

Sayyid Badr to call for fast-tracking Palestinian state creation

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, is set to call for the creation of a Palestinian State at the earliest to save the Palestinian people from destitution, annihilation and death.

In a major foreign policy speech to be delivered in Oxford in the United Kingdom on Thursday evening, H E

Sayyid Badr is expected to demand leaders from countries which represent the global majority convene an emergency international conference soon to agree on arrangements for implementation of a two-state solution.

Representatives of Hamas must be included in the conference to fast-track the establish-



H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi

The 30-minute lecture - titled 'Talking to Anyone for the good of Everyone' - will be delivered at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

ment of a Palestinian State. Peacemakers must engage with the group as it cannot be eradicated.

He will argue that only those rights that come with sovereignty can give the Palestinian people hope to survive. Without such a state, they will be condemned to the "perpetual threat of destitution, annihilation

and death".

He will also voice his concern over the ongoing crisis deepening divisions between the Global South and the Global North and call for the abolition of veto powers in the United Nations Security Council, arguing that is a relic of the Cold War.

His 30-minute lecture - titled *Talking to Anyone for the good of*

Everyone - will be delivered at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. Following the lecture, H E Sayyid Badr will be the guest of honour at a dinner marking the official inauguration of the centre's Oman Hall.

The gathering will be attended by diplomats, academics and distinguished foreign policy experts.

Oman Air sets course for overhaul, financial recovery

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Air is steering towards a promising future, marked by a significant reduction in losses and a boost in revenue growth, without relying on commercial bank loans or government aid in 2024.

H E Said bin Hamood al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Chairman of Oman Air's Board of Directors, unveiled this positive shift at the second media gathering dedicated to discussing the airline's transformation plan on Wednesday.

The airline's financial turnaround, with losses reduced by 25%, is credited to a series of strategic measures and decisions, aligned with the transformation plan introduced in August 2023.

These steps were designed to tackle the airline's long-standing issues of accumulated debt and operational losses. According to H E Mawali, the plan includes optimising the fleet size and revising the destination network to better suit the airline's strategic goals.

A key announcement on the appointment of a new CEO will be made soon, the minister informed, signalling a major organisational restructuring to meet current market demands and the airline's needs. "This restructuring



(Supplied photo)

The airline's financial turnaround, with losses reduced by 25%, is credited to a series of strategic measures and decisions, aligned with the transformation plan introduced in August 2023

H E SAID BIN HAMOOD AL MAWALI

aims to establish financial stability by 2026, setting the stage for future expansion."

H E Mawali highlighted adjustments in the airline's network, which involves discontinuing flights to Islamabad, Lahore, Colombo and Chittagong, while introducing a new route to Sialkot.

Furthermore, the airline is set to operate seasonal flights to Zurich and Mali during winter, and to Trabzon in summer, moving towards profitability.

"We had 56 destinations, only four of which made profits. So, now we are working to reach a stage where at least 60% of these are profitable."

Addressing layoffs, the minister

clarified that only 20 employees were let go recently, countering rumours of major job cuts.

In a strategic move to boost its service offerings, Oman Air aims to sign a deal with an international company to bring in 30,000 passengers directly in 2024.

The strategic overhaul extends to Oman Air's fleet, necessitating decisions on surplus aircraft and the streamlining of executive and administrative functions, H E Mawali added. "A new organisational structure is underway, tailored to the current phase's comprehensive needs, promising a rejuvenated and financially sustainable Oman Air."

Oman to host Socca World Cup in Nov

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman will host the Socca World Cup 2024 from November 28 to December 8 to be held for the first time in the Middle East and Asia.

The announcement was made during a press conference on Wednesday at Oman International Convention and Exhibition Centre held under the patronage of H H Dr Mona Fahad Mahmoud al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University.

The logo of the tournament, also unveiled on Wednesday, is inspired by Oman Across Ages Museum.

Managed by International Socca Federation, the Socca World Cup is six-a-side football tournament, which started in 2018 in Portugal.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Waleed bin Juma al Obaidani,



(Supplied photo)

President of International Socca Federation in Middle East, informed that 44 teams from around the world will participate.

The tournament has been in planning for more than four years. "The Socca World Cup coming to Oman is a significant event for both the country and the Middle East. The efforts put into hosting the tournament, with support from the Ministry of

Culture, Sports and Youth and local partners, demonstrate a commitment to making this event successful," said Obaidani.

A special stadium for the tournament with capacity to seat 3,000 will be erected and efforts are currently focused on developing a strong national team through a dedicated amateur league in collaboration with Oman Football Association.

"We will participate in the Socca Mexico Championship being held from February 21 to 26 to scout for Omani talent."

Obaidani informed that the committee supervising the tournament will conduct field visits to schools to raise awareness on it, and also organise special events for children and Omani companies to engage the community and build excitement around the world cup.

According to Obaidani, the benefits of hosting the event in terms of sports promotion, the economy and tourism are promising. It will also boost Oman's prospects to hosting more international tournaments in the future.

"Concerted efforts are being exerted to ensure the success of Socca World Cup 2024 in Oman, and the event is likely to contribute significantly to the growth and promotion of football in the region," Obaidani said.



Three Omani cities in Global Network of Learning Cities



RO177mn projects inaugurated at SEZAD



Gioconda Vessichelli brings 'BollywoOpera' to Muscat

Archaeologists unearth largest Early Bronze Age structure in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a groundbreaking discovery, a team from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has unearthed what is believed to be the largest Early Bronze Age structure in Oman.

The remarkable find, located on the fringes of Wadi Andam in Mudhaibi, North Sharqiyah governorate, dates back over 4,500 years. The site, known as Al Gharyein, showcases a unique architectural style not previously identified in the region, according to the team at the Department of Archaeology at SQU's College of Arts and Social Sciences.

The excavation, in December 2023, unearthed a building spread over more than 550sqm.

"This structure, characterised by its significant size and stand-alone nature, marks the oldest and largest non-tower edifice discovered on the Omani Peninsula from the Early Bronze Age. This finding contrasts sharply with contemporary structures,

such as those at Umm al Nar in Abu Dhabi and Dahwa in Saham, North Batinah, which did not exceed 300sqm," the researchers stated.

The Al Gharyein building is distinguished by its unique architectural design, featuring a rectangular fort with rounded corners, encircled by a substantial stone wall and a supporting retaining wall. The main building, presumed to be a central, unroofed fort due to its expansive area, differs from residential designs, suggesting its use as a public or possibly religious space.

Over four seasons of excavation, beginning in 2018 and concluding in December 2023, SQU's Department of Archaeology has unearthed a vast Early Bronze Age settlement at the site.

The settlement, inhabited during the Hafet (3000-2700 BC) and Umm al Nar (2700-2000 BC) eras, represents a continuity of settlement over nearly a thousand years.

Continued on Page 03

شركة الدقم لتوليد الكهرباء ش.م.و
Duqm Power Company S.P.C.

Tender Announcement

Introduction

Duqm Power Company SPC (herein the "Employer" or "DPC") inviting proposals from qualified and experienced Bidders to undertake the Supply and delivery of branded Lab Chemicals, branded Reagents and branded Equipment's Annual Calibration and Maintenance Support to DIPWP.

Tender Number	Tender Title	Tender Description	Tender Fees	Clarification Closing Date	Bid Submission Date
DPC-DPW-00-000-LE-TND-0050	Supply and delivery of Lab Chemicals, Reagents and Equipment's Annual Calibration and Maintenance Support to DIPWP	Supply and Delivery of branded Laboratory Chemicals and Reagents to DIPWP and also to provide Equipment's calibration and Maintenance support at Duqm for a period of One (1) year. 1. Analytical Grade Chemicals 2. Laboratory Equipment's Reagents 3. Laboratory Equipment for Annual Calibration 4. Laboratory Equipment's Maintenance Support 5. Laboratory Equipment's Spare Parts.	25 OMR	29.02.2024	06.03.2024

Request for proposal

- Bidder shall submit Tender Bond for a value of 2% of the Tender Value valid for a period of 120 days from the Bid submission date.
- Successful Bidder shall provide 5% of the Contract Value as performance bond.
- The RFP will be made available in electronic form only from 9:00 AM, 15th February 2024 Oman time until 29th February 2024, 12:00 pm.

Bidder Minimum Qualifications

Bidder must send the following to Pre-qualify.

- Expression of Interest
- Similar Experience (list of plants) in the same field with reference.
- Tender Board registration/ JSRS Registration and commercial registration in Oman
- ISO certificates if any
- Any other document Bidder can provide to qualify.

We encourage suppliers currently operating in Duqm area (Al Wusta Region).

Interested Suppliers shall contact DPC via email to tender@marafiq.om with the subject heading "Supply and Delivery of Laboratory Chemicals to DIPWP at Duqm" to receive further instructions related to payment of tender fee and collection of RFP.

P.O.Box: 80 P.C: 102
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
www.marafiq.om

Muscat book fair to spotlight Palestine crisis

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The 28th edition of Muscat International Book Fair will open on February 21 showcasing a collection of over 600,000 titles from 34 countries at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

At a press conference on Wednesday, H E Sayyid Saeed bin Sultan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Culture in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, informed that the inaugural ceremony will be held under the patronage of H E Dr Mohammed bin Saeed al Mamari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

This year, Dhahirah will be the guest of honour of the fair and feature a dedicated pavilion highlighting the governorate's intel-

lectual and cultural heritage. A comprehensive agenda of programmes, activities and cultural events is planned for the duration of the fair ending on March 2.

The fair will also serve as a platform for cultural discussions and activities featuring prominent intellectuals and media personalities, H E Sayyid Saeed informed.

According to Ahmed bin Saud al Rawahi, Director of the book fair, a total of 847 publishing houses from 34 countries are participating - 676 directly and 171 through agencies.

The fair will feature 622,000 titles, including approximately 269,000 Arabic books, 200,000 foreign books, and 19,000 Omani publications. Notably, the collection will include 35,989 new releases printed between



H E Sayyid Saeed bin Sultan al Busaidi announces the 28th edition of Muscat International Book Fair on Wednesday

A total of 847 publishing houses from 34 countries will participate showcasing a collection of over 600,000 titles in the 28th edition of Muscat International Book Fair starting on February 21

2023 and 2024. A special area has been designated for children and family-oriented activities, including a theatre for events and workshops, a language corner and a

children's museum corner. The book fair will have several pavilions with cultural cafés.

Rawahi also informed that the fair will put the spotlight on Palestine, addressing different aspects of the crisis, while this year's theme is artificial intelligence, with numerous events and activities exploring this technology.

At the press conference, H E Mohammed bin Saeed al Balushi, Undersecretary of Ministry of Information, outlined the comprehensive media coverage planned for the fair. Daily updates on events and activities will be provided across different media platforms, alongside live coverage of cultural events during the fair, ensuring wide dissemination of the cultural events and discussions taking place.

WEATHER WATCH			PRAYER TIMINGS	
	Max	Min		
Muscat	24	18	Fajr	5.24am
Abu Dhabi	29	17	Sunrise	6.40am
Doha	26	19	Duhr	12.26pm
Kuwait City	22	18	Asr	3.41pm
Manama	25	19	Maghrib	6.07pm
Riyadh	30	18	Isha	7.18pm

REQUEST FOR QUOTE

RENEWAL OF INSURANCE POLICIES 2024

Muscat Duty Free (MDF) invites quotes for the renewal of insurance policies in various classes under medical, life and non-life policies as per company requirement. Interested insurance companies are invited to pay RO50 tender fee, sign a Non Disclosure Agreement and collect the document set which includes full details about the various insurance policies.

Instructions to Insurance Companies:
Deadline for RFQ collection 15th February 2024 5:00 PM.
Request for RFQ document, clarifications and quote must be sent to: muthu@ims89.com
Deadline for submission of the proposals 28th February 2024 by 5:00 PM.

Unesco adds three Omani cities in Global Network of Learning Cities

Muscat - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) has announced the inclusion of three Omani cities in its Global Network of Learning Cities.

The three cities are the wilayats of Muscat, Nizwa and Sur.

The achievement is attributed to the efforts of the Ministry of Education, represented by the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, in partnership with the Ministry of Interior, to promote Omani cities on the global stage. This is done in consideration of its tourism and cultural potential to spread awareness on education for sustainable development in the local community, and to raise Oman's ranking in international indicators, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

The announcement was made during a virtual ceremony organised by the Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning on Wednesday, which saw participation of representatives of the newly listed cities from several countries.



(Supplied photo)

Joining this network is acknowledgment of the efforts undertaken by these cities to achieve the principle of lifelong learning in practice, MoE stated.

The Unesco Global Network of Learning Cities - established by the Unesco Institute for Lifelong Learning in 2012 - aims to

support and improve lifelong learning practices in cities around the world. The network achieves this by enhancing dialogue on education policies, establishing links between those in charge of city administration and various educational institutions, as well as strengthening partnerships be-

tween global cities.

A Learning City works to mobilise its resources in all sectors to promote comprehensive learning for all (from basic to higher education), stimulates learning within families and local communities, facilitates learning for work, and expands the use of

modern educational tools to promote a culture of lifelong learning. This enhances the capabilities of individuals, improves social cohesion and boosts economic and cultural growth of societies, in order to achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

Tender Announcement

Based on The Royal Decree of His Majesty the Sultan, May Allah Protect and Preserve Him, for the Establishment of New Industrial City in Madha and Exemplary Ready-made Factories. The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
5/2024/PEIE/H Q-5	Consultancy Services for Detailed Master Plan, Detailed Design for Madha Industrial City & Detailed Design and Construction Supervision for Entrepreneurship Industrial Complex	28-02-2024	25-03-2024	Consultancy Services	First and above	50

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

@madaynoman

madayn.om

Muscat Eat food fest spread over 3 weekends starts today

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) will launch the sixth edition of Muscat Eat at Oman Automobile Association in Seeb, Muscat on February 15. Scheduled for February 15-17, February 22-24 and February 29-March 2, the festival aims to showcase Oman's diversity in culture and heritage through a rich tapestry of events.

An official at MHT said, "This edition boasts a diverse range of entertainment activities, theatrical performances and participation of specialised institutions offering a variety of local and international cuisines. What makes the festival unique is its focus on supporting small and medium enterprises engaged in the food, entertainment and local products."

