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TOTTENHAM HELD BY WEST HAM, EVERTON HIT BACK AT NEWCASTLE



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OQ GROUP 2023 NET PROFITS AMOUNT TO RO 970 MILLION



P20

BEEES VS. DRONES: HOW TECH IS TACKLING CROP POLLINATION



ROYAL DECREE RATIFIES AGREEMENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued a Royal Decree No (22/2024) on ratification of an agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Swiss Federal Council on work permit for companions of official employees, signed in Muscat on November 30, 2023. Article (1) ratifies the aforesaid agreement as per the version attached to this Decree. Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

Oman great partner for making peace in Yemen

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY @shadadm

Tim Lenderking, US Special Envoy for Yemen, on Wednesday said that the attacks by Ansar Allah are undermining the progress in the peace process in the broader Yemeni conflict, while underscoring the importance of the role of the Sultanate of Oman as it is a key partner in supporting efforts of de-escalation in the Red Sea and backing peace in the region.



FOR SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

The worshippers perform Taraweeh prayer at Al Haj Ali Hasan Mosque in Barka on Tuesday night. Taraweeh is a nightly prayer performed by Muslims in the holy month of Ramadhan and follows the obligatory Isha prayer. These prayers offer Muslims an opportunity for spiritual reflection, self-discipline and renewal.

PHOTO BY ABDULWAHID AL HAMDANI

AL MIRANI FORT OPEN FOR VISITORS



The 16th-century Al Mirani Fort in Muscat has been opened for visitors, following a soft inauguration on Wednesday. The fort in old Muscat overlooks the Sea of Oman and was the first where cannons were installed in Oman. Al Mirani Fort existed before the Portuguese invasion, and was later rebuilt by the Portuguese in 1587. It is also called the Al Gharbiya Fort as it commands a view of a high rocky hill at the end of the west wall. Al Mirani Fort, built at the same time as nearby Al Jalali Fort, has a special place in history as it contributed to the fall of the Portuguese. **DETAILS ON P3**

End Israeli aggression: Arab League

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the extraordinary session of the Council of the Arab League on the level of permanent delegates, on Wednesday. The meeting discussed the Arab and international efforts to stop genocide and the policy of starvation and displacement against the Palestinian people and putting the UN Security Council and the international community before its responsibilities in the face of the Israeli occupation. The Sultanate of Oman was represented at the meeting by Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League. Addressing the session, Al Rahbi said: “We meet today in the midst of developments and



A Palestinian woman checks on a traditional embroidered dress as she performs chores in a makeshift tent made from a parachute used to airdrop food aid, set on the rubble of their home in a devastated area around Gaza's Al Shifa hospital on Wednesday. — AFP

a dangerous escalation in the course of the ongoing events. The war on the Gaza Strip has spilled over the region which confirms that the occupying state has guarantees to escape punishment or prosecution and that is also proven by its blatant disregard for the UN Security Council's resolution calling for ceasefire.”

Al Rahbi expressed regret over the failure of the international community to confront Israel on both the political and military levels until now, supporting the Arab consensus to the decision demanding the UN Security Council to take a decision under Chapter Seven of the United Nations Charter. — ONA



Honestly, I could not think of better partners to work with than Oman and Saudi Arabia, and that is why I am here so often. I have made more than 50 trips to this region since I was appointed envoy three years ago

TIM LENDERKING
US Special Envoy for Yemen

I was appointed envoy three years ago,” he said. He added that the continued attacks on maritime navigation in the Red Sea hinder the arrival of humanitarian needs and aid to Yemen.

TURN TO P2

A study to protect endangered Arabian leopard

SALALAH: Dr Hadi bin Muslim al Hakmani has shown great interest in preservation of Arabian leopard for more than 20 years. He has a leading experience in developing strategies and programmes to protect this endangered animal in the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He is presently in charge of wildlife and biodiversity conservation efforts undertaken by the Royal Commission for Al Ula (RCU) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Arabian leopard formerly lived in a wide stretch extending from Palestine



Arabian leopards area of presence shrank to the mountains of the Arabian Peninsula.

in the northwest and along the mountains adjoining the Red Sea in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Yemen,

and eastward towards the Hadhramaut and Mahra mountains in Yemen all the way to the mountains of Dhofar



Dr Hadi bin Muslim al Hakmani is in charge of wildlife and biodiversity conservation efforts.

and the eastern and western Al Hajar Mountains including the mountains of Musandam in the Sultanate of Oman. it was

also found in the mountains of the United Arab Emirates. Nowadays, its area of presence shrank to the mountains of the Arabian Peninsula. Presently, the Arabian leopard lives in small groups separated from each other in the south of Oman (Dhofar Governorate) and the mountains of southern and eastern Yemen, with a small number living in the south of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is considered a rare tiger species that is classified as critically endangered according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature

(IUCN) classification. Al Hakmani said: “Studying the Arabian leopard is not easy compared to tigers in Africa due to the fact that it lives in small groups beside being a solitary animal that lives mostly alone. We study it indirectly using camera traps and radio tracking and also by tracking signs and traces related to it to find out about its genetics. The urbanisation development such as the construction of roads and modern cities that took place in Dhofar Governorate widely affected the presence and movement of the Arabian leopard.” — ONA



FM RECEIVES US YEMEN ENVOY

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Tim Lenderking, US Special Envoy for Yemen, in Muscat on Wednesday. During the meeting, they sides exchanged views on the Yemeni crises and the current escalation in the region. They underscored the importance of ending the war and achieving a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, as well as facilitating the entry of relief and humanitarian aid. The meeting was attended by Shaikh Ahmed bin Hashel al Maskari, Head of the GCC Department and several officials from both sides. – ONA

Oman great partner in making peace in Yemen

FROM PAGE 1

Lenderking was earlier in Saudi Arabia to meet with partners to discuss the need for an immediate cessation of attacks in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, which are undermining progress on the Yemen peace process and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Yemen and other needy countries.

He added that the continued attacks on maritime navigation in the Red Sea hinder the arrival of humanitarian needs and aid to Yemen. He stated that the threat to global maritime navigation leads to a rise in the prices of food commodities and exacerbates the global inflation crisis.

"We favour a diplomatic solution, we know that there is no military solution. Saudi Arabia mediating between the Ansar Allah and the internationally recognised Yemeni government gives us some hope that we can use this moment to get beyond current tensions", he said, adding that there has been a 15 per cent reduction in ships being able to dock at Yemen's Hodeidah Port, obstructing humanitarian aid.

"While in Saudi Arabia and now in Oman, I met with counterparts to discuss the steps to de-escalate the current situation and renew focus on securing a durable peace for the Yemeni people," he said.

He pointed out that the consultations he is conducting with partners in the countries of the region focus on de-escalation, using diplomatic channels, and harnessing regional efforts with the aim of reaching lasting peace for the Yemeni people.

Over RO 22 mn projects under implementation in Al Dakhiliyah

NIZWA: Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is witnessing the implementation of multiple development and service projects as part of the Governorates Developments Programme and the Balanced Development Programme which aim at achieving several national development objectives and pillars and meeting citizens' needs in accordance to the previously set priorities.

The Office of Al Dakhiliyah Governor explained that 43 projects are currently under implementation at a total value of RO 22, 283,000. Those projects include road paving and rehabilitation, developing markets, creating public parks and gardens and beautification projects.

Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, affirmed that the implementation of these projects is among the priorities set for this this year with focus on enhancing the social and economic dimension of development, and providing public services that meet the needs of community members and keep pace with the commercial, tourism and entertainment movement in partnership with the private sector.

Among the projects that are



43 projects include road paving and rehabilitation, developing markets, creating public parks and gardens and beautification projects

currently under implementation are construction and rehabilitation of internal roads and public car parks, establishing and renovation of markets and public parks, developing commercial complexes, beautification of the entrances of the wilayats, lighting of internal roads and installing LED lamps, among others, the governor said.

These projects are expected to improve the investment environment in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, the governor said stressing that the governorate boasts diverse economic opportunities. The governorate also seeks to bring in projects that enhance the governorate's central role of tapping available opportunities by both Omani and foreign investors within a suitable environment

increased chlorophyll levels, leaf count and crop yield."

Biochar extracted from expired milk contains organic materials that contribute to improving the soil structure, stimulates root growth, and enhances the absorption of essential nutrients for plants. In addition, it reduces the use of chemical fertilizers that may be harmful to the environment.

Biochar extracted from expired milk contains organic materials that contribute to improving the soil structure, stimulates root growth, and enhances the absorption of essential nutrients for plants. In addition, it reduces the use of chemical fertilizers that may be harmful to the environment and negatively affect public health. — ONA



potential health risks associated with their usage," Fajr said.

"Furthermore, the efficacy of our innovation has been demonstrated through its positive impact on plant growth, including

Among the most important road projects currently under construction are the internal road paving project in Bahla with a length of 62 km, and paving of internal road in Al Hamra with a length of 51 km which is expected to be completed in the last quarter of this year

characterised by innovation and flexibility and an administration that keeps pace with the latest international developments.

Engineer Sulaiman bin Hamad al Sunaidy, Director-General of Al Dakhiliyah Municipality, said that among the most important road projects currently under construction are the internal road paving project in the Wilayat of Bahla with a length of 62 km, and paving of internal road in the Wilayat of Al Hamra with a length of 51 km which is expected to be completed in the last quarter of this year. — ONA

Ramadhan nights golden chance to come closer to Allah

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Nights of Ramadhan are special with many benefits because for these are great moments of reflections and prayers.

Hatim bin Harith al Abdissalaam, life coach and member from the Islamic Information Centre, Oman, says the nights of Ramadhan are special because people have recharged their batteries with nutrition and they are ready to be devoted to the Almighty.

After Isha prayers, the first prayer for the night is Taraweeh.

"It is almost an hour long and majority of the people pray at the mosque. Then there is another special prayer which is called



It is a golden opportunity where Allah has promised to answer the prayers of those who are calling in these specific times

Tahajud, it starts almost at 2 am," said Hatim.

In some mosques, the prayer starts at 3 am while at others it will go up till four to 4:30 am.

According to Hatim, the uniqueness of this prayer is that it is for the elite of the society in terms of spirituality, "Because let us admit the fact that it takes a lot of courage and sacrifice to leave your sleep while everybody else is fast asleep and be alone with Allah." This is the practice in some of the mosques but very few

people go to perform this prayer.

"They turn off the lights because sometimes you break into tears remembering all the sins and shortfalls he did against Allah.

You are asking for forgiveness. In Islam, there are no mediators and so we directly ask for forgiveness from Allah."

He noted that when you hear the Holy Quran being recited, you feel that Allah is talking to you directly through those words. Therefore you become very emotional and spiritual.

"It is a golden opportunity where Allah has promised to answer the prayers of those who are calling in these specific times," noted Hatim.

He added, "So we urge everyone including myself to plan

and incorporate this prayer at least once in Ramadhan, because it will surely add a lot to your spiritual journey in the holy month."

People are up usually late night but Hatim points out they are up for the wrong reasons because they are in restaurants, playing football etc.

"We need to have priorities. Ramadhan only comes once in a year and if you see the people who are not here with us anymore, they might be wishing to come back here to fast for another Ramadhan," he said while urging, "So instead of wasting time in unproductive way let us not spend these nights in an unproductive way. Ramadhan is a month to develop your time for prayers and supplication for Allah."



COUNCIL CHAIRMAN RECEIVES AUSTRIAN ENVOY

Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, received Christophe Ceska, Ambassador of Austria accredited to the Sultanate of Oman. They discussed bilateral relations between Oman and Austria. They also discussed a number of areas of cooperation and ways of developing cooperation between parliamentary councils.

OHRC highlights rights of people with autism



OHRC officials taking part in the videoconferencing

MUSCAT: The Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC), in association with the Asia Pacific Forum, organised a symposium titled “Respect and support for rights of people with autism from the perspective of national human rights institutions” on Wednesday via videoconferencing.

Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairman of OHRC, said that the symposium constituted a link in a series of events organised by the OHRC as part of its cooperation with regional and international organisations.

He added that such activities affirm OHRC’s keenness to shoulder its responsibilities in protecting and consolidating human rights, in line with provisions of the Basic Law of the State and international charters and agreements.

The participants agreed to support studies on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), unify related strategies among national human rights institutions, expand partnerships between national institutions and civil society and provide training for autistic children and their families.

Other measures agreed by the participants include developing special programmes for people with autism, supporting public and private initiatives related to autism, reviewing ASD laws and agreements to include this segment and spreading awareness about ASD among members of society.

The event attracted the participation of numerous national human rights

The participants agreed to support studies on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), unify related strategies among national human rights institutions, expand partnerships between national institutions and civil society and provide training for autistic children

institutions (NHRIs) and regional networks within the Global Alliance, alongside a cadre of specialists, researchers and representatives of the civil society from inside and outside Oman.

Maryam bint Abdullah al Attiyah, GANHRI Chairperson, in her speech said, “The escalating indicators of autism spectrum disorders have spurred governments to enhance their endeavours in early autism detection, particularly as many nations are signatories to the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).”

She further remarked, “Autism spectrum disorder stands as one of the priorities in the GANHRI and OHCHR programmes. The role of NHRIs encompasses bolstering policies aimed at legislative advancement, and advocating for and aiding the most vulnerable segments of society.”

Kairn Fitzpatrick, Executive Director of the Asia Pacific Forum, delivered an address

underscoring the imperative that individuals on the autism spectrum are entitled to equal rights as neurotypical individuals. He emphasised the role of NHRIs in safeguarding these rights, emphasising the importance of understanding and surmounting the challenges encountered by individuals with autism.

In his address, Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, OHRC Chairman, underscored that the symposium’s organisation aligns with the OHRC mandate as outlined in its system. This includes engaging with international human rights mechanisms, participating in regional and international human rights gatherings, and organising conferences, workshops and seminars on human rights matters. The OHRC aims at advancing and protecting human rights in accordance with the Basic Law of the State and international treaties and conventions.

He further highlighted that this seminar falls within the purview of the OHRC adherence to the competencies and responsibilities stipulated in the Paris Principles, encompassing collaboration with human rights institutions, particularly regional institutions and other national institutions dedicated to advancing and protecting human rights. This collaboration entails aiding in the formulation of human rights programmes and research, contributing to their implementation, and enhancing societal awareness regarding diverse human rights issues and subjects.

Al Mirani Fort now open for visitors

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 3

The 16th-century Al Mirani Fort in Muscat has been opened to visitors, following a soft inauguration on Wednesday. The fort in old Muscat overlooks the Sea of Oman and was the first where cannons were installed in Oman.

Al Mirani Fort existed before the Portuguese invasion and was later rebuilt by the Portuguese in 1587. It is also called the Al Gharbiya Fort as it commands a view of the high rocky hill at the end of the

west wall. Al Mirani Fort, built at the same time as nearby Al Jalali Fort, has a special place in history as it contributed to the fall of the Portuguese.

“This historical landmark that has stood tall for more than 400 years will be open for all visitors so that everyone will have the opportunity to enjoy the details of this magnificent architectural monument and its wonderful view of the city of Muscat, the Al Alam Palace, and the old port of Muscat,” the operators said on the social media.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) signed an agreement in 2023 with the Hajar Mountains Resorts and Hotels Company to manage and operate Al Mirani Fort.

The ministry seeks to bolster the private sector, and small and medium enterprises by enabling them to market craftspeople’s work and thereby enrich local tourism with value-added projects.

The MoHT has been handing over management and maintenance of the nation’s historical forts and castles to the private sector.



Al Mirani Fort has a special place in history as it contributed to the fall of the Portuguese.

Al Najd Agriculture
Development Company

شركة النجد
للتنمية الزراعية

Name of the position	General Manger (GM)
Report to	Board of Directors

Al-Najd Agricultural Development Company looking for a General Manger responsible for managing the overall performance of Al-Najd Agricultural Development Company, developing strategic plan to fulfil Company’s vision and mission. The responsibilities will also include achieving the strategic objectives, performance, and expansion targets, promoting revenue, and profitability.

The position holder will be accountable to the Board of Directors for fulfillment and implementation of all plans and policies. Represent the Company to Government and stakeholders.

Key Result Areas

- Preparation and achievement of business strategy and business plan for the Company;
- Top line and Bottom line of the Company;
- Efficiency and sustainability of Company operations;

- Effective integration of all functions;
- Company finance and administration;
- Customer satisfaction, and
- Employee’s management and development.

Key Tasks

- Oversee day-to-day operations
- Determine the overall direction, strategy and goals of the Company.
- Formulate the long-term objectives, plans and targets of the Company.
- Translate the business plan into budget, goals and targets for the Mangers. Direct and coordinate their efforts and monitor achievement.
- Review activity reports and financial statements regularly and monitor farms performance continuously to ensure approved business plans are executed successfully.
- Direct the growth and business development initiatives of the Company, ensuring adequate resources allocations.
- Set out specific performance standards in key areas.
- Guide and assist Mangers in all operational issues involving planning, coordination, adherence to target/work schedule, etc.. to improve sustainability and increase profitability, consumer reach and productivity.
- Evaluate performance of Mangers for compliance with approved policies and objectives of the Company and required performance goals and standards.
- Coordinate with the Board of Directors for the evaluation of feasibility of new projects.
- Develop and maintain contacts with stakeholders and competent authorities and major customers to further business interests.
- Manage selection, development, measurement, motivation, cooperation, and termination of team staff.
- Any other responsibilities entrusted by the Board of Directors.

Education Level – Minimum Requirement

- Bachelor’s degree in agriculture, and
- MBA or higher degree(Master/PhD) in Agri-business or related fields.

Work Experience

Overall experience of at least 20 years in agriculture sector of which a minimum of 5 years working experience as General Manger in agribusiness in the private sector (mandatory).

Skills

- Knowledge of sustainable crop production in hot dry climate;
- Business acumen and commercial orientation
- Strong management and business background
- Knowledge of finance/production/operations management, quality assurance and control, familiarity/comfortable with using statistical tools
- Strategic planning and implementation
- Examining and re-engineering operations and procedures
- Develop technical, marketing, and financial plans,

- analyze, and interpret all related data
- Knowledge of profit and loss, balance sheet and cash flow management and general finance and budgeting.
- Knowledge of corporate governance and general management best practices
- Excellent leadership, project management and people management
- Financial awareness to understand and interpret numbers
- Excellent written & verbal communication / presentation skills
- Excellent written and spoken skills in English.

