindset. You may set up a business, build a house or deliberate on making the planet a better place for future generations with all your senses focused on sustainability. Or you may simply enjoy a picnic or a party with friends and yet do it in a sustainable fashion – it would all depend on your mindset, the materials you use and discard, your choices and challenges, and, above all, your concern about not disturbing your surroundings after the din of your revelry has settled.

Simply put, sustainability entails fulfilling the needs of the current generation without compromising the needs of future generations. It is all about striking a balance between economic development and maintaining the resources and beauty of the planet.

I'm really excited these days – I hear a group of school students in Muscat is getting ready to showcase projects at the annual Sustainability Fair that will be held on February 27. Mentored by tutors who have helped school teams find expression for their vibrant ideas and dreams, these students are all set to showcase new ways of doing old tasks in a sustainable fashion. And there is a strong message for everyone that will not only tug at your heart strings but also set you thinking to usher in changes in lifestyles.

They say old habits die hard... But it's time to put these to death! Let's take care of litter and leaks; let's do things differently – recycle and reuse; let's keep the air we breathe cleaner and the lawns a little greener.

See you around at the Oman Sustainability Fair 2024 tomorrow at W Muscat!



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AMERA warns of illegal firms offering hajj services

Our Correspondent
Salalah

The Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (AMERA) has issued a stern warning against unlicensed companies advertising hajj services on social media platforms.

A statement said, 'The number of fake companies, not licensed by the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, has increased. Pilgrims are urged to exclusively contract with licensed operators registered through Oman's electronic pilgrim registration system. Visit

www.hajj.om for verified information and review service brochures from accredited hajj companies.'

On Sunday, AMERA issued a ministerial decision to form Oman Hajj Mission 1445 AH.

The decision stipulated that Sultan Said al Hinai will be head of the mission, Dr Ahmed Ali al Kaabi deputy head for administrative and financial affairs, and Abdulaziz Mas'oud al Ghaffri deputy head for pilgrim affairs and hajj campaigns.

Oman Hajj Mission lends support to pilgrims and assists them when performing hajj rituals.

Phase 1 of Ibri Industrial City inaugurated

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of the Secretariat General of National Celebrations (SGNC) programme to inaugurate key national projects, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) on Sunday celebrated the inauguration of the Phase 1 of Ibri Industrial City under the auspices of Na-jeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah.

Highlighting the significance of developing an industrial hub in Al Dhahirah Governorate, Rawas said that the inauguration of Ibri Industrial City marks a strategic continuation of the sultanate's goal to ensure balanced economic growth across its diverse governorates.



“Aligned with the core objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040, this project aims to present a dynamic and competitive investment landscape that appeals to both local and foreign investors. The introduction of an

industrial city in Al Dhahirah Governorate is poised to catalyse a significant qualitative leap in manufacturing industries and commercial activities. The city will play a role in generating job opportunities, encouraging ex-

ports and establishing export industries,” Rawas said in a press statement.

He added, “Al Dhahirah's strategic location, bordering Saudi Arabia and the UAE, will further support international

trade operations. Coupled with its proximity to important hubs like Sohar Port, Khazaen Economic City and Nizwa Industrial City, as well as oil and gas concession areas and raw materials such as metals, marble and copper, the governorate holds immense potential for sustainable economic growth.”

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of Ibri Industrial City infrastructure project (Phase 1), Salah al Alawi, Director General of Ibri Industrial City, said, “The industrial city spans an extensive area of 10mn sqm, with Phase 1 successfully completed at a cost of RO9mn, covering 3mn sqm. The presence of a fully-equipped industrial city will serve as a pivotal factor in driving development and fostering an ideal

environment for the private sector to engage in a diverse range of industrial, commercial and service activities.”

Alawi highlighted Madayn's commitment to promote investment in Ibri Industrial City through the introduction of a comprehensive incentive package. This package grants investors exemption from rental value for a period of two years for all new projects, followed by a reduction in the rental value for a period of three years by 50% for contracts concluded during the period from 2021 to 2024. Additionally, all fees listed in the Investment Regulations were reduced by 50% for all projects.

“These incentives resulted in a notable increase in investor in-

terest, with 10 projects now underway in Ibri Industrial City, boasting an initial investment totalling RO6.5mn. Several of these projects have already commenced construction and development activities,” Alawi informed.

Infrastructure projects

Ahmed al Farsi, Director of Projects at Madayn's Directorate General of Facilities and Infrastructure, said that the Phase 1 of Ibri Industrial City includes the construction of roads, truck parking zone, water network and water tank, firefighting network, sewage networks and collection tank, dyke for protection against rainwater, and security system with surveillance cameras.

Gulf Mushroom Products Co. (S.A.O.G.)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

Dear Shareholders

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the twenty sixth annual report of Gulf Mushroom Products Co. (SAOG) for the financial year ended 31 December 2023. The Board of directors, executive management and staff of Gulf Mushroom thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tank for leading the country on the path of sustainable long-term economic development through its Vision 2040 and robust fiscal and economic policies and support for the private sector.

Regional focus

With slowing down of global economy during the year, the GCC economies also slowed down due to reduced activities in the oil sector. However, economic recovery is expected in 2024 and beyond as oil sector recovers and particularly as non-oil sector activities continue to rise supported by the ongoing economic diversification efforts, rising tourism and infrastructure projects being implemented across the region.

Preview of Results

Global economic slowdown and rising material and logistics costs due to conflicts in Europe & Middle East during the year impacted Company's revenues and profitability. The revenues of the company for the year ended 31 December 2023 were RO 10.275 million compared to RO 9.813 million in 2022, an increase of 5%. Earnings before depreciation and finance costs in 2023 was RO 2.500 million compared to RO 2.751 million in 2022, a decrease of 9%.

Net profit after tax for the year ended 31 December 2023 was RO 1.385 million compared to RO 1.558 million in 2022, a decrease of 11%.

The net assets of the company (including land revaluation reserve) as of 31 December 2023 were RO 10.141 million compared to RO 9.172 million as of 31 December 2022.

During the year your Company achieved a total production of 6,291 metric tons of different varieties of fresh mushrooms compared to 6,055 metric tons in the previous year, an increase of 4%.

Exports during the year 2023 were RO 9.135 million (89% of total sales) compared to RO 8.713 million (89% of total sales) during 2022.

Economic diversification and export revenues

With about 90% exports and by employing large amount of Omani youth, Company is proud of its contribution to Oman's economic diversification and social development policies.

Capacity Expansion

During the year Company has successfully completed the second expansion of its mushroom production capacity as per schedule. As the market leader in the regional markets, Company is committed to fully service the market demand and has a policy of increasing its production capacity in stages from time to time.

Technical Expertise

Production of compost and cultivation of mushrooms is carried out in a controlled environment involving hi-tech climate control systems and micro-biological processes. Your Company has a dedicated and highly experienced technical team and continuously engages with international consultants to stay up to date with technical developments in the mushroom industry.

Quality and safety certifications

Company is strictly following a standard food safety management program and is holding HACCP and Global GAP certifications issued by reputed bodies. Company's operations are regularly subjected to external surveillance and audits by quality auditors.

Dividends Policy

Company uses its cash reserves to re-invest in growth and to provide regular returns to its shareholders. For the year ended 31 December 2023 the board of directors is pleased to propose cash dividend at 15% of paid-up share capital subject to approval from appropriate authorities and shareholders. Share price and dividend history for the last ten years is shown in the table below-

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Share price at year end (RO)	0.426	0.386	0.336	0.306	0.306	0.306	0.306	0.263	0.238	0.226
Cash Dividend	-	-	-	-	5%	5%	-	7%	10%	15%*
Bonus shares	10%	15%	10%	-	-	-	10%	-	10%	-

* subject to approval from appropriate authorities and shareholders.

Corporate Governance

Company strictly adheres to the corporate governance regulations issued by the Capital Market Authority and exercises strong governance through its board of directors, well documented policies and procedures and sound internal control systems. During the year there were 16 meetings of the board of directors, audit committee and nomination & remuneration committee. Reference may be made to the Management Discussion and Analysis Report and Report on Corporate Governance which are enclosed.

ESG

Company has voluntarily reported its social and governance data for the financial year 2023 in the ESG Disclosure platform of MSX as per the ESG Guidelines issued by MSX.

Human resources

Company is proud of its skilled and motivated employees which includes 146 Omani citizens representing 35.96% of total employees. Besides hiring Omani workers, Company has employed Omani commerce and technical graduates across all business functions and in different levels. Company follows best industry practices for improving employee motivation, performance and growth through periodic performance appraisals, incentives and rewards and training programs.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Company has a CSR policy and contributes to social causes within the CSR budget approved by the shareholders every year.

Outlook

Tourism is a key driver of demand for fresh mushrooms. During 2023 tourist arrivals in the Middle East surpassed pre-pandemic levels by more than 20% and this sector is expected to see a stronger growth in 2024 with the implementation of initiatives like the unified tourist visa in the GCC region. However, the prevailing geo-political tensions will continue to weigh

on confidence. Your company is the leading producer of fresh mushrooms in the entire Middle East region and is committed to maintaining its leadership position and sustain its growth in revenues and profits in the future.

Thanks and Gratitude

We express our gratitude and loyalty to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tank May God protect him and guide him for the benefit of Oman and its people. We express our gratitude and thanks to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and all officials for their guidance and support extended to the company.

We thank the shareholders for their constant support to the company. We also thank the management team and staff of the company for their dedication and sincere efforts towards achieving the goals of the company.

Chairman of the Board of Directors

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2023		
	2023 RO	2022 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	13,944,428	12,579,229
Right-of-use asset	13,536	21,291
	13,957,964	12,600,520
Current assets		
Inventories	1,803,308	2,187,593
Trade and other receivables	1,873,997	1,600,816
Cash and bank balances	355,589	752,858
	4,032,894	4,541,267
Total assets	17,990,858	17,141,787
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	4,576,580	4,160,527
Legal reserve	1,175,076	1,036,548
Special reserve	12,405	12,405
Revaluation reserve	1,379,890	1,379,890
Retained earnings	2,997,317	2,582,067
	10,141,268	9,172,037
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Government soft loan	479,342	589,417
Deferred Government grant	38,845	46,313
Commercial loan	3,180,672	3,105,921
Lease liability	-	8,575
Deferred tax liability	638,377	590,993
Employees' end of service benefits	517,790	411,316
	4,855,026	4,752,535
Current liabilities		
Government soft loan	237,860	149,117
Commercial loan	1,144,232	1,071,766
Lease liability	8,575	8,168
Short term borrowings	-	250,000
Trade and other payables	1,406,925	1,489,635
Income tax payable	196,972	248,529
	2,994,564	3,217,215
Total liabilities	7,849,590	7,969,750
Total equity and liabilities	17,990,858	17,141,787
Net assets per share	0.222	0.200

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023		
	2023 RO	2022 RO
Income from operations	10,274,807	9,812,998
Cost of operations	(5,633,122)	(5,104,326)
Gross profit	4,641,685	4,708,672
Selling and distribution expenses	(768,281)	(724,480)
Administrative expenses	(1,410,598)	(1,261,130)
Other income	37,179	27,895
Depreciation on property, plant and equipment	(595,912)	(624,435)
Depreciation on right-of-use asset	(7,755)	(7,755)
Finance costs	(266,453)	(286,707)
Profit before income tax	1,629,865	1,832,060
Income tax	(244,581)	(274,021)
Total comprehensive income for the year	1,385,284	1,558,039
Earnings per share - basic and diluted	0.030	0.034

The complete accounts of Gulf Mushroom Products Co. SAOG will be delivered to any shareholder or other interested party who requests them, in either Arabic or English, as requested, within 7 days of receipt of written request.

M/s Gulf Mushroom Products Co. SAOG

P.O. Box: 383, Postal Code: 320, Barka, Sultanate of Oman, Fax: 00968 26883955, Email: info@gulfmushroom.com

Ibri Industrial City signs four investment deals



Four investment contracts worth RO7mn were signed on Sunday by Ibri Industrial City

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As many as four investment agreements were signed for Ibri Industrial City during the inauguration ceremony of the Phase 1 of the city on Sunday.

The first agreement was signed with Seeh Al Sarya Company to establish a factory specialised in the oil and gas

industry, spanning 60,000sqm, with an investment totalling RO6mn.

The second contract was inked with Fifth Wave of Food Industries Company to set up a food industry factory (roasted coffee) covering an area of 5,000sqm, with an investment of RO500,000.

The third contract, with Raad Ibri Company, aims at establish-

ing a manufacturing factory (for coal and its derivatives) across 5,000sqm, with an investment of RO250,000.

Lastly, the fourth contract was signed with Al Mizah United Company which specialises in light industries (cardboard). The company plans to develop a project on an area of 8,000sqm with an investment surpassing RO250,000.

Qatar to boost LNG production with new expansion project

Doha, Qatar - Qatar's energy giant QatarEnergy on Sunday announced that it is proceeding with a new LNG expansion project, the 'North Field West' project.

The North Field West project will further raise Qatar's LNG production capacity to 142mn tonnes per annum (MTPA) before the end of this decade, representing an increase of almost 85% from current production levels.



Saad Sherida al-Kaabi

Saad al Kaabi announced the presence of huge additional gas quantities in the North Field estimated at 240tn cubic feet, which raises Qatar's gas reserves from 1,760tn to more than 2,000tn cubic feet

Qatari energy ministry Saad Sherida al-Kaabi made the announcement during a press conference at QatarEnergy headquarters in Doha.

Kaabi announced that extensive appraisal drilling and testing have confirmed that productive layers of Qatar's giant North Field extend towards the west, which allows for developing a new LNG production project in Ras Laffan.

The minister said, "QatarEnergy has focused its efforts and attention on determining how far west the North Field's productive layers extend in order to evaluate the production potential from those areas. We have continued geological and engineering studies and have drilled a number of appraisal wells in that area. I am pleased today to announce that

duce significant additional quantities of gas from this new sector."