The official informed that the festival seeks to enhance tourism, bringing together chefs to present both popular and traditional Omani dishes in a festive atmosphere. Visitors can explore different corners,

including a cooking and culture corner, a section for small and medium enterprises, a food sustainability corner, and workshops designed to build public awareness.

"The festival is planned strategically on three weekends to ensure maximum participation of SMEs. The public is encouraged to visit the festival from 4pm to 12 midnight," the MHT official said.

In reference to the ministry's efforts to develop culinary tourism and arts, he informed that MHT recently launched a

programme called Omani Culinary Arts Forum as part of the implementation of the Oman Tourism Strategy.

Omani cuisine has been recognised as a valuable tourism product that provides authentic and innovative experiences. The forum aims to support food tourism and culinary arts, create diverse job opportunities, promote entrepreneurship and local content linked to supply chains, and showcase local culinary arts as a living embodiment of Omani culture and heritage.

A photograph showing a person's hands holding a small, round, golden-brown food item, possibly a dessert or snack, over a table. The table is set with various food items, including what looks like a small bowl of soup or sauce, and a plate of food. In the background, there are colorful banners and lights, suggesting a festive atmosphere.

Oman Drones event blends technology and creativity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Drones competition, organised by the Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), concluded on Tuesday marking a significant milestone in promoting technological innovation among Omani students.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, an MTCIT official informed that the competition saw enthusiastic participation of 26 students representing various universities in the sultanate.

The competition featured two distinct categories, each designed to challenge and showcase the skills of participants.

In the first - called Manual Drone Control - 16 participants competed, while the second category - called Autonomous Control Enhanced by Artificial Intelligence - saw participation of ten students.

Moamen Mohammed al Busaidi won first place in the Manual Drone Control challenge, while Mohammed Abd al Hamid al Hinai won the Autonomous Control Enhanced by Artificial Intelligence category.

RO177mn projects inaugurated at Duqm zone

Duqm – The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) on Wednesday celebrated the inauguration of the Marine Fishing Port, the Freight Services and Customs Terminal, and the main roads No 1 and 5 at the Duqm Port.

The opening ceremony was sponsored by H E Lieutenant-General Hassan bin Mohsen al Sharqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, in the presence of a number of public and private sectors officials.

Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, Acting CEO of SEZAD, said, "With the completion of the Marine Fishing Port, the Shipping and Customs Services Station, and the main highways at the Duqm Port, the primary and fundamental infrastructure system in SEZAD is completed." He explained that the total cost of the three new projects amounted to about



RO177mn.

The largest commercial fishing port in Oman, the Sea Fishing Port in Duqm, spans 7.5sqkm and was built to accommodate the largest international commercial fishing vessels, with a depth of 10 meters, according to Akaak. The fishing port is made up of two 3.3km long breakwaters and 1.3km of permanently installed ship docks. Six floating berths and a dedicated quay for Coast Guard

police boats have been made available to the port.

The customs station project, he noted, is part of the third package of projects at the Port of Duqm, which includes a number of buildings within the Port of Duqm. The main road No 1 is approximately 3.93km long and is a dual road with two lanes in each direction. Similarly, the main road No 5 is around 3.3km long and is also a dual road.

"SEZAD represents a model of economic integration as it includes several economic and service development zones: a fishing port, a multipurpose port, a dry dock for ship repair and development, multiuse areas for tourism, industry, and logistics, and a modern residential city. All of these are served by a road transport network that connects Duqm to the various zones in Oman," Akaak said.



الأنوار للاستثمارات ش.م.ع

Al Anwar Investments SAOG

Post Box: 468, Postal Code: 131, Al Hamriya, Sultanate of Oman, Tel : +968 24692503/24692504, Fax: +968 24692507, E-mail: info@alanwar.om, Website: www.alanwar.om

Directors' Report

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the un-audited consolidated results of Al Anwar Investments SAOG (AAI) for the nine -month period ended on 31 December 2023.

Financial Overview of Al Anwar Investments Group ("AAI")

The Company reported a net profit of OMR 556,000 for the nine-month period ended on 31 December 2023 as against a net loss of OMR 879,000 for the period ended on 31 December 2022, primarily as a result of fair value gain of OMR 880,000 generated on company's marked to market investments listed on stock exchange in Oman and realised gain of OMR 342,000 on the sale of AAI stake in Almondz Global Securities Ltd, India, which was classified at fair value. The total comprehensive income for the nine-month period ended on 31 December 2023 was OMR 1,853,000 as against a gain of OMR 1,031,000 for the period ended on 31 December 2022, primarily as a result of fair value gain of OMR 846,000 recorded on investments classified as Fair value through other comprehensive income (FVOCI).

Net asset per share of the Group as of 31 December 2023 has increased to 156 Baisas per share. This is on a total paid-up capital of OMR 20.6 mil. On 31 December 2022 the company recorded a net asset per share of 152 Baisas per share on a paid up capital of OMR 20.0 mil.

Investment update

1. Al Maha Ceramics SAOG

The Company has reported revenue of OMR 4,566,836 for the nine-month period ended on 30 September 2023 as compared with OMR 7,606,280 during the previous period, a decline of 40%. Net Loss after tax for the period was OMR 678,898 as compared to a profit of OMR 1,859,379 in the previous period. This is primarily attributed to the decline in revenue due to increased competition from low cost imported tiles from India and the impact of new custom duties in KSA. Additionally, the company recorded a share of loss of OMR 1,232,138 from its newly acquired associate, Al Hael Ceramics LLC.

2. Voltamp Energy SAOG

The Company has reported revenue of OMR 20,340,751 for the nine-month period ended on 30 September 2023, as compared with OMR 26,398,357 during the previous period, a decline of 23%. Net profit after tax (attributable to shareholders of Parent Company) for the period was OMR 360,879 compared to net loss of OMR 1,437,62 3 in the previous period.

3. Arabia Falcon Insurance Company SAOG

The Company has reported Gross Written Premium of OMR 18.6 m during the nine-month period ended on 30 September 2023 as compared to OMR 17.2 m for the previous period, a growth of 8%. The Net profit after tax for the period was OMR 919,517k compared to OMR 936,269k in previous period, a decline of 2%, due to decrease in insurance service results balanced by the increase in investment and other income.

4.AI Ruwad International for Education Services SAOC

The Company has reported lower revenue for the nine months period ended on 31 October 2023. This is primarily due to lower number of students enrolled in the school during academic year.

The school signed a Governance agreement with Ellesmere College, UK on 4th November 2022. This should improve the school's competitive position and support it in attracting higher number of students in future years.

5. National Biscuits Industries Ltd. SAOG

The Company has reported revenue of OMR 11,501,000 for the six months period ended on 30 September 2023, compared with OMR 9,892,000 during the previous period, an increase of 16%. Net profit after tax for the period was OMR 309,000 as compared to Net loss of OMR 2,000 in the previous year.

6. The National Detergent Co. SAOG

The Company has reported revenues of OMR 15,831,401 for the nine-month period ended on 30 September 2023, as compared with OMR 14,852,204 for the previous period, a growth of 6.6%. Net profit for the period was OMR 481,458 compared to loss of OMR 387,944 in the corresponding period of last year. The company exercised control over costs including materials cost, which has contributed to an improvement in the profitability of the company compared to last year corresponding period. The Company's flagship brand BAHAR is maintaining its market position in Oman. The sales have also grown in both Oman as well in Export markets during the period.

7. Oman Chlorine SAOG

The Oman Chlorine Group (Consolidated) has reported revenue of OMR 24,357,000 for the nine-month period ended on 30 September 2023 as compared with OMR 23,470,000 in the previous period, a growth of 3.8%. Net Profit (attributable to Parent Company Shareholders) for the period was OMR 1,613,000 as compared to profit of OMR 2,536,000 in the previous period, a decline of 36.4%, due to decline in Global caustic prices, and increase in finance cost as a result of increase interest rates globally

Oman Chlorine, the parent Company, has reported revenue of OMR 9,784,000 as compared to OMR 9,808,000 of last year, a decline of 0.2%. Net profit for the period was OMR 1,404,000 compared to previous period profit of OMR 2,127,000, a decrease of 34.0%, mainly due to decline in Global caustic prices as compared to 2022.

Future Outlook

Oman's economy is expected to continue to improve as oil prices recovers from the lows witnessed in prior years. S&P Global Ratings has revised Oman's rating outlook to positive from stable, citing improving fiscal position, progress on reforms and rising oil prices.

AAI has maintained a prudent and active approach towards managing its investment portfolio. Our objective this year is to:

- continue to support and pro-actively manage our investment companies and,
- take advantage of investment opportunities available in the market

We are confident that AAI and its Group companies will continue to play a pivotal role in Oman's economic growth, create job opportunities for Omani nationals, and attract foreign investments in the Sultanate of Oman.

Thanks, and Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to take this opportunity to express our greetings and good wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and pray to Allah to grant him and his government success to lead the country and the people to greater prosperity and progress.

The Board records its sincere appreciation to Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion, Capital Market Authority, Muscat Stock Exchange, Bankers, Auditors for their continued support to AAI and the group companies.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Board of Directors of all Al Anwar associate companies for direction given to the managements of the respective companies. I place on record my sincere thanks and appreciation for the dedicated efforts of the management team and all employees of the group companies.

I would also like to convey my sincere thanks to the Shareholders of AAI for the confidence they have reposed in the company and its Board.

For & on behalf of the Board of Directors of
Al Anwar Investments SAOG

Masoud Humaid Malik Al Harthy
Chairman

UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	31 December 2023 OMR'000	31 December 2022 OMR'000	Audited 31 March 2023 OMR'000
Assets			
Investment in associates	31,882	31,611	31,048
Investments at fair value	16,702	15,061	14,176
Property and other assets	2,274	2,302	2,308
Receivables	184	225	1,116
Cash and bank balances	243	220	183
TOTAL ASSETS	51,285	49,419	48,831
Equity			
Share capital	20,600	20,000	20,000
Legal reserve	4,603	4,568	4,603
Fair value reserve	2,449	1,447	1,152
Retained earnings	4,507	4,353	5,551
Equity attributable to shareholders of Parent Company	32,159	30,368	31,306
Liabilities:			
Bank borrowings	18,700	18,625	17,142
Payables	426	426	383
TOTAL LIABILITY	19,126	19,051	17,525
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	51,285	49,419	48,831
Net assets per share attributable to shareholders of the Parent Company (in Baisas)	156	152	157

UNAUDITED CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE Nine MONTH PERIOD ENDED

	31 December 2023 OMR'000	31 December 2022 OMR'000
Share of results of associates	456	689
Interest income	58	250
Realised Profit / (loss) on sale of investment	342	(5)
Net Increase / (decrease) in value of investment	880	(745)
Other income	22	11
Net income	1,758	200
Administrative expenses	(260)	(234)
Capital work-in-progress written off	(36)	-
Financing charges	(776)	(775)
Corporate social responsibility	-	(10)
Director Remuneration and sitting fees	(130)	(60)
Total expenses	(1,202)	(1,079)
Profit (loss) for the period before tax	556	(879)
Income tax expense	-	-
Profit / (loss) after tax for the period	556	(879)
Other comprehensive income (expense):		
Share of other comprehensive profit / (loss) of associates	451	(190)
Net Increase / (decrease) in value of investment	846	2,100
Other comprehensive profit for the period	1,297	1,910
Total comprehensive Income (loss) for the period attributable to Equity holders of Parent Company	1,853	1,031
Earnings profit (loss) per share attributable to shareholders of Parent Company (in Baisas)	3	(4)

Note:1) The complete accounts will be send by mail to any shareholders who requests them in arabic or english as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.
2) Financial statements are available on MSX website.

Omani Industry Day celebrations focus on AI, automation

Our Correspondent
Muscat



H E Dr Saleh bin Saeed Masan

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) celebrated Omani Industry Day in Sohar on Wednesday, under the theme 'Factory Automation and Artificial Intelligence'.

This year's Omani Industry Day celebrations emphasised the importance of the industrial sector as a main pillar of economic diversification and achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040, in the context of the global shift towards the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The celebrations mainly focused on the use AI and automation in the industrial sector, particularly in factories.

The ceremony was attended by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, and a number of excellencies and high-ranking officials.

H E Dr Saleh bin Saeed Masan, Undersecretary of MoCIIP for Commerce and Industry, delivered a speech in which he emphasised that the industrial sector is of great importance for achieving comprehensive development in Oman, as the rest of the economic sectors revolve around it and integrate with it.

H E Masan noted that the latest data issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information indicate that the output of the manufacturing sector amounted to RO2.454bn during the first nine months of 2023 at constant prices, and non-oil ex-

ports amounted to RO6.767bn until November 2023.

According to the Global Industrial Competitive Report, issued by the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Oman achieved a jump in its global ranking by about 16 places in just 7 years, and was ranked 56th globally out of 153 countries, reflecting the acceleration of industrial competitiveness over the past years.

The Omani Industry Day celebration ceremony included the inauguration of the National Product Identity Platform (Made in Oman), an electronic service platform to expedite the obtaining of a national product identity license and certificate, and the use of the logo on Omani products.

By establishing the National Product Identity Platform, MoCIIP aims to utilise the database of Omani products registered in it to guide various businesses and activities supporting local products and highlighting their quality and diversity.

During the ceremony, MoCIIP signed four agreements with local companies to enhance the performance of the industrial sector.



ONEIC wins RO42mn contracts from OETC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman National Engineering & Investment Company (ONEIC) has been awarded two major contracts worth RO41.963mn by Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), a member of Nama Group, to build power transmission lines in Dhofar Governorate.

'The company would like to announce to its valued shareholders and investors that OETC has awarded ONEIC two tenders for the sum of RO41,963,337, for establishing 132kv/33kv electricity transmission lines associated with 132kv transmission lines in

Dhofar Governorate," ONEIC said in a disclosure filed with the Muscat Stock Exchange on Wednesday.

The contract's duration is for 18 months, commencing on February 13, 2024.

'These projects are part of several significant strong projects that have been awarded to the company in an innovative manner and achieved successes and technical leaps in building expertise in the field of engineering specialization,' ONEIC said.

ONEIC further said that it anticipates generating substantial revenues through these new projects.

