

P12

CHELSEA SURVIVE
LEICESTER SCARE
TO REACH FA CUP
SEMI-FINALS



P13

MADAYN PROMOTES
INVESTMENT
OPPORTUNITIES IN
SAMAYIL INDUSTRIAL CITY



P20

CROATIA'S TOURIST
PEARL DUBROVNIK
SEEKS TO RECLAIM
CITY FOR LOCALS



MUSCAT

SEVERE SHORTAGES AT BLOOD BANKS

The blood banks in the Sultanate of Oman are facing severe shortages during the holy month of Ramadhan as they have received only 308 donors for blood and 24 for platelets against the requirement of more than 2,700 blood and 260 platelet donors to meet patients' needs. The Central Blood Bank in a statement said that it needs 10 platelet donors daily to save the lives of many patients and those injured in accidents, burns, major surgeries such as open heart, organ transplantation, cases of severe bleeding, women during childbirth, newborn children (premature), and patients who suffer from a deficiency of platelets.

DETAILS ON P3

REAL ESTATE DEALS EXCEED RO 207M

The value of real estate transactions in the Sultanate of Oman stood at RO 207.8 million by the end of January 2024, compared to RO 260.5 million during the same period in 2023, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The data indicate that the fee collected for all legal actions amounted to RO 6.6 million by the end of January, comprising an increase of 13.4 per cent compared to the corresponding period of 2023. Traded value of sale contracts decreased by 14.7 per cent to RO 101 million at the end of January. **SEE P13**

RO 15.4m investments from three projects

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
[@Afrahalbalushia](#)

Workshops on developing cultural and innovative industries concluded on Sunday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The workshops were organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth in cooperation with the National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher). Approximately 235 participants participated in the workshops during from February 25 to March 7, and the workshops were held at the Oman Exhibition and Convention Centre. They generated 3 projects with an investment value of RO 15.4 million, 8 investment opportunities (to the tune of RO 19 million) and 20 empowerment initiatives.



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said during the closing ceremony.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Chairman of the Steering Committee of the Second Developmental Programme on Investment in Innovative and Cultural Industries, said that the workshops discussed means of fostering the culture of innovative action, establishing enablers and addressing related challenges in Oman. The workshops will also contribute in supporting

creative work process in Oman. Al Yousuf added: "During the last stage, those responsible for the development circles were keen to host a number of those concerned with cultural and creative affairs in the Sultanate of Oman and abroad. Many parties concerned with creative projects were sought from institutions and individuals, in addition to academics, researchers, and expert houses to achieve the desired results. **TURN TO P2**

HM confers medals on SSF officers

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, on Sunday conferred medals of Excellent Service and Royal Commendation on a number of officers and non-commissioned officers of the Sultan's Special Force (SSF) on the occasion of the SSF Day, which falls on March 15 every year. On this occasion, a ceremony was held at Assumood Garrison during which Maj Gen Musallam Mohammed Ja'aboub, SSF Commander, pinned the medals of Excellent Service and Royal Commendation on the SSF officers honoured in appreciation for their dedication and sincerity in serving their country and performing their sacred national duty.

DETAILS ON P3



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ABRAJ

ENERGY SERVICES SAOG

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



Dear Shareholders,
The Board of Directors is pleased to welcome the Shareholders to the eighth Annual General Meeting of Abraj Energy Services SAOG - (Abraj) and to present the Annual Report for the financial year ended 31st December 2023.

Abraj had, sustainably, performed well throughout the year 2023, with good steady results from the Drilling and workover services and a remarkable contribution from Well Services. Building on the strong recovery post-Covid-19, the company has continued to grow in revenue, net profit, and market share. Abraj has successfully managed to grow outside Oman for the first time by winning a contract for the provision of drilling rigs in Kuwait. This breakthrough in penetrating the regional market will form a strong base for Abraj to retain the current growth rates.

Abraj is focused on providing services around Oil and Gas Wells, during and post wells construction. From building a wider service portfolio, Abraj now focuses on strategic top-tier services coupled with strong operational efficiency to realize maximum financial returns and sustainable growth. Abraj continues to benefit from the strength of long-term contracts in generating sufficient cash flow for growth.

Abraj Energy Services SAOG Performance:
In 2023, Abraj managed to breakthrough the regional market by penetrating the Kuwaiti drilling market with the award of 3 drilling rigs with KGOC expected to start operation in 2024. Abraj fleet remained at 25 Drilling rigs with 100% utilization for our drilling rigs and 100% utilization for workover rigs. Our market share is at 29% for drilling rigs and becoming the leader and national champion of Oman.

HSE:
Abraj had a very good HSE Performance in the year 2023. Abraj managed 2023 with zero LTI and as a result LTIF remained zero against the threshold of 0.36, whereas TRCF by end of the year was 0.49 against the threshold of 1.17. RTAF remain 0.09 against the threshold of 0.20. Management site audits were completed successfully as per plan in 2023. Also, level 1 contractor audit completed as per set plan in 2023.

Medical fitness to work compliance achieved 99% by the end of 2023.

All Abraj units (Rigs, Workover and Well Services) achieved LTI free year in 2023 however below units LTI free years are among the top:

- Rig 207 completed 12 years LTI free in 2023.
- Rig 202 completed 11 years LTI free in 2023.
- Hoist 2 completed 11 years LTI free in 2023.
- Muscat warehouse achieved 10 years LTI free in 2023.
- Rig 209 and 303 achieved 9 years LTI free in 2023.
- Rig 306, Hoist 1 & Rig 304 achieved 8 years LTI free in 2023.
- Rigs 210, 201 and Muscat workshop achieved 7 years LTI free in 2023.

Well Services:
In 2022, Well Services had 7 Cementing Packages and 1 Integrated Fracturing Services Fleet contracted out. By 2023 Well services managed to add one more Frac fleet and acquire more cementing scope to improve total assets utilization by 25% which contributed to 23% growth as a result this had a remarkable impact on WS financial performance.

Well services currently have 20% market share for the core services and progressively expanding this market share by outperforming service quality and New Technology differentiation being a trusted technical provider for all our customers.

For Well services main Highlights for 2023 are:

- Improved assets utilization by 25%
- Achieved 23% Revenue Growth and significant financial performance improvement.
- Reduced Cementing Non Productive time by 85%, even though activity increased by 25%
- Successful startup and smooth execution of Stimulation campaign with OQ
- Successful commissioning and flawless startup of Oxy Frac Stimulation contract
- Successful execution of BP High Profile Multistage gas Frac operation which will position the Company for more scope in 2024 onward
- Successful execution of several gas wells and HPHT Multistage fracs opened the door for Abraj to qualify and acquire more scope in Gas wells.
- Successfully deployment of Key Frac New Technologies added value to both Abraj and its Clients.
- Successful technical validation of key cementing technologies for the Company's main client PDO which resulted into 10% growth.
- Successfully qualified by Kuwait Oil Company for Conventional Cementing Service.
- Successfully achieving API Q2 certification for all services.

Total Revenue booked in 2023:
The actual revenue realized in 2023 was OMR 144.3 Million, which represents a 5.3 % increase (OMR 7.3 Million) compared to the 2022 OMR 137.0 Million. This revenue increase is mainly attributed to higher number of rig months and no rig is stacked in Year 2023.

Total Net Expenditure including Tax provided in 2023:
Total net expenditure including Tax provided in FY23 is OMR 128.8 Million and increase of OMR 8.3 Million (6.9 % higher) as compared to total expenditure booked in 2022 amounting to OMR 120.5 Million. This increase in expenditure is mainly attributed to:-

- Higher number of rig months as all drilling rigs were operational
- Higher administrative cost attributable to MSX / MCDG / CMA fees for IPO listing and other related expenditures for Website improvement & other overhead such as higher manpower and other head office related expenditures

Net profit realized for the year 2023:
The net profit for the year is RO 16.6 Million, an increase of OMR 42 Thousand (0.3% higher) as compared to net profit of OMR 16.5 M in 2022.

Acknowledgements:
The Board of Directors expresses their sincere and deep gratitude to the vision and wise great leadership of the country's leader for maintaining sustainable growth and prosperity of the Omani Economy. Abraj Board also wishes to place on record its thanks and gratitude to the Ministry of Oil & Gas, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Ministry of Manpower, and Capital Markets Authority for their guidance and support. Abraj Board also would like to appreciate and thank you for the valuable support and guidance from the Shareholders, Bankers, and Suppliers. The Board thanks the Management team and all Abraj employees for their dedication and commitment to meeting challenging situations.

Ayad Al Balushi
Chairman of the Board

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER

	2023 RO'000	2022 RO'000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property and equipment	191,405	196,106
Right-of-use assets	5,502	5,996
Intangible assets	231	191
Deferred tax assets	426	662
Deferred expenses – non-current	94	119
Capex advances	4,546	1,180
Total non-current assets	202,204	204,254
Current assets		
Trade and other receivables	41,293	33,974
Advances and prepayments	1,092	2,895
Deferred expenses – current	25	140
Inventories	23,786	18,605
Bank term deposits	-	18,449
Cash and cash equivalents	8,071	41,120
Total current assets	74,267	78,183
Total assets	276,471	282,437
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Capital and reserves		
Share capital	77,020	77,020
Legal reserve	10,718	9,062
Retained earnings	58,040	58,539
Total equity	145,778	144,621
Non-current liabilities		
Term loans – non-current portion	72,060	76,953
Deferred income - non-current portion	1,094	1,857
Deferred tax liabilities	4,407	4,437
Employees' end of services benefits	2,218	1,955
Lease liabilities - non-current portion	3,565	4,288
Total non-current liabilities	83,344	89,490
Current liabilities		
Term loans - current portion	13,232	18,841
Lease liabilities – current	2,212	1,958
Trade payables	16,401	15,428
Other payables	12,068	7,989
Deferred income – current portion	762	1,027
Income tax payable	2,674	3,083
Total current liabilities	47,349	48,326
Total liabilities	130,693	137,816
Total equity and liabilities	276,471	282,437

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

	2023 RO'000	2022 RO'000
Revenue from contracts with customers	144,346	137,040
Cost of sales	(111,430)	(103,632)
Gross profit	32,916	33,408
General and administrative expenses	(7,410)	(6,682)
Other expenses	(736)	(1,431)
Other income	10	84
Impairment reversal on non-financial assets	757	-
Expected credit loss reversal / (charge) on trade receivables	140	(192)
Operating profit	25,677	25,187
Finance costs	(6,323)	(6,345)
Finance income	142	566
Net Finance costs	(6,181)	(5,779)
Profit before tax	19,496	19,408
Taxation	(2,935)	(2,899)
Profit for the year	16,561	16,519
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	16,561	16,519
Earnings per share		
Basic and diluted earnings per share-Baiza	0.022	0.021

Note:
The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

3 projects generate investment of RO 15.4m

FROM P1
The investment projects that have been announced and which will see the light during the next stage.”
The working teams will continue their path during the next stage to maximise the results and follow up on the achievements, as the most important thing that was achieved in these workshops is reaching a definition of the cultural and creative industries sector and knowing its importance in terms of the investment opportunities and that it may provide job opportunities for young Omanis, the sector of governance, creating interconnection and integration between the parties concerned with it, and identifying some of the capabilities required to advance this sector.

Al Yousef added that the workshops hosted specialists in cultural and innovative fields from Oman and abroad, representatives of innovative projects, academics, researchers and houses of expertise. At the closing ceremony, the participants watched a visual presentation on cultural and innovative industries and toured a roadshow on the outcome of the workshops.

Unesco Chair promotes falaj system projects

NIZWA: The Unesco Chair for Aflaj Studies at the University of Nizwa, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, conducted a set of studies and research projects that identified common difficulties faced by aflaj (centuries'-old irrigation system) in the Sultanate of Oman and proposed solutions to address the challenges. The studies laid emphasis on the need to intensify programmes and projects that tackle the negative impacts on the falaj system in Oman.

Dr Abdullah bin Saif al Ghafri, Professor of the Unesco Chair for Aflaj Studies at the University of Nizwa, said that the Chair recently published results of its latest studies that combined field data, smart technologies and new theories.

He added that the challenges varied from one project to another, with some projects facing logistical difficulties, while others met with financial or administrative difficulties.

— ONA



Workshops on developing cultural and innovative industries concluded on Sunday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. – ONA



The University of Nizwa conducted studies and research projects that identified common difficulties faced by aflaj in Oman





HM CONFERS MEDALS OF EXCELLENCE ON SSF OFFICERS



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, on Sunday conferred medals of Excellent Service and Royal Commendation on a number of officers and non-commissioned officers of the Sultan's Special Force (SSF) on the occasion of the SSF Day, which falls on March 15 every year.

On this occasion, a ceremony was held at Assumood Garrison during which Maj Gen Musallam bin Mohammed Jaaboub, SSF Commander, pinned the medals of Excellent Service and Royal Commendation on the SSF officers honoured in appreciation for their dedication and sincerity in serving their country and performing their

sacred national duty.

Maj Gen Jaaboub also pinned the 'Special Service Medal' and the 'Medal of Long Service and Good Conduct' on other personnel of the Sultan's Special Force in recognition of their dedication and sincerity in serving their country and performing their sacred national duty.

Maj Gen Jaaboub felicitated the honoured personnel and urged them to maintain their high performance under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander.

The ceremony was attended by senior officers, officers and personnel of the SSF. — ONA



Oman ambassador presents credentials to ruler of Andorra

ANDORRA: Urgell, Joan-Enric Vives i Sicília, Co-Prince of the Principality of Andorra and Bishop of Urgell, received today Omar bin Said al Kathiri who presented his credentials as non-resident ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Principality of Andorra.

The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the

Co-Prince of Andorra along with his wishes of good health and happiness to him and more progress and prosperity to the government of Andorra.

For his part, the Co-Prince of the Principality of Andorra asked the ambassador to pass on his greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik wishing him good health and well-being.

— ONA



SAYYID BADR BIDS FAREWELL TO CHINESE AMBASSADOR

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received here on Sunday Li Lingbing, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Sultanate of Oman to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty. Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation to the ambassador for her efforts in enhancing bilateral relations, wishing her success. — ONA

Severe shortages in blood banks during Ramadhan

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The blood banks in the Sultanate of Oman are facing severe shortages during the holy month of Ramadhan as they have received only 308 donors for blood and 24 for platelets against the requirements of than 2,700 blood and 260 platelet donors to meet patients' needs.

The Central Blood Bank in a statement said that it needs ten platelet donors daily as the need continues to save the lives of many patients and those injured in accidents, burns, major surgeries such as open heart, organ transplantation such as marrow or liver transplantation, cases of severe bleeding, women during childbirth, newborn children (premature), and patients who suffer from a deficiency of platelets.

Platelets are used in the treatment



of cancer patients, especially those undergoing chemotherapy, as they need frequent platelet transfusions throughout the treatment period.

Blood donation times during the holy month at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher are from 7:30 pm to 11:30 pm and from 8 am to 12:30 pm (Sunday - Thursday). The last time to donate platelets is 10:30 pm.

For platelets, blood donation

is made using a device to separate blood cells, which are collected in designated bags and separated from the rest of the blood components by the device. It takes about 45 to 60 minutes.

The donor must be in good health, weight must be more than (50 kg), and haemoglobin level must be normal.

The donor must be between 18 and 60 years of age and must

Blood donation times during the holy month at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher are from 7:30 pm to 11:30 pm and from 8 am to 12:30 pm (Sunday - Thursday). The last time to donate platelets is 10:30 pm

have donated blood at least twice during the last two years without any complications during or after donation, such as dizziness and fainting.

More than a month has passed since the last blood donation and must not have taken aspirin or other painkillers, drugs containing aspirin within the past 10 days. Platelets can be donated once every 15 days.

Comm Centre discusses strategic projects, media analysis

MUSCAT: The Government Communication Centre on Sunday held its 23rd gathering with communication and media departments of various government units.

The gathering discussed prominent strategic projects and events which were dealt with by the centre in cooperation with government units during the previous period.

Moreover, the event highlighted the results of a study prepared by the centre on diagnosing the current situation of communication and media. The study also assessed the role of communication and media departments, their purviews and operations and their effects on the interaction with audiences.

Further, the event reviewed the objectives of the study in analysing the current situation and identifying points of strength



The event reviewed objectives of the study in analysing current situation

and challenges facing these departments.

The gathering also touched on the efforts of the Ministry of Information, represented by the Government Communication Centre and the Media Training Centre in empowering employees of communication and media departments in government units through the implementation of specialised training programmes. — ONA

Project to enhance value-added of rose in Jabal Akhdhar

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources embarked on a project that aims at enhancing the value-added of rose harvest in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The project is financed by the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund at a cost of RO 150,000 and lasts for two years.

The project aims to prepare a study to provide primary data on rose cultivation and related industries in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in partnership with small and medium enterprises specialising in rose-related industries in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. The project also aims



The project aims to prepare a study to provide primary data on rose cultivation and related industries in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar

to support the cultivation of an additional 5 acres of local roses in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar as well

as supporting and introducing agricultural machinery and improving some agricultural

operations by 50 per cent, and training and qualification of 15 beneficiaries in the field of rose



water industry.

Hanan bint Said al Sulaimiyah, Executive Director

of the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund, said that the project is aimed at introducing agricultural mechanisation and improving some agricultural operations by 50 per cent to develop rose cultivation in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, supporting farmers with small manual tillers and other machines that are suitable for the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar environment and terrain.

The Department of Agricultural and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, will determine the type of mechanisation to be introduced by selecting the best and most cooperative among the beneficiaries and provide them with the machines.