He also announced the presence of huge additional gas quantities in the North Field estimated at 240tn cubic feet, which raises Qatar's gas reserves from 1,760tn to more than 2,000tn cubic feet, and the condensates reserves from 70bn barrels to more than 80bn barrels, in addition to large quantities of liquefied petroleum gas, ethane, and helium.

Kaabi added that QatarEnergy will immediately commence the basic engineering works necessary to ensure that the planned progress is achieved according to the approved schedule for this new project, which will be called the North Field West project.

2 years on, Russia-Ukraine war exacts stinging economic costs

Gökhan Ergöçün

The World Bank estimates that Russia's 'special military operation' has caused \$152bn of direct damage in Ukraine since February 24, 2022

Two years on, the casualty count from Russia's war on Ukraine numbers in the tens of thousands, while many more lives have been uprooted and entire cities left in shambles. The material damage caused by the war, which Moscow launched on February 24, 2022 as a "special military operation," is estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars.

According to a recent report from the International Rescue Committee (IRC), some 14.6mn Ukrainians are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance as of this year, including the 3.7mn internally displaced.

The report showed that over 4,000 attacks on education facilities and over 1,300 attacks on healthcare have been recorded since February 2022, while over 1.5mn homes have been destroyed.



A Ukrainian soldier patrols around the City of Vuhledar on November 15, 2023 (Anadolu Agency)

stroyed.

The UN also forecasted in December that the total cost of reconstruction and recovery in Ukraine is now at around \$486bn, up from the previous estimation in 2022 at \$411bn.

The IRC report revealed that an area the size of Romania is now riddled with landmines and that the explosion of the south-

ern Nova Kakhkova dam in June left 600,000 hectares of arable land without irrigation.

According to the Kyiv-based Centre for Economic Strategy (CES), the unemployment rate in Ukraine, which was at around 10% before the war, rose to over 30% during the conflict before declining down to its current 17%. Hunger has also been a significant concern throughout the war, with food insecurity - rising to up to 30.3% - now at 19.2%.

Exports and imports had been at similar levels at roughly \$7.5bn in January 2022. But the balance collapsed after the war began, with the trade balance trailing at negative levels. As of December, it was at minus \$3.7bn.

Ukraine's annual inflation rate,

10% in January 2022, saw 26.6% in October 2022 and is currently at 4.7%. After growing 6.3% in the last quarter of 2021, the country's economy contracted 14.9% in the first quarter of 2022, 36.9% in the second quarter, 30.6% in the third, and 31.4% in the last quarter.

After declining 10.3% in the first quarter of 2023, the Ukrainian economy posted its first positive GDP growth rate - 19.5% - in the second quarter of 2023. It remained in the black with 9.3% in the third quarter and 6.5% in the last quarter, according to the CES' estimations.

Russian side

Annual inflation in Russia, which was at around 9% before the war, has been hovering at 11-17.8% in the first year of the conflict.

After this period of double-digit inflation, it fell as low as 2-3% due to the base effect and interest rate hikes by the country's central bank. It has been gradually increasing since a 2.3% reading April to 7.4% in January.

The Russian Central Bank has lowered its interest rate from 20% to 7.5% level from March to September 2022 but had to increase the rate gradually after July last year to 16% as of December.

The country's credit default swap (CDS) risk premium, long-flat before the war at around 200, has skyrocketed to about 13,800.

Russian Central Bank reserves, at over \$320bn, have been blocked since the beginning of the war by Brussels, along with G7 countries and Australia.

In addition, 70% of Russian banking assets and \$21.6bn of assets of more than 1,500 people and entities are under Western sanctions, according to a report the European Council released in May.

Russia's exports during the last year fell by 28.3% to \$425.1bn, down from \$588.3bn, while its exports to Europe plunged 68% to \$83.9bn. Imports were at \$280.4bn in 2022 and at \$285.1bn last year.

Anadolu Agency

ECB posts first annual loss in two decades

Frankfurt, Germany - The European Central Bank (ECB) last year recorded its first annual loss in almost two decades, according to a financial statement.

The central bank reported a loss of €1.3bn (\$1.41bn) for 2023 - its first annual loss since 2004. "This loss takes into account the full release of the provision for financial risks, amounting to €6,620mn, which partially covered losses incurred during the year," said the statement.

"There will be no profit distribution to the euro area national central banks (NCBs) for 2023," it added.

The ECB said raising its key interest rates to fight inflation in the euro area resulted in increased interest expenses on its liabilities that are subject to variable interest rates.

Interest income on its assets, however, did not increase to the same extent or at the same pace, since those assets largely have fixed interest rates and long maturities, it added.

The central bank said it is likely to incur losses over the next few years but then expects to return to making sustained profits.

Google plans to begin Pixel phone production in India in Q2 2024

New Delhi, India - Google has told suppliers to start making its Pixel smartphones in India by the next quarter at the earliest, as part of the search engine giant's aim to further diversify its supply chain away from China and capture the booming Indian smartphone market, Nikkei Asia has reported.

As per the news report published on Thursday, the supply chain strategy is part of Google's ambitious target of shipping more than 10mn Pixel phones this year, after shipping around 10mn units for the first time in 2023 amid a global economic slowdown.

Google will first prepare the production line for its high-end Pixel 8 Pro in the southern part of India in the coming weeks, then begin turning out phones in the April-June quarter, the news report quoted multiple sources familiar with the plan.

This will be followed by production of the Pixel 8 in the north of the country around the middle of this year, the news report said quoting sources.

There are emerging smartphone manufacturing hubs in both of these parts of the country, thanks to companies like Apple, Samsung, Oppo and Xiaomi bringing several assembly



and component suppliers into India in recent years. Previously, the majority of Google's Pixel phones were produced in China.

"Google is not the only tech company that started to look for a 'China+2' strategy. That means diversifying away from China into another place is not enough, but suppliers should have multiple non-China options for better supply chain resilience," one of the sources said, as per the news report.

The company announced last year that its first made-in-India Pixel phones will be available this year, joining Apple and Samsung in tapping the massive and growing Indian market at a time when the overall smartphone in-

dustry is slowing.

The Indian smartphone market grew 1% on the year to 146mn units in 2023, with the pace of growth in the second half of the year hitting 11% versus the previous year, research agency IDC's data showed.

That compares with a 4.7% overall decline in the global smartphone market in 2023. China, the world's biggest smartphone market, saw a 5% drop last year, IDC's data showed.

Google's phone manufacturing plans also come as the Indian government makes an aggressive push to turn the country into a tech manufacturing powerhouse by offering incentives

and weighing tighter import restrictions to attract companies to build local supply chains for mobile devices and personal computers.

The same Nikkei Asia report said Apple has told suppliers to accelerate their investments in India to quickly build its iPhone supply chain ecosystem outside of China. Taiwan's Acer and Asustek Computer, two of the world's biggest PC makers, also have plans to step up production in the country this year, Nikkei Asia reported.

Google, however, did not respond to Nikkei Asia's multiple requests for comments, as per the news report.

ANI

Fed officials want to have more confidence in easing inflation before interest rate cut

Washington, US - Two senior officials of the US Federal Reserve said they want to have more confidence in softening inflation before considering to begin interest rate cuts this year.

"I would like to have greater confidence that inflation is converging to 2% before beginning to cut the policy rate," Governor Lisa D. Cook said Thursday during her speech at Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs in New Jersey.

When the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) last raised its policy rate in July, the

risk of inflation remaining above 3% for some time was "quite salient," she said. "Since then, inflation has fallen more quickly than anticipated, and the risk of persistently high inflation, though it has not disappeared, appears to have diminished."

"At some point, as we gain greater confidence that disinflation is ongoing and sustainable, that changing outlook will warrant a change in the policy rate," she added.

Fed Vice Chair Philip Jefferson said the Fed's "strong actions" have moved its policy rate into restrictive territory, while the restrictive stance of monetary

policy is putting downward pressure on economic activity and inflation.

"If the economy evolves broadly as expected, it will likely be appropriate to begin dialing back our policy restraint later this year," he told Thursday at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, D.C.

Jefferson, however, said three risks can affect the economic outlook and the FOMC's forecast.

Both Jefferson and Cook have voting rights in the FOMC this year.

Philadelphia Fed President

Patrick Harker, on the other hand, hinted that the Fed's first interest rate cut could come sooner than expected.

"While the policy interest rate is indeed 1 point higher, the inflation rate is down by a much greater amount," he told Thursday during his speech at the University of Delaware. "I do believe we may be near the point where we can adjust the policy rate downward."

Harker noted that he does not have a vote on the FOMC this year, but said "I still have a voice in our policy discussions and intend to use it."

Agencies

شركة التغليف المحدودة (ش.م.ع.) Packaging Co Ltd. (SAOG)		
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT	Financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2023	
On behalf of the Board of Directors, we present the Chairman's Report of "Packaging Co Ltd (SAOG)" for the year ended on 31st December 2023	2023 RO	2022 RO
The year ended with revenue of RO. 10,060,270/- and net profit of RO.110,471/- (after tax) as against revenue of RO. 10,562,150/- and net loss of RO.168,514/- (after tax) in the same period of previous year 2022. The profit before depreciation is RO.717,350/- (after tax) for the year 2023, compared to profit before depreciation of RO.428,734/- (after tax) in the previous year 2022.		
The increased competition from the local carton makers have resulted in lower average sales realization than the expected and resulted in lower profit. The paper prices were stable in the year 2023 but have started increasing and may have negative impact over profitability in the year 2024.		
We would like to place on record our thanks to all our employees for their dedication and hard work.		
We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to all of you for the patience and confidence reposed in the company. We also thank the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Muscat Securities Market for their support.		
On behalf of the Board of Directors, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimur Al Said for his vision and growth oriented policies aimed at bringing about a prosperous national economy.		
Chairman of the Board of Directors		
Statement of comprehensive income		
	2023 RO	2022 RO
INCOME		
Revenue from contracts with customers	10,060,270	10,562,150
Direct costs	(8,914,900)	(9,970,582)
Gross Profit	1,145,370	591,568
Other income	159,814	288,150
	1,305,184	879,718
EXPENSES		
General and administration	515,465	510,963
Selling and distribution	416,764	365,677
Finance Charges	242,785	201,127
	1,175,014	1,077,767
profit / (Loss) before taxation	130,170	(198,049)
Deferred tax (charge) / credit	(19,699)	29,535
Net (loss) /profit for the year	110,471	(168,514)
Other comprehensive income:		
Not reclassifiable to income statement:		
Loss on revaluation of freehold land	-	(100,000)
Deferred tax release on revaluation decrease	-	15,000
Other comprehensive loss for the year	-	(85,000)
Total comprehensive income for the year	110,471	(253,514)
Basic earning per share	0.037	(0.056)
Note: The Complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them either in Arabic or English within 7 days of the receipt of the request at the company's address at PO Box No 2818, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman.		

Omani industries secure deals at Gulfood 2024

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn', successfully concluded its participation at Gulfood 2024 in Dubai, UAE.

Food industry leaders, investors and producers showed keen interest in the diverse range of Omani products showcased at the sultanate's pavilion, a press release said.

Hamood al Balushi, assistant director general at Madayn, emphasised that the remarkable turnout for Omani products at Gulfood, which exceeded expectations this year, underscores their exceptional quality and reputation both regionally and internationally. "This year's participation has enabled Omani industries to receive more export requests, sign commercial deals, renew existing ones, and explore entry into new markets," Balushi pointed out.

Balushi further stated, "This year, Madayn, in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, worked towards expanding participation by enabling more Omani companies and factories to join the exhibition. Additionally, the sultanate's pavilion provided free spaces for the SMEs to interact with exhibition visitors and showcase their products, recognising their significant contribution to the local economy."

He emphasised the keen interest expressed by global in-



Hamood al Balushi



Madyan al Balushi



Moosa al Moosawi

vestors and business owners in setting up or expanding existing businesses in the Sultanate's industrial cities. The representatives of Madayn, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Oman

Chamber of Commerce and Industry briefed the visitors on Oman's investment environment and the support and incentives offered by the three bodies.

Moosa al Moosawi, director of Exhibitions and Products Pro-

motion at Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), highlighted that OCCI's participation at Gulfood reflects its commitment to promoting and supporting Omani industries, and complementing the initia-

tives led by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Madayn. Al Moosawi mentioned that the diverse global offerings of food-related products and services that were available at the exhibition provided choices tailored to meet specific needs and budgetary requirements.

Madyan al Balushi, head of Export Development Department at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, underscored the key role played by international exhibitions like Gulfood in spotlighting and promoting Omani products globally.



FDO participates in Gulfood 2024 in UAE

Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) had a successful participation at Gulfood 2024, the premier global food and beverage trade exhibition held in Dubai from February 18 to 23.

FDO's participation not only underscored its dedication to excellence but also highlighted Oman's prominence in the seafood industry on a global scale, a press release said.

Gulfood 2024 boasted over 5500 exhibitors, offering attendees access to over 100,000 new products and innovations across eight diverse sectors. With 190 country pavilions, the event provided a platform for experiencing global diversity like never before, attracting over 100,000 visitors.

As Gulfood 2024 comes to a close, FDO and its subsidiaries are geared to harness the momentum garnered from the event, continuing their mission to excel in the global seafood market.

The FDO booth buzzed with excitement as visitors explored the diverse range of offerings, with numerous prospects for future collaborations and business ventures on the horizon.

Key highlights of FDO's participation at Gulfood 2024 included opportunities seized by its subsidiaries to explore new markets and avenues for growth, leveraging their expertise and reputation to expand globally.

An added attraction to FDO's participation was a series of live cooking sessions featuring fresh Omani seafood, providing visitors with an immersive taste of Oman's rich culinary offerings. These sessions not only captivated attendees but also facilitated potential business expansion opportunities with suppliers and distributors, underscoring FDO's commitment to fostering meaningful industry connections.

FDO's triumphant presence at Gulfood 2024 further solidified its position as a major player in the global fisheries industry. The event showcased Oman's thriving fisheries sector, drawing significant attention from investors.

Zakariya, CEO of SIMAK, said, "Our participation at Gulfood 2024 has been pivotal in highlighting Oman's seafood industry potential."