OPEC remains bullish on global oil demand growth in 2024-25

Muscat – The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) remains bullish on global oil demand growth in the next two years but has nudged down the quantity of crude its members must produce to balance the market, according to the latest edition of OPEC’s Monthly Oil Market Report.

The 12-member oil producers’ group sees worldwide oil demand rising by 2.25mn barrels per day (bpd) in 2024 and 1.85mn bpd in 2025, OPEC said as reported by S&P Global Commodity Insights.

The predictions are unchanged from January 2024.

In total, global liquids consumption will reach 104.4mn bpd this year and 106.25mn bpd in 2025, up 40,000 bpd each month on month, the report said.

However, the organisation lowered the ‘call’ on its crude – the amount OPEC would have to pump to balance global supply with demand – by 90,000 bpd in 2024 and 110,000 bpd in 2025, compared with January’s estimates.

OPEC output will need to hit 28.38mn bpd in 2024 and 28.85mn bpd in 2025, the bloc now predicts, S&P Global Commodity Insights reported.

Both predictions remain well above current OPEC production, giving the group a strong hand to influence prices the forecasts come to pass. In the report, OPEC said its members had pumped 26.34mn bpd in January, down slightly from 26.69mn bpd in December.

Non-OPEC output

The OPEC report forecasts that non-OPEC oil production will rise



1.19mn bpd in 2024 and by 1.27mn bpd in 2025, with the latter unchanged month on month, according to S&P Global Commodity Insights.

Non-OPEC producers including the US, Canada, Brazil and Guyana have stepped up output in recent months, reducing the bloc’s market share and constraining its capacity to support prices.

By contrast, OPEC and its Russia-led allies, which together formed OPEC+ in 2017, have embarked on a series of overlapping production cuts since 2022, the most recent of which came into effect in January.

In addition to Saudi Arabia’s and Russia’s 1.5mn bpd of voluntary production and export cuts, extended through first-quarter 2024, other members have pledged to roll back a combined 696,000 bpd of production.

Nevertheless, while OPEC’s linchpin producer Saudi Arabia is pumping below 9mn bpd, levels not seen since the pandemic, others including Iraq and Kuwait continue to produce much above their output quotas, setting the stage for a potential compliance row in coming months.

The next OPEC+ decision will come in March, when the volun-

tary production cuts are set to expire. The group is due to meet next in Vienna June 1.

The multilayered output cuts have not succeeded in preventing a weak pricing structure at the start of 2024, fueled by demand uncertainty, high interest rates and record production in some non-OPEC countries, the S&P Global Commodity Insights report said.

Platts, a unit of S&P Global Commodity Insights, last assessed dated Brent price at \$84.62 per barrel on February 12, having recovered from a December dip but well below the 2023 high of \$97.92 per barrel reached September 27.

OPEC has blamed poor prices on financial speculators but said in the report that short selling had eased.

‘Oil prices were further buoyed by stronger-than-expected macroeconomic data, specifically from the US, and signs of robust physical market fundamentals,’ it said.

Moving forward, OPEC remains optimistic about global economic growth, predicting a GDP increase of 2.7% in 2024 and 2.9% in 2025, driven by waning inflation and India and China.

Total number of Fintechs hits 30,000 globally

Muscat – According to data presented by Stocklytics.com, the number of financial technologies companies (Fintechs) has doubled in the past five years and hit almost 30,000 in 2024.

Over the past five years, the financial services industry has drawn tens of thousands of tech companies whose services and products transformed how people and businesses spend, invest,

save, and borrow money.

As AI-driven solutions continue pushing the sector forward, the Fintech landscape counts more companies than ever, according to a press release.

The number of new companies working in this market continued surging in 2021, with the total number rising to 26,346 by the end of the year. After a slow-down in 2022.

Annual Financial Report of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2023



BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Muscat City Desalination Company SAOG (the Company), I am pleased to present to you the Annual Report of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2023.

The Company was incorporated on 19 January 2013 as a Closed Joint Stock company. In 2017, the Company underwent an Initial Public Offering pursuant to its obligations under the Project Founder's Agreement and was subsequently listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on 2 January 2018.

Operational Highlights

The Company owns and operates the 42 Million Imperial Gallons per Day (191,000 m3/day) Al Ghubrah Independent Water Plant (the Plant). The Plant is in North Ghubrah, Muscat Governorate, Sultanate of Oman and was developed under a Build, Own, Operate (BOO) scheme. Commercial operation date (COO) was achieved on 19 February 2016.

The Company currently generates its revenue through the sale of potable water pursuant to a Water Purchase Agreement (WPA) with Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWC). The potable water from the Plant is fully contracted to OPWC. Electricity, which is the main energy source, is procured from Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC) pursuant to the Electricity Supply Agreement with MEDC. The Operations and Maintenance (O&M) of the plant is contracted to Muscat City Desalination Operation and Maintenance Company LLC (MCDOMC or the Operator) through a 20-year Operations and Maintenance Contract (O&M Contract).

During the financial year 2023, the Company achieved a lower Plant availability of 95.20%, compared with 97.39% during the same period in 2022, which was mainly due to the higher scheduled outage rate of 4.57% in 2023, compared with 2.38% for the same period in 2022. Further, the total forced outage rate for the financial year in 2023 was 0.23% which is similar to 2022.

During the year, the Plant experienced algae bloom events in the month of July 2023 and August 2023, and the operations and availability of the Plant was adequately controlled with the incorporation of the Dissolved Air Flotation (DAF) system adopted at the Plant. The impact of the algae bloom events was minimal. In addition, the Plant did not have the material infestation of jellyfish during this year.

This year, the Company achieved a potable water production of 66,593,073 m3 a reduction by 0.5% compared with the total water production of 66,926,208 m3 in 2022. This was mainly due to more scheduled outages.

Financial Results

In 2023, operating revenue decreased by 0.4% to RO 18,563 million as compared to RO 18,644 million in 2022, as a result of lower electricity price in 2023. Operating costs in 2023 was RO 12,047 million which is almost similar to 2022 result of RO 12,046 million. Accordingly, the Company recorded profit before tax of RO 2,749 million, which is 7.8% lower compared with RO 2,982 million in 2022.

Pursuant to the authority granted by the shareholders at the Annual General Meeting held on 23 March 2023, the Board of Directors has resolved the distribution of cash dividends of the retained profits for the year ended 31 December 2022 as below:

- a) At its meeting held on 18 April 2023, the distribution of cash dividends of value 3,210 baizas per share to the shareholders who are registered in the Company's register as at 15 May 2023 amounting to circa RO 500,000. The dividend was paid in May 2023.
- b) At its meeting held on 25 October 2023, the distribution of cash dividends of value 3,220 baizas per share to the shareholders who are registered in the Company's register as at 1 November 2023 amounting to circa RO 501,000 and was paid in November 2023.

The Board of Directors, at its meeting held on 14 February 2024, resolved the distribution of cash dividends in May and November 2024, to the Company's Shareholders who are registered in the Company's register as at the dates to be determined by the Board, out of retained earnings of the Company as reflected in the Company's audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2023, providing that the aggregate amount of the dividends shall not exceed Baiza 4,822 per share amounting to circa RO 750,000. The dividend distribution is subject to Shareholders' approval at the Annual General Meeting to be held on 25 March 2024 and in compliance with the Commercial Companies Law, other applicable Omani legislation and also certain covenants stipulated in term loan facilities agreements.

Health, Safety and Environment

Ensuring full compliance with Health, Safety and Environmental (HSE) standards continues to be a high priority of the Company and its Operator. As of 31 December 2023, the Company achieved 2,863 days without Lost Time Incident since its COO. In April 2017, the Operator was awarded with ISO 14001:2004 Environmental Management System and ISO 45001:2018 Occupational Health and Safety Management System. In September 2018, the Operator successfully migrated its ISO 14001:2004 to ISO 14001:2015, and both ISO Certificates have been re-certified in July 2023. It is worth noting that the Operator has been awarded ISO 22301:2019 Business Continuity Management System certification since March 2022.

Corporate Governance

The Board of Directors and Management of the Company believe in the importance of the internal control system. The Company has a comprehensive system of internal controls in place. The Company had carried out a comprehensive review of its key internal policies and procedures to ensure its compliance.

The Company has established an in-house Internal Audit Unit since 2022. The Internal Audit Unit has developed an internal audit plan for 2023 which was approved by the Audit Committee, and fully implemented during the year.

There was no significant finding identified for the year ended 31 December 2023. The Management is fully committed to implement the recommendations arising from the findings of the Internal Auditor.

Al Busaidy Mansoor Jamal & Co ("AMJ") was appointed, to carry out appraisal for the performance of the Board during the financial year ending 31 December 2023, pursuant to the approval by the shareholders at the Company's AGM held on 23 March 2023.

AMJ conducted the Board evaluation based on the criteria approved by the shareholders and the evaluation report will be presented to the shareholders at the Company's AGM which will be held on 25 March 2024.

Information Security

The Company has developed information technology ("IT") and security policy and procedures pursuant to the Capital Market Authority ("CMA") Circular No. E/1/2022 on Information Security Guidelines for Public Listed Companies. Some enhancements to the Company's IT systems and controls have been implemented, whereas some longer-term enhancement projects are being implemented. The Internal Audit Unit reviewed the implementation of the enhancement projects with supervision by the Audit Committee.

During the financial year, assessments of the policy, procedure and IT infrastructures were conducted by consultants who are accredited by the relevant authorities in Oman to ensure that the Company's information security measures are compliant with regulations, and effectively protect against potential threats and vulnerabilities. There were no significant cyber security breaches identified for the year ended 31 December 2023.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Since the outset of our operation, we've deeply committed to contribute toward the wellbeing of the Omani community at the forefront of our business. This philosophy has taken root throughout our day-to-day operation. Our CSR activities in the year 2023 are sought to build and strengthen our outreach to key areas of the local community, especially focused on the area of education, human development, and health and safety. CSR activities undertaken by the Company in 2023 are as below:

- Donation of wheelchairs to Oman Association for Persons with Disabilities**
On the ground of our CSR philosophy, we donated wheelchairs to Oman Association for Persons with Disabilities with our sincere intention and hope that these wheelchairs would be able to help communities with disabilities in the Sultanate of Oman.
- Donation of special wheelchairs to Association for the Welfare of the Handicapped Children**
The association serves children from the age of 6 to 14 through comprehensive programs of education, health, physical and academic services. The association is also specialised in providing therapies for children with Autism and Down Syndrome. We hope that these special wheelchairs will improve the wellbeing of these children.
- Donation of sport equipment to three schools**
The Company also donated sport equipment to the following schools as part of the CSR initiatives:
 - Thuraya Bint Mohammed Al-Busaaidiya for girls;
 - Al-Khawai Basic School for boys; and
 - Al-Ullas Basic School.

We hope this initiative will benefit these schools and their students.

- Cash Donation to Oman Charitable Organization**
We also made a cash donation to Oman Charitable Organization, which is in line with CMA's guideline.
- Cash Donation to Al Noor Association for the Blinds**
It is an NGO which serves the welfare interest of the blinds for their social, economic, education, health and training, including teaching of Braille. It is financed via donations from the public and corporate organisations. The Company believes the cash donation will benefit the association in achieving its objectives.

- Plant tours for school students to learn the importance of water resources**
We invited students from two Omani public schools to our Plant. During the Plant tours, students were given the opportunity to learn the importance of water resources and firsthand information about the process of seawater desalination process which is the primary source of water in Muscat and essential for the life of citizens in the Sultanate of Oman. Students were from Thuraya Bint Mohammed Al-Busaaidiya for girls, and Al-Khawai Basic School for boys, both of which are in the vicinity of our Plant.
- On-the-job technical training for students**
In line with our commitment to supporting the human development of young Omanis especially who are aiming at working for industrial sectors, we accepted some young students for the on-the-job-training for the operation and maintenance of water desalination facilities at our Plant. During the year, we accepted, in total, 33 students from the following institutes:
 - Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC);

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them either in Arabic or English to the company's address at PO Box: 1935, PC: 114, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman or go to our website www.mcdcoman.com

Oman Aluminium Recycling Forum calls for maximising in-country waste recycling

Muscat – Sohar Aluminium held Oman's first 'Aluminium Recycling Forum 2024: Forging the Future,' under the patronage of H E Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority, at JW Marriott Hotel, Muscat.

The forum, which was supported by the Environment Authority, marked a platform bringing together key players in the Omani aluminium industry, metal recyclers, and academia to understand the current situation in the sultanate for aluminium scrap and source opportunities for in-country recycling.

This first-of-its-kind forum featured several insightful presentations, discussions, and keynote speeches from industry pioneers such as Marlen Bertram, Director – Scenarios



and Forecasts, International Aluminium Institute and presentations by Dr Majid al Maharbi, Associate Professor at Sultan Qaboos University, and others.

Speaking at forum, Eng Said bin Mohammed al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium Company, said, "Oman's Vision 2040 aims to promote up-

stream and downstream integration to enhance the contribution of non-oil sectors to the GDP. Aluminium recycling can play a part here too, as one company's scrap can be another's feedstock. To further this vision, we need to collaborate on maximising aluminium recycling within our industry."

Germany's economic morale at one-year high

Frankfurt, Germany – Germany's economic morale further improved to a one-year high in February amid hopes that borrowing costs this year will drop, according to data released on Tuesday.

The ZEW Indicator of Economic Sentiment for Germany this month rose to 19.9, a jump of 4.7 points from the previous month, above market forecasts.

"More than two-thirds of the (survey) respondents expect the European Central Bank to make interest rate cuts over the next six months in light of falling inflation rates. Almost three-quarters of respondents expect imminent interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve", said ZEW head Achim Wambach.

An index of current condi-

tions in Germany, on the other hand, dropped 4.4 points to minus 81.7 points in February, its lowest level since June 2020.

The ZEW indicator of economic sentiment for the euro area increased 2.3 points from a month ago to 25 in February.

The situation indicator for the eurozone climbed 5.9 points to minus 53.4 points.

Team Land Cruiser Auto Body excels at 2024 Dakar Rally

Team Land Cruiser Auto Body (TLC) has secured their 11th consecutive Production Car category victory at the 2024 Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia.

