

'Tourism sector to grow 4 times faster than national economy'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's tourism sector has achieved unprecedented growth surpassing pre-pandemic levels. In 2023, the sultanate welcomed close to 4mn visitors. With further growth expected in the next few years, World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has stated that Oman's travel and tourism sector will grow four times faster than the national economy over the next ten years.

On her visit to Oman from February 6 to 9, Julia Simpson, President and CEO of WTTC, said, "Last year, we saw a significant boost in international arrivals, up by a third on the previous year, highlighting Oman's truly global appeal."

She added that WTTC's recent *Economic Impact Report* forecasts Oman's travel and tourism sector will outpace the national economy four times faster over the next ten years. "The National Tourism Strategy 2040 will support the sector's significant economic growth," she added.

Julia's visit, hosted by Omran Group, underscores Oman's rapid development and strategic focus in the sector, perfectly aligned with WTTC's vision for sustainable growth, a press re-



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JULIA SIMPSON

lease stated.

Julia praised Oman's significant progress in tourism, driven by Omran Group's strategic initiatives, which align with WTTC's principles of sustainable and inclusive growth in global travel and tourism. "It has been an absolute pleasure discovering this beautiful destination which continues to attract travellers from around the world."



Future prospects

According to Omran, the future of Oman's tourism sector is promising, with an anticipated annual growth of 7.4% from 2023 to 2027.

'Ranked among the top 20 global destinations in 2023, the country is poised to elevate its global presence further. As the Official Guest Host Country at ITB Berlin 2024, Oman, through

Omran Group's participation, is set to showcase its growing tourism potential on the world stage. This strategic participation and visit by Julia Simpson, also opens avenues for exploring potential collaboration with WTTC to host one of its prestigious events in Oman, further reinforcing the Sultanate of Oman's position as a prominent player in the global tourism arena,' Omran

stated.

As the country's primary driver in tourism development, Omran - valued at nearly US\$1.5bn and managing over 4,000 hospitality keys - is pivotal in shaping Oman's tourism future. The group's strategy integrates economic growth and diversification, respecting and harmonising with Oman's rich cultural and natural heritage.

Data privacy enhanced with new regulations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has released the executive regulation of the Personal Data Protection Law, as outlined in Ministerial Decision No 34/2024.

The regulation aims to establish a comprehensive framework for the procedures, controls, conditions and legal timelines for personal data protection, in line with Royal Decree No 6/2022.

Key highlights of the regulation include the mandatory requirement of obtaining a permit prior to processing personal data, as stipulated in Article 5 of the law. Special emphasis is placed on safeguarding children's personal data, alongside outlining clear procedures for data subjects to exercise their rights.

The regulation mandates obtaining a processing permit, detailing the application process - including submission of a personal data protection policy - and outlining measures to address data breaches. Permits are valid for up to five years, with specific guidelines for renewal, amendment and cancellation.

It necessitates obtaining explicit consent from a child's guardian before processing their data, underscoring the protection of vulnerable data subjects.

Rights of personal data owners are clearly defined, encom-



passing the revocation of consent, modification, access to processed data, data portability and erasure, except where necessary for national preservation. Additionally, data subjects must be notified of any personal data breaches and the consequent actions taken.

Controllers and processors are bound by several obligations, including obtaining express consent from data subjects, adhering to child data processing controls, and maintaining transparency through a visible personal data protection policy. They must also ensure confidentiality, retain processing documents, establish a personal data processing activities record, appoint a Personal Data Protection Officer, and comply with extraterritorial data transfer controls.

In the event of a data breach, controllers are required to notify the ministry within 72 hours, potentially followed by notifying affected data subjects if the breach poses serious harm or risks.

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Homegrown microchips prove mettle, clear international testing phase

Our Correspondent
Muscat

On the road to manufacturing Oman's first advanced microchips, a milestone has been achieved with the Oman-1 and Oman-2 chips after a successful round of testing in Taiwan.

The chips were sent to the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company last year, where these underwent thorough testing to ensure readiness for production.

'Exciting news as the Oman-1 and Oman-2 chips have officially arrived, marking a significant milestone for our nation. These chips - proudly designed by Omani engineers - are now back. Initial testing has indicated that the chips are alive. More testing results will be shared as soon as available,' GSME Oman, the company responsible for manufacturing the chips posted on

ITHCA Group invests in GSME

Muscat - The government-backed ITHCA Group, which is mandated to enhance the sultanate's digital capabilities, has invested in the Silicon Valley-based semiconductor design firm GS Micro-electronics (GSME).

The group has concluded an agreement with GSME, which was signed by Said al Mandhari, CEO of ITHCA Group, and GSME's Jahangir.

According to Mandhari, this strategic investment by the group in GSME is an important financial achievement and a technological leap forward for Oman, "as this investment confirms our keenness to promote innovation. This gives Oman a head start and leadership in the semiconductor industry".

LinkedIn.

Following return from Taiwan, the chips are going undergoing trial. 'Embarking on a groundbreaking journey as chip testing kicks off for nine innovative projects. Six blocks tested with 100% success; this achievement is a great sign of hope and pride that local talent is on par with in-

ternational standards in chip design. This achievement marks a significant milestone in Oman's semiconductor journey,' the company stated.

Praising the team in the sultanate, Farhat Jahangir, Founder, President and CEO of GSME, the parent company, said, "Great job GSME Oman and special thanks

to Dr Rashad Ramzan, Dr Hassan Saif, National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences and the University of Nizwa team for your great support in enabling semiconductor design training in Oman."

Oman-1 and Oman-2 represent the innovativeness and promise of Oman's semiconductor industry. 'Notably, this achievement showcases Oman's commitment to technological advancement in the semiconductor industry, aligning with the vision set forth in Oman Vision 2040.'

"The fact that these chips are proudly made by our own engineers showcases the incredible talent and potential in our country. Looking forward to more exciting updates as further testing progresses," Raqiya al Quraini, Integrated Circuit Designer at GSME Oman, posted on LinkedIn.



AUSSIE 'POCKET ROCKET' WINS STAGE 1

Caleb Ewan of team Jayco Alula was the winner of the 181.5km Stage 1 of Tour of Oman 2024, finishing in front of Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Saturday. The Australian 'Pocket Rocket' got the better of Bryan Coquard (Cofidis) in second position and Alexander Kristoff (Uno-X Mobility) in third. On Friday, New Zealand's Finn Fisher-Black (UAE Team Emirates) cycled to a thrilling victory in the second edition of Muscat Classic



First government fertility centre to open on Feb 14



13th Arab Excellence Awards Ceremony 2023 in Muscat

Bodies of Gaza girl, ambulance team found after 12 days

Cairo, Egypt - A six-year-old girl who went missing in Gaza last month has been found dead, along with several of her relatives and two paramedics who had gone to save her.

Hind Rajab was fleeing the city with her aunt, uncle and three cousins when the car they were travelling came face to face with Israeli tanks, and were fired upon.

Audio recordings of calls between Hind and emergency call operators suggest that the six-year-old was the only one left alive in the car, hiding from Israeli forces among the bodies of her relatives. Her pleas for someone to rescue her ended when the phone line was cut amid the



Photographs of Hind Rajab, Yusuf Zeino and Ahmed al Madhoun released by Palestine Red Crescent Society

Death toll crosses 28,000

Gaza's Health Ministry has said that the number of Palestinians killed from the Israeli aggression since October 7 has risen to 28,064, with 67,611 others wounded.

'The Israeli occupation committed 16 massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, killing 117 and wounding 152 during the past 24 hours,' the ministry said.

Thousands more are missing and presumed dead, trapped under the rubble or their bodies strewn on streets.

sound of more gunfire.

Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) accused Israel of deliberately targeting the ambulance it sent to rescue Hind after she had spent hours on the phone with dispatchers begging for help with the sound of shooting echoing around.

PRCS has published a video showing the wreckage of the ambulance that was sent to rescue Hind 12 days ago. The two medics who were dispatched, Yusuf Zeino and Ahmed al Madhoun, were also killed.

'Hind tragically lost her life alone after pleading with our teams for hours in a terrified and desperate voice, 'Come take me',

the PRCS said. 'Rest in peace, Hind, and to the heroes of humanitarian work, Yusuf and Ahmed.'

Paramedics from PRCS managed on Saturday to reach the area, which had previously been closed off as an active combat zone. They found the black Kia car Hind had been travelling in - its windshield and dashboard smashed to pieces, bullet holes scattered across the side.

'The occupation deliberately targeted the Red Crescent crew despite prior coordination to allow the ambulance to arrive at the site to rescue Hind,' the Red Crescent said in a statement. Agencies

Climate change, decarbonisation meet on Feb 26-28

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) will organise Oman Environmental Sustainability Conference at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from February 26 to 28 focused on mitigating the effects of climate change and decarbonisation efforts.

The event will be held under the patronage of Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

The conference will discuss several topics on the environment and natural resources and include presentations of close to 200 scientific research papers from various countries published for the first time.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of EA, said, "Throughout the duration of the conference, participants will have the opportunity to engage in discussions, share insights and learn from experts who are at the forefront of decarbonisation efforts. Together, we will explore innovative solutions and best practices that can drive progress towards our shared goal of mitigating the effects of climate change and



Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri

achieving global climate targets."

He noted that addressing the urgent issue of climate change requires a collective effort from various sectors. "Our conference will serve as a crucial platform for fostering collaborations and knowledge exchange among scientists, researchers, policymakers, industry leaders and environmentalists, all driven by a resolute commitment to decarbonisation."

He added that decarbonisation is the key to reducing or eliminating carbon emissions from a wide range of sources and that the conference is dedicated to promoting the adoption of low-carbon technologies, strategies and policies across industries such as energy, transportation and manufacturing. "It is through these efforts that we can pave the way for a sustainable and greener future," Amri said.

Baby College pioneers early childhood education in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In an initiative aimed at enhancing child development, a school for mother and babies recently opened at two locations in Muscat.

Called Baby College, award-winning classes of this innovative concept were introduced in Azabiba and Al Mouj, providing a structured platform for early childhood education.

The brainchild of Neda Mostofi, Baby College has been tailored to bridge the educational gap for mothers seeking an enriching developmental programme for their infants in Muscat. Drawing inspiration from the success of Baby College UK and leveraging her personal journey as a British mother to an Omani child, Neda recognised the need for a comprehensive educational framework that supports both mothers and their babies during the crucial early stages of development.

"Having experienced the benefits of Baby College UK firsthand, I was keen on creating a similar nurturing environment in Muscat. This initiative is not just about child development; it's about empowering mothers with



knowledge and skills to foster their child's growth effectively," Neda informed.

Led by Sarah Reed, Programme Leader, Baby College runs weekly one-hour sessions for three distinct age groups - infants, toddlers and juniors. These sessions are designed to offer

more than just an educational experience, providing a community for mothers to engage, share experiences and learn together.

"Our curriculum is the culmination of expertise drawn from various developmental fields, ensuring a holistic approach to early childhood education.



(Supplied photos)

Through carefully curated play, movement and learning exercises, we aim to equip parents with the understanding of how these activities contribute to their child's overall growth," Sarah elaborated.

With a team comprising early years specialists, academics and

practitioners, Baby College positions itself as a unique offering in Muscat's educational landscape, specifically catering to the needs of young mothers and their babies. Following the positive reception, there are plans to open another centre in Madinat Qaboos.

Khasab hosts international sculpture forum, aims for an open-air museum

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The ongoing second edition of Musandam International Sculpture Forum is witnessing intense competition featuring five sculptors from Oman, Japan, Ukraine, Tunisia and Georgia.

This unique event, from February 6 to 29 at Bassa Beach in the wilayat of Khasab, aims to transform the local landscape into a canvas for creative expression.

In a conversation with Muscat Daily, Forum Supervisor Dr Ali al Jabri revealed the forum's ambitious goal of establishing the Middle East's first open-air sculpture museum.

The innovative project seeks to blend art with the natural and cultural essence of Musandam,



(Supplied photo)

The vision is to position Khasab - and Musandam at large - as a prime destination for culture and art, inviting international sculptors and art enthusiasts to explore and engage with the region's artistic offerings

DR ALI AL JABRI

drawing inspiration from its rugged terrain, rich history and diversity. The event is part of Musandam's winter activities, organised under the auspices of Musandam Governor's Office.

This year's forum has seen artists working on multiple sculptures reflecting various artistic styles aiming to enrich public spaces in Khasab. These art installations are not only expected to beautify and enhance the aesthetic and cultural appeal of the region but also attract domestic and international tourists.

Initially, the sculptures will adorn Bassa Beach, with plans to gradually disperse these across Khasab in future editions of the forum. "The vision is to position Khasab - and Musandam at large - as a prime destination for cul-

ture and art, inviting international sculptors and art enthusiasts to explore and engage with the region's artistic offerings."

Jabri emphasised the forum's role as a vibrant cultural movement in Oman, fostering interactions and exchanges among international artists. It serves as a platform for sculptors to share their expertise in marble, stone and wood carving, while promoting sculpture as an important art form among the Omani community, especially the youth.

The forum's broader objectives include making Oman a global hub for sculpture, showcasing the country's natural and cultural heritage, and encouraging Omani youth with talent for sculpting to participate and contribute to the art form's growth in the sultanate.



(Supplied photo)

First government fertility centre to open on Feb 14

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is set to mark a milestone in healthcare with the official opening of its first government-operated fertility centre on February 14.

Housed in the Al Wattayah Obstetrics and Gynaecology Complex, the facility will aid couples become parents, offering solutions to challenges related to pregnancy and childbirth.

The centre will be distinguished by a specialised medical team, comprising consultants in infertility and assisted pregnancy, technicians and embryologists, all of whom have extensive experience in the field of fertility.

Equipped with cutting-edge laboratory technology, the facility will deliver comprehensive and professional medical care services at no cost, while adhering to the highest standards of quality and professionalism.

With ambitious goals set for its initial years, including treating 1,000 cases in its first year, it expects to serve up to 1,500 cases in the following year.

It will employ in vitro fertilisation (IVF) techniques to address various infertility issues, including obstructed fallopian tubes, male infertility characterised by low sperm count or poor sperm motility, ovulation disorders in women, and unexplained infertility following the failure of

other treatments.

The IVF procedures will adhere to international criteria to maximise success rate and increase pregnancy outcomes. Eligibility for treatment will include specific conditions such as the prospective mother being under 42 years of age, absence of healthy children from the current marriage, and maintaining a body mass index (BMI) of under 35. Exceptions may include women aged 43 to 44 with good ovarian reserve, verified through testing, to enhance treatment success.

The centre also acknowledges the significant impact of maternal age on the success rate of intracytoplasmic sperm injection, noting a decline in success with advancing age. Moreover, it will extend fertility preservation services for individuals, such as cancer patients, at risk of fertility-affecting diseases by safeguarding reproductive cells like eggs and sperm before undergoing fertility-compromising treatments.

Referrals to the fertility centre will be accepted from obstetrics and gynaecology departments across all government hospitals and health complexes, urology clinics addressing male infertility, reproductive endocrinology clinics at The Royal Hospital and Al Wattayah Complex, endocrine clinics and oncology centres, ensuring a comprehensive approach to fertility care across Oman.

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MAFWR takes up 5 aquaculture projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources (MAFWR) unveiled plans to establish five new aquaculture projects within this year.