— ONA



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ENHANCING TRADITION WITH TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

DUE to the development of high technology and its trend towards artificial intelligence many of the problems we face have found its solutions. However, many people are searching for solutions to the problems that they face during the holy month of Ramadhan so that they can best prepare for the holy month.

Can AI technologies help make Ramadhan easier is the question on everyone's mind?

FOOD DELIVERY SERVICE

Among the problems that many people face relate to obstacles in Ramadhan, including food delivery services. For many, this is a most important features that artificial intelligence can provide to people during the holy month. With the busyness of work and worship during Ramadhan, sometimes it is not possible. There is a time to make food, so AI provides you with applications that help you order food and see to it that it arrives at the right time.

ORGANISING WORK AND REMINDING APPOINTMENTS

During Ramadhan, most people need to organise and arrange their daily work. They sometimes need to be reminded of some important matters, and here comes the role of artificial intelligence programmes and applications available specifically to solve this crisis.

ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE DURING TRAFFIC SNARLS

Traffic congestion is usually one of the basic common problems faced by residents of Muslim countries, especially during peak moments. That is mainly for those who precede breakfast, and those were employees complete their daily work and heading toward their homes.

Thus, Google Maps can be used to help avoid this problem. The phone will recognise his navigation habits and will start displaying traffic information on its screen continuously before driving on the road. If congestion begins after the car enters the street, artificial intelligence will automatically redirect the user towards less crowded roads.

DIFFERENT IDEAS

Voice assistants can display hundreds of recipes from different kitchens. This provides ideas for a variety of different meals within 30 days is not an easy task. Therefore, the user only has to put forward his question to the voice assistant, whether on Android phones, iPhones, or on the Google search engines. He can ask how to prepare a particular dish, or even give the assistant the specifications of the dish he wants.

For example, a dish consisting of meat and rice is healthy or does not contain high calories. If the fasting person is not ready to put in the effort to cook, it is sufficient for him to ask the smart assistant to make a reservation at a restaurant he likes or to order food.

DETERMINE PHONE USE TIMES

Many Muslims use their phones and tablets for additional hours during Ramadhan, whether to watch series on streaming platforms or to pass the time while waiting for the iftar or later for suhoor. The artificial intelligence built into smartphones allows them to know the time the user spends on the phone and its applications, and limits can easily be set.

Daily usage or switch to 'Do not disturb' mode to disconnect from others. Those who are fasting, especially those who live in Western countries. For example, there is a religious application that helps users remind them of prayer times, iftar times, and the qibla compass, in addition to other services, such as the dish of the day, and digital books.

These are available within a large electronic library via the application. The library provides books and magazines for adults and children, some children's games, colouring books, and more.



EmpowerED series fosters youth entrepreneurship in Oman

MUSCAT: The Global Shapers Community (GSC) Muscat Hub launched its EmpowerED series as part of its ongoing mission to empower and reskill the youth in Oman.

The workshop engaged the youth of Muscat, drawing in over 50 attendees both industry professionals and students at the Oman Youth Centre.

The Global Shapers Community, launched in 2011 by the World Economic Forum, unites young leaders dedicated to tackling global issues through local projects. Focused on fostering dialogue, innovation, and social

entrepreneurship, the community strives to create positive change for a more inclusive and sustainable world.

The Mastering ‘101’ entrepreneurship workshop served as a comprehensive introduction to entrepreneurship. Led by entrepreneurial ecosystem developer Kaiser Tirmizi, the workshop discussed principles of design thinking and lean start-up.

Followed by a panel discussion featuring Jaifar al Aghbari, the founder and CEO of Level Nine, a company specialised in events management and gaming. The discussion explored the youth

entrepreneurial ecosystem for aspiring business owners in Oman.

Ali al Bahrani, Reskilling Project Lead at GSC Muscat, underscores the importance of the EMpowered series. He states, “The series offers a diverse range of upskilling and reskilling workshops, empowering Omani youth. Tailored training opportunities bridge skill gaps and nurture confident individuals ready to catalyse positive change in Oman’s workforce and society.”

The series also supports the Sultanate of Oman’s goal of empowering youth contribution initiatives in the development of the country.

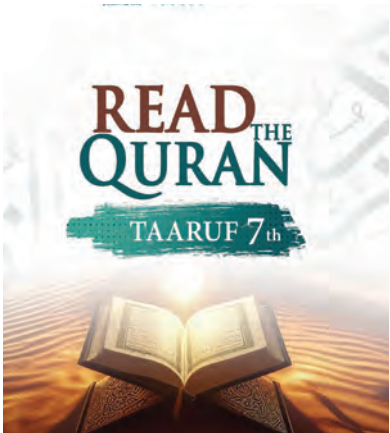
MERA holds Ta’aruf event for non-Muslims on March 22

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Holy Quran has quick fixes aplenty for any obstacles in life and it is the only way out for humankind to seek solace; hence, read, read and read Holy Quran.

This is the theme on which the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs represented by The Department of Islamic Information and Cultural Exchange at Ifta Office has built the 7th edition of the Ta’aruf event to be held on Friday, March 22 at the OCEC Grand Ballroom at 4.30 pm.

‘Ta’aruf’ that translates as ‘Know Islam’, being held every year during the holy month, opens up doors of wisdom about the religion and the belief to the new reverts to Islam and people from other faiths. It hosts people who wanted to know more of the religion, its applicability in the modern world, and its stance in events that affect humans as well as other creatures globally. The idea behind the evening of believers and non-believers is to shed more light on the



principles of Islam at a time when wrong conceptions, misunderstanding about Islam and Islamophobia persist among some segments of the society.

Attendance will be restricted for only new reverts to Islam and people from other faiths who want to know more about the religion. Attendant should be adults (15 years and above) and registration must be through the website. As many as 600 people who register first will be given priority and, finally, attendees should be present themselves by 4.30 pm.

“Ta’aruf, an exclusive event to let the non-Muslims and new Muslims know Islam more is held under the

‘Ta’aruf’ is being held every year during the holy month, opens up doors of wisdom about the religion and the belief to the new reverts to Islam and people from other faiths

auspices of the Department of Introduction to Islam and Cultural Exchange at the ministry and will be a window to those who want to know about Islam with all its true instructions to mankind,” Hamed al Badi, representative of the ministry told the *Observer*.

In last year’s event titled ‘Toward Human Happiness’, nearly 700 people from across the continents who embraced the religion and its customs and culture gathered themselves and shared their feelings. Registration to the event can be made on <https://www.mara.gov.om/taarufevent.aspx>, and more information about the event can be had from 24644660/ 24644662 or by sending an email to islamicdept@mara.gov.om



المعهد الوطني للضيافة
national hospitality institute

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AGENDA FOR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (“AGM”) AND EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING (“EGM”)

The Board of Directors of National Hospitality Institute SAOC (the “Company”) invites the shareholders to attend the AGM and EGM of the Company to be held on **Sunday 31st March 2024, at 1:00 P.M. and 1:30 P.M.** respectively at Meeting Room in National Hospitality Building in Wadi Al Kabir, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman to discuss the following agenda:

Firstly: AGM Agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ report for the financial year ended 31st December 2023 (Attachment - 1).
- To consider and approve the Auditors Report, the Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account for the financial year ended 31st December 2023 (Attachment - 2).
- To approve the sitting fees being availed by the members of the Board of Directors and the members of the Board’s sub-committees for the financial year ended 31st December 2023 and to specify the sitting fees for the next financial year (Attachment - 3).
- To bring to the attention of the shareholders the transactions entered into with Related Parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2023. (Attachment - 4).
- To approve the appointment of the Auditors for the financial year ending 31st December 2024 and fix their remuneration.

Secondly: EGM Agenda:

- To discuss share capital erosion due to accumulated losses.

For further information please contact Mrs. Saada Al Harthy, on phone No (24813141) GSM Number 92381488 or email address: Saada@nhioman.com

Chairwoman

MSX index drops 9 points

MUSCAT: Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) general index (30) on Sunday dropped (9.6) points, comprising a decline by (0.20 per cent) to close at (4,775.90) points, compared to the last session, which stood at (4,785.52) points.

The trading value on Sunday stood at (RO 3,166,492), comprising a decline by (22.5 per cent), compared to the last session, which stood at (RO 4,084,675).

The report released by MSX pointed out that the market value went up by (0.056 per cent) to reach about (RO 24.17) billion.

The report added that the value of shares bought by non-Omani investors reached (RO 947,000), comprising (29.89 per cent). The value of shares sold by non-Omani investors reached (RO 604,000), comprising (19.07 per cent). — **ONA**

TENDER NOTICE



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
179/2024/MAFWR/HQ-14	Supply Dry Feed for Livestock Research Stations	Tuesday 12/3/2024	Monday 1/4/2024	Monday 22/4/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades	(25/-) Twenty Five Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Ten Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.

- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies, and for International company that not have head quarters in the Sultanate of Oman should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender) and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.

- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.

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

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



المتحدة للتمويل
United Finance

أنجز المزيد
Achieve more

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2023

Dear Shareholders,

As we close another year of sustained financial growth and strategic achievements, I am privileged to present, on behalf of the Board of Directors, the financial results of United Finance Company SAOG for the year ended 31st December 2023.

Economic Overview:
The Omani economy has continued to exhibit a robust rebound post the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The fiscal and monetary measures instituted by the Omani government and the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) have laid the groundwork for a swift recovery and long-term economic stability. The year 2023 marked a continuation of this upward trajectory, supported by a resurgence in global economic activity and an uptick in oil prices.

Financial Performance:
Our financial performance for 2023 reflects the strength and resilience of our strategic approach. We have experienced substantial growth in our assets, which have increased to OMR 103,778,553 as of December 2023, compared to OMR 93,012,220 in the previous year, marking an 11.6% increase.

Our total equity saw a modest rise, demonstrating our commitment to maintaining a strong capital base. The net installment finance debtors represent our focused growth in our core business areas, with a significant increase of 10.9% year-over-year.

We have prudently managed expenses, which have resulted in an operating income of OMR 3,200,111, an increase of 23.3% over the previous year. After accounting for taxation and other considerations, our net profit after tax and provisions stands at OMR 1,790,350, reflecting an 11.7% increase from the prior year.

Looking Ahead:
Looking to the future, our outlook for 2023 is optimistic. The government's initiatives towards economic diversification and the anticipated GDP growth bode well for our operations. We are poised to capitalize on these positive developments, driven by a strategic focus on our core financial services and a commitment to technological innovation.

Strategic Initiatives:
Our strategic initiatives remain in alignment with the national vision, and we have continued to enhance our service offerings, aligning with our new brand promise. The implementation of our advanced core banking system is on track, and we expect this to significantly enhance our service capabilities and operational efficiency.

Human Resources:
Our investment in human capital is reflected in our rigorous training programs and leadership development initiatives. These efforts underscore our commitment to nurturing a workforce that is equipped to meet the challenges of a dynamic financial landscape.

Dividend:
In recognition of our financial health and in appreciation of our shareholders' continued support, the Board of Directors is pleased to recommend a cash dividend of 3% pending shareholder approval.

Acknowledgement:
Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tark Al Said for his visionary leadership. We also express our sincere thanks to the various regulatory authorities, our bankers, shareholders, and stakeholders for their unwavering support. A special note of appreciation is extended to our management and staff for their dedication and hard work.

In conclusion, the promising economic indicators and our solid financial performance place us in a strong position for continued growth. We look forward with confidence to the year ahead, with the unwavering support of our stakeholders and the grace of Allah.

Warm regards,

Mohamed Abdulla Al Khonji
Chairman

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

	2023 RO	2022 RO
Interest income on instalment finance income	8,843,139	7,711,497
Interest expense	(2,789,639)	(1,767,572)
Net instalment finance income	6,053,500	5,943,925
Fee commission and other income	1,234,148	604,429
Net operating income	7,287,648	6,548,354
Operating expenses	(3,974,846)	(3,858,037)
Depreciation	(112,691)	(95,306)
Allowance for expected credit losses	(1,093,817)	(708,860)
Profit before tax	2,106,294	1,886,151
Income tax expense	(315,944)	(282,924)
PROFIT FOR THE YEAR	1,790,350	1,603,227
Other comprehensive income		
<i>Other comprehensive income that will not be reclassified to the income statement</i>		
Revaluation (loss) / gains on equity instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income	(9,359)	170,000
TOTAL PROFIT AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	1,780,991	1,773,727
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.005	0.005

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2023

	2023 RO	2022 RO
ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,552,357	1,007,164
Deposit with the Central Bank of Oman	250,000	250,000
Other assets	515,715	464,439
Instalment finance debtors - net	97,851,019	88,236,802
Investment securities	714,791	724,150
Deferred tax asset	16,923	16,923
Property and equipment	2,333,093	2,312,742
Assets held for sale	544,655	-
TOTAL ASSETS	103,778,553	93,012,220
EQUITY		
Share capital	35,612,729	34,914,441
Share premium reserve	-	528,402
Legal reserve	5,431,171	5,252,136
Special reserve	2,368,989	2,368,989
Impairment reserve	2,267,058	1,911,736
Investment revaluation reserve	160,641	170,000
Retained earnings	3,032,173	2,906,214
Total equity	48,872,761	48,051,918
Liabilities		
Creditors and other payables	4,609,072	5,109,438
Borrowings	43,407,898	36,205,556
Taxation	328,822	295,308
Corporate deposits	6,560,000	3,350,000
Total liabilities	54,905,792	44,960,302
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	103,778,553	93,012,220
NET ASSETS PER SHARE	0.137	0.138

The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them, in either Arabic or English within 7 days of the receipt of such request addressed to:
Chief Executive Officer, United Finance Co. SAOG
P O Box 3652, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: 24577300 Fax 24561557
E-mail: ufc@ufcoman.com, Website: www.ufcoman.com

Deadly strikes hit Gaza killing 61 Palestinians

GAZA: At least 61 Palestinians were killed in overnight Israeli bombardment, the health ministry in Gaza said on Sunday, as Israel was preparing to send negotiators to new truce talks in Qatar.

Israel’s security cabinet and the smaller war cabinet were to meet to “decide on the mandate of the delegation in charge of the negotiations before its departure for Doha,” the prime minister’s office said.

Its statement did not specify when the delegation would leave for the latest round of talks which comes after Hamas submitted a new proposal for a pause in fighting and captives release.

More than five months of war and an Israeli siege have led to dire humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip, where the United Nations has repeatedly warned of looming famine for the coastal territory’s 2.4 million people.

Shelling and clashes were reported in south Gaza’s



Smoke rises from Gaza, amid Israel’s ongoing strikes on the Palestinian enclave. — Reuters

main city of Khan Yunis and elsewhere.

The territory’s health ministry said 12 members of the same family, whose house in Deir al-Balah was hit, were

among those killed overnight. Most Gazans displaced by the fighting have sought refuge in Rafah on the Egyptian border, where Israel has threatened to launch a ground

offensive, without giving a timeline.

The head of the UN’s World Health Organisation, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, appealed to Israel “in the name

The territory’s health ministry said 12 members of the same family, whose house in Deir al-Balah was hit, were among those killed overnight

of humanity” not to launch an assault on Rafah.

An evacuation planned by the Israeli army ahead of launching its assault was not a practical solution, Tedros argued, noting that Palestinians there do not “have anywhere safe to move to”.

“This humanitarian catastrophe must not be allowed to worsen,” he said on social media platform X.

Israel’s retaliatory campaign has killed at least 31,645 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the

health ministry.

Palestinian groups also seized about 250 Israeli and foreign captives in the attack. Dozens were released during a week-long truce in November, and Israel believes about 130 remain in Gaza including 32 presumed dead. But air and sea missions are no alternative to land deliveries, UN agencies say. Humanitarian groups have cited Israeli restrictions as among the obstacles they face.

The United States, which provides Israel with billions of dollars in military assistance, has also grown increasingly critical of Netanyahu over his handling of the war.

Washington has said it cannot support Israel’s long-threatened operation in Rafah without a “credible, achievable, executable plan” to protect Palestinian civilians. The crisis has only grown worse in Rafah, said medical staff at a clinic run by Palestinian volunteers that offers treatment for displaced Gazans. — AFP

Netanyahu vows to invade Rafah despite world pressure

GAZA: Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu vowed on Sunday to send ground forces into Gaza’s southern Rafah city despite growing international concern over the fate of Palestinian civilians sheltering there.

Netanyahu, whose security and war cabinets were due to discuss latest international efforts towards a truce deal, stressed that “no amount of international pressure will stop us from realising all the goals of the war”.

“To do this, we will also operate in Rafah,” he told a cabinet meeting, hours before he was set to meet visiting German Chancellor Olaf Scholz for talks on the war raging since October 7.

Israel has repeatedly threatened to launch a ground offensive against Palestinians in Rafah, now home to nearly 1.5 million mostly displaced Gazans sheltering near the Egyptian border.

US President Joe Biden, whose country provides Israel with billions of dollars in military assistance, has said a Rafah invasion would be a “red line” without credible measures to protect civilians.

UN World Health Organisation chief Tedros Adhanom

Israel has repeatedly threatened to launch a ground offensive against Palestinians in Rafah, now home to nearly 1.5 million mostly displaced Gazans

Ghebreyesus urged Israel “in the name of humanity” not to launch a Rafah assault, warning that “this humanitarian catastrophe must not be allowed to worsen”.

Envoys were planning to meet in Qatar soon to revive stalled talks for a ceasefire and hostage release deal.

A proposal calls for an Israeli withdrawal from “all cities and populated areas” in Gaza during a six-week truce and for more humanitarian aid, according to an official from the Palestinian groups.