These unprecedented results are thanks to the performance of Akira Miura and co-driver Mayeul Barbet, who took first place in their No 500 Land Cruiser 300 GR Sport, with Ronald Basso and Jean-Michel Polato taking second in the No. 501 Land Cruiser 300 GR Sport.

The Dakar Rally, unfolding over Saudi Arabia for the fifth time, covered 7,891km from AlUla to Yanbu along the Red Sea Coast.

The route included 4,727km of timed specials, guiding 778 competitors through the diverse landscapes of Saudi Arabia.

The 2024 edition introduced a new stage, the '48H CHRONO STAGE', pushing participants' endurance to the limit across two consecutive days of driving to finish the stage. The rally's final stage was held on a challenging 174km loop course in Yanbu, marking the conclusion of the 15-day event. The stage, characterized by sandy terrain and hidden obstacles, demanded careful driving.

Akio Toyoda, TGR Chairman, also known as Morizo, commented, "To everyone at Team Land Cruiser Auto Body, congratulations on winning the Production Car category for the 11th consecutive year! I think car No. 500 achieved victory thanks to three people: driver Akira Miura



alongside two navigators, Mayuel Barbe and the late Laurent Lichtleuchter, who was always watching over them. I'm really happy that car No. 500 was able to cross the finish line with the best result. Thank you for your continued support in 'making-ever better Land Cruisers'!"

The Land Cruiser 300, which marked its debut participation in Dakar Rally in last year's edition with high driving performance and a one-two finish, managed to overcome previous speed-related challenges this time around with improvements in the engine

air intake system, rear suspension, and enhanced tires. This allowed TLC to reaffirm its dominance in the Production Car category and add another chapter to its illustrious legacy.

This edition of the Dakar Rally also saw Toyota take part in the Dakar Future Program's Mission 1000. This initiative encourages automakers to develop hydrogen engines, electric or biofuel hybrids, and other cutting-edge carbon-neutral powertrain technologies. 10 vehicles were selected to traverse a 1000 km section that allowed participants to pinpoint areas for further tech-

nical development. It also provided a unique opportunity for Toyota to put its hydrogen engine-powered HySE-X1 to the test.

The vehicle was developed by the Hydrogen Small mobility & Engine technology (HySE) research association, a collaborative effort between Toyota and four other Japanese automotive and motorcycle manufacturers. It is based on a chassis by Belgian partner Overdrive Racing, with a modified layout to accommodate a hydrogen fuel tank and fuel supply system. Its participation in Dakar Rally furthers Toy-

ota's carbon-neutrality efforts and promotes global awareness around the potential of compact hydrogen mobility.

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established TGR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand.



E-Travel & Tours organises event for corporate clients

E-Travel & Tours, a reputed travel agency engaged in providing a bouquet of top-notch travel-related services in Oman, hosted a classy event introducing a pioneering concept of soft-adventure self-drive guided road trips through more than 70 diverse countries worldwide, with top-tier dream vehicles. The programme was held on January 27 in association with The Passage, an Oman-bound travel company and Adventures Overland, the world's leading & multiple award-winning, best luxury road trip company, reputed for its benchmark-setting excellence.

'This was an exclusive programme for VIPs, CIPs and the top brass of various key corporate clients,' a release stated.

The chic initiative showcasing this unique travel experience, was coordinated by their general manager Ejaz Kazi and unfolded at the Afrah Ballroom at the Grand Hyatt, under the auspices of their Group CEO Hussain al Lawati.

Tushar Agarwal, the co-founder of Adventures Overland, an avid traveller himself, and Kuldeep Singh Yadav, it's Business Head, presented a stunning show, whetting the audience's appetite with exhilarating videos of their Supercar Drive, Iceland Expedition, the A.O. Brand Video and their amazing Jordan Overland itinerary, which they hope to replicate in Oman in the near future. Adding to the excitement was the prize for two lucky persons to join their breathtaking seven-night Spiti Valley Himalayan odyssey.

'For further information on these refreshing get-aways, unfolding a niche & hitherto untapped avenue of vacationing contrasting with mundane city-style vacation packages, do get in touch with the experienced Vacations team at E-Travel, who will guarantee you an unforgettable experience,' the company stated, adding, 'let's conquer the world, one road trip at a time, together with Adventures Overland'.

Geely holds test drive event in Sohar

'Happy Life Geely Drive' - a highly anticipated Geely test drive event - was held at Lulu Hypermarket in Sohar on February 2, creating excitement amongst the audience, while setting the mood for the next episode which has been lined up for Lulu Hypermarket in Sur, on Thursday and Friday.

The event in Sohar featured a grand display of all the Geely car models, aiming to showcase the brand's elegance, innovation, and superior performance.

The test drive, organised with utmost care, aimed at engaging the audience further by offering various interactive activities.

Face painting and henna artists were available throughout the event, providing attendees with captivating designs and transforming their experience into an immersive one.

With an overwhelming response from the attendees, Geely test drive event in Sohar



was undoubtedly one of the great events. The event left the audience fascinated by the cutting-edge features and sleek designs of the Geely car models, and captivated by the smooth execution of the event itself.

Building on this success, Geely is thrilled to announce the continuation of the roadshow in various locations across Oman.

Attendees of the Sur event

will once again have the opportunity to explore Geely's impressive car line-up and experience the brand's commitment to excellence first-hand.

As the roadshow progresses, Geely will be making stops at Lulu Hypermarket in Nizwa, on February 22 and 23, at Barka on February 29 and March 1 at Grand Centre Mall, and finally, in Salalah on March 7 and 8 at Lule

Hypermarket. The roadshow events in each location will start from 5pm onwards, allowing attendees to indulge in a remarkable automotive experience.

Geely understands the importance of connecting with the local community and is committed to bringing its exceptional car models directly to the people. The roadshow events are a testament to this dedication, offering Oman residents the chance to explore the advanced features, luxurious interiors, and advanced technology that Geely has to offer.

Geely invited all car enthusiasts and residents of Oman to attend these upcoming events and witness the epitome of automotive brilliance. 'Make sure to mark your calendars for the test drive event 'Happy Life Geely Drive' happening near you and get ready to embark on an unforgettable journey with Geely,' it added.



Oman Post, Palestine Post sign MoU to enhance cooperation

Oman Post, the national postal operator, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Palestine Post during the 1st Arab Postal Leaders Forum.

The MoU was signed by Sayyid Nasr Albusaidi, Chief

Postmaster General at Oman Post, and Moath Daraghmeh, General Director of Palestinian Post, a release stated.

The MoU focuses on fostering collaboration in postal and financial services, joint stamp is-

suance, e-commerce, and the exchange of experiences in the postal services field, it added.

The forum brought together leaders from the postal sector across the Arab world, fostering discussions and partnerships.

Asyad highlights Oman's role as key integrated logistics hub in region

Marking a significant milestone in the realm of sustainable logistics and project cargo management, Asyad Group, Oman's global integrated logistics provider, was the Strategic Partner at Break Bulk Middle East 2024.

Held on Monday and Tuesday in Dubai, this paramount event attracted over 8,000 professionals and key decision-makers from the global oil and gas, energy, chemicals, and infrastructure sectors, reinforcing its position as the region's foremost venue for initiating new project ventures.

Asyad's showcase featured its integrated logistics capabilities, including Asyad Shipping, Asyad Ports, Port of Duqm, Asyad Logistics, Oman & Etihad Rail, all backed by the strategic support of Asyad's Free Zones.

This holistic approach not only highlighted the group's important role in facilitating major projects but also positioned Oman as a key logistics hub in the region.

"As part of our group-wide commercial integration efforts, we're committed to showcasing our comprehensive suite of services to regional and global players," asserts Andrew Dawes, Chief Commercial Officer of Asyad Group.

"Aligned with our ambitious objectives, we're aggressively expanding into global markets to understand customer needs and promote Oman and Asyad as the ideal logistics hub and global supply chain facilitator."

Breakbulk Middle East 2024 is a pivotal forum for exploring



the latest trends and challenges facing the breakbulk and project cargo sector, including sustainability, decarbonisation, and the handling of project cargo.

Asyad highlighted its leadership in these critical areas. This participation reflected the group's dedication to steering the industry towards more sustainable and efficient paradigms, embodying Asyad's commitment to integrating innovation with sustainability in maritime and logistics operations.

"This event enabled us to fortify our connections with industry leaders and pave the way for future collaborative endeavors that will significantly bolster Oman's and the wider region's sustainable development objectives," Dawes added.

Asyad Group interacted directly with an array of project owners, EPC contractors, industrial manufacturers, and global project forwarders. These pivotal interactions are essential for sculpting the logistics industry's future, enabling Asyad to both influence and respond to the evolving demands of the sector.

The strategic partnership with Breakbulk Middle East 2024 aligned with Asyad's objectives to highlight its leading role in the logistics sector, emphasising sustainability and efficiency in project cargo handling.

By participating in this premier event, Asyad aimed to solidify its position as a catalyst for economic growth and a leader in the transition towards sustainable logistics solutions.

European NATO allies to invest \$380bn in defence in 2024, says secretary-general



NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg

Ankara, Turkey - European NATO allies will invest a total of US\$380bn in 2024, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced on Wednesday. Stoltenberg said he expects 18 allies to spend two per cent of the GDP on defence this year.

would produce 200,000 artillery shells per year. "We can never take peace for granted," Stoltenberg said, and added that there is 'no imminent military threat against any NATO ally'. "NATO will continue to ensure that there is no room for

We can never take peace for granted. NATO will continue to ensure that there is no room for miscalculation in Moscow about our resolve to protect all allies

JENS STOLTENBERG

"That is another record number and a six-fold increase from 2014 when only three allies met the target. In 2024, NATO allies in Europe will invest a combined total of US\$380bn in defence. For the first time, this amounts to two per cent of the combined GDP," NATO chief told a news conference ahead of the defence ministers' meeting. He added that the ministers will also discuss increasing production, and recalled that Germany started building a new ammunition factory that

miscalculation in Moscow about our readiness and resolve to protect all allies," he stressed. Stoltenberg also commented on the war in Ukraine, and the Western countries' support, hailing the EU's recent decision 'on a major new package of aid'. The secretary-general also hailed the Ukraine Armed Forces' victories in the Black Sea region, for pushing away the Russian fleet and being able to export grains without a deal with Moscow. Anadolu Agency



Israel continues siege of Nasser hospital in Gaza

Gaza, Palestine - Doctors Without Borders (MSF) on Wednesday voiced deep concern on the situation in the Nasser hospital in Khan Younis, south of the Gaza Strip, as the Israeli army continues its siege and shelling of the health facility.

"We are very worried about the situation unfolding at Nasser hospital in Khan Younis," said MSF in a statement on X.

It called on the Israeli army 'to ensure that all medical staff, patients and displaced people are unharmed'.

MSF added that the Israeli army ordered all displaced people inside the hospital to evacuate it, while only allowing medical staff and patients to stay 'with a limit of one caretaker per patient'.

"People are afraid to leave the hospital because they hear reports of people being shot at. Those who wish to leave must be granted safe passage out," MSF concluded.

On Tuesday, the Health Ministry in Gaza said a number of Palestinians were killed by the Israeli army while trying to exit the Nasser hospital.

The Hamas group, for its part, also warned that the Israeli army 'intends to commit a crime' against those inside the hospital.

On Sunday, the head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said it was deeply concerned about the situation in and around the Nasser hospital in the Gaza Strip, which has been surrounded by Israeli forces.

"We're deeply concerned

about the safety of patients and health personnel due to the intensifying hostilities in the vicinity of the hospital. We repeat: health MUST be protected at all times," Tedros Ghebreyesus said on X, reiterating his call for a cease-fire.

Death toll in Gaza jumps to 28,576

The Palestinian death toll from Israel's deadly offensive against the Gaza Strip jumped to 28,576 since October 7, the Health Ministry in Gaza said on Wednesday.

The Gaza-based Health Ministry made the statement as the Israeli deadly onslaught against Gaza enters its 131st day.

It also said 68,291 other people have also been injured in the ongoing onslaught.

The statement noted that in the past 24 hours, the Israeli army committed 11 massacres across the Gaza Strip which left 103 people killed and 145 others injured. "Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads and rescuers can't reach them," it added.

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Palestinian group Hamas in October, in which nearly 1,200 Israelis are believed to have been killed.

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

Israel stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice, which in an interim ruling in January ordered Tel Aviv to stop genocidal acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians in Gaza.

Meanwhile, families of Israeli captives held in Gaza departed for The Hague to lodge a case against the Palestinian Hamas group at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

According to the Israeli public broadcaster KAN, the Israeli delegation, comprising 100 representatives of the families, will file the complaint, and is expected to hold a news conference near the court in The Hague.

Anadolu Agency

'Russia preparing for conflict with NATO'

London, UK - Russia is ramping up preparations for a potential military conflict with NATO within the next decade and is planning to double the number of its troops stationed along its border with the Baltic states and Finland, Estonia's intelligence chief claimed on Tuesday.

Russia is currently unwilling to take any military action against the Western alliance in the short term, partly because Russia has to keep troops in Ukraine, Kaupo Rosin, director-general of the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, told reporters in the capital Tallinn ahead of the release of Estonia's national security threats report. However, according to him, Moscow believes a military conflict with NATO is possible within the next 10 years.

"We will highly likely to see an increase in manpower, possibly doubling. We will see an increase in armed personnel carriers, tanks, and artillery systems over



the coming years," Rosin said, referring to the Baltic states of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, as well as the Finnish border.

Rosin is the latest European official to warn of a military expansionary threat to Baltic states from the Kremlin, calling for European states to start increasing

their military spending and rearming. Estonia and other Baltic states have increased military spending to more than three per cent of GDP on defence this year, exceeding NATO's two per cent target.

He claimed that the likelihood of a military Russian attack

'would be much higher than without any preparation'.

The Russian war on Ukraine has prompted Germany to permanently plan to base 4,800 troops in the Lithuanian region by 2027, which analysts argue is at risk of a Russian attack.

Anadolu Agency

Pakistan's 'old guards' set to form new coalition government

Karachi, Pakistan - A coalition led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is set to form the new government for a five-year term after amassing support of newly-elected lawmakers it required for a simple majority in the lower house of parliament, or National Assembly.