In a significant move to bolster the fisheries sector, Dr Issa Mohammed al Farsi, Director of Fish Farming Development Department, MAFWR, announced the upcoming projects of 2024, naming the second phase of the abalone aquaculture project in Mirbat, Dhofar governorate and a white-legged shrimp venture in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, South Sharqiyah as the two most important ones.

Additional projects are set to commence in Barka, South Batinah, along with Marine Fin Fish projects in Khasab (Musandam governorate) and Seeb (Muscat governorate).

Six shrimp farming projects were made operational across various governorates in 2023,



representing an investment of RO134.087mn in total.

South Sharqiyah, known for its extensive coastline, emerged as a prominent location for shrimp farming, hosting the majority of these projects.

Dr Farsi highlighted the shrimp farms’ contribution in generating new income avenues for local communities, under-

scoring their economic impact beyond the traditional fisheries sector. The shrimp farming ventures have notably facilitated direct sales of produce by local citizens, transport operators, and small to medium enterprise owners, either within local markets or through exports.

This initiative has opened up new commercial pathways and

contributed to the livelihoods of the local populace, he added.

On the ministry’s future plans, Dr Farsi said, “MAFWR aims to enhance the value addition of national aquaculture products and to enrich the local market with a variety of high-quality fishery products, thereby reinforcing Oman’s position in the global aquaculture landscape.”

Floating cages deployed in 3,500T fish farming project in Musandam

Muscat - In an effort to increase fish production in Oman, Musandam Global Investment Company has stared deployment of floating cages for a 3,500-tonne capacity aquaculture project in Musandam.

The company introduced floating cages in the Al Harf area, within the wilayat of Khasab, marking a significant step towards enhancing fish production and embracing sustainable farming practices in Oman.

An official at Musandam Global Investment Company informed that the deployment of floating cages will unfold in eight phases. A total of 32 cages will be deployed to house a variety of fish species.

“This project aims to contribute significantly to Oman’s national income, with the first harvest anticipated in the third



quarter of 2024,” the official added.

Notably, the company, alongside foreign investors, inked a memorandum in 2023, laying the groundwork for the Musandam Fish Farming Company. This venture came up with a promise to offer an integrated marine fish farming project in the open waters of Musandam, targeting an

annual production exceeding 3,500 tonnes of fish for regional and international markets.

The comprehensive project blueprint includes an open water farm, a fish breeding unit, facilities for juvenile stages, and a processing unit for fish packing, alongside a research and development lab. Support infrastructure such as storage, logistics, and ancillary services are also part of the project, ensuring a holistic approach to aquaculture.

Adherence to sustainable farming principles and external auditing are fundamental to the project’s ethos, aiming to meet the highest standards of marine environment conservation and product quality.

Oman’s aquaculture landscape is diversifying, with projects categorised into integrated and commercial ventures.

Muscat Municipality sets garden arches to add beauty to walkways

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to beautify the city and increase afforestation, Muscat Municipality is installing a number of fabricated metal arches for plants in the Ruwi area.

A municipality official said that a number of fabricated garden arches were installed in various areas of Ruwi as the first phase of the governorate-wide project. “These arches have been installed along the walkways to enhance afforestation in residential neighbourhoods, increase green coverage and create a conducive atmosphere for outdoor activities,” said the official.

The fabricated arches are designed to withstand the harsh weather conditions, and over time will add aesthetics to the walkways, he added.



Talking about the quality of such installations and other city projects, the official said, “The municipality has the latest technologies for landscaping and spreading the green cover. This is reflecting in the ongoing project as well.”

There are 137 parks within Muscat governorate with a total

green area stretching up to 2,730,446sqm. There are 19,565 date palm trees in the governorate, while the number of other trees stands at 51,831.

This is in addition to 336,777 shrubs and fences and seasonal flowers spread over an area of 84,205sqm.

The municipality’s nursery

plays a vital role in the propagation of trees and plants such as sidr, zam, peltophorum, neem, in addition to African tulip, begonia, poinciana and others.

The average annual production of plants in the Qurm Park nursery is estimated to be between 100,000 to 120,000, while the number of shrubs is said to be between 250,000 to 300,000.

“The project to beauty the sidewalks adjacent to public roads and squares have a special place among the municipality’s different projects. This type of landscaping is done to add a vibrant visual element that has environmental, psychological and aesthetic benefits consistent with modern concepts of city planning,” said the official.

“We are working according to a well-thought-out plan to expand the scope of green spaces.”

Oman celebrates day of cultural luminaries

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman observed a special day dedicated to its globally recognised personalities, as endorsed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Unesco), on Saturday.

This initiative, spearheaded by the Ministry of Education through the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture, and Science, earmarks February 10 as the annual day to honour the memory of Omani personalities included in the Unesco list of globally influential personalities.

The Unesco included linguist Al Khalil bin Ahmed al Farahidi in

its list of highly influential personalities in 2005, the physician-cum-pharmacist Rashid bin Omaira al Rustaqi was included in 2013, social reformer Sheikh Nooreddin al Salmi in 2015, physician Abu Mohammed Abdullah al Azdi in 2015, poet Nassir bin Salim al Rowahi in 2019, and the legendary navigator Ahmed bin Majid - celebrated as the Lion of the Sea - was given his rightful place in the list in 2021.

The day was marked to honour the contributions and legacies of Omani figures who have left an indelible mark on both local and global stages. Oman’s successful inclusion of six distinguished individuals and two historic events in Unesco’s programme underscores the



Ahmed bin Majid

country’s rich cultural and historical heritage.

Unesco recognised Oman’s two significant cultural milestones in its list of anniversaries for 2024-25. This recognition included the 350th anniversary of

the Jibreen Castle and the 150th death anniversary of renowned Omani historian and poet Humaid bin Mohammed bin Ruzaiq.

Jibreen Castle, a 17th-century architectural marvel, stands as a testament to Oman’s historical architectural excellence and cultural richness.

Unesco also honours the 150th anniversary of historian Ruzaiq’s passing, a prominent figure in documenting Oman’s historical narrative during the Al Busaid dynasty’s rise to power until Sayyid Said bin Sultan’s reign ended in 1856. Ruzaiq’s scholarly work, marked by its impartiality and thorough research, offers invaluable insights into Oman’s past, the European influence in the Indian Ocean.

Data privacy enhanced with new regulations

Continued from Page 01

The regulation introduces the role of the Personal Data Protection Officer, tasked with advising on data protection matters and liaising with the ministry on personal data processing issues.

Chapter VIII governs the international transfer of personal data, setting conditions to safeguard national security and ensure external processors provide adequate protection levels. This includes obtaining data subject consent and assessing the external processor’s protection level.

Lastly, the regulation outlines punitive measures, empowering the minister to impose sanctions, including warnings.

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Sultanate’s trade surplus declines to RO7bn in 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman’s trade surplus in the first 11 months of 2023 sharply decreased to RO6.997bn compared to a surplus of RO9.587bn during the corresponding period of 2022, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NC SI).

The value of Oman’s merchandise exports reached RO20.636bn for the January – November period of 2023, declining by 11.4% compared to the same period in 2022, when it stood at RO23.289bn.

On the other hand, the value of merchandise imports of Oman amounted to RO13.639bn during the first 11 months of 2023, a decrease of 0.5% compared to RO13.702bn recorded in the same period of 2022.

The decline in the value of exports was mainly due to the decline in the value of Oman’s oil and gas exports in 2023. The combined value of oil and gas exports fell to RO12.525bn at the end of November 2023, declining by 17.7% from RO15.215bn



recorded in the corresponding period of the previous year.

The value of crude oil exports fell by 17.3% to RO8.9bn by the end of November 2023 compared to the same period of the previous year. The value of Oman’s LNG exports decreased by 15.7% to RO2.3bn during January – November period of last year from RO2.7bn recorded in the same period of 2022. The value of refined oil exports also declined by 23.5% to RO1.3bn.

On the other hand, the value of non-oil Omani exports slightly decreased by 1.4% to RO6.767bn in the first 11 months of 2023 against RO6.866bn in the corresponding period of 2022.

In contrast, the total value of Oman’s re-exports to other countries grew by 11.1% to RO1.3bn during January – November period of 2023 compared to the same period of the previous year.

OQ mulls IPOs of two units this year: Report

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Following the successful completion of two initial public offerings (IPOs) of its subsidiaries Abraj Energy Services Company and OQ Gas Networks in 2023, Oman’s globally integrated energy group, OQ, is considering IPOs of two more subsidiary companies this year, according to a Bloomberg report.

‘Oman’s state energy company, OQ, is considering selling shares in two units this year as the country seeks to raise funds and deepen capital markets by listing government-owned businesses across the economy,’ the Bloomberg report said on Friday.

OQ is evaluating plans to list its exploration and production business, as well as a methanol and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) fuels unit, said Ashraf al Mamari, Acting Group CEO of OQ, as reported by Bloomberg.

‘It’s still too early to discuss possible valuations,’ he noted.



Oman is hoping an influx of capital from state asset sales will boost industries such as energy, transport, and tourism. That’s part of a broader trend of divestments in the energy-rich region as larger neighbors Saudi Arabia and the UAE also look to diversify their economies to prepare for a post-oil age, according to the report.

Earlier this month, Bloomberg reported that OQ had asked

banks to pitch for roles in the IPOs of the two units. OQ Exploration & Production may raise about \$1bn in an IPO, people familiar with the proposals said at the time.

In March 2023, Oman’s largest oilfield services provider Abraj Energy Services, a subsidiary of OQ Group, raised nearly RO94mn via an IPO that was oversubscribed by 8.7 times after receiving strong demand

from local, regional, and international investors. Abraj had offered 49% of its share capital through the IPO.

In October last year, another OQ subsidiary company, OQ Gas Networks, the sole operator of Oman’s gas transportation system, successfully completed its RO288mn IPO, which was oversubscribed nearly 14 times, making it the largest IPO to date in Oman.



Sembcorp Salalah
سيمبكورب صلالة

Chairman's Report

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors (the Board) of Sembcorp Salalah Power & Water Company ("SSPWC" or "the Company"), I am pleased to present the audited financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2023.

Financial Results

The Company delivered a net profit of RO20.5 million in 2023. Operating profit was RO30.1 million in 2023, compared to RO31.5 million in 2022. The decline in operating profit was mainly due to higher operating costs due to an increase in planned maintenance and an increase in the cost for Long Term Service Agreement. Basic Earnings Per Share was 21.5 baizas in 2023. The Company continued to report a strong balance sheet, ending the year with net assets of RO161 million.

I invite you to refer to the Management Discussion and Analysis Report section of the Annual Report for more information on the Company's financial results.

Dividends

The Board is recommending a cash dividend of 2.5 baizas per share to be paid on April 1, 2024, and a cash dividend of up to 8 baizas per share, based on cash flow availability, to be paid on November 3, 2024. In 2023, the Company paid a total dividend of 7.5 baizas per share.

The Company follows a reasonable dividend payout policy, subject to debt repayments, working capital and operational expenditure requirements. The amount of annual dividends and the determination whether to pay dividends in any year is also subject to factors including the Company's business prospects, financial performance, free cash availability, covenants under the Financing Documents and outlook for the power and water sectors.

Operations

There is no change in the industry structure in Dhofar region. Sembcorp Salalah will continue to remain as one of the key power and water producers to meet the demands of the region. Our operational philosophy is the unwavering commitment to achieving the highest standard of plant reliability and efficiency, which is critical to the ongoing success of the Company. To achieve targeted plant availability and reliability, the Company follows robust operation and maintenance strategy which include asset management, meticulous maintenance schedules, spares management and manpower training and development. In 2023, reliability of the power and water plants were 99.78% and 99.94% respectively, compared to 99.86% and 99.98% in 2022. The power plant load factor remained stable at 41.63%, compared to 41.07% in the previous year. Water plant load factor increased from 58.69% to 62.71%. However, due to the take-or-pay commercial arrangement that we have with Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the plant load factor does not have a significant impact on the profitability of the Company.

Going forward

While we acknowledge challenges of prevailing macro-economic conditions, we will remain focused on maximising shareholder returns through judicious financial and operational management. Safe and reliable operations will remain a top priority of the Company.

Health, Safety, Security and the Environment (HSSE)

The health and safety of our people as well as protecting the environment we live in is important to our business. We aim to achieve world-class health and safety performances in our daily operations and our management team is committed to continuous improvement on this front.

During the year, the Company successfully achieved no lost time incidents and zero incidents of environmental non-compliance. I am also pleased to report that the Company achieved a new milestone of 6 million safe man-hours, setting the record for an 11th consecutive year of safe and efficient operations. This is a strong testament to the commitment that our staff and contractors have in sustaining a safe culture through the strict implementation and conformance to the Sembcorp HSSE Policies and Standards.

Caring for Communities

The Company recognises the importance of being a responsible corporate citizen and is committed to making a positive impact to the communities in which we operate through our community investments. In 2023, the Company donated RO60,000 to Oman Charitable Organization as part of the country's charity mandate as well as to the establishment of an Accident and Emergency Unit and a Dialysis Centre at the Mirbat Hospital.

Corporate Governance

The Board believes that a business built on the principles of good governance is key to our long-term success. Our Company complies with the Code of Corporate Governance issued by the Oman Capital Market Authority. More details can be found in the Corporate Governance report.

On Record

During the year, Mr Andrew Koss resigned as director of the Company on November 26, 2023. On behalf of the Board, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation for his invaluable contributions to the Company.

I would also like to thank my fellow directors, shareholders, OPWP, regulators (Authority for Public Services Regulation and Capital Market Authority), and our partners (Dhofar Integrated Services Company, The Environment Authority, Integrated Gas Company, Oman Electricity Transmission Company, OQ Company and other governmental and non-governmental bodies) for their guidance and support to the Company. I am also grateful to our employees and contractors for their dedication and commitment to the Company.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq Al Said for his wise leadership as well as his continued support and encouragement to the private sector. We will continue to work closely with His Majesty's government and remain committed to our mission to supply quality and reliable power and water of the highest standards to the Dhofar region.