Generic Skills

- Strong Character
- Integrity and loyalty
- Good understanding of labour, environment and business law

- Solid judgement qualities
- Self motivated
- Displays cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability

Please send the cv’s to email address: soaad@alnajd.com.om, the last day to apply 2/5/2024



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JUST AS ISLAM ENCOURAGES MODERATION AND HUMBLENESS, IT HAS ALSO EMPHASISED ON PROTECTING OUR NATURE

STEPS TO MAKE HOLY MONTH GREEN

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

As the holy month draws to a close, it is time to size up our thoughts, actions, food consumption, wastage, and reevaluate our attitude towards the environment.

Just as Islam encourages moderation and humbleness, It has also emphasised on protecting our nature. Environmentalists say it is never too late for a sustainable Ramadhan.

Fasting from dawn till dusk helps us refine ourselves. But Ramadhan is also a time to be kind to our surroundings, especially the environment, according to experts as well as scholars. Azzan bin Nasser al Hosni, an environmentalist, says Ramadhan is also about going green by reducing waste and using resources responsibly. According to him, as we gather and give thanks for our many blessings, we also need to think of this planet that is entrusted to us.

“It is never too late to go green and going green during Ramadhan involves reducing food waste, using eco-friendly packaging for Iftar meals, conserving water and energy, and incorporating sustainable practices into daily routines,” he said.

Yet another sign of going green is to extend our support for the environment during Ramadhan that include organising community clean-up events, planting trees, reducing plastic usage, and donating to environmental organisations or causes.

“Also, just as we see around, supporting each other during the holy month, we can also offer acts of kindness, share meals with those in need, check in on friends and family, and participate in charity initiatives together,” he said.

CHECKLIST FOR A GREENER RAMADHAN

1 BUY LOCAL AND PROMOTE LOCAL

It is a good time to also promote Omani products and services in the remaining days of the month and one should decide to support the local farmers by using locally sourced fruits and vegetables.

2 REDUCE FOOD WASTE

While organising a social or family Iftar, ask the participants to bring their own crockery/ Tupperware to take any excess food home for supper or Suhoor.

3 FOOD CHARITY

Inform the person or family or people of your intention to distribute Iftar so that they don't have to find their food for breaking fast. While you're fulfilling the Islamic obligation of feeding another, it could also be the environmentally-friendly action to do.

4 CUT RED MEAT

By and large, it has been found that red meat has the highest carbon footprint than other proteins and we should decide to reduce the same in our cuisine. By reducing our consumption we are actually reducing our carbon footprint drastically.

5 USE ENERGY SAVING LIGHTS

Use LED lamps and energy efficient gadgets to save electricity and avoid unwanted expenses as far as electricity consumption is concerned. For fair usage, one can use timers to save power.



USE MUNICIPAL SLAUGHTERHOUSES FOR EID

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 3

Muscat Municipality announced the readiness of its slaughterhouses in Al Amerat and Al Seeb for Eid al Fitr. The veterinary medical staff will ensure that all procedures are being taken to ensure the animals are free of any diseases. These slaughterhouses have a sufficient number of butchers and cleaners for hassle-free services .

The municipality supervises the company operating the slaughterhouses, which uses modern slaughtering equipment and devices for meat processing, storage and transport under the



Muscat Municipality urged the people to use its slaughterhouses instead of residential premises for healthy handling of meat.

supervision of specialised staff. It will also accommodate a large amount of carcasses of all types to ensure the health and safety of individuals. It is also working in coordination with the company operating the slaughterhouses to extend the working hours before Eid al-Fitr in two shifts.

To avoid rush and ensure delivery on time, the slaughterhouses will work on the first day of Eid from 7 am to 2 pm for processing meat of sheep and goats. The second shift from 7 pm to 10 pm is slotted for cows and camels. The second day will have the same morning time. But the evening time will be from 4

pm to 8 pm. On the third day the slaughterhouses will work from 6 am to 1 pm.

The municipality urged the people to use its slaughterhouses instead of residential premises for healthy handling of meat. This is to avoid contracting diseases that are transmitted from animals to humans. It also warned against dealing with butchers without certificates. This certificate ensures that butchers are free of infectious diseases and that the slaughter process is safe. Using slaughterhouses also ensures clean disposal innards instead of dumping it in public places, which will attract animals and birds.



Decked up lamps and other decorations, the restaurants and cafes are abuzz with visitors seeking a new experience in the holy month.

Ramadhan spirit enlivens Nizwa's hotels and cafes

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, APRIL 3

Restaurants and cafes in the Wilayat of Nizwa in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate are witnessing high footfall during Ramadhan.

Decked up lamps and other decorations, the restaurants and cafes are abuzz with visitors seeking a new experience in the holy month.

Restaurant and cafe owners in Nizwa are focusing on offering menus and buffets rich in delicious foods including traditional fare like dates, milk, and fruits. Among the most popular dishes this year specifically are the wide variety of eastern and western meals that suit all tastes.

Al Julanda al Salmi, owner of NizCafe, said, "Many government and private institutions that organised gatherings in the cafe are satisfied. We added extra seats and trained our staff to interact with customers more professionally. The number of customers was higher than usual, perhaps due to increased promotion of the cafe, people's familiarity and confidence in the service provided. We annually host a PlayStation tournament,

which has increased the cafe's visitors."

Omar al Kamiani, owner of Liwan Nizwa restaurant, said: "We made preparations ahead of Ramadhan and there was a good turnout from visitors. We have hosted around 500 citizens and 300 tourists so far, including families, employees and students. We made some modifications to the menu for Ramadhan to cater to everyone's taste."

Shatha al Jabri, Meshan, cafe owner, said: "The preparations to welcome Ramadhan include decorating the restaurant and outdoor areas, allowing visitors to experience spiritual moments with chants and prayers surrounding the venue. Our customers eagerly await the restaurant's special Iftar meals. Both young and old find comfort in the Ramadhan atmosphere, which is filled with spirituality, joy, and a variety of distinctive Ramadhan dishes. So far, we have received 2,157 people, and we anticipate a further increase due to the upcoming special events and promotions."

Other restaurant and cafe owners also confirmed noticeable increase in the number of visitors this year compared to previous years.

CPA bolsters oversight in Dhofar ahead of Eid

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, APRIL 3

A significant uptick in commercial activity is transforming Dhofar Governorate into a bustling hub as families stock up on essentials for the upcoming Eid al Fitr celebrations. Shop windows across Salalah and other towns brim with special offers and discounts, invigorating the consumer scene.

Recognising this surge in activity, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has intensified its oversight efforts to ensure price stability, product quality and consumer safety. Dedicated teams of legal officers and inspectors are conducting comprehensive inspections across commercial establishments. A key focus is verifying the legitimacy of promotional offers and ensuring compliance with relevant regulations.

The CPA maintains its vigilance throughout the year, with a particular emphasis on peak seasons like Ramadhan and back-to-school. Their well-defined action plan, involving extended inspection hours during the holy month, underscores their commitment to market stability and adherence to the Consumer Protection Law. The consumer watchdog emphasises the importance of collaboration between all stakeholders — consumers, vendors, and regulatory bodies — in maintaining a thriving marketplace.

Local businesses are committed to offering competitive promotions while upholding product quality. Mohammed Saeed, a local trader, exemplifies this approach. "We are committed to offering special promotions and discounts to attract customers and



An official of Consumer Protection Authority inspecting outlets in Salalah

encourage purchases, all while prioritising the quality and safety of our products," he remarked.

Consumers like Aisha bint Salim, are adopting mindful shopping practices. "I create a specific list of necessities to ensure I don't make impulse purchases," she said.

Another consumer, Salem bin Ali, expressed his appreciation for the CPA's efforts. "I value the Consumer Protection Authority's role in monitoring the markets, safeguarding consumer rights and facilitating shopping at fair prices," he said.

While Dhofar's commercial vibrancy invigorates the local economy and fosters job opportunities, the market is experiencing a shift in consumer behaviour compared to pre-pandemic times.

Tailors like Sushan Kumar report a rise in raw material costs, leading to an increase in clothing prices. Moftah al Din, a salesman, anticipates a surge in demand, particularly for women's products closer to Eid, but expresses concerns about lingering pandemic-induced price hikes.

These insights reveal an

evolving shopping landscape. Consumer spending habits might remain cautious due to the pandemic's lingering effects, even as Ramadhan and Eid traditionally stimulate commercial activity. Rising costs put pressure on both businesses and shoppers, creating a delicate balance between consumer confidence and market stability.

The CPA's proactive approach provides a crucial safeguard during this vibrant period. Their commitment to a fair and thriving marketplace for all resonates with the general population.

MAWALEH VEGETABLES AND FRUITS MARKET TIMINGS ANNOUNCED

SEEB: The Central Vegetables and Fruits Market in Southern Al Mawaleh, Wilayat of Al Seeb, will work from 4 am till 5 pm from April 7 to 9. The market will be closed during the first and second days of Eid al Fitr.

Sayyid Salim bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Director-General of Muscat Municipality in Al Seeb, said entry for large refrigerator trucks that are loading foodstuff through the main gate will be from 4 am till 11 pm. Entry for vehicles of consumers to



The Central Vegetables and Fruits Market in Southern Al Mawaleh, Wilayat of Al Seeb

the market who come for shopping will be from 4:30 am to 10:30 pm through gates 2 and 5. — ONA

MOORE STEPHENS LLC
NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF
DAWOOD CONTRACTING SPC
(AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1538)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Dawood Contracting SPC, bearing commercial registration number 1618571, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Member on 28 February 2024. The liquidator alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

**Office No. 41, 4th Floor, Building No.1022, Way No. 1013;
Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099, Email: info@moore-oman.com**

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within 180 days from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Dawood Contracting SPC
(Under voluntary liquidation)



Bodies of killed aid workers to be repatriated

GAZA: The bodies of six foreign aid workers killed in a Gaza strike were expected to be transported out of the war-torn Palestinian territory on Wednesday as Israel faced a chorus of outrage over their deaths.

Israeli bombardment killed seven staff of the US-based food charity World Central Kitchen on Monday in an attack that UN Chief Antonio Guterres labelled “unconscionable” and “an inevitable result of the way the war is being conducted”.

The remains of the six international staff, who were killed alongside one Palestinian colleague, were set to be taken out of Gaza through the Rafah crossing with Egypt, said Marwan Al Hams, director of the city’s Abu Youssef Al Najjar Hospital.

Israel’s armed forces chief Herzi Halevi called the attack a “grave mistake”, which he blamed on night-time “misidentification”, adding in a video message that “we are sorry for the unintentional harm to the members of WCK”.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had earlier pledged the “tragic case” would be investigated “right to the end”.

The seven deaths piled more pressure on Israel where the UN warns the population of 2.4 million is on the brink of famine.

US President Joe Biden said he was “outraged and heartbroken” by the deaths and charged that Israel “has not done enough to protect aid workers trying to deliver desperately needed help to civilians”.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he had voiced his “anger and concern” in a phone call with Netanyahu, while Britain summoned the Israeli ambassador and demanded “full accountability”.



One of the ambulances carrying the bodies of staff members of aid group World Central Kitchen, arrive at the Rafah crossing with Egypt. – AFP

The remains of the six international staff, who were killed alongside one Palestinian colleague, were set to be taken out of Gaza through the Rafah crossing with Egypt

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk wrote on X to Netanyahu and Israel’s ambassador, saying the deaths were straining ties and that “the tragic attack against volunteers and your reaction are generating an understandable anger”.

After their deaths, the charity suspended operations and a ship that had carried food aid from Cyprus to Gaza turned back towards the Mediterranean island with around 240 tonnes of supplies that had not been unloaded.

Israel’s retaliatory campaign has killed at least 32,916 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry

Gaza. Overnight, Israeli strikes killed at least 60 more people, the ministry said.

Palestinian groups seized around 250 captives on October 7.

Israel believes about 130 remain in Gaza, including 34 who are presumed dead.

The families of the captives have staged four straight nights of mass protests, joined by a resurgent anti-government movement.

Thousands gathered in front of parliament on Tuesday, with former prime minister Ehud Barak blaming Netanyahu for the October 7 “disaster” and demanding new elections. — AFP

UN rights council to consider draft resolution for Israel arms embargo

GENEVA: The UN Human Rights Council will consider a draft resolution on Friday calling for an arms embargo on Israel, citing the “plausible risk of genocide in Gaza”.

If the draft resolution is adopted, it would mark the first time that the United Nations’ top rights body has taken a position on the war raging in Gaza.

The text condemns “the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects by Israel” in populated areas of Gaza and demands Israel “uphold its legal responsibility to prevent genocide”.

The draft resolution was brought forward by Pakistan on behalf of 55 of the 56 UN member states in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) — the exception being Albania.

The text is co-sponsored by Bolivia, Cuba and the Palestinian mission in Geneva.

The eight-page draft demands Israel end its occupation of Palestinian territory and immediately lifts its “illegal blockade” on the Gaza Strip.

It calls upon countries to stop the sale or transfer of arms, munitions and other military equipment to Israel, citing “a plausible risk of genocide in Gaza”.

The draft also “condemns the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare”, calls



Pro-Palestinian demonstrators wave Palestinian flags as they call for a ceasefire in Gaza during a protest as part of the “People’s White House Ceasefire Now Iftar” outside the White House in Washington, DC. – AFP

for an immediate ceasefire and “condemns Israeli actions that may amount to ethnic cleansing”.

Last week, the UN Security Council in New York passed a resolution calling for a ceasefire — thanks to an abstention from Washington, Israel’s closest ally.

The draft being brought in Geneva calls on states to ensure that UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, receives sufficient funding and demands Israel stop expanding settlements in Palestinian territories.

The resolution condemns the firing of rockets against Israeli civilian areas and demands “the immediate release of all remaining captives and detainees”.

The council will discuss whether to adopt the resolution, alongside three other resolutions concerning Israeli settlements, the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan. Israel has long accused the Human Rights Council of being biased against it. The bloodiest-

ever Gaza war erupted with October 7 attack, which resulted in about 1,160 deaths in Israel, according to a tally based on Israeli official figures.

Palestinian groups also seized around 250 captives. Israel believes about 130 remain in Gaza, including 34 who are presumed dead.

Israel’s retaliatory campaign has killed at least 32,975 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in Gaza. — AFP

Palestinians relaunch bid to become UN member state

UNITED NATIONS: The Palestinians officially revived their bid for a full member state in the United Nations — a process with an uncertain outcome but one they say is necessary in the face of Israel’s offensive in Gaza.

The Palestinians, who have had observer status at the world body since 2012, have lobbied for years to gain full membership, which would amount to recognition of Palestinian statehood.

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, dated on Tuesday, UN envoy Riyad Mansour requested “upon instructions of the Palestinian leadership” that an application dating back to 2011 be reconsidered. The letter has been transmitted to the Security Council, and the Palestinians have asked that it be reviewed this month, according to the documents. Mansour has repeatedly said in recent months that given Israel’s military offensive in the Gaza Strip, UN membership is a priority for the Palestinians.

“It was the international community that decided to create two states in Palestine since 1947,” Mansour said in February.

“It is the duty of the international community along with the Palestinian people to complete that exercise by admitting the state of Palestine to membership.” Last month, he said the Palestinians would “start mobilising the largest number of countries to support us” and expressed hope that the council would act in April, pointing to a council meeting set for April 18 on the situation in Gaza. Malta, which holds the rotating Security Council presidency, said Mansour’s letter was “received and circulated” to council members, adding that talks would be held “on a way forward”.

The League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement sent a letter to Guterres on Tuesday, also seen by AFP, supporting the bid by the Palestinians. “We wish to bring to your attention that, as of this date, 140 Member States have recognised the state of Palestine,” said the joint letter, which included a list of those countries. — AFP



A Palestinian boy sits amid the rubble of a destroyed house in the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah. – AFP



In brief

■ OSLO



NORWAY'S PARLIAMENT TEMPORARILY CLOSED OFF AFTER THREATS

Norway's parliament, the Storting, was temporarily closed off on Wednesday after repeated threats against the institution, police said.

Two threats were directed at the institution on Tuesday, but no link between them has been established yet, Oslo police chief of operations Sven Bjelland told a press briefing. The first was not deemed credible, but the second threat led police to cordon off the building in the centre of Oslo on Wednesday.

"We are now at a stage where we do not believe that these (threats) were real, but that does not mean that they are not serious," Bjelland told reporters on Wednesday. — AFP

■ TOKYO



JAPAN PM TALKS SECURITY WITH INDONESIA'S PRABOWO DURING VISIT

Japan will deepen security ties with Indonesia, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told president-elect Prabowo Subianto on Wednesday on the ex-general's second stop after Beijing.

During their meeting on Wednesday Kishida "stated that Japan attached great importance to cooperation with Indonesia in maintaining and strengthening the free and open international order based on the rule of law", Japan's foreign ministry said.

He added that "Japan would advance security cooperation with Indonesia besides the provision of a large patrol vessel for Indonesia decided in December 2023", the ministry said. — AFP

■ NEW DELHI



RAHUL GANDHI FILES NOMINATION FOR INDIA NATIONAL ELECTION

Thousands of supporters thronged India's most prominent opposition leader Rahul Gandhi during a campaign procession on Wednesday ahead of his formal nomination for national elections starting this month.

Gandhi is the leading figure in an opposition alliance fighting an uphill battle in this year's polls. But Gandhi was given a rousing reception in Wayanad, a picturesque town in the southern state of Kerala, with a huge crowd gathering to cheer his arrival.

The 53-year-old formally filed his nomination to re-contest Wayanad with the local election office after the rally. — AFP

Nato urges to ensure Ukraine arms flow

BRUSSELS: Nato foreign ministers on Wednesday debated the creation of a 100-billion-euro, five-year fund for Ukraine, as the alliance's chief urged them to guarantee long-term arms supplies for Kyiv's outgunned forces.

"Ukraine has urgent needs," Jens Stoltenberg said as the ministers met in Brussels. "Any delay in providing support has consequences on the battlefield as we speak. So we need to shift the dynamics of our support."

"We must ensure reliable and predictable security assistance to Ukraine for the long haul so that we rely less on the voluntary contributions and more on Nato commitments, less on short-term offers and more on multi-year pledges," he said.

Officials said Nato's secretary general has proposed creating a 100-billion-euro fund to help arm Ukraine in its fight with Russia over five years.

That could help insulate the flow of weaponry to Ukraine following a potential return of Donald Trump to the White House after US elections in November.