Embassy of Pakistan felicitates Pakistani women in Oman

The Embassy of Pakistan in Muscat proudly hosted an event to honour the accomplishments of Pakistani women residing in Oman. The event was the first of the three events that the Embassy plans to organise to celebrate the Pakistan National Day 2024.

HH Sayyida Hujaija Jaifer al Said was the Guest of Honor at the event and distributed certificates among the ladies, a press release said.

The event was the first-of-its-kind, organised to recognise the

Around 60 women from all walks of life, representing academia, healthcare, entrepreneurship, arts, and community service were recognised by the Embassy.

contributions and successes of Pakistani women across different spheres of life. Around 60 women from all walks of life, representing academia, healthcare, entrepreneurship, arts, and community service were recognised

by the Embassy.

During the ceremony, distinguished Pakistani women were accorded special recognition and presented with certificates as a token of appreciation for their outstanding contributions to

their respective fields and to the community in general.

Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman, H E Imran Ali expressed his admiration of Pakistani women who excelled in their fields. He said that Pakistani women continue to inspire and lead in all spheres of life and emphasised Pakistan Government's unwavering commitment to promote gender equality, and enhancement of opportunities for women, both domestically and internationally.



Pakistan School Muscat holds annual sports gala

Pakistan School Muscat held its Annual Sports Gala 2023-24 on February 18 and 19.

H E Shaiful Anuar Mohammad, Ambassador of Malaysia, graced the occasion as the chief guest. Also present were H E Imran Ali Chaudhry, Ambassador of Pakistan, Bilal Hassan, deputy head of Mission, Pakistan Embassy, Malith Kumarasinghe, principal of Sri Lankan School Muscat, and Ameer Hamza, chairman, Board of Directors, a press release said.

The Karate display and aerobics show were most appreciable and alluring. Athletic competi-

tions were held including races, relay races, straight relay races and tug of war - including one between teams of parents and teachers - which was won by the teachers' team.

Overall, among Juniors, Sir Syed House was the winner and among Seniors, Johar House was the winner to receive the annual sports champion trophy.

The Chief Guest gave away the awards to the winners among cheering slogans at the arena. The winning teams' captains collected trophies while the players were awarded with individual medals.

Training programme on local administration held

The specialised training programme 'Local administration within the priority of sustainable governorates and cities' development' for the second group was launched on Sunday at Oman Institute for Oil and Gas (InstOG) at Sultan Qaboos University. It continues till February 29, a press release said.

The programme targets the functional levels of assistant manager, department manager, and the like, and higher than the governorate and walis' offices. This programme aims to introduce the target group to the essence of local administration,



its origins and history, and clarification of its foundations and general principles.

Governance of local administration in the Sultanate of Oman, the role of local administration in Oman Vision 2040 achievement, and its supreme purposes in the government sector will be discussed.

Additionally, the directive planning of the governorate and projects and the professional competencies of members of local administrations in Oman will also be touched upon, besides the comprehensive vision of local administration.

Student delegation participates in cultural and scientific week

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences is actively engaged in the ninth cultural and scientific week for Gulf universities and institutions, taking place from February 24 to 28, hosted by Qatar University.

The primary objectives of this participation are to deepen fra-

ternal relations, foster bonds of friendship and love among students from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, reinforce Arab and Islamic education, encourage adherence to Arab-Islamic values, contribute to the formation and refinement of students' personalities, nur-

ture their talents and capabilities, and inspire them to positively engage in the social and economic development of their countries, a press release said.

The university's delegation, consisting of 13 students, will be involved in various thematic areas, including innovations, arts,

science, culture, and religion. The cultural and scientific week for students from GCC countries serves as an opportunity to exchange educational and cultural experiences, fostering a cooperative and brotherly environment among university students in GCC countries. This environ-

ment aims to contribute to the development of their talents and capabilities, connecting them with a culture that enhances knowledge-based economies.

This participation aligns with Qatar's commitment to the intellectual, educational, and ethical development of generations.

Kia unveils 'Platform Beyond Vehicle'

Kia Middle East and Africa announces the forthcoming introduction of its revolutionary 'Platform Beyond Vehicle' (PBV) model in the MEA region, scheduled for 2026.

To celebrate the announcement, Kia hosted an event to introduce the modular vehicles on February 20 and 21, at Banyan Tree, Bluewaters Island, Dubai. Guests, including media representatives, governmental entities, fleet customers, and business owners from key markets across the region, were in attendance to witness the unveiling of Kia's latest total mobility solution, a press release said.

Kia's PBVs represent the brand's vision to be a Sustainable Mobility Solutions Provider beyond the traditional concept of automobiles. As such, PBVs are a powerful combination of fit-for-purpose EVs with advanced software technology designed to open the door to new businesses and lifestyles – by reimagining the concept of space thanks to advanced, tailored interiors that provide flexibility and freedom.

The newly established model aims to address the unmet requirements of a diverse customer base within the MEA fleet vehicle segment. It will provide tailored mobility solutions optimised for the region's specific market and business conditions, helping to overcome challenges related to limited transportation options and one-dimensional product offerings that currently exist.



Soo Hang Chang, president, Kia Middle East and Africa, said, "The introduction of Kia's PBV to the Middle East and Africa signifies our commitment to pioneering future-forward mobility solutions for fleets across the region. Operating on a customer-centric model, the PBV business is dedicated to delivering freedom and flexibility through modular, customizable vehicles catering to the diverse needs of businesses and individuals alike. Above all, Kia's aim is to ensure all PBV vehicles are simple to operate and intuitive to engage with, regardless of where, when and how they are used."

"The debut of this product marks a significant milestone for Kia Middle East and Africa since our brand relaunch in 2021, and we will continue to meet the rapidly evolving needs of the market reiterating our position as the leading sustainability mobility solutions provider in the region," he added.

Utilising 'Easy Swap' technology to flexibly address the diverse demands of customers, a single vehicle chassis can be utilised to fulfill multiple mobility needs. The PBV can operate as a taxi during the day to a delivery van at night with the integration of a variety of interchangeable upper bodies or life modules. Further customization is possible with the PBVs 'Dynamic Hybrid' weldless body structure assembly, which permits adjustments according to the required vehicle purpose.



MoE receives CEO of ETS

H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniya, Minister of Education, on Sunday received in her office Amit Sevak, CEO of the American Educational Testing Service (ETS).

At the beginning of the meeting, the minister welcomed the guest, praising the efforts made by the American Educational Testing Service in everything that would develop educational work, a press release said.

During the meeting, a number of aspects of joint educational cooperation between the Ministry and the Foundation were discussed, in addition to aspects of future cooperation to achieve the desired goals and objectives.

The guest praised the developmental achievements made in the Sultanate of Oman at all levels, welcoming the areas of cooperation with the ministry in everything related to evaluation and testing systems in an effort to develop and improve this aspect.

Bank Muscat organises 'Himam Marathon'

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in Oman, organised 'Himam Marathon by Bank Muscat', dedicated to celebrate the achievements of persons with disabilities.

The event took place at the bank's head office in the presence of Sheikh Waleed Khamis al Hashar, CEO of Bank Muscat, and a number of executive management members and representatives from the Special Olympics Oman. The Marathon witnessed a wide participation of more than 250 persons with physical, mental, hearing disabilities, besides people with Autism and Down Syndrome, along with their families.

Such initiatives significantly contribute to integrating the handicapped in society, providing them the platform to showcase their sports abilities to help them achieve their ambitions, a press release said.

The Marathon featured races tailored for people with autism, Down syndrome, physical, hearing and visual impairment, challenging them to complete an 800m race track. The competition demonstrated participants' sports spirit and determination. The top three males and the top three females in each race, totaling 24, won worthy prizes. Sheikh Hashar presented the prizes to the winners.



MOH organises 1st Advanced Costing System workshop

The Ministry of Health (MOH), represented by the Directorate General of Planning, organised a workshop titled 'Empowering the Ministry of Health through Advanced Costing System' under the auspices of H E Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, at Crown Plaza Hotel.

The workshop aimed to create an integral system to calculate the cost of health services, a press release said.

Dr Qasem al Salmi, director general of planning, touched upon the strategic transformation of healthcare in Oman. Furthermore, Dr Sultana al Sabahi, health economics specialist, reviewed the implementation of an advanced costing system for the Ministry of Health in the Sultanate of Oman.

During the workshop, several issues related to healthcare costing were discussed. These included different approaches to costing in healthcare, the healthcare costing system used in Saudi Arabia, the roadmap for establishing a costing system, and the significance of coding and status in Oman.

It is worth mentioning that the workshop came up with several initiatives and solutions that enhance and contribute to the development and ideal utilisation of the available resources in order to increase efficiency in the health system.



Ooredoo announces winners of Manzili raffle draw

Ooredoo has announced the second set of lucky winners of Manzili, Ooredoo's Mega Home Internet Raffle Draw.

Fabulous prizes were again up for grabs, including free lifetime Home Internet subscriptions, three, six, and nine month Home Internet subscriptions, Smart TVs, Mesh WiFi devices, and PlayStation 5 consoles, a press release said.

Ooredoo announced the winners during a fun-filled event at



Nizwa Fort as it reaches out to customers across communities and regions in Oman. The telco aims to be 'in sync' when providing a personalised and seamless customer service and wants to upgrade everyone's worlds.

The Grand Prize Draw will be held in March when Ooredoo will give away a brand-new home. Customers subscribe or upgrade to any new 5G or Fibre Home Internet connection for RO28 per month to enter the draw.

شركة التغليف المحدودة (ش.م.ع.) Packaging Co Ltd. (SAOG)

INVITATION TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of PACKAGING COMPANY LIMITED SAOG (the Company) has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting , which will be held on Tuesday at 05:00pm on 26/03/2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om) and will be held in this location (through www.mcd.om) . If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting General Meeting shall be held on Thursday at 05:00pm on 28/03/2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om) and will be held in this location (through www.mcd.om) to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Director's Report for the financial year ended 31st December 2023
- To consider and approve the company's organization and management report for the financial year ending December 31, 2023.
- To consider and approve the Auditor's report, Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss account for the financial year ended 31st December 2023.
- To Inform the association of the related party transaction during the financial ended 31st December 2024.(as per attached).
- To consider and ratify the Board of Directors sitting fees paid during the preceding year and to determine the board sitting fees for the upcoming financial year. (as per attachment).
- To appoint the auditors for the financial year ending 31st December 2024 and to approve their remuneration.
- To evaluate the performance of the board of directors for the financial year 2023, as per report submitted by the auditors.

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:

- 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 MCDC.
- 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 on telephone No 99434183 or email: jasim@packoman.com

Chairman Legal adviser External Auditor



Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky

Zelensky says Ukraine must bolster its military might

Kyiv, Ukraine - Ukraine's president said on Saturday that the country must strengthen its military might to protect its territory amid its ongoing war with Russia. "You know very well all we need to keep our sky protected, to strengthen our military on the land, and you know all we need to sustain and continue our success in the sea, and you know perfectly well that we need all this in time. We count on you," President Volodymyr Zelensky's office quoted him as saying in an address to G7 leaders.

Zelensky thanked the leaders on behalf of his country for their vital support. "Thanks to our cooperation, millions in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries around Russia can feel that their homeland will not become (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's backyard," he said.

Asserting that the war Russia launched two years ago and 'the horror brought by Russia still did not deprive Ukraine of a normal future', he said Ukraine has 'stood against the strikes. We are reclaiming what belongs to us, and will certainly make the Putin system pay the proper price for every Russian evil'.

Russia launched its 'special military operation' on Ukraine exactly two years ago, on February 24, 2022.

Agreements with Italy, Canada

Meanwhile, Ukraine signed security cooperation agreements on Saturday with Italy and Canada as it entered the third year of the war with Russia.

Zelensky wrote on X: "Our meetings with Italian Prime

Minister Giorgia Meloni are always meaningful. Today we have an important result. We signed a bilateral security cooperation agreement between Ukraine and Italy."

Zelensky and Meloni discussed further support for Ukraine in the context of Italy's G7 Presidency.

"I am grateful to Italy for its support of Ukraine and our defence capabilities, as well as recovery efforts and approval of military aid until the end of 2024," he added.

Ukraine signed security cooperation agreements on Saturday with Italy and Canada as it entered the third year of the war with Russia

Zelensky said he signed a security cooperation agreement with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, which allocates more than US\$2.2bn in macro-financial and defence assistance in 2024.

He also had a meeting with EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo.

"We must be no less active in Ukraine's European integration than we were last year.

"Together, we must address each of the existing disagreements in Europe - and we must together defend our Europe from all forms of Russian aggression against Europe. Our Europe is and will remain among the global leaders," Zelensky wrote on X. Anadolu Agency

Trump defeats Haley in Republican presidential primary in S Carolina

Both the candidates, however, are still nowhere near the 1,215 delegate count needed

Houston, US - Donald Trump notched another victory on Saturday against Nikki Haley, this time in the former governor's home state of South Carolina.

The Associated Press called the Republican presidential primary race for Trump shortly after polls closed at 7pm local time.

"This was a little sooner than we anticipated, an even bigger win than we anticipated," Trump told reporters after the race was called.

"I have never seen the Republican Party so unified as it is right now," said the former president. "You can celebrate for about 15 minutes, but then we have to get back to work."

Despite her fourth consecutive defeat to her former boss, Haley also lost in Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada, the former South Carolina governor, and UN ambassador under Trump said she will keep on campaigning.

"I'm not going anywhere," said Haley. "On Sunday, I'll still be running for president. I'm campaigning every day until the last person votes."

Haley has indicated that she will head straight to the state of



Former US President Donald Trump

Michigan for its primary February 27, then onto the Super Tuesday contest on March 5, when the greatest number of states hold their primary elections and caucuses.

"In the 10 days after South Carolina, another 21 states and territories will vote," said Haley. "People have a right to have their voices heard. And they deserve a real choice, not a Soviet-style election where there's only one candidate, and he gets 99 per cent of the vote."