The crucial February 8 elections resulted in a hung parliament, with no party securing two-thirds seats to form the

government with a simple majority, triggering an intense race to stitch coalitions.

According to the latest tally announced by the Election Commission of Pakistan, the PML-N-led coalition, which also includes the centre-left Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), and several smaller parties, has a combined strength of over 150 out of 266 direct seats in the

National Assembly.

Ahsan Iqbal, a central PML-N party leader, has also claimed that the coalition has surpassed the number required for a majority in parliament.

Speaking to Anadolu, he asserted that the total seats won by the coalition partners are 'close to two-thirds majority'.

The coalition has also named former Prime Minister and PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif as its

candidate for the coveted post for a second term.

The junior Sharif remained prime minister of a coalition government with almost the same parties for 16 months, from April 2022 to August 2023, following the ouster of Imran Khan through a no-trust vote.

To form a government with a simple majority, a party requires 134 direct seats.

Anadolu Agency

CONDOLENCES



The Chairman, Management and Staff of Apex Press & Publishing express their heartfelt condolences on the sad demise of

MADHU PILLAI

We pray to God Almighty to rest his departed soul in eternal peace and give strength to the bereaved family members to bear this irreparable loss.

Indonesia elections: Counting begins as millions cast ballots

The official results will be announced in the next 35 days while early trends are expected to flow by late Wednesday

Jakarta, Indonesia - A six-hour-long voting process has concluded in Indonesia where millions of people on Wednesday cast their ballots in the country's presidential, national and provincial elections.

Polls opened at 7am (0000GMT) amid heavy rain in the capital Jakarta and other parts of the country and closed at 1pm (0600GMT).

Counting has begun at many places.

However, heavy rains and flooding forced the election authority to delay polls in Demak regency, Central Java, Jakarta Post news website reported. Some polling stations were damaged due to gusty winds and downpours.

The official results will be announced in the next 35 days while early trends of Wednesday's poll are expected to flow by late Wednesday.

Voter turnout was yet to be released.



A voter casts her ballot at the No. 35 polling station in Bogor, Indonesia on Wednesday (Xinhua)

More than 204mn people were eligible to vote to choose the country's next president, vice president and lawmakers for the parliament as well as members of provincial legislative bodies.

Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto, former Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo and former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan are the three frontrunners to succeed President Joko

Widodo, popularly known as 'Jokowi'.

"This is a celebration of democracy," Jokowi told reporters before casting his vote along with first lady Iriana Widodo in the Gambir district of Jakarta.

Baswedan cast his vote at a polling station near his private residence in Lebak Bulus in southern Jakarta.

Pranowo voted in Semarang, the capital of Central Java province, where he served as governor for a decade.

Leading in pre-poll surveys, Subianto cast his ballot in the Hambalang area of West Java province.

No survey has shown any of the three candidates passing the 50 per cent mark to claim the presidency.

Early voting began overseas, where the Indonesian diaspora has been casting their ballots since February 5.

Indonesia is the world's third-largest democracy and the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy.

It is also holding the world's largest single-day elections to choose around 20,000 administrative officials across 38

Heavy rains and flooding forced the election authority to delay polls in Demak regency, Central Java. Some polling stations were damaged due to gusty winds and downpours

provinces where 820,000 polling stations have been set up.

Some seven million officials have been deployed to oversee polls on election day, marred by rains and flooding in some areas.

It marks the second time since 2019 that Indonesia holding presidential and parliamentary elections simultaneously.

Besides presidential hopefuls, some 10,000 candidates are vying for positions.

Indonesia is home to more than 274mn people.

The Southeast Asian country held its first free general elections in 1999 and has since 2004 directly elected its president.

Spread across 17,000 islands, Indonesia has three time zones.

Barring police and military personnel, anyone aged 17 and above can vote.

Polling in the eastern provinces of Maluku, North Maluku, Papua, West Papua, South Papua, Central Papua, Papua Highlands and Southwest Papua closed two hours early.

Anadolu Agency

Ancient military base uncovered in Israel

Tel Aviv, Israel - Archaeologists uncovered the remains of an ancient Roman legionary base in northern Israel dating back 1,800 years, the Israel Antiquities Authority announced on Wednesday.

The excavation, at the foot of Tel Megiddo, reveals insights into the military presence and infrastructure of the Roman Vllth 'Ferrata' Iron Legion, the Antiquities Authority said.

Tel Megiddo, also known simply as Megiddo, occupies a strategic position overlooking the Jezreel Valley, a key crossroads of ancient trade routes connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia. Its history spans thousands of years, making Tel Megiddo one of the most extensively excavated sites in the region.

Among the discoveries are sections of the Via Pretoria, the camp's main road, as well as a semicircular-shaped podium and stone-paved areas that formed part of a large public building. According to the Antiquities Authority, the sheer scale of the legionary base - measuring 550 metres long and 350 metres wide - makes it a unique find in the region. Preliminary surveys of the camp area using ground-penetrating radar indicated that the entire base was underneath the wheat fields of Kibbutz Megiddo.

ANI/TPS

STRUCK BY ART



A visitor views a painting during the press preview of an exhibition of the works by Dutch painter Frans Hals at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, on Tuesday. The exhibition will be open to the public from February 16 to June 9 (Xinhua)

Storms, bushfires disrupt power supplies in Australia

Sydney, Australia - At least one person died and hundreds of others were left without electricity on Wednesday in Australia's state of Victoria due to extreme weather, including storms, strong winds, lightning and bushfire, officials said.

The state was swept by the deadly storms and destructive bushfires since late on Tuesday.

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action said while electricity network crews have 'restored power to a large number of properties following yesterday's severe storms, about 250,000 homes and businesses are still without power in Victoria due to storm damage, down from a peak of 530,000 yesterday (Tuesday) evening'.

Energy Minister Lily D'Ambrosio said Victoria witnessed



'one of the largest outage events in the state's history', ABC News reported.

Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan said one dairy farmer died in Mirboo North due to storms over South Gippsland on Tuesday night.

"Given the extent of the widespread damage, it may

take days, if not weeks, to restore electricity to all of those impacted," according to the energy department.

The extreme weather has also impacted several mobile phone communication towers as the authorities moved faster to restore cell phone network.

Anadolu Agency

Addressing climate change key to preventing conflicts, says UNFCCC chief

United Nations, US - Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), on Tuesday emphasised the critical need for rapid action against climate change to prevent future conflicts.

Addressing the Security Council high-level open debate on the impact of climate change and food insecurity on the maintenance of international peace and security, Stiell highlighted the dire state of global hunger exacerbated by climate change.

"Today, one in 10 people on earth already suffers from chronic hunger. That number is

unacceptable." He stressed the intertwined nature of climate change, food insecurity, and conflict, stating that 'climate change is contributing to food insecurity and to conflict'.

The UNFCCC chief underscored the urgency of the situation, noting the rapid changes in climate patterns and their destructive impact on agriculture. "The world is heating. Fast. Rain-fall patterns are changing. And storms are becoming stronger and more destructive," Stiell remarked.

He cited the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, highlighting that 'food produc-



Simon Stiell speaks at the UNSC debate in New York, on Tuesday (Xinhua)

tion is already lower than it would have been without climate change'.

Stiell drew attention to the potential for 'huge supply shocks' in the future, where 'harvests fail si-

The links between hunger and conflict are well-established, Stiell noted, with historical instances where 'bread riots have fueled revolutions and toppled govts'

multaneously, in major producer countries'.

He warned of the inevitable food shortages, price spikes, and hunger that would follow without significant climate action.

The links between hunger and conflict are well-established, Stiell noted, with historical instances where 'bread riots have fueled revolutions and toppled

governments'.

He emphasised: "The combination of climate change, hunger, and war is a devastating one."

"There is no national security without food security. And there will be no food security without enhanced action to stop climate change," said Stiell.

He highlighted the solutions and ways forward, including the

role of the UNFCCC process and the need for the Security Council to be informed about climate security risks in real-time.

Stiell called for prioritising investments in climate-resilient agrifood systems and adaptation plans that identify increasing food security as a priority.

He stressed the need for significant adaptation finance, particularly for developing countries vulnerable to climate shocks.

Concluding his speech, Stiell emphasised the importance of ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions aligned with the Paris Agreement goals.

Xinhua

INDIA

Modi urges nations to listen to ‘voice of the Global South’

Dubai, UAE - Highlighting the importance of inclusivity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday called upon the countries at the World Governments Summit (WGS) in Dubai, to amplify the voices and priorities of the Global South in global decision-making processes.

He urged for reforms in global governance institutions to the better representation of the developing world.

“Today, when we are transforming our country, shouldn’t there be reform in the global governance institutions as well? We have to promote the concerns of the developing world and the participation of the Global South in global decision-making,” Modi said.

He said that it is important to prioritise national sovereignty and also keep the dignity of international law.

“We have to listen to the voice of the Global South, we have to bring forward their priorities, we have to help the needy countries...,” he said.

Modi also said that by bringing reforms, the nations will not only be able to tackle challenges but also foster a global bond and strengthen cooperation.

“We will have to create global prototypes for emerging challenges like AI and cryptocurrency, and cybercrime. We will have to give priority to our



Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, in Dubai on Wednesday (ANI)

national sovereignty and also keep the dignity of international law,” he added.

He also called for international collaboration and called for a ‘global protocol’ to tackle emerging issues like artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency, and cybercrime.

Lauding the UAE’s advancement in every fora, especially Dubai, Modi said that the way it is ‘becoming the global epicentre of global economy, commerce and technology is a big thing’.

Modi also emphasised that his biggest principle has been

‘minimum government, maximum governance’ and noted that it is the government’s job to ensure minimal government interference in people’s lives.

“My biggest principle has been ‘minimum government, maximum governance’. I have always emphasised creating an

environment in which a sense of enterprise and energy in citizens grows. I believe that it is the job of the government to ensure that government interference in people’s lives is minimal,” he said.

The prime minister said people have trust in his government’s intent and commitment. “This happened because we have given priority to people’s aspirations. We are sensitive to people’s needs. We have focused on fulfilling people’s needs and dreams. Along with the top-down and bottom-up approaches, we have also moved with the whole of society approach,” he said.

Noting that challenges of the previous century, including food, health, water and energy security, are increasing despite the progress in technology, he said that the world needs governments that are inclusive and take everyone along.

Modi also held a bilateral meeting with UAE Vice President and Prime Minister, and ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Modi and UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan held a bilateral meeting, and several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were exchanged in their presence. ANI



Sonia Gandhi files her nomination for the Rajya Sabha election, from Rajasthan, in Jaipur on Wednesday (ANI)

Sonia Gandhi files nomination for RS seat from Rajasthan

Jaipur, Rajasthan - Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi filed her nomination for the Rajya Sabha election from Rajasthan on Wednesday.

Party MP Rahul Gandhi, party’s general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and state party president Govind Singh Dotasra were also present.

Sonia Gandhi, who is chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party, was Congress president for almost 22 years between 1998 and 2022 and is a five-time Lok Sabha MP from Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh.

The move to file nominations for Rajya Sabha comes ahead of Lok Sabha polls expected to be held in April-May this year.

There are 10 Rajya Sabha seats in Rajasthan. In the upcoming biennial elections three seats in the State are up for grabs. The ruling BJP is set to get two of the seats, while the Opposition Congress will get one, on the basis of their respective strengths in the State Assembly.

The two BJP candidates are BJP State vice-president and former Minister Chunnimal Garasiya, and former Sumerpur MLA Madan Rathore.

The BJP has 115 and the Congress 70 MLAs in the

200-member State Assembly. A minimum of 67 votes will be required to win one Rajya Sabha seat in the event of a contest.

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who was last elected to Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan, is retiring in April this year. The term of

The Congress party announced on Wednesday the first list of candidates for the upcoming Rajya Sabha Elections to be held in various states

Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav will come to an end this April. Besides one Rajya Sabha seat in the State has become vacant after the resignation of the BJP’s Kirodi Lal Meena.

The Congress party announced on Wednesday the first list of candidates for the upcoming Rajya Sabha Biennial Elections to be held in various states.

The last day for filing nomination papers is February 15 and the term for Rajya Sabha MPs is six years.

ANI

Preparations underway for BJP National Convention in Delhi

New Delhi - The preparations ahead of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) National Convention scheduled for February 17 and 18 have begun in Delhi on Wednesday.

As per the party source, the accomplishments of the Modi government will be highlighted through decorations at various locations throughout Delhi. A theme based on 12 significant

works of the Modi government will be showcased from the BJP headquarters to the Bharat Mandap.

Meanwhile, the first theme-based cut-out has been installed at the BJP headquarters. The office now features a cut-out of the Tejas, a fighter aircraft made in India, and Prime Minister Modi in an Air Force dress.

In addition to this, 11 other

thematic decorative cut-outs will be installed. These will include exhibits based on the Ayodhya Ram Temple, Chandrayaan (India’s lunar mission), the COVID-19 vaccine, Jan Dhan accounts, and other schemes of the Modi government, sources added.

The convention will be attended by BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi

and BJP President J P Nadda.

As the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections draw near, the BJP is making every possible effort to secure a third term with a substantial majority.

This year, the BJP party’s slogan for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections is ‘Teesri Baar Modi Sarkaar, abki baar 400 paar’.

Earlier in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the NDA won 353

seats, the UPA stood at 91, and others won 98. The voting was staggered in seven phases between April 11 and May 19, in which around 67 per cent of the nearly 900mn eligible people exercised their franchise to elect 542 members of the Lok Sabha.

The Lok Sabha elections are likely to be held this year in April. ANI



Ilham Aliyev

Ilham Aliyev sworn in as Azerbaijan’s president

Istanbul, Turkey - Ilham Aliyev was sworn in for a new term as Azerbaijan’s president during a ceremony in the capital Baku on Wednesday.

Farhad Abdullayev, the head of Azerbaijan’s Constitutional Court, invited Aliyev to take the oath of office in the National Assembly after the court officially confirmed his victory in last week’s snap election, Azerbaijan’s presidency said in a statement.

The statement said Aliyev took the oath by placing his hand on the country’s Constitution, swearing to abide by it while executing his powers, as well as to ‘protect the state’s independence and

territorial integrity, and serve the people with dignity’.

