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SABALENKA, TSITSIPAS SURGE IN MIAMI



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OMAN LAUNCHES BID ROUND FOR 7 MINING BLOCKS



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ARAB CREATIVES TAKE BACK THE NARRATIVE IN THE PEARL DIVER'S DAUGHTER



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY PRESIDENT OF CHINA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, in reply to His Majesty's congratulatory cable on re-electing him as President of the Republic. In his cable, President Xi expressed his sincere appreciation and best wishes of good health and success to His Majesty. He also affirmed his keenness to develop strategic joint relations to achieve further tangible results between the two countries. — ONA

CRUDE PRICE AT \$77.61 A BARREL

Oman oil price for May delivery on Tuesday reached \$77.61, comprising a rise by \$2.80 from the price of Monday, which was \$74.81. The average price of Oman oil for March delivery has stabilised at \$80.92 per barrel, thus \$3.49 per barrel higher than February delivery. World oil prices extended some of the previous day's gains. Brent crude rose 0.4 per cent to \$78.43 a barrel, while US futures rose 0.37 per cent to \$73.09. Crude prices rose more than \$3 on Monday after a halt to some exports from Iraq's Kurdistan region added to worries about oil supplies.

INSIDE



39 MIGRANTS DIE IN FIRE AT MEXICO FACILITY

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Northern governorates get heavy rain



Normal life was affected in Nizwa following heavy rains on Tuesday. PHOTO BY SAMI AL HINAI

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

As rains and thunderstorms continue across various governorates, the Wilayat Al Hamra received the highest rainfall so far. The Oman Met Office said a number of wilayats in the governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi, North Al Batinah, Al Dhahirah, South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Muscat, North Al Sharqiyah and South Al Sharqiyah are witnessing rains of varying intensity which caused wadis to overflow.

The impact of upper trough will continue on Wednesday

over Al Wusta and Dhofar.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Jaifar bin Hamad al Busaidy, weather forecaster at Civil Aviation Authority, said: “The Wilayat of Al Hamra in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate recorded the highest amount of rainfall of 28 mm so far, followed by Saiq in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar with 9.4 mm and 9 mm in the wilayats of Bukha and Izki.”

**THUNDER CLOUDS**

The aerial picture shows activity of thunder clouds with rain of varying intensity accompanied by active winds at times in

Four people rescued from Wadi Al Mudhaibi

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority rescued four people after their vehicles were washed away in Wadi Al Mudhaibi in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate. In addition, a woman was rescued after her car was washed away in a wadi in the Wilayat of Nizwa. All five people are in good condition. The Wilayat of Al Khabourah in North Al Batinah Governorate reported highest rainfall with 52 mm, followed by the Wilayat of Izki with 40 mm, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

South Al Dakhiliyah (wilayats of Adam and Manah) and several wilayats of North Al Sharqiyah and South Al Sharqiyah and sporadic cloud activity in Al Wusta and Dhofar will bring sporadic rain of varying intensity.

Meanwhile, the northwesterly winds have begun and the weather forecaster at the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre said: “The northwesterly winds bring dryness with it. We do not expect any further development of clouds in the northern areas of the Sultanate of Oman.”

The impact of the upper

trough will still be experienced in the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea. Later, there are chances of northwesterly winds to bring down the temperature, according to the weather forecaster.

Meanwhile, the Royal Oman Police on Tuesday said that there is no truth in the video that was being circulated on the social media about the drifting of a school bus in a flowing wadi with a group of students in the Wilayat of Izki. They said that the bus had broken down earlier and the students had already been transported safely by another bus. **SEE ALSO P3**

OMAN, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC TIES



NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago signed a joint statement to establish diplomatic relations based on the relations of cooperation and friendship between the two countries. The statement was signed by Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, and Dennis Francis, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations. — ONA

‘Musandam Winter’ campaign to boost tourism

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 28

According to Omar bin Ali al Shuhi, history researcher, Musandam Governorate owes its name to the Cape of Musandam, an island on the Sea of Oman adjoining Kamzar maritime village. The island is but a hilltop in the middle of the sea surrounded by rock islands the most prominent of which is Salama Island.

The Sultanate of Oman's attention to wildlife and maritime life has been manifested in the issuance of Royal Decree No (54/2022) which established the National Natural Park Reserve in



the Governorate of Musandam. The governorate comprises 23 islands, 13 of which are quite large.

“The most important among

them is the Telegraph Island locally known as Maqlab Island. It is home to the first modern communications cable in the

Arabian Gulf, The submarine cable stretches from the city of Mumbai in India and the city of Basra in Iraq. The island of Maqlab is home to the transmit station,” Al Shuhi said.

Musandam Island is the largest island in Musandam Governorate, second only to Aum Al Ghanam Island. Musandam Island, overlooking the Strait of Hormuz, is among the most stunning places in Oman. It boasts significant historic landmarks such as Ras al Bab.

The island boasts scenic views, emerald beaches and beautiful plains that attract tourists seeking to enjoy mountain hiking and long-distance trekking.