Even with the loss, Haley will continue to pick up delegates which is important to winning the presidential nomination. Despite Trump being considered the frontrunner, both candidates are still nowhere near the 1,215 delegate count needed to clinch the party's nomination.

Delegates will formalise the nomination at the Republican National Convention which starts July 15 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Speaking in South Carolina's

Charleston, Haley said, 'I'm a woman of my word', referring to her earlier remarks about staying in the presidential race until Super Tuesday. She said: "I'm not giving up this fight when a majority of Americans disapprove of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden."

Her remarks were presented in a more sombre tone in comparison to her speech after the New Hampshire primary. Nikki Haley stated that she does not believe Republican presidential

candidate Donald Trump can secure a win against US President Joe Biden in a rematch presidential election, saying that 'Trump drives people away'. Haley admitted that she lost by a wide margin. However, she highlighted '40 per cent is not some tiny group'. She stated that even though she has lost four states to Trump. However, there are many more states where people have not still voted.

She said: "In the next 10 days, another 21 states and territories will speak. They have the right to a real choice, not a Soviet-style election with only one candidate." She added: "And I have a duty to give them that choice," according to CNN report.

Nikki Haley congratulated Donald Trump on his projected victory in the Palmetto State's GOP primary. She expressed gratitude to the voters of the state 'for using the power of your voice'.

She said: "No matter the results, I love the people of our state." Haley said: "I love what we accomplished together and I love how we've united during our worst challenges and tragedies."

Haley stated that she voted along her with mother on Saturday. She said that her mother was a lawyer in India and termed the experience as 'something very special', according to CNN report.

Haley said: "She was named one of the first female judges, and because of the times, she was never able to sit on the bench." "But the fact that she could go with me and cast her ballot for her daughter as president of the United States was an amazing moment," she added.

Agencies

S Korea: Hospitals grapple with disruptions

Seoul, South Korea - Hospitals across South Korea continued to grapple with disruptions to their daily operations on Sunday, as a large-scale walkout by trainee doctors entered its sixth consecutive day, local media reported.

The protests began on Tuesday last in the Far East nation after thousands of junior doctors, including trainee medics, filed mass resignations against the government's plan to admit 2,000 more students to medical schools next year.

Currently, South Korea admits 3,058 students for medical studies.

All major hospitals have been experiencing delays in their operating schedules, which has prompted even patients in criti-



The protests began last Tuesday and all major hospitals have been experiencing delays in their operating schedules

cal condition to seek care at smaller medical facilities, Seoul-based Yonhap News reported.

Some hospitals adjusted their intensive care unit schedules from three shifts to two be-

cause of the shortage of on-duty doctors. The government has also extended health care hours, among other measures, to 'minimise the impact of the move on the health and lives of

the people'.

The government claims that the planned increase in the number of medical students is necessary to address a 'shortage' of doctors, particularly in rural areas and essential medical fields, particularly high-risk surgeries, paediatrics, obstetrics and emergency medicine.

Doctors, however, demand that the government rather focus on improving compensation to induce more physicians to practice in such unpopular areas.

In a related development, the Korean Medical Association, a nationwide lobbying group of doctors, plans to convene a meeting later on Sunday to discuss their course of action.

Anadolu Agency

Eight people Killed in bus accident in South Africa

Johannesburg, SA - Eight people were killed and scores of others injured after a bus they were riding in overturned on Saturday near Vryheid, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa, authorities said on Sunday.

The passengers were travelling from the province's Moses Mabhida stadium, where the ruling African National Congress launched its manifesto for upcoming elections.

"Police and various emergency services are at the scene of the bus accident on the R33 between Vryheid and Paulpietersburg in KwaZulu-Natal Province," said the police in a statement. "According to a preliminary report, the bus was coming from the Moses Mabhinda stadium when it overturned. Eight people have so far been confirmed dead and scores injured. Those that are injured have been taken to various hospitals in the area for medical care."

The ANC said those involved in the accident were its members from Mpumalanga Province.

"There are reports of several fatalities and a number of comrades in critical condition. It is a true tragedy that there is such a loss of lives after such a memorable day," the ANC said.

Xinhua

UK premier Rishi Sunak accused of 'harbouring extremists'

London, UK - British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has been accused of 'being complicit' in a shocking wave of Islamophobic racism in the wake of a blatant attack on the London mayor from Conservative Party's former deputy chairman Lee Anderson.

Labour leader Keir Starmer accused Sunak of harbouring 'extremists in his party' and other senior Conservatives were condemned for 'toxic' rhetoric, in an article in *The Observer*.

Starmer's accusation came after the suspension of Anderson, who had claimed London Mayor Sadiq Khan was under the control of 'Islamists' and following an article by former Home Secretary Suella Braverman who said in an article that 'the Islamists, the extremists and



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak

the antisemites are in charge' in the UK.

The Islamophobic attacks followed a decision last week by the Speaker of the House of Commons, Lindsay Hoyle, in which he broke a tradition by permitting an

Labour leader Keir Starmer accused Sunak of harbouring 'extremists in his party' and other senior Conservatives were condemned for 'toxic' rhetoric

amendment by the Labour Party to a Scottish National Party (SNP) motion that called an immediate cease-fire in the Gaza Strip.

Hoyle later on apologised and said he 'regretted' the decision, which he contented he only

made in the name of protecting some MPs who were under great pressure from his constituents to call a cease-fire. But the SNP motion passed the House of Commons with that amendment to demand an 'immediate humani-

tarian cease-fire', losing somewhat its intended effect.

The Islamophobic politics went further last week in British politics as former Prime Minister Liz Truss remained silent at a US event where a staunch Islamophobic and xenophobic figure

Tommy Robinson - former leader of the racist English Defence League (EDL) group and a founder of PEDIDA UK - was hailed as a hero.

Starmer wrote that Anderson's suspension was right after 'this appalling racist and Islamophobic outburst'.

"But what does it say about the prime minister's judgment that he made Lee Anderson deputy chairman of his party?" he asked. "Whether it is Liz Truss staying silent on Tommy Robinson or Suella Braverman's extreme rhetoric, Rishi Sunak's weakness means Tory MPs can act with impunity. This isn't just embarrassing for the Conservative party, it emboldens the worst forces in our politics."

Anadolu Agency

Israeli war cabinet approves guidelines for hostage swap dialogue with Hamas

Jerusalem - The Israeli war cabinet on Sunday approved guidelines for negotiations with Hamas regarding a hostage exchange deal, according to Israeli media.

The move came after talks were held in Paris on Friday between representatives of Israel, the US, Qatar and Egypt to discuss a hostage-prisoner swap deal between Tel Aviv and Hamas.

When Hamas accepts these guidelines, Israel will send a delegation to Qatar to continue hostage swap talks, *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper reported.

The daily, however, did not provide any details about these guidelines. According to the newspaper, many details still need to be discussed, including the terms of a proposed ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and the return of displaced Palestinians to northern Gaza.

Hamas is believed to be holding more than 130 Israeli hostages following its cross-border attack on October 7, while Israel holds at least 8,800 Palestinians in its prisons, according to official sources from both parties.

A previous deal in November saw the release of 81 Israelis and 24 foreigners in exchange for 240 Palestinians, including 71 women and 169 children.

Jordan's warning

Meanwhile, Jordan on Sunday



warned that continuing the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan risks an expansion of the conflict in the region.

Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar, is scheduled to start on March 11.

"Continuing the aggression in these circumstances as Ramadan approaches will place the entire region at the risk of an explosion," Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi told a joint press

conference in Amman with his Bulgarian counterpart Mariya Gabriel.

"Every day passes with the war going unabated increases the risk of explosion and mounts its casualties," he added.

The Bulgarian foreign minister, for her part, voiced concern about the humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip.

"Jordan has proven itself as a peacemaker in the region and we support its efforts," she said.

The move came after talks were held between representatives of Israel, the US, Qatar and Egypt to discuss a hostage-prisoner swap deal between Tel Aviv and Hamas

The Israeli army, in the meantime, said on Sunday that it has ended its military operation at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis city in the southern Gaza Strip.

A military statement claimed that Israeli forces seized unused sealed medicines carrying names of Israeli hostages during the raid on the hospital.

According to the statement, around 200 'terrorists' and suspects were arrested and

weapons seized during the operation. There was no comment from Hamas on the Israeli statement.

The Israeli army raided the medical facility on February 15 after a weeks-long siege, forcing thousands of displaced Palestinians inside the hospital to flee under heavy Israeli bombardment. Gaza's Health Ministry said eight patients had died at the hospital last week due to a lack of oxygen amid an Israeli

raid on the medical complex.

The Health Ministry also said on Sunday that at least 86 Palestinians were killed and 131 others injured over the last 24 hours.

"The Israeli occupation committed seven massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 86 martyrs and 131 injured during the past 24 hours," the ministry said in a statement.

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

Flouting the International Court of Justice's provisional ruling, Israel continues its onslaught on the Gaza Strip where at least 29,692 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, and 69,879 injured since October 7, according to Palestinian health authorities.

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

The Israeli war on Gaza has pushed 85 per cent of the territory's population into internal displacement amid acute shortages of food, clean water and medicine, while 60 per cent of the enclave's infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, according to the UN.

Israel stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice.

Anadolu Agency

Yemen's Houthis hits American oil tanker, warships in Red Sea

Istanbul, Turkey - The Houthis said on Sunday that they targeted an American oil tanker in the Gulf of Aden and American warships in the Red Sea.

Spokesman of Yemen's Houthi armed forces, Yahya Saree, made the announcement on Telegram but did not provide information on the results of the attacks.

Saree said that the attacks were carried out in response to aggression against the Palestinian people and strikes by the Americans and the British against Yemen.

The US said earlier that it shot down an anti-ship ballistic missile launched by the Houthis in the Red Sea.

"On Feb. 24 at 5 p.m. (Sanaa time), USS Mason (DDG 87) shot down one Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile (ASBM) launched into the Gulf of Aden from Iranian-backed Houthi controlled areas of Yemen," CENTCOM wrote on X.

The missile was likely targeting MV Torm Thor, a US-flagged, owned and operated chemical and oil tanker, it said.



The missile was shot down without any injuries, it added.

The Houthis have been targeting cargo ships in the Red Sea owned or operated by Israeli companies or transporting goods to and from Israel in solidarity with the Gaza Strip, which has been under an Israeli onslaught since October 7.

With tensions escalating due to joint strikes by the US and UK

against Houthi targets in Yemen, the group declared that it considered all American and British ships legitimate military targets.

Besides, the Houthi group said on Sunday that the US and UK carried out 22 airstrikes targeting three Yemeni governorates, including the capital Sanaa.

The US and British 'aggression' targeted the city of Sanaa and its countryside with 17

airstrikes, the Houthi-affiliated Saba news agency reported.

"The US-British aggression also launched two airstrikes on the communications network in the Qaradha area of Haifan district, and launched another raid on the communications network in the Shamir area of Maqbanah district in Taiz governorate," it said.

Anadolu Agency

Thousands demonstrate in Spain seeking arms embargo on Israel

Madrid, Spain - In a show of solidarity with Palestine and condemnation of Israel's actions, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets across Spain in a wave of demonstrations demanding an immediate halt to arms trade with Israel.

Organised by left-wing civil society groups and supported by several political parties, the protests resonated with chants calling for an end to what demonstrators called the 'genocide in Palestine' and urged for severing ties with Israel.

Led by left-wing Podemos leader Ione Belarra, the rallies gained momentum as she announced plans to present a motion in parliament seeking an arms embargo on Israel.

Belarra emphasised the need for sincerity from the government, accusing the current coalition of empty promises and no concrete action in its support for Palestine.

"We will see the sincerity of the government in the motion we will submit to parliament to impose an arms embargo on Israel.



If they really want to stop the genocide and do not want to be an accomplice to Israel, they will ban arms trade," she said.

The protests, which drew significant attendance in the capital Madrid, featured slogans denouncing Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and calling for an immediate cease-fire in the Gaza, where Israeli attacks have killed nearly 30,000 Palestinians.

Podemos, despite not being part of Spain's ruling coalition, threw its weight behind the demonstrations, highlighting the unity among various factions in Spain in their support for Pales-

tine. Demonstrators also criticised Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares' claims that Spain's weapons trade with Israel had been halted since October 7, dismissing them as false.

They cited commercial data indicating ongoing collaboration between Spanish companies and Israel in the military sector.

"Israel continues its massacre against Palestine strongly ... This is not only against Palestinians but also colonialism and human rights crimes against the whole world," said Maria Rocas, a protester in Madrid.

Anadolu Agency

Why escalating DR Congo conflict is fuelling anti-West sentiment

Kigali, Rwanda - Demonstrators in the Democratic Republic of Congo are burning the flags of Western countries, reflecting anger about their perceived support to Rwanda through the M23 rebels.

The anti-West sentiment started in Kinshasa, the capital of the DR Congo, earlier this month, where demonstrators burned vehicles belonging to embassies and the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of

Congo (MONUSCO).

Demonstrators accuse the international community of 'indifference' to the security and humanitarian crisis in eastern Congo. In recent weeks, the protests picked up, extending to eastern DR Congo where fighting has flared between the army and M23 rebels.

During the latest demonstration in Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu province, on February 20, dozens of angry youngsters, some draped in the



Congo flag, trampled on the flags of France, the US, EU and Poland. DR Congo accuses Rwanda of backing the M23 rebels - a claim Kigali has consistently denied.

It is hard to ascertain the amount of pressure the protests could have on Western governments, but it drives the point home that Congolese lives matter, according to analysts.

"It's clear those 'citizens' manifestations' against Western missions in Kinshasa were the last play by Kinshasa to put

diplomatic pressure on Western states in order to hold Kigali accountable for allegedly backing the M23 rebels!" Louis Gitinywa, a Rwandan-based political analyst, told Anadolu.

"The efforts have been fruitful as we recently observed a radical shift from the US, EU and the UN Security Council, issuing strong statements calling on Rwanda and other parties to cease their support to the belligerent parties in the conflict."