Israel plans to attend the talks, with cabinet members due to “decide on the mandate of the delegation in charge of the negotiations before its departure



Children stand next to the rubble of Al-Faruq Mosque, that was destroyed during Israeli bombardment, in Rafah. — AFP

for Doha”, Netanyahu’s office said, without giving a date for when they would leave.

The war meanwhile raged on, and overnight Israeli bombardment across the territory killed at least 61 Palestinians, the Gaza health ministry said.

Palestinian girl Leen Thabit, retrieving a white dress from under the rubble of their flattened house, cried as she said that her cousin was killed in the strike.

“She’s dead. Only her dress is left,” Thabit said. “What do they

want from us?”

Shelling and clashes were reported in south Gaza’s main city of Khan Younis and elsewhere, and the Israeli army said its forces had killed “approximately 18 terrorists” in central Gaza since Saturday.

More than five months of war and an Israeli siege have led to dire humanitarian conditions in Gaza, where the UN has repeatedly warned of looming famine for the coastal territory’s 2.4 million people. — AFP

Aid trucks reach northern Gaza

CAIRO: Trucks of flour have reached northern Gaza for distribution to areas that have had no aid in four months, Palestinian media reported on Sunday, with famine looming in the enclave and truce talks due to resume in Qatar.

A convoy of 12 trucks arrived in the north on Saturday — six in Gaza City and six in the Jabalia refugee camp — carrying supplies to also be distributed to the northernmost areas of Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun, the media and residents said.

The Home Front media outlet reported that the aid was distributed by the “Popular Committees”, a group that includes leaders of powerful clans in Gaza. A source said the route was secured by Palestinian security personnel.

Aid agencies have warned that pockets of Gaza already face famine, with hospitals in the north reporting children dying of malnutrition and dehydration.

The hunger crisis has piled international pressure on Israel more than five months into its ground and air campaign in Gaza with more talks for a ceasefire and captives exchange expected in the coming days.

Israel’s military campaign in Gaza has now killed more than 31,500 Palestinians according to health authorities in Gaza.

An Israeli strike overnight killed 12 people in one house in Deir al-Balah in the centre of the tiny, crowded Gaza Strip, the health ministry said, among 92 people

it said had been killed in the previous 24 hours.

Israel’s stated war aim is to wipe out Palestinian group Hamas, and it has said this can only be achieved with an assault on Rafah on the border with Egypt, the last relatively safe place for civilians who have flocked to camps there from other parts of Gaza.

Israel’s Western allies have warned it against attacking Rafah, however, unless it is able to protect civilians. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said on Friday he had approved plans for an assault.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Sunday after talks with Jordanian King Abdullah in Jordan that the large number of civilian casualties that would result from such an assault would make regional peace “very difficult”.

A source familiar with the truce talks in Qatar said that the head of Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency would join the delegation attending the negotiations with Qatari, Egyptian and US mediators and was expected in Doha on Sunday. — Reuters



A man receives a bag of flour during the distribution of humanitarian aid in Gaza City. — AFP

Acute malnutrition has doubled in north Gaza strip

NEW YORK: 31 per cent or 1 in 3 children under 2 years of age in the Northern Gaza Strip suffer from acute malnutrition, a staggering escalation from 15.6 per cent in January.

Malnutrition among children is spreading fast and reaching devastating and unprecedented levels in the Gaza Strip due to the wide-reaching impacts of the war and ongoing restrictions on aid delivery.

At least 23 children in Northern Gaza Strip have reportedly died from malnutrition and dehydration in recent weeks, adding to the mounting toll of children killed in the Strip in this current conflict — about 13,450 reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Nutrition screenings

conducted by Unicef and partners in the north in February found that 4.5 per cent of the children in shelters and health centres suffer from severe wasting, the most life-threatening form of malnutrition, which puts children at highest risk of medical complications and death unless they receive urgent therapeutic feeding and treatment, which is not available.

The prevalence of acute malnutrition among children under 5 years of age in the north has increased from 13 per cent to as high as 25 per cent.

“The speed at which this catastrophic child malnutrition crisis in Gaza has unfolded is shocking, especially when desperately needed assistance has been at the ready just a few miles away,” said Catherine Russell,

Unicef Executive Director.

“We have repeatedly attempted to deliver additional aid and we have repeatedly called for the access challenges we have faced for months to be addressed. Instead, the situation for children is getting worse by each passing day. Our efforts in providing life-saving aid are being hampered by unnecessary restrictions, and those are costing children their lives.”

Screenings conducted for the first time in Khan Younis, in the middle area of the Gaza Strip, found 28 per cent of children under 2 years have acute malnutrition, more than 10 per cent of which have severe wasting.

Even in Rafah, the southern enclave with the most access to aid, the results from screenings

among children under 2 years doubled from 5 per cent who were acutely malnourished in January to about 10 per cent by the end of February, with severe wasting rising fourfold from 1 per cent to more than 4 per cent over the month.

“We are doing everything we can to avert a worsening of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, but it is not enough,” said Russell. “An immediate humanitarian ceasefire continues to provide the only chance to save children’s lives and end their suffering. We also need multiple land border crossings that allow aid to be reliably delivered at scale, including to northern Gaza, along with the security assurances and unimpeded passage needed to distribute that aid, without delays or access impediments.”



Muhammad, 11-year-old and Reham, 9-year-old, stand in front of one of the food distribution centres in Rafah, south of the Gaza Strip.



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7

In brief

■ GOMA



UN TROOPS WOUNDED AS FIGHTING FLARES IN DR CONGO

Clashes have broken out between government forces and M23 rebels leaving eight UN peacekeepers injured after a brief lull in fighting in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the United Nations said.

One of the peacekeepers was “gravely wounded” in the attack at Sake, said UN mission head Bintou Keita.

The strategic town lies 20 kilometres west of Goma, capital of North Kivu province, and fighting resumed in the area, witnesses said, after several days of quiet. A Congolese security source said that the UN soldiers were wounded when two shells landed on their camp in Sake’s Mubambiro district. — AFP

■ KABUL



21 DEAD IN AFGHANISTAN AFTER BUS COLLIDES WITH TANKER

At least 21 people were killed and 38 injured on Sunday when a bus collided with a fuel tanker truck and burst into flames in southern Afghanistan.

“Twenty-one people were killed... in a traffic accident between a passenger bus, a tanker and a motorbike” on a main highway through Grishk district in southern Helmand province, Mohammad Qasim Riyaz said, a spokesman for the provincial governor. Of the 38 people injured, 11 were seriously hurt.

The accident occurred in the early hours of the morning on a key highway between the city of Herat through southern provinces to Kabul. — AFP

■ REYKJAVIK



ICELAND LAVA FLOWS SLOW AFTER FOURTH ERUPTION SINCE DEC

Lava flows from a volcano in southwest Iceland that had lit up the night sky slowed on Sunday while man-made barriers appeared to be successful in steering the lava away from infrastructure.

The eruption - the fourth since December - began on Saturday evening, sending fountains of molten rock soaring from a roughly 3 km-long fissure. “The eruption was quite energetic, and there was a lot of material coming out, more than in the previous eruption,” Halldor Geirsson said, associate professor at the Institute of Earth Sciences at the University of Iceland. — AFP

Wave of Ukrainian drones target Russia on final day of voting



Russia's Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu visits a military hospital under construction in Sevastopol, Crimea. – Reuters

MOSCOW: Russia said it was targeted by a wave of Ukrainian drones on Sunday, as thousands headed to the polls for a final day of elections set to extend President Vladimir Putin’s rule.

Queues of people were also seen forming outside polling stations in Moscow and Saint Petersburg at noon, when Russia’s opposition called for people to collectively spoil their ballots or vote against Putin.

The three-day vote had already been marred by a surge in fatal Ukrainian bombardment, incursions into Russian territory by pro-Kyiv sabotage groups and vandalism at polling stations.

Ukrainian drones attacked at least eight Russian regions overnight and on Sunday morning, with some reaching as far as the Moscow region, the defence ministry said.

Ukrainian drones attacked at least eight Russian regions overnight and on Sunday morning, with some reaching as far as the Moscow region

Three airports serving the capital briefly suspended operations following the barrage, while a drone attack in the south sparked a fire at an oil refinery.

In the Russian-controlled part of Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia region, where voting is also taking place, “kamikaze drones” set a polling station ablaze, according to Moscow-installed authorities.

The defence ministry said it had “intercepted and destroyed

35 unmanned aerial vehicles” across the country.

There were repeated acts of protest in the first days of polling, with a spate of arrests of Russians accused of pouring dye into ballot boxes or arson attacks.

Before his death in an Arctic prison last month, opposition leader Alexei Navalny urged Russians to collectively vote at noon in a protest the opposition dubbed “Midday Against Putin”.

Reporters saw an increase in people queuing outside polling stations at midday in Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

Ukraine has repeatedly denounced the elections as illegitimate and a “farce”, and urged Western allies not to recognise the result.

Russian state media have played up recent gains on the front and portrayed the conflict as

a fight for survival against attacks from the West.

Moscow has also sought to press its advantage on the front line as divisions over Western military support for Ukraine have led to ammunition shortages, although Kyiv says it has managed to stop the Russian advance for now.

In Ukraine, a Russian missile strike on the Black Sea port city of Odesa killed 21 people including rescue workers responding to an initial hit.

In Russia’s border city of Belgorod, Ukrainian shelling killed a 16-year-old girl and wounded her father, the region’s governor said on Sunday.

The governor has ordered the closure of shopping centres and schools in Belgorod and the surrounding area for two days because of the strikes. — AFP

Trump hails election as ‘most important date’ in US history

VANDALIA: Donald Trump told a rally in Ohio that November’s presidential election will be the “most important date” in US history, painting his campaign for the White House as a turning point for the country.

Days after securing his position as the presumptive Republican nominee, the former president also warned of a “bloodbath” if he is not elected — though it was not clear what he was referring to, with the remark coming in the middle of comments about threats to the US auto industry.

“The date — remember this, November 5 — I believe it’s going to be the most important date in the history of our country,” the 77-year-old told rally-goers in Vandalia, Ohio, repeating well-worn criticisms that his rival, President Joe Biden, is the “worst” president.

Criticising what he said were plans to build cars in Mexico and sell them to Americans, he stated: “We’re going to put a 100 per cent tariff on every single car that comes across the line, and you’re not going to be able to sell those cars if I get elected.”

As Trump’s comment gained traction on social media, Biden’s campaign released a statement calling the Republican a “loser” at the ballot box in 2020 who then “doubles down on his threats of political violence.”

“He wants another January 6 but the American people are going to give him another electoral defeat this November because they continue to reject his extremism, his affection for violence, and his thirst for revenge,” the campaign said, referring to the deadly attack on the US Capitol by Trump supporters in 2021.

Later, Biden spoke at a dinner in Washington, where he also warned of “an unprecedented moment in history.”

“Freedom is under assault... The lies about the 2020 election, the plot to overturn it, to embrace the Jan. 6 insurrection pose the greatest threat to our democracy since the American Civil War,” he said.

Earlier this month Trump and Biden each won enough delegates to clinch their party nominations in the 2024 presidential race, all but assuring a rematch and setting up one of the longest election campaigns in US history.

Among the issues Trump is campaigning on is sweeping reform of what he calls Biden’s “horror show” immigration policies, despite the ex-president successfully pressuring Republicans to block a bill in Congress that included the toughest border security measures in decades. — AFP



Former US President and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks during a Buckeye Values PAC Rally in Vandalia, Ohio. — AFP

Blinken arrives in Seoul for summit

SEOUL: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived on Sunday in South Korea on the first stop of a brief Asia tour also including the Philippines, as Washington moves to reinforce ties with two key regional allies.

Blinken landed on Sunday afternoon ahead of the third Summit for Democracy on Monday, an initiative of US President Joe Biden, which Seoul is hosting this week.

Before arriving in Seoul, Blinken made a brief stop in Bahrain, where he spoke to King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa about efforts to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza.

The summit, which runs from March 18-20 will bring together government officials, NGOs and civil society members.

Seoul is one of Washington’s key regional allies, and the United States has stationed about 27,000 American soldiers in the South, to help protect it against the nuclear-armed North.

Seoul’s conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol has boosted ties with Washington and sought to bury the historical hatchet with former colonial power Japan to better guard against Pyongyang’s threats.

Blinken will meet South



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (C) arrives at the Osan Air Base in Pyeongtaek. – AFP

The summit, which runs from March 18-20 will bring together government officials, NGOs and civil society members.

Korean Foreign Minister Cho tae-yul, the ministry said, for discussions that will cover how to boost the alliance, as Washington and Seoul explore how to improve their so-called “extended deterrence” against North Korea.

The democracy summit has attracted some criticism due to its selective invitation list, which excludes countries that consider themselves democratic, such as Thailand and Turkiye.

Previously, The Caribbean regional body CARICOM was

holding an emergency meeting with representatives of Haiti, the United Nations and concerned countries including the United States.

The meeting charged Haitian political groups with establishing the transitional governing body, and most of those groups have submitted the names of their chosen representatives, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday. He told reporters he expects the transition council to be “fully stood up” within “the coming days.”

The United States on Friday announced plans to send an additional \$25 million in humanitarian aid, on top of the \$33 million announced early in the week.

After Seoul, Blinken heads to Manila, a trip that will reaffirm “our unwavering commitment to the Philippine ally”, according to State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller.

He will talk with local officials including President Ferdinand Marcos, with issues including over the South China Sea likely to top the agenda.

The US is redoubling efforts to improve long-standing ties with regional allies such as Manila. — AFP

Ramadhan, a month of learning and behaving!



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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An author, columnist,
creative writer,
translator and a
communications
professional

The holy month of Ramadhan has just started announcing the beginning of blessed time of the year. Muslims all over the world are observing this month by fasting from the dawn till sunset everyday. It goes on for around 29 or 30 days depending on the sighting of moon on the 29th day of the month. Ramadhan is regarded as a generous guest visiting every house of Muslims bringing blessings and graces of different sorts.

Ramadhan is the month of fasting, mercy, forgiveness and kindness as people are being more compassionate to one another during this month. As a matter of fact, this month is the holiest month in the Islamic calendar and marks a significant occasion for Muslims. Its importance and value as a month is marked by the revelation of the Holy Quran, prescription of fasting and declaration of the Night of Al Qadr, which is better than one thousand months in terms of value in praying to Allah on this night.

This is affirmed by the verse of the Quran, “The month of Ramadhan in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and criterion (between right and wrong). So whoever of you sights the month, he/she

must observe fasts that month and whoever is ill or on a journey, the same number of days which one did not observe fasts must be made up from other days”.

The value of Night of Al Qadr is addressed in the verse, “Surely We revealed it (Quran) on the night of Qadr — And what do you know what Night of Al Qadr is — the night is better than thousand of months — the angels and the spirit descend in it by the permission of their lord every command — it is peace till the break of morning.”

As a point of fact, fasting was prescribed in this month and assigned to other nations before it has been assigned to the nation of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This has been affirmed by the Quranic verse when the Almighty Allah addressed human beings: “O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil.”

Ramadhan is a month of learning for it passes different lessons to Muslims during their fasting period since the dawn to sunset. Fasting urges all Muslims to recall various aspects of living practices and morals. It also reminds them of all those poor people and needy families within the society. It basically mirrors the daily struggle of poor people

RAMADHAN IS
A MONTH OF
LEARNING FOR IT
PASSES DIFFERENT
LESSONS TO
MUSLIMS DURING
THEIR FASTING
PERIOD

who strive to afford food and other life necessities for themselves and their families.

Therefore, while fasting, Muslims become more thoughtful and sympathetic to their poor brothers and sisters. In return, good deeds are usually conducted in this month reflecting the spirit of giving and care. Donation of food and money to the families in need is usually a key.

Generally, fasting is a spiritual practice that does not just consist of refraining from eating and drinking, but from every kind of selfish desires and wrong-doings too. Fasting is not merely of the body, but basically of the spirit as well. Essentially, the purpose of fasting is to develop and strengthen one’s power of self-control to resist wrong desires and bad habits. This definitely will help people attain nearness and closeness to Allah. Besides, fasting promotes charity and generosity as people get more sympathetic with the suffering of others.

Undoubtedly, Ramadhan as a month is a time for obtaining blessings from the Almighty Allah as well as time for giving and sharing. Fasting as a practice is a valuable experience towards achieving self-improvement and discipline. It could be the start of maintaining the good deeds and principles to be habitual in everyday life of people.

Rural clinic offers respite for Zimbabwe patients

MARY TARUVINGA

Outside a hospital in rural Zimbabwe, scores of people wait patiently under trees or inside small tents for news of their loved ones.

Vendors sell snacks, fruits and drinks to drivers queuing at the gates of what has become an unlikely sought-after healthcare destination in the impoverished southern African country.

Zimbabwe’s public health system has all but collapsed under years of mismanagement, amid shortages of funds, staff, medicine and equipment.

When in need, those who can afford it, including government ministers, fly overseas to seek treatment.

Some check into private, but relatively expensive clinics in Harare.

Many others make the trip to Mount Darwin, a small village in the parched countryside about 200 kilometres north of the capital and home to the Karanda Mission Hospital.

“I lost all hope of having my aunt treated in Harare, after we were asked to bring water for her to drink and bathe as well as to flush the toilet,” says a SUV-driving man, who gave his name as Gunira.

After a three-hour drive, nurses assist the aunt to move from the vehicle to a stretcher and take her inside the building.

Funded by the Evangelical church of Zimbabwe and run by three North American doctors, the hospital originally set up to cater to rural folks has built a reputation as one of the best in the country.

The 150-bed clinic treats up to 100,000 people a year and is almost always full, says medical director, Paul Thistle, a Canadian physician who married a Zimbabwean woman.