"Moscow needs to understand that they cannot achieve their goals on the battlefield and they cannot wait us out," Stoltenberg said, without giving details of his proposal.

The plan has support from Ukraine's staunchest supporters such as Poland and the Baltic states.

But others caution there are many questions on where financing would come from and the plan could change dramatically by the time Nato holds its next summit in Washington in July.

The plan from Stoltenberg would also see a Nato mission take more control of coordinating arms supplies to Kyiv from a US-led grouping that currently helps



Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg (C) opens a round table during the North Atlantic Council (NAC) Ministers of Foreign Affairs, in Brussels. — AFP

We must ensure reliable and predictable security assistance to Ukraine for the long haul so that we rely less on the voluntary contributions

JENS STOLTENBERG
Secretary General of Nato

oversee support.

Stoltenberg's pitch comes as Ukraine's forces are struggling to

hold back Russia in the face of dwindling supplies from Kyiv's Western backers.

A \$60-billion US funding package is currently stalled in Congress but there are hopes lawmakers could move to pass it in the coming weeks.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba arrived in Brussels more focused on the short-term need for air defence in the face of a surge in Russian missile bombardments.

"Ukraine is currently the only country in the world that defends itself against ballistic missile attacks almost everyday,"

he wrote on the X social media platform after meeting his Polish counterpart.

"This means that all Patriot batteries available around the world that can be provided to Ukraine must be delivered to Ukraine as soon as possible. There is no more important place for them."

The meeting in Brussels comes as Nato readies to mark its 75-year anniversary since it was founded in the wake of World War II. — AFP

Kenyan doctors reject govt's offer to end strike



Medical practitioners participate in a demonstration against the govt's failure to hire trainee doctors in Nairobi. — Reuters file photo

NAIROBI: Kenyan public hospital doctors rejected a government offer aimed at ending a weeks-long strike that has severely disrupted health services, their union chairman said late on Tuesday.

The Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU), which represents more than 7,000 members, went on strike on March 15 to demand payment of their salary arrears and the immediate hiring of trainee doctors, among other grievances.

The government asked the doctors to end their strike in a statement issued late on Tuesday, saying the salary arrears have been paid and that trainee doctors would be hired from Thursday this week at a cost of 2.4 billion shillings (\$18.39 million).

"We decline these proposals in total," Abidan Mwachi, KMPDU's chairman,

wrote on social media platform X, adding that the government had not paid salary arrears.

The walkout, which has been compounded by a strike by clinical officers that started this week, has left patients struggling to access care from expensive private hospitals, leading to worsening chronic illnesses and even deaths.

In Nairobi's Mathare slum, Jane Akoth said that she was turned away from the hospital on Tuesday when she went to get an operation for her daughter Beatrice Akinyi, who was diagnosed with cancer last year.

In the eastern county of Tharaka Nithi, an area member of parliament was quoted by The Standard newspaper as saying the one-year-old daughter of one of his constituents had died due to a lack of healthcare arising from the strike. — Reuters

Day of mourning in Finland after school shooting death

HELSINKI: Flags in Finland flew at half-mast on Wednesday as the country mourned the killing of a 12-year-old by a classmate who opened fire and seriously injured two others.

All public buildings and institutions lowered their flags at 8:00 am on Wednesday, and the interior ministry encouraged the whole country to participate in the day of grieving.

On Tuesday morning, a 12-year-old Finnish boy opened fire at his school in Vantaa, Finland's fourth-largest city.

According to Finnish broadcaster MTV Uutiset, the boy wore a mask and noise-cancelling headphones when he carried out the shooting.

The child who was killed, a Finnish boy also aged 12, died at the scene, and the suspect had already fled the school by the time police arrived.

The police opened an investigation into murder and attempted murder on Tuesday.

The suspect, who was carrying a gun, was arrested in a "calm manner" within an hour of the shooting and admitted to being the shooter in a preliminary interrogation.

Police said they were looking to establish a motive for the crime, as well as conducting hearings and technical examinations of the crime scene on Wednesday.

"The police have a preliminary idea of the motive, but for investigative reasons it cannot yet be confirmed," the police said in a statement on Wednesday morning, adding that the suspect had admitted to the crime on Tuesday.

As the suspect is under 15 years old, he can not be held criminally responsible in Finland, and would not be incarcerated.

Two injured girls remain in

hospital, according to police.

Prime Minister Petteri Orpo said on Tuesday that the incident was "deeply upsetting", adding that his thoughts were with the victims, their parents, other pupils and teachers.

"In the coming days, we must be present for the children and young people, offer them words of comfort and show them that we care about them," he said in a statement.

"They may be scared or have questions. It is important that we talk about the incident in our homes." — AFP



Members of Parliament observe a minute's silence as they pay their respects for the victims of the school shooting. — AFP

Nature is riddled with ‘forever chemicals’

BENJAMIN LEGENDRE

They didn’t exist a century ago but today PFAS “forever chemicals” contaminate the environment from groundwater to Antarctic snow to turtle eggs, and concern over their possible toxicity is growing. Lawsuits and regulations targeting per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are multiplying, with France becoming the latest jurisdiction to consider tough new curbs on these long-life substances. On Thursday, a French legislator will introduce a bill to address what he calls the health “emergency” posed by exposure to PFAS in the environment.

Widely used in everyday items, highly durable, and very slow to break down, PFAS have been detected in water, air, fish and soil in the remotest corners of the globe.

“No ecosystem has escaped,” said Yann Aminot, a specialist in environmental contamination at the French Research Institute for Ocean Science (IFREMER). He spent six years examining tuna from the Indian and Pacific Oceans, dolphin livers

from the Bay of Biscay, and samples from French oyster farms.

“I don’t think I have ever seen a single sample free of perfluorinated contaminants,” the researcher told AFP. These molecules — the best known of which gave birth to non-stick Teflon — were developed after World War II to give packaging, paints and coatings exceptional resistance to water or heat.

This very quality turned out to be a particular problem for oceans, said Aminot.

“Being persistent compounds — which do not degrade and are mobile — they end up in the marine environment, which always ultimately is the receptacle for contamination,” he said.

A study published in January by the American Chemical Society, a nonprofit scientific organisation, said that PFAS had been detected in the Arctic Ocean at a depth of 3,000 feet (914 metres).

IFREMER recently examined the diets of two fish — sea bass and sole — in the Seine estuary of France and discovered PFAS riddled throughout the food chain. From the tiny zooplankton eaten by shellfish, which are consumed by smaller fish and ultimately larger predators, PFAS lurked at every step along

WIDELY USED IN EVERYDAY ITEMS, HIGHLY DURABLE, AND VERY SLOW TO BREAK DOWN, PFAS HAVE BEEN DETECTED IN WATER, AIR, FISH AND SOIL IN THE REMOTEST CORNERS OF THE GLOBE.

the way. A 2022 study in Australia established the transmission of PFAS from female turtles to their unborn offspring, while other research found traces in polar bear livers and birds, seals and other animals.

A wealth of scientific research has demonstrated the pervasive reach of PFAS in nature, but possible harms to people and the planet have been harder to definitively establish.

More than 20 years ago, a study in the US concluded that once inside the body PFAS may be able to reach the brain of vertebrates and affect the nervous system.

Studies have since shown that exposure to some PFAS — there are at least 4,000 chemical compounds in the family -- may be linked to serious health effects in humans and animals.

It is a subject of growing concern, with French ecologist and MP Nicolas Thierry asking lawmakers to ban PFAS from 2025 if alternatives exist.

The European Union is considering a blanket Europe-wide ban on PFAS from as early as 2026 while New Zealand will outlaw their use in cosmetic products by 2027.— AFP

Swiss set to vote on limiting immigration

Switzerland is set to hold a vote on measures designed to limit immigration to stop the population hitting 10 million before 2050, after enough signatures were deposited on Wednesday.

Under Switzerland’s direct democracy system, citizens can trigger popular votes by collecting 100,000 valid signatures within 18 months.

The hard right Swiss People’s Party (SVP) submitted 114,600 signatures to the Federal Chancellery in Bern on Wednesday — collected in half the time. “Mass immigration continues its frantic course... with devastating consequences for our small country,” said the SVP, which is the biggest party in the wealthy Alpine nation.

Adopting the initiative “is urgent to protect our unique landscape, our high quality of life, our above-average prosperity and for a secure, free future for us and our children”.

Once petition signatures are verified, it generally takes months, or even years, before a vote takes place. The permanent population at the end of 2022 was 8.82 million, up from 8.54 million at the end of 2018.

Foreigners make up a quarter of the population.

The initiative proposes to modify the Swiss constitution, stipulating that “the permanent resident population of Switzerland must not exceed 10 million people before the year 2050”.

The permanent resident population would include Swiss nationals living in the country and foreigners with either a residence permit valid for at least one year, or staying in the country for at least 12 months.

If it exceeds 9.5 million before 2050, the government and parliament “will take measures, in particular regarding asylum and family reunification, with a view to ensuring compliance”.

If these measures are not enough, Switzerland would ultimately have to terminate the agreement on the free movement of people with the EU.

Switzerland is not in the European Union but has been part of the EU’s Schengen open-borders area since 2008. The move comes in the midst of negotiations for a rapprochement between Switzerland and the EU.

The SVP said the initiative was “the answer to immigration-related problems in Switzerland”, citing housing shortages, rising rents, traffic jams, overcrowded public transport, falling school standards, violence and crime, electricity shortages, stagnant per capita income, higher health insurance premiums and “increasing pressure on our beautiful countryside”.

The SVP, which comfortably topped the Swiss general election in October, has come a long way from its roots as a farmers’ party in the German-speaking part of Switzerland.

— AFP

Writing a new handbook for getting rich



Patricia Cohen

The author is global economics correspondent for The New York Times

For more than half a century, the handbook for how developing countries can grow rich hasn’t changed much: Move subsistence farmers into manufacturing jobs, and then sell what they produce to the rest of the world.

The recipe — customised in varying ways by Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and China — has produced the most potent engine the world has ever known for generating economic growth. It has helped lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, create jobs and raise standards of living.

The Asian Tigers and China succeeded by combining vast pools of cheap labour with access to international know-how and financing, and buyers that reached from Kalamazoo to Kuala Lumpur. Governments provided the scaffolding: They built up roads and schools, offered business-friendly rules and incentives, developed capable administrative institutions and nurtured incipient industries.

But technology is advancing, supply chains are shifting and political tensions are reshaping trade patterns. And with that, doubts are growing about whether industrialisation can still deliver the miracle growth it once did. For developing countries, which contain 85 per cent of the globe’s population — 6.8 billion people — the implications are profound.

Today, manufacturing accounts for a smaller share of the world’s output, and China already does more than one-third of it. At the same time, more emerging countries are selling inexpensive goods abroad, increasing competition. There are not as many gains to be squeezed out: Not everyone can be a net exporter or offer the world’s lowest wages and overhead.

There are doubts that industrialisation can create the game-changing benefits it did in the past. Factories today tend to rely more on automated technology and less on cheap workers who have little training.

“You cannot generate enough jobs for the vast majority of workers who are not very educated,” said Dani Rodrik, a leading development economist at Harvard University.

The process can be seen in



Garment factory workers after their shift in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The country built its success on turning farmers into textile workers. – The New York Times

Bangladesh, which the World Bank’s managing director called “one of the world’s greatest development stories”

THERE ARE DOUBTS THAT INDUSTRIALISATION CAN CREATE THE GAME-CHANGING BENEFITS IT DID IN THE PAST. FACTORIES TODAY TEND TO RELY MORE ON AUTOMATED TECHNOLOGY AND LESS ON CHEAP WORKERS WHO HAVE LITTLE TRAINING.

last year. The country built its success on turning farmers into textile workers.

Last year, though, Rubana Huq, chair of Mohammadi Group, a family-owned conglomerate, replaced 3,000 employees with automated Jacquard machines to do complex weaving patterns.

The women found similar jobs elsewhere in the company. “But what follows when this happens on a large scale?” asked Huq, who is also president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

These workers don’t have training, she said. “They’re not going to turn into coders overnight.” Recent global developments have accelerated the transition.

Supply chain meltdowns related to the Covid-19 pandemic and to

sanctions prompted by Russia’s attack of Ukraine drove up the price of essentials such as food and fuel, biting into incomes.

High interest rates, imposed by central banks to quell inflation, set off another series of crises: Developing nations’ debts ballooned, and investment capital dried up.

Last week, the International Monetary Fund warned of the noxious combination of lower growth and higher debt.

The supercharged globalisation that had encouraged companies to buy and sell in every spot around the planet has also been shifting.

Rising political tensions, especially between China and the United States, are affecting where businesses and governments invest and trade.

Companies want supply chains to be secure as well as cheap, and they are looking at neighbours or political allies to provide them.

In this new era, Rodrik said, “the industrialisation model — which practically every country that has become rich has relied on — is no longer capable of generating rapid and sustained economic growth.” Nor is it clear what might replace it.

One alternative might be found in Bengaluru, a high-tech centre in the Indian state of Karnataka.

Multinationals like Goldman Sachs, Victoria’s Secret and the Economist magazine have flocked to the city and set up hundreds of operational hubs — known as global capability centres — to handle accounting, design products, develop cybersecurity systems and artificial intelligence and more. — NYT

Is exercise for aging people unsafe and risky

As a professional who has spent more than three decades in physical education, I know exercise is vital to fitness and wellness. It is important to exercise as it is the surest form to lead a long life.

The programme should include safe exercises that affect mobility, balance, sound sleep, mental health, strength, and stress reduction.

Exercise programmes differ by age and are planned and beneficial for older adults. The correctly performed exercise will undoubtedly lead to a healthy life.

I strongly disagree with the argument that exercise for aging people is unsafe and risky and should be avoided as much as possible.

There is no need for older adults to shy away from any specific movements. Regular physical activity is important for maintaining good health, regardless of age.

The workout programme/ exercises for one should depend on the present fitness level and any medical/health issues. It's never too late to begin a righteous schedule.

There can be various physiological changes depending on the age of the body. Mainly in older people's bodies, it is seen that they lose muscle mass, making their weight training exercises a bit difficult, which requires a certain amount of strength.

The body partially becomes less efficient in maintaining balance with a gradual shortage of



Ishwar Deshmukh

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IT'S ESSENTIAL TO MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH AS ONE AGES, BUT IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO AVOID OVEREXERTION

endurance, resulting in overall performance.

One also has to ensure that it reduces the risk of injury and enhances the overall quality of life. You may experience aches and agony initially for a few days.

Be mentally strong and confident, and don't let this discontinue from your exercise programme.

The few suggestive, enjoyable, and helpful exercises that can be included in the routine for older adults are: Stretching and balancing exercises; emphasising minimal-impact activities; as per the restrictions, focus on simple strengthening exercises to build your quadriceps, gluteals, abs, and biceps muscles; moderate exercises like brisk walking, jogging and cycling; mild cardio exercises; and yoga and meditation.

It's essential to maintain good health as one ages, but it is also important to avoid overexertion.

Apart from physical activity, a healthy diet and staying hydrated with a balanced diet not only help maintain good health but also boost an adult's exercise.

Exercise is beneficial at any age. It allows one to stay active and independent and lead a delightful life.

In conclusion, I would suggest having a word with/ consult with your doctor before you start any exercise programme of your choice and interest.

Lastly, I would like to quote- "Age is no barrier - it is a limitation you put on your mind."

TEEN HERO WITH MOTHER!



Artem Donskov, a 14-year-old schoolboy, who worked as a cloakroom attendant at the Crocus City Hall and saved dozens of people by showing them emergency exits during an attack by gunmen on the concert venue, poses for a picture with his mother Alexandra in Krasnogorsk in the Moscow Region, Russia, on Wednesday. – Reuters

Why have inflation forecasts been so wrong?

Last year, following the Great Inflation of 2021-22, central banks, leading academics, and international institutions issued a smattering of post-mortems. Yet even before the ink was dry on their analyses, inflation forecasts were being revised down almost as fast as they had been revised up during the two preceding years.

For example, in June 2023, the US Federal Reserve's median projection for core year-on-year personal-consumption-expenditures inflation (excluding food and energy prices) in the fourth quarter was 3.9 per cent, with the Federal Open Market Committee's projections ranging from 3.6 per cent to 4.5 per cent. In the event, it was 3.2 per cent.

Before addressing what forecasters are missing, two clarifications are in order. First, central banks' inflation forecasts are no worse, and may be somewhat better, than private-sector forecasts, on average – which is what one would expect, given that they tend to have better access to data and more expertise. Second, inflation forecasts have not obviously gotten worse. Yes, the International Monetary Fund, among others, has noted that inflation forecast errors were 2.5 and five times larger for 2021 and 2022, respectively, than the average for 2010-19. But the levels of annual inflation in 2021 and 2022 were 1.3 and 2.5 times larger than the 2010-19 average, and the changes in annual inflation rates were 2.6 and 7.1 times larger.

The benign interpretation is that the shocks got bigger, not that inflation forecasting became less competent. But an obvious rejoinder is that forecasts don't particularly matter when the variable being forecast doesn't change



Willem H. Buiter

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Ebrahim Rahbari

The writer is an independent strategist and economist, is a former chief currency strategist, global head of foreign-exchange analysis, and head of global macroeconomics at Citigroup

much. We still need to know why forecasts continue to miss the mark. Two factors are now well-documented. First, forecasts underestimated the demand impact of massive monetary and fiscal easing, alongside high spending multipliers associated with significant pandemic-related transfers to households. Second, major demand stimulus hit just as supply chains were under major, unexpected strain, owing first to the pandemic and then to Russia's war on Ukraine. Shocks are by definition difficult to predict, and they were particularly large in 2020-22. But the forecasts also had a more fundamental flaw: they lacked realistic representations of price and wage setting. Large shocks differ from small shocks in that they change key features of the transmission mechanism. For example, firms tend to change prices more frequently when faced with large shocks. According to the Fed, during the second half of 2021 and again during the second half of 2022, firms updated prices twice as often as they did before the pandemic.