Aliyev then placed his hand on the Quran, the Muslim holy book, indicating that he will ‘remain loyal to and respect national and moral values and traditions that have been created by the people of Azerbaijan for centuries’.

Azerbaijan is officially a secular state, but its population is overwhelmingly Muslim.

Aliyev, who has been Azerbaijan’s president since 2003, was reelected for a fifth term in office on February 7 with over 92 per cent of the vote.

Anadolu Agency

Farmers block highways around Spanish cities, ports in ‘super Wednesday’ protests

Viedo, Spain - Farmers’ protests in Spain intensified on Wednesday, with tractors cutting off several major cities, highways and ports.

Dubbed the ‘super Wednesday’ of protests, demonstrations, mostly organised by unions, have besieged all the main accesses to Seville - Spain’s fourth largest city.

The Spanish traffic authority DGT also shows several other highways cut across Andalusia, Extremadura and around the Catalan city of Girona.

According to El Pais, the ports of Tarragona and Motril were also fully blocked on Wednesday morning.

In Madrid, protesters were outraged after the government deauthorised protests around Mercamadrid - Spain’s main wholesale market for fresh produce - just hours before it was scheduled.

In the province of Granada, farmers stopped a truck carrying Moroccan cherry tomatoes, throwing the shipment all over the road.

One of the farmers’ key complaints is that they are dealing with ‘unfair’ competition from non-EU countries that do not need to comply with the same



In Madrid, protesters were outraged after the government deauthorised protests around Mercamadrid - Spain’s main wholesale market - just hours before it was scheduled

environmental and labour standards and can therefore sell products cheaper.

That is just one of many complaints that have triggered mass

mobilisations for more than one week straight.

The farmers are also clamouring for simplified bureaucratic procedures, the enforcement of a

law that prohibits farmers from selling products below cost, more government support and changes to a range of local issues from wildlife management to water usage rules.

On Wednesday, Spain’s Agriculture Minister Luis Planas met with representatives from supermarkets, distributors and other representatives from the food

system. In that meeting, he said he would analyse prices and how to ensure farmers are paid above the cost of production.

On Thursday, he will meet with representatives from the main farmers’ unions. Another union, the Union of Unions, is not set to have any representation at Thursday’s meeting.

Anadolu Agency



Adam Yates celebrates winning the Tour of Oman on Wednesday; (right) Yates celebrates on the podium



Yates saves the best for last

UAE Team Emirates rider claims thrilling fifth stage to win Tour of Oman

Muscat - UAE Team Emirates rider Adam Yates delivered an outstanding performance to overcome Jan Hirt of Soudal Quick-Step in style to win the Tour of Oman in Jabal Al Akhdhar on Wednesday.

The British rider also took the fifth stage after a thrilling race.

Adam, completed the full tour in 14 hours, 22 minutes and 30 seconds while Hirt of Czech Republic clocked 14 hours, 22 minutes and 49 seconds. New Zealand rider Finn Fisher-Black came third after finishing in 14 hours, 23 minutes and 9 seconds.

"We came to Oman with high ambitions in Tour of Oman 2024 and I am happy that the team ended all the races with some wins. It was a nice week for us,

and we are looking for a new challenge in UAE tour next week to claim more triumphs. This race was great as we have young riders in the team and it was great experience for them to gain

We came to Oman with high ambitions and I am happy that the team ended all the races with some wins. It was a nice week for us, and we are looking for a new challenge in UAE

ADAM YATES

more experience," Yates said.

"I saw many nice places in Oman in my first attendance to this beautiful country. I will be back again for more wins," he added.

"As a team we worked very well and implemented a good tactic. We will have few days rest ahead of another major assignment in UAE tour," the British rider said.

The peloton roll began from Samail Al Feyhaa Resthouse for a short stage, with a 72-km course adapted to the weather conditions. When the iconic ascent up Jabal Al Akhdhar loomed

on the horizon it appeared the attackers were eager to get there as soon as possible.

Attacks started strongly but it took 19 kilometres of hard battle for four riders - Huub Artz (Intermarché-Wanty), Lund Tobias Andresen (Team DSM-Firmenich PostNL), Tord Gudmestad (Uno-X Mobility) and Tegshbayar Batsaikhan (Roojai Insurance) - to get away. Fisher-Black's UAE Team Emirates drove the bunch behind the leaders.

Into the last 25km, the gap was up to two minutes and 30 sec. Astana Kazakhstan team joined UAE Team Emirates at the front of the bunch. The attackers maintained a lead of 2hours 25sec as they enter the last 10km. Kern Pharma also pulled

the peloton to reduce the gap.

Oscar takes golden jersey

Spanish rider Oscar Pelegrí Ferrandis of Burgos-BH team managed to end all the stages of Tour of Oman 2024 with golden jersey. Fisher-Black took the overall general white jersey classification (won Best Young Rider) and he also claimed the green jersey as he managed to led the general ranking points with 24 points ahead than Luke Lamperti.

Chief guest HE Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Undersecretary of Ministry of Culture sports and Youth for sports and Youth, handed the awards to the winners in presence of Saif bin Sebaa al Rushaidi, Chairman of Oman Cycling Association.



Hubert Hurkacz

Hurkacz survives Lehecka challenge in Rotterdam

Rotterdam, Netherlands - Hubert Hurkacz outlasted a hearty challenge from Czech foe Jiri Lehecka and won 6-3, 6-7 (9), 7-6 (9) in the first round of the ABN AMRO Open on Tuesday in Rotterdam, Netherlands.

No 4 seed Hurkacz served on match point three times in the second-set tiebreaker, but Lehecka extended the match each time before earning the 11-9 tiebreaker victory. The tables were turned in the second set, when Hurkacz saved match point in the 10th game and three more in the tiebreaker before posting his own 11-9 win.

Russian second seed Andrey Rublev had an easier go of it against Belgian qualifier Zizou Bergs, prevailing 7-5, 6-3. No. 5 seed Alex de Minaur of Australia beat Sebastian Korda 6-4, 6-3, and No. 8 seed Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan defeated Croatia's Borna Coric 6-3, 6-4.

Hungarian Marton Fucsovics, Kazakhstan's Alexander Shevchenko and Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff also advanced. Serbia's Dusan Lajovic knocked off Frenchman Arthur

Fils, the eighth seed, 6-3, 6-4 in first-round action in Buenos Aires.

While Lajovic had just one ace to five for Fils, Lajovic also had no double-faults, while his opponent had nine. Lajovic also won 67 percent of his points on second-serve points, while Fils converted only 38 percent on his second serve.

The fifth seed, Argentine Sebastian Baez, had an easier time of it, defeating Spain's Bernabe Zapata Miralles in straight sets 6-3, 6-3.

Meanwhile, Colombian qualifier Daniel Elahi Galan rallied past Argentinian wild card Diego Schwartzman 2-6, 6-1, 6-4. Galan saved six of nine break points while converting four of his six break-point opportunities against the former world No. 8.

Argentina's Federico Coria pleased the home crowd with a 7-5, 4-6, 7-5 victory over Austria's Sebastian Ofner. Other winners included Argentina's Camilo Ugo Carabelli, Chile's Alejandro Tabilo and Italians Luciano Darderi and Andre Vavasori.

Osaka edges Martic in Doha, Tsurenko upsets Jabeur

Doha, Qatar - Naomi Osaka scored another milestone in her comeback to the Hologic WTA Tour on Tuesday with her second-round win at the Qatar TotalEnergies Open in Doha. A 6-3, 7-6(9) win over Croatia's Petra Martic earned her back-to-back victories at a Hologic WTA Tour event for the first time in 23 months.

The four-time Grand Slam



Naomi Osaka

champion was on top of Martic -- whom she last played 10 years ago -- for nearly the duration of the match. But she failed to serve out victory at 6-3, 5-4, and eventually, saved four set points in an epic second-set tiebreak to seal the straight-sets win.

Osaka will next face World No.37 Lesia Tsurenko of Ukraine, who was a 6-3, 6-2

winner against No.4 seed Ons Jabeur.

Tsurenko won nine straight games from 3-1 down in the first set against World No.6 Jabeur to score her first Top 10 victory in five years.

Jabeur, meanwhile, told reporters after the match that she was plagued by small problem in her right knee throughout the 81-minute affair.

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

A female project co-ordinator and research assistant with 15 years experience in training, recruitment, administration, and finance; work experience with

UN-FAO; Exe, with MBA, MSc in Sustainability, MA in English, is looking for a full-time job. Contact: +968-98260708 email: meena.v24@gmail.com

CLASSIFIED LISTINGS

Muscat Daily offers a variety of classified listings for individuals and establishments: Situations Vacant/Wanted, Accommodation Wanted or Available, Sale of Household Items, Cars for Sale or Wanted, Matrimonial Alliances, etc Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call: 99104346

WJ Towell Group Company



Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease



AL AZOON UNITED PROJECTS

FOR ALL TYPE OF MAINTENANCE WORKS

PAINTING WALL PAPER, WALL DESIGN, ELECTRICAL, PLUMBING TILE FIXING, CIVIL WORKS, CEILING DECOR, A/C REPAIRING

CONTACT : AMIR ALI 96609857

SEND YOUR REQUEST FOR

Birthday/Anniversary wishes to wish@apexmedia.co.om with your resident card copy (It's free of cost)

mai alkaline

pH 9.1 to 9.5

Alkaline Ionized Drinking Water

Hydrate Smartly

- ✓ Ultra-hydrating
- ✓ Revitalizing
- ✓ Energizing
- ✓ Electrolytes

800 71 222 9275 5522



Real Madrid's Brahim Diaz celebrates after scoring against RB Leipzig on Tuesday

BRAHIM'S WALTZ

Diaz stunner helps Real Madrid beat Leipzig in Champions League last-16 first leg

Leipzig, Germany - Real Madrid's Brahim Diaz scored a stunning goal after a mazy run as they won 1-0 at RB Leipzig on Tuesday to take a clear advantage into their Champions League last-16 second leg next month.

The 24-year-old, filling in for the injured Jude Bellingham, struck against the run of play in the 48th minute.

Real goalkeeper Andriy Lunin, replacing the injured Thibaut Courtois, then came to the rescue with a string of saves to protect the lead as the Spaniards made it seven straight wins in the competition this season.

"It was difficult for us, that's how it is here," Real coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "The start of the first half and second half were difficult. Lunin played a great game, the best game.

"We were dangerous in transitions, we could have scored more but we could also have tied. This is a small advantage," said Ancelotti.

We struggled with the positioning of their wingers in the first half but we sorted it out later on. Even so, having to dig in was to be expected here."

In a lively start the home side

thought they had gone ahead when striker Benjamin Sesko headed in after three minutes. His effort though was disallowed following a VAR review.

The Slovenian had another chance before Real gradually brought some balance to the game and came close them-

blocking Sesko's rebound effort.

With Leipzig taking more risks in search of an equaliser, Real, waiting to break, found openings and almost scored again when Vinicius Jr flicked the ball onto the post in the 72nd.

Lunin was kept busy throughout the second half and did well

It was difficult for us, that's how it is here. The start of the first half and second half were difficult. We were dangerous in transitions, we could have scored more

CARLO ANCELOTTI

selves through Rodrygo, making his 200th appearance for the club.

Leipzig were again more aggressive after halftime but the home crowd was silenced when Real struck on the break.

Diaz picked up the ball near the sideline, shook off three players, cut in towards the box and curled a superb shot past keeper Peter Gulacsi.

The hosts almost drew level two minutes later but Lunin stopped a Dani Olmo shot before

to deny Sesko and Olmo again before also keeping out substitute Amadou Haidara's effort late in the game.

"In the end it was a great solo effort that decided the game," said Leipzig goalkeeper Gulacsi. "It is frustrating for us because we played well and were not the worse team of the two.

"It was an open game in the second half and we had our chances."

The return leg in Spain is on March 6.



Pep Guardiola

'The way we played today was perfect'

Copenhagen, Denmark - Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola was delighted with his side's performance as they beat FC Copenhagen 3-1 in the first leg of their last-16 Champions League tie on Tuesday, with Kevin De Bruyne once again magnificent for the English champions.

De Bruyne scored the opener and played a part in the two subsequent goals as City negotiated a tricky away leg in a venue where rivals Manchester United lost 4-3 in the group stage.

"The biggest players appear on the biggest stages, it's the hour of truth in the last 16 of the Champions League," Guardiola said of the Belgian's efforts on TNT Sports.

"The way we played today was perfect - be patient in the right moment,

It's not done, the third goal helped us a lot and hopefully we can finish at home...

PEP GUARDIOLA

they are so tight, well-organised. I'm really proud of the team again. It's not done, the third goal helped us a lot and hopefully we can finish at home."

For much of the second half it looked like City would be taking home a slender one-goal lead against a side who have shown they are capable of pulling off an upset, but Phil Foden's stoppage-time goal made it 3-1 to give them a two-goal cushion.

"It was important not to lose the qualification here. The game was really well played from minute one. We conceded a goal, avoidable but sometimes it happens... but in general we concede really, really few," Guardiola said.

The coach said he had sympathy for winger Jack Grealish, who had to be replaced in the first half after picking up a groin injury.

"It's a pity because in these types of games we need this type of tempo, the control."

De Bruyne, Foden star as Man City beat Copenhagen



Manchester City's Phil Foden scores against FC Copenhagen on Tuesday

Copenhagen, Denmark - Manchester City survived a scare to beat FC Copenhagen 3-1 in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie at the Parken Stadium on Tuesday, with Phil Foden scoring late to ensure a two-goal cushion ahead of the second leg.

With the Danes still on their winter break, City dominated the opening exchanges and they took the lead in the 10th minute when Kevin De Bruyne scored with a brilliant first-time finish across the keeper and in at the far post. City continued to press and the home side's box began to look like the shooting gallery at Copenhagen's Tivoli fair-ground until an injury to Jack Grealish briefly derailed them, forcing Pep Guardiola to send on Jeremy Doku instead.

The home side shocked the visitors in the 34th minute thanks to a goal from Magnus Mattsson, who probably could not have imagined a better debut when he joined the club from Dutch side NEC Nijmegen

on Feb. 1.