Charging affordable rates — a consultation costs around \$15 compared to the average \$50 asked by private hospitals in Harare — it draws patients from well beyond its catchment area. Some come from as far as neighbouring Zambia.

We “never turn any patient away,” says Thistle.

“Karanda has stood out not because we have the most modern medication, the highest technology in diagnostic equipment but because we have the intangibles,” he said.

That means a caring staff, something that elsewhere is also short in supply, say some patients.

Zimbabwean doctors and nurses have moved abroad en masse in recent years, due to poor working conditions and pay amid runaway inflation. — AFP



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Reading together makes for better family bonding



As winter gently disappears for this year and the unrelenting sun begins to shine on much of Oman, people are going to be indoors as much as they can, bar the evenings to catch the cool breeze. How to keep children occupied is a question many wonder, especially as outdoor games and group activities have become so rare.

Reading as a family used to be commonplace for many years.

Much before technology took over our world, families would sit together reading and the bedtime stories was standard practice. There is no reason that this pastime should not be continued.

These days when parents and children stay distracted with so many diversions, setting up a time to read together is invaluable. There are many reasons for this.

As *The Los Angeles Times* says, “Reading books with your young child and telling stories together can reduce stress, strengthen family bonds and support your child’s social-emotional development. Reading together also helps your child develop vocabulary and learning skills necessary to thrive in school”.

Reading together is a great way to understand children’s interests as they are growing up. It does not have to

be stressful. In fact, reading together should not be about assessing the child’s proficiency or speed. It is not about judging but sharing.

READING, TELLING AND SHARING STORIES ALSO HELP IN DEVELOPING CHILDREN’S EMPATHY AND CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Having said that, of course reading, at times reading aloud, helps in cognitive development and language development. Being able to process new information, guess meanings and understand concepts is a large part of the measurable outcomes of reading. When this is done together, it can increase a child’s curiosity and confidence.

Reading, telling and sharing stories also help in developing children’s empathy and cultural understanding. It helps to open the windows of the world to introduce them to diverse worlds and develop sensitivity and understanding of others.

Children are known to be creative and imaginative. Reading together gives them a chance to explore the limits of their imagination. Guided by elders, whether parents or siblings, reading leads to discussions, even related stories and songs — there are no limits to the imagination.

Being role models is an important part of parenting.

Reading together gives children the belief that it is an important and enjoyable part of a daily routine if parents are reading with them. It does not help if children are made to sit with a book and parents are on a digital screen — that is setting up the wrong message.

There are many techniques to plan reading moments. These can include setting up a daily routine, whether before or after meals, in the afternoons after school, or even on a weekend morning. Anytime that is convenient to everybody and can be set as a routine works well. What is important is that it becomes an enjoyable activity and not a chore.

In today’s world, parents find less time to spend with their families as they juggle home and work responsibilities. Setting some time apart to read together will enhance the quality of the time spent while adding to the creative imagination of young minds.

Americans move to climate-risky spots

Pickup truck by a set of new buildings near the beachfront in New Hanover County, North Carolina - an area he says is prone to flooding. “That’s crazy. That never should have gone in here,” he said, referring to new development blocks away from the US East Coast. “Whenever I get on the phone with the county, usually within 30 days we have significant flooding,” said the former oceanographer, after opening a presentation and flicking through slides of flooded roads and areas around the region.

The burgeoning county has faced a barrage of recent storms and is at major risk of flooding again over the next 30 years, according to First Street Foundation, a climate risk tracking group.

Parr and other activists are racing to prevent another major development on an approximately eight-acre patch of land farther north, across from downtown Wilmington, in a spot uniquely prone to flooding.

Precisely how to build in floodplains and areas most at risk from climate change amid continued population growth is an issue US officials are grappling with as people and developers move into - not away from - perils like flooding and wildfires.

“The challenge of managing climate risk in the long term is much, much harder if we continue to develop in hazardous places the way we have been to date,” said Miyuki Hino, assistant professor in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina.

For years, local officials have been grappling with what to do with a tract of land along the western bank of the Cape Fear River across from Wilmington — an area that floods relatively routinely even outside of major storms.

Much of the patch nearby is still zoned industrial, and options range from expanding open space to rezoning the area to allow for high-



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density, mixed-use development. Developers had proposed three multi-story towers, 550 condominium units and 300 apartments for a spot known as Point Peter, at the confluence of the Cape Fear River and Northeast Cape Fear River, but the project stalled in 2021 as county officials wanted more time to assess longer-term plans. Kirk Pugh of KFJ Development Group, the project’s developer, is frustrated with the slow pace - and said building in and around the Cape Fear River area can be done safely. The original concept included a “sacrificial first floor” and a stormwater capture and release design among the features, he noted, that would allow water to move “freely” if a freshwater flooding event occurred. “The argument that we shouldn’t build in a floodplain... well, most of our county is in a floodplain,” he said. Those opposed to building up the area say it does not make sense to pursue even scaled-back versions, given the long-term trends of sea level rise and climate change fuelling more intense storms and flooding in the region. “Risky isn’t even the right word,” said Kemp Burdette with Cape Fear River Watch, an advocacy group. “Risk indicates that something might happen or it might not happen. A flood over there is inevitable.” Wilmington’s location toward the end of the massive Cape Fear River Basin and just west of the Atlantic Ocean makes it uniquely at risk for flooding from multiple sources, including natural sea level rise. Out of 40 areas across the US, Wilmington experienced the biggest increase in “nuisance”, or high tide, flooding days due to tidal changes over the past 70 years or so, according to a 2021 study from University of Central Florida researchers. And in New Hanover County, 40 per cent of properties have greater than a 26 per cent chance of being severely affected by flooding over the next three decades, according to projections from First Street.

REHEARSAL FOR PARADE



A Pakistan Air Force (PAF) F-16 fighter jet performs manoeuvres during a rehearsal ahead of the Pakistan's Day parade, in Islamabad, on Sunday. – AFP

Climate leadership from the Global South

Last month, the International Energy Agency’s ministerial gathering took place in Paris, while the African Union, which recently joined the G20, held its annual summit in Addis Ababa. Both fora recognised the urgent need to fulfil the commitments made at last December’s United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, not least to triple installed renewable-energy capacity by 2030. But the challenges ahead are substantial.

COP28 identified many actions that are crucial to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. Beyond the sharp increase in renewable-energy capacity, these include doubling the rate of energy-efficiency improvements by 2030, phasing down the “unabated” use of fossil fuels, and providing financial support to developing countries as they work to expand energy access and advance economic development.

Africa and Latin America have a central role to play in fulfilling the world’s net-zero ambitions. Both regions boast abundant renewable-energy potential, thanks to vast solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal resources. By leveraging these, Africa and Latin America can make rapid progress in reducing their carbon emissions, enhancing energy access, and stimulating sustainable economic growth.

Our countries, Colombia and Kenya, are already making significant strides towards a cleaner energy mix. Though Colombia has massive oil and gas



Omar Andrés Camacho
The writer is Minister of Mines and Energy of Colombia



Soipan Tuyá
The writer is Cabinet Secretary of the Kenyan Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, and Forestry

reserves, hydropower generation accounts for nearly 70 per cent of its electricity production. And the government is committed to increasing the share of renewables in the energy mix further by 2030. By harnessing wind, solar, biomass, and geothermal, Colombia can diversify its renewable-energy portfolio and further reduce its reliance on fossil fuels. Colombia is also taking direct action to accelerate the phaseout of fossil fuels. The government recently announced a ban on the issuance of new licenses for oil and gas exploration, and has signalled its intention to address the negative effects of fossil-fuel extraction. These measures will not only curb carbon emissions, but also help protect the country’s vulnerable ecosystems and rich biodiversity. As for Kenya, it is emerging as a renewable-energy success story in Africa. Using its vast geothermal, wind, solar, and hydroelectric resources, Kenya has raised the share of renewables in its electricity generation to a whopping 94 per cent. Its geothermal sector has achieved remarkable growth, making it Africa’s leading producer of geothermal power. And now, Kenya is helping its neighbours, Ethiopia and Djibouti, to harness their own geothermal resources as well. Underpinning Kenya’s progress are government efforts to

implement supportive policies and create an enabling environment for private investment. The Kenyan government’s forward-thinking approach has not only resulted in expanded energy access for its people; it has also created jobs and local industries, thereby advancing economic development and opening up opportunities to collaborate with others. Kenya is a founding member of Accelerated Partnerships for Renewables in Africa, an initiative that aims to bolster the energy transition in African countries, with support from Denmark, Germany, and the United Arab Emirates. Colombia and Kenya’s



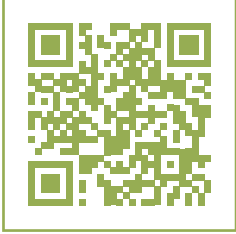
COP28 identified many actions that are crucial to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

achievements should be highlighted and celebrated to motivate and guide other countries in their own clean-energy transitions. Those with fossil-fuel resources, for example, must follow Colombia’s example in limiting oil and gas exploration. But Colombia and Kenya are not only passive models for others to follow; they are also active global leaders. If their clean-energy transitions didn’t already make their commitments apparent, their recent decision to join the Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance – an international coalition of governments and partners working to facilitate the fossil-fuel phaseout

– should make them so. Still, financing is key if the world is to realise its clean-energy ambitions. Low investment in Africa is a major challenge. A recent BloombergNEF report shows that in 2021, just 0.6 per cent (\$2.6 billion) of the \$434 billion invested in renewable-energy projects went to African countries. A sharp increase in funding flows from rich countries to clean-energy sectors in both Africa and Latin America is urgently needed. Beyond direct financial support from rich countries, the global financial system — including the International Monetary Fund and multilateral development banks — must urgently be reformed, so that it is fairer and more efficient. Only then can this system deliver enough financing to meet the growing needs of developing economies. Coordinated action to ease the debt burdens on developing economies is also vital. At COP28, the Global South demonstrated solidarity and a commitment to cooperation. By sharing knowledge and best practices, developing economies can drastically accelerate the clean-energy transition. But, if the world is to succeed at combating climate change and safeguarding our collective future, bold action to ensure adequate financing is essential.

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‘Saleb’ claims Basra Race in UAE, ‘Manar’ second

‘BF ARKAN’ WINS SHIELD AT BARKA RACE

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

The horse ‘Saleb’ owned by Royal Cavalry won first place, while ‘Manar’ achieved second place at Al Ain Equestrian Track in the UAE.

‘Saleb’ snatched first place in the second round ‘Basra Race’, allocated to purebred Arabian horses for a distance of 2,000 metres, led by jockey Saif al Balushi and supervised by trainer Ibrahim al Hadhrami.

‘Manar’, owned by Royal Cavalry, finished second in the third round ‘Hili Race’, allocated to filly for a distance of 1,800 metres, led by jockey Connor Beasley, under supervision of Ibrahim al Hadrami.

OERF CONCLUDES SEASON

On the other hand, Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation (OERF) concluded the final race for the season 2023-24, the race was held at Al Rahba horse racing



Royal Cavalry’s ‘Saleb’ crosses the finishing line in Al Ain.

track in Barka.

The final race was held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal bin Hamad al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, in the presence of Sayyid Munther bin Saif bin Hamad al Busaidy, OERF Chairman.

The event included five rounds, three of which were allocated to purebred Arab horses, one round to purebred Arabian horses of local production, and one round to purebred hybrid horses.

‘BF Arkan’ owned by Majed bin Ali al Maamri won the first round ‘Rustaq Fort’ for purebred Arabian horses for 2,000 metres, led by Al Mutasem bin Said al Balushi, under trainer Ahmed bin Hamood al Raqadi.

‘RB King’ claimed the second round ‘Nizwa Fort’ for purebred Arabian horses for a distance of 2000 meters, owned by HH Sayyid Saud bin Harib al Said, rode by jockey Amer bin Ali al Rasbi and



A horse show during the Barka race.

supervised by Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Balushi.

‘Al Mugahaz’ finished first in the third round ‘Suhar Fort’ for purebred Arabian horses for 2,000 metres, owned by Abdulsalam bin Salim al Mashaykhi, led by Adam bin Talib al Balushi and supervised by Abdulrahman bin Salim al Rasbi.

‘BF Mohtaram’ grabbed the fourth round ‘Al Mirani Fort’ for purebred hybrid horses for 2,000



Sayyid Saud al Busaidy (centre) crowning the winner along with Sayyid Munther al Busaidy (R) in Barka.

metres, owned by Fahd bin Khamis al Balushi, led by Munis bin Salim al Siyabi and supervised by Mahmoud bin Khamis al Balushi.

‘GS Athba’ achieved first place in the fifth round ‘Al Jalali Fort’, for purebred Arabian horses of local production for 1,600 metres, owned by Jamal bin Salim al Shabibi. GS Athba was rode by Adam bin Talib al Balushi and trained by Amer bin Salim al Ghunaimi.

At the end of the race, the chief

guest honoured the first-place winners, in addition to those who excelled in the season 2023-24.

Salim bin Said al Rashidi was crowned the best horse owner award, Al Muatasem bin Said al Balushi was crowned the best knight, Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Balushi won the Best Trainer Award, where the Shield award for the best local production horse was won by ‘BF Arkan’, owned by Majed bin Ali al Maamari.

Coach Ahmed calls up probables for Oman U19 team

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

Oman national under-19 football team head coach Ahmed al Alawi has called up 24 players to take part in the domestic preparatory camp which will begin on Monday in Muscat. The nine-day camp will feature mixture of technical training sessions, local preparatory matches and some fitness exercises.

The gathering is part of the team’s long preparatory plan for the forthcoming assignments including the third edition of the West Asian Championship which will be held in Saudi Arabia in the middle of the current year. Then, the team will vie for one of the direct spots at AFC U20 Asian Cup 2025 Qualifiers in September 2024, while the finals of 2025 AFC

U20 Asian Cup is scheduled to take place in February 2025.

Recently, the U-19 football league concluded as Al Suwaiq were crowned the champions following their crucial 5-4 penalty shoot-out win over Saham as the match ended in a 1-1 draw at the regulation time. The match produced many potential faces who can represent the national team from both the teams.

The announced squad featured four players from the winning team including goalkeeper Mamoon al Soli, Yousef al Shabibi, Muhannad al Saadi and Ouadi al Manwari while there were no players selected from Saham despite their top performance in the league.

Moreover, there were no players too from Izki and Al Khabourah clubs as they ended in the third



and fourth places respectively. The coaching staff of the national under-19 football team observed

the league in different stages and they announced the squad after the completion of the league.

The last camp for the team was in January as the team had played some local friendly matches.

The Oman junior team had played against Ahli Sidab with the Oman U19 winning by 3-0. Oman’s goals were scored by Ayoob al Busaidy, Said al Ghanboosi and Al Hussain al Qasmi. The second match was against Muscat club and the game concluded with Oman’s victory at 2-0. Rabee al Sunaidy and al Hussain al Qasmi netted the winning goals for the Oman team.

The Oman team had managed to advance into the Asian Cup for three times and will be looking to confirm their fourth presence in the upcoming edition. Oman’s last appearance was in the 2023 AFC U20 Asian Cup Uzbekistan finals last March. Oman’s campaign in the Asian Cup had ended with

only one point from a goalless draw against Jordan. Oman had suffered two defeats in the first two games of the group against South Korea and Tajikistan. It was the third participation for them in Asian AFC U20 finals in Uzbekistan after 2014 (Myanmar) and 2000 (Iran) editions.

OMAN SQUAD: Majid al Farsi, Masoud al Bahri, Ghassan al Masrouri, Basha al Muharabi, Rabee al Sunaidy, Abdullah al Jabri, Said al Ghanbousi, Jawad al Azi, Adnan al Mashaefri, Ali al Alawi, Mohammed al Sameen, Ahmed al Shanfari, Al Hussain al Qasmi, Oadi al MANwari, Muhannad al Saadi, Mamoun al Soli, Yousef al Shabibi, Rashad al Dheen, Yassar al Balushi, Fahad al Mukhaini, Abdullah al Mamari, Ziyad al Jaalani.

Curry hot in injury return as Warriors beat Lakers

LOS ANGELES: Stephen Curry returned from a sprained ankle to score 31 points and reserve Klay Thompson added 26 to spark Golden State over the Los Angeles Lakers 128-121 in an NBA showdown on Saturday.

The Lakers, who lost forward Anthony Davis after the first quarter to a poke in the left eye, squandered a 40-point performance by LeBron James in falling to the Warriors.

“A big win for us,” Curry said. “I don’t know the last time we won in here against them. Big deal.”

Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Curry missed Golden State’s past three games and the Warriors are only 1-5 this season without him.

The 36-year-old guard and four-time NBA champion returned in spectacular fashion, adding six rebounds and five assists while hitting 12-of-24 shots from the floor, and 3-of-10 from 3-point range.

James, who hit 15-of-23 shots, added eight points and nine assists and filled in after Davis went to the locker room after the first quarter and did not play again. “They always going to talk about me and him,” Curry said of James. “It was about our total group tonight. For us, it takes a whole team to win and we needed it — we needed it bad.”

Draymond Green contributed 12 rebounds and 13 assists and Jonathan Kuminga added 23 points for Golden State.

The game was halted for several minutes near the end by a malfunctioning shot clock. “I’ve never seen that in my career. Usually they have a back-up clock or something,” Curry said.

“That’s the worst thing that could happen, especially this age. You build up all pre-game, you get going and when the engine shuts off it’s hard to get it going again.”

The Warriors are a percentage point ahead of the Lakers in the last two play-in positions in the Western Conference.