# Mind what you eat in Ramadhan

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousef

A commonly seen phenomenon in the holy month of Ramadhan is a tendency to overeat post-iftar despite the fact that the holy month of Ramadhan is one of the most important months for self-discipline, controlling emotions and maintaining health.

Medics have sounded a word of caution that overeating is detrimental to personal health and internal organs might find it difficult to adjust to the sudden influx of food, carbonated drinks and caffeine.

Dr Amira al Raidan, Awareness and Training supervisor at the National Committee for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, said that one of the benefits of fasting is that it helps regulate blood sugar levels, and even reduces the risk of developing diabetes.

“It also plays a big role in preventing disease by allowing the body to focus on its other functions, including focusing on strengthening the immune system’s ability to fight the disease,” Dr Amira, who is also



the senior medical officer, Drug Addiction Unit at Al Massarah Hospital, said.

“Based on the clarification of the importance of fasting, it makes the individual feel an improvement and seeks to be careful to follow healthy eating habits through moderation in eating healthy food, breaking the fast with a few dates and drinking water, and not reaching a state of saturation,” Dr Amira said.

Fasting helps to improve the psychological state of an individual by controlling feelings of anger and excitement, and this in turn helps to modify positive behaviour, especially when practising self-reflection and when dealing with others.

Dr Siju George, Specialist Orthodontist, feels that it is important to remember that breaking the fast is an integral

part of this holy month. While indulging in delicious food and drinks after a long day of fasting can be tempting, it’s important to maintain a balanced and healthy approach to eating.

“Overeating after breaking the fast can not only diminish the spiritual experience of Ramadhan, it can also take a toll on our bodies. Consuming large portions of food, especially those high in sugar and fat, can cause bloating, indigestion, and even weight gain,” he said.

Instead of giving in to the temptation to overeat, one should try to focus on moderation and balance.

“Start by breaking the fast with a small portion of nutrient-rich foods, like soup or salad, and then gradually move on to more substantial dishes. Remember to drink plenty of water throughout the evening to stay hydrated,” adds Dr George.

By taking a mindful and balanced approach to breaking the fast, one will not only feel better, but also be able to experience the true essence and beauty of Ramadhan.



## Oman, Tajikistan hold political consultations

MUSCAT: The second round of political consultations was held on Tuesday between the foreign ministries of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Tajikistan.

The Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Foreign Ministry’s Under-Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs, while the Tajik side was headed by Huseynzade Muzaffar, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan.

The two sides discussed aspects of the bilateral relations. They also affirmed the two countries’ keenness in constantly developing these

relations in various political and economic fields, according to the vision of the leaderships of the two countries.

They also exchanged views on regional and international matters of mutual interest.

The session also saw the participation of Zubaydullo Zubaydov, Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan to the Sultanate of Oman, Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Oman’s Ambassador to Tajikistan, Shaikh Hamad bin Saif al Rawahi, Head of the International Cooperation Department, and officials from both sides. — ONA

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SEASON 2022-2023

## Tourism ministry opens Qurna Qaid mosque in Samayil

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism inaugurated Qurna Qaid Mosque in Samayil following restoration work over the last year and a half.

The mosque was inaugurated under the auspices of Shaikh Sultan bin Ali al Nuaimi, Wali of Samayil, and in the presence of several dignitaries.

The mosque, located at a height of approximately 3 metres above the ground, consists of the main prayer hall, and a platform of 30 square metres. The interior includes a mihrab, columns with architectural arches, four windows, and two entrances from the side of the edifice; the outer structure consists of a seating bench, with stairs on both sides.

The mosque is also equipped with an audio system and internal and external loudspeakers, in addition to all the necessary services and



amenities.

The restoration and maintenance work was undertaken in several stages, including documentation and photography, cleaning and consolidation work and preparation of drawings for the restoration work, taking into account the preservation of architecture and style in which the mosque was built, as well as the use of traditional building materials, like stones and clay that constituted 70 per cent of the materials. — ONA

## Housing ministry goes big on digital transformation

AFRAH AL BALUSHI  
@Afrahalbalushia

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning seeks to utilise government lands optimally and sustainably for investment by providing electronic housing options for citizens who are eligible to be granted government housing lands.

Electronic housing options aim to enhance options, safety, transparency, and keeping pace. Housing options are available under the following heads: Choose your land, Own your land, Plan your land, Sorouh, and Sorouh Plus.

Mazen bin Mohammed al Shahourzi, General Director of Geographical Information at the ministry, said, “In line with our transformation in the two sectors, the comprehensive digital transformation initiatives come to move our services to a high level of proficiency and professionalism,

to simplify and improve the procedures and services provided.”

The ministry started sending text messages to citizens who deserved residential lands last year. It stated that this comes within the ‘Choose your land’ service to start the selection process from three options electronically. The ‘Choose your land’ service allows citizens to choose through interactive geographic maps that show the location and details of the plot.

More than 23,000 families were able to choose residential land through the digital ‘Choose your land’ service during the year 2022. For the year 2023, the ministry is targeting to distribute more than 23,000 plots of land.

The ministry has also provided a new option for those wishing to purchase land (buy your own land) at a price that is subsidised by the government. The option is for those who have not yet obtained government land.