Large shocks may well have been the reason. But firms also find it more straightforward to raise prices when others are already doing so, and the combined pandemic and energy shocks probably were an effective coordination device for price increases. Wage setting is different from price setting. According to a 2009 European Central Bank study, firms tend to change wages about one-third less frequently than prices. Wage growth did pick up throughout

2021-22 as workers quit at record rates (a trend that closely tracked wage pressure). But the models underestimated how long it would take for tight labour markets and large price increases to feed into wage setting. Those delays prolonged the underlying inflationary impulse without necessarily magnifying it in a cumulative sense. Importantly, many of the factors that pushed up prices were "one-off" adjustments in response to supply and demand shocks. They called for more significant relative price changes than would have been the case if there had been a shock to trend inflation driven by persistently excessive aggregate demand. This was most evident in the major energy-price shock in 2022. It was exactly that: a relative price shock that partly reversed in 2023. Similar dynamics played out in the prices of goods that were closely tied to energy prices or were immediately affected



The IMF has noted that inflation forecast errors were 2.5 and five times larger for 2021 and 2022 respectively.

by major supply-chain strains. These, too, reversed – as we saw with car prices and container freight rates. There is a vibrant debate about whether firms abnormally raised their profit margins in recent years. A recent Fed study finds that non-financial corporate profits rose to 19 per cent over gross value-added in the second quarter of 2021, up from 13 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2019. But once prices have risen and profit margins are high, they are less – not more – likely to rise further than before the large price adjustments. Normalising energy prices, supply chains, and profit margins all contributed to the faster-than-expected decline in inflation in the second half of 2023. The Great Inflation will be as transformational for central banks' models as the 2008 financial crisis was. Back then, the models were adapted to include a more realistic mapping of financial impacts. Now, we need a more

realistic treatment of price and wage setting. Specifically, three changes are in order. Most importantly, understanding inflation requires analysis at the sectoral or sub-sectoral level, ideally in a way that also reflects supply-chain linkages. This will make forecasts even more complex, but there is no way around it. Considering disaggregated data is essential to identifying, and disentangling, the relevant changes in supply and demand and their persistence. Individual sectors sometimes significantly affect aggregate inflation, with house prices in the US being a prominent example.

Second, forecasts should account for the level (or size) of shocks to capture non-linearities, especially for profit mark-ups. And lastly, forecasts should regularly re-examine changes in circumstances and assumptions. During the Great Inflation, important changes in the US included the major boost to aggregate demand (from monetised fiscal transfers to households); the higher frequency of price adjustments, given the size of the combined supply and demand shock; and the high number of recently refinanced mortgages that locked in low rates.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell, paraphrasing Winston Churchill, recently called forecasters "a humble lot – with much to be humble about." Though they will have learned many useful lessons from the Great Inflation of 2021-22, remaining humble may be the best way to avoid being humbled again.

sport



OMAN’S AHMAD AL HARTHY
POISED FOR FIRST GTWCE
CAMPAIGN WITH BMW

PAUL RICARD IN FRANCE TO
HOST OPENING ROUND OF
ENDURANCE CUP SEASON

DOUBLE PRO-AM CHAMP
AL HARTHY RELISHING NEW
BRONZE CLASS CHALLENGE

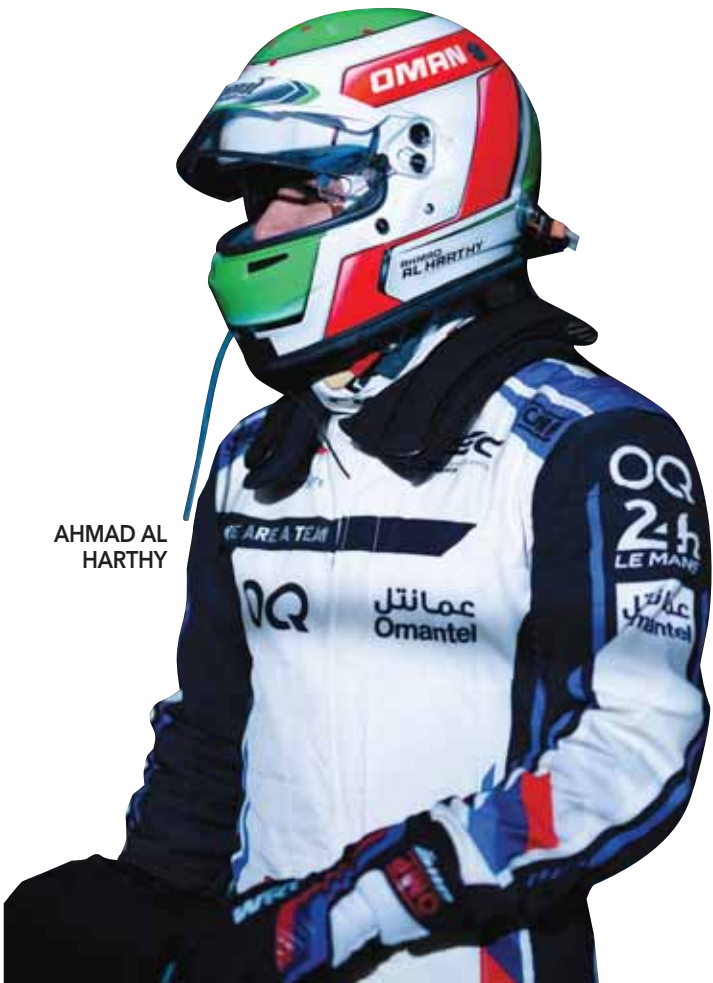
JENS KLINGMANN AND SAM
DE HAAN COMPLETE OQ BY
OMAN RACING ENTRY

OMAN RACING READY FOR ‘BRONZE’ CLASS BID IN PAUL RICARD

PARIS: Two-time Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup Pro-Am Champion Ahmad al Harthy begins his bid for the new ‘Bronze’ class title at Paul Ricard in France this weekend, April 6/7, during the opening three-hour race of the 2024 season.

Marking the Omani’s first GTWCE campaign with BMW and crack outfit Team WRT, Al Harthy is joined in the striking new orange, black and white No 30 BMW M4 GT3 by British racer Sam De Haan and BMW factory racer Jens Klingmann.

Following a positive two-day prologue test at the Le Castellet track near Marseille in early March with the BMW M4, Al Harthy and the newly branded OQ by Oman Racing squad heads into this week’s activity at Paul Ricard focused on a strong and competitive beginning to the season.



Of course, it’s only four weeks since the Omani sportsman got his dovetailed campaign in the FIA World Endurance Championship underway in Qatar, achieving a well-deserved fourth place LMGT3 class finish with team-mates Maxime Martin and Valentino Rossi.

Key support for the Omani sportsman’s five-round campaign, which will reach its conclusion in Saudi Arabia in late November, comes from prestigious partners OQ, Oman Ministry of Culture Sports and Youth, Omantel and BMW Oman.

Al Harthy’s Pro-Am titles in the Endurance Cup came in 2017 and 2019 and he is determined to mount a similarly strong bid for glory in the new Bronze class.

AHMAD AL HARTHY
“We’re all very excited to get our GTWCE season underway this weekend. It’s a huge year for me, and my incredible partners, with the

dual programme in FIA WEC and the GT World Challenge. So, after a good start to WEC in Qatar, I’m determined to get the new GTWCE season off to the best possible start in France.

“The new BMW M4 GT3 is a fantastic car, it’s great to drive and the guys at Team WRT are already doing a fantastic job for OQ by Oman Racing. Obviously, I’ve raced alongside Sam [De Haan] before and we work very well together. Jens [Klingsmann] is a BMW factory driver so we definitely have a strong and very capable line-up. We know the competition is incredibly high so consistency is vital.”

Al Harthy’s first track action at Paul Ricard will come during the Bronze Test on April 5, ahead of a two-hour Free Practice and one hour Pre-Qualifying session on April 6. On Sunday, April 7, final qualifying will get underway at 09.45 local time with the race following at 15.00 local time.

Kuwait city to host Gulf Cup from Dec 21

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 3

The Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF) announced on Tuesday the new dates of the 26th edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup from December 21, 2024 to January 3, 2025 in Kuwait instead of the previous dates which were during December 13 to 26, 2024.

It will be the fifth time for Kuwait to host the Gulf Cup after they had hosted the last one in 2017 besides the editions of 1972, 1990 and 2003.

Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia hosted the event for four times while the Sultanate of Oman and UAE had hosted the Gulf Cup for three times.

Oman national football team, the runners-up of the last edition in Iraq, will attend in the forthcoming Arabian Gulf Cup in Kuwait in 2024 for the 24th time.

Oman had attended all the Gulf tournaments in Kuwait



Action during Oman-Iraq final in the last edition of Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra.

and the 23rd edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup in Kuwait in 2017 was the special one as the Red Warriors were crowned champions following their triumph over United Arab Emirates in the final on penalty shoot-out after a goalless draw

in the regular time. Oman under new coaching staff headed by the Czech coach Jaroslav Silhavy will eye for the third title in Kuwait after they won two titles in 2009 (in Oman) and 2017 in (Kuwait).

On the other side, a team from AGCFF visited different venues in Kuwait recently to ensure the readiness of the hosts ahead of hosting the event.

The inspection team visited all the venues including Ali Sabah Al Salim in Al Nasr club and Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium. It is expected both the venues will be the main venues during the tournament.

The inspection team also visited the available training areas and the facilities in all the venues including Mix Zone, Media area and VIP seating.

The recommendations by the team were addressed to the organising committee in Kuwait to work on improving the facilities ahead of hosting the event.



OJA's sports media committee holds meeting.

SPORTS MEDIA PANEL FORMS SUB TEAMS AFTER RELAUNCH

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 3

Oman’s sports media committee, belonging to Oman Journalists Association (OJA), formed sub teams in their first meeting in 2024 recently after re-establishment of the committee. Salim bin Hamed al Jahwari was elected as chairman of the committee while Salim bin Saleem al Habsi as vice-chairman and Bashir al Riyami as secretary of the committee.

During the opening meeting of the committee, the chairman and members

agreed on forming three sub-teams including: Sports Activities team headed by Fadhil al Mazroui and Ibrahim al Falahi as assistant. Media publication team headed by Hamed al Riyami and Adil al Balushi as his assistant. Marketing team chaired by Salim al Habsi and assisted by Ahmed al Kaabi.

It is expected that during the coming days, the committee will hold its second meeting to approve 2024/2025 calendar which will feature several activities and programmes at the internal and external levels. The formed sub teams will work to cover all the planned events and involve all the relevant people to the sports media. Moreover, the teams will ensure covering and highlighting all the events in the visual, audio and print media entities.

BOWLING ROCKETS: Yadav hits 156.7 km/h in LSG victory

BENGALURU: Speedster Mayank Yadav bowled the quickest ball of the new IPL season at 156.7 km/h (97.4 mph) in a fiery spell to power Lucknow Super Giants to a 28-run win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Tuesday.

Lucknow rode Quinton de Kock's 56-ball 81 and an unbeaten 40 by Nicholas Pooran to post 181-5 at Bengaluru's M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

New pace sensation Yadav then turned up the heat with his thunderbolts to return figures of 3-14, which included removing Glenn Maxwell for a duck and bowling Cameron Green for nine.

"Glad to have him in our team," De Kock said of Lucknow's pace ace.

"He is bowling rockets at the moment. He is keeping things simple. Youngsters bowling express pace can get caught up trying different things."

Bengaluru were bowled out for 153 and suffered their third loss in four matches this season. Lucknow won their second straight match after an opening defeat.

The 21-year-old Yadav surpassed his previous top speed, having sent down a ball at 155.8 km/h on his IPL debut in Lucknow's first win of the season on Saturday.

Shaun Tait bowled the IPL's fastest ever ball in 2011 at 157.71 km/h.



Mayank Yadav of Lucknow Super Giants celebrate a wicket against Bengaluru.

Delhi-born Yadav went to Lucknow for \$24,000 ahead of the 2023 edition but was ruled out by an injury that cost him the entire season.

He has set the tournament alight in his first two matches and ultimately dreams of representing his country.

"I feel very good, winning two player of the match awards, but I am happier that we won both the matches," he said. "My aim is to play for India as much as possible. So I feel this is just the start and my main goal is what I am focused on."

Bengaluru lost the wickets of Virat Kohli, skipper Faf du Plessis and Maxwell in the space of nine deliveries and three runs. Left-arm spinner Manimaran Siddharth, who came in as impact substitute in place of De Kock, got Kohli as his debut wicket as the star batsman miscued a shot to backward point and walked back after his 22 off 16 balls.

Du Plessis was run out in the next over off a direct throw and three balls later Yadav had Maxwell out caught at mid-on with his searing pace. Despite cameos from Rajat Patidar, who made 29, and Mahipal Lomror, who hit 33 off 13, the chase ended tamely.

De Kock set up the win with an attacking knock at the top featuring eight fours and five sixes, and put on a 56-run stand with Marcus Stoinis, who hit a 15-ball 24. — AFP

ISC to hold Ramadhan box cricket tourney

MUSCAT: The Indian Social Club Oman will be organising a Ramadan Box Cricket tournament for its members on April 5 at Oasis Cricket Academy in Ghala.

This tournament consists of 16 teams and will be played on a knockout basis. The participating teams are Hindi Wing, Goan Wing, Kerala Wing, Kachcci Wing, Malabar Wing, Uttranchal Wing, Sanskrit Wing, Bengali Wing, Bohra Wing, Tamil Wing, Deccani Wing, ISC parent body team, two teams from Gujarati Wing and Karnataka Wing. The main sponsor for the tournament is National Metalcans and supported by Oasis Water and Supa Sports.

Sanjit Kanojia, Sports Secretary of ISC, added that this tournament is a family tournament where each team will have one lady and one child player. "I am excited for the tournament as this will be first time ISC will be conducting Family Box Cricket and I am looking forward to see a huge crowd where most of the families will come and support their team and enjoy the evening," he added.



Ominvest successfully concludes second edition of football tournament

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to fostering community engagement and encouraging Omani young talents to improve their skills through sports, Oman International Development and Investment Company 'Ominvest' successfully organised the second edition of the Ominvest Football Championship.

The Ominvest Football Championship is designed to foster a culture of active participation and cooperation among employees across the Group's companies.

The tournament featured 10 teams, divided into two groups. The first group features sports teams from Thawani Pay, Alizz Islamic Bank, National Finance (A), Liva Insurance, and NSSG.

The second group included Ominvest, Takaful Oman, Oman Arab Bank, Liva Insurance (A), and National Finance (B). Kicked off on March 17, the championship saw the top two teams from each group advance to the semifinals. With anticipation running high, the semifinal matches showcased thrilling competition as the four teams competed for a spot in the final showdown.

Graced by Abdulaziz al Balushi, Group CEO, and attended by a number of executives and employees from the Group, the curtains drew to a close on Monday, April 1, marking the conclusion of the Ominvest Football Championship amidst a large audience at Al Amal Club.

Last year's winning team, Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, was engaged in an exhibition match against the National Football Team Stars,

adding thrilling vibes to the closing ceremony of this year's championship.

In the final, the Oman Arab Bank team faced off against Liva Insurance (A). After a thrilling encounter, the Oman Arab Bank team won 3-2 on a penalty shoot-out after normal time ended in a draw of 2-2. As a result, Oman Arab Bank were crowned champions, while Liva Insurance (A) finished as runners-up.

The final match was filled with excitement as teams competed for victory, drawing enthusiastic crowds who passionately supported their favourites. The Ominvest Football Championship matches are known for their suspense and thrill and this year was no exception.

In response to the event, Waleed al Yarubi stated, "We would like to congratulate the winning team and wish all participating teams the best in future tournaments. We are also grateful to all participants for their contributions to making

this event successful. Our main goal for organising these activities is to promote sports and employee engagement and we are confident that they will foster a stronger sense of unity and collaboration across the Ominvest Group companies."

"Organising the second edition of the Ominvest Football Championship is a true testament to our contribution to societal well-being. This tournament aims to enhance communication and collaboration among participants from Ominvest Group, aligning with our core values of fostering collaboration and teamwork among employees. Ominvest organised a similar event last year which was well-received by the community and garnered immense praise. Hence, we have launched the second edition of the tournament as part of our dedication to promoting interest in sports and physical activity, essential for bolstering employee performance and productivity," he added.



Oman Arab Bank were crowned champions in Ominvest tournament.

Sri Lanka sweep Bangladesh Test series



Sri Lanka players pose with the series trophy after winning the second and last Test against Bangladesh in Chittagong. — AFP

CHITTAGONG: Lahiru Kumara finished with 4-50 to help Sri Lanka thump Bangladesh by 192 runs in the second Test and sweep the two-match series 2-0 on Wednesday.

The fast bowler dismissed last man Khaled Ahmed to wrap up a one-sided contest before lunch on the fifth day in Chittagong.

Hosts Bangladesh, chasing a mammoth 511 in their second innings, added just 50 after resuming on 268-7.

Mehidy Hasan Miraz staged a lone fight to stay unbeaten on 81 after completing his sixth Test half-century. With a Sri Lankan triumph all but inevitable when the day began, Mehidy played some positive strokes to bring up his fifty off 68 balls.

He lost overnight partner Taijul Islam for 14 when the batsman drove off-spinner Kamindu Mendis to Nishan Madushka at gully.

Kamindu finished with 3-32 to go with his unbeaten 92 with the

bat in the first innings, earning him the man of the match award.

He was also named player of the series after scoring a hundred in both innings of the first Test.

"The bowlers did their basics on this wicket and the batters did their job as well," Sri Lankan captain Dhananjaya de Silva said.

"The batters were a bit disappointed about not getting runs in the first Test, but we have experienced players. I was confident they would get runs," he



Sri Lanka's Lahiru Kumara celebrates Mahmudul Hasan Joy's wicket.

added.

"There wasn't a lot of spin on offer. So I thought about reverse swing as a way to get wickets. The pacers were really on the spot."

Sri Lankan pacers accounted for 33 of the 40 Bangladesh wickets to fall, a rare feat on Bangladesh's generally spin-friendly pitches.

Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said the home side's poor showing for the red-ball series would provoke some soul-searching.

"If you look at our batting, everyone got set but didn't get a big score. That's something to think about," he said. "If you get set, you have to make a score. We have to play more first-class cricket."

Sri Lanka won the first Test in Sylhet by 328 runs.