Golden State Warriors’ Stephen Curry (30) shoots against Los Angeles Lakers’ Spencer Dinwiddie (26) and Rui Hachimura (28) during the third quarter at Crypto.com Arena. — USA Today Sports

THUNDER SHARE LEAD

Jalen Williams scored 23 points, grabbed seven rebounds and had six assists as the Oklahoma City Thunder grabbed a share of the Western Conference lead by winning 118-112 at Memphis.

The Thunder matched defending NBA champion Denver atop the West at 47-20.

Rookie Chet Holmgren scored 22 points and pulled down 11 rebounds while Shai Gilgeous-

Alexander added 20 points for Oklahoma City. “We just had to make winning plays down the stretch,” Holmgren said. “It wasn’t going our way the whole game but we came together enough to come away with the win.”

Minnesota moved within a game of the West co-leaders as Anthony Edwards scored 31 points and Mike Conley added 25 in a 119-100 Timberwolves triumph at Utah.

Jalen Brunson fired in 42 points to spark the New York Knicks to a 98-91 victory at Sacramento.

— AFP

NBA RESULTS

Warriors bt Lakers 128-121
Knicks bt Kings 98-91
Pacers bt Nets 121-100
Timberwolves bt Jazz 119-100
Rockets bt Cavaliers 117-103
76ers bt Hornets 109-98
Pelicans bt Trail Blazers 126-107
Thunder bt Grizzlies 118-112
Bulls bt Wizards 127-98

Khalid Kail, Bilal shine in PSM Ramadhan cricket

MUSCAT: Oriental Travels and SE XI posted wins on the second day of Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) Ramadhan tape ball cricket tournament on Saturday. Both the matches were played in front of a good crowd at the PSM grounds.

The first match was played between Oman House King and Oriental Travels. Oman House won the toss and elected to field.

Oriental scored 93 for 3 wickets with Khalid Kail scoring a quickfire 32 runs in 18 balls with two fours and sixes each. Waqas remained not out on 30 runs.

In reply, Oman House could manage only 70 runs in 8 overs with Faizan scoring 20 runs in 6 balls. Nadeem Khan took two wickets for 6 runs.

Khalid Kail was adjudged as the man of the match.

In the second match, Oman Tape Ball Club batted first and scored 60 runs in the stipulated 8 overs. Tahir Khalil got two wickets for four runs.

In reply, SE XI scored 61 runs in just 4.4 overs. Bilal scored 24 runs and was declared the man of the match.

Mohammad Riaz was the chief guest and gave away the man of the match awards.

On Monday, Hal Phone Cosmos will take on JSW XI in the first match at 9 pm. PSM will meet Chrwa XI

in the second match of the night at 10.15 pm at the PSM grounds.

On Friday, the tournament was opened by the Deputy Head of Mission and Head of Chancery of the Pakistan Embassy, Bilal Hasan. Also present were PSM Chairman Ameer Hanza, board members and Pakistan Embassy Officers.

In the opening match, Hadi XI beat SK 1010 team by six wickets. SK 1010 scored 76 for 6 wickets in 8 overs with Numan and Zahoor hitting 14 each. Safeer of Hadi XI got 4 wickets for 9 runs in 2 overs to destroy SK batting line-up.

In reply, Hadi XI batters Muhammad Kamran (23) and Kamran Ali (22) scored briskly in seven balls as they clinched victory by 6 wickets.

In the second match, PSM beat Pakistan Embassy team by 31 runs in a high-scoring match.

Batting first, PSM piled up 128 runs in 8 overs. Danish Riaz blasted 55 runs in 15 balls with six sixers and three fours. Muhammad Amir was not out on 19 runs.

Irfan of Pakistan Embassy took 3-26 in 2 overs.

Pakistan Embassy made a decent chase but ended 31 runs short at 97 runs with Raheef (20) and Nadeem (22) making good contributions.

PSM’s Rasil took two wickets for eight runs.



Orion gymnasts Lamees, Roshd claim Grand Final spots in Dubai

MUSCAT: Two of Orion Gymnastics club’s budding stars, Lamees al Shidhani and Roshd al Mandary, showcased their talent at the prestigious Dubai Open for Gymnastics Academies, held under the Patronage of the Dubai Sports Council recently.

Their stellar performances secured them a coveted spot in the Grand Final scheduled for May 25, a testament to Orion’s commitment to excellence and top-notch training.

Adding to Orion’s list of achievements, on March 9, two more gymnasts from the club participated in the LVLUP 2024 Gymnastics Challenge. Alexandra Muromtseva and Haya El Maghraby soared to victory, with Alexandra clinching the gold and Haya securing the silver medal in their respective age groups.



Lamees and Roshd pose in Dubai.

Orion Gymnastics, nestled in the heart of Bausher at Muscat College, specialises in classes for children aged 4 and above.

With expert coaches and a supportive environment, Orion Gymnastics focuses on instilling discipline, dedication and a love for the sport in its wards, the club said.

Oasis Cricket Club opens doors to local cricket talent in Oman

MUSCAT: The Oasis Cricket Club has commenced operations adjacent to the state-of-the-art Oasis Badminton Academy in Ghala.

The inauguration ceremony, graced by Alkesh Joshi, a Member of the Oman Cricket Board, witnessed the presence of cricket enthusiasts, players, and parents in Muscat.

Joshi emphasised the significance of such initiatives in fostering cricket’s growth in Oman, stressing the importance of promoting women’s cricket. He expressed intentions for the Oasis Academy’s women’s team to participate in the upcoming Oman Cricket League season. The facility boasts three modern box cricket pitches and two net practice pitches built to international standards by seasoned curators.

These versatile box cricket pitches can be transformed into net practice areas as needed. Expert coaching sessions cater



to individuals, groups, and all age brackets.

Additionally, the Academy extends its pitches to clubs, corporations, and social organisations for hosting cricket tournaments.

The surge in local interest in cricket, evidenced by increased participation among Omani

nationals, aligns with the nation’s rising prominence in international cricket circles. The recent inclusion of Rohan Ramachandran, a Keralite expatriate, in the Oman national cricket team has further fuelled excitement among players and parents alike.

Oasis Cricket Club Founder

and Chairman Yogendra Katyar attributed the academy’s inception to the growing support for local cricket, mirroring the success of the Oasis Badminton Academy. Katyar underscored the need to extend the same level of support to Oasis Cricket Club as its badminton counterpart.

Chelsea survive Leicester scare

LONDON: Carney Chukwue-meka rescued Chelsea with a stoppage-time strike that inspired a 4-2 win over 10-man Leicester in an FA Cup quarterfinal thriller on Sunday.

Mauricio Pochettino's side were fortunate to survive a stirring fightback from Championship promotion chasers Leicester amid a mutinous atmosphere at Stamford Bridge.

Chukwuemeka netted in the closing minutes to save Chelsea from the embarrassment of being forced into extra-time.

Noni Madueke added Chelsea's fourth to ensure the angry fans who booed Pochettino in the second half were silenced, at least for now.

For the sixth time in the last eight years, the Blues have advanced to the last four in the FA Cup.

But this was hardly a triumphant afternoon for Blues boss Pochettino, whose inconsistent team blew the two-goal half-time lead given to them by Marc Cucurella and Cole Palmer.

In between those strikes, Raheem Sterling missed a penalty and Axel Disasi gave Leicester hope with a farcical own goal early in the second half.

When Stephy Mavididi scored an eye-catching equaliser, Chelsea were in turmoil once again as the hapless Sterling earned the wrath of the home support.

But Leicester's Callum Doyle was sent off for a professional foul on Nicolas Jackson, setting the stage for the Blues' late revival.

Chelsea have failed to win a single domestic trophy since their most recent FA Cup triumph six years ago. The west Londoners are languishing in 11th place in

the Premier League and former Tottenham and Southampton boss Pochettino is yet to win silverware in England.

Under mounting pressure amid a troubled first season in charge, Pochettino revealed this week that some of Chelsea's young players endured a sleepless night before their League Cup final defeat against Liverpool in February. Making amends by winning the FA Cup would buy Pochettino some much-needed breathing space.

JEERS FOR STERLING

Chelsea had taken the lead in the 13th minute when Nicolas Jackson accelerated past Jannik Vestergaard into the Leicester area before whipping over a low cross that Cucurella converted from close-range.

It was the Spanish defender's first goal since joining Chelsea from Brighton in August 2022.

In the 25th minute, Cole Palmer surged down the right flank and crossed to the edge of area, where Sterling was clattered by Abdul Fatawu as he prepared to shoot.

Palmer has been taking Chelsea's penalties this season and Sterling's decision to grab the ball proved misguided.

A frustrating season for the 29-year-old, who was left out of the England squad again this week, showed no signs of abating as he fluffed his lines with a weak penalty that was easily saved by Jakub Stolarczyk.

To his credit, Sterling didn't hide and he set up Palmer's goal on the stroke of half-time.

Sterling raced into the area and delivered a low cross that Palmer deftly slotted home from



Chelsea's Malo Gusto celebrates after the FA Cup quarterfinal against Leicester City. – Reuters

close-range.

Disasi gave Leicester a lifeline in the 51st minute as the centre-back panicked under pressure from Daka and hacked a misjudged backpass past stunned keeper Robert Sanchez into his own net from 30 yards.

Weaving into the Chelsea area

as the anxious Blues defence backed off, Mavididi curled a blistering finish into the top corner in the 62nd minute.

Chelsea thought they had been given a penalty in the 73rd minute when Doyle tripped Jackson.

VAR ruled the offence was just outside the area, but that didn't

save Doyle from a red card.

Sterling was booed by Chelsea fans after a woeful free-kick, while Pochettino also copped it with chants of "you don't know what you're doing" when he substituted Mudryk.

Sterling was jeered again when he was taken off, so it was no sur-

prise to see Pochettino punching the air in relief in stoppage-time.

Chukwuemeka produced a cool finish after Palmer's sublime back-heel teed up the young midfielder. Madueke put a flattering gloss on the scoreline when his deflected strike dipped under the bar in the final seconds. —AFP

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ALCARAZ FACES MEDVEDEV FOR INDIAN WELLS TITLE

INDIAN WELLS: Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz handed Australian Open winner Jannik Sinner his first defeat of 2024 on Saturday to set up an Indian Wells final against Daniil Medvedev.

Alcaraz's 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 victory ended Sinner's 19-match winning streak, including a 16-0 start to the year, and ensures Alcaraz will remain No. 2 in the world rankings next week. "To be able to end something like this, it's incredible for me," Spain's Alcaraz said of busting the Italian's streak.

Sunday's final against fourth-seeded Russian Medvedev is a repeat of last year's championship decider. Medvedev also had to fight back in a 1-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 victory over 17th-ranked American Tommy Paul. In the final he'll be out to thwart Alcaraz's bid to become the first repeat Indian Wells ATP champion since Novak Djokovic won three straight titles from 2014-2016.

Alcaraz and Sinner's semi-final was disrupted by a three-hour rain delay at 2-1 in the first set but proved worth the wait as the 20-something stars put on a show. "Matches with Jannik are always special," Alcaraz said. "We know we have to play at our highest level to win. We have to put magic on the court, unbelievable points and for the crowd it is also wonderful." Sinner quickly seized the initiative when play resumed, winning four straight games to pocket the first set. He saved the only break point he faced, and gained the insurance break for a 5-1 lead, pouncing on a short ball for a stinging cross-court passing winner on break point.

Alcaraz turned it around in the second set with a savvy change of style, backing up to give himself more time on the returns and gradually working his way into the match. He broke Sinner with a deep volley winner for a 3-1 lead and held for 4-1 in a game that had fans on their feet cheering a thrilling rally at the net. He saved break points in the seventh and ninth games before sealing the set with a drop-shot winner.

MENTALLY STRONG

"I stayed strong mentally," Alcaraz said. "I think that's a really important part in this game.

"This kind of match, a set down playing against someone that's playing an unbelievable game – I'm really happy with the things I've done.

"I changed my style a little bit, I changed my game a little bit, and I think it worked very, very well," said Alcaraz, who is chasing his first title since winning Wimbledon last year. —AFP



Completion of maiden equity crowdfunding bolsters Zameeli platform

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

Mamun, an embedded finance and payments startup headquartered in Muscat, has successfully concluded the Sultanate of Oman’s first equity crowdfunding campaign in collaboration with Zameeli, a homegrown tech startup connecting Omani freelancers with SMEs. This achievement not only highlights the potential for expanding investment avenues in Oman but also signifies a growing interest in the tech sector within the country.

It has propelled Zameeli to new heights while diversifying its investor base. Initially supported by the Oman Technology Fund, Zameeli has now broadened its investor base through Mamun, indicating the startup’s appeal and Mamun’s ability to unlock investment opportunities.

With a substantial user base including notable organisations like Omran and the Ministry of Information, alongside a growing network of Omani freelancers, Zameeli serves as a testament to the evolving tech landscape in Oman and the opportunities it presents for local businesses.

The successful collaboration between Mamun and Zameeli sets the stage for the launch of Mamun’s secondary market, which is expected to further enhance participation in Oman’s financial ecosystem and stimulate innovation in the tech sector.

Mohammed al Tamami, COO



Zameeli is a community-driven platform that supports Omani freelancers.

of Mamun, commented, “The successful conclusion of our secondary market signifies a step towards fostering an ecosystem of investment and trust within Oman. Beyond facilitating transactions, our goal is to promote financial empowerment and tap into the exceptional talent within our region. Zameeli’s equity crowdfunding campaign through Mamun reflects our commitment to strengthening the local freelancer economy and fostering tech innovation.”

Tariq al Habsi, Co-founder & CEO of Zameeli, emphasised the platform’s dedication to its community, stating, “As Zameeli enters its growth phase, our recent fundraising efforts aim to empower our freelancers—the core of our community.

We are allocating resources to ensure their active involvement in and benefit from the platform’s future. Our vision is to develop Zameeli into a community-driven platform that shares its success with freelancers, reflecting the collaborative spirit that defines Oman’s tech sector.”

Oman launches competitive process for 5 new wind IPPs

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

In alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and Oman’s commitment to achieve Net-Zero by 2050, Nama Power and Water Procurement (PWP), the exclusive procurer of power is set to announce the initiation of the Request for Qualification (RFQ) for five new Wind Independent Power Projects (Wind IPPs Projects).

This marks a significant milestone in the pursuit of clean and efficient power generation within the region.

PWP has invited qualified and experienced entities to submit their statement of qualifications for the Wind IPPs Projects, thereby contributing to the realisation of a greener and more resilient energy future.

A summary of the projects is as follows:

In the Main Interconnection System (MIS):

- Jaalan Bani bu Ali Wind IPP: The project will be located at Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate for commercial operation in Q1 2027 with a capacity of 91-105 MW.
- Duqm Wind IPP: The project will be located at Ras Madrasah in Al Duqm for commercial operation in Q4 2027. The project capacity is expected to be in the range of 234-270 MW.
- Mahout Wind I IPP: The project will be developed in Mahout in Al Wusta Governorate



Oman’s first wind IPP in Dhofar.

for commercial operation in Q4 2027 with a capacity of 342-400 MW.

In the Dhofar Power System (DPS):

- Dhofar Wind II IPP: The project will be adjacent to the existing Dhofar Wind I IPP with a capacity of 114-132 MW to be operational in Q2 2027.
 - Sadah Wind IPP: the project will be developed at a site located in Sadah with a capacity of 81-99 MW for commercial operation in Q4 2027.
- “The Sultanate of Oman has embarked on an ambitious

journey of increasing the renewable energy capacity up to 3.84 GW by 2029.

Stemming from Oman Vision 2040 strategic direction of new infrastructure projects geared towards green economy, green strategies, and renewable energy production,” said Ahmed bin Salim al Abri, Acting CEO at PWP.

“The proposed renewable energy capacity will help the Sultanate of Oman increase the renewable energy proportion as part of the total energy mix to 30% and 39% by 2030 and 2040

respectively.”

These projects mark a significant step toward advancing PWP’s renewable energy contribution of 2.2 TWh annually starting from 2027 and serve as a testament to PWP’s ongoing efforts to usher in a sustainable and resilient energy future for the communities it serves and to contribute to Oman’s Net-Zero targets.

(For queries and information, interested parties may email at: prj.wind2026@omanpwp.nama.om).

TURN TO PAGE 16

Madayn promotes investment opportunities in Samayil Industrial City

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), the entity overseeing industrial cities in the Sultanate of Oman, has recently announced promising investment opportunities in Samayil Industrial City.

Last year, the industrial city witnessed the successful localisation of 24 new projects, increasing the total to 157 projects, with an overall investment exceeding RO 155 million.

These projects cover an area exceeding 2.2 million square metres within the industrial city’s total area, which surpasses 11 million square metres.

One of the standout investment opportunities in Samayil Industrial City is within the dairy and fruits juice products manufacturing sector.

A recent expansion project saw a significant increase in the manufacturing capabilities, with a 5,000 square metres area allocated for production.

With a cost of RO 1.796 million, this expansion highlights the potential for growth within the food processing industry in



Last year, the industrial city witnessed the successful localisation of 24 new projects, increasing the total to 157 projects, with an overall investment exceeding RO 155 million.

the region.

Another notable investment opportunity lies within the dolomite calcination unit, which boasts a sprawling 20,000 square metres area with a cost of RO 11.593 million.

This unit signifies the growing demand for mineral processing and production within Samayil Industrial City, showcasing the city’s potential as a key player in the minerals industry.

Furthermore, the date processing and packaging

unit offers another attractive investment opportunity, with a 5,000 square metres area and a cost of RO 2.103 million.

As dates are a staple in Omani cuisine and culture, this unit presents a promising venture for investors looking to tap into the local market and beyond.