A poorly hit pass from City keeper Ederson fell to Mohamed Elyounoussi and his blocked shot fell into the path of Mattsson, who curled a beautiful strike inside the right-hand post to send the home fans' plastic cups of beer flying into the chilly night air in celebration.

Unfortunately it was not to last and their team fell behind again just before the break when De Bruyne's persistence in a block tackle saw the ball fall to Bernardo Silva, who finished deftly with his left foot.

The Copenhagen defence looked like they had managed to hold firm but Foden cut in from the left in second-half stoppage time to rifle home a third goal and make it 11 wins on the trot for the English champions.

"We've played here a couple of times, the atmosphere is great and you know they're going to try and do everything. They had a great group stage so we have to respect them," De Bruyne told broadcaster TNT Sport.

Fernandez: Chelsea are still hopeful of securing Champions League spot

London, England - Chelsea's poor Premier League campaign has left them 13 points off the final Champions League qualifying spot but midfielder Enzo Fernandez says a change of attitude has given them hope they can still reach Europe's elite club competition next season.

Back-to-back Premier League defeats by Liverpool and Wolverhampton Wanderers early this month were the latest setbacks for Mauricio Pochettino's side, but an FA Cup win over Aston Villa and 3-1 league victory over Crystal Palace on Monday has restored some belief.

Chelsea, who spent more than 400 million pounds (\$506 million) during last year's close season, are 10th in the league, 13 points behind fourth-placed Tottenham Hotspur.

"The victory at Crystal Palace is worth a lot to us. Last week we defeated Aston Villa in the FA Cup," Argentine international Fernandez told ESPN in an interview published on Tuesday.

"We are changing our attitude



Chelsea's Enzo Fernandez celebrates with teammates after scoring against Crystal Palace on Monday

above all, and obviously this victory gives us confidence for what follows ... Throughout the season, we've had ups and downs in the league and that is why we find ourselves a little far away of the first places.

"But there is a long way to go, we have trust in our work, in a

We are changing our attitude and obviously this victory gives us confidence

ENZO FERNANDEZ

new team, and day by day we are improving to be able to meet the objective, we want to play in the Champions League next year," said Fernandez.

Chelsea next face Manchester City in the league before taking on Liverpool in the League Cup final.



Racheal Kundananji

Bay sign Kundananji from Madrid for world record fee

California, US - Bay FC have signed Zambia forward Racheal Kundananji from Spain's Madrid CFF, the clubs announced on Tuesday, with the American team paying up to a reported \$860,000 to set a new world record in women's football.

The 23-year-old, who joined Madrid in 2022 from fellow Spanish top-tier side Eibar, signed a contract through the 2027 season with an extension option for the 2028 campaign,

the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) club said

The San Francisco Bay Area's new NWSL franchise paid \$785,000 for Kundananji, local media reported, with a possible \$75,000 in add-ons, making her the most expensive female soccer player ever.

The deal breaks the transfer record set when Chelsea signed Colombia forward Mayra Ramirez from Levante for 500,000 euros (\$535,400.00)

in January.

"People in Zambia will be surprised but they will be so happy," Kundananji said.

Kundananji, who represented Zambia at the 2023 Women's World Cup and the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics, scored 25 goals in her first season in Madrid during the 2022-23 campaign. Bay will face Angel City on March 16 in their first game as an expansion team in the 2024 season.

ADVANTAGE AL NAHDA

Oman team will be upbeat after holding Al Riffa 1-1 in AFC Cup semifinal first leg

Muscat - Inters Gui's header helped Al Nahda hold Bahrain's Al Riffa to a 1-1 draw in the first leg of their AFC Cup West Zone semi-final on Monday.

In the match played at Khalifa Sports City Stadium in Manama, Al Riffa took the lead in the 62nd minute through Ali Haram's brilliant header but the Oman side came back strongly through Gui who found his target with a header after his first effort rebounded off the crossbar.

The goal and the result will surely give Al Nahda a big boost when the teams meet in the second leg at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Monday.

Al Kahrabaa win

In the other semifinal, Mohamed Zaher's 20th minute strike secured Iraq's Al Kahrabaa a 1-0 win over Lebanon's Al Ahed.

Al Kahrabaa coach Luai Salah said he wanted an improved performance from his team in the second leg next Tuesday.

"We achieved an important win against a good team, but I am not satisfied with the performance," said Salah.

"What made me happy is the level of concentration and cautiousness in both halves as this gave us the edge in the end."

He admitted his team were rusty heading into the tie at the Sultan Qaboos Sport Complex Stadium.

"The absence of official matches affected the team, and in Basra the performance will be different.

"We will a better performance in Basra, and I am sure that the



Al Nahda's Inters Gui (R) celebrates with a teammate after scoring against Bahrain's Al Riffa in the first leg of their AFC Cup West Zone semifinal

What made me happy is the level of concentration and cautiousness in both halves as this gave us the edge in the end

LUAI SALAH, AL KAHRABAA COACH

team will show its real identity."

Al Ahed's Rafat Muhammad said his side will have to find another gear if they are to keep their dreams of a second AFC Cup title alive.

"I thank the players for the ef-

forts they made during the match but we wasted several chances, and we were not active offensively.

"The mission in the second leg is difficult, but we will fight until the end," said Muhammad.



Ahmad al Harthy

Al Harthy ends bruising Abu Dhabi ALMS finale in third

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina Circuit witnessed a frustrating end to an otherwise sparkling Asian Le Mans Series campaign for Ahmad al Harthy on Sunday as the Omani and 99 Racing team-mate Louis Deletraz concluded the five-round season third in the LMP2 title battle.

Going into the final event of the campaign leading the standings by 20 points, Al Harthy got things off to a perfect start in the No.99 Orica 07-Gibson LMP2 car by dominating qualifying, 0.8 seconds faster than anyone to secure a double pole position for rounds four and five.

Race one was nothing short of

stint. In the end, though, the car couldn't deliver the performance required and Al Harthy, Deletraz and Filipe Albuquerque - standing in for the unwell Nikita Mazepin - finished in 11th position.

"What an unbelievable turn of events this weekend", said a shocked Al Harthy, "After qualifying, where I was so happy with the car and my performance, we really were in a strong position and in the perfect place to try and maximise our potential. What happened in the two races was quite incredible, but we still end the season P3 in the championship and with a couple of wins as well."

"The guys at the team worked so, so hard this weekend and the effort everyone put in overnight to make sure we could even get onto the grid for Sunday's race was amazing"

AHMAD AL HARTHY

luckless, with surprising lap one contact spinning Al Harthy out of the lead. Mounting a rousing recovery, more dramas then undid the Omani's stirring drive and heavy damage sustained during an incident behind the Safety Car led to a devastating retirement.

Following incredible work by 99 Racing overnight and throughout Sunday morning, and thanks to the AF Corse team from whom a new Orica tub was acquired, Al Harthy lined-up on pole position for round five - he and Deletraz now three points adrift in the title battle.

Even though having to serve a debatable drive-through penalty early on, ordered by officials as a result of the race-ending incident the day prior, Al Harthy performed strongly in the opening

Having performed so faultlessly in qualifying on Saturday morning, Al Harthy relished the opening race later in the day and the team had a genuine chance of wrapping-up the ALMS title with one round to spare. Unfortunately, his fortunes changed dramatically.

"The guys at the team worked so, so hard this weekend and the effort everyone put in overnight on Saturday to make sure we could even get onto the grid for Sunday's race was amazing", reflected Al Harthy, "Huge thank you to everyone and, of course, to Louis, Filipe and Nikita who have been great to work with. Abu Dhabi wasn't the weekend we wanted, to say the least, but we can still be proud of all we've achieved in the ALMS."



Son Heung-min

Son injured finger in quarrel with South Korea teammates

Seoul, South Korea - Tottenham Hotspur and South Korea captain Son Heung-min injured his finger in an altercation with teammates on the eve of the country's exit from the Asian Cup.

The players quarrelled during a team dinner ahead of their 2-0 semi-final defeat by Jordan last week, which extended their 64-year wait for another Asian Cup title.

"It happened when some young players went up to play table tennis, and Son Heung-min and other older players took issue with it," a South Korean

Football Federation official told Yonhap News Agency on Wednesday.

"The players exchanged a few words and Son hurt his finger in the process."

The Korean Football Association were not immediately available for comment regarding the incident.

After returning from tournament in Qatar, Son came off the bench in Tottenham's Premier League match against Brighton & Hove Albion on Saturday with his right index and middle finger strapped together.

We are all mega-motivated for the year ahead, says Hamilton

London, England - Lewis Hamilton said he was 'mega-motivated' as Mercedes presented a heavily-revised car for the seven-times world champion's last season before he moves to Ferrari.

Mercedes finished second overall in 2023 but the former champions failed to win a race for the first time in 11 years, with Red Bull winning 21 of 22 and Max Verstappen taking his third title in a row.

Hamilton, 39, announced this month that he would be leaving at the end of the season after signing a multi-year deal.

The Briton said, in an online launch before the first laps at Silverstone circuit on Wednesday, that it had been an emotional time and it felt surreal to be starting his 12th season with the team.

"We are all mega-motivated for the year ahead and will be giving it everything we've got on the journey ahead," he declared.

Team boss Toto Wolff said once-dominant Mercedes faced a big challenge to get back to the top. "We know it's difficult, we



Lewis Hamilton

know it's a big mountain to climb because if a team is far ahead like the Red Bull was last year, that's not easy," he explained.

"But we have a superb driver combination, hopefully a fast car, the best people in the factory that are giving it all in order to

succeed and I think there are some very good ingredients to be back in the front again."

The W15 car has a silver nose, marking the 90th anniversary of Mercedes' famed 'Silver Arrows', plus the familiar red, green and black of recent seasons.

Depleted India look to spoil Stokes' milestone match

Rajkot, India - A severely depleted India will do everything they can to try and deny England captain Ben Stokes a victory in his 100th test when the teams clash in the third match of the five-test series in Rajkot on Thursday.

India have not lost a test series on home soil since 2012 but that record is under threat after batting stalwart Virat Kohli was ruled out of the series for personal reasons, while frontline seamer Mohammed Shami is

also unavailable through injury.

Compounding their crisis, batter KL Rahul and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja sustained injuries in Hyderabad, where England registered a thrilling victory to go 1-0 up in the series.

The duo missed the second test in Visakhapatnam, where India levelled the series, and while Rahul continues his spell on the sidelines, Jadeja will reunite with Ravichandran Ashwin in India's spin attack in Rajkot.

Off-spinner Ashwin is one

England have a style of playing aggressively. They connect sometimes, sometimes not

RAVINDRA JADEJA

strike away from 500 test wickets. Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav are vying for the third

spinner's role, while Sarfaraz Khan and Devdutt Padikkal will fancy their test debut on Thursday.

"In the past, it wasn't easy for other teams that come here and play in these conditions," Jadeja said of England's fearless approach under Stokes.

"England have a style of playing aggressively. They connect sometimes, sometimes not. But that's their style. We have to think of our plan B."

For the first time in the series,

England will be playing two seamers with Mark Wood, replacing Shoaib Bashir, joining James Anderson in the only change to their squad.

"Taking a bit of knowledge from the last test match we played here, albeit a long time ago, it was a pretty true, flat wicket," Stokes said.

"Bringing in an extra seamer this week is the option we've gone with because we think it's going to give us the best chance of winning."



The return of Ravindra Jadeja will be a welcome boost for India



14

MEATBALL MANIA
Roll them, stock them, and soak them in any sauce - meatballs!



15

IN TOWN
Indian Republic Day reception and French Cultural Week meet



16

ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town in Hollywood and Bollywood

Living 'here and now'

GIOCONDA VESSICHELLI, AN ACCOMPLISHED ITALIAN SINGER, WINNER OF SEVEN INTERNATIONAL OPERA AWARDS AND CREDITED WITH THE CREATION OF 'BOLLYWOOPERA' (FUSION OF OPERA AND BOLLYWOOD MUSIC), WAS IN TOWN THIS WEEK FOR A PRIVATE CONCERT FOR AN ELITE AUDIENCE. IN A FREE-WHEELING CHAT WITH MUSCAT DAILY, SHE SHARES THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ASPIRATIONS OF HER CURIOUS 'INNER CHILD' THAT ASPIRES TO SOMEDAY EVEN GO TO THE MOON OR MARS



DIVA-STATED

Hubert Vaz

Is this your first trip to Oman and what are your first impressions of Oman?

This is my first trip to Oman and I hope many more will follow as I loved the people, very gentle and kind, the culture and the music, the desert (I am a desert lover) and wadis as well as old villages.

As a uniquely talented artist, whom do you credit your talent to and do you fear that someday this limelight will all be over?

To God and to my resilience, perseverance, and strong brain. I don't have any fear in life because I live every instant as it will be the last one. I live in 'here and now' philosophy.

Bollywood doesn't quite have enough space to sustain your Bollywoodera - do you think this will be a short-lived craze?

I don't have a tendency of thinking too much about the future and not live and enjoy the present moment. I just do what I feel and this is the secret of my inner happiness. Actually, Bollywood has given me more space that what I expected, as it was an experiment and it has surprised me a lot to see that the biggest labels of India (and Asia) -Tseries, Zee Music, Sony - have released my music which was so experimental. They trusted on my artistic skills and the millions of views I got on my songs actually made me super satisfied.

What do you treasure the most in life, as an artist and which is your biggest nightmare?

The love and respect for all the human beings and natural elements, the capability of protecting the inner child inside myself

Yes, I have travelled to150 countries - almost the entire world. I want to go to the moon or Mars someday.

What is your message to young Omani performers who look towards the West for inspiration?

Simply don't look to the West for inspiration. You have much more culture than the West's pop music and a much bigger spirituality and ancient knowledge. So, just look better as yourself, and if you really want to look at western music, listen to a lot of Mozart's music - it will help you to enlighten your mind and your musical skills. And always exit from your comfort zone, keep the 'inner child' within yourself always awake!

In an earlier interview, you mentioned that everything happened when you were just 12 years old. Can you elaborate?

It was when I did my first concert and got noticed by Luciano Pavarotti who was in the jury and taken on board of the biggest Italian opera talent agency who was representing the legendary Luciano Pavarotti. That opened the doors of a worldwide career in the biggest opera houses of the world to me.