Anadolu Agency

South Africa's ruling ANC launches election manifesto to retain power

South Africa, with a population of 62mn, has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world

Durban, South Africa - Tens of thousands of supporters of South Africa's governing African National Congress (ANC) party on Saturday gathered at the Moses Mabhida Stadium in the coastal KwaZulu-Natal province where the party launched its election manifesto.

Supporters dressed in yellow and white T-shirts bearing ANC logos sang and danced as they filled the over 50,000-capacity stadium ahead of President Cyril Ramaphosa's speech.

"Over the next 5 years, the ANC will create a jobs plan to create millions of jobs for South Africans," Ramaphosa said, adding: "The ANC plans to put South Africans to work, to reduce the high unemployment rate."

With a population of 62mn people, South Africa currently has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, standing at 32.1 per cent, according to official government figures released last week.

Opposition parties have been using the issue of high unemployment in their campaigns to taunt the ANC, which has been in



South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa pledged that his government will continue to fight corruption and vet public officials

Over the next 5 years, the ANC will create a jobs plan to create millions of jobs for South Africans

CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

power since 1994.

Ramaphosa said that in the past 30 years, the ANC has been able to meet the basic needs of poor South Africans, such as providing low-cost free housing,

water, and electricity.

Experts say the high unemployment issue could cost the ANC's voter base, but in its manifesto launch, Ramaphosa outlined the ANC's success story of

the past 30 years.

"Our economy has grown three times since 1994. There were only eight million South Africans in employment then, now it's 14mn people," he said, pledging to invest more in industrialisation to create more jobs and grow the economy.

He said that once reelected, the ANC will prioritise growing jobs, tackling the high cost of living, and invest in its people, advance democracy and freedom for a better Africa.

"Today 60 per cent of our budget is dedicated to improving the lives of our people. We will do more to consolidate and improve services for our people so no one is left behind," he pledged.

He also noted that in past years, the ANC has offered free better education for all which has transformed the lives of millions of South Africans.

"South Africans are today more educated than they were during apartheid and more South Africans are healthier - we will continue to improve education to overcome inequality," he said.

South Africa will celebrate 30

years of freedom on April 27 and Ramaphosa is expected to use the day to announce his party's progress ahead of the May 29 provincial and national elections.

Ramaphosa also pledged that his government will continue to fight corruption and vet public officials.

The ANC's major competitors include the Democratic Alliance, the second-largest political party in parliament, and the Economic Freedom Fighters, the third-largest party, who have both launched their election manifestos.

According to experts, the ANC's latest threat is the newly formed Umkhonto We Sizwe party, backed by former President Jacob Zuma, who recently announced he will not vote for the ANC.

Opinion polls by the Social Research Foundation said earlier this month that Umkhonto We Sizwe could get up to 24 per cent of the vote in Zuma's home province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa's second-most populous province

Anadolu Agency

Belarusian President Lukashenko to seek reelection in 2025

Istanbul, Turkey - Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said on Sunday that he will seek a seventh term during the country's presidential election set to take place in 2025.

"I will run (for president). Tell this to them (the Belarusian opposition in exile)," Lukashenko told reporters at a polling station in the capital Minsk after voting in the country's parliamentary and local elections, according to state news agency Belta. "Not a single person, a responsible president will abandon his people who followed him into battle and this is very important for me," he added.

Voters have begun casting their ballots early on Sunday in the country's parliamentary and local elections.

Next year, Belarus is scheduled to hold a presidential election, the date of which has yet to be announced.

Lukashenko also touched on Armenia's suspension of its participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organization



Alexander Lukashenko

(CSTO), saying that the alliance will not collapse as a result.

"We react to this (decision) absolutely calmly. If they don't want to be in the CSTO, it won't collapse, it won't be destroyed," Lukashenko said.

Indicating that there has not yet been an official notification from Armenia on this matter, Lukashenko asked the Armenian side to not rush in making any sudden decisions.

"It's easy to leave. But then it will be difficult to come in. No need to leave, no need to freeze something," he said.

Anadolu Agency

India: PM Modi inaugurates Gujarat's first AIIMS in Rajkot

Rajkot, India - Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated Gujarat's first All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Rajkot, on Sunday.

Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Mansukh Mandaviya, and Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel were present at the inauguration of AIIMS Rajkot.

"Gift of new AIIMS to Gujarat! Prime Minister @NarendraModi dedicated AIIMS, Rajkot to the nation!" Mansukh Mandaviya posted on X.

Before the inauguration, PM Modi inspected the hospital along with the Union Health Minister and other officials of the hospital.

PM Modi laid the foundation stone for the institution via video-conferencing in December 2020.

The hospital was built at a cost of Rs 1,195 crore.

Modi will inaugurate a medical college of JIPMER at Karaikal, Puducherry, and a 300-bed satellite centre of the Post Graduate Institute of Medical and Educational Research



India's PM Narendra Modi visits AIIMS Rajkot campus during the institution's inauguration in Rajkot, on Sunday (ANI)

(PGIMER) in Sangrur, Punjab, among many other health projects spread across the country, the statement said.

Earlier in the day, the prime minister inaugurated the 'Sudarshan Setu' connecting the Okha mainland and the Beyt Dwarka island, built at a cost of around Rs 980 crore.

The 2.32km-long cable-stayed bridge is the longest of its kind in the country, the PMO said in a statement.

Sudarshan Setu boasts a unique design, featuring a footpath adorned with verses from the Bhagavad Gita and images of Lord Krishna on both sides, it said.

It also has solar panels installed on the upper portions of the footpath, generating one megawatt of electricity, the statement said.

Before the construction of the bridge, pilgrims had to rely on boat transport to reach Beyt Dwarka.

ANI

Navalny's body handed over to his mother

Moscow, Russia - The body of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has been handed over to his mother more than a week after he died, CNN reported, citing Navalny's spokesperson Kira Yarmysh's statement.

In a post shared on social media, Yarmysh stated: "Alexey's body was handed over to his mother. Many thanks to all those who demanded this with us." She stated that Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, is still in Salekhard, the Arctic town where her son's body was being held.

On February 16, Alexei Navalny died while he was behind bars in a nearby penal colony. According to the Russian Press Service, Navalny 'felt unwell after a walk' and 'almost immediately' lost consciousness.

Yarmysh stated that plans regarding the funeral of Navalny have not been made yet. She added: "We do not know if the authorities will interfere to carry it out as the family wants and as Alexey deserves. We will inform you as soon as there is news."

Navalny's family and colleagues have blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin for his death. The death of Alexei Navalny comes ahead of presidential election set to be held in Russia in March.

Alexei Navalny's wife, Yulia Navalnaya, accused Putin of ordering that the body be held to hide cause of Navalny's death and out of fear that large crowds will attend his funeral. The allegations have been denied by Kremlin, according to CNN report.

ANI

Pakistan's EC gears up to hold presidential poll by March 9

Islamabad, Pakistan - The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is gearing up to hold the election for the office of Pakistan's President by March 9, two days prior to the retirement of half of the senators after completing their six-year terms, Pakistan-based Dawn reported.

A senior Pakistan Peoples Party office-bearer said: "The president will be elected by the present senators after setting up all four provincial assemblies," adding that the election could be held on March 9 or 10, according to Dawn report.

The six-party alliance, set to form a coalition government at the Centre under the PML-N leader Shehbaz Sharif, has already declared PPP chairman



Asif Ali Zardari as its consensus candidate for Pakistan's top constitutional office.

The Article 41(4) of Pakistan's Constitution reads:

"Election to the office of president shall be held not earlier than sixty days and not later than thirty days before the expiration of the term of the president in office: Provided that, if the election cannot be held within the period aforesaid because the National Assembly is dissolved, it shall be held within

thirty days of the general election to the Assembly."

As the general elections were conducted on February 8, Pakistan's presidential election needs to be held by March 9, just two days prior to the retirement of half of the 100-member Senate, Dawn reported.

The elections in Pakistan's Senate were also due in the first week of March, Dawn reported, citing sources. However, due to the delay in the general elections of the national and provincial assemblies, the Senate polls will now be conducted either in the last week of March or the first week of April, which implies that the upper house will remain dysfunctional and incomplete for some period.

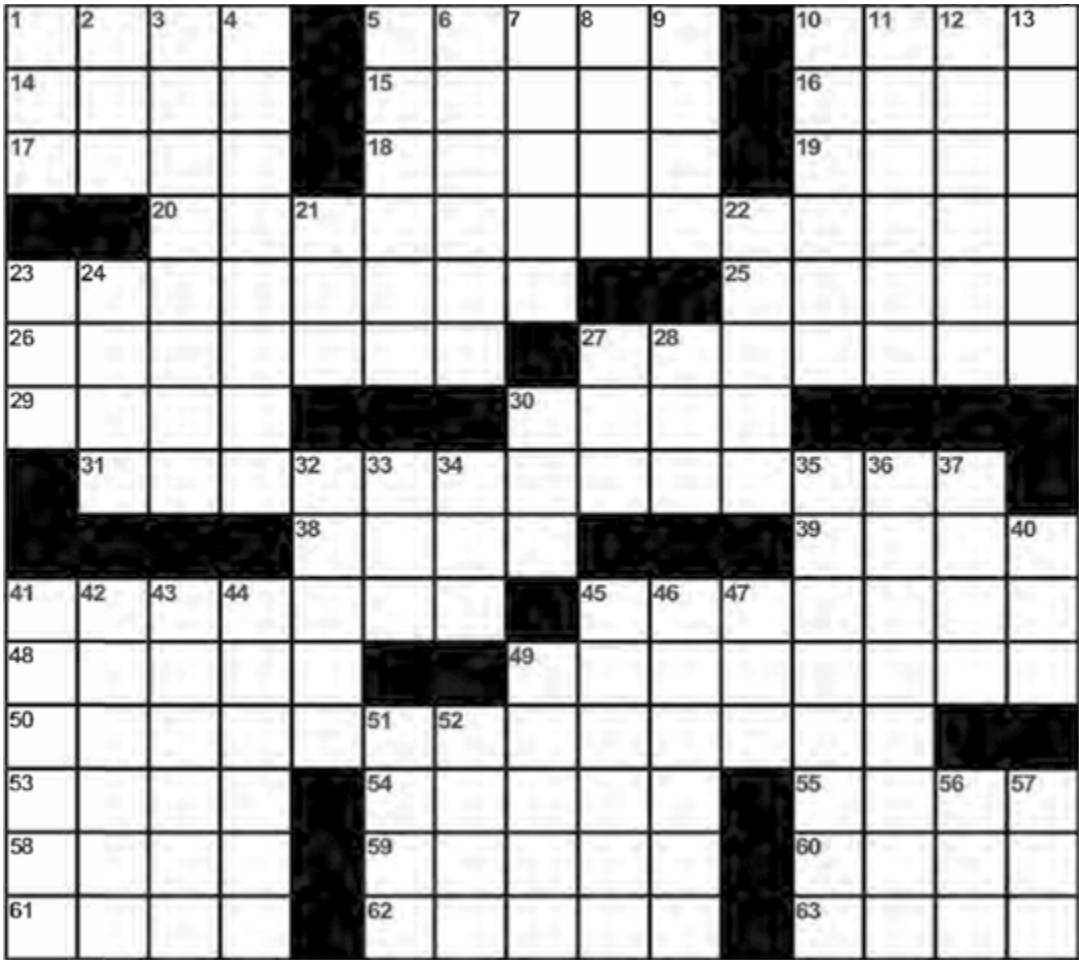
According to the PPP leader, it is due to the upcoming presidential election and to ensure Zardari's win that the party has stopped its two senators - Nisar Khuhro and Jam Mahtab Dahar, from taking the oath as Members of Provincial Assembly in the Sindh Assembly.

According to the formula applied for the president's election in Pakistan, the vote of a senator is considered a single vote, while in the Sindh Assembly, one vote will be equal to nearly four votes. With this formula, Zardari will benefit in the presidential elections.

Notably, Pakistan's incumbent president, Arif Alvi, is already on an extended tenure.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Struggle for air
- 5) It goes through the roof
- 10) Pierce with a knife
- 14) Chip in a pot?
- 15) Holiday pie ingredient
- 16) Call to mind
- 17) Small biter
- 18) Absinthe flavoring
- 19) God of love
- 20) Brought up pickled fish?
- 23) Thaws a freezer
- 25) For this reason
- 26) Batters in Baltimore
- 27) Amount in grandma's recipe
- 29) Acknowledge the villain's entrance
- 30) It's guaranteed to remove wrinkles
- 31) Guevara grills
- 32) Kasparov's equipment?
- 38) Chew the fat
- 39) Swarm
- 41) Key West shows?
- 45) Collection of sacred songs
- 48) Bring together
- 49) Second Amendment words

- 50) James Bond's depressing drink?
- 53) _Van Dyke
- 54) Like many teenagers' rooms
- 55) Haitian's head
- 58) Dueling sword
- 59) One of classic TV's Hux tables
- 60) "Terrible" czar
- 61) Loch _ monster
- 62) First vertebra
- 63) Transmit, as a text

DOWN

- 1) Prevent from speaking
- 2) Massachusetts cape
- 3) Celebrities' favorite seafood?
- 4) He broke Ty Cobb's record
- 5) Thinly distributed
- 6) Dogmata
- 7) They turn litmus paper red
- 8) Charge alternative
- 9) Reflex-testing site
- 10) Like a Stephen King reader, often
- 11) Comic actor's asset
- 12) Immediately
- 13) He wasn't the dummy

- of the act
- 21) "You've got mail" co.
- 22) Thick-skinned jungle beast
- 23) Play-_
- 24) Rocker Clapton
- 27) They're ahead of jrs.
- 28) Organized criminals
- 30) Make angry
- 32) Male bovine
- 33) Stuff one's face
- 34) Franken and Capone
- 35) Mythical island
- 36) What hunting dogs do
- 37) Have an opinion
- 40) Bride's title
- 41) Like a sneak attack
- 42) Needing more time on the vine
- 43) Sister's daughters
- 44) Vampires may take them to heart
- 45) Old Iran
- 46) Greek woodland deities
- 47) Former White House spokesman Fleischer
- 49) Metabolism type
- 51) Urban organization of song
- 52) Leave a solid state?
- 56) Convert into leather
- 57) Author's last word?