In addition to these opportunities, the breakfast cereal manufacturing unit, with a 3,000 square metres area and a cost of RO 736,000, demonstrates the diverse range of industries

thriving within Samayil Industrial City.

This unit caters to the growing demand for breakfast cereals in Oman and the wider region, highlighting the city’s potential for expansion in the food production sector.

Other investment opportunities include sectors in: water leakage prevention solutions, copper bars and sheets manufacturing, gypsum production, electrical conductors manufacturing, glossy ceramics production, HVAC equipment manufacturing, electrical switch manufacturing, marble product manufacturing, and prefabricated building production.

With a competitive rental rate of RO 1 per square metre on an annual basis, coupled with the availability of pre-feasibility studies, Samayil Industrial City offers a conducive environment for businesses to thrive and grow.

The strategic location of the city, combined with the support and incentives provided by Madayn, makes it an ideal destination for local and international investors looking to capitalise on the burgeoning opportunities in Oman’s industrial landscape.

Oman real estate transactions exceed RO 207 million



MUSCAT: The value of real estate transactions in the Sultanate of Oman fell by 20.2% to RO 207.8 million by the end of January 2024, compared to RO 260.5 million during the same period in 2023, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data indicate that the fees collected for all legal actions amounted to RO 6.6 million by the end of January 2024, comprising an increase of 13.4% compared to the corresponding period of 2023.

Traded value of sale contracts decreased by 14.7% to RO 101 million at the end of January 2024, while the number of sale contracts rose

TRADED VALUE OF MORTGAGE CONTRACTS DECREASED BY 25.4% TO RO 105.4 MILLION COMPARED TO RO 141.3 MILLION DURING THE SAME PERIOD OF 2023.

by 6.6% to 6,124. Traded value of mortgage contracts decreased by 25.4% to RO 105.4 million compared to RO 141.3 million during the same period of 2023.

The number of mortgage contracts also fell by 10.4% to 1,522 contracts.

The number of ownership deeds issued by the end of January 2024 fell by 4.7% to 20,612, and the number of ownership deeds issued to citizens of GCC countries also fell by 9.9% to 100. — ONA

BankDhofar launches Ramadhan auto loan offer with 4 per cent interest rate

MUSCAT: BankDhofar launched Ramadhan auto loan offer with attractive interest rate. The offer translates BankDhofar's commitment to provide the best services, products and financial solutions to its customers. The offer enables customers to own their dream car during the holy month of Ramadhan with interest rates starting from 4 per cent.

Commenting on the offer, Amjad bin Iqbal al Lawati, Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar said: "With this offer we wanted to make sure that our customers get the chance to buy the car of their choice without having to worry about the high interest rates.

At BankDhofar, we are always keen to provide our customers the best financial solutions. Recently we have launched the auto loan offer and we look forward to design further attractive offers that will meet the various needs of our customers."



BankDhofar's Ramadhan auto loan offer is available for new and used car purchases, and it comes with a number of benefits

including; fast approval process and flexible repayment options up to 10 years.

BankDhofar's Ramadhan auto

loan offer is the perfect way to celebrate the holy month and make your dream of owning a new car a reality. To avail the offer,

customers can visit the car dealers across the Sultanate of Oman and BankDhofar's sales team are there to assist them with the loan process till 11:00 pm during the holy month of Ramadhan. Also, customers may visit one of the 115 BankDhofar branches to apply for the auto loan with a dedicated support team to assist them.

BankDhofar is one of the best banks in the region, catering to customers' needs and requirements, and setting the standard for the best customer experience within the banking industry in the Sultanate of Oman through innovative products and creative solutions.

Following best international banking practices, provision of outstanding customer experience, in addition to its commitment to community development and contribution to the growth of the national economy, has placed BankDhofar at the top of the list of best banks in the region.



NBO unveils Ramadhan salary transfer cashback campaign

MUSCAT: In a strategic move aimed at enhancing its customer-centric offerings, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced an exclusive 15 per cent cashback in Reward points for new customers who choose to transfer their monthly salary to the bank.

This exciting promotional campaign, set to kick off during the holy month of Ramadhan, is available to all individuals with a monthly salary of RO 600 or above.

With this offer, NBO is elevating its cashback rate from 10% in 2023 to an impressive 15% in 2024, solidifying its position as a market leader by providing a competitive cashback rate.

Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager and Head of Retail Products at NBO, said: "We are delighted to present this exclusive 15 per cent cashback offer to our new customers during the holy month of Ramadhan. As always, National Bank of Oman prioritises the welfare of its customers. With this latest promotion, NBO has raised its cashback rate by 5 per cent compared to the previous year, positioning itself in direct competition with other prominent banks in the region. We extend a warm welcome to new customers and encourage them to become part of the NBO family, where they can enjoy a range of benefits."

Enjoy sheer riding pleasure this Ramadhan with AJIA's BMW Motorrad offers

MUSCAT: AlJenaibi International Automobiles (AJIA, the official importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, invites motorcycle enthusiasts to enjoy sheer riding pleasure this Ramadhan with a host of incredible offers.

In the spirit of Ramadhan, AlJenaibi International Automobiles is making the purchase of a new BMW Motorrad bike even more enticing for motor bike enthusiasts by providing unmissable offers.

Customers who want to fuel their sense of adventure by purchasing a new BMW

Motorrad model will be at ease as they enjoy BMW Motorrad service for 3 years or 30,000km (whichever comes first) and BMW Motorrad warranty for 5 years with unlimited mileage.

To ensure exploring the Sultanate of Oman's terrain on their new BMW Motorrad is as safe as possible, AlJenaibi International Automobiles is also providing each new customer with complimentary riding courses from Motorcycle Learning Centre (MLC) to enhance their skills and a complimentary BMW Motorrad



helmet.

Adding to that, Sabah al Zadjali, brand manager of BMW Motorrad Oman: "Safety is a top priority for us.

That is why, regardless of the customer's experience, we are providing complimentary training or refreshing courses, and encourage everyone to attend.

There is always room for improvement." Whether searching for a motor bike for performance, motorsport, touring or riding on the road — BMW Motorrad has something for everyone.

Omantel, CCED sign pact to contribute to Oman's energy sector transformation



MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication and ICT services in the Sultanate of Oman, has recently announced a groundbreaking collaboration with CC Energy Development (CCED), a prominent oil and gas operator in Oman.

This strategic partnership marks the initiation of a comprehensive Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) project aimed at contributing to the further transformation of the operational landscape of Oman's energy industry.

At the core of this partnership is a multi-year contract. This contract will witness Omantel deploying cutting-edge cloud-based solutions across CCED's financial, supply chain, and human capital management domains. By leveraging Omantel's expertise in telecommunications and CCED's industry prowess, the project aims to drive unprecedented levels of efficiency, innovation, business transformation, and competitiveness within Oman's oil and gas sector.

Talal al Maamari, CEO of Omantel, said, "We are thrilled to embark on this transformative journey alongside CCED. This partnership underscores our commitment to driving digital innovation and enabling operational excellence in Oman's energy sector. By harnessing the power of cloud technology, we aim to propel CCED towards greater efficiency, resilience, and success."

Walter Simpson, Managing Director of CCED, said, "As a leading player in Oman's oil and gas industry, we recognise the importance of embracing technological advancements to stay ahead in a rapidly evolving landscape. This collaboration with Omantel will optimise performance and create a leaner operation while improving efficiency and productivity."

Through the implementation of Oracle cloud solutions, CCED anticipates significant enhancements in operational agility, cost optimisation, and resource allocation.

National Finance introduces exclusive Ramadhan auto financing offer

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to customer-centricity and service excellence, National Finance, the leading finance company in the Sultanate of Oman, recently announced its exclusive Ramadhan auto finance solution.

The solution offers customers a 2-month/60-day deferment period, enabling them to fulfil their aspirations of car ownership during Ramadhan while postponing instalment payments until after Eid. Furthermore, the offering boasts a long 10-year tenure, enhancing convenience and affordability for all.

Of notable mention is the swift approval process, with customers applying for Auto Finance during Ramadhan receiving approvals within just 1 hour, showcasing National Finance's commitment to providing fast and streamlined services.

Furthermore, nine National Finance branches will operate with extended hours from 8:30 pm to 11 pm during the holy month of Ramadhan, ensuring accessibility to the company's exceptional services at customers' convenience, beyond regular work hours.

Commenting on the proposition, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer,



National Finance, said, "Our exclusive Ramadhan Auto Finance Solution is aimed at delivering exceptional value to our customers, empowering them to buy their dream vehicle while simultaneously promoting financial inclusivity.

By combining convenience, flexibility and service excellence, our Ramadhan auto deal ensures a streamlined, smooth, and swift vehicle acquisition process."

As a trusted partner for growth, National Finance exemplifies a

deep understanding of market dynamics and trends, evident in its meticulously crafted solutions tailored to meet the evolving demands of its valued customers.

The company enhances the customer journey by deploying experienced relationship managers at its branches. These professionals stand ready to offer expert counsel and assistance, further augmenting the overall customer experience.

Embracing a comprehensive approach to addressing customer requirements, National Finance

inspires confidence in its prowess, nurturing enduring partnerships grounded in trust and dependability.

National Finance's Ramadhan auto finance solution attests to the company's resolve to empower customers with finance solutions that boast competitive rates and a host of value-added benefits.

National Finance encourages individuals to take advantage of this limited-time offer and make their auto-ownership dreams a reality.

EU, Egypt agree 7.4 bn euro deal on energy, migration

CAIRO: The European Union, which seeks to stem irregular migrant arrivals, and cash-strapped Egypt were on Sunday due to sign a 7.4 billion euro (\$8 billion) package of loans, grants and energy cooperation deals.

It will include billions in credit over coming years and deals to step up Egyptian energy imports to help Europe “move further away from Russian gas” amid the Ukraine war, a senior European Commission official told reporters.

EU Chief Ursula von der Leyen — who was to be joined in Cairo by the government leaders of Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Greece and Italy — was to sign the package later in the day with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

The agreements includes five billion euros in loans over four years, 1.8 billion euros in investment and hundreds of millions for bilateral projects including on migration, the official said on condition of anonymity.

Egypt, mired in a painful economic crisis, borders war-battered Libya and two ongoing conflicts — the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, and Sudan's war between the regular armed forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi meets with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the Ittihadiya presidential palace in Cairo, Egypt, in this file photo. – Reuters

“Egypt is a critical country for Europe today and for the days to come”, said the commission official. The official pointed to Egypt's “important position in a very difficult neighbourhood, bordering Libya, Sudan and the Gaza Strip”.

Egypt already hosts around nine million migrants and refugees, including four million

Sudanese and 1.5 million Syrians, according to the UN's International Organization for Migration.

The EU official said the deal includes steps to cooperate on “security, counter-terrorism cooperation and protection of borders, in particular the southern one” with Sudan.

The Gaza Strip, where Israel

is at war with the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas since the October 7 attack, “will not be the main focus but will be part of the discussion” in Cairo, the official added.

The high-powered delegation was to include three Mediterranean leaders — Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, her Greek counterpart

Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides. They were to be joined by Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer and Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo.

CASH FOR MIGRATION CONTROL

The agreement follows other controversial deals the EU has sealed in northern Africa — with Libya, Tunisia and Mauritania — to stem the flow of irregular migrants across the Mediterranean Sea.

The EU's border agency Frontex last year recorded nearly 158,000 migrant arrivals in Europe via the dangerous sea route, up by 50 per cent on the previous year.

The aim is to limit arrivals at a time of rising anti-immigrant rhetoric in Europe and of right-wing populist political parties in several EU nations. Human rights groups have strongly condemned past deals with authoritarian governments.

US-based Human Rights Watch said it had documented “arbitrary arrests and mistreatment of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees by Egyptian authorities”. HRW again criticised what it labelled “the EU's cash-for-migration-control approach” which it said “strengthens

authoritarian rulers while betraying human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and activists whose work involves great personal risk”.

Egypt stresses that migrant boats have not sailed from its coast in recent years. But Egyptians still arrive in Europe by sea, mostly via Libya or Tunisia to Italy.

Highly indebted Egypt, the Arab world's most populous nation, is in dire need of financial help as it weathers a severe economic crisis marked by rapid inflation.

The International Monetary Fund this month agreed an \$8 billion loan package after Cairo implemented a flexible exchange rate and raised interest rates.

Egypt's economy, dominated by military-linked enterprises and focused on infrastructure mega-projects, has been hit hard by a series of recent economic shocks.

Among them have been the Covid pandemic's impact on tourism, higher prices for food imports amid the Ukraine war, and attacks by Yemen's Ansar Allah on Red Sea shipping that have slashed Suez Canal revenues. Egypt's external debt has ballooned to nearly \$165 billion, and the cost of servicing it is expected to reach \$42 billion this year. — AFP

TotalEnergies preparing Port Arthur, Texas FCC for restart



TotalEnergies' Port Arthur, Texas refinery is pictured in this photo. – Reuters

HOUSTON: TotalEnergies was preparing to restart the gasoline-producing fluidic catalytic cracker (FCC) over the weekend at its 238,000 barrel-per-day (bpd) Port Arthur, Texas refinery, said people familiar with plant operations. Following the FCC's restart, the company plans to restart the refinery's coker and small crude distillation unit (CDU), the sources said.

The 76,000-bpd FCC was shut by a leak and a clamp had to be fabricated, the sources said. The clamp was installed on Thursday. The 60,000-bpd coker and 40,000-bpd ACU-2 CDU were shut after the FCC was idled, according to the sources. Once the coker restarts, ACU-2 will be brought back up

into production.

The TotalEnergies refinery has struggled since late November after the end of a three-month overhaul on the FCC.

It struggled to resume full production until being hit by a plantwide power outage on Jan 16. The refinery returned to normal production by February 21 following the outage.

TotalEnergies reported that two sulphur recovery units malfunctioned on March 7, according to a notice to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. ACU-2 is the smaller of two CDUs that begin the refining process by breaking down crude oil into feedstocks for all other units at the refinery. — Reuters

Mergers, clean fuels vie for attention at Houston energy conference

HOUSTON: Top oil executives and ministers descend on Houston this week for one of the world's biggest energy conferences emboldened by blockbuster mergers, stable oil prices and less pressure for a large scale move to clean fuels.

Global oil prices have remained in a range between \$75 and \$85 per barrel, a level fuelling profits but not hurting economic growth, despite war in Eastern Europe and turmoil in the Middle East.

Stock markets continue to spur deals, making Big Oil even bigger. The annual CERAWEEK conference comes as demand for oil and gas continues to rise alongside solar, wind and biofuels. Energy markets have accommodated a reordering of global flows as customers turn more to regional energy suppliers or live with longer seaborne supply chains.

“A remarkable thing is the (price) stability, given the geopolitical turmoil,” said



Attendees mingle as top energy executives and officials from around the world gather during the CERAWEEK 2023 energy conference in Houston. – Reuters

Daniel Yergin, vice chairman of conference organiser S&P Global and a Pulitzer Prize-winning author on global energy.

Unlike past conferences where conversations were dominated by market-share battles between US shale oil producers and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, talk of

price wars have been supplanted by energy security issues, Yergin said.

“When demand was down and prices were down, it was very easy to see a way towards energy transition, but with Russia/Ukraine (war) and price shocks, energy security is back on the table,” Yergin added.

More than 7,200 people are expected to hear the latest outlook on energy markets from the heads of top producers' BP, Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Saudi Aramco, Sinopec and Petronas.

Global liquefied natural gas (LNG) developments and US climate policies will be a major topic in separate sessions by big exporters Cheniere Energy and Venture Global LNG, while US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm and White House adviser John Podesta press the administration's climate goals.

While oil prices are strong, natural gas has been overwhelmed by a production glut. But “this year will be a transition year to a much more bullish gas and power market next year,” said Vikas Dwivedi, an energy strategist at financial firm Macquarie Group.

Notably absent this year, which occurs during the Islamic holy month of Ramadhan, are top oil ministers from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

WASHINGTON

Tesla to raise US prices for Model Y vehicles

Tesla said it will increase prices for all Model Y cars in the United States by \$1,000 on April 1, the automaker said on its website. “Prices will increase by \$1,000 for all Model Y trims on April 1,” Tesla said on its website.

The company on March 1 had also raised the prices of its Model Y rear-wheel drive and long-range vehicles by \$1,000 to \$43,990 and \$48,990.

Tesla did not make it explicitly clear if the April increase would come on top of the March



increase for the rear-wheel and long-range models.

Tesla had temporarily cut prices of some of its Model Y cars in the US in February, after it slashed prices across Europe and China. — Reuters

KYIV

Ukraine's GDP up by 3.6% in January-February

Ukraine's gross domestic product rose 3.6 per cent in the first two months of this year, and growth is expected to continue in the first quarter, the economy minister Yulia Svyrydenko said on Sunday.

“This was driven by several factors, including investment demand, favourable weather conditions for construction works, agricultural exports, (and) the operation of the Ukrainian sea corridor,” Svyrydenko said on Facebook, citing preliminary



data. She said the expansion of production capacity in the mining industry and stability in the energy sector in the country were additional factors.

NEW YORK

US probes Adani Group over potential bribery

The United States has widened its investigation of India's Adani Group to focus on the conduct of its founder, Gautam Adani (pictured), and whether the company may have engaged in bribery, Bloomberg reported.

Prosecutors are digging into whether an Adani entity or people linked to the company, including Gautam Adani, were involved in paying officials in India for favourable treatment on an energy project, the report said. The US Attorney's office for



the District of New York and the Justice Department's fraud unit in Washington are handling the investigation and are also looking at Indian renewable energy company Azure Power Global, the report added. — Reuters

Oman launches competitive process for 5 new wind IPPs



What the Request for Qualification process entails.