Bangladesh will host Zimbabwe for five T20s in May in their next international engagement, ahead of the T20 World Cup starting in June. — AFP

TOTTENHAM HELD BY WEST HAM, EVERTON HIT BACK AT NEWCASTLE

FOREST PULL THREE POINTS CLEAR
OF RELEGATION ZONE WITH A
FIRST-HALF BLITZ OF FULHAM

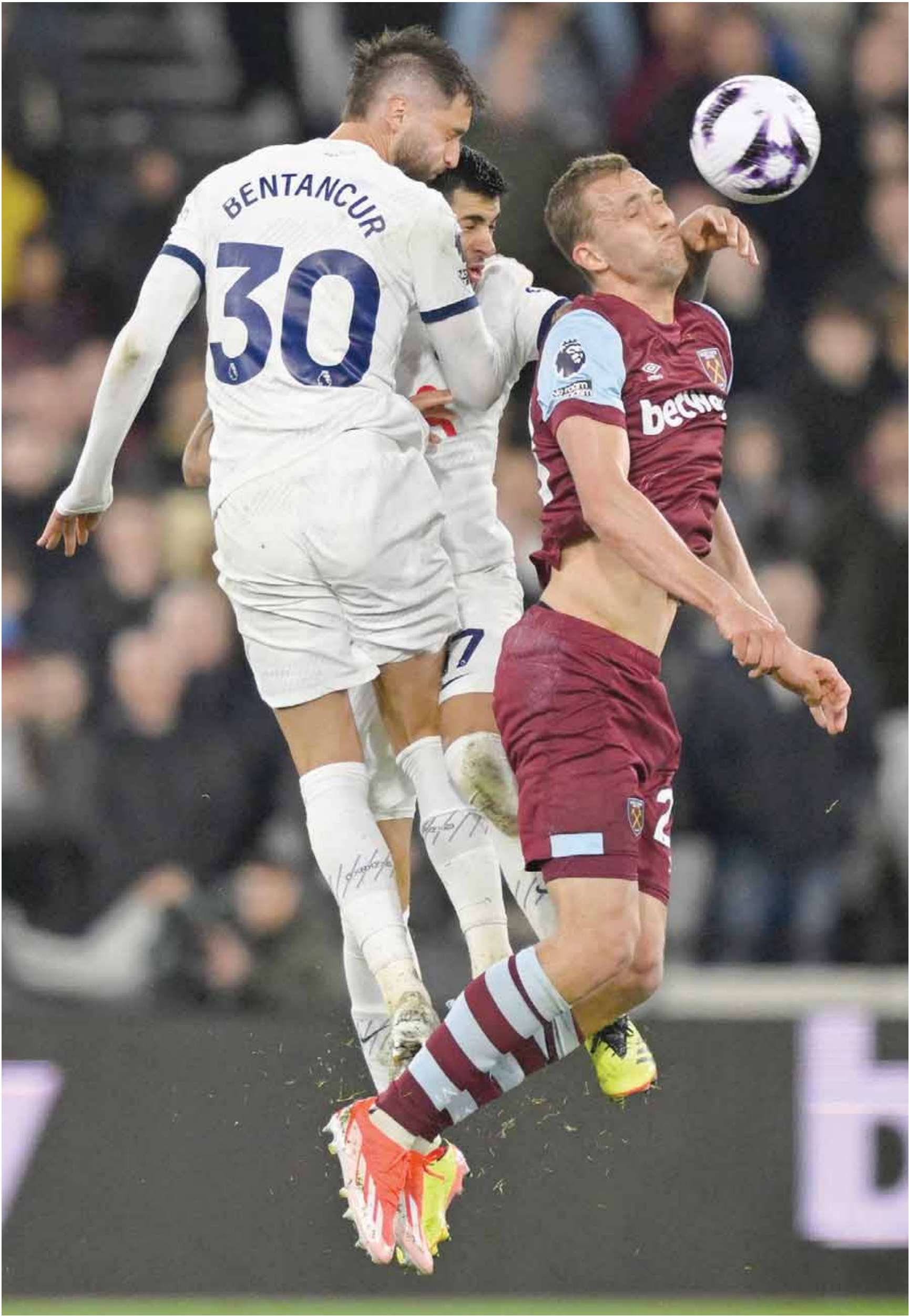
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE TABLE AFTER
TUESDAY'S MATCHES (PLAYED, WON,
DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS
AGAINST, POINTS):

Liverpool	29	20	7	2	67	27	67
Arsenal	29	20	5	4	70	24	65
Man City	29	19	7	3	63	28	64
Aston Villa	30	18	5	7	62	42	59
Tottenham	30	17	6	7	62	44	57
Man Utd	29	15	3	11	40	40	48
West Ham	31	12	9	10	50	55	45
Newcastle	30	13	5	12	64	52	44
Brighton	29	11	9	9	51	46	42
Wolves	30	12	6	12	43	47	42
Bournemouth	30	11	8	11	44	53	41
Chelsea	28	11	7	10	49	47	40
Fulham	31	11	6	14	47	50	39
Crystal Palace	30	7	9	14	34	50	30
Brentford	30	7	6	17	42	55	27
Everton	30	8	8	14	31	42	26
Nottm Forest	31	7	8	16	39	53	25
Luton	30	5	7	18	43	62	22
Burnley	31	4	7	20	32	66	19
Sheff Utd	29	3	6	20	27	77	15

NOTE: Top four teams qualify for the Champions
League; fifth-placed team enters Europa League.
Bottom three relegated
■ Everton deducted six points for breaching profit and
sustainability rules (PSR)
■ Nottingham Forest deducted four points for
breaching PSR

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS
On Tuesday
Bournemouth 1 (Kluivert 79) Crystal Palace 0
Burnley 1 (Bruun Larsen 37) Wolves 1 (Ait Nouri 45+3)
Newcastle 1 (Isak 15) Everton 1 (Calvert-Lewin 88-pen)
Nottingham Forest 3 (Hudson-Odoi 9, Wood 19, Gibbs-
White 45+3) Fulham 1 (Adarabioyo 49)
West Ham 1 (Souma 19) Tottenham 1 (Johnson 5)

Tottenham Hotspur's
Rodrigo Bentancur
in action with West
Ham United's Tomas
Soucek. — Reuters



LONDON: Tottenham missed the chance to move into the Premier League's top four after a 1-1 draw at West Ham, while Newcastle were also held 1-1 by Everton on Tuesday.

Spurs have made a habit of recovering from slow starts to win in recent months, but this time they failed to capitalise on scoring after just five minutes. Brennan Johnson was left with the simple task of tapping into an empty net from Timo Werner's cross.

West Ham were under pressure to respond after collapsing from 3-1 up to lose 4-3 at Newcastle on Saturday.

The Hammers were quickly level as Jarrod Bowen's corner flew in off the back of Kurt Zouma.

A draw kept West Ham one point ahead of Newcastle in seventh, but they missed the best chance to take all three points when Michail Antonio fired straight at Guglielmo Vicario.

Tottenham close to within two points of Aston Villa in fourth and extend their lead over sixth-placed Manchester United to nine points.

"Disappointed not to get a



Everton's Dominic Calvert-Lewin scores their first goal from the penalty spot. — Reuters

better outcome, but a tough game," said Spurs boss Ange Postecoglou. "There's a lot of games to go still. I will be very surprised if all games aren't tight. Everyone is fighting for something. We have to maintain our levels."

EVERTON'S UNWANTED RECORD
Injury-hit Newcastle's hopes of European football next season were dented by Dominic Calvert-

Lewin's late equaliser for Everton from the penalty spot.
Alexander Isak netted for the fifth consecutive game at St James' Park to open the scoring.
The Swede took his tally for the season to 19 as he cut inside Jarrad Branthwaite and slotted into the far corner on 15 minutes.
"Alexander Isak is an outstanding technician," said Newcastle manager Eddie Howe. "He looks like he will score in



Nottingham Forest's Morgan Gibbs-White celebrates scoring their third goal with team-mates. — Reuters

every game at the moment." How Sean Dyche longs for a striker of Isak's quality. But Calvert-Lewin ended a near six-month goal drought from the spot after Ashley Young was hauled down inside the box by Paul Dummett.
Everton set a new club record winless run of 13 Premier League games to leave their 70-year stay in the top flight still at risk.
The Toffees edge four points

above the relegation zone but have the threat of a second points deduction for breaches of financial rules hanging over them.

FOREST BLITZ
Nottingham Forest pulled three points clear of the relegation zone with a first-half blitz of Fulham to win 3-1.
The home side sped out of the blocks at the City Ground as Callum Hudson-Odoi and Chris

Wood smashed home inside the first 19 minutes.
Fulham boss Marco Silva showed his disgust by making a triple substitution after just half an hour. However, even that did not halt Forest's momentum as Morgan Gibbs-White made it 3-0 in first-half stoppage time.
"It's important but it can not distract us because we have a long way to go," said Forest boss Nuno Espirito Santo. "We've had good performances before and not been able to sustain them so let's take that into this game and try to sustain the performance."
Fulham pulled one back through Tosin Adarabioyo in the second half but it was too little, too late for the Cottagers.
Second-bottom Burnley are now unbeaten in four but slip six points adrift of safety after a 1-1 draw at home to Wolves. Jacob Bruun Larsen put the Clarets in front, but Rayan Ait-Nouri's header secured Wolves a point.
Bournemouth climbed above Chelsea into 11th thanks to Justin Kluivert's winner as they beat Crystal Palace 1-0. — AFP

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Port of Duqm expands infrastructure, focuses on green initiatives



In 2023, the Port of Duqm witnessed a flurry of developments, with a notable \$12.2 billion investment.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, APRIL 3

The Port of Duqm in Oman is making significant strides in expanding its infrastructure and embracing green initiatives to meet the evolving demands of the global energy markets.

Reggy Vermeulen, Port of Duqm CEO, shed light on the port's outlook for investments in port development amidst current global market challenges.

Vermeulen, in an interview with Gulf Intelligence, highlighted the increasing investments in port infrastructure across the Middle East, citing projects in the UAE, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and specifically the Duqm project.

Positioned at an intersection between the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, the port faces challenges posed by geopolitical instability affecting trade flows.

However, Vermeulen affirmed the port's proactive approach in collaborating with major players to ensure resilient and efficient trade routes.

Regarding infrastructure expansion plans for 2024, Vermeulen emphasises the dual approach of optimising existing infrastructure while developing new facilities to cater to future projects. The focus is on increasing capacity and enhancing logistical capabilities to serve a wider range of destinations.

Moreover, with the rise of alternative and cleaner energy sources, the port is actively engaging in generating green hydrogen and attracting green steel industries for sustainable development.

Looking ahead, the Port of Duqm aims to continue serving markets in Africa, South Asia, and beyond, leveraging its strategic location in the Indian Ocean region.

Vermeulen underlined the port's potential as a key



Reggy Vermeulen
Port of Duqm CEO

hub in facilitating trade and manufacturing activities between regions, including the Middle East, India, Africa, and the United States.

The port's role as a stable political area for logistics and manufacturing is crucial in supporting the growing demand for trade in these regions, he said.

Furthermore, Oman's free trade agreement with the US positions the Port of Duqm as a bridge between different continents, offering opportunities for leveraging raw materials from the region for manufacturing and exporting to promising markets like the US.

The port's vision, Vermeulen said, aligns with the projected growth in trade and economic activities in regions like Africa and South Asia, emphasising the need for strategic hubs like Duqm to support these developments.

In 2023, the Port of Duqm witnessed a flurry of developments, with a notable \$12.2 billion investment ushering in a new era of growth and expansion.

A total of 933 vessel calls were recorded, with the Port of Duqm Container Terminal (PODC) handling 81% (756 calls) and the ASYAD Drydock Complex (ADC) accounting for the remaining 19% (177 calls).

This bustling maritime activity facilitated the flow of 7.55 million tonnes of cargo through the port's diverse terminals. The

Port achieved an impressive Omanisation rate of 82%, with 16% representing women in the workforce.

The year saw 272 cargo vessel calls encompassing a wide range of categories, including liquid bulk, naval, container, break bulk, and dry bulk shipments.

Additionally, several strategic agreements were inked to bolster the port's operations and attract key players in the industry.

Key agreements signed in 2023 included the novation of the UK Service Agreement to Emdad in January, signalling a new era of collaboration. The port solidified its partnership with DEME by signing an agreement for a storage hub, enhancing logistical capabilities.

Furthermore, agreements with prestigious entities like Mitsui Kobe, Al Ahli Bank, and Vale were instrumental in paving the way for strategic alliances and fundraising initiatives.

In April, the port inked a significant deal with Mitsui Kobe for land reservation, laying the groundwork for future projects.

Subsequent agreements with Al Ahli Bank for fundraising, Vale for land reservation, and Vulcan Green Steel for a license to occupy highlighted the port's commitment to sustainable and innovative practices.

The signing of a BOOT (Build, Own, Operate, Transfer) and sub-usufruct agreement with Vulcan Green Steel in October underscored the port's dedication to fostering long-term partnerships.

Moreover, the port ventured into the realm of decarbonisation by signing agreements with industry giants such as Shell and OPAZ. These collaborations aimed at reducing carbon emissions and exploring sustainable energy solutions align with the port's vision for a greener and more environmentally conscious future.

OQ Group 2023 net profits amount to RO 970 million

MUSCAT: OQ, the global energy group, reported revenues of RO 13.7 billion in 2023. Financially, the group generated profits of RO 1.975 billion before deductions and RO 970 million as net profits.

The stellar performance was fuelled by operational excellence in exploration, production, and industrial sectors, coupled with cost efficiency efforts and divestment gains.

This achievement aligns with Omani directives to boost financial and operational efficiencies. Looking ahead, OQ aims to enhance financial and operational performance, control costs, improve business



aspects, and boost competitive capabilities while transitioning towards carbon reduction and renewable energy investments.

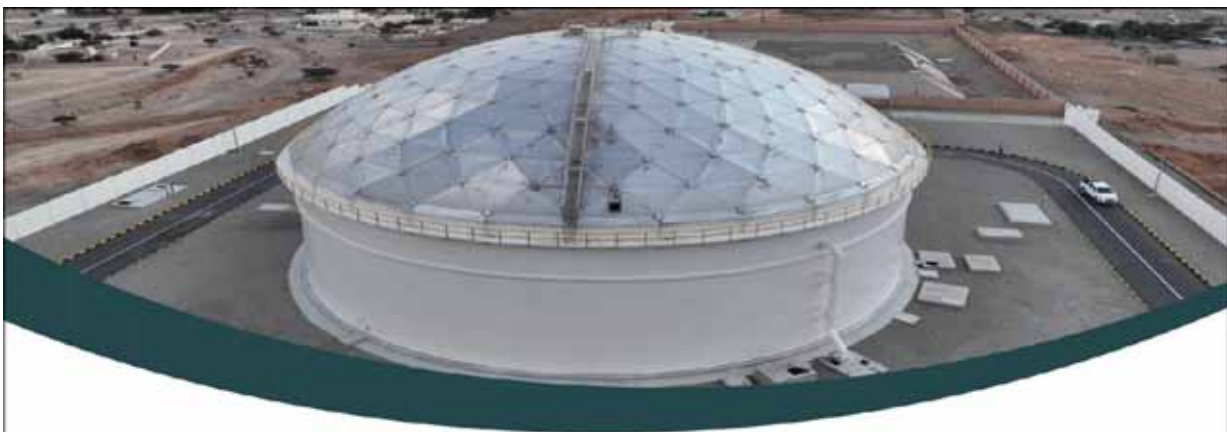
In 2023, OQ's total oil production hit 246,000 barrels per day, processing 81 million barrels.

The group's focus on human resources resulted in an Omanisation rate of 83% and

training programs for hundreds of employees to empower Omani youth.

Highlighting social responsibility, OQ invested RO 4.4 million in 2023 across social, environmental, economic, and health sectors. Notably, 46 million work hours were incident-free, showcasing adherence to safety standards.

Emphasising local value addition, OQ allocated RO 408 million locally, reflecting 77% of total purchases. SMEs received RO 95 million (18% of expenditure), reinforcing OQ's commitment to the local economy and national development. — **ONA**



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) hereby announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Description	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2603962/2024	Transporting of (45 m3 - 273 m3) daily of potable water from Wadi Gul Tanker Filling Stations in Al Hamra Willayat and Bladesit in Bahla Willayat to the TFS in Hail Ashour in Al Hamra Willayat	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO. 500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	22/04/2024	06/05/2024
T/2616964/2024	Transporting, Distributing and Uploading 272.727 m3/daily of water from Mowailh Main Tanker Filling stations in Suhar to Tanks available at Wadi Al-Bidi Tanks in Sohar in North Batinah Governorate	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO. 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	22/04/2024	06/05/2024
T/2615964/2024	Disconnection and Reconnection Water Activities in Muscat Governorate	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO. 1,500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	22/04/2024	06/05/2024
T/2614960/2024	Service Contract for Standby Generators at Nama Water Services STP and Pump Stations	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO. 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	22/04/2024	06/05/2024
T/2612959/2024	Connection of New Wellfield in Al Ansab to Ghala Reservoir and Al Ansab Tank	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 1500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	22/4/2024	20/5/2024
T/2615962/2024	Consultancy Services for Construction Supervision of Water Distribution Network in Al Qasf Scheme, Al Qasf Village and Dhahrat At Tawi in Al Khaburah Wilayat	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	R.O. 100/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	22/4/2024	20/5/2024
T/2480932-2/2024 Re-Float	Call Off Contract for Supply of Laboratory Chemicals for Nama Water Services Laboratories for 3 years	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O. 100/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	22/4/2024	06/5/2024
T/2459835-2/2024 Re-Float	Supply, Commissioning & Training of Three Sewer JET/ VAC 16,000 Liters Capacity	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	R.O. 500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	22/4/2024	06/5/2024

The tender document can be purchased from Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from the date of publication of this announcement. The applicants shall pay the tender fee through electronic payment gateway through Supplier Login.

Applicants who are not registered with Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) shall register from <https://owwsc.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> to have the login credentials of Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Nama Water Services e-tendering page (Supplier Login). All participating Companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of the bid value in a sealed envelope to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 2:00 pm on the bid submission date.

Bid Bond must be obtained from a Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman and it should be addressed in favour of Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services). The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above.

For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.nws.nama.om or Email to: tender@owwsc.nama.om

MHD Automobiles announces Ramadhan offers for Jetour

MUSCAT: MHD Automobiles LLC an exclusive dealer of Jetour in Oman, proudly announces its exclusive Ramadhan offers for 2024, showcasing a blend of luxury, convenience and unparalleled rewards for customers across Oman.

This year, we are thrilled to present a lineup of exciting offers designed to elevate your automotive journey:

1. Assured scratch & win gift: Every purchase during Ramadhan comes with the chance to win a remarkable prize!
2. Free service: Enjoy worry-free driving with complimentary servicing



from 20,000 up to 100,000 kilometres. This offer varies from model to model, ensuring that every Jetour owner receives the utmost care and attention.