Tan Cheng Guan

Chairman of the Board

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

	2023 RO	2022 RO
Revenue	79,176,559	74,176,028
Cost of sales	(49,586,578)	(43,331,560)
Gross profit	29,589,981	30,844,468
Administrative and general expenses	(683,040)	(711,360)
Other income	1,224,918	1,352,048
Profit before interest and tax	30,131,859	31,485,156
Finance income	864,635	333,898
Finance costs	(6,839,598)	(8,728,113)
Profit before income tax	24,156,896	23,090,941
Income tax expenses	(3,630,726)	(3,470,277)
Profit after tax	20,526,170	19,620,664
Other comprehensive income		
Item that are or may be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss:		
Cash flow hedges - fair value adjustments	508,180	5,655,837
Cash flow hedges - reclassified to profit or loss	(619,771)	2,302,339
Cash flow hedges - deferred tax liability / (asset) on change in fair value	16,738	(1,193,729)
Other comprehensive income for the year - net of tax	(94,853)	6,764,447
Total comprehensive income for the year	20,431,317	26,385,111
Earnings per share:		
Basic earnings per share	0.0215	0.0206

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2023

	2023 RO	2022 RO
Assets		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	238,116,599	248,808,129
Right of use assets	601,689	647,549
Intangible assets	-	175
Derivative financial instruments	-	29,279
Total non-current assets	238,718,288	249,485,132
Current assets		
Inventories	5,795,556	5,519,281
Trade and other receivables	9,115,180	8,403,673
Current portion of derivative financial instruments	456,508	376,250
Bank deposits	17,615,780	17,333,540
Cash and cash equivalents	1,326,499	7,250,823
Total current assets	34,309,523	38,883,567
Total assets	273,027,811	288,368,699
Equity and liabilities		
Share capital	95,457,195	95,457,195
Legal reserve	16,875,190	14,822,573
Retained earnings	48,467,732	37,153,469
Hedging reserve	249,844	344,697
Total equity	161,049,961	147,777,934
Liabilities		
Non-current liabilities		
Long term loan	50,787,450	73,305,197
Long term lease liabilities	593,820	557,568
Asset retirement obligation	811,813	780,136
Deferred tax liabilities	24,644,492	24,814,395
Deferred revenue	880,348	1,078,882
Derivative financial instruments	137,837	-
Total non-current liabilities	77,855,760	100,536,178
Current liabilities		
Current portion of long term loan	23,517,264	27,780,298
Trade and other payables	6,810,040	9,002,051
Current tax payable	3,794,786	3,272,238
Total current liabilities	34,122,090	40,054,587
Total liabilities	111,977,850	140,590,765
Total equity and liabilities	273,027,811	288,368,699
Net assets per share	0.169	0.155

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014-LB CB No. 1977207

Aramco-DHL joint venture ASMO set to transform future supply chain

Dammam, Saudi Arabia - German logistics company DHL and Saudi energy giant Aramco have formed a joint venture seeking to shape the future of logistics supply chain.

At a ceremony last week in the eastern Saudi city of Dammam, the new joint venture called ASMO (Advanced Supply Management Operations) was revealed as a new procurement and logistics services hub.

The joint company aims to further streamline supply chain processes in a sustainable and efficient way, said executives from the companies involved.

'ASMO is envisioned to meet the growing demand for more sustainable and efficient supply chain services in Saudi Arabia, while at the same time reflecting the expanding market potential of the region as a global trade gateway for the energy, chemical, and industrial sectors,' said a post-ceremony press release.

'In a world challenged by supply shortages, logistics disruptions, and rising costs, ASMO is poised to emerge as a regional supply chain hub, covering supply chain services from procurement to logistics, warehousing, and even a B2B e-marketplace for customers,' it added.

Hendrik Venter, the CEO of DHL Supply Chain in Europe, the



ASMO was revealed as a new procurement and logistics services hub during a ceremony in Dammam

Middle East, and Africa, gave an exclusive interview to Anadolu Agency on the new venture's aims and ambitions.

"Three-and-a-half years ago, senior management from Aramco and DHL got together and discussed using Aramco's ecosystem, specifically their technology and technological expertise in the fuel technologies combined with DHL as the global logistics leader," he said.

Venter said Saudi Arabia's goal of becoming a logistics hub also contributed to the founding of the joint venture. He stressed that they want to provide small, medium and local companies, in addition to global customers, "the opportunity to have access to vetted and qualified suppliers with ethically sourced products."

"With that, these companies will have access to procurement efficiencies, in addition to an

end-to-end supply chain management service. By having more efficient and effective procurement practices, they can do away with unnecessary excess stocks, freeing up capital so that they can focus on their own businesses," Venter added, pledging that a more streamlined supply chain will "also drive down carbon emissions."

"ASMO will be focusing on energy, but also on the chemical

and the industrial sectors. We will also focus on spare parts, including valves, pipes, bolts, and anything else whose supply chain can be more streamlined, thus resulting in an improvement in carbon emissions," he added.

"This will be a significant overlap in the products which these companies use. So, if you can combine all of that volume and scale, you provide better procurement practices for every-

body," he stressed.

The executive also stressed the significance of "backhaul kilometers," adding that trucks should return to their point of origin fully loaded so that energy efficiency and workload is optimized in the best way possible.

Use of AI crucial

Venter also said that advanced technologies, especially artificial intelligence (AI), will play a pivotal role in the operations of ASMO.

"ASMO will certainly use a tremendous amount of data, capabilities of AI, robotics and other technologies," he said.

"If we can use the data more effectively, we can improve forecasting, we can improve anticipation and planning and it could therefore have benefits in terms of sustainability and effectiveness of end-to-end supply chain management," Venter said.

"We will also use automation and robotics," he added, saying that "robotics will work alongside humans, which will have added value."

"We will use technology and robotics to do repetitive tasks, heavy lifting, and potentially dangerous activities. Those will be done by technology and robotics while the human aspect will continue to add value," he said.

US budget deficit set to grow by \$1tn in next decade

Washington, US - The US budget deficit is expected to increase by \$1tn in the next decade, according to a report by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO).

The federal budget deficit is projected to grow from \$1.6tn in fiscal year 2024 to \$2.6tn in 2034, it said.

"Deficits also expand in relation to the size of the economy, from 5.6% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024, when the collection of certain postponed tax payments temporarily boosts revenues, to 6.1% of GDP in 2025," said the report that was released Wednesday.

"In 2026 and 2027, revenues increase faster than outlays, causing the deficit to shrink to 5.2% of GDP by 2027. Thereafter, outlays rise faster than revenues," it added.

The Congressional Budget Office said it expects the deficit to return to 6.1% of GDP by 2034, significantly larger than the 3.7% that deficits have averaged in the past 50 years.

Agencies

Renewables to account for 65% of India's energy mix by 2030: Minister

New Delhi, India - About 44% of India's energy requirements at present come from non-fossil sources and are likely to touch as high as 65% by 2030, much higher than what the country pledged at the COP summit in 2021, said Union Minister RK Singh.

At COP26 held in 2021 in Glasgow, India committed to an ambitious five-part "Panchamrit" pledge. They included reaching 500GW of non-fossil electricity capacity, generating half of all energy requirements from renewables, to reducing emissions by 1bn tonnes by 2030.

India as a whole also aims to reduce the emissions intensity of GDP by 45%. Finally, India commits to net-zero emissions by 2070.

"At COP26 we pledged that by 2030 we will have 50% of our capacity which will be non-fossils, mostly renewables. If fact it would be actually 60-65%. We will be way beyond what we pledged," the minister who handles power and renewable portfolio said at The Energy and Resources Institute's World Sustainable Development Summit 2024 on Friday evening.

The minister said that



103,000 megawatts of renewable capacity is under construction in India and 71,000 megawatts is under bidding process

103,000 megawatts of renewable capacity is under construction in India, and 71,000 megawatts is under bid, which according to him was unmatched.

"Our rate and speed and scale of the energy transition is per-

haps unmatched. We are the only one who is issuing bids for round-the-clock renewable energy. We are the only country that is adding storage as a mission to bring the price of storage down," he said.

India's per capita emission is

one of lowest at 2.0-2.6 tonnes, against the world average of 6.8 tonnes, he asserted.

"Developed countries have become developed by using fossil fuels. 77% of the legacy carbon dioxide load on our planet earth was caused directly by them, which has led to the rise in global temperature."

Whereas India with 17% of the global population contributes to just 3% of the legacy carbon dioxide load, he said.

ANI

China's fast deflation poses risks for investors globally

London, UK - China, the world's second-largest economy, is facing significant economic headwinds as consumer prices experience the fastest decline in 15 years which could impact investors around the world.

This is the stark warning from Nigel Green, the CEO of deVere Group, one of the world's largest independent financial advisory and asset management organisations.

It comes as the consumer price index fell 0.8% year-on-year in January, according to official statistics released on Thursday, the fourth consecutive month of declines and the biggest contraction since 2009.

In a press statement, Green said, "The latest data suggests that deflation could be becoming entrenched in the world's second largest economy and that raises red flags for investors globally."

"The impact can be expected to reverberate across various sectors, prompting a re-evaluation of investment strategies."

He continued, "Prolonged deflation in China poses a threat to its manufacturing and export sectors, key drivers of the nation's economic growth, and sectors often favoured by



international investors.

"The deflationary trend in China could also weigh heavily on commodities and industries dependent on natural resources. A slowdown in Chinese demand for raw materials may impact global commodity prices, affecting investors in sectors such as mining, energy, and agriculture. Companies relying on exports to China for their commodities may experience decreased sales, impacting global investors with exposure to these markets."

"In addition, those with stakes in Chinese tech companies and global technology funds could see diminished returns as these sectors face the possibility of re-

duced funding and a more challenging business environment.

"Falling prices and reduced confidence may also lead to decreased demand for consumer goods, retail and housing and commercial properties as markets adjust to changing economic conditions."

In an article this week for Asia Times, Nigel Green writes that policies from Beijing will be crucial in pulling China out of the current situation.

The cumulative effect of three years of economic downturn, erasing a staggering \$7tn of value, "demands a departure from the smaller measures," he notes.

China pledges measures to boost domestic consumption this year

Beijing, China - China will introduce a raft of measures, such as stimulating purchases of vehicles and household appliances, to boost consumption this year, a commerce ministry official said.

"Automobiles, household appliances and home furnishing are the focus of traditional consumption and are closely related to people's lives," Vice Minister of Commerce Sheng Qiuping told a press conference.

China will work to promote vehicle trade-ins this year due to the great demand among people

and the potential for replacement, Sheng said.

Last year, China's new car sales exceeded 30mn units for the first time, up 12% year-on-year.

The country's second-hand car trading volume reached 18.41mn units in 2023, an increase of nearly 15%.

Car ownership has reached 340mn in China, ranking first in the world, according to the vice minister.

China will also encourage the renovation of old houses and the



replacement of home appliances, as part of a package of measures to bolster domestic demand.

On top of that, China will spur new forms of consumption, such as cross-border e-commerce, new energy vehicles (NEVs) and China-chic products, to unleash consumption potential, Sheng added.

Sufficient supplies

China has ramped up efforts to ensure adequate supply of necessities during the upcoming Spring Festival holiday, which

runs from February 10 to 17.

There are sufficient inventories of daily necessities in wholesale markets across the country, while supermarket inventories of necessities have increased by 10% to 30% more than usual, Sheng said. He added that major e-commerce platforms will continue to provide delivery services during the holiday season.

Market prices are also generally stable. On Monday, the average wholesale prices of grain, edible oil, beef and mutton in the country's 100 large-scale whole-

sale markets remained unchanged from the beginning of the month.

The prices of pork and eggs rose 2.1% and 0.7% respectively, while vegetable prices showed a seasonal increase, according to the vice minister. As the Spring Festival draws near, major shopping malls, supermarkets and online platforms are seeing robust sales. In late January, sales of retail enterprises tracked by the ministry increased by 19.9% month on month.

Xinhua

Arabian Gulf influenced Sadaf Edition of Range Rover launched in Abu Dhabi

The Range Rover SV Bespoke Sadaf Edition – a breathtaking example of bespoke curation inspired by the heritage of the Arabian Gulf – has been revealed to an exclusive audience at Range Rover House in Abu Dhabi.

Set along the spectacular shores of the Arabian Gulf, Range Rover House provided the ideal backdrop for the SV Bespoke Sadaf Edition, allowing select guests to experience the essence of Range Rover and enjoy a curated luxury experience.

Influenced by the region's long association with the Arabian Gulf and seaborne trade, the Range Rover SV Bespoke Sadaf Edition's unique colour combination is inspired by the long, rich tradition of pearl diving, an integral part of the history and culture of the region.

Professor Gerry McGovern OBE, Chief Creative Officer, JLR, said, "Taking inspiration from the heritage of the Arabian Gulf the Range Rover SV Sadaf edition is a sublime example of Range Rover's peerless DNA; beautifully crafted, understated and highly desirable."

Range Rover designers took inspiration from the unique colours of the natural pearls and the seashells that contain them to create the Range Rover Bespoke SV Sadaf Edition. An exclusive 'glass pearl flake' white gloss exterior paint, inspired by the white of seashells, provides a deep and sophisticated finish,



A sophisticated pearlescent white exterior and deep blue interior of the new Range Rover SV Bespoke reflect and celebrate the heritage of the region

paired with a pearlescent contrast roof that complements the seashell-toned exterior colour and 23-inch Diamond Turned SV wheels with gloss dark grey contrast and matching inserts. On the bonnet, beautifully sophisticated two-piece hand crafted metal script badging is finished in

24k gold and black chrome, for a jewellery-like finish.

Inside, a bespoke interior has been meticulously crafted in duo-tone leather, featuring semi-aniline Perlino front seats, while the upper section of the dashboard and the rear seats are covered in Liberty Blue near-aniline

leather that reflect the blue colour of the Arabian Gulf. Natural Cream Ash Burr veneer with contrasting stitching and bespoke embroidery highlight the exclusivity of the vehicle. The treadplates feature the 'Sadaf Edition' wordmark alongside a '1 of 20' designation.

Bruce Robertson, Managing Director of JLR MENA said: "The Middle East is one of the most important markets for JLR and Range Rover. Our clients in the region have a unique taste and know exactly what they are looking for in a vehicle that fits their lifestyle. The Range Rover SV Bespoke Sadaf Edition not only shows that we listen to our clients and strive to satisfy their discerning tastes, but also it truly exemplifies the capabilities of SV Bespoke and demonstrates how we can go above and beyond their expectations".

The Range Rover SV Bespoke Sadaf Edition is powered by Range Rover's 615ps V8 twin-turbo mild hybrid petrol engine. It is exclusively available for sale in the Middle East region with production limited to just 20 units. Heightening its exclusivity, clients will receive a custom-made sculpture, designed by renowned Emirati conceptual designer and sculptor Matar Bin Lahej, who gained worldwide fame for his design and calligraphy work that wraps the Museum of the Future building in Dubai.

Range Rover House is a unique destination held at the Anantara Santorini Abu Dhabi, an exclusive new destination in Abu Dhabi set to open its doors in mid-February 2024.

Rozana Hotel Muscat celebrates anniversary

Rozana Hotel Muscat, part of Castle Tourism Hotel Management LLC celebrated its second anniversary this year basking in the glory of several achievements during the last two years.

'Over the past two years, we have achieved significant milestones and growth, establishing ourselves as a trusted and innovative player in the hospitality industry,' the hotel management said in a statement.

Since our inception in 2021, Rozana Hotel has been committed to serve the ultimate hospitality services and quality products to our cliental. 'Our success is attributed to the dedication of our talented team and the unwavering support of our valued customers and partners.'

'In the past year, we have achieved targeted revenue, occupancy and guest experience, highlighting our commitment to excellence and continuous improvement.' Looking ahead, Rozana is poised for further growth and innovation.

The management revealed that the hotel has 'exciting plans in the pipeline including up-coming new property associates with International operators. We remain committed to delivering exceptional value to our clients and contributing positively to our industry'.

'As we celebrate this milestone, we hope for many more years of success, collaboration, and innovation,' it added.



Helping Hands provides catering services for The Chedi Muscat staff

Helping Hands, a leading ISO-certified catering services provider, is delighted to announce its recent agreement with The Chedi Muscat to offer exclusive catering services to its hotel staff.

This strategic collaboration signifies a valuable addition to Helping Hands' expanding portfolio of hospitality clients, a release said.

Renowned for its state-of-the-art kitchen facilities and a team of seasoned professionals, Helping Hands is a part of the Khimji Ramdas Group, and has emerged as the preferred catering partner for leading hotels and resorts in the sultanate.