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

One of your friends keeps going on and on about how they are changing and growing, but you've yet to see any real evidence of this transformation. Before you call them on their baloney or tell them that they are fooling themselves, think about what they really need right now: your support, not criticism. Be patient and understand that sometimes real change takes real time. It doesn't always happen dramatically. Encourage them to keep going and they'll be able to.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Today, try to open up just a little bit and let the world see the part of yourself that you are sometimes too afraid to reveal. Talk about that hobby you're still trying to get the hang of, or sing a few bars of the song you've been working on with your vocal coach. You might not be ready for prime time, but so what? Have pride in your imperfections and show the world that you are a work in progress (just like the rest of us). People are very attracted to imperfect people.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

While your ambition is usually something that helps you be in the right place at the right time, now your drive for success could send you right over a cliff! Be cautious about voicing your opinions, because the allies you used to always be able to count on for support are not necessarily on your side this time. Of course, that doesn't mean you are wrong, but it does mean that political games are going to be a bit trickier to play today than they usually are.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Professor Sprout is a character in which series of books?

- A. Winnie the Pooh
- B. Harry Potter
- C. The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo
- D. Pippi Longstocking

2. The letters "G I", when applied to dietary matters, stand for what?

- A. Glucose Intolerant
- B. Glycemic Index
- C. Genetically Imbalanced
- D. Grossly ignorant

3. Of the 29 letters in the Turkish alphabet, how many are vowels?

- A. 5
- B. 8
- C. 6
- D. 7

Answers: 1.B 2.B 3.B



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

If you have been too self-indulgent recently, you need to try to rein it in today. People are starting to wonder whether or not you have the right priorities, so cut out excessive activity and get back to a simpler way of living for now. You'll welcome it even if you haven't been craving it. Drink water instead of wine, cook at home instead of dining out, shop at thrift stores instead of luxury boutiques. All these little substitutions will make you appreciate your pampering all the more.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You'll see the problems that arise today before anyone else does, but you have to be careful about how you alert everyone to them. If all you do is point fingers and complain about how things are not what they could be without offering any constructive ideas, you are whining, not helping. Before you raise any red flags, think of a possible solution. That way, when you are pointing out a problem, you are also pointing out a way to fix it and thereby making yourself useful.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Thinking ahead may seem impossible now. You really don't know what's coming. Since you don't have a crystal ball, you won't be able to figure it out without more information. But maybe you shouldn't get so caught up in thinking in terms of a certain time frame. Instead of figuring out what the next week, month, or year holds, think in bigger and less specific terms. This is a good time to indulge in fantasies. Imagine what you want your life to be like in general.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Today the people around you may be behaving in some unexpected ways, but you probably will be as well. There is a lot of uneven energy around you. But this unpredictability can add a lot of fun to the day too. So if someone who is usually introverted suddenly starts talking a mile a minute, just play along and go with the flow. Try being more submissive than you usually are, and see what this normally shy person has to say. You'll get joy out of seeing them get their moment in the sun.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You might not have all the knowledge in the world, but you have a lot of heart, and that will count for a lot today. By using your kindness and compassion to make stronger friendships with people, you'll be able to use their skills to get closer to what you want. Don't think of it as using someone, because you're not. It's perfectly acceptable to align yourself with people who add value to your life. After all, they choose to have you in their life because you add so much too.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

A new business or professional opportunity could come up today, but the timing might not be totally right for you. Resist the urge to force things. Listen to your instincts. If you don't feel ready to take on something new, don't accept it. Trying to make a square peg fit into a round hole will only end in frustration. Self-preservation is important today, so keep track of your resources, energy level, and social commitments!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

It's been tough keeping up with all of the changes that have been going on with the people in your social network, so why not host a small dinner party so everyone can get up to speed on what is going on in everyone else's life? You are the perfect person to serve as the cornerstone for everyone. Relationships are a living thing. They continually grow and evolve, so make sure you're encouraging them to grow in a healthy and happy direction for everyone.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

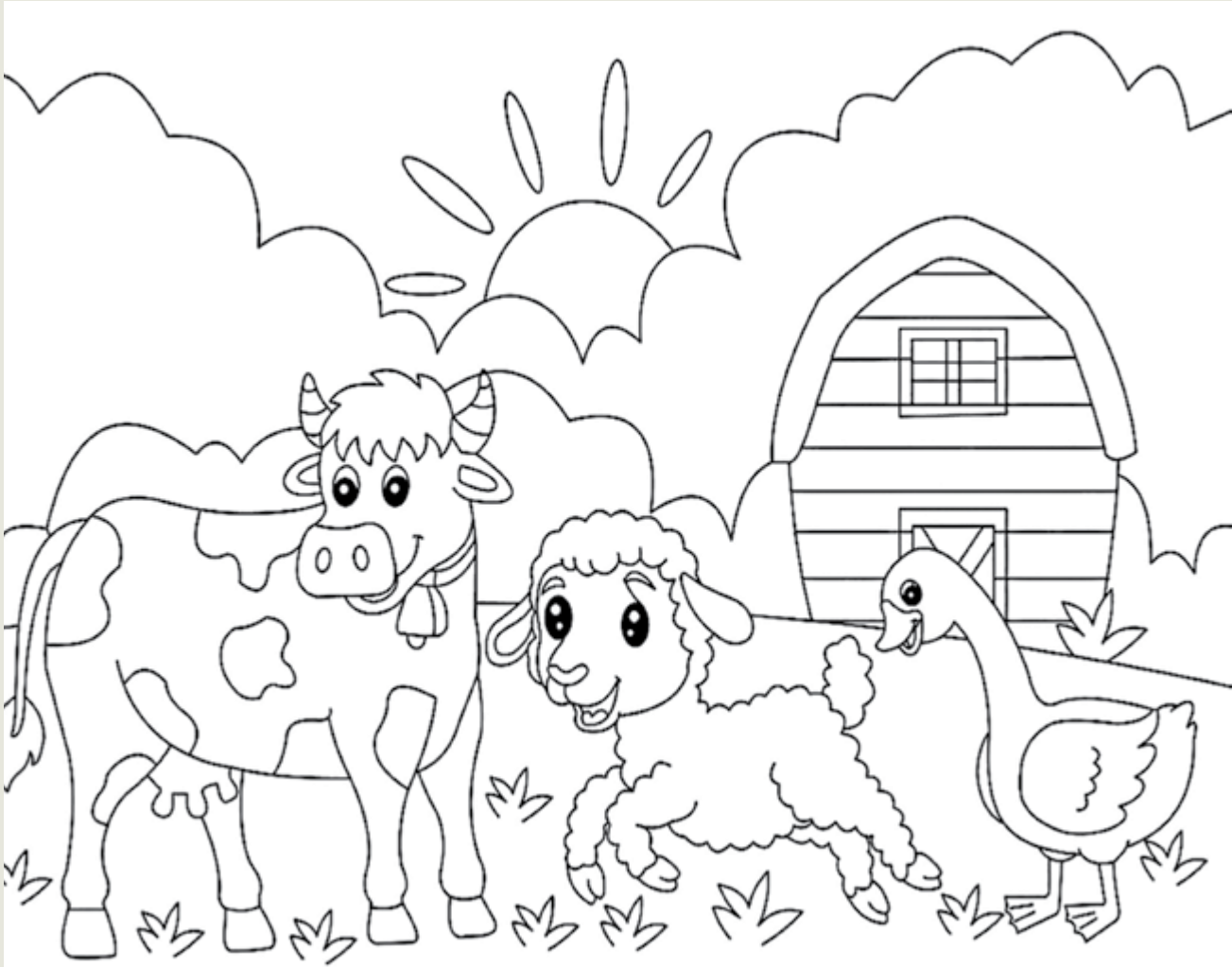
Any business transactions you participate in today should be given your closest attention. Make sure you're charged the correct amount at the store. Reread a contract before signing on the dotted line. Save that receipt for the electronics purchase. Take nothing for granted. No one is necessarily trying to trick or cheat you, but you need to protect yourself more conscientiously. It doesn't take any more effort, and it will save you a lot of money and headaches down the line.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Your latest scheme is an important one, and you are definitely approaching the point of no return when it comes to your level of commitment. If you want things to continue on this path, you need to throw yourself into the process. Otherwise, you need to jump ship or you run the risk of getting in too deep. If this plan involves travel, you will have to look at your calendar far into the future and make sure you can take the time you need to do things the way you want to do them.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

O	V	O	T
R	Z	C	S
R	A	I	V
M	E	N	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

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

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

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



Manchester City's Phil Foden celebrates after scoring against Bournemouth

Little boy Foden has become a world class player, says Guardiola

Bournemouth, England - Gifted as he is, Phil Foden has often been overshadowed by Manchester City's big hitters but the England forward is now a world-class performer in his own right, manager Pep Guardiola said after Saturday's win at Bournemouth.

Foden's ninth league goal of the season secured the unconvincing 1-0 win that pushed champions City to one point behind Premier League leaders Liverpool.

With Erling Haaland not back to his best after injury and playmaker Kevin de Bruyne used as a late substitute on Saturday, Foden was the spark that kept City's bandwagon firmly on track for a fourth successive title.

The 23-year-old Foden has also contributed seven assists this season and has stepped up to be one of City's leaders on the pitch. "Forget about the goals - of course they are important - but do you know how he played?," Guardiola told reporters.

"How he controlled and accelerated. He has become already a top-class football player. From a little boy, now he has become already Phil, a world class, top player.

"He's so good. He can play everywhere, especially in the central position and play really, really good."

City are now 11 games unbeaten in the league and while Liverpool and Arsenal are right with them in the title race, Guardiola's side are showing again the ability to churn out results at the business end of the season. They beat Brentford 1-0 in midweek and Guardiola said his squad's durability still surprised him.

"What can I say?, The calendar is so demanding and the expectations are so high," he said. "What they have done for many years with a lot of games and many things. "And always you believe they will fall down and won't continue to do it - they surprise me."

ALL GUNS BLAZING

Arsenal and Man City close in on Liverpool

Manchester, England - Manchester City and Arsenal closed in on Premier League leaders Liverpool with contrasting victories on Saturday as Manchester United's bubble was burst by Fulham.

With Liverpool in League Cup final action on Sunday, the tightest of title races was squeezed further as City edged to a 1-0 victory at Bournemouth to cut the gap to one point.

Arsenal showed again they are a force to be reckoned with as they outclassed Newcastle United 4-1 - taking their goal tally from the last three leagues games to 15.

Liverpool have 60 points with champions City on 59 and Arsenal on 58, all three teams having played 26 games.

It is the closest three-horse title race in the Premier League for 10 years when Manchester City, Liverpool and Chelsea's battle went to the wire.

The gap between the leading three to United was evident again as Fulham won at Old Trafford for the first time in more than 20 years after Alex Iwobi's stoppage-time goal earned them a surprise 2-1 victory.

United's first loss in six league games left them eight points behind fourth-placed Aston Villa, who bolstered their hopes of qualifying for the Champions League with a 4-2 home victory over struggling Nottingham Forest.

Crystal Palace gave new manager Oliver Glasner a dream start with a 3-0 win over 10-man Burnley to ease their relegation fears and push their opponents closer to the drop.

Everton were denied a vital victory in their survival battle as Lewis Dunk headed a stoppage-time equaliser to salvage a 1-1 draw for 10-man Brighton and Hove Albion.



Arsenal's Bukayo Saka celebrates after scoring against Newcastle United on Saturday

The players surprise me every time, the character, always competitive when they are tired. Winning 0-5 is not a reality. Hopefully we can have a week off soon to rest the legs.

PEP GUARDIOLA

Phil Foden's ninth league goal of the season proved enough for champions City to overcome Bournemouth although it was not the usual slick display by Pep Guardiola's side.

Foden struck in the 21st minute as he coolly slotted in

after Erling Haaland's shot had been saved by Neto.

"The players surprise me every time, the character, always competitive when they are tired," Guardiola said after his side's unbeaten league run stretched to 11.

"Winning 0-5 is not a reality.

Hopefully we can have a week off soon to rest the legs."

While City showed the priceless ability to eke out victories when not at their usual levels, Arsenal were simply unstoppable as they bounced back impressively from defeat by Porto in the Champions League.

An own goal by Sven Botman and a simple Kai Havertz finish put Arsenal 2-0 up at the break before Bukayo Saka and Jakub Kiwior struck to wrap up the points before substitute Joe Willock scored a consolation for Newcastle.

As City eye a fourth successive league title, United's problems re-surfaced at Old Trafford to dilute the mood of optimism.

Billionaire Jim Ratcliffe vowed to knock City off their perch this week after completing his 27% stake in the club and taking charge of the club's soccer operations. But that looked unlikely as United remained in sixth place, 16 points behind Liverpool.

Calvin Bassey put Fulham ahead with his first goal for the club but United defender Harry Maguire equalised in the 89th minute with a half volley

Barca thrash Getafe to move to second

Barcelona, Spain - Raphinha, Joao Felix, Frenkie De Jong and Fermin Lopez scored to earn Barcelona a 4-0 win over visitors Getafe on Saturday which lifted Xavi Hernandez's side to second in the LaLiga standings.

It was a much-needed win for last year's champions who are enduring difficult season and have been under pressure after coach Xavi announced he was stepping down as manager at the end of the campaign.

In a half-empty Olympic stadium, the hosts dominated from the start and opened the scoring through Raphinha in the 20th minute.

In a quick counter, the Brazilian winger beat the offside trap to latch on to Jules Kounde's long pass and blasted the ball past Getafe keeper David Soria.

Raphinha wasted two great chances in similar fashion and Luis Milla almost equalised in the 49th minute with a long-range



Barcelona's Fermin Lopez celebrates after scoring against Getafe

strike that hit Marc-Andre ter Stegen's right post.