FROM PAGE 13

Commenting on the projects currently operational or under construction, Al Abri stated that the company is currently contracting with two operational projects: the first being Dhofar I Wind IPP with a production capacity of 50 megawatts, which commenced commercial operation in November 2019, while the second plant is Ibri II Solar IPP with a production capacity of 500 megawatts, and commercial operation began in August 2021.

The company also contracted last year, in 2023, for two solar IPPs: Manah I and Manah II, with a combined production capacity of 1,000 megawatts, and it is expected that both stations will commence commercial operation in the first and second quarters of the coming year.

Eng Abdullah bin Rashid al Sawafi, the Chief Operating Officer, added: “These projects have economic returns represented in attracting

foreign investments, which are expected to reach around four and a half billion US dollars over the next five years.

Additionally, these projects contribute to reducing natural gas consumption and diverting it to other economic projects, with the planned reduction in gas consumption per unit of electricity from 199 in 2022 to 144 in 2027, in addition to the added local value of these projects at the local level.”

Al Sawafi also stated that renewable energy projects have significant environmental returns in terms of reducing carbon emissions.

It is expected that the renewable energy projects previously contracted or in the future until 2027 will contribute to reducing carbon emissions by 2.8 million tonnes annually.

Furthermore, the company contributes to the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to a systematic transition towards achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

Oman Fisheries accumulated losses soar to RO 16.509 million

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

Oman Fisheries Company SAOG, one of Oman’s biggest and oldest fish processing businesses, posted a net loss of RO 3.513 million for the financial year ended December 31, 2023, effectively boosting accumulated losses to a total of RO 16.509 million.

The publicly traded company — a subsidiary of the government’s fisheries investment arm Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) — reported a 30% decline in consolidated turnover to RO 8.894 million for fiscal 2023, down from RO 12.797 million for the previous year.

Total quantities of assorted fish sold during the year slumped to around 13.337 million tonnes, down from 19.566 million tonnes in 2022. The net loss (after tax) surged 200% to RO 3.513 million, up from a net loss of RO 1.168 million in 2022.

Notwithstanding the losses, Oman Fisheries continues to make headway in the implementation of its ‘transformation plan’, first launched in August 2023, said Haitham bin Mohammed bin Ali al Fannah, Chairman.

“Good progress has been made in the following areas: Cost optimisation including logistics; Restructuring the commercial team to improve supply/demand matching; Improving our fish landing and commercial fishing share; Expanding market reach to new regions including USA and Russia; Introducing Value Added Products to maximise the value per unit and profit margins; and Upgrading all quality management



The newly opened Duqm Fisheries harbour is expected to drive up fish landings .

TOTAL QUANTITIES OF ASSORTED FISH SOLD DURING THE YEAR SLUMPED TO AROUND 13.337 MILLION TONNES, DOWN FROM 19.566 MILLION TONNES IN 2022. THE NET LOSS (AFTER TAX) SURGED 200% TO RO 3.513 MILLION, UP FROM A NET LOSS OF RO 1.168 MILLION IN 2022.

systems resulted in HACCP international certification of all company branches,” he stated in the Directors’ Report.

Commenting on Oman Fisheries’ financial and operational performance during 2023, the CEO said the company was up against “logistical and global trade challenges, high freight costs and higher fish

purchase prices” during the year.

The 30% decline in revenue was “due to the optimisation of our product mix, and prioritising products with higher margins and fast-moving products resulting in better profit margins for less quantities,” the CEO stated in the Management Discussions & Analysis report.

Significantly, prevailing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East region also had an impact on Oman Fisheries’ performance, according to the company. A shortage of reefer containers towards the end of the year, stemming from the political instability in the Red Sea area, was one factor.

Other contributory factors, the company noted, were: Insufficient volumes at landing sites; Increased prices of products as a result of high competition from other

companies; and Adverse weather conditions encountered at the start and at the end of 2023.

Exports to international markets accounted for the lion’s share of Oman Fisheries’ total revenues in 2023, according to the company.

Of total revenues of RO 8.894 million recorded in 2023, around 77% came from the following markets: Africa, Middle East, Europe, Asia & Pacific, North America and Australia.

Dominating exports were the following fish types: Horse Mackerel (30% of total exports by value), Chub Mackerel (10.7%), Yellowtail Scad (7.75%), Indian Mackerel (7.6%), Sardine, 7.2%), Cuttlefish (6.5%), Jack Mackerel (5.4%), and Rabbit Fish (49%), and well as smaller quantities of Ribbon Fish, Yellow Fin Tuna, Frigate Tuna, and Croaker.

GIB names head of Oman branch

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

Gulf International Bank BSC (GIB) announced the appointment of Yaseen al Lawati (pictured) as the Branch Manager for GIB Oman, the bank’s newly established branch in Muscat, which provides comprehensive wholesale banking solutions to a growing number of



corporates, financial institutions, and government clients across the

Sultanate of Oman.

Commenting, Sara Abdulhadi, CEO of GIB BSC, said, “Yaseen’s appointment to lead GIB’s new Branch in Oman, leveraging his extensive industry experience, supports our strategy to expand our regional presence, meet the needs of our clients, and strengthen the bank’s franchise in the Sultanate of Oman.”

Yaseen joins GIB with more

than 20 years of professional experience, most recently having served as Director of Credit Suisse AG. Prior to that, he held several senior roles at the National Bank of Oman including Head of Business Development and Strategy and Head of Investment Banking Division.

Yaseen holds a BA in Finance and a BS in Accounting from the University of Missouri, USA.

The importance of taking leave from work for productivity



TARIQ AL BARWANI
The author is Knowledge Oman Founder knowledgeoman.com

Ahmed and Sami are colleagues that work in the same department/company, perform almost identical roles (in different shifts), and carry same pay grade; yet the output of their deliveries and consequently performance is not the same. Ahmed maintains high level of productivity, is

mostly refreshed and energised at work, and engages in personal development activities.

Whereas Sami on the other hand, though prioritises work over personal well-being, but is found at many times falling behind with projects, regularly overwhelmed and is stressed, and sometimes gets into conflict with other team members within the organisation. What more? Ahmed is on the verge of being promoted, while Sami is stuck and seems to have become stagnant in his career.

My article this week is on the importance of taking regular healthy leave away from office in order to excel in one’s career. Ahmed blocks his annual calendar with days away from office (as official leave), while Sami dreads the idea of taking leave, and also takes work with him while on official leave. That’s

the secret why Ahmed progresses at work.

Many research issued on the relationship between taking leave and productivity, from institutions of the likes of the World Health Organisation (WHO), show that high rates of employee’s burnout, decreased productivity, absenteeism and turnover are a direct result of not taking the necessary leave from office.

Employees are emotionally exhausted, depressed, are sometime found detached and end up not performing well, leading to the end-of-year appraisal disappointment I had shared in my previous articles. While there may be no specific statistics pertaining to an industry or verticals per se, yet the picture is clear that the impact is seem to be consistent, irrespective of an organisation, industry or a nation

as a whole. The importance of taking regular official leave from office cannot be underestimated. Burnout from work will be reduced, mental and physical health will be improved, creativity and innovation will be boosted, and ultimately among other positives, your job satisfaction and engagement at work will be enhanced.

I had been known to be workaholic through the various activities and engagements that I have, from working in a telecom as a professional, offering consultancy to organisation as a service, delivering speaking engagements to both public and private institutions, sitting for a public listed company and offering advisory services to community and academia.

Nevertheless, I must confess that my performance has been outstanding needless to mention

an improved work-life balance due to regularly taking leave, booked in advance every year.

I know many executives who have either lost their jobs, lost relationship with their families and/or fall sick periodically (spending most of their time in hospitals). The reason was due to lack of quality sleep, and of course taking the necessary leave from office to rejuvenate.

I know for a fact that a number of established and successful entrepreneurs that includes the likes of Bill Gates (Microsoft Founder), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook, now Meta, Founder), and the late Steve Jobs (Apple Founder and CEO), took annual and/or bi-annual solo retreats to refresh, re-energise and think.

The same applies to international sport figures as well such as Serena Williams

(a professional tennis player) among others. All of them realise the importance of taking regular leave in order to learn, un-learn, think and continue to innovate and succeed in their personal and professional lives.

Taking leave from work is extremely important in order for one to maintain productivity at work. As you have realised from my article today, many of the successful and high-net worth individuals who also run leading multinational initiatives and organisations take frequent leaves in order to rest, recharge, think and get back at work, refreshed and for more action.

Make it a habit starting today to plan and book your leave and time away from office in advance, and see your career transform profoundly and positively as well. Until we catch up again next week, stay positive.

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HADITH

GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Sahl bin Sa'd (Allah be pleased with him) reported Allah's Messenger as saying:

In Paradise there is a gate which is called Rayyan through which only the people who fast would enter on the Day on Resurrection. None else would enter along with them. It would be proclaimed: Where are the people who fast that they should be admitted into it? And when the last of them would enter, it would be closed and no one would enter it.

FATWA



HIS EMINENCE
SHAIKH AHMED BIN
HAMAD AL KHALILI
GRAND MUFTI OF OMAN

Is external usage of ointment considered breaking the fast?

External usage does not affect fasting. Just like bathing during days of Ramadhan is acceptable, in the same context, using external ointments is also permissible.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

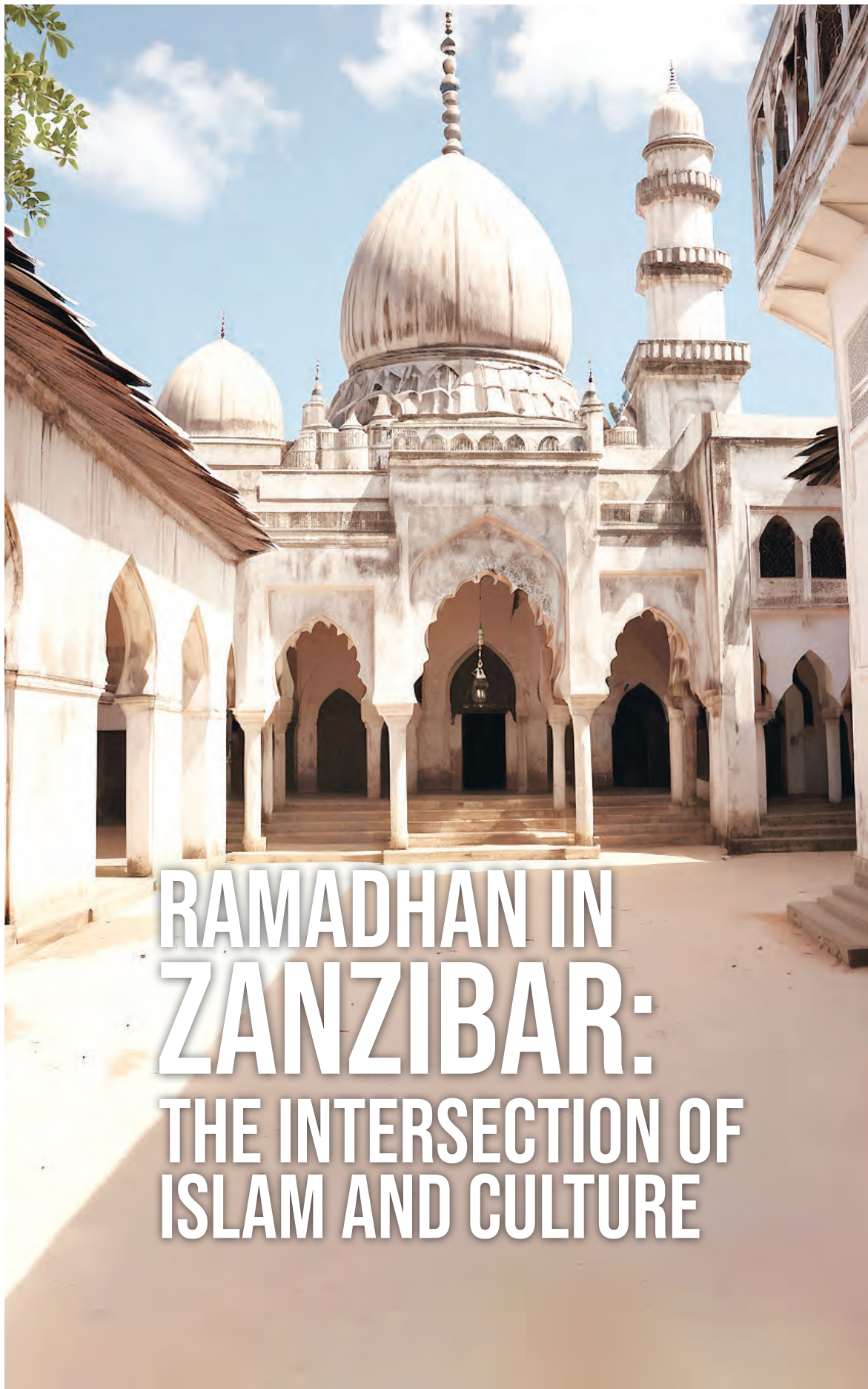


Say, "O disbelievers. I do not worship what you worship. Nor do you worship what I worship. Nor do I serve what you serve. Nor do you serve what I serve. You have your way, and I have my way.

(Al Kafirun)

Ramadhan

MONDAY | MARCH 18, 2024 | RAMADHAN 7, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



RAMADHAN IN ZANZIBAR: THE INTERSECTION OF ISLAM AND CULTURE

BY KABEER YOUSUF

Zanzibar is an archipelago off the coast of East Africa, belonging to Tanzania. Its main islands are Unguja (often referred to as Zanzibar Island) and Pemba. Zanzibar has a rich history deeply intertwined with trade, particularly in spices like cloves, and its strategic location made it a hub for traders from various parts of the world, including Arabs, Persians, Indians, and Europeans.

Zanzibar's relation to Oman dates back centuries. Omanis exerted significant influence over Zanzibar, particularly during the 18th and 19th centuries when it was a centre of the Omani Sultanate's maritime empire. The relationship was characterised by trade, cultural exchange, and political ties. Oman established control over Zanzibar, and it served as an important trading post and a key link in the Arab slave trade.



sent unique challenges, with temperatures soaring as high as 34 degrees Celsius during the day, making fasting a formidable test for adherents, as shared by Omanis partaking in Ramadhan on the island.

But unlike in Oman where crimson of winter is still in the horizon, the condition is a little bit hard due to weather conditions with temperature as high as 34 degrees Celsius during the day, according to Omanis spending their Ramadhan in Zanzibar.

Apart from that Ramadhan is beautiful in Zanzibar, people help each other, they eat together especially in the villages, and mosques are full as Islamic teachings are going on after evening Asr prayers till Maghrib.

After Ishaa prayers, most of the mosques conduct Taraweeh prayers and ask forgiveness from Almighty Allah.

On this island, one can see a perfect mix of culture, religion, and daily life



There's a fondness between Oman and Zanzibar due to historical, cultural, and economic ties. Many Omanis have familial connections to Zanzibar due to historical migrations and intermarriages. Additionally, Zanzibar continues to hold significance for Oman, both culturally and economically, particularly in the realm of trade and tourism. The historical legacy and shared cultural heritage contribute to the enduring bond between the two regions.

Approximately 99 per cent of the population of Zanzibar identifies as Muslim. Islam's presence in Zanzibar dates back over a millennium and has been deeply intertwined with the region's history, culture, and society.

The rise of Islam in Zanzibar can be traced back to the early days of the Islamic expansion in the 8th century AD. Arab traders and merchants from the Arabian Peninsula, particularly from Oman, established trade routes along the East African coast, including Zanzibar. Through these interactions, Islam gradually spread to the region, with traders, scholars, and settlers playing key roles in its dissemination.

By the 10th century, Islam had firmly

taken root in Zanzibar, and the Swahili city-states that emerged along the coast became centres of Islamic culture and learning. Over the centuries, Zanzibar's position as a trading hub further facilitated the spread and consolidation of Islam in the region. The arrival of Arab settlers and the intermarriage between Arab traders and local African populations also contributed to the expansion of Islam.

During the 19th century, Zanzibar became a major centre of the Omani Sultanate, and the influence of Islam continued to grow under Omani rule. Arab traders and religious leaders played significant roles in shaping the religious and cultural landscape of the islands.

Today, Islam remains deeply ingrained in the social fabric of Zanzibar. Mosques dot the landscape, and Islamic traditions and practices are observed throughout the islands.

In Zanzibar, the observance of Ramadhan commenced on March 12, mirroring the practice in Oman, where the crescent moon signals the start of the holy month. However, unlike in Oman where the lingering chill of winter persists, Zanzibar's conditions pre-

and the celebrations of the holy month of Ramadhan offers a deep cultural immersion as it provides a firsthand experience of the rituals, traditions, and the collective spirit that defines the holy month for the predominantly Muslim population. From early morning Suhoor meals to the evening Iftar feasts, the island takes on a special atmosphere that is a testament to the significance of Ramadhan in Zanzibar life.

Zanzibari society is one where Islam is deeply ingrained in the daily lives of its people. With over 98 per cent of the population being Muslim, the island becomes a unique enclave where Islamic traditions and practices play a central role in shaping the local culture. This contrasts with the broader Tanzanian society, emphasising Zanzibar's distinctive identity.

In Zanzibar, the start of Ramadhan also marks the beginning for preparations for Eid celebrations, so towns and shops are full of people selecting various clothes for themselves and for their children.

In fact this is the busiest time of the year in Zanzibar.