3. Free insurance: Drive with confidence knowing that your new Jetour vehicle comes with complimentary insurance coverage, providing peace of mind on every journey.
4. Free registration: Say goodbye to registration hassles as we handle all formalities on your behalf. With free registration, customers can hit the road without any administrative burdens.
5. Free window tinting: Beat the heat in style with complimentary window tinting for your Jetour vehicle. Our premium tinting service ensures a cool and comfortable ride, enhancing both aesthetics and functionality. In addition to these enticing offers, Jetour Oman aims to welcome

customers to our showrooms with open arms.

To encourage walk-ins and create an engaging experience for all, we are delighted to introduce the “Walk In & Win” raffle.

Every visitor to our showrooms stands a chance to win exciting prizes, adding an element of excitement to every visit.

“We are thrilled to present these exclusive Ramadhan offers to our customers across Oman,” said Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO MHD Automobiles LLC.

He also remarked, “At Jetour, we are dedicated to providing exceptional value and service and these offers reflect our commitment to enhancing the automotive experience for our valued customers.”

Maximise your rewards with NBO Badeel top up redemption

MUSCAT: In its commitment to deliver a seamless banking experience to its loyal customers, the National Bank of Oman (NBO) has introduced 'Badeel Top Up', a new redemption option to its widely acclaimed Rewards Program.

This innovative feature allows customers to utilise their earned reward points to fund their Badeel Travel Pre-Paid Card. Ensuring a streamlined process, the ongoing offer facilitates easy access and utilisation of rewards in a user-friendly and convenient manner, underlining NBO's unwavering commitment to delivering accessible and customer-centric banking experiences.

Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager and Head of Retail Products at NBO, said: “We, at National Bank of Oman, are committed to providing customers with not just financial services, but an enhanced and rewarding lifestyle. Through the Badeel Top Up option, we are redefining the concept of rewards, allowing our customers to convert their points into real, tangible benefits.

We encourage our customers to maximise the utility of the Badeel Travel card with this redemption option, as it provides a hassle-free travel experience.



The ongoing offer is designed to enhance the lives of our customers and their loved ones through a simple yet effective points-earning system, in a testament to NBO's dedication to offering innovative and personalised solutions.”

The Badeel Travel Pre-Paid Card provides a secure, convenient, and cashless solution for carrying multiple currencies within a single, streamlined platform. With the introduction of the Badeel Top Up option, NBO customers can now take their rewards to the next level.

Each 400 points earned through the Rewards Program is equivalent to RO 1, providing customers with tangible value for their loyalty. The minimum top-up amount in points is RO 10, and thereafter, the minimum is RO 1, with terms and conditions applying.

HSBC ANNOUNCES NEW CEO FOR OMAN BRANCH

MUSCAT: HSBC has announced that Elie El Asmar (**pictured**) will be the Chief Executive Officer of its new branch in Oman which is scheduled to open in May. The branch will exclusively serve corporate customers.

“Elie brings extensive experience of international and corporate banking to this role thanks to over 30 years of service in various roles at HSBC across the Middle East and North Africa,” said Stephen Moss, HSBC's Regional CEO for the

Middle East, North Africa and Türkiye (MENAT) region.

“Elie has served as a country CEO and has successfully grown revenues when leading businesses and is therefore ideally suited to this new opportunity for our new internationally focused wholesale branch in Oman.”

Commenting on his appointment, Elie said: “HSBC's international network is a key strength, both as the world's leading trade bank facilitating global business flows and as a



connector of clients to business and investment opportunities all over the world. Our physical

presence in Oman enables us to maintain our focus on supporting economic diversification, further developing capital markets, attracting international investment and growing trade corridors within MENAT and beyond.”

HSBC Bank Middle East Limited - Oman Branch will focus exclusively on wholesale banking by connecting internationally focused enterprises in Oman with the rest of the world and vice versa.

Dhofar Islamic launches SME business banking account

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic Banking window of BankDhofar, is pleased to announce the launch of SME Business Banking account. This account comes in line with the Oman Vision 2040.

The account offers a diverse range of banking solutions, to the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) segment. The solution takes into consideration the day-to-day needs of the customers and provides features aiding their business enhancement.

Key Features of the account:

- Simplified Account Opening:** Convenient account opening and documentation process, making it easier for businesses to get started with their banking journey. Customers can walk in to any of Dhofar Islamic branches across Oman.
- Sharia Compliant Products and Services:** With a wide range of Sharia compliant products & services are offered to meet customers' needs.
- POS Connection Support:** With

this account, customers can also take advantage of the POS (point-of-sale) systems.

This will aid customers in their cash receivables and enhance their sales.

WPS Solution: Dhofar Islamic offers a unique Wage Protection System (WPS) solution that simplifies salary payments, offers a convenient and efficient way to manage employee payroll.

It allows the customer to process the salary online by uploading a file or walk-in to the extensive branch network and provide a bar-coded document to process the salary.

- Cards:** Customised debit cards designed to meet the unique needs of SME's.
- RCCD Service:** Remote Cheque Capture and Deposit services are designed to facilitate bulk cheque processing remotely and adds efficiency, flexibility, security, and cost effectiveness to SME's business operations.



Local and International Transfers: As customers can use our branches services to transfer money anywhere locally and internationally.

Payment Gateway: It also offers payment gateway to aspiring SME customers to collect payments for their online transactions by integrating Dhofar

Islamic Payment Gateway on their websites.

Dhofar Islamic offers a range of investment solutions, including deposits and financial products, to help businesses grow and maximise their surplus funds.

Dhofar Islamic has a dedicated team which oversees the implementation of its SME strategy.

Chery Tiggo 7 family shows safety technology leadership

MUSACT: In today's automotive market, vehicle safety has become a crucial standard for consumers when choosing cars. This drives automotive companies to continuously innovate, aiming to provide a safer and more reliable driving experience.

The Tiggo 7 family, with its cutting-edge safety technology and user-centred design philosophy, has demonstrated outstanding safety performance globally, comprehensively safeguarding user driving safety.

The Tiggo 7 Pro, as the flagship model in the Tiggo 7 family, was honoured with a “five-star safety” rating in December 2023 through rigorous testing by a renowned Australian automotive



safety rating organisation.

In the crash test results, the Tiggo 7 Pro scored 88 per cent in adult occupant protection, 72 per cent in pedestrian, cyclist, and motorcycle user protection, and

86 per cent in safety assistance, ultimately receiving the highest five-star safety rating.

Additionally, the Tiggo 7 Pro is equipped with safety assistance systems such as

AEB (Autonomous Emergency Braking), LKA (Lane Keep Assist), ELK (Emergency Lane Keep) within the LSS (Lane Support System), BSM (Blind Spot Monitoring), and SAS (Speed Assistance System) with a SLIF (Speed Limit Information Function) and iACC (intelligent Adaptive Cruise Control), among others.

The five-star rating not only symbolises the Tiggo 7 Pro's high-level passive safety performance but also highlights the effectiveness of its advanced active safety technology and driving assistance systems.

ANCAP CEO Carla Hoorweg stated, “2023 has been a record year for new car sales, and with the release of new ANCAP

five-star safety ratings, we see mainstream and emerging brands expanding choices for safety-conscious consumers.”

Furthermore, the safety design details of the Tiggo 7 Pro reflect a thorough consideration for comprehensive passenger protection, ensuring that every journey is a safe and reliable one.

For example, the model comes standard with the Bosch ESP 9.3 electronic stability control system, which, by precisely monitoring the vehicle's dynamic state, can automatically adjust the vehicle's posture in extreme driving conditions, effectively preventing loss of control and skidding and significantly enhancing driving safety.

The electronic child safety

lock is another crucial safety feature that allows the driver to control the status of the rear door lock from the driver's seat, preventing children from accidentally opening the car door in the process of running and greatly enhancing the safety of children in the car.

Moreover, the Tiggo 7 Pro has made innovations in body structure design.

Chery Automobile took the first spot among all Chinese automotive brands in J.D. Power 2023 China Initial Quality StudySM(IQS). For more details please visit [https://china.jdpower.com/press-release/2023-IQS In Oman](https://china.jdpower.com/press-release/2023-IQS-In-Oman), Chery vehicles are distributed by Saud Bahwan Group.



OIA announces social investment policy, launches 'Qimam' platform

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) yesterday unveiled a social investment policy for its subsidiaries and launched a new platform named 'Qimam' to handle queries related to local added value.

The OIA also launched the second version of a list of mandatory products and services scheduled to be provided by OIA subsidiaries (a total of 251 products and services).

The Social Investment Policy has a number of objectives: Ensuring that social investment projects and plans are aligned with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 and meet the needs of the local community; Developing a framework for social investment at companies affiliated to OIA; Determining the approaches of social welfare projects; Regulating governance, tasks and responsibilities assigned to the parties concerned.

It also include: Defining procedures and mechanisms for allocating budget according to the company's priorities and the status of its financial position; Establishing balance between social investment projects and



The OIA also launched the second version of a list of mandatory products and services scheduled to be provided by OIA subsidiaries.

contributions by related sectors and beneficiaries; and Enhancing collaboration between OIA companies.

Meanwhile, Qimam digital platform was launched by the OIA to handle all queries related to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), research, development, innovation programmes and the mandatory list of products and services.

The platform seeks to facilitate communication between OIA and its subsidiaries about queries related to in-country value (ICV),

study proposals and challenges facing SMEs, help researchers and innovators communicate with OIA affiliate firms and ease contact with local companies to check what products and services can be added or modified in the list of mandatory items.

As part of the social investment policy, cooperation agreements worth RO 6 million were signed with SMEs. In addition, OQ Group launched a business accelerator programme codenamed 'OQ-X' and it concluded a cooperation

programme with the Ministry of Health to set up an accidents and emergency building in the Wilayat of Duqm.

In the same context, Asyad Group and Omantel signed an agreement to devise a business accelerator in the logistics sector

Asyad inked three contracts with SMEs that are holders of the Entrepreneurship Card, while Oman Airports Company signed six agreements with other SMEs in the field of supply and ground services related to airports.

— ONA

Bank Muscat shareholders approve renewal of EMTN and cash dividends of 15.5%

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat held its Annual Ordinary General Meeting (AGM) and an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of the Bank's shareholders on March 26, 2024 through the electronic platform of Muscat Clearing and Depository's website.

Both meetings were presided over by Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani (pictured), Chairman of the Bank's Board of Directors, in presence of the Board's members, the executive management and number of shareholders.

In the EGM, the shareholders approved the renewal of Euro Medium Term Note (EMTN) Programme (the EMTN Programme), including the capital markets Alternatives and the issue of international Additional Tier 1 instruments by the Bank, up to an aggregate amount of \$ 2 billion.

In the AGM, the shareholders also approved the Report of the Board of Directors and reviewed the



Auditor's Report for the financial year ended December 31, 2023.

They reviewed the report of the Sharia Supervisory Board of Meethaq, the Islamic Banking window of the Bank, for the financial year ended December 31, 2023 and agreed to appoint the statutory auditors for the Bank and the external independent Sharia auditors for Meethaq.

During the meeting, Saud bin Nasser bin Rashid al Shukaili was elected as a director to fill the vacant seat in the Board of Directors until the next Board term elections.

The shareholders also approved the recommendation to distribute a dividend of 15.5 per cent in the form of cash, therefore they will receive a cash dividend of RO 0.0155 per ordinary share aggregating to RO 116.349 million on the Bank's existing share capital. The Bank's capital adequacy ratio will stand at 21.22 per cent which is well above the minimum level required by the regulatory authorities.

Speaking on the occasion, Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani (pictured) thanked the regulators, shareholders, clients and partners for their support and commitment to the Bank.

He stated: "The Bank is making strategic efforts to maintain its leading position as a reliable banking partner in the Sultanate of Oman, and to provide sustainable banking solutions in line with the current and future requirements of customers, thus achieving

remarkable progress despite challenges.

It is committed to developing its digital infrastructure, and harnessing its resources to employ the latest modern digital services in order to enhance its operational efficiency and enrich the customers' experience."

Shaikh Khalid al Mashani added that Bank Muscat's Board of Directors welcomed and supported the measures undertaken by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and the Financial Services Authority (FSA) to strengthen and diversify the financial sector in Oman.

Shaikh Khalid al Mashani wished all the success as the Sultanate of Oman embarks on a new stage of growth and progress.

As disclosed earlier, the Bank posted a net profit of RO 212.45 million for the full year, compared to RO 200.75 million reported during the same period in 2022, reflecting an increase of 5.8%.

GFW receives 3,997 complaints against layoffs in 2023

HIBBA AL KINDI

MUSCAT, APRIL 3

The General Federation of Oman Workers (GFW) has revealed in a report that it received a significant 3,997 complaints from around 51 establishments challenging the termination of their employment contracts during 2023.

Other complaints related to delayed payments, cessation of wages, poor working conditions and non-compliance with safety and occupational health standards.

A significant number of Omani and non-Omani workers were also dismissed by private sector establishments.

Additionally, the federation oversaw 393 legal consultations while handling labour complaints from labour unions, general sectoral unions, and groups of workers in the private sector.

Moreover, the Federation provided legal assistance in 20 labour cases in 2023, 11 of which were resolved in favour of the workers, while the rest are still pending resolution.

The number of labour unions in the Sultanate of Oman has grown to a total of 327, distributed across 16 sectors.

The majority fall within the commerce and industry sector (99 or 30%), followed by the oil and gas sector (82 or 25%), and the construction and contracting sector (32 or 9.7%).

Only four new unions were established in 2023, which represents a sharp drop from the number of unions formed in the



GFW's headquarters in Muscat

OTHER COMPLAINTS RELATED TO DELAYED PAYMENTS, CESSATION OF WAGES, POOR WORKING CONDITIONS AND NON-COMPLIANCE WITH SAFETY AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH STANDARDS.

previous year (17).

The new unions were in the transport sector (2), and one each in the construction and contracting sector, and the water and electricity sector.

Muscat Governorate accounts for 47.7% of the unions, followed by North Al Batinah Governorate (22%), Al Wusta Governorate (14.37%), and Governorate of Dhofar (5.19%).

Additionally, according to the report, there are currently seven main general sectoral unions in Oman. They operate as centralised organisations which include several unions within that sector.

They aim to facilitate and coordinate between the unions and the federation. The seven general sectoral unions represent the following sectors: oil and gas, education, construction, tourism, electricity, and retail and distribution sector.

Oman holds significant potential for CCUS projects: Oxy

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, APRIL 3

Oxy Oman, a key player in the country's upstream energy sector, says it is continuing to press ahead with a number of initiatives to help achieve its Net Zero goals across its expansive operations in the Sultanate of Oman.

Notable is a strategy to unlock opportunities for investment in Carbon Capture, Storage & Utilisation (CCUS) – a core focus area in its energy transition vision – in partnership with majority state-owned gas pipeline operator OQ Gas Networks (OQGN).

Reaffirming this commitment in its latest 2023 Climate Report, the wholly-owned subsidiary of US-based Occidental Petroleum Corporation (Oxy) commented: "Oman also has significant potential for CCUS projects.

In November 2023, Oxy signed a Memorandum of Understanding with OQ Gas Networks SAOC,

the sole transporter of natural gas in Oman, to jointly study the development of potential CCUS projects in Oman in conjunction with Oxy's enhanced oil recovery (EOR) projects, which could also support the further development of Oman's hydrogen industry."

That MoU commits the two sides to exchanging knowledge and technical expertise aimed at developing strategies to enable the deployment of CCUS projects in Oman in line with the national strategic direction.

Envisioned are initiatives for carbon capture and the transport of carbon dioxide to Oxy Oman's production assets for EOR purposes.

A separate MoU signed on the occasion also commits Oxy Oman to collaborating in a Ministry-led effort towards the formulation of a CCUS and Blue Hydrogen Policy & Regulatory Framework Terms of Reference (CCUS TOR).

Key stakeholders across the



Mitigation of routine flare, GHG emissions and methane leaks is a key priority.

government and the Oil & Gas industry are participating in this initiative as well.

Oxy's latest Climate Report also lists successes in its broader drive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), notably by reducing routine flaring.

"Our international operations expect to reach Zero Routine Flaring (ZRF) well ahead of the World Bank's 2030 target.

Oxy implemented major gas compression and recycling projects in Oman in 2022, and successfully commissioned a new compressor in 2023 to significantly reduce flaring," it noted.

Additionally, with a goal to detect and monitor potential leaks of methane – a potent greenhouse gas – Oxy says it has leveraged its satellite-based monitoring

programmes to provide weekly coverage for its Oman operations.

"In 2022, we expanded our leak detection and repair programme to Oman, training our staff on Optical Gas Imaging (OGI) technology and putting these cameras to work augmenting routine operator inspections and investigating the source and cause of emissions identified during periodic satellite-based surveys," it stated, adding that scores of ground-based sensors have been installed as well.

In terms of upstream hydrocarbon assets, Oxy Oman is one of the biggest players in the E&P sector with working interests in a total of 8 concessions.

It is the operator of Block 9, Block 27, Block 53 (Mukhaizna Field), Block 62 and Block 65 and has additional interests in Blocks 30, 51 and 72, which are in the exploration phase.

In 2023, Oxy Oman's share of production was 66 Mboe/d

(million barrels of oil equivalent per day).

One of its biggest assets is Block 9, which has produced over 789 million gross barrels since the beginning of its operation through successful exploration, continuous drilling improvements and EOR projects, according to the company.

Also notable is the Mukhaizna Field in Block 53, which features a major pattern steam flood project for EOR that utilizes some of the largest mechanical vapour compressors ever built.

Since assuming operations in the Mukhaizna Field in 2005, Oxy has drilled close to 3,600 new wells and has produced over 607 million gross barrels.

Capital invested by Oxy across all of its Oman assets in 2023 totalled \$374 million. It included the cost of drilling 97 wells and executing facilities projects to support development and EOR activities.

FSA to enhance integrity of financial services sector

At every stage, the Sultanate of Oman has witnessed the establishment of economic and financial institutions and their upgrade to specialised organisations in providing services and following up on issues of concern to investors and customers.

From this standpoint came the issuance of Royal Decree No. 20/2024 establishing the Financial Services Authority (FSA).