The agreement with The Chedi Muscat underlines Helping Hands' commitment to delivering top-notch services to diverse clientele within the hospitality sector.

Catering to the entire staff of The Chedi, comprising individuals from various nationalities with unique dietary requirements, Helping Hands has meticulously crafted an extensive menu.

The aim is to provide a culinary experience that caters to diverse tastes, ensuring that the staff anticipates and enjoys their meals each day.

Nama Water team visits Al Ansab Wetland to spread awareness on World Wetland Day

Nama Water Services (NWS) participated in celebrating World Wetland Day as part of the company's commitment to achieving the goals of preserving the environment, which helps reduce carbon emissions and achieve zero neutrality.

The company celebrates this occasion, which falls on February 2 of each year, and the celebration stems from the principle of emphasising the importance of wetlands and making the environment healthy and balanced.

A team from the NWS visited Al Ansab Wetland in the presence of their CEO Qais bin Saud al Zakwani.

"Today we celebrate our participation in this important event, which highlights the interconnection between wetlands and human well-being, through various activities and volunteer work with the participation of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat and the Basmatna Gur Voluntary Team," said Salem bin Musalam al Saadi, Environment Wetland Manager, following the visit.



Saadi spoke about the international importance of the Ansab wetland, and stressed that it occupies an international status and are considered wetlands under the Ramsar Wetlands Convention, which is the oldest global agreement in the field of the environment and reflects the Company's efforts and

represents great importance in preserving the environment and sustainable use of wetlands and their natural wealth."

"Celebrating this day aims to raise awareness about the important role played by wetland, which are considered a vital habitat for diverse plants and birds, which enhances biodiversity and contributes to the environmental balance in the region," he added. During the celebration, opportunities in Al Ansab Wetland were discussed, and the most prominent components of the lakes were identified, which work to contribute to preserving wildlife and enhance environmental awareness.

Board of Indian schools organises training for admin staff

The management of Indian schools on Saturday organised a training programme on 'Effective Business Communication and Office Etiquette' for the admin staff of Indian Schools in Oman, a release stated.

The training programme was conducted at the Indian School Muscat to equip the staff with the 21st century skills required for effective management of their offices, the release added.

Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools Oman, while inaugurating the training programme, applauded the yeoman service rendered by the admin staff.

"Your contributions are essential in creating an environ-



ment conducive to effective teaching and learning. Without your organisational skills and attention to detail, the administrative aspects of running a school

would be difficult," he said.

Recognising the role of non-teaching staff in schools is crucial for fostering a culture of appreciation and respect. Their efforts

often go unnoticed or undervalued, but they are the backbone of a well-functioning educational institution. The Indian School Board provide adequate training,

support, and professional development opportunities to non-teaching staff to enhance their skills and job satisfaction, ensuring they can continue to con-

tribute effectively.

The training programme was facilitated by Dr Binu James Mathew, a certified trainer with a vast experience of having conducted over 150 training courses across higher educational institutions, corporates and other organisations.

The programme organised for the Indian Schools admin staff included hands-on training on written and spoken communication, time management, emotional intelligence, integrity, and confidentiality. The main objective of this program is to enhance the interpersonal skills of the non-teaching staff which will help them to deal with all stakeholders effectively.

Economy
Forum held
at InstOG

Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Bussaidi, the Governor of Muscat, sponsored the opening ceremony of the Innovation and Knowledge-Based Economy Forum at Oman Institute for Oil and Gas (InstOG).

The event was organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation within the activities of the Oman Innovation Festival in Muscat last Tuesday.

The purpose of holding this forum was to create a sustainable platform, create a positive and supportive environment for innovators, enhance communication and institutional cooperation, and create an effective partnership between the concerned entities that support the activation of the innovation system.

As well as enhancing methods of investment and financing in the field of innovation to supply the market with innovative services and products. This forum is an interactive forum that provides best practices in the field of innovation.

Badr Al Samaa organises CME on
advancements in orthopaedics

Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, largest private healthcare group of Oman, organised a special programme Continuing Medical Education (CME) focused on the latest advancements in orthopaedics.

This educational initiative - under the banner of Badr Treatment Abroad, a facilitation wing focusing on ensuring advanced treatments are done in Oman and provide assistance in treatment abroad - aimed to provide healthcare professionals with valuable insights into emerging trends, innovative treatments, and best practices in orthopaedic care.

The CME was attended by managing directors of Badr Al Samaa - Abdul Latheef Uppala and Dr P A Mohammed; executive director Moideen Bilal; guests of honour Professor Jalaluddeen M V and Dr Ahmed Rizwan CM, senior management of Badr Al Samaa, and doctors.

In his welcome note, Moideen Bilal said that Badr Al Samaa has the vision of providing every advanced medical treatment in Oman and “we are taking all possible initiatives to



ensure that such services are made available here in Oman”.

Four well qualified and renowned orthopaedicians from India presented various topics in the CME and shared their successful cases.

Dr Latheesh Leo, orthopaedic oncology surgeon, presented his paper on ‘Hand and Microsurgery: beginning with the end in mind’.

Dr Sandeep Shibli, paediatric orthopaedic surgeon presented

on ‘Paediatric Orthopaedics: Pushing beyond boundaries’.

Dr Hashir Safwan U, spine and scoliosis surgeon presented on ‘Uncomplicating the Curve: Scoliosis’.

Dr Navaneeth S Kamath, orthopaedic oncology surgeon presented on ‘Then & Now: Limb Salvage in Orthopaedic Oncology’ All the sessions were followed by interactive sessions and had good participation from the doctors present.

Managing directors of Badr Al Samaa - Abdul Latheef Uppala and Dr P A Mohammed - in a joint statement said that Badr Al Samaa under its Badr Treatment Abroad program has a vision that the people of Oman requiring high end surgical interventions need not to travel abroad, Badr Al Samaa will felicitate the process of making the best surgeons across the world and advanced technology available within Oman to add to the convenience and cost saving for the deserving patients.

Guests of honour Professor Jalaluddeen M V and Dr Ahmed Rizwan CM jointly stated that the orthopaedics surgery and many other medical specialties have evolved a lot in recent years and expressed happiness in collaborating with Badr Al Samaa to introduce these advancements in Oman and benefit the patients who are otherwise required to wait for long time or have to

travel abroad for such treatments.

Dr Ranjan Babu, Dr Umer Farook and Dr Rakesh Hareendran, specialist orthopaedicians from Badr Al Samaa introduced the speakers. Sofi Showkat was the anchor and Sameer PT, CEO presented the thank you note.

Orthopaedic medicine continues to evolve rapidly, with new techniques, technologies, and treatments constantly reshaping the field.

Oman Oil hosts ‘Tmakon’ youth programme

Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) celebrated the conclusion of its ‘Tmakon’ programme with a graduation ceremony of 50 shortlisted Omani freelancers held under the auspices of H E Sheikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Undersecretary for Labour in the Ministry of Labour.

Launched in 2023 in partnership with the Youth Center, Tmakon equipped 300 young Omani freelancers in different fields with the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to create and innovate and run a business successfully.

“The completion of our Tmakon programme marks a significant step in empowering the next generation of business leaders, innovators and visionary entrepreneurs. OOMCO is delighted by these achievements and to be part of their future success,” said Khamis al Shuaibi, general manager Shared Services at Oman Oil Marketing Company.



“We recognise the important role that the next generation will play in the development and diversification of our national economy and engaging and supporting creative Omani youth to fulfil their potential will have a profound positive impact across our communities. We are proud of the accomplishments of our graduates and look forward to witnessing their continued success in the years to come.”

The year-long Tmakon programme worked with Omani freelancers with a track record of good performance, potential entrepreneurs with unique business ideas and emerging Omani start-ups with viable project proposals.

The programme was managed by the Youth Center, an incubator that aims to support young people in recognising their talent, developing, and honing their skill sets, and unleashing their original thinking.

Tmakon is part of the ‘Empower’ social responsibility programme and reflects OOMCO’s dedication to CSR and its ongoing contributions to the development of Oman’s workforce. SME development is one of Oman Oil Marketing Company’s main CSR pillars, and by investing in the professional growth of young talents, OOMCO aims to build a skilled and knowledgeable workforce that will play a crucial role in shaping the future of the energy sector in the sultanate.

A new initiative - Experience Hub - aims to develop diverse essential skills and relevant experiences in partnership with the Ministry of Labour.



BSM ward honoured
for highest marks in
Oman by Pearson

Pearson glorified a student of Bangladesh School Muscat (BSM) for attaining highest marks in Oman, in the last Edexcel-Pearson International Advanced Subsidiary examination.

Mikaella Cupalao, student of commerce stream of the school, was given a special certificate, ‘outstanding Pearson Learner Awards’, for scoring highest marks in Economics in Oman, topper in the country ranking with 164 out of 200 UMS (Uniform Mark Scale) mark.

BSM also organised a special event to celebrate the outstanding performance of Mikaella. She was given academic excellence award by the school on the occasion of 53rd victory day celebration of Bangladesh. A distinct event was organised in the school’s multipurpose hall to celebrate both the glorious achievements. While expressing her ceaseless cheerfulness, Mikaella thanked the school authority for their whole-hearted caring to keep the students on the right track towards the success. She expressed heartfelt gratitude to her economics teacher as well.

“I am substantially satisfied with my results and from what I have achieved. At the same time, my parents are delighted with my standardized test scores and are proud of my achievements. With their emotional support, I was able to study under the strand I am most comfortable with and accomplished great feats,” said Mikaella.

“I have been a student of Tayabul Haque and he has been a great help to my journey with Edexcel International exams. I have achieved excellent marks and scored remarkably from being his student. My heartfelt gratitude to him and my favorite BSM as well for wholehearted support of the authority.”

Engineer Kazi Emdad Hossain, the chairman of Bangladesh schools in Sultanate of Oman, congratulated Mikaella for soaring the school flag in the sky. He also thanked Md Tayabul Haque, head of economics department, for his effective and efficient endeavor towards his students.

In his welcome speech, he said, “As the chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to express my boundless happiness on behalf of the entire school on this glorious accomplishment! We are really proud of you, my dear Mikaella; you have made us great! Keep it up and establish yourself a role model for other students. I also thank Tayabul Haque, our economics teacher for his devotion.”

Along with other members of the board of directors, principal and concerned teachers, students of senior section and invited guests attended in the event to celebrate the glory.

Indian Schools Film Fest comes to an end in style

The fifth edition of the Indian Schools Film Fest (ISFF), an annual event organised under the aegis of the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman, came to an end with a grand Valedictory Function held at Indian School Al Seeb auditorium on January 28.

Mahfoudha Mubarak al Aaraimi, Director General for Labour, Muscat governorate graced the function as chief guest.

Lal Jose, renowned south Indian film director, producer and actor was the celebrity guest on the occasion. Dr Sivakumar Manickam, chairman, Board of Directors, Indian Schools Oman presided over the function, a release stated.

The programme was attended by vice chairman Shameer P T K, director in charge Nidheesh Kumar, director of the board Vijay Saravanan, senior principal and education advisor Vinobha M P, school management committee (SMC) president Krishnan Raman, besides the regular members of the SMC, principals, teachers and students of different Indian schools in



Oman. This 5th edition of ISFF with the tagline ‘Imagine, Ignite, Influence’ had an array of genres such as Short Film, Animated Film, HSE Video Creation, Ad Making, Reels, Travelogue, and Educational Movie for the students and facilitators to unleash the spark of their ingenuity.

SMC president Krishnan Raman welcomed the august gathering and spoke about the educational significance of the Film Fest.

Dr Manickam underscored the significance of the Film Fest in his address. “The purpose of the film fest organised by the Indian School Board is to give a hands on experience to our students on the nuances and techniques of film making and to make them aware of the numerous avenues open to them in this domain.”

Dr Manickam lauded the efforts of Indian School Al Seeb in harnessing maximum participation for the event.

Principal Dr Leena Francis gave a presentation compiling the exciting phases and vibes of the film fest and threw light on the acumen and creativity of the participants.

Is Senegal on the brink of political turmoil?

Johannesburg, South Africa - Protests erupted in Senegal on Sunday after President Macky Sall announced the indefinite postponement of elections that had been scheduled for February 25.

Police fired tear gas at protesters and arrested opposition leaders, including former Prime Minister Aminata Toure. Several protesters were also detained.

But during a tense parliamentary session on Monday, the National Assembly passed a law in support of postponing the presidential election until December 15, leading to further riots.

Some opposition lawmakers were forcibly removed from the assembly before the vote, leaving many to question the current state of Senegal's long-praised track record as a bastion of democracy in West Africa.

According to Sall, one of the reasons for election delay was to address objections to the dis-



Supporters of opposition presidential candidates set tires on fire as they gather at the Saint-Lazare intersection following the indefinite postponement of presidential election in Dakar, Senegal on February 4 (Anadolu Agency)

qualification of several opposition candidates that could affect the credibility of the polls.

Last month, a constitutional council removed several opposition candidates from the election.

With his second term expiring on April 2, Sall, 62, has vowed not

to seek another as this would violate the country's constitutional limit.

Tensions growing

South Africa-based political analyst Edwin Yingi told Anadolu that, Sall's decision to postpone

the election, besides violating the Constitution, risked arousing suspicions of a bigger scheme to extend his power into a third term.

"That's why the opposition and its supporters are now not listening to his explanations," explained Yingi, a postdoctoral fel-

low at the department of political sciences at the University of South Africa.

He noted that until recently, Senegal had been seen by the international community as a democratic oasis in West Africa - a country that has avoided military coups even as juntas seized power in many of its neighbours. But perceptions could change if

events in Senegal are the build-up of years of public frustration.

These, he said, came to a head, last year in July when violent protests after prominent opposition leader Ousmane Sonko was arrested and charged with plotting an insurrection a week after he had been convicted for immoral behaviour and sentenced to two years.

Democratic spaces have been shrinking with the government clamping down on protesters and arresting opposition leaders

YINGI

democracy keeps losing ground, warned Yingi.

"Of late, democratic spaces have been shrinking in the country, with the government clamping down on protesters and arresting opposition leaders."

Yingi argued that recent

Authorities responded with tear gas, suspending Internet access, and sweeping arrests of protesters.

According to Yingi, young people in Senegal are also frustrated with high unemployment and want to see more jobs cre-

ated, thus joining the protests.

Political turmoil

Buchanan Ismael, a political scientist at the University of Rwanda, warns that if the current situation is not handled with care, Senegal could descend into political turmoil.

"I believe that Senegalese people, including politicians, need to sit down and give a chance to dialogue, if they want to have a credible election and also to come out with a new agenda for their elections," he told Anadolu.

Ismael believes delaying the polls might allow some opposition candidates who had been excluded from running in the election to get their names back on the ballot.

Some of the prominent candidates excluded in the race include, Ousmane Sonko and Karim Wade, son of former President Abdoulaye Wade.

Anadolu Agency



Colombia announces start of peace talks with FARC dissident faction

Bogota, Colombia - The Colombian government announced on Friday the beginning of peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissident rebel faction known as the Segunda Marquetalia.

The announcement was made by Otty Patino, Colombian High Commissioner for Peace, and dissident FARC leader Ivan Marquez.

"We agree on the need to carry out an orderly, agile, rigorous, and respectful peace process, which provides tranquillity and certainty to Colombian society in the genuine commitment to political solution and peacebuilding," according to a joint statement.