CONSERVATION

Darwin's Galapagos island species, protected yet still at risk

INDUSTRIAL FISHING BOATS hover menacingly on the edges of Ecuador's Galapagos Marine Reserve, where schools of multi-coloured fish and hammerhead sharks frolic in the protected Pacific waters.

The reserve is a haven for the flurry of creatures and plants living in the waters around the Galapagos Islands where naturalist Charles Darwin found the inspiration for his theory of natural selection.

But outside its boundaries, not delineated by any physical barrier, there is no protection on the high seas where these same species also venture.

The sharks, turtles, iguanas, sea lions and

fish that thrive in the Galapagos "don't understand political boundaries," Stuart Banks, a senior marine scientist at the Charles Darwin Foundation, said on board Greenpeace's Arctic Sunrise research vessel.

"So they're going to be moving between different territories and that's when they're most at risk, particularly to things like industrial fishing and by catch."

The solution, according to Greenpeace, is to secure a much larger area of ocean by creating the first-ever marine protected area on the high seas bordering the Galapagos Marine Reserve. But for this to happen, at least 60 countries must ratify the High Seas Treaty adopted by United Nations member states last June. Only two have done so to date.

LIKE A JIGSAW PUZZLE

AFP accompanied an Arctic Sunrise scientific mission to the area this month to investigate the threats posed to the Galapagos Marine Reserve, which Greenpeace describes as "probably the best conservation project carried out in the oceans."

The reserve of nearly 200,000 square kilometres (some 77,000 square miles) is one of the world's largest and most biodiverse with more than 3,000 species, many of them found nowhere else.



Biologist Paola Sangolqui explained she was testing water samples to analyse "which marine species have been in this area and have left some kind of DNA trace."

For his part, Daniel Armijos was in charge of underwater video monitoring of fish numbers and prevalence.

"It is kind of like putting together a big jigsaw puzzle because everything is integrated in some way," explained Banks.

"And if you're looking to prioritise the most important regions to start working, to know where those corridors are (along which species migrate), you need to use genetics so you can start to look at how particular popula-

tions are connected from one region to another."

HAMMERHEAD HAVEN

From the Arctic Sunrise, scientists also descended a robot to explore the coral reefs that serve as key feeding and breeding grounds for many fish, said expedition leader Sophie Cooke, for whom "the abundance of marine life in this national park is simply staggering." Marine reserve employee Eduardo Espinoza, in charge of day-to-day monitoring, said the archipelago is a rare sanctuary for hammerhead sharks, whose fins are a delicacy in some Asian countries.

Hammerheads were at particular risk of "overfishing and illegal fishing," Espinoza said as he fixed an identifying label to a young specimen.

"In the Galapagos, hammerhead sharks are always abundant. They have a refuge here to reproduce, from where they move throughout the Pacific," he added.

- Free species worth more -

Cooke said the Galapagos was an important migratory stop for many species, which is "why we need to connect all these different marine protected areas and protect these reserves: so the migration routes of these species can be kept safe."

The Galapagos Islands are designated a Unesco Natural World Heritage site.

Another reason to protect the area is its attraction for tens of thousands of visitors every year, like American diver Ryan Doyle, 24. "In comparison to Florida, where I'd also dive recreationally, there's so much life here," Doyle told AFP. "There's so many sharks and everything looks so healthy. So you can kind of like see the conservation" at work.

Diving instructor Anthony Gavilanes, 30, said locals like himself nowadays "live off tourism" more than fishing as before.

"For us, species swimming freely in the water are worth more than they are on a plate served at a table." — AFP

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF MUSLIM FAITH

625

Battle of Uhud: The Second Important Islamic Battle

The Battle of Uhud in 625 CE pitted early Muslims of Medina against the Quraysh tribe of Mecca, following their clash at Badr. Despite initial success, a tactical error led to Muslim losses. It holds historical importance as a strategic test for the early Muslim community, showcasing lessons of steadfastness, obedience, and reliance on God. Despite setbacks, it emphasised perseverance and faith.

RAMADHAN AROUND THE WORLD

NIGERIA



The history of Islam in Nigeria dates back to the 11th century when it was introduced through trade routes across the Sahara Desert. The Kanem-Bornu Empire, which existed in what is now northeastern Nigeria, was one of the early centres of Islamic civilisation in the region. Islam spread further during the 19th century through the influence of Islamic scholars and leaders, as well as through trade and conquest.

In the early 19th century, the Sokoto Caliphate was established in what is now northern Nigeria, becoming one of the largest historical states in Africa, spreading Islam across much of the northern region. The British colonisation of Nigeria in the late 19th and early 20th centuries did not diminish Islam's influence; rather, it became a significant factor in Nigeria's religious landscape alongside Christianity and indigenous religions.

Today, Nigeria is roughly divided between a predominantly Muslim north and a predominantly Christian south, with adherents of both religions coexisting across the country. Islam remains a major religion in Nigeria, with a significant portion of the population identifying as Muslims.

During Ramadhan in Nigeria, special foods like Suya and Masa are enjoyed, while markets buzz with activity selling ingredients and Eid gifts. Communities unite for iftar, Taraweeh prayers, and charity events. Eid festivities bring together families and friends for prayers, feasting, and gift exchanges, enhancing cultural and religious bonds.

RAMADHAN TRIVIA

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE HOLY MONTH

WHAT IS IT CALLED WHEN A MUSLIM STAYS AT THE MASJID FOR 3 OR MORE NIGHTS?

Answer to yesterday's trivia: Dates and Water

HEALTH TIPS

TO GUIDE YOU THIS RAMADHAN

MONITOR YOUR HEALTH

Tracking health during Ramadhan is crucial for balanced nutrition, hydration, and blood sugar levels. With fasting from dawn to sunset, maintaining proper hydration and nutrient intake is essential. Monitoring blood sugar helps manage diabetes effectively. Tracking physical activity ensures adequate exercise while considering energy levels during fasting. Sleep patterns may shift, affecting overall well-being; monitoring sleep helps maintain balance.



THE TRIANGLE OF SUCCESS

BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

Have you heard about the triangle of success in Ramadhan? We just concluded the first week of Ramadhan of the year 2024, but it is not too late to set goals and achieve them.

This is where the triangle of success could aid and provide a constant guideline. On many occasions, we fall into the traps of trends and habits, tending to follow the patterns set by others and forgetting the purpose of the Holy Month.

Hatim bin Harith al Abdissalaam, a Life Coach and member of the Islamic Information Centre, explains that the triangle of success consists of three main elements: planning, sleeping, and nourishment.

Planning involves setting goals for Ramadhan, determining what activities and habits to engage in, and identifying habits to eliminate. Sleeping refers to the importance of getting sufficient rest during Ramadhan, managing sleep schedules effectively to ensure productivity throughout the day. Nourishment entails consuming food that not only sat-



isfies hunger but also meets the body's nutritional needs, providing the energy required to maintain spiritual and physical well-being during the fasting period. By incorporating these three elements into daily practice, individuals aim to optimise their Ramadhan experience and achieve success in spiritual growth and personal development.

"With these three factors, we are able to regulate your

Ramadhan to make it successful. So, we start planning on what activism you want to partake in Ramadhan, what habits you want to gain, and what habits you want to get rid of," said Hatim.

He emphasised the importance of sleep, quoting the Arabic saying, "alnawm sultan," which means sleeping is the sultan as it controls activity. "So, if you sleep well by planning when you will go to sleep and when you will wake up, your entire day becomes productive," pointed out the life coach.

The third factor, nourishment, is attained from food. It is not just about overcoming hunger but also about maintaining and meeting the body's needs. When it comes to food, he stressed that one cannot simply dump anything into their body because biology and chemistry cannot be tricked. According to him, even if one is trying to be productive and positive, the quality of what goes into their body matters.

"One can feel fatigued, tired, and lazy and just cannot be productive. The whole idea of Ramadhan is to be at the highest level of spirituality, and for

that, you need energy. So, without proper planning, a proper diet, and rest, one cannot be at the best level of spirituality," Hatim shared.

One essential lesson that Ramadhan teaches, which applies to leading a good life in general, is self-discipline. Ramadhan requires individuals to exercise self-control over their desires, particularly through fasting from dawn until sunset, refraining from negative behaviours, and engaging in acts of worship and charity.

This practice of self-discipline cultivates patience, resilience, and willpower, which are valuable traits for navigating life's challenges and pursuing long-term goals. Additionally, Ramadhan fosters empathy and compassion as individuals experience hunger and deprivation, deepening their understanding of the struggles faced by others and motivating them to contribute to the welfare of their communities. Overall, the lesson of self-discipline learned from Ramadhan serves as a foundation for leading a fulfilling and virtuous life characterised by balance, integrity, and service to others.

The Journey of a Rare Vinyl Record ends at Madina Museum

BY KABEER YOUSUF

Gramophones may be a thing of the past, but a rare vinyl gramophone record possessed by an expatriate has become a precious addition to the International Fair and Museum of the Prophet's Biography and Islamic Civilization in the holy city of Madina.

Karimadath Mohammed Shafi from Kozhikode, an avid fan of gramophones and their records who collected anything and everything related to the olden-day music system and repaired some of the gramophones possessed by antique collectors in and around the city, had never

imagined that he would be shot into fame one day when he stumbled upon the records containing recitations from the Holy Quran by Shaikh Abdul Basit Abdul Samad ten years ago.

He told the *Observer* that he always wanted to preserve it at some place that really values the item and to let the global pilgrims who visit Madina cherish the timeless voice of Abdul Basit.

Last week, he arrived in the holy city as per a pre-fixed appointment to meet with the authorities through one of his close aides in Saudi Arabia and handed over the precious collection to the museum officials.

Shaikh Abdul Basit Abdul Samad is a famous reciter



born in Armant, Egypt in 1927. His amazing style of recitation and application of Tajweed rules made him the winner of three awards in international recitation competitions in the 1970s. These priceless gems of unique recitation were donated to this museum by Muhammad Shafi and have become petroglyphs that will last forever.

"I've been keeping this vinyl record for the past 10 years because from the day I possessed it, I had a desire to give it to any one of the good museums. Ten years ago when I had

come here in Madina, in a Quran press, I had seen an ordinary cassette and CD, and from that time itself, I felt if I could keep my gramophone here, it would be nice," shared the antique collector, with the *Observer*.

"This is my hard work for the past 10 years and in the end, Alhamdulillah, it happened through a friend in Saudi Arabia, and I'm grateful to the Almighty and everyone around who helped me keep the collection for the generations to come," an emotional Shafi adds.

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MONDAY | MARCH 18 | 2024

CROATIA'S TOURIST PEARL DUBROVNIK SEEKS TO RECLAIM CITY FOR LOCALS

CROATIA'S HISTORIC city of Dubrovnik aims to lure back locals priced out by high tourist prices with a plan next month that includes banning new private rental permits, following the example of other popular destinations across Europe.

Dubrovnik, famed for its Baroque churches, Renaissance palaces and spectacular location on the Adriatic's rocky coastline is a stop-off point for holiday cruises and attracts millions of global visitors that bring in much-needed revenues to the nation's economy.

But the success of the UNESCO World Heritage site has come at a price. Tourists clog the narrow streets and push up rents. Locals occupy just 30% of the Old Town's accommodation.

Before the break-up of

Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, and Croatia's independence war, some 5,000 residents lived there. Today, 1,200 remain.

"Young people will depart us, they will leave to some other places because it will be impossible to live in Dubrovnik," Mayor Mato Frankovic said.

The city council is expected in April to pass a regulation banning new rental permits in the Old Town and its surrounding area, Frankovic said. The move is part of the city's obligation to meet certain UNESCO rules, he said.

The city has already begun buying apartments that will be offered to young families under a 10-year lease, and will ban the short-term lease of flats in large apartment buildings. In 2018, it limited the number of tourists from cruises to 4,000 at a time.

"We shall protect the town's historic foundations and enable the people to live and spend time there," Frankovic said.

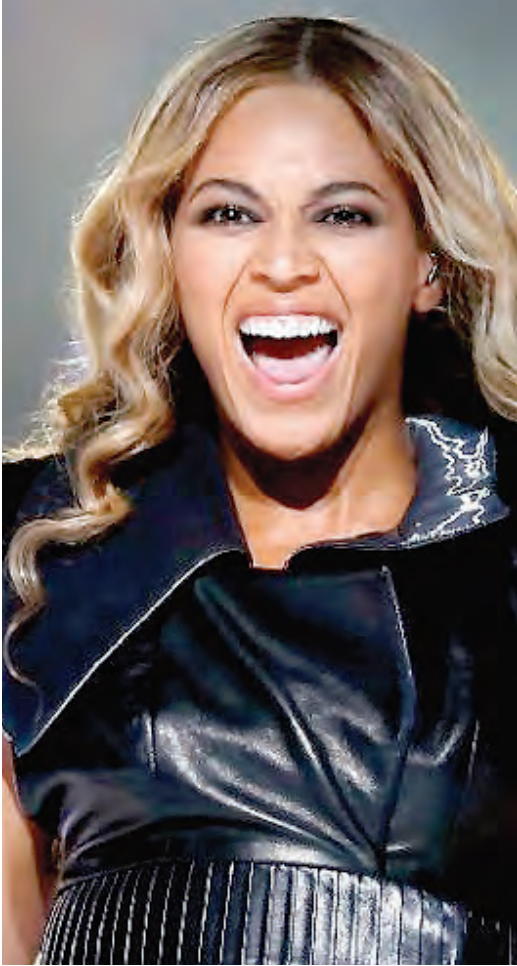
Other European authorities are also seeking to reclaim cities for local inhabitants. Portugal, for instance, has been acting to lower housing prices.

In Dubrovnik, not everyone agrees on the need for change.

Vedran Miovic, of the Hedera Estate agency that manages some 150 units in Dubrovnik, says private accommodation is "much better for the community" compared with big hotels and resorts, which he said only benefited big foreign funds.

Old Town resident Marija Trojenovic, however, welcomed the plans. "Bring back people to the town because people make the town," she said. — Reuters

Beyoncé makes her mark on country music, shining light on genre's Black roots



TEXAS NATIVE AND singer-songwriter Denitia was deeply moved when she heard the first notes of Beyoncé's hit country song, "Texas Hold 'Em."

But it was more than the exhilarating, catchy thrum of the banjo at the start of the song that caught Denitia's attention: It was an overdue acknowledgement of the rich history of Black country music artists and their legacies.

"Beyoncé's success in country music is shining a light on a history of Black folks in country music, in our creation, our contribution to the genre, in our being listeners and avid audience members of country music," said Denitia, who now lives in Nashville and was named one of CMT's next country artists to watch earlier this year. "We have been there from the start and we're still there."

Experts and fans view Beyoncé's foray into the genre as a reclamation and homage to the legacy of Black Americans within country music and culture - a history that has largely gone unrecognised in some mainstream music circles. They say Beyoncé, who was born and raised in Houston, Texas, is now walking in the footsteps of many acclaimed Black country music legends who came before her.

From historical figures like Lesley "Esley" Riddle, and Charley Pride, who broke down historical barriers, to current artists like Mickey Guyton, Jimmie Allen and Rhiannon Giddens, who played the banjo, an instrument of West African origin, heard throughout "Texas Hold 'Em."

"Despite the fact that country music as an industry and often country music spaces like bars and festivals, are primarily white, Black artists have been creating the music that's the roots of country," said Francesca T. Royster, associate professor of English at DePaul University, where she teaches courses on Shakespeare, film, and Black feminism.

"The story that's been told about country music is that it's like this authentically white, nostalgic music, when in fact, Black, Indigenous, Latinx contributions are really important to the sound."

TALENT IS TALENT

Beyoncé is set to release her highly anticipated country album, *Cowboy Carter*, on March 29. She first teased the forthcoming album when she released two new songs after making a surprise appearance in a Super Bowl commercial. The album serves as the second in a three-album project that kicked off with her 2022 critically acclaimed *Renaissance*.

Excitement has swirled around the project, and "Texas Hold 'Em," has soared multiple music charts, cementing Beyoncé as the first Black woman to top the Billboard Country Chart. Royster noted that the banjo featured on the song has become a signature instrument, sound and tradition of country music, but added it was originally invented by and grounded in the music of enslaved Black people.

For Royster and others, Beyoncé's success is a reminder that "anyone, whatever their racial or ethnic identity, can participate in this culture and not feel like a genre or creed of creative art form or way of storytelling is closed to them."

Beyoncé has been vocal throughout her career about her ties to country music and southern culture, dropping hints throughout her career of the impact both have had.

Her 2016 *Lemonade* album featured the country song "Daddy Lessons," which she performed later that year at the Country Music Awards with The Chicks, formerly known as The Dixie Chicks. While the performance was praised, it was also met with swift criticism and racist backlash, stating she had no place on country's biggest stage.

There's been a long documented history of exclusion within the country music space. A 2021 study found that between 2002-2020, just one per cent of songs played on country stations were by Black artists.

News of her country album has also been met with some mixed reviews and tepid response by some. Fans have complained several country radio stations have not given airplay to the songs, including Oklahoma radio station KYKC, which went viral for rejecting a fan's request to play Beyoncé's country song. General Manager Roger Harris said it rejected the request because the label initially designated it as under the Pop and R&B categories and the station was "unfairly targeted."

Despite the controversy, fans across the world continue to celebrate, posting clips of themselves donning glittery cowboy boots and hats, and dancing to the songs, like Danielle Williams-Hooley and three of her friends, who created a line dance routine to the song.

"I really appreciated it because there are a lot of African American country artists that we don't really know about, including myself," said Williams-Hooley, a teacher from Texas, noting she's hopeful the songs' success will "trickle down" to other Black country artists. "At the end of the day, talent is talent no matter what your skin colour is." — Reuters