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# Rain affects normal life in Al Dakhiliyah



AMAL AL RIYAMI  
NIZWA, MARCH 28

Most parts of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate received heavy rains on Tuesday. The rain caused waterlogging in many areas, and most of the wadis were overflowing till the time of filing

this report.

The rain caught people unaware even though the forecast for bad weather and rains were there from the Met Office. Fortunately, students came back home safely even as many roads leading to the valleys were cut off and roads were blocked at several places.

Most wadis in the Wilayat of Nizwa, including Al Hijri, Al Musalla, Al Rahba, Sumait, Al Suwaihriya, Kamma, Kalbuh, and Wadi Al Muaiden were seen overflowing. Similar was the case in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar where Wadi Al Manakher and Wadi Saiq were

flowing with a huge current of water.

Izki also witnessed the flow of the wadis including Al Hajar, Al Masdoud, Al Shabak and Qent.

On the positive side, the rain eased the summer heat and gave relief to those who are fasting during the holy month of

Ramadhan.

With the rain, the people are expecting good crops, flowers, and nutrition for standing trees and herbs in the area.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority, cloudy weather will continue for some time in other governorates including

North al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Muscat, South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta. There are chances of rain of varying intensity, sometimes thundery, accompanied by active downward winds and hail.

PHOTOS BY SAMI AL HINAI

## No more clothing donation boxes on streets

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

Muscat Municipality has announced that collection boxes for clothing items will be removed from the streets of the city.

In a statement, Muscat Municipality, said, "The municipality wishes to advise the public that issuing approvals for the placement of clothing collection boxes in public places in Muscat Governorate has been suspended."



It added that the suspension was due to such boxes piling up at street entrances and in

residential neighbourhoods, which led to traffic problems, as well as leading to spoiling the aesthetics of public places.

The municipality urged all committees, associations and institutions that have previously been authorised to place donation containers in public places to remove them within one year from the date of its announcement.

The municipality will take the necessary measures in this regard in case of non-compliance with the above regulation, it added.

## ‘Because we believe that person deserves second chance’

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousef

Fak Kurba, a humanitarian initiative that aims to secure the release of those who are caught up in minor financial offences and help them resume a better life, aims to release 1,300 people this year.

Speaking to Oman Observer, Dr Mohammed al Zadjali, Head of the Fak Kurba initiative, said, "the initiative comes under the slogan 'Because we believe that a person deserves a second chance' and aims to collect financial donations to release the insolvent in prisons due to claims arising from different financial cases."

"We are aiming at more than 1,300 individuals who are caught up in minor financial cases but were jailed or are about to be jailed, and the release will be made possible with donations from individuals, corporates and the like," he added.

The initiative, which helps both

citizens and expatriates, is currently in its 10th edition and has so far released more than 4,969 persons who met the conditions. "The tenth edition of the humanitarian initiative is designed within the framework of community synergy, and one can support the mission through its bank account, its website and through Thawani Pay," Dr Zadjali said.

The 10th edition of the Fak Kurba initiative will continue until mid-April 2023, and the Lawyers Association is looking forward to transforming the humanitarian initiative into a sustainable project that works throughout the year through its own administrative staff, Dr Zadjali said. One can log on to the initiative's website [www.fakkrba.om](http://www.fakkrba.om) and the initiative's bank account.

Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Vice-President of the Supreme Judicial Council, said,



"We are aiming at relieving humanity of distress for the year 2023, which is adopted by the Omani Lawyers Association, in commitment to divine wisdom, and following the example of the Holy Prophet in extending his oath, and based on synergy and cohesion that characterises the pure Omani soil and the generosity, benevolence and good character of its people."

"The public can be partners in supporting the society and offer to relieve the distress of our brothers and sisters, because a person always deserves a second chance," he added.

During its humanitarian journey, which began in 2012 until now, Fak Kurba also contributed to promoting the values of solidarity between individuals and groups and activating the role of institutional partnership and social responsibility between institutions and companies.

## GAC Wins 'Best Performance – Customer Experience 2022' Award at MMMEA Aftersales Conference



**Muscat:** General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributor for Mitsubishi Motors in Oman, has won the coveted 'Best Performance – Customer Experience 2022' award at the annual Mitsubishi Motors Middle East and Africa Aftersales Conference held recently in Dubai, UAE. This is the first time GAC has won this prestigious award, surpassing other competing distributors in the Middle East and Africa region.

The award recognises GAC's dedication and commitment to providing exceptional customer service and always ensuring the highest levels of customer satisfaction. The company's efforts and customer-centric approach have been reflected in its outstanding Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) and Net Promoter Score (NPS) scores, which have been continuously improved, scaling newer heights with each passing year.

"We are extremely honoured and delighted to receive this prestigious award from Mitsubishi Motors Middle East and Africa. Winning this

award is a testament to our team's tireless efforts, unwavering dedication, and commitment to providing our customers with the best vehicle ownership experience possible," said Manoj Ranade, General Manager of GAC. "We believe every customer deserves exceptional service, and we work tirelessly to ensure that our customers have an unforgettable experience when purchasing and owning a Mitsubishi vehicle. Winning this accolade reinforces our commitment to providing