The new decree decided to transfer the affiliation of accounting and auditing offices to the latest body, in addition to its other previous tasks, including supervision of insurance companies, since the affiliation of accounting and auditing offices was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Commerce,



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Industry and Investment Promotion before that.

Accounting and auditing offices are an exceptionally large sector in the country, numbering 196 offices, most of which are managed by international accounting and auditing companies, in addition to some Omani companies that prepare annual financial reports for companies, private institutions, government companies and others. There is no doubt that this revamp will enable the FSA to follow up and supervise the conditions of companies and institutions to a greater extent, especially since most of the financial reports that it issues belong to public joint-stock companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange and other joint, family and individual companies as we know. There are

concerns that those who work in some accounting and auditing companies either cover up for their clients or, on the other hand, fail to maintain confidentiality of key data relating to public joint-stock companies.

This can lead to the exploitation of buying and selling opportunities for shares of companies listed on the MSX by some people before all customers and investors know about them.

This causes harm to some investors in the market.

The presence of the Financial Services Authority will enhance the tasks of accounting and auditing companies to carry out their tasks correctly and complement the rest of the other sectors included in this authority.

In the coming period it will prepare an executive plan to inventory accounting and

auditing offices, and reconsider the law regulating them, according to Shaikh Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, Executive President of the Financial Services Authority.

The issuance of the Royal Decree establishing this authority will enhance the integrity and independence of the financial sector in Oman, and expand its various businesses and sectors, in addition to greater supervision and control of the accounting and auditing profession.

This work also paves the way for the issuance of special legislation, laws, and regulations for each sector in a manner commensurate with its nature and organisational structure, with the aim of enhancing the Authority's role in providing the appropriate investment environment to achieve economic

diversification, encourage investment, develop the private sector, work, and employment initiatives and enhance international cooperation.

We do not forget that the presence of this body will enable, qualify and build the national capabilities of Omanis in the presence of such a large number of them in the field of accounting who are graduates of Sultan Qaboos University and national and foreign universities and in specializations of interest to accounting, auditing companies.

The presence of the new authority will work to enhance the protection of the rights of investors, in addition to enhancing confidence in the financial markets, encouraging investment, and achieving the economic inclusiveness that we aim to achieve.

Opportunity Oman: Oman and East Africa - Leveraging history for a prosperous tomorrow

A promising economic partnership is blossoming between Oman and the East African Community (EAC), rekindling historical ties and unlocking a wealth of opportunities for both regions.

This strategic collaboration positions Oman as a vital gateway for the EAC to access Middle Eastern markets while simultaneously fostering economic diversification within Oman itself and EAC as a gateway for Oman to go to the hinterland of Central Africa—where Oman also has a historical connection and EA countries are busy investing in logistic corridors to Central Africa.

The opportunities are for both sides.

The EAC, a dynamic economic bloc with a population exceeding 283.7 million and a GDP of \$312 billion, presents a significant market for Omani goods and services.

The partnership aims to stimulate economic growth, attract foreign direct investment (FDI), and create employment opportunities across diverse sectors by eliminating trade barriers and fostering regional integration.

The opposite is true: Oman provides a sink and re-export hub for EAC products, especially from the agriculture, industrial, and minerals sectors.

Oman's historical connections with East Africa, particularly Kenya and Tanzania, are a strong foundation for this collaboration. Shared cultural heritage, familial bonds and Swahili's prevalence as a common language create natural bridges between the regions, facilitating communication and fostering trust.

To cultivate a conducive business environment, the partnership prioritises several key pillars:

- **Tariff reductions:** Lowering or eliminating tariffs on imported goods will incentivise trade flows and make products more affordable for consumers and businesses.
- **Robust legal framework:** A solid legal framework protects



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

The author is the Founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board advisor & business transformation mentor.

THIS STRATEGIC COLLABORATION POSITIONS OMAN AS A VITAL GATEWAY FOR THE EAC TO ACCESS MIDDLE EASTERN MARKETS WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY FOSTERING ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION WITHIN OMAN ITSELF AND EAC AS A GATEWAY FOR OMAN TO GO TO THE HINTERLAND OF CENTRAL AFRICA—WHERE OMAN ALSO HAS A HISTORICAL CONNECTION AND EA COUNTRIES ARE BUSY INVESTING IN LOGISTIC CORRIDORS TO CENTRAL AFRICA.



Maritime connectivity between Oman and East Africa has developed significantly over the past decade.

investments, ensures fair business practices and fosters investor confidence.

- **Streamlined customs procedures:** Simplifying customs regulations and documentation will expedite the movement of goods across borders, enhancing trade efficiency.
- **Cultural exchange:** Promoting cultural exchange programs will strengthen diplomatic ties, foster mutual understanding and build bridges between the people of Oman and the EAC.
- **Investment protection:** Implementing robust investment protection mechanisms will provide assurances to foreign investors, attracting much-needed capital inflows, including ease of repatriation of foreign funds on both sides.
- **Infrastructure development and logistics:** Collaborating on infrastructure projects, such as port development, air, land and sea transportation networks, storage facilities and energy initiatives, will enhance regional connectivity and facilitate trade flows.
- **Economic**

diversification: Both regions stand to benefit from economic diversification efforts.

Oman can lessen its dependence on hydrocarbons, while East Africa can develop its industrial and agricultural sectors, fostering long-term sustainable growth.

Oman's strategic location and well-developed infrastructure, including ports like Salalah, Sohar and Muscat, position it as a crucial trade gateway for the EAC.

This partnership presents exciting investment opportunities in various sectors, such as agriculture, manufacturing, tourism and renewable energy.

Real-world examples underpin the potential of this partnership. Oman's Vision 2040 prioritises tourism development, agricultural modernisation and technology innovation, aligning perfectly with the EAC's needs.

Additionally, its social protection laws and tax reforms show Oman's commitment to social welfare and economic sustainability.

The East Africa-Oman Strategic Partnership holds

immense potential to bolster bilateral trade, generate new employment opportunities, catalyse economic growth across various sectors and open up market access for businesses in both regions.

Key provisions, such as the elimination of tariffs, robust protection of intellectual property rights, ease of people movement, and commitments to market access in the service and financial sectors, further enhance the prospects of this transformative collaboration.

This partnership presents a unique opportunity for Oman and the EAC to build upon their shared history, cultural bonds, and linguistic heritage.

The ongoing cultural exchange programs, facilitated by Omani support in recent years, have already made significant progress in supporting the restoration of historical Omani sites in Zanzibar, such as the old Sultan's house, Bait Al Ajaib - both in Stone Town and many other historical places.

However, to truly capitalise on the potential of this collaboration, it is crucial to recognize the pivotal role that

the private sector must play in further strengthening this partnership.

It is essential to empower the Omani private sector to penetrate the East African market and provide them with the necessary support to explore these new opportunities.

As venturing abroad and navigating new markets may be an unfamiliar experience for many Omani private sector entities, governments from both sides must go the extra mile in assisting them, drawing from the experiences of other countries that have supported their private sectors in similar endeavours.

Ease of movement, provisions of business visas and security of these business entities are crucial to building confidence for both sides.

While agriculture presents a viable investment option in Oman, more local resources may be needed, as demonstrated by the experiences of other countries investing in the entire supply chain.

Therefore, the most effective initial strategy would be to support the local Omani business community by appointing them as local agencies for Omani products, supplemented by export guarantee programs through the Development Bank, Credit Oman, etc.

Devising and implementing a comprehensive 3 to 5-year strategy that focuses on empowering the private sector, fostering cultural exchange, and leveraging historical ties can help achieve the dual objectives of supporting the wealth of the local Omani community and increasing exports, ultimately contributing to a more balanced trade relationship between Oman and the EAC.

As Oman and the EAC embark on this promising journey, they stand poised to write a new chapter in their shared history.

By harnessing the power of collaboration, innovation, and a shared vision for the future, this strategic partnership has the potential to unlock a new era of prosperity for both regions and usher in a brighter and more interconnected future for all.

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Attn of: the Managing Director - Commercial

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Manufacturer : Marini
Model : M150E205

Location: Liwa, Muscat. Tel: 91479571

The offers should be emailed to : oman@strabag.com

and submitted in closed envelope to :
STRABAG OMAN LLC
Way 5007, Building 700A,
P.O. Box 444, Muscat, P.C 100
Attn of: the Managing Director - Commercial

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Contact phone number: 9358 7527

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HADITH

GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Abu Dharr, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that he heard the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, saying:

"No man accuses another of impiety or disbelief except that it (the accusation) rebounds on him if the one accused is not as he said."



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

FATWA

A person drank water accidentally during Imsak. He realised this during Al Fajr. What should he do?

If he was aware that the period of Imsak has already begun, he should make amends for that slip on the same day.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

We have given you plenty. So pray to your Lord and sacrifice. He who hates you is the loser.

(al Kawthar)

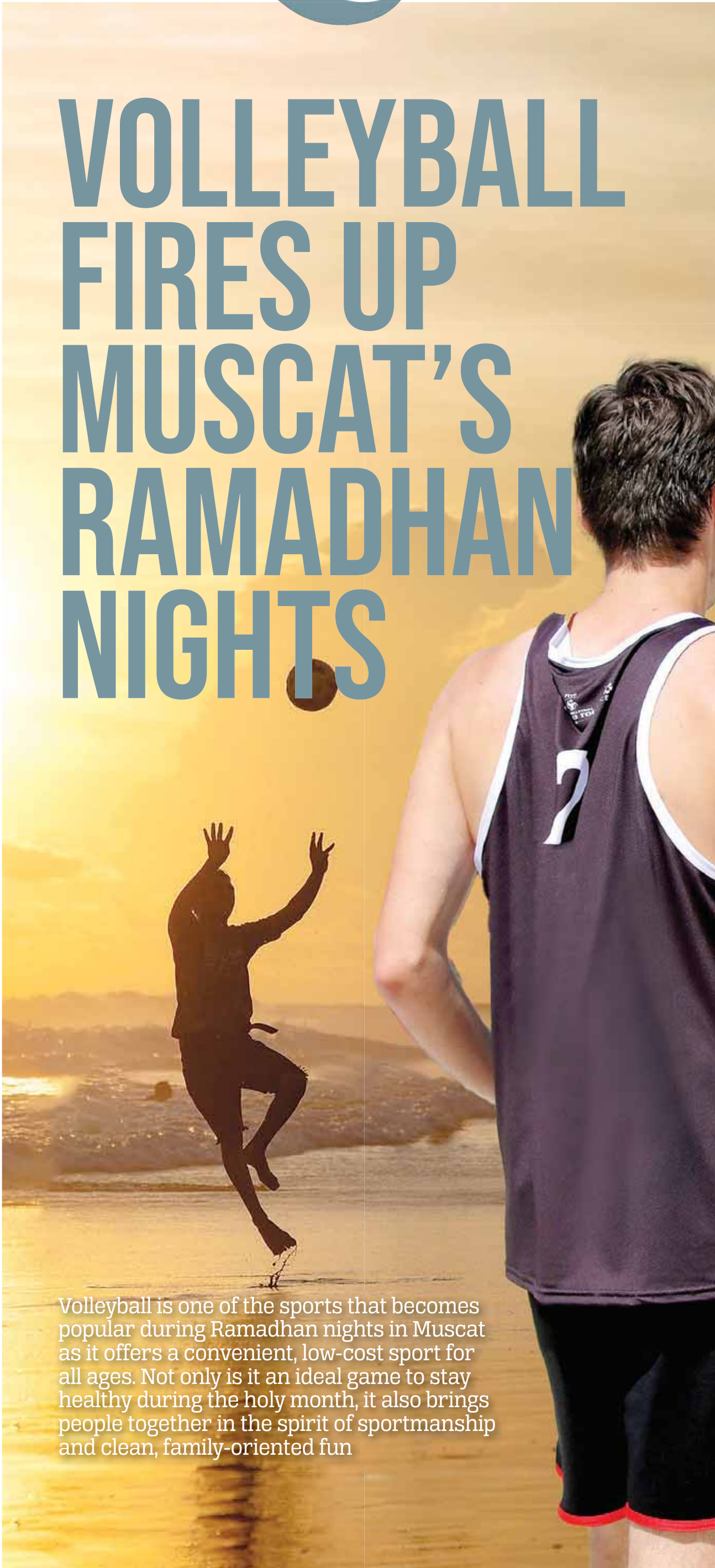


Ramadhan

THURSDAY | APRIL 4, 2024 | RAMADHAN 24, 1445 AH

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VOLLEYBALL FIRES UP MUSCAT'S RAMADHAN NIGHTS



Volleyball is one of the sports that becomes popular during Ramadhan nights in Muscat as it offers a convenient, low-cost sport for all ages. Not only is it an ideal game to stay healthy during the holy month, it also brings people together in the spirit of sportmanship and clean, family-oriented fun

BY AHMED AL KAABI

The nighttime of Ramadhan has become a hub of activity for sports enthusiasts in Muscat, with volleyball emerging as a popular choice. The cooler temperatures offer a reprieve from the scorching daytime heat, making it ideal for outdoor activities.

Doctors commonly offer advice on physical activity during Ramadhan to ensure individuals maintain their health and well-being while fasting. They typically recommend scheduling workouts during non-fasting hours, such as in the evening, after breaking the fast or before the pre-dawn meal (Suhoor), to allow for adequate hydration and energy replenishment.

As a sport, volleyball embodies an enjoyable atmosphere and activity associated with the holy month. It is popular due to its low cost, minimal physical contact and ability to bring together people of all ages and backgrounds. In Muscat, games usually take place at specific times, such as after the Taraweeh prayer or before dawn, and sometimes before the Iftar

with six-player teams on a larger court, using a standard ball.

Beach volleyball tends to involve more defensive play, while indoor volleyball may have more complex offensive strategies. Despite these distinctions, both require similar skills and offer unique playing experiences.

As a form of entertainment, the games played by people across Oman during Ramadhan are customised and do not necessarily follow the official format of the games. For a lot of people, especially the young ones, it's just a matter of enjoying and doing something to pass the time and engage in physical activity.

Mohammad al Yaarubi, an enthusiast of the game, shared that in his observation, volleyball enjoys the attention of many young people during this season.

"We start preparing for it before the beginning of the holy month. We have a prior agreement on the venue and time for the game, and often it is scheduled after Taraweeh prayer. Those that joined are amateur neighbourhood players," he shared.

Al Yaarubi said that they like playing the



meal.

Volleyball is a team sport played on a rectangular court divided by a net. Each team comprises six players. The objective is to score points by grounding the ball on the opponent's court while preventing them from doing the same. Points are earned through successful plays or opponent faults. A match typically consists of best-of-five sets, with the first team to reach 25 points winning a set. Players serve to initiate play, and teams rally to keep the ball in play. Rotation ensures fair positioning and specialised roles like setters and liberos contribute to team strategy and success.

Under volleyball, the game is split into two different categories. Beach volleyball and indoor volleyball differ primarily in surface, team size, court dimensions, ball characteristics and attire.

Beach volleyball is played on sand with two-player teams on a smaller court, using a slightly larger, lighter ball. Indoor volleyball is played on a hard court

game because it's very convenient. After all, teams don't need large fields or spend a lot of money to set up a field to play. For their kind of setup, they usually spend about RO 10 for two wooden sticks that serve as a stand for the net, a ball, and two spotlights, which can cost RO 15. These items can be used throughout the season.

Al Yaarubi thinks a lot of other volleyball enthusiasts love the sport because it does not require high fitness and the rules are easy to follow. He also shared that, unlike other sports, the risk of injuries is also very low.

"It's a game that can be enjoyed without physical person-to-person contact, so it's perfect as an alternative to workouts," Al Yaarubi said.

As a Ramadhan must-do, Al Yaarubi shared that the game's association with the holy month dates back decades. In the past, young people from the neighbourhood would gather next to the home of one of the owners, who would donate electricity and lighting. The beauty here is that the children are close to their homes in the neighbourhood.

After some time, Al Yaarubi said that dedicated courts have been established in the area where teams are registered and organised for the Ramadhan volleyball league. The game took on a life of its own and became a Ramadhan essential.

As a preferred game by a lot of youngsters during the holy month, establishing volleyball as a permanent sport in Oman offers numerous benefits, including fostering community engagement, promoting health and enhancing national sports culture. Investment in coaching programmes and youth development initiatives can nurture talent and ensure sustainable growth. Volleyball can become a cornerstone of Oman's sporting landscape, enriching lives and fostering a sense of pride. For now, though, becoming a Ramadhan sport makes this an endearing game to play and has all the potential to develop into something more.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF MUSLIM FAITH

651 Muslim Conquest of Mesopotamia

In 651, the Muslim conquest of Mesopotamia led to the fall of the Sassanian Empire. It marked a pivotal moment as Islam expanded its territory and influence. The significance lies in the establishment of Islamic rule in the region, shaping the course of history and spreading Islamic civilisation. Modern Muslims often view it as a demonstration of the power of faith and the potential for societal transformation under Islamic governance, inspiring notions of unity and triumph in the face of challenges.

RAMADHAN AROUND THE WORLD

TANZANIA



Islam arrived in Tanzania through Arab traders and settlers along the East African coast as early as the 8th century. The coastal regions, including Zanzibar and Pemba islands, became significant centres for Islamic influence. By the 10th century, Islam had firmly established itself in the region, largely through trade networks and intermarriage with local populations.

One key figure instrumental in spreading Islam in Tanzania was Sayyid Said bin Sultan, who ruled Zanzibar in the early 19th century. He not only encouraged Islamic practices but also established Islamic institutions, including mosques and schools, which facilitated the spread of the religion among the local populace.

Today, Muslims constitute a significant portion of Tanzania's population, estimated to be around 35-40 per cent. They are primarily found along the coast and in Zanzibar, but sizable Muslim communities exist throughout the country.

During Ramadhan, Muslims in Tanzania, like in many other parts of the world, observe iftar, the breaking of the fast at sunset. Muslims break fast with dates, enjoy mandazi (fried bread), samosas, chapati (flatbread), and soup, showcasing a blend of Arab, Indian and African influences.