Joao Felix extended Barca's lead in from a low cross by Andreas Christiansen from the right and De Jong struck from the edge of the box to score the third,

following good work by Raphinha. Substitute Lopez lashed in a rebound in added time to complete the rout for the champions who moved to second in the standings on 57 points, five behind leaders Real Madrid and one ahead of third-

placed Girona, both of whom have a game in hand.

"We played a very complete game both in defence and attack, I'm satisfied with the performance and the result, now we'll wait to see what Girona and Real do..." Xavi told Movistar Plus.

Almeria hold Atletico

Atletico Madrid's poor LaLiga run continued on Saturday as they were held to a 2-2 draw by bottom side Almeria thanks to a brace by 19-year-old Argentine forward Luka Romero.

Atletico, who have now failed to win three of their last four league matches, are fourth in the standings with 52 points. They trail third-placed Girona by four points and are three ahead Athletic Bilbao in fifth, both of whom have a game in hand.

Almeria remain winless after 26 matches and have only nine points, 11 adrift of the safety zone. Atletico started strong and Angel Correa's close-range effort in the second minute handed the visitors the lead.

While Memphis Depay missed a chance to extend their lead a few minutes later, Romero levelled the score with a fine strike from long-range in the 27th minute.



Bayern Munich's Harry Kane celebrates after scoring against RB Leipzig

Kane goal helps Bayern beat Leipzig and end losing run

Munich, Germany - Harry Kane struck twice, including a stoppage-time winner, to guide Bayern Munich to a 2-1 victory over RB Leipzig on Saturday, snapping a three-game losing run in all competitions and staying eight points off leaders Bayer Leverkusen.

The embattled Bavarians, desperate to end a losing run of two consecutive Bundesliga defeats along with one in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie against Lazio, concluded a turbulent week on a high after having decided to part ways with coach Thomas Tuchel at the end of the season.

"We played a very good first half, but couldn't take the lead," Tuchel said. "The second half was a bit complicated. We scored the opener when Leipzig

were strong.

"We reacted well after the equaliser. The win was good for us after three defeats in a row."

Bayern are in second place, eight points behind leaders Bayer Leverkusen, who are top on 61 points off leaders Bayer Leverkusen.

Tuchel said talking about title chances at the moment was superfluous.

"We don't need to talk about that (title chances). We have to win every single game now. The situation is clear, Leverkusen have a big lead. Now we have to deal with this situation."

Bayern should have gone in front in the first half when Kane hit the post with a fifth minute header and come close again with a bicycle kick.

China appoint Ivankovic as new coach after terminating Jankovic deal

Hong Kong - Branko Ivankovic has been named China's new head coach, replacing Aleksandar Jankovic after the Serbian failed to take the country beyond the group phase of last month's Asian Cup.

The Chinese Football Association announced the move on Saturday. Ivankovic will lead the team into back-to-back World

Cup qualifiers with Singapore on March 21 and 26.

"Due to the Chinese team's failure to enter the knockout stage in Asian Cup, the contract between CFA and Jankovic terminated automatically," the organisation said in a statement.

"The CFA is thankful for the hard work of coach Jankovic and his coaching team, and wish



Branko Ivankovic

them all the best."

Ivankovic was appointed "after the assessment of experts" and has previous experience in the country, winning the Chinese Super League title in 2010 during an 18-month spell with Shandong Luneng.

The 69-year-old also coached Iran at the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany and has won

league titles in his native Croatia as well as in Iran with Persepolis.

He took Oman to the third round of qualifying for the 2022 World Cup but left his role in the Gulf state after also exiting the Asian Cup in the group phase.

China have only qualified for the World Cup once, making their debut appearance at the finals in 2002.

SPIN IN THE TALE

India on course for series victory after Ashwin and Kuldeep destroy England

Ranchi, India - Spin twins Ravichandran Ashwin and Kuldeep Yadav combined to rout England in their second innings and put India on course for a series-clinching victory in the fourth test on Sunday.

Off-spinner Ashwin (5-51) and left-arm wristspinner Kuldeep (4-22) shared nine wickets on a turning track to bundle out England for 145 inside two sessions.

Chasing 192 for a victory that would fetch them an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series, India cruised to 40 for no loss at stumps on day three.

Skipper Rohit Sharma (24) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (16) have looked unperturbed on a pitch, where the ball spun sharply and stayed low occasionally.

Earlier, when action resumed on Sunday, Dhruv Jurel (90) led a spirited rearguard action to rescue India, who posted 307 all out in reply to England's first innings 353.

Jurel combined in a 76-run partnership with Kuldeep (28), whose 131-ball vigil was the longest in his test career.

Jurel smashed four sixes and



India's Ravichandran Ashwin celebrates with teammates after taking an England wicket on Sunday

six fours in his knock but fell short of a hundred when Tom Hartley (3-68) bowled him.

Off-spinner Shoaib Bashir (5-119) claimed his first five-wicket haul in test cricket.

A lead of 46 was much lower than England probably had expected having reduced India to

177-7 before the hosts roared right back into the contest after Ashwin's triple strikes.

The off-spinner had Ben Duckett caught short leg for 15 and trapped Ollie Pope lbw with his next delivery. Pope fell for his second duck in the match.

While Ashwin could not complete a hat-trick, he got the important wicket of Joe Root (11) lbw. Root, who made a classy century in the first innings, was initially adjudged not out, but Ashwin coaxed his captain Rohit Sharma into challenging the decision.

The hosts were rewarded

Earlier, when action resumed on Sunday, Dhruv Jurel (90) led a spirited rearguard action to rescue India, who posted 307 all out in reply to England's first innings 353

when replays confirmed the ball would have gone on to hit the stump. Opener Zak Crawley smashed seven fours in his 60 before losing his middle stump to Kuldeep.

The spinner struck another

telling blow when he had Ben Stokes bowled for four before the tea break.

The England captain missed the ball, which hit his pad before spinning back between his legs and went on to hit the stumps.



Karen Khachanov celebrates after winning the Qatar ExxonMobil Open in Doha

Khachanov beats Mensik to capture Doha title

Doha, Qatar - No. 2 seed Karen Khachanov defeated Czech teenager Jakub Mensik 7-6 (12), 6-4 Saturday to win his sixth career title at the Qatar ExxonMobil Open in Doha.

The 27-year-old Russian did not drop a set all week, a record he kept intact by fighting off four set points in the opening-set tiebreak.

Khachanov prevailed on the 26th point of the tiebreak by crushing a forehand return on Mensik's big serve, then collected the only break of the match in the opening game of the second set.

"I stayed strong, I'm extremely happy that I won the first set. It lifted me a lot and gave me a lot of confidence to step up in the second," said Khachanov, whose one-hour, 49-minute victory delivered his first title since Zhuhai in September.

Aussies beat New Zealand in third T20 to sweep series

Auckland, New Zealand - Australia completed a clean sweep of their three-match Twenty20 series against New Zealand on Sunday as Matthew Wade's side won a rain-affected clash by 27 runs via the Duckworth-Lewis method at Eden Park.

The Australians had already clinched the series after winning the first two meetings in Wellington and Auckland, and racked up 118 runs for four wickets in 10.4 overs that were repeatedly interrupted by rain.

Travis Head top scored for Australia with 33 runs from 30 balls before he was caught by Ish Sodhi off Mitchell Santner's bowling and New Zealand were set a target of 126 runs in 10 overs. Opener Will Young fell in the second over, and with Tim Seifert and Finn Allen joining him



Australia players celebrate with the trophy

in the pavilion soon, New Zealand's cause was all but lost.

Glenn Phillips smashed 40 not out off 24 balls but it was not

enough in the end.

The bilateral series was the last international outing for both teams prior to the start of the Indian Premier League next month and June's T20 World Cup in the West Indies and the United States.

Paolini wins Dubai Championships

Dubai, UAE - Italian Jasmine Paolini fought back from a set down to beat qualifier Anna Kalinskaya 4-6 7-5 7-5 in the final of the Dubai Tennis Championships on Saturday to secure her second WTA singles title.

Kalinskaya, the Australian Open quarter-finalist, had been on a giant-killing run in Dubai, having stunned world number one Iga Swiatek in the semi-finals after knocking out Grand Slam champions Coco Gauff and Jelena Ostapenko in the previous rounds.

The Russian had beaten Paolini at Melbourne Park last month and took the opening set. But Paolini mounted a comeback and levelled the tie — only to then find herself in trouble in the decider as she slipped to within a game of defeat at 3-5.

But the 28-year-old kept her composure to seal the win, becoming only the fourth player in 24 years to win the final in Dubai after dropping the first set.



Jasmine Paolini celebrates after winning the Dubai Tennis Championships

"It was really tough. I tried to stay focused on every point to believe it. I'm really proud of myself," said Paolini, who reached

the finals after overcoming top-25 ranked opponents Sorana Cirstea, Maria Sakkari and Beatriz Haddad Maia.

Ricciardo has no problem with team Visa Cash App RB's full name

Manama, Bahrain - Daniel Ricciardo will not be cutting any corners in saying his Red Bull-owned Formula One team's new name, even if Visa Cash App RB hardly trips off the tongue.

The Italy-based team formerly known as AlphaTauri, and before that Scuderia Toro Rosso and Minardi, start the season in Bahrain next week with new management, closer ties to champions Red Bull and a mouthful of fresh identity.

"I know commentators are like 'That's too long' and whatever, but the truth is they are helping us go racing so I am very happy to call it the full name," the Australian told Reuters on Saturday.

"I know people are going to shorten it and I've already heard

RB and whatever. I will say 'Do as you wish', but you'll hear me say 'Visa Cash App RB'.

"I know for sure people are saying VCARB (the chassis name is VCARB01) but that sounds like a (energy drink) competitor to Red Bull. It doesn't sound quite right."

The name is a talking point for the lack of a clear identity without the title sponsors and also because the team look likely to be getting more mentions than last year when they finished eighth overall.

Ricciardo was fourth fastest on the first day of testing last Wednesday and fifth on Thursday. Some have already suggested RB -- an abbreviation of Racing Bulls -- could emerge as



Daniel Ricciardo

dark horses but the Australian played that down.

"We believe we can do better than eighth," he said, speaking during a break in filming for the

"I know for sure people are saying VCARB (the chassis name is VCARB01) but that sounds like a (energy drink) competitor to Red Bull

DANIEL RICCIARDO

team's Austrian Vodka sponsor NEFT and dressed in black tie and tuxedo. "If people are expecting an Aston (Martin) and (Fernando) Alonso (situation) from last year, and fighting for a

podium from race one, we're obviously not there yet.

"I've got an idea of who's quick and maybe who's struggling but...it's not even that I'm scared to comment on it, the truth is that I'm just still relatively unsure.

"Even if some teams are within a couple of tenths, a couple of tenths could be five positions on the grid. It can swing pretty quickly."

Ricciardo, who raced for Red Bull between 2014-18 and is angling for a return if Sergio Perez leaves at the end of the season, said the senior team's new RB20 car had made a big impression.

While Ferrari were fastest in testing, Red Bull still looked like the team to beat with an eye-

catching evolution of the winner of 21 of 22 races last year.

"They were at the front a decade ago and then saw Mercedes go on this massive run and I feel like they really just want to make an absolute statement not to be overtaken again, or to hold onto this front spot for as long as possible," said Ricciardo.

"I think that's why they've been absolutely relentless in their approach for this year in designing something like they have.

"I know for fans, they are probably like 'Man, I want to see a different winner' but from a competitive point of view you have to admire it."

Ricciardo left McLaren at the end of 2022 and returned to a race seat with AlphaTauri.

GOLF OF MEXICO

Stunning burst of seven birdies helps Ortiz storm to imperious victory at International Series Oman

Muscat - Mexico's Carlos Ortiz upstaged Louis Oosthuizen and Joaquin Niemann to record a convincing victory in the US\$2million International Series Oman today - the first of this year's International Series events. His Highness Sayyid Malik Bin Shihab Bin Tariq Al Said presented Ortiz with the International Series Oman trophy. Ortiz, joint leader at the start of day with Oosthuizen and with a host of big-name players breathing down his neck, showed no fear and shot a seven-under-par 65 to top the leaderboard on 19-under. He beat one of the pre-event favourites Oosthuizen by four, after the South African carded a 69 at Al Mouj Golf, here on the magical Muscat coastline, when the wind was up. Niemann fired a 67 to take third place outright, one stroke further back. Ortiz brilliantly broke away from the pack with seven birdies in nine holes starting from the sixth. At the turn he had a two-shot lead thanks to birdies on six,



Carlos Ortiz with HH Seyed Malik Bin Shihab Bin Tariq al Said, HH Seyed Azzan Bin Qais al Said, Cho Minn Thant, and Rahul Singh

I hope this is the start of a great year. It means so much to win an International Series event. I would like to play in Majors this year and win on the LIV Golf League

CARLOS ORTIZ

seven and nine and left the field trailing in his wake with an eye-catching one-man show making birdies on 10, 11, 13 and 14. He was able to stroll down the 18th with a four-shot lead over Oosthuizen.

holes," said the 32-year-old Mexican - the former Fireballs GC player on the LIV Golf League who now plays for Torque GC, who are captained by Niemann. "After that it was more downwind, so this is how this course plays and you have to take advantage of it. The wind then calmed down and I attacked the pins, and I made some good putts. I hope this is the start of a great year. It means so much to win an International Series event. I would like to play in Majors this year and win on the LIV Golf League."