You have collaborated with many Indian artists as well as global singers/music composers. What is the main difference between Indian artists/composer and others?

Non Indian artists plan everything months of advance, they are more rigorous in respecting timings and dates whereas Indian artists are more spontaneous and less mechanical. Sometimes, I felt that we have



Simply don't look to the West for inspiration. You have much more culture than the West's pop music and a much bigger spirituality and ancient knowledge

GIOCONDA VESSICHELLI

that grants me always lots of energy and curiosity for whatsoever is new. I don't have the word 'nightmare' in my vocabulary, as I always have nice dreams and positive words in my vocabulary. So, I think that negative words like 'nightmare' automatically open the door to a lot of negativity. So, I really never thought about it.

Are they yet a few things that your 'inner curious child' wants to explore?

delayed much in delivering a music project because till the last minute nothing was ready. But then, in the last minute, the magic happened! And the results were magnificent! I love the way Indian artists can remember every single note by heart, without writing hundreds of pages of music scores. It is something beautiful that Indian kids start writing when they are only 3 years old, while in Western countries, they start writing at 6 years old.

FINGER FOOD

Ingredients

For the meatballs

400g ground beef
1 egg
¾ cup fine breadcrumbs
¼ cup heavy cream
1tsp salt
½tsp ground pepper
2 large cloves garlic - minced

1/2 cup ketchup
1/2 cup brown sugar
4tbsp water
1 1/2tbsp apple cider vinegar
2tsp Worcestershire sauce
1tsp minced garlic
Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

Preheat your oven to 220°C. Combine all meatball ingredients in a medium bowl. Gently mix everything well to combine. Take small portions and roll out small balls using your hands. Spray cooking oil on a baking sheet and place the meatballs on it. Bake for approximately 15-20 minutes or until they are evenly brown.

While the meatballs are in the oven, make the sauce. Combine all ingredients in a large skillet and simmer over medium-high heat for about ten minutes, until slightly thickened. Add the baked meatballs into the sauce and toss. Place the meatballs on a serving tray and spoon some of the sauce over them. Garnish with chopped fresh parsley and serve warm, with toothpicks.



750g lean turkey
1 cup breadcrumbs
2/3 cup onion - minced
1/2 cup fresh parsley - minced
2 large eggs
3 cloves garlic - minced
2tsp Worcestershire sauce
1/2tsp dried basil
1/2tsp dried oregano
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1/4 cup olive oil (for frying)

To make the meatballs, in a large bowl, combine ground turkey, bread crumbs, onion, parsley, eggs, garlic, Worcestershire sauce, basil, oregano, 1tsp salt, and ½tsp pepper. Using a strong spatula or your hands, mix well. Shape the mixture into 2-3cm balls.

To bake the meatballs, preheat oven to 220° C. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil for easy cleanup. Coat a wire rack with nonstick spray and set on prepared baking sheet. Arrange meatballs on rack, brush with oil, and bake until browned with crispy edges, about 15 to 20 minutes.

To fry the meatballs, heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Fry the meatballs in batches until browned on all sides and the meatballs are cooked, about 5 to 7 minutes per batch. Enjoy with any favourite dip. 🍷

Meatballs

Meatballs

Prepare and stock up suitable portions meatballs in your freezer during winter. You can churn out delectable fingerfood

Prepare and stock up suitable portions of meatballs in your freezer during winter. You can churn out delectable fingerfood in minutes to warm you up in an instant



- 1/2 cup milk
- 2-3 slices bread (remove crusts)
- 400g ground beef
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 cup freshly grated parmesan cheese
- 1tsp dried parsley
- 1tsp dried oregano
- 1/2tsp salt
- 1 -2 cloves garlic - minced

2tbsp olive oil
2 cups tomato puree
1tsp basil, 1 clove garlic - minced
1/2tsp salt
1 1/2tsp oregano
1 1/2 cups water
1 can peeled tomatoes

In a small bowl, soak the bread in the milk for

about 5 minutes, then squeeze out moisture and crumple into small bits. In a medium bowl, combine the bread with ground beef, eggs, parmesan and spices gently mix to combine well and form into small balls. In a medium frying pan on medium heat, add the olive oil and the meatballs, brown them on all sides.

To make the sauce, in a large deep pan, add the olive oil, the tomato puree, spices and water, stir until well combined. Add the browned meatballs. Over medium heat, heat to boiling, then lower heat to medium low and simmer for approximately 20 minutes (covered). Then raise the heat to medium, leave pan slightly uncovered and cook for 20 minutes until sauce has thickened and meatballs are cooked through.

Serve immediately, topped with freshly grated parmesan cheese, if desired. If you decide to bake the meatballs, shred some firm mozzarella and sprinkle on top. Then bake in the oven until melted.

take a break

IN TOWN

FRENCH WEEK



The Embassy of France celebrated French Cultural Week at the embassy lawns last week



Photos: V K Shafeer

Republic Day reception



The Embassy of India hosted a reception at the embassy lawns to mark India's 75th Republic Day on January 26



Photos: V K Shafeer

BOGGLER

T	A	Y	T
X	L	B	A
E	I	E	C
O	E	D	Z

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS



1. What is the highest mountain in Great Britain?
A. Ben Nevis
B. Ben Affleck
C. Ben Adam
D. Big Ben

2. In 'The Jungle Book', what kind of animal is Baloo?
A. Cheetah
B. Bear
C. Python
D. Monkey

3. What term is used in tennis for 40-40?
A. Love all
B. Truce
C. Deuce
D. Game point

Answers 1. A 2. B 3. C

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It can be hard to stay grounded and keep your hopes high at the same time, but if anyone can pull off this type of emotional gymnastics today, it's you! Cautious optimism is the goal of the day, and it's a goal you can reach easily. You know how to keep yourself from getting your heart too set on a certain outcome, so trust that. You know that perfection is impossible.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

While having a little more discipline doesn't sound like fun, it could actually end up inviting more excitement into your life. Having rules and schedules to follow doesn't have to feel stifling. If you just see things from another perspective, these rules will actually help simplify things and give you a clear idea of the path you should be on.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Thanks to your ability to see things from other people's perspectives, you make a great partner -- and lots of people are noticing. They've seen how people who work with you tend to do very well. They know how you give credit where credit is due, and this type of fairness is in high demand. Thus, you will be in high demand.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

It sometimes takes patience to achieve balance in your life, so if you're feeling a little out of whack today, breathe through it. Things are going to be just fine. Sure, certain details aren't making you smile, but if you step back and look at your life as a whole, things are pretty awesome. Late in the day, you could get some very interesting news.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Watch out for the people who are trying to quiet you today. They are probably more afraid that what you say will make them look bad than anything else. You can't let their insecurity stop you from shining, so go forward with whatever your plans were, no matter what the worrywarts say. You can make a good impression by sticking to your guns and not succumbing to fear.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Healthy dissent is critical if you ever want to make your group's process better. Those in charge are wise enough to value good criticism, and they can handle your honesty, so let them hear it today. After all, how can they fix something when no one will let them know what isn't working right? Stop taking the rules at face value and look at things more objectively.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Reach out to a sad or depressed friend today. They need some help getting a smile back on their face, and you make it easy. Spend some time with them exploring the world. Show them some of the new places and activities that excite you. They may not feel like coming out right away, but turn on the charm and convince them.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You haven't been in too much of a hurry to reach your goals lately because your ambition has been taking a nap. That's perfectly fine, but today you are going to start to feel like stirring things up and putting a few more challenges in your path. You are getting antsy! Luckily, you should get a tiny taste of power. It will be so delicious that you'll want to know where you can get some more.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your fear is the only thing that is holding you back. It's time to stare it down and see for yourself that it isn't so tough after all. If you're single, take a risk and ask that person out. It's only one date, not a lifetime commitment. Are you afraid they'll say no? So what? At least you can cross them off your list. Afraid to ask your boss for a raise?



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your energy has been a little unpredictable lately, which has, not surprisingly, made you grumpy and short-tempered. Luckily, today you should start to feel a lot more stable and cheerful. Right now, you are up for anything, and your energy will come through for you whenever you need it most. This makes today a great day for a contest that involves physical stamina or skill.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Not everyone is on top of the details like you are today, so it's unwise to expect too much from other people. The sooner you realize that you need to go it alone the better. They are just working at their own pace and abilities, and you can't rush them. Instead of getting frustrated waiting for them to catch up, just go off and take care of other things. Keep yourself busy.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

An authority figure could be acting a little bit strange and distant today, but try not to take it too personally. They might be more concerned with their own issues than with mentoring you or challenging you to do your best right now, but that doesn't mean they've forgotten how much they owe you. And that they won't be back to normal.

entertainment



GRISELDA BLANCO
LAWSUIT WITH
NETFLIX SETTLED

A lawsuit aimed at the Sofia Vergara-starring Netflix show *Griselda* has been settled. The counsel of the family of the late Griselda Blanco dismissed the complaint with prejudice, which means the same claim can't be brought back to court. The settlement comes weeks after the actress and the streamer were sued over the miniseries, in which Vergara portrays the Colombian drug lord, who was killed in 2012.



USHER AND JENNIFER
GOICOECHEA WED

Pop superstar Usher and his longtime partner, Jennifer Goicoechea, quietly married in Las Vegas mere hours after the R&B singer's blockbuster halftime show during Sunday's Super Bowl game. Surrounded by close friends and family, "they both look forward to continuing to raise their children together surrounded by love and thank everyone for the well wishes," said a rep for Usher. The couple's whirlwind night saw them head from Usher's lauded performance at Allegiant Stadium to Vegas Weddings' outdoor Terrace Gazebo, where they wed in an intimate ceremony.

CELEBRITIES
SPORT
BLACK
AT
NEW
YORK
FASHION
WEEK

New York Fashion Week (February 9-14) saw the presence of many celebrities at various fashion shows and NYFW events to celebrate all things fashion. Surprisingly many dazzled around the venues in black outfits. Supermodel Gisele Bündchen hosted a New York Fashion Week dinner with FRAME and looked fabulous in a black leather outfit. Julianne Hough attended the Naeem Khan show in a black sequin gown paired with sleek sunglasses. And Jessica Chastain was seen at the Gucci Ancora Collection Party radiant in a long-sleeved black gown.



From left: Jessica Chastain, Gisele Bündchen and Julianne Hough

Esha Deol hops onto
divorce bandwagon

Bollywood veterans, Dharmendra and Hema Malini's daughter Esha Deol is next on the Bollywood divorce bandwagon. Reports about her divorce with husband Bharat Takhtani have been rife recently after Takhtani was missing at some family events. Putting all speculations to rest, the actress confirmed that she and Bharat have decided to part ways mutually. The couple had married in 2012 and are parents to daughters Radhya (6) and Miraya (4). Infidelity is said to be at the core of the separation.



Bollywood's old disco
sensation suffers stroke

Yesteryear dancing sensation Mithun Chakraborty, who ruled supreme over Bollywood's disco era of the 70s, was discharged from a Kolkata (India) hospital on Monday. The 73-year-old actor had been admitted to Apollo Hospital on February 10 after complaining of severe chest pain. He was diagnosed with an Ischemic Cerebrovascular Accident (stroke) of the brain but was later said to be 'absolutely fine'. He was quoted as saying, "There is actually no problem, I am absolutely fine. I have to keep control of my food habits. I may start working soon, may be tomorrow."



Cillian Murphy denounces
Hollywood's press tours

Cillian Murphy is ready for Hollywood to re-invent the wheel on its press tours. "I just think it's a broken model," the *Oppenheimer* star told GQ in a cover story. "Everybody is so bored." Murphy admitted he was a bit relieved when the SAG-AFTRA strike prevented him from attending *Oppenheimer's* opening weekend. He also pointed to his film's success - alongside *Barbie*, both films' 'Barbenheimer' trend set records at the box office last summer - as evidence that the press wouldn't even have been necessary after all.



COMING SOON

DOGS AT THE OPERA

Moscow, early 20th century. The stray dog Samson, running away from animal catchers, finds himself in the Bolshoy Theater. So the main character gets acquainted with the dog of the prima ballerina, after which he helps to return the stolen decoration of the hostess.



Genre: Animation Starring: Anna Starshenbaum, Diomid Vinogradov, Garik Kharlamov
Language: English Release date: February 15



OPERA REVIEW:
MIDSUMMER'S NIGHT DREAM
Genre: Romance Starring: Peter Kirk, Sydney Mancasola, Christopher Ainslie, John Chest

If there is one dramatist who even after centuries can manage to provoke and ignite the La la land in every grown up, it is the Bard Shakespeare. And what great treat for the eyes and mind can it be to witness one such spectacular drama from this 16th century master in Oman. The timeless allure of William Shakespeare's genius found its way to the sultanate with a mesmerising performance of *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream opera at the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) on the weekend of February 9 and 10. This rendition, presented in operatic form, was nothing short of a theatrical spectacle that seamlessly blended comedy, drama, magic, and passion. The evening unfolded as a captivating journey through the enchanted realms of Shakespeare's classic. The opera showcased a rich tapestry of characters, from



Captivating journey of
enchantment

fairies and lovers to clowns. Under the direction of Laurence Dale, the production breathed new life into this masterpiece. What truly stole the show was the remarkable 3D stagecraft which was awesome. The stage transformed into a magical forest, with layers of giant oak trees that seamlessly shifted moods from romance to suspense, with a kaleidoscope of hues, creating a visual feast for the senses. The stage also added comic relief with animals like a donkey and bear and a flying magician. The stellar cast, led by Peter Kirk as Lysander, Sydney Mancasola as Titania, Christopher Ainslie as Oberon, and John

Chest as Demetrius, brought Shakespeare's characters to life with unparalleled grace and skill. Their performances added depth and nuance to the already enchanting narrative, making this collaboration between the Royal Opera House Muscat and Teatro Carlo Felice di Genova a resounding success. As the curtains fell on this magical opera, it was evident that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had not only transcended time but also geographical boundaries, leaving an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of the audience in Oman.

Rating ★★★★★

new arrivals

MARINA
H O M E

U R B A N • E X O T I C

SHOP IN STORE & ONLINE

WWW.MARINAHOMEINTERIORS.COM

☎ 22 060 999 OMAN AVENUES MALL, AL KHUWAIR, MUSCAT