The armed group vowed not to carry out kidnappings for extortion purposes and

made plans to create border peace zones to stimulate economies.

"The Segunda Marquetalia reiterates its commitment, expressed in the founding Manifesto of August 2019, to completely stop abductions for economic purposes," it said.

The armed group, made up of combatants who left the 2016 peace agreement and took up arms again, is believed to have 1,663 fighters and is considered the hard wing of the dissident factions.

Marquez was the FARC chief negotiator for peace talks held with the government of Juan Manuel Santos in Havana, which concluded with the signing of the peace agreement.

Anadolu Agency

US museum returns looted artefacts to Ghana

Accra, Ghana - The Fowler Museum in Los Angeles, California has returned seven royal artefacts to Ghana's Ashanti king, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, in a ceremony that marks a significant step towards the repatriation of cultural treasures looted during colonial times.

The Thursday handover coincided with the king's silver jubilee, making it a doubly momentous occasion for the Ashanti people of the West African nation.

The returned artefacts include a black gold necklace, a royal gold crown, and a stool, which were looted by British troops during the Sagrenti War in 1874 and eventually found their way to the museum on the campus of the University of California.

The return of these items represents a small but meaningful step towards correcting the historical injustices inflicted on indigenous cultures by colonial powers.

Otumfuo Osei Tutu II expressed his gratitude for the return of the artifacts, acknowledging the significance of the gesture for the Ashanti people.

"What just happened confirms what occurred so many years ago when the British attacked us and looted our treasures," Otumfuo Osei Tutu II said



Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Ghana's Asante king, receives artefacts returned by the Fowler Museum of UCLA to the Manhyia Palace in Kumasi, Ghana, on Thursday

at the ceremony.

"Let's remain united to bring about peace and development in the kingdom," he added, stressing the importance of unity in the face of historical adversity.

The return of the artefacts is part of a broader effort to repa-

triate looted treasures, with a second batch of 32 items set to arrive from leading cultural institutions in the United Kingdom, including the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum, in April.

Anadolu Agency

LIT UP IN RED



Tokyo Tower is lit up in red to celebrate the upcoming Chinese Lunar New Year, or Spring Festival, in Tokyo, Japan, on Friday (Xinhua)

Spillover of Myanmar conflict strikes

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Haunted by the roar of gunfire and mortar blasts, Abdul Gafur strains to recall the last time such violence shattered the peace near his home in a southeastern Bangladesh border village.

Life in Modhampara, nestled on the Ghumdhum border with Myanmar, has always been precarious, but the current escalation feels different.

"It's like the sky itself is raining down on us," Gafur told Anadolu, his voice heavy with despair. "The relentless sound of gunfire is unbearable. We can't stay here any longer."

For the past several weeks, Bangladesh's border with Myanmar has become a battleground for the Southeast Asian nation's military, known locally as the Tatmadaw, and an armed group known as the Arakan Army. Stray mortar shells and gunfire have forced Bangladeshi villagers in the border areas of Bandarban and Cox's Bazar districts to abandon their homes and seek



refuge.

In nearby Jalpaituli, where two villagers have been killed by a mortar shell from the other side of the border, the exodus has begun as terrified families flee their bamboo and tarpaulin homes.

As they seek refuge in government shelters, they must take the single winding road connect-

ing these villages through the hills, but also leading to the volatile border, a stark reminder of the conflict.

Taking refuge in one of these shelters, Nur Jahan, a woman in her sixties, feels a deep injustice. "Police brought us here, saying it's unsafe near the border," she sighs. "But why must we leave our homes? This fight isn't ours."

Around a dozen schools in the border areas have already shut down indefinitely. Ferry services from Teknaf to the tourist hotspot of Saint Martin's Island have also been halted over security concerns. Tourists stranded on the island are scrambling for ways to return to the mainland.

Anadolu Agency

Saudi Arabia calls for ‘urgent’ UNSC meeting to prevent invasion of Rafah

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia warned on Saturday of the repercussions of a possible Israeli incursion into the city of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, the last refuge for displaced Palestinians, according to Saudi Press Agency.

“The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has warned of the extremely dangerous repercussions of storming and targeting the city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, which is the last refuge for hundreds of thousands of civilians forced to flee by the brutal Israeli aggression,” the agency reported.

It added that Saudi Arabia affirmed ‘its categorical rejection and strong condemnation of their forced deportation’.

The kingdom renewed ‘its demand for the necessity of an immediate cease-fire’, noting that ‘this continued violation of international law confirms the necessity for the UN Security Council to urgently convene to prevent Israel from causing an imminent humanitarian catastrophe for which everyone who supports the aggression bears responsibility’. The Israeli army is preparing a ground military operation in heavily-populated Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, amid plans to evacuate residents before the launch, Israeli media reports said on Friday.

Rafah is the last refuge for the displaced in the Gaza Strip. It is now home to more than 1,400,000 Palestinians, including



A Palestinian mother feeds her child near a makeshift tent as the Palestinian families seek refuge at the El-Mavasi district in Rafah, Gaza on Friday (Anadolu Agency)

1,300,000 displaced people from other governorates, according to the Gaza Government Media Office. Since the start of the Israeli onslaught against Gaza on October 7, Israel ordered residents in northern and central Gaza to evacuate toward the southern part of the enclave, leading to the

current overcrowded conditions in the south, especially in Rafah.

117 killed in last 24 hours

At least 117 Palestinians were killed in the Gaza Strip in the last 24 hours, taking the death toll in Israeli onslaught on the besieged

enclave to more than 28,000, the territory’s Health Ministry said on Saturday.

“The Israeli occupation committed 16 massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 117 martyrs and 152 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.”

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since the October 7 cross-border attack by Hamas, which Tel Aviv says killed nearly 1,200 people. The attacks have killed more 28,064 people, mostly

women and children, and wounded 67,611 others.

The offensive has also left 85 per cent of Gaza’s population internally displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicine, while most of the enclave’s infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed.

The International Court of Justice in a provisional ruling mandated Israel to prevent genocidal attacks in Gaza, but it has continued with the assault.

‘Humanitarian catastrophe’

Germany on Saturday said an Israeli attack on Rafah in Gaza would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe.

“The plight in Rafah is already incredible. 1.3mn people are seeking protection from the fighting in a very small area. An offensive by the Israeli army on Rafah would be a humanitarian catastrophe in the making. The people in Gaza cannot disappear into thin air,” German Foreign Minister Annalena Bearbock said on X.

“Israel must defend itself against Hamas terror, but at the same time alleviate the suffering of the civilian population as much as possible,” she stressed.

Against this backdrop, another pause to the fighting is needed, Bearbock said, adding she would discuss the matter again next week in Israel.

Meanwhile, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric on Friday voiced concern over Israeli premier’s plan for civilian evacuation from Rafah in southern Gaza.

“We are extremely worried about the fate of civilians in Rafah,” Dujarric told reporters in New York.

Anadolu Agency



Hillary Clinton

Protesters call Hillary Clinton ‘war criminal’

Istanbul, Turkey - Pro-Palestinian protesters on Friday interrupted former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s speech at the Columbia University, and called her a ‘war criminal’.

“Hillary Diane Rodham Clinton, you are a war criminal! The people of Libya, the people of Iraq, the people of Syria, the people of Yemen, the people of Palestine as well as the people of America will never forgive you,” a man shouted during her address, according to videos circulating on social media.

While the protester was removed from the lecture hall, he continued to chant: “Free, free Palestine” and “You will burn.”

The ex-first lady then attempted to commence her speech on sexual violence related to conflicts, saying: “Yelling doesn’t solve the problem,” only to be disrupted by another protester.

However, she attempted to speak above the protester’s disruption, but eventually abandoned her efforts as more individuals joined in. “People are free to protest, but they are not free to disrupt events or classes and that is going to be the standards that we follow here and going forward,” she said.

Anadolu Agency

US Senate passes US\$95bn for Ukraine, Israel

Houston, US - The US Senate voted late on Friday to push a US\$95.3bn funding package for Ukraine and Israel closer to passage.

Senators voted 64 - 19 in a bipartisan effort to move forward with the bill, which would provide US\$60bn in defence aid for Ukraine in the war against Russia, US\$14bn in defence for Israel in the war versus Hamas, US\$9bn for humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza, the West Bank and Ukraine, and US\$4.8bn to support allies in the Indo-Pacific, according to multiple media outlets.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the vote ‘keeps the process of passing the emergency national security package moving forward on the Senate floor’.

His counterpart, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, urged fellow Republicans to advance the legislation to ‘provide for the common defence and equip the next commander-in-



Senators voted 64-19 in a bipartisan effort to move forward with the bill, which would provide US\$60bn in defence aid for Ukraine in the war against Russia, US\$14bn in defence for Israel in the war versus Hamas

chief with the tools to exercise American strength’.

Some Senate Republicans are trying to add border security provisions to the funding bill that Schumer stripped from the package when it had to be reduced from its original proposal of US\$118bn.

“How can you be helping Ukraine with their invasion but not be helping America with its invasion?” said Senator Marco Rubio, who voted against advancing the bill, arguing that it failed to address the ‘invasion’ of millions of migrants at the US-Mexico border.

Senator Mike Lee said it was ‘almost impossible to conceive’ that sending humanitarian aid to Gaza would not benefit the Palestinian resistance group, Hamas.

At least one amendment to the bill needs to be hashed out before the full Senate votes on the package.

If the measure clears the Senate, the Republican-led House of Representatives would then decide whether to introduce the bill to a full House vote for approval.

Palestine on Saturday called on Washington to take ‘concrete action’ to stop the Israeli ‘genocidal massacres’, as Tel Aviv is preparing to expand its ground offensive to Rafah.

Anadolu Agency

Israel strikes in central Lebanon

Beirut, Lebanon - Israel struck the coastal area of Wadi al-Zeina in central Lebanon on Saturday, causing casualties.

Witnesses said an Israeli airstrike targeted a vehicle in the Wadi al-Zeina area, Chouf district. More details and reactions were not immediately available.

This is the second time that Lebanon has seen bombing deep into its territory since the outbreak of conflict between Hezbollah and the Israeli army.

In early January, a raid targeted a meeting of Hamas leaders in the southern suburb of the capital Beirut, which led to the killing of Saleh Al-Arouri, the deputy head of the Hamas political bureau.

Anadolu Agency

52 countries to make statements at ICJ on Israel’s actions

The Hague, Netherlands - A total of 52 countries, including Turkey, and three international organizations, will make oral statements at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at a February 26 hearing on the legal consequences of Israel’s actions in occupied Palestinian territories, the top UN court said on Friday.

The ICJ announced the calendar of oral presentations in the advisory opinion to be given on the legal consequences of Israel’s acts in the Palestinian territories it has occupied, including East Jerusalem.

Accordingly, 52 states, including Turkey, as well as the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the African Union, will each make 30-minute oral presentations on

February 19-26.

The oral statements will begin with a presentation by Palestine on February 19 and conclude with the Maldives on the afternoon of February 26.

Turkey’s statement is set for Monday, February 26 at midday.

Advisory opinions not binding

The main duties of the ICJ include resolving legal disputes that arise between states in line with international law and providing advisory opinions on legal issues referred to it.

The UN court, at the request of the UN General Assembly, will issue a non-binding advisory opinion on the legal consequences of Israel’s policies and



acts in occupied Palestine on this issue.

The public hearings of the court at the Hague Peace Palace will be broadcast live.

This is the first time such a large number of states made written and oral statements to an advisory opinion before the court, while Israel, which made

written statements, did not take part in the oral hearings.

The ICJ’s advisory opinion is not related to a disputed case between two states, unlike the case filed by South Africa at the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Israel for violation of the Genocide Convention, but only Israel.

The oral statements will begin with a presentation by Palestine on February 19 and conclude with the Maldives on February 26

It contains the world court’s non-binding legal opinion on the legal liability of Israel’s occupation of Palestine.

World court opinion

In its resolution dated December 30, 2022, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee of the UN General Assembly asked:

“What are the legal consequences arising from Israel’s continuous violation of the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination, its prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation of the Palestinian territories it has occupied since 1967, including measures to change the demographic structure, character and status of Jerusalem, and its adoption of relevant discriminatory legislation and measures?”

The second question that the ICJ was asked to provide an advisory opinion on was: “How do the above-mentioned Israeli policies and actions affect the legal status of the occupation and what are the legal consequences of this status for all states and the UN?”

Anadolu Agency

Imran Khan's party claims victory in Pakistan's national elections

Islamabad, Pakistan - In a major political development, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has claimed that it has won 170 out of 265 National Assembly seats and is set to form an alliance with Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM), Pakistan-based The Nation reported on Saturday.

This comes even though the counting for the polls is underway and the independent candidates mostly backed by the PTI, have clinched victory on 100 seats.

PTI leader Barrister Gohar Khan alleged that there was an attempt to 'shape' the seats won by PTI into defeat. He also called on the party workers to protest outside the offices of Returning Officers (RO) tomorrow, where results got 'delayed', Dawn reported. Speaking to reporters on Saturday, he claimed that the PTI has won 170 National Assembly seats out of the 265 where elections were held.

"We claim with great certainty that right now, the PTI has achieved a lead on 170 seats of the National Assembly," Khan said. "Out of these, 94 are those that the ECP is admitting and has issued Form-47 (provisional results)." Gohar further said that 22 seats - including three of Islamabad, four of Sindh and the rest of Punjab - were those where, according to Form-45, the PTI had won but were 'converted to a defeat'.

He alleged that there was an



'apparent attempt to shape the winning seats of the PTI into defeats'. Notably, Imran Khan was disqualified from contesting the elections due to criminal convictions. The electoral symbol of the PTI was also taken away by the ECP, in a ruling later backed by the Pakistan apex court. As a result, the PTI leaders and supporters contested as independent candidates, Dawn reported.

According to the unofficial provisional results reported by Geo News on 255 out of 265 seats show the independent

candidates, mostly backed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) are leading on 100 seats, followed by PML-N and PPP at 73 and 54, respectively.

In the provisional results released by the Election Commission of Pakistan, the independents are leading on 91 seats, followed by PML-N and PPP at 71 and 54, respectively.

Barrister Gohar Ali Khan further said that people peacefully used their right to vote on February 8 on ex-premier Imran Khan's call, and it was ECP's 'constitu-

tional and legal responsibility' to declare polling results by 2am the next day and to 'explain the reasons if there was a delay.'

The PTI leader has also called on party workers and supporters to hold a protest on Sunday outside the offices of returning officers in constituencies where the poll results were being 'withheld and delayed'.

"According to (Imran) Khan sahib's instructions, the areas in which our results were withheld and delayed - we will share that list with you - and intentionally

our majority is being converted...to turn a winning seat into a defeat," Dawn quoted Gohar as saying.

"This is why, the areas in which the results were not declared, we will hold protests tomorrow in those constituencies outside the relevant RO offices," he added. He further added that the protest would be peaceful, urging party workers and supporters to protest 'according to the law', adding that it was a constitutional right.

ANI

Indian PM to visit UAE on February 13-14

New Delhi, India - Prime Minister Narendra Modi is to embark on a two-day official visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from February 13 during which he will inaugurate the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi, BAPS Mandir, and will also address the Indian diaspora.

The Ministry of External Affairs said in a press release that Modi will also hold a bilateral meeting with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and will also participate in the World Government Summit 2024.

This will be Modi's seventh visit to the UAE since 2015 and the third in the last eight months.

During the visit, the Indian and UAE leaders will discuss ways to further deepen, expand and strengthen the strategic partnership between the countries and exchange views on regional and international issues of mutual interest, the statement read.

Prime Minister Modi will also meet with Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and Defence Minister of UAE. He will participate in the World Government Sum-

mit 2024 to be held in Dubai as guest of honour and deliver a special keynote address at the Summit.

Modi will inaugurate the BAPS Mandir, the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi. He will also be addressing the Indian community in the UAE at an event in Zayed Sports city in Abu Dhabi.

According to the MEA, India and UAE enjoy warm, close and multi-faceted relations underpinned by strong political, cultural and economic linkages.

"Following the landmark visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to UAE in August 2015, bi-

lateral relations between the two countries been elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Both countries signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in February 2022 and a Local Currency Settlement (LCS) System in July 2023 to promote the use of Indian Rupee and AED for cross-border transactions," the statement added. India and the UAE are among each other's top trading partners with a bilateral trade of about US\$85bn in 2022-23.

ANI



Narendra Modi

ALL SET FOR SPRING



Artists paint idols of Goddess Saraswati at a roadside workshop for the upcoming Basant festival, in Amritsar, India, on Saturday (ANI)

India to implement CAA before Lok Sabha elections

New Delhi, India - Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said that the Citizenship Amendment Act, which was passed by the Parliament in December 2019, will be notified and implemented before the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

"CAA is an Act of the country, it will be definitely be notified. It will be notified before the polls. CAA will be implemented by the polls, and there should be no confusion around it," Shah said speaking at the ET Now-Global Business summit here in the national capital.

"CAA was a promise of the Congress government. When the country was divided and the minorities were persecuted in those countries, Congress had assured the refugees that they were welcome in India and they will be provided with Indian citizenship. Now they are backtracking," Shah said.

He said in categorical terms that CAA was brought in to provide citizenship and not to take away anyone's citizenship.

"Minorities in our country, and specially our Muslim community, are being provoked. CAA cannot snatch away anyone's



Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal at Parliament House premises in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

citizenship because there is no provision in the Act. CAA is an act to provide citizenship to refugees who were persecuted in Bangladesh and Pakistan."

The CAA, introduced by the Narendra Modi government, aims to confer Indian citizenship to persecuted non-Muslim migrants, including Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis, and Christians, who migrated from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan and arrived in India before December 31, 2014.

Following the passage of the CAA by Parliament in December

2019 and its subsequent presidential assent, significant protests erupted in various parts of the country. Speaking about the upcoming Lok Sabha polls the home minister said that this election was about corruption against development.

"This election is not about INDIA alliance versus NDA. This is about corrupt governance versus. zero tolerance against corruption. This election is about those who want to secure national security versus those who, endanger national security."

ANI

Trump calls for dropping charges in mishandling classified documents case

Istanbul, Turkey - Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump on Friday said charges accusing him of mishandling classified documents should be dropped now that a special counsel investigation declined to charge the President Joe Biden.

"If he's not going to be charged, that's up to them. But then I should not be charged," Trump said at a National Rifle Association expo in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

His remarks came a day after Justice Department Special counsel Robert Hur announced that he will not prosecute Biden



for his handling of classified documents even though he 'retained and disclosed classified materials' after his vice presidency.

This is nothing more than selective persecution of Biden's political opponent, me. I don't think it's Biden, because I don't think he knows he's alive

DONALD TRUMP

"Our investigation uncovered evidence that President Biden wilfully retained and disclosed classified materials after his vice

presidency when he was a private citizen," Hur wrote in a report, adding that it 'does not establish Biden's guilt beyond a

reasonable doubt'.

Trump also made remarks at Biden's mental faculties after the special counsel's report raised

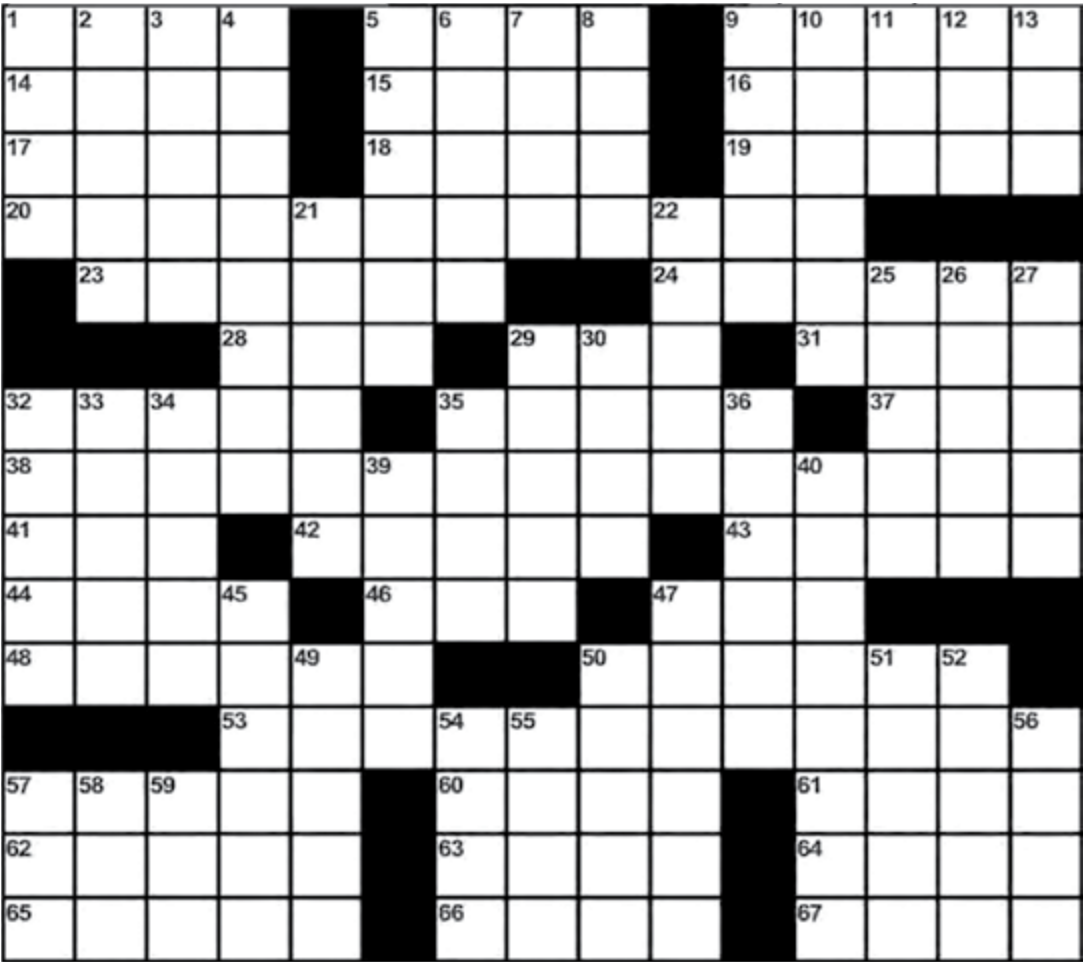
questions about the president's memory.

"This is nothing more than selective persecution of Biden's political opponent, me. I don't think it's Biden, because I don't think he knows he's alive," Trump said.

Former President Trump was indicted last June on 37 counts regarding nearly 300 classified documents taken from his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida after leaving office, and his alleged efforts to cover up the information from federal investigators. He has pleaded not guilty to all charges.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS
- 1) "Sir" alternative
5) Way through the woods
9) According to Hairdo one picks out?
15) Mixed bag
16) Material on a coarse board
17) Rustic cross
18) Type of large bag
19) Kitchen appliance
20) What all divers must do
23) La Brea hazard
24) Deadly
28) Absorbed, as a cost
29) Hawaiian dish
31) Per rmances r one
32) A Muse
35) Weeper of myth
37) Apprehend
38) Be acclaimed and then some
41) Coke complement
42) Things discouraged in society
43) Destiny, to a Hindu
44) Flight data, brie y
46) Cheerios grain
47) Thing to seek rgive-
- ness for
48) Beliefs
50) Small songbird
53) Hide out r a bit
57) Calculating snake?
60) Death notice, brie y
61) Arm bone
62) As from
63) Characteristic carrier
64) Word on a bathroom door
65) Warm
66) Admirer at a distance
67) Big rst r a baby
- DOWN
- 1) Cleopatra's Antony
2) Happening, as "the game"
3) Bouquet
4) Not rushed, to a conductor
5) Baked, crusted entree
6) Like an active kite
7) Brother of Janet Jackson
8) Farmer, at times
9) High dwelling
10) Brains or intelligence
11) Ballpoint, e.g.
12) .0000001 joule
13) Bread type
21) North, to Manhattan-ites
22) Accused's need
25) Courtroom addressee (with "your")
26) Burglar deterrent
27) Chad's neighbor
29) Burgundy grape
30) _ and aahs
32) "Snowy" bird
33) One way to go
34) Don Draper, e.g.
35) 1492 ship of note
36) Type of kiss that involves noses
39) Hang-man's creation
40) Brat's outbursts
45) Choose
47) More cushiony
49) Auto's ur
50) Bale binder
51) Arm of the sea
52) 1,000 kilograms
54) Balcony section at the opera
55) Comply with
56) Mud dauber, e.g.
57) Cigarette remains
58) Kick the bucket
59) Evidence acceptable in court

NOTE PAD

ATTIC CREW CMON
CORER AUTO LONE
MOOSE ON THE LOOSE
ELM ETCH SANDER
BELIE TEST
ODOR CLARETS
RANIS SARI SPA
BLEEP ON THE CREEP
SIS ALEE EUROS
ORDERLY BENE
VENT AUDEN
TIARAS OSLO GTO
BOSUN ON THE OCEAN
ALES ROTE MATTE
RASH TWOS STIES

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Social situations might feel intimidating to you right now. It's not that you are feeling insecure, it's just that you are not comfortable meeting new people when there is so much distracting you. So if there is an event you can't avoid, then at least put your best foot forward. Skip the shallow small talk and have a real conversation with someone. That way, at least you won't be bored! Ask them some compelling questions that start conversations.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
If you have been dealing with a mystery, today you will finally have all the clues you need to solve it. You are more than intuitive enough to fill in any blanks and connect the dots about what is really going on. Follow your gut. If you sense that someone is being less than up front with you, ask them to elaborate. They'll crack as soon as you push them and reveal what's going on. And most importantly, believe in your hunch about the big changes that are coming to your career.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Conflicting ideas and opinions might create tension at home, but out in the world they could create a sizzling hot connection with someone new. Nothing stirs up your emotions like a heated debate, so don't shy away from disagreement right now, especially with someone you would like to get to know better. This is no time to be shy about how you feel. And you have enough positive energy around you today to deliver your argument with charm and grace.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
If you encounter anyone intimidating today, you can avoid getting nervous by being observant and charming. Be sensitive to their body language and notice how they are moving and expressing themselves. They could be hiding a few insecurities, and if you look closely enough you will see that they are actually human just like you. Your fear will disappear! Compliment them and you'll not only show them how intuitive you are but how kind you are.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Til it's a day when you'll be seeking greater depth from people. Some folks will rise to the occasion, while some might just not be able to reach the level of discourse you want. And that's okay. It's important for you to respect both possibilities. If you have a strong urge to get philosophical with someone, stick to talking to one of your friends who you know is just as intellectually curious as you are. Your brain needs some stimulation and you know where to find it.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
When you think you are finished with all of your work today, take another look and make sure. You cannot leave anything undone before calling it a day. Tie every loose end up in a neat little bow, and be certain that done really means done. It's the only way to let yourself breathe a deep sigh of relief and free yourself up to put your mind toward more frivolous pursuits without feeling even the tiniest twinge of guilt. Following through with tasks can be time-consuming, but it's time well spent.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You are in a great frame of mind to tackle any bad habits you have been trying to kick, and your ability to commit is stronger than ever. It's also a great time to ramp up your health regimen. You're on the right track, but you need to go a little bit faster. You have so much power over your body and your state of mind. Why not use it? A positive change is well within your grasp. All you have to do is a reach a little bit more and you'll get to where you want to be.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Your generous nature will force you to jump into the middle of a conflict today. You want to help make the peace. And you can help a great deal, but once you do you need to get out from the middle of everything as soon as possible! When the resolution has been reached, flip back to your more stingy urges and tell everyone to take care of the rest of the issues without you. You can't fix everything for everyone. Do your part and then move on. Focus on your own needs again.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Your ambition is starting to get revved up today thanks to the inspiring progress a friend or coworker has made. But before you follow in their footsteps, you have to figure out what you'll do once you reach your destination! Moving forward without a plan is only going to result in you getting lost. So hold off making any big moves today. Wait to see how things pan out for other people. You need to plan your career goals completely before you pursue them.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
You have some tough choices to make today, although you don't know it yet. The good news is that no matter what you decide, you can't go wrong. When you come to a crossroads today, ask a friend to give you some insight. They've been there before, and what they have to tell you will shed quite a bit of light on your situation. Your friends are valuable resources for all kinds of life challenges, so make use of their ideas.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Today is the perfect day to take one more look at a situation that has been confusing you. After reviewing your notes and thinking hard about who the main players are, you should suddenly see a clear path. Your vision was clouded before because so much of your heart was involved. And while it's good to be passionate, you have to be logical, too. You have to go where the facts tell you to go. It's not always the most romantic route, but it's usually the best one.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
The voice in your head is speaking the truth, so listen when it warns you away from someone or something today. From something as minor as deciding which movie to go see, to as major as deciding whether or not to sign legal documents, you need to go with your gut. Make sure that every part of you is comfortable with everything you get involved with right now. Don't respond to pressure, no matter how strong it is and no matter who is pressuring you.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. How heavy is a megagram?

- A. 0.1 tonnes
- B. 10 tonnes
- C. 100 tonnes
- D. 1 tonne

2. The 2nd and 6th presidents of the USA had the same surname. What was it?

- A. Jefferson
- B. Adams
- C. Grant
- D. Lincoln

3. In which of these areas would you be most likely to find a traditional dwelling called a rondavel?

- A. Pacific Islands
- B. Alaska
- C. Mongolia
- D. South Africa

Answers: 1. B 2. D 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

S	Z	C	N
T	T	I	L
A	S	T	R
A	P	I	E

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

'T20 and Test can live as great friends'

Broad reflects on dwindling interest in longest format and suggests ways to bring back excitement

Muscat - Test cricket has been struggling to maintain its relevance and popularity against its younger sibling, T20 cricket. But two recent Test matches, one in Hyderabad where England beat India and the other in Brisbane in which the West Indies stunned Australia, rekindled hope and interest among the cricket fraternity. These matches showcased the lasting drama that Test cricket is capable of producing.

Every year, from December to February, five T20 leagues occur on three continents. These leagues are known for their entertainment value and lucrative salaries, but they also have a direct impact on Test cricket. A recent example of this is when Cricket South Africa decided to send a second-string Test team to New Zealand, allowing their top players to participate in the domestic SA20 league.

Speaking to SportsBoom, Stuart Broad, the fifth highest wicket taker in Test cricket emphasised how Test cricket needs to be preserved and the administration should work towards creating special windows for this.

Broad expressed immense enjoyment while watching recent Test matches in India and Australia. He envisions designated windows when all nations play Test cricket simultaneously, fostering a sense of global engagement. Broad emphasises the emotional impact of Test cricket, citing the thrilling West Indies victory and the players' passionate reactions. Despite the rise of T20 cricket, he believes that Test cricket and T20 can coexist, com-



Stuart Broad is the fifth highest wicket-taker in Test cricket

What's imbalanced is you've got Kagiso Rabada playing four Test matches a year and I was playing 12 or 15. That doesn't sort of suit. I don't know how you could fix that sort of scheduling

STUART BROAD

plementing each other and contributing to the growth of the sport. "I am a believer particularly the T20 and Test cricket can live as great friends. They can live together, they can work together and grow the sport. I think players have a love for Test cricket still."

In a recent interview with SportsBoom Former South Africa Test player and coach, Mark Boucher, expressed disappointment with Cricket South Africa (CSA) for scheduling a Test Series in New Zealand during the 2024 SA20.

Broad echoes similar sentiments and thinks Covid played a role in creating the backlogs of Test series and hopefully the administrators can now find gaps

and windows between T20 and Test events.

Broad acknowledges the necessity of decisions prioritising T20 leagues over Test matches for the growth of the sport. At the same time he emphasises the importance of accommodating various formats in the cricket calendar, ensuring there is space for everything.

"What's imbalanced is you've got Kagiso Rabada playing four Test matches a year and I was

playing 12 or 15. That doesn't sort of suit. I don't know how you could fix that sort of scheduling."

Regarding the future of Test cricket, Broad acknowledges the financial disparities between T20 and Test cricket.

He notes instances like Mitchell Starc earning more for two balls in the IPL than a whole Test match playing in Australia. Despite the challenges, Broad highlights the emotional significance of Test cricket and the need for collective efforts to ensure its continued relevance and success.

Geopolitics plays a disruptive role in sports. India and Pakistan have not played a Test match against each other since 2007. Sachin Tendulkar and Wasim Akram, two of the greatest contemporary batters and bowlers from the subcontinent, only played against each other in 7 Test matches. In recent times, the financial model of cricket boards has become a determining factor in deciding which teams can afford to play Test cricket.

"In T20 cricket you only have to look at the shirts out there. You've got sponsor, sponsor, sponsor like Formula 1. Test cricket is so limited and so structured, I used to get told off for having an Adidas logo on my sweat band. You would get fined for it, so the limitations don't work. There's certainly scope to open up Test match cricket to partners and bring in finances that way. We need to reduce the gap between the lowest paid nations and the top paid nations in Test cricket."



Simona Halep

Halep says truth is going to come out after ban appeal

Lausanne, Switzerland - Former Wimbledon and French Open champion Simona Halep was confident she would soon return to tennis after exiting sport's top court on Friday after three days of proceedings to appeal a doping suspension that could end her career.

"I had the chance to show my defence and I really believe that the truth is going to come out and the day to be on court is going to be soon," Halep told reporters outside the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in the Swiss city of Lausanne.

The 32-year-old Romanian has been provisionally suspended since October 2022 after testing positive for roxadustat, a banned drug that stimulates the production of red blood cells, at the U.S. Open that year.

Tennis anti-doping authorities also charged the former world number one, with another doping offence last year due to irregularities in her athlete biological passport (ABP), a method designed to monitor different blood parameters.

Howard Jacobs, Halep's lawyer, said CAS had heard her arguments but it was unclear when the court might issue its ruling.

Haddad Maia gets the better of Jabeur

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates - Sixth seed Beatriz Haddad Maia reached the Mubadala Abu Dhabi Open semifinals for a second straight year after upsetting second seed Ons Jabeur 6-3, 6-4 in 1 hour and 30 minutes.

The Brazilian had come through the longest match of the year on Wednesday, outlasting Magda Linette 7-6(6), 6-7(1), 6-1 in 3 hours and 42 minutes.

Haddad Maia started from where she left off and took the first set 6-3, despite the crowd rooting for Jabeur.

Although Jabeur showed flashes of brilliance, she couldn't find her rhythm against Maia's strong baseline game. She saved one match point, but Maia wouldn't be denied, winning the match and setting up a semi-final against Daria Kasatkina.

The top-half semifinal will see No.1 seed Elena Rybakina take on No.8 seed Liudmila Samsonova after both advanced in straight sets. Rybakina defeated lucky loser Cristina Bucsa for the second time this year, coming from 3-1 down in the second set to win 6-1, 6-4.

Whereas Bucsa had pushed Rybakina hard in the Adelaide second round, this time round



Ons Jabeur

Rybakina sailed through the first set for the loss of just eight points. The Spaniard's ability to redirect pace garnered her an early lead in the second set, but Rybakina recovered to win five of the last six games.

The former Wimbledon champion fired seven aces, and dropped just five points behind her first serve.

Rybakina will face a stern test against Samsonova, who defeated No.4 seed Barbora Krejickova 7-5, 6-4. Samsonova is

4-0 against Rybakina at pro level, all on outdoor hard courts, including wins in the Montreal and Beijing semifinals last year. The only time Rybakina was victorious over Samsonova at any level was in their only junior meeting in 2016, winning 3-6, 7-5, 7-6(5) on clay in Umag.

Top seed falls in Romania

No. 8 seed Ana Bogdan of Romania ousted top-seeded Arantxa Rus of the Netherlands 3-6, 7-6

(6), 7-6 (5) in a three-hour, 28-minute marathon in the quarter-finals of the Transylvania Open on Friday in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

Bogdan won a tightly contested second-set tiebreaker on her second set point, then rallied from down 5-4 in both the third set and the ensuing tiebreaker to finish the upset. Bogdan had eight aces without a double fault while saving 12 of 18 break points; Rus had four aces but committed eight double faults.

Kohli ruled out of England Test series due to personal reasons

Mumbai, India - India batsman Virat Kohli has been ruled out of the remaining three tests of their five-match home series with England for personal reasons, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said on Saturday.

Kohli pulled out of the first two tests, also for personal reasons. The Indian cricket board said in a statement that it fully respected and supported the player's decision.

The 35-year-old former captain, who has scored nearly 9,000 runs in 113 tests, will miss an entire home series for the first time in his career.

England won the opening Test by 28 runs in Hyderabad before the hosts levelled the series at 1-1 with a 106-run victory at Visakhapatnam this week.

The third Test will be held



Virat Kohli

in Rajkot from Thursday, with matches to follow at Ranchi and Dharamsala.

The injured duo of batter KL Rahul and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, who missed the second match, were recalled to the 17-man squad announced by the BCCI for the final three tests. They will only play subject to fitness clearance from the medical team.

Middle-order batsman Shreyas Iyer was left out amid reports that he had suffered a back issue, while selectors resisted the temptation to rest in-form pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah, who has had his share of time out due to injury last year.

Mohammed Siraj was also included in the squad after missing the last game, while fellow seamer Akash Deep earned his maiden Test call-up.

'Getting back into Red Bull and family, I feel so much at home'

Las Vegas, United States - After being a motor racing nomad, Daniel Ricciardo says being back in the Red Bull stable with Formula One's newest team, the now-rebranded Visa Cash App RB, has been like coming home.

Ricciardo won seven races while at Red Bull from 2014 to 2018. Last year he joined the Red Bull-owned AlphaTauri team, and he is now tipped as a

possible replacement for Mexican Sergio Perez to partner world champion Max Verstappen in 2025.

"Getting back into Red Bull and the family, I feel so much at home, so the truth is this is where I want to be," Ricciardo told Reuters. "I am embracing it a lot more because a year ago I was unsure if I would race Formula One ever again..."

"Deep down I knew I wasn't



Daniel Ricciardo

I knew I wasn't done but there was no guarantee I would be offered a seat again

DANIEL RICCIARDO

done but there was no guarantee I would be offered a seat again."

For now, a new name, look and sponsors have fuelled new ambitions of moving up the grid for Ricciardo and his Japanese team mate Yuki Tsunoda.

Visa Cash App RB completed its makeover on Thursday with a splashy launch of its new livery, smack in the middle of Super Bowl week. "I think it is a year when the team takes that step and (is) not seen as a Red Bull junior team anymore," said

Ricciardo, who is an NFL fan and attended last year's Super Bowl but will miss Sunday's as he prepares for testing.

"It's a team that is going to stand on its own two feet and hopefully make some noise."

While it is still a little over three weeks until the roar of engines is heard at the season opener in Bahrain, there has been plenty of buzz in the F1 world.

Big London connection in Nigeria’s bid for Cup of Nations glory

Abidjan, Ivory Coast - Nigeria will have a strong London connection in Sunday’s Africa Cup of Nations final with key players born in Britain likely to line up against the Ivory Coast.

There are four players born in the boroughs of the British capital in the Nigerian squad plus two other key regulars, Calvin Bassey and midfielder Alex Iwobi, who have lived in London from an early age. Ola Aina, Semi Ajayi and Ademola Lookman are English-born and have made a major contribution to Nigeria’s progress to the final.

Joe Aribo, also from London and who struggled with injury at the start of the tournament, has had limited game time but has contributed off the bench.

Lookman, who is Nigeria’s top marksman at the tournament with three goals, is proving an

excellent partner in attack alongside African Footballer of the Year Victor Osimhen.

Aina has emerged as arguably the best right back on view over the last month in the Ivory Coast while centre back Ajayi has played every minute of their six games.

Lookman, a product of Charlton Athletic’s academy, played for England when they won the 2017 Under-20 World Cup.

At first he rejected Nigeria’s overtures saying he wanted to play for England, but two years ago switched allegiance and has gone on to become a regular.

Aina came through the Chelsea academy and was also an England youth international while Ajayi was bought by Arsenal from Charlton but sat on the bench for the Gunners in the Premier League.



Nigeria’s top scorer in the tournament Ademola Lookman is one of the four London-born players in the team

GLORY BECKONS

Ivory Coast eye historic comeback as they face Nigeria in Cup of Nations final



Ivory Coast players celebrate after their semifinal victory against DR Congo

Abidjan, Ivory Coast - Ivory Coast can complete a remarkable recovery and put a successful seal on an absorbing Africa Cup of Nations tournament if they can beat Nigeria on Sunday and claim the title on home soil.

Hollywood screenwriters would find their passage to potential glory barely plausible, but the Ivorians are one game away from the continent’s top prize despite being on the verge of elimination on several occasions over the last month.

They scraped through the group phase, staged thrilling come-from-behind wins in the last-16 and quarter-final and are

now looking to complete one of the great comebacks in the tournament’s storied history.

“I don’t have the words, I still have trouble taking it all in,” admitted Ivory Coast’s coach Emerse Fae.

Fae was catapulted into the job after 70-year-old Frenchman Jean-Louis Gasset was sacked as the Ivorians waited for three days to find out whether they would qualify from the group phase as one of the best third-placed sides.

When they did, they went on to beat holders Senegal on penalties and then snatch a quarter-final win over neighbours Mali, where they were down to 10 men for most of the match, equalised in the 90th minute and then netted the winner at the end of extra time.

“It’s incredible, to reach the final in your country’s tournament. It’s an immense joy. The players have done extraordinary things,” added Fae, 40.

The Ivorians lost to Nigeria in their second group game when a cagey contest was decided by a penalty, only awarded after a lengthy VAR review.

Nigeria employed a clever tactical plan, which included an uncharacteristic five-man defence and extensive use of the

I don’t have the words, I still have trouble taking it all in It’s incredible, to reach the final in your country’s tournament. The players have done extraordinary things

EMERSE FAE



Saka likely to be fit for West Ham clash

London, England - Arsenal’s England forward Bukayo Saka is on track to be fit for the visit of West Ham United in the Premier League on Sunday, manager Mikel Arteta has said.

Saka, who has made 22 league appearances this season and scored eight goals, injured his right leg during Sunday’s 3-1 win over Liverpool where he scored the first goal.

“He’s been recovering again this week and he looks okay,” Arteta said. “Tomorrow we have another training session and we are hoping we are going to have a few back,” the Spaniard said, adding that midfielder Thomas Partey was progressing well but did not have a date for returning.

Third-placed Arsenal have won their last three matches, but Arteta is wary of David Moyes’s West Ham who beat them 2-0



Bukayo Saka

at the Emirates in December.

“He’s a really competitive manager who is really good at getting the edge in a game. He waits for the right moment and tries to punish you. They are a really good side. We will have to be at our best to win the game,” Arteta said. The Arsenal boss added that he did not agree with the criticism of his team for their

celebrations after Sunday’s 3-1 win over leaders Liverpool which rejuvenated their hopes in the title race as defending champions Manchester City close in.

“Managers and teams celebrate a lot. It’s so tough to win in this league. It was a big match for us, you could tell from the stadium the atmosphere, it was a great day,” he said.

Haaland back among goals with double as Man City beat Everton

Manchester, England - Erling Haaland scored his first goals in 77 days as Manchester City battled their way past Everton 2-0 to go top for the first time since mid-November.

Everton had worked hard to restrict the champions to no shots on target until Haaland broke the deadlock in the 71st minute before being set up by substitute Kevin De Bruyne for the second 14 minutes later.

It took Haaland’s tally this season to a league-leading 16 goals as City claimed their 10th consecutive win in all competitions and a run of six in the league.

City made four changes from the side that beat Brentford on Monday. John Stones and Manuel Akanji replaced Kyle



Erling Haaland

Walker and Josko Gvardiol in defence, while Jeremy Doku and Matheus Nunes replaced the benched De Bruyne and Bernardo Silva.

In his 300th Premier League match, Sean Dyche, who had to watch from the stands because

of a ban, named an unchanged side from their 2-2 draw with Tottenham Hotspur.

The visitors nearly caught Man City by surprise. Dwight McNeil slipped through Ben Godfrey, but the defender’s sliding attempt was claimed by Ederson as both players collided.

Thereafter the half was dominated by City, but they struggled to create chances past a deep and resolute Everton defence. They had nine shots in the first half, of which five were blocked, but none was on target, for the first time since January 2023.

It was their most shots without hitting the target in the opening 45 minutes of a Premier League match since November 2019 when they had 14 against Southampton.



Donyell Malen

Malen hits double as Dortmund beat Freiburg

Berlin, Germany - Donyell Malen scored twice to help Borussia Dortmund to a 3-0 victory over visitors Freiburg in the Bundesliga on Friday and tighten their grip on fourth spot.

The Dutch forward had come close with a bicycle kick before he threaded a shot past three Freiburg defenders in the 16th minute.

He then timed his run perfectly to latch on to a Niclas Füllkrug pass and rifle in from a tight angle deep in first-half stoppage time for his ninth league goal. Germany international Füllkrug headed in their third goal in the 87th.

Dortmund, who face PSV Eindhoven later in February for their Champions League last 16 first leg, are fourth in the standings on 40 points.

The game was interrupted twice with fans throwing chocolate coins and tennis balls onto the pitch in protest to a planned investor deal with the league.

Messi’s Tokyo appearance fuels Hangzhou cancellation

Hong Kong - Chinese sporting authorities have cancelled next month’s friendly international between Argentina and Nigeria amid a growing backlash against Lionel Messi’s failure to play in an Inter Miami match in Hong Kong last week.

Argentina were scheduled to play Nigeria in the Chinese city of Hangzhou next month before facing the Ivory Coast in Beijing, but Messi’s failure to take the field for Inter Miami in Hong Kong on Sunday caused widespread anger among fans.

The organiser of the Hong Kong match said they would give fans a 50 per cent refund for tickets after the Argentine did not take the field due to injury, but

played in Japan days later.

The backlash grew on Friday, with Hangzhou sports authorities saying that Argentina’s friendly against Nigeria would no longer take place.

“As a commercial event, a company and the Argentinean soccer team negotiated that the team would play a friendly match in March this year in the city of Hangzhou,” the Hangzhou authorities said in a statement.

“In view of the current well-known reasons, according to the competent authorities, conditions to hold the friendly match are not mature, therefore (we) have decided to cancel it.”

It was not immediately clear if Argentina’s other friendly



Lionel Messi in action against Japanese side Vissel Kobe in Tokyo

against Ivory Coast in Beijing would also be cancelled.

The Chinese FA did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment sent outside normal business hours.

The Argentine FA also did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

Tatler Asia, a privately owned publishing and lifestyle company, said in a statement on its Instagram page that it was “deeply sorry” and “heartbroken” that fans were let down after Messi stayed on the bench during Sunday’s match.

The match in Hong Kong drew 40,000 fans, with some spectators paying up to nearly HK\$5,000 (\$640) per ticket.

QATAR CHAMPIONS

Akam Afif scores hat-trick as Al Annabi defeat Jordan to retain title

Lusail, Qatar - Akram Afif scored a hat-trick of penalties as Qatar won their second consecutive AFC Asian Cup title after defeating Jordan 3-1 in the Qatar 2023 final at a packed Lusail Stadium on Saturday.

Though Yazan Al Naimat's equaliser gave first time finalists Jordan a flicker of hope, Afif's coolness and Qatar's overall superiority saw them defending the title they won in emphatic fashion in 2019 comfortably.

Afif's hat-trick, the first of the tournament, took his tally to eight as he won the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Yili Top Scorer Award.

Ahead of the kick-off, Iraq legend and former captain Younis Mahmoud unveiled the AFC Asian Cup trophy in front of a capacity crowd at the Lusail Stadium, warming the fans up nicely for the final.

Qatar settled the faster with Afif almost catching Jordan napping in the fifth minute when he waltzed through the defence but goalkeeper Yazeed Abulaila was quick off his line to thwart the danger.

Afif had another crack at goal two minutes later when Lucas Mendes did well on the right flank before sending his cross into the six-yard-box but the Al Sadd forward fired a low drive straight into the arms of Abulaila.

Qatar continued to pressure the Jordanian defence with Hasan Al Hydos threatening a delightful through ball to Almoz



Qatar's Akram Afif scores against Jordan in the Asian Cup final on Saturday

Though Yazan Al Naimat's equaliser gave first time finalists Jordan a flicker of hope, Afif's coolness and Qatar's overall superiority saw them defending the title they won in emphatic fashion in 2019 comfortably

Ali, who was stopped in his tracks by an alert Mahmoud Al Mardi. Limited to just counter-

attacks, Jordan's Nizar Al Rashdan whipped a long ball for Ali Olwan, with the forward setting

up Yazan Al Naimat, who forced goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham to parry his powerful drive from above the box.

Jordan struggled to match Qatar's intensity and paid the price in the 22nd minute following Abdallah Nasib's clumsy challenge on Afif, who coolly slotted home the ensuing penalty to take his tournament tally to six which also confirmed

him as the top scorer.

Jordan, having had to play second fiddle for the majority of the half, could have equalised just before the break but Mousa Tamari saw his effort from inside the box blocked by Mohammed Waad, with the Montpellier forward then failing to find the target from close range, sending Olwan's cross over the bar.

Coach Ghalenoei takes responsibility for Iran's exit

Doha, Qatar - Amir Ghalenoei apologised for Iran's 3-2 defeat to Qatar in their Asian Cup semi-final on Wednesday, with the head coach saying he was to blame.

Despite Sardar Azmoun giving them a fourth-minute lead, Iran were overrun by Qatar, with strikes from Jassem Gaber and Akram Afif putting the defending champions ahead. Alireza Jahanbakhsh restored parity from the penalty spot but Almoz Ali snatched victory for the hosts with his 82nd-minute goal.

"I want to apologise to the Iranian people. We should have advanced into the final but we could not do it. I want to thank the players, they put everything they had into this match," said Ghalenoei, with the defeat meaning Iran's wait for a fourth continental continues.

"We lost plenty of opportunities but our performance in the second half was one of our best. We had eight corners in the second half. But this is football. When you don't get anything from your chances, you are going to be punished and this happened to us today."

"From a technical standpoint, we had a very competitive match. However, this tournament has witnessed several teams experiencing unexpected exits, including Saudi Arabia, Korea Republic and Japan. I take full responsibility for this defeat. Today marks one of the toughest days I've ever experienced in my life."

Iran's inability to convert their chances left Ghalenoei frustrated, with Jahanbakhsh hitting the post in the final minute of added time.

"Four days ago everyone was happy when we defeated Japan, now after this defeat against Qatar, everyone is against us. We maintained the same formation as the one we used against



I want to apologise to the Iranian people. We should have advanced into the final but we could not do it.

AMIR GHALENOEI

Japan, with just two changes. "In the first half, we identified opportunities to capitalise on, and after scoring the first goal, we had numerous chances to seal the game. However, that didn't happen for us. "Even though our players are based abroad, they all dedicated themselves to training and representing their country and people. However, in football, not everything is within our control."

Ewan clinches opening stage of Tour of Oman

Muscat - Australian rider Caleb Ewan of the Jayco Al Ula team won the opening stage of the 13th edition of 2024 Tour of Oman on Saturday at Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah. The 30-year old produced an impressive show in the 181.5 km distance race which concluded at Oman Convention and Exhibition Center to win the stage.

He controlled the first stage race leadership ahead of other rivals in the race. Syritsa Gleb from

Astana Kazakhstan team won the white jersey as he was the best young rider while Oscar Pelegri Ferrandis of Burgos-BH team claimed the golden jersey and was named the most active and aggressive rider during the race.

Ewan finished the stage in four hours 23 minutes and 28 seconds to take the red jersey while also claiming the green jersey.

"It is a special moment for me finally as this victory is the first win for me this season. I had a

I am happy with this and looking for more in the forthcoming races

CALEB EWAN

few opportunities so far this year but I did not manage to win. I am happy with this triumph and

looking for more in the forthcoming races. In general, the race was pretty easy but the hard part was at the middle with some climbs beside some windy at the end of the race," Ewan said.

"The weather is very nice in Oman as it is not cold and it is not hot as well. It is the perfect weather for the riders to compete and show their top skills. It is expected to rain in the coming few days based on the weather predictions, but we hope as rid-

ers to have suitable climate to vie properly in the race."

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of the Automotive, Construction Equipment, and Renewable Energy cluster in MHD, the chief guest delivered the awards to the top winners in presence of Sheikh Faisal bin Humaid Al Qasimi, President of the Arab Cycling Federation and Saif bin Sebaa al Rushaidi, Chairman of Oman Cycling Association, beside many other officials.



Caleb Ewan celebrates on the podium

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Heritage gift

BULL OF NIMRUD

Iraq has received a replica of the famous Assyrian ‘Bull of Nimrud’ statue that stood in the Roman Colosseum and at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. A gift from the Italian government, the statue now permanently resides outside the Basrah Museum.

The original monument was destroyed by ISIS militants, in 2015, who attacked the archaeological site and destroyed valuable artifacts using bulldozers and explosives. It had been made in the 9th century BC and stood over 16 feet.

“Italy is at the forefront of safeguarding cultural heritage because it is the soul of a nation and embodies its history,” Gennaro Sangiuliano, Italy’s culture minister, read from a statement at an inauguration ceremony at the museum attended by Italian and Iraqi officials last week. “It will, therefore, continue to make every effort to advance international collaboration in the field of cultural heritage protection and to work for the enhancement of the heritage of humanity.”

The historical city of Nimrud, located near modern-day Mosul, was chosen as the capital by the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BCE). Ashurbanipal II built a grand palace decorated with multiple ‘lamassu’ monuments - statues of lions or winged bulls, each with the head of a bearded man. The ‘Bull of Nimrud’ is among the many cultural artifacts that ISIS destroyed when they attacked the archaeological site in 2015.

The replica was made by a team of experts led by restoration specialist Nicola Salvioli, who crafted a model of the creature out of polystyrene from images and video footage. Later, that model was used as the basis for a larger fibreglass copy that was fabricated by a 3D printer. Once the process was completed, the monument was covered in a mixture of plastic and stone dust to give the appearance of authenticity.

The gift comes on the heels of a high-profile restitution in June of last year from Italy to Iraq of a tablet engraved with cuneiform text and the insignia of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. According to reports, ‘the circumstances surrounding the tablet’s arrival in Italy remain unclear.’

In ancient Mesopotamian religion, the ‘lamassu’ represent protective spirits or demons. They often formed pairs with the Sh?du - colossal guardian statues, of demons or animals, that were placed at the sides of the entrance gates of temples and palaces, just as the Bull of Nimrud was.

The replica project was funded by the Meeting of Civilisations Association. Italian artisans had recreated it and displayed it at the Colosseum in Rome in a 2016 exhibition entitled ‘Reborn from Destruction’.

Ebla, Nimrud, and Palmyra were showcased alongside two other reconstructions - of a portion of the ceiling of the Temple of Bel in Palmyra and of the archive room of the Palace of Ebla. The following year, the monument was moved to UNESCO headquarters in Paris, where it stood in front of the entrance as a symbol of the organisation’s commitment to sharing history and transmitting the values it carries to future generations, UNESCO stated.

The bull’s return to Iraq, now permanently positioned in front of the entrance to the Basra Museum, follows a high-profile rededication to the country in June.

Francesco Rutelli, the former minister of culture whose Associazione Incontro di Civiltà that had spearheaded plans to make the replica, wrote on Facebook - ‘Here is a light, a precious Italian light. The donation is a small miracle of Italian soft power, of our cultural diplomacy.’

(Source: artnews.com)

Italy gifts ‘Bull of Nimrud’ replica to Iraq’s Basrah Museum



The replica

The original winged human-headed bulls, the powerful guardians of ancient Assyrian gateways, at the royal palace of Nimrud (near Mosul in modern Iraq)



Lebanon’s TAKREEM Foundation held its 13th Arab Excellence Awards Ceremony 2023, in Muscat on February 3, to felicitate Arab personalities who have excelled in varied fields to change the prevailing narrative about the Arab world.

Nadim Arnaout, global manager at TAKREEM, shares some insights into the foundation’s mission. Excerpts:

Hubert Vaz

Since its inception in 2009, how many Arabs from how many countries has Takreem awarded? More than 150 Arab and international personalities from different fields, from most of the Arab countries, in addition to UK, USA, Sweden and many more have been awarded so far.

Why was the need felt to promote Arab achievements through Takreem’s Foundation?

In the vibrant tapestry of the Arab world, initiatives like Takreem unfold narratives that transcend mere tales of success - they are woven with threads of recognition, visibility, and a resolute commitment to challenge stereotypes. By casting a spotlight on accomplished individuals and transformative projects, these endeavours embark on a global stage, where the brilliance of Arab achievements takes centre stage, dispelling misconceptions and showcasing the rich diversity and talent embedded within the Arab community.

Takreem, as a torchbearer of inspiration and motivation, understands the profound impact that sharing success stories can have on the Arab world. In these narratives of triumph, the initiative seeks not only to celebrate achievements but to ignite a flame of inspiration that propels others to pursue their dreams fervently. The stage upon which these accomplishments



are celebrated becomes a platform for individuals to glean motivation, fostering a collective spirit to contribute positively to their communities.

Beyond accolades and triumphs, there lies a deeper purpose - to craft a positive narrative that counters prevailing negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the Arab world. Takreem endeavours to paint a more accurate and uplifting portrait of the region and its people to reshape perceptions and foster a nuanced understanding of the cultural richness within the Arab world.

Recognition, however, is not an isolated endeavour. It serves as a catalyst for collaboration and networking within the Arab community. Ultimately, the act of celebrating achievements extends beyond individual triumphs - it becomes a powerful instrument for empowering communities.

To what extent have the awardees of

previous years proved to be role models or inspired future generations?

The recipients from past years have undeniably emerged as exemplary role models, proving to be a profound source of inspiration. Their noteworthy contributions transcend their specific fields, leaving a lasting impact on the societies they are part of, particularly in the Arab world.

It is important to highlight that these individuals were already on a trajectory to becoming role models and sources of inspiration even before being honoured. What Takreem has effectively

Takreem endeavours to paint a more accurate and uplifting portrait of the region and its people to reshape perceptions and foster a nuanced understanding of the cultural richness within the Arab world

NADIM ARNAOUT

achieved is the expansion of their influence, widening their reach, and augmenting their capacity to inspire and positively impact their communities.

How diverse are the achievers of 2023 - any striking achievement this year?

The achievers of 2023 exhibit remarkable diversity in terms of their significant accomplishments within their respective fields. While merit remains the primary criterion for recognition, there is a conscious effort to consider diversity, including factors such as country of origin and gender. It is worth

noting that each laureate has made substantial contributions, and although there may not be a singular unprecedented achievement, the collective impact of their diverse accomplishments contributes to the overall uniqueness of the group.

How has the Takreem award been motivational in the future success of some awardees?

The Takreem award has played a pivotal role in motivating the future success of certain awardees who have reached great heights. By placing them

in the spotlight, the award has facilitated networking opportunities and increased recognition within their respective fields. Being in the limelight, these awardees have been able to leverage their achievements, leading to enhanced visibility, new connections, and further opportunities for professional growth.

Any new category of award added this year?

No new categories were added this year. The laureates of this year include:

- Award for Corporate Leadership: Hatem Dowidar (Egypt)
- Award for Cultural Excellence: Arab Fund for Arts and Culture - represented by Rima Mismar (Lebanon)
- Award for Environmental Development and Sustainability: Dr Yousef al Horr (Qatar)
- Award for Excellence in Education: Nayla Zreik Fahed (Lebanon)
- Award for Outstanding Arab Woman: Dr Amani el Tounsi (Egypt)
- Award for Science and Technological Achievement: Dr Rachid Deriche (Algeria)
- Award for Young Entrepreneur: Anis Kallel (Tunisia)
- Lifetime Achievement Award: Dr Ghassan Abu Sittah (Palestine)
- Special Distinctions - HE Mohammed al Zubair and Dar Al Atta’a from Oman.

7. What would you say are the main hurdles faced by Arab go-getters in pursuing challenging professions?

Some of the main challenges facing Arab go-getters include limited access to quality education and training opportunities, unequal gender representation, cultural expectations and societal norms that might discourage certain career paths, and in some cases, economic barriers.

Additionally, political instability and regional conflicts can impact job opportunities and hinder professional growth. Overcoming these challenges often requires a combination of systemic changes, advocacy for equal opportunities, and initiatives to promote inclusive and diverse professional environments.

Does Takreem receive support from any governmental organisations in any GCC states?

Takreem has been fortunate to receive generous support from various sponsors and patrons, predominantly from the private sector. Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain have in the past extended generous support when each hosted the awards night. This year, the Omani Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Abu Dhabi government have provided gracious assistance.