The win marks his first success on a main Tour since he claimed the Houston Open on the PGA Tour in 2020. It will also make up for losing in a sudden-death play-off for the individual title at last year's LIV Golf Tucson. That performance did however help the Fireballs win the team title, one of two in 2023. He became only the third Mexican winner on the Asian Tour. Carlos Espinosa was the first at the 1995 Canlubang Classic while Abraham Ancer was the next, 28 years later, at last year's star-studded season-opening PIF



ISM U16 players celebrate with the trophy

ISM win inter-school U16 title, OCA emerge academy champions

Muscat - Indian School Muscat defeated Indian School Wadi Kabir by five wickets in the final of the Oman Cricket Inter-School U16 Junior Domestic League 2023-24 supported by Mazoon Dairy SAOC at Municipality Grounds recently. ISWK posted 185 in 30 overs courtesy of Saumya Sampat's 36 and a collective contribution from the other batters. Vihaan Chauhan picked up two wickets for ISM. In response, ISM chased down the target with one over remaining courtesy Giriharan KK's 69 along with 36 from Siddheswaran and 31 from Jeet Shah. Arav Pillai picked three wickets. Oman Cricket Academy defeated Muscat Cricket Coaching Centre Yellow by seven wickets in the final of the Oman Cricket Inter-Academy U16 Junior Domestic League. MCCC Yellow made 187 with Hafiz Mohammed and Jeet Shah scoring 50 each. Vignesh Karthikeyan took three wickets for OCA while Muhammed Abrar and Mohammed Aseel took two each. OCA U16 easily chased down the target courtesy of a fine 66 from Kavish Shah, 46 from Christo Tredoux and 45 from Saumya Sampat. In the prize distribution ceremony, Alkesh Joshi, Treasurer - Oman Cricket, Kiran Asher - Board Member, Oman Cricket, Paul Martin, Mazoon Dairy and Duleep Mendis - Chief Development Officer - Oman Cricket graced the stage. Saumya Sampat of ISWK bagged the Best Batsman award while Jayapranesh Ayyapan of ISAS was the Best Bowler and Rishab Gupta of ISWK Cambridge was adjudged the Best All-Rounder. In the inter-academy tournament, Jeet Shah of MCCC Yellow was the Best Batsman while Vignesh Karthikeyan of OCA was adjudged the Best Bowler and Saumya Sampat of OCA was the Best All-Rounder.



Daniele Rugani of Juventus (R) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Frosinone on Sunday

Late goal from Rugani helps Juve beat Frosinone

Turin, Italy - Daniele Rugani scored an added time goal to give Juventus a much-needed 3-2 win over a brave Frosinone on Sunday, their first Serie A win in five games. Juventus remain second on 57 points, six behind leaders Inter Milan who have two games in hand and play Lecce later on Sunday. Frosinone drop to 16th on 23 points, three above the relegation zone. "A liberation, too important a goal that takes us out of a difficult moment from which we struggled to emerge," Rugani told Sky Sport after his 95th minute winner. Both sides came into the game without a win in four games, which had left Juventus struggling to keep pace with Inter in the title race and Frosinone dangerously close to the bottom three, and made for an entertaining first half. Juventus opened the scoring in the third minute when Weston McKennie beautifully controlled

a long ball from Federico Gatti before playing a low cross from the right side of the area which Dusan Vlahovic met to give the home side the perfect start. The home crowd were stunned into silence 11 minutes later when Nadir Sortea crossed from the right and with Juve's defence standing like statues, Walid Cheddira rose to head past Wojciech Szczesny. Frosinone clearly did not come to the Juventus Stadium to sit back and defend, and in the 27th minute

their positive play was rewarded again when they took the lead. Abdou Harroui cut in from the left wing, spotted the run of Marco Brescianini and played the perfect through ball. Brescianini took a couple of touches taking him into the area and held off Rugani to get his shot away into the top corner. Five minutes later and Vlahovic had a great chance to level when Federico Chiesa flicked a pass which left the striker in front of goal but his heavy first touch allowed the keeper to block his effort. Frosinone failed to clear the ball and when Andrea Cambiaso's pass found McKennie, his first time ball found Vlahovic who controlled before turning and curling his shot into the bottom corner. The intensity dropped after the break with Juventus looking the more likely to take the lead without creating any clear-cut chances and Frosinone looking happy to take a point.

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CHAPEA

Mars-manship

DO YOU WANT TO SPEND A YEAR INSIDE A MOCK MARS BASE FOR SCIENCE? IF SO, NASA WANTS YOU

Applications are open for NASA's next year-long mock Mars mission, which simulates the challenges crews may face during future expeditions on the Red Planet.

The ground-based mission, called CHAPEA (Crew Health and Performance Exploration Analog), consists of four volunteer crewmembers living and working inside an isolated 158sqm, 3D-printed habitat.

Located at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, the Mars Dune Alpha habitat includes an adjoining 111sqm enclosure used for simulated spacewalks.

"As NASA works to establish a long-term presence for scientific discovery and exploration on the moon through the Artemis campaign, CHAPEA missions provide important scientific data to validate systems and develop solutions for future missions to the Red Planet," NASA officials state.

The first CHAPEA crew is more than halfway through their year-long mission, which began on June 25, 2023 and is scheduled to end on July 6, 2024. Now, NASA is seeking applicants for its CHAPEA 2 mission, which is expected to kick off in spring 2025. Applications are open to the public through April 2, 2024.

"NASA is looking for healthy, motivated US citizens

or permanent residents who are non-smokers, 30-55 years old, and proficient in English for effective communication between crewmates and mission control," officials said in the statement from the space agency.

"Applicants should have a strong desire for unique, rewarding adventures and interest in contributing to NASA's work to prepare for the first human journey to Mars."

Over the course of the year-long mission, the four-person crew will perform tasks ranging from robotic operations to habitat maintenance, crop growth, simulated spacewalks and exercise. The Mars Dune Alpha habitat is designed to replicate what future missions to Mars may look like, including challenges such as resource limitations, equipment failures, communication delays and other environmental stressors.

The walk through Mars Dune Alpha reveals the row of crew quarters in a hallway across from a lavatory and shower area. That hall turns at its end to an area setup for small-scale produce production, which sits adjacent to an open kitchen and recreation area with a table and lounge furniture.

A doorway across the communal space leads to a work area with a desk and shelving for equipment. Rooms on either side house fitness and laundry machinery, and robotics control stations and a 3D printer. Another doorway in the open work area features a

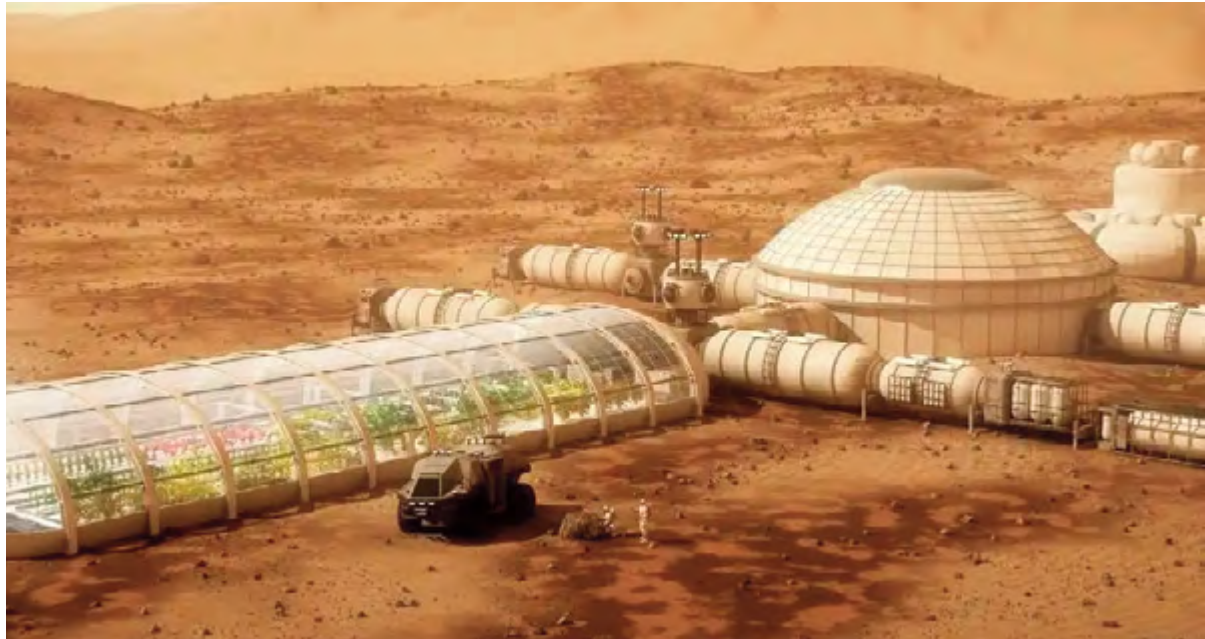
small medical bay, which sits across from the habitat's primary airlock.

Applicants are required to have a degree in a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) field or medicine, as well as professional experience in STEM, military training or test piloting. Full details of the application process and applicant requirements can be found online.

CHAPEA 2 is the second of three planned missions inside the Mars Dune Alpha habitat. Research gained through these simulated missions will help NASA support crew health and performance while living on Mars during future long-duration exploration missions.

(Courtesy: space.com)

The Mars Dune Alpha habitat is designed to replicate what future missions to Mars may look like



TRAVEL TRENDS

AS YOU LIKE IT

TOUR OPERATORS AND TRAVEL AGENCIES NO LONGER DICTATE TRAVEL ITINERARIES – THOSE ARE FOR BORING TRAVELLERS WHO WANT EVERYTHING CHALKED OUT IN ADVANCE. NEW TRENDS FOR 2024 SUGGEST THE CUSTOMISATION OF TRAVEL PLANS TO SUIT THE TASTES AND TIME ZONES OF TRAVELLERS

After travelling with a somewhat 'quest for freedom' after the pandemic in 2022, travellers shifted focus in 2023 to experience more meaning from the travel itself. Hence, there was an increase in travel via trains rather than planes, as well as spiritual/health retreats as guests sought peace of mind and escapes from reality.

Now, in 2024, according to a recent study, more than half of global travellers (64%) are planning to reduce spending elsewhere in their personal budgets in order to increase it on travel. Latest trends indicate a whole new set of quests by discerning travellers.

Duality travel

Duality travel describes when holidaymakers squeeze at least two destinations into one trip (also known as twin or multi-centre travel). With Google searches for multi-destination trips having increased by 456% since the start of 2023, the end of Covid restrictions seems to have permanently transformed how people perceive travel. "Clients are coming to us requesting multi-destination holidays in numbers like I've never seen before," says Ben Nelson, founder and managing director of luxury international travel company, Nelson Travel. "Tanzania's Serengeti and Zanzibar have come out as our most popular multi-centre travel combinations at the moment. Travellers can witness the great migration in Tanzania before continuing to an isolated, untouched shoreline in the Zanzibar archipelago."

There is also set to be a particular rise in multi-destination trips to

the Caribbean says Helen Tabois from holiday specialists Inspiring Travel Company, thanks to new flights, such as Tradewind Aviation's between Antigua and Anguilla, St Barths and Anguilla, and Cayman Airways' new route from Barbados to Grand Cayman.

Demand for island-hopping itineraries in both, the Maldives and Greece, is also surging, while fresh flight connections between Tahiti and the Cook Islands mean these island nations are now a great twin-centre option, according to James Bell, managing director of upscale travel agency The Turquoise Holiday Company.

Impact travel

Impact travel is a more focussed type of vacationing, through which the traveller gets to see the direct positive results of their visit, while minimising any negative effects. Craft Travel, a boutique tour operator specialising in curated experiences, has observed a 112% escalation in requests for impact travel trips in the past year.

Sustainability, social responsibility, and environmental conservation are the cornerstones of the trend, with travellers wanting to offer their time and money to socially, environmentally, and economically worthwhile activities.

Safaris, such as African Bush Camps, are a key area where people switch approaches. In doing so, they actively participate in preserving the very landscape and environment they are looking to explore. Also, the Maldives' beautiful Huvafen Fushi island resort is now offering guests the chance to cultivate coral with marine biologists as a living legacy of their trip in the ocean.

DNA pilgrimages

Genealogy site 'Ancestry' is said to receive more than one billion searches per month, and rival 'Family Search' had more than 200 million readers in 2022. The pandemic gave many the gift of time to research their personal history, so now that travel is no longer restricted, the natural follow-on trend is that of exploring such newly found heritage first-hand, via travel.

Cazenove+Lloyd has noticed an upswing in so-called ancestry trips or DNA pilgrimages - specially designed trips that enable travellers to discover more about the people and places they have come from. The bespoke itineraries have been known to include surprise lunch meetings with the former colleagues of a traveller's late relations, armed with photos.

Ultra personalisation

Is checking in to find a framed wedding photo on your hotel bedside table too much? How about having your initials on your pillowcase, towel, and slippers, as well as on the froth of your coffee or on biscuits?

Niceties like these are found at The Carlton Tower Jumeirah in Knightsbridge and guests loved them. It seems, the travel industry is only going to become more creative in taking service personalisation to an even higher level.

"Some of the hotels I work with are working to create more impactful bespoke experiential services by offering extensive questionnaires before arrival, or WhatsApp personal assistants who can cater to every whim of the traveller," says Anna Beketov, an associate vice president for communications agency FINN Partners.

Tim Hentschel, co-founder and CEO of HotelPlanner.com, believes AI will be what accelerates advances in customisation. "We believe 2024 will see more hotels using AI tools, such as chatbot, and contact check-in and payment systems, to personalise their service down to the unique needs and wants of every customer."

Slow travel

According to findings published by World Travel Market in November 2023, the trend for Saudi tourists to explore and relax in their own Kingdom during their valuable vacation time has continued, with the volume of domestic trips increasing by 37% compared pre-Covid times. Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam, Makkah, and Abha remain the country's all-time favourite Saudi destinations.

While Saudi is developing at breakneck pace in most industries and areas, travel is one realm the whole country seems to agree should be slowed right down. Marriott Bonvoy and foresight agency The Future Laboratory analysed holiday plans over the next three years from 14,000 travellers in Europe and the Middle East before publishing their 2024 Future Travel Trends paper. In it, they found that 77% of Saudis say they've already been on a so-called 'slow holiday'.

Indeed, sustainability is an integral part of the new way Saudis travel, with 70% checking out the eco-credentials of the most recent place they stayed in, and 42% looking into the environmental impact of all their own holiday plans. A large number of guests even pay out more for accommodation they know is more sustainable.

(Courtesy: listmag.com)