DOS & DONTs: ETIQUETTE GUIDE DURING THE HOLY MONTH

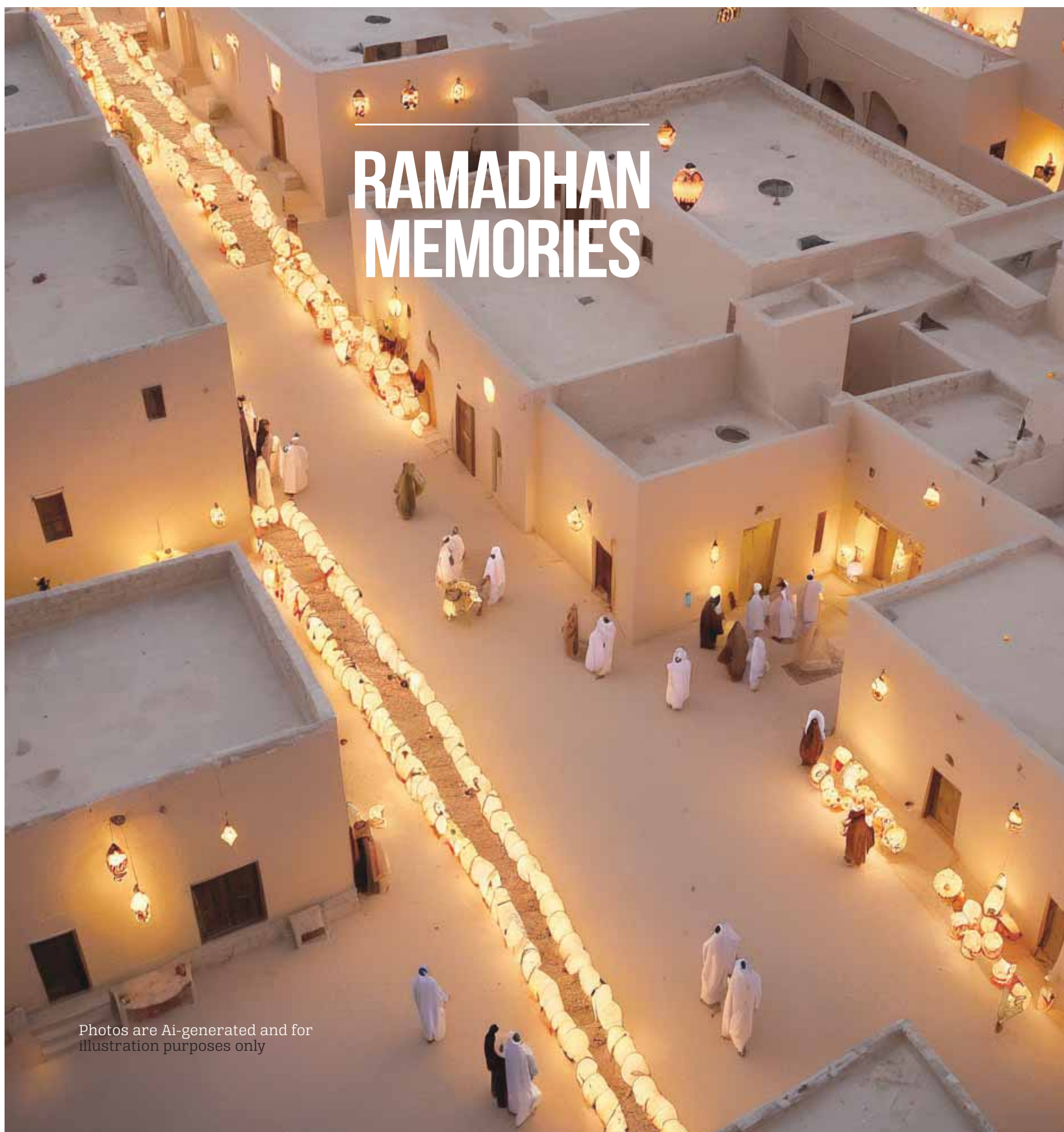
DON'T LOSE FOCUS ON SPIRITUAL GOALS

Avoid losing focus on spiritual goals and aspirations amidst the distractions of daily life. The final days of Ramadhan are a precious opportunity for spiritual growth and should be utilised wisely.

RAMADHAN TRIVIA HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE HOLY MONTH

WHY ARE ODD-NUMBERED NIGHTS IMPORTANT DURING THE LAST TEN DAYS OF RAMADHAN?

RAMADHAN MEMORIES



Photos are AI-generated and for illustration purposes only

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD WAS ONE BIG FAMILY

BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

Intizar bint Nasser al Furqani is from Nizwa but now she lives in Muscat with her family, so naturally Ramadhan these days are here in the city, but often her mind is filled with childhood memories of Ramadhan.

"They are lovely memories. They might echo others' experiences with traditional food, Taraweeh prayers and the observance of Fatoor and Suhoor," Intizar reflected.

Breaking the fast with family holds sentimental value, with the call to prayer signalling the end of the fast. A sip of water becomes priceless.

"We begin with dates and then buttermilk and then Omani Kahwa," she noted.

Most people prefer to pray and then continue with their first meal after daylight.

"After the prayers we come back to complete our food," she said.

The preparation of meals during Ramadhan is akin to a celebration in itself.

Intizar provided insight, saying, "We begin cooking after Salat Al Asar because preparing Fatoor and Suhoor is time-consuming. For dinner, we prepare rice and saloona (curry) with meat, chicken or fish. Dinner during Ramadhan could occur anytime between 9 pm to 12 midnight, with dishes like kabouli, white rice, koubs, or chapathis being served. My friends from Al Sharqiyah N&S governorates enjoy a fish salad called Qasha for Iftar."

In Oman, there are distinct recipes from various regions, but what truly distinguishes them are the spices found in every Omani kitchen. These spices carry an aroma that becomes intertwined with nos-



talgia, such as in the Omani rice dish cooked with dry lemon.

"Just as special spice mixes are prepared at home for Eid, we do the same for Ramadhan. Turmeric, coriander, cinnamon, and black pepper are key ingredients. We utilise these spices for kabouli or saloona," Intizar explained.

"When I was a child, we did not celebrate Qaranqasho in Nizwa, but this year there was a celebration and the children had a wonderful time," she reflected.

Traditionally, women used to stitch clothes themselves, particularly engaging in hand-made embroidery.

"But in our household, the ladies are more inclined toward cooking. Harees and Shorba are particularly popular dishes during Ramadhan," she added.

What is one thing from the traditional Omani kitchen that would be wonderful to have in the modern kitchen?

She replied, "Today, we have a wide variety of cooking utensils. Traditionally, most people cooked rice, shorba and saloona in a simple manner.

The style of serving the food is also a major part of the experience and the 'One Plate' system was significant. The large single plate could be made of any metal. Another utensil would be the 'Safar' because, in the past, large quantities of rice and saloona were prepared."

So, what is one of her favourite memories?

"When neighbours used to eat together," she replied.

Food was not shared by distributing it to different houses; instead, they ate together.

The neighbourhood was one big family.

Ramadhan

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THURSDAY | APRIL 4 | 2024

BEEES VS. DRONES: HOW TECH IS TACKLING CROP POLLINATION

IN TOWERING GLASSHOUSES at a tomato farm in South Australia, everything from the temperature to the ultraviolet radiation levels is tightly controlled. But despite the farm's scientific approach, pollinating the crops can still be hit or miss.

The Perfection Fresh farm in Two Wells currently relies on workers who zip between the rows of vines on trolleys, tapping strings tied to the frames to gently shake the plants so pollen drops onto the stigmas to ensure pollination – or so they hope.

"It is largely a manual process, and this is a challenge," said Troy Topp, general manager at Perfection Two Wells. "Eight years into this job, I'm still trying to find the most effective way to pollinate."

With about 190 million tonnes produced annually, tomatoes are among the world's most valuable crops, and are increasingly grown in protected environments as farmers face more extreme weather linked to climate change, pests and land shortages.

But pollination is a big challenge in covered environments such as glasshouses, where bees are not as effective, and mechanical methods such as tapping, brushing by hand, or using blowers and vibrating devices are labour-intensive and unreliable, growers say.

So Perfection Fresh, one of Australia's largest tomato producers, is trying out a new technology – drones.

Turbulence from the drones' propellers helps to maximise the vibration of the flower's reproductive parts and disperse the pollen – leading to higher crop yields.

"Drones can solve challenges with labour availability, and be quicker and more consistent. Together with pollination, the drones can also be used for crop forecasting and disease monitoring," Topp told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

ALTERNATIVE TO NATURE?

As nature losses grow and many species decline globally, some researchers are investigating whether tech solutions like drones could help fill the gap, and protect global food systems.

Agriculture is among the top users of drones worldwide.

Their growing use in pollination – both in covered farming and in fields – is driven by declines in bee populations because of warmer temperatures, pesticide use, diminishing habitats and other human impacts.

Honeybees struggle in covered environments because they can become disorientated, and in Australia, which has no native bumblebees, the need for different types of pollinators is even more pressing, said Katja Hogendoorn, a research fellow at the University of Adelaide.

"We can do a lot with technology, and drones are a viable option for pollination," said Hogendoorn, who studies native bees and pollination.

"We can't solve for every risk with technology, but if drones can be used for mitigating risk in pollination, why not," she said, warning that widespread drone use might allow the global horticultural industry to resume insecticide use.

But technology is often a poor replacement for the diverse benefits of natural systems, others warn.

Honeybees in Kenya, for instance, provide not just pollination services but an additional income from honey harvesting for farmers who increasingly lose crops to more extreme weather.

And in a country where human settlements are encroaching on traditional wildlife habitats – pushing elephants to raid and destroy farms, bees are being

harnessed as "living fences" to protect crops by keeping the animals at bay.

"Drones cannot perform all the duties that the bees are doing in the environment, they can't compete to that level," said Newton Simiyu, a project manager at the Born Free Foundation, the conservation charity that first developed the beehive fences.

FARMERS TURN TO DRONES, AI

The trend towards data-based precision agriculture – such as the use of drones or other tools based on artificial intelligence (AI) – is driven by demographic changes, technological advances and climate change impacts on productivity, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) says.

For Siddharth Jadhav, an engineer who researched drones in Singapore, their use in aerodynamically controlled pollination – using the drone's downward draft to enable pollen dispersal – is a logical application.

They are particularly suited for self-pollinating crops such as strawberries and tomatoes, said Jadhav, who is founder and chief executive of Singapore-based tech firm Polybee, which uses off-the-shelf mini drones and its own software applications.

To be effective, the technology needs to be "robust and scalable, and easy enough for farm workers to use with minimal training", Jadhav said.

After promising experiments in vertical farms in Singapore, Australia's Hort Innovation – a horticulture non-profit – funded a year-long trial of Polybee's drones to pollinate strawberries and tomatoes in covered farms.

The trial, which concluded last year, showed "drones' effectiveness in pollinating tomatoes in glasshouses, setting the stage for further exploration and investment", said Brett Fifield, Hort Innovation's CEO.

After the trial at Perfection Fresh, two of Polybee's drones – named Maverick and Goose after characters from the "Top Gun" film – now cover 10 rows of tomatoes. A single battery charge lasts about 40 minutes, enough to cover two rows.

The drones, which measure about 38 cm (15 inches) diagonally, hover over the plants at a fixed speed, covering one side of the row first, and the other side on the return journey.

Their downward draft loosens the pollen more efficiently and consistently than blowers or tapping, Topp said. Reducing workers' interactions with the plants can also minimise the risk of disease, he added.

"We're not the first to try and solve pollination in glasshouses, but other methods have failed because they're challenging to use, or consume too much labour and time, and are not precise," said Jadhav, adding that the drones have also been tested to pollinate strawberries in Britain.

"Drones are an elegant way to solve the problem – you just programme them, and it's a big risk off the table for growers who have so many other risks to deal with," he added.

NOT ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

More than a third of the world's food production depends on bees. Yet bees and other pollinators are declining worldwide in abundance and diversity, according to the FAO, with rising temperatures and other climate change impacts linked to the decline.

That has made alternative pollination methods all the more urgent.

Besides Polybee, others that are

experimenting with drones and robots for pollination include California-based Dropcopter that dispenses pollen in almond, apple and cherry orchards, and Harvard University's robobees that mimic the action of bees.

At Perfection Fresh the aim is to move fully to drone pollination and to use the drones' high-resolution cameras to gather data for yield forecasting with AI.

"Solving pollination is not enough. Forecasting yield helps farmers get better prices, and also ensure better food security because accurate data is crucial for developing more resilient varieties," Jadhav said.

Because of these benefits, the technology is also relevant in poorer countries, though cost is a barrier.

"The technology is not accessible to all, just to large companies and investors. Therein lies a threat," said Hogendoorn.

Meanwhile, from Azerbaijan to Venezuela, attempts are underway to encourage beekeeping to preserve local bees – whose benefits to farmers sometimes go far beyond pollination.

BENEFITS OF BEES

In the rural heartlands of central Kenya, farmers living on the edge of the Meru National Park are using honeybees to combat a decades-old problem – marauding elephants that wreak havoc on their crops, sometimes even causing villagers' deaths and prompting retaliations.

From 2000 to 2020, 1,160 elephants were killed with causes being attributed to either self-defence, or retaliatory killings, data from the ministry of tourism, wildlife and heritage shows.

But over the past year, a more harmonious solution appears to have emerged: rows of beehives are strung together on wires, forming a barrier around fields. When an elephant tries to breach the wire, it triggers the hives, sending the bees buzzing into action and prompting the elephants to flee.

"Before the beehive fences, it felt like a constant battle. The elephants used to come almost every night," said farmer Alexander Mburunga, 33, standing next to a large yellow wooden box containing a beehive on his 10-acre (four-hectare) maize farm bordering the national park.

"Now, the elephants keep their distance, and our crops are thriving," he said at his farm, located 320 km (200 miles) from the capital, Nairobi.

Conservationists from the Born Free Foundation, which began the initiative in January last year, say although the project is still in its initial stages, the results have been promising. Farmers are noticing some additional benefits, too.

Geoffrey Munyua, 35, said not only have the elephants stayed away from his 1.5-acre (0.6-hectare) plot since the beehive fences were constructed, his cowpea and millet yields have increased.

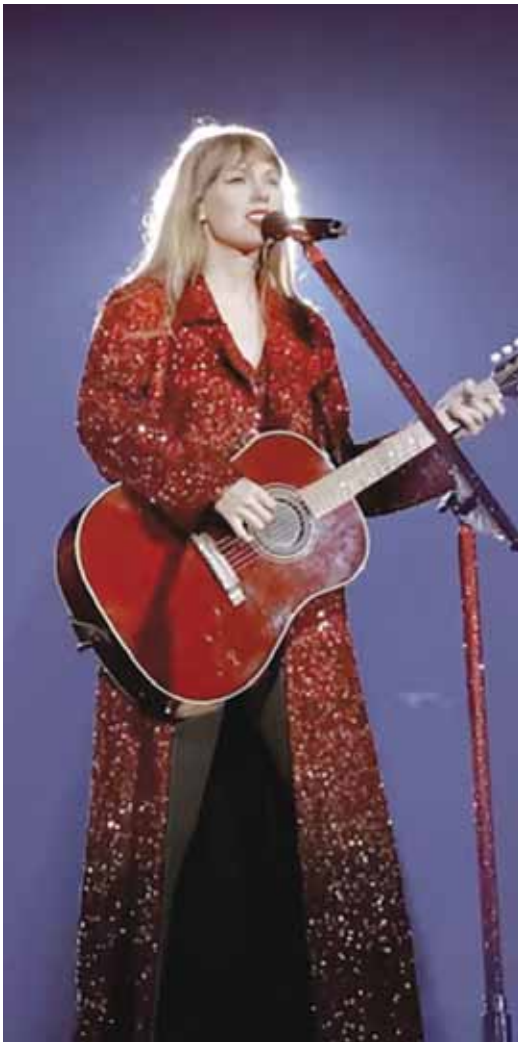
"I haven't harvested yet, but my crop yields are looking much better and will be higher this year because of the bees pollinating," said Munyua.

"I am also hoping to harvest the honey from the hives and earn extra income," he added.

Simiyu from the Born Free Foundation said that while technological advances such as micro-drones in pollination should be welcomed, they were no replacement for bees.

"Technology is advancing, but nature will always remain superior," he said. – Thomson Reuters Foundation

Taylor Swift officially declared a billionaire by Forbes



TAYLOR SWIFT WAS officially named a member of the three-comma-club Tuesday, as Forbes confirmed rumors estimating her wealth exceeds a billion dollars.

The financial news outlet said she is the first artist to achieve billionaire status solely on the basis of her music, and estimated she has a \$1.1 billion fortune.

Other industry heavyweights who've hit the mark -- Rihanna and Jay-Z among them -- have earned their massive wealth in part via fashion brands, alcohol companies or entertainment holdings, among other interests.

Along with her vast songwriting catalog, Swift staged the first billion-dollar tour ever -- the ongoing Eras Tour has boosted economies and delighted fans around the world.

Swift, 34, also has a significant real estate portfolio, with homes in New York, Beverly Hills, Nashville and a coastal mansion in Rhode Island.

Her touring milestone was one of many records Swift shattered over the past year, including winning a fourth Grammy for Best Album, the most of any artist.

She received wall-to-wall attention throughout 2023, which closed with Time Magazine honoring Swift as Person of the Year, calling her a "rare person who is both the writer and hero of her own story."

And in mere weeks fans have a brand-new album to look forward to: Swift is set to drop "The Tortured Poets Department" on April 19.



- NEW RECORD -

The frenzy around Swift was augmented last year by her dating life, as the pop culture icon began a very public romantic relationship with tight end Travis Kelce of the Kansas City Chiefs, who ultimately won the Super Bowl championship.

Chiefs games -- where Swift has been a regular in a private box -- smashed a series of ratings records this past season.

It was yet more evidence of her vast influence: with hundreds of millions of social media followers and a staunchly loyal fan base, she can move any dial with the tiniest of efforts.

Even politicians -- and conspiracy theorists -- for months have been opining on her potential impact on the upcoming presidential election.

Swift was born in Pennsylvania on December 13, 1989. She began writing songs professionally as a teenager, signing with Nashville's Big Machine Records as a country artist.

Years after she went full pop and, as she moved on to a major deal with Universal, Swift became embroiled in very publicized feud with Big Machine.

The sale of her song catalog to a private equity firm triggered a massive dispute over musicians' rights -- and a bold new era of Swift's career.

She vowed to re-record her first six albums in order to own their rights, and began making good on the promise, urging her fans to listen to "Taylor's Version" instead of previous releases.

In the meantime, she's released several more original studio albums, with her 11th due later this month.

And her conversation-commanding Eras tour is due to continue until the end of 2024, with estimates anticipating she will surpass the \$2-billion threshold, a staggering sum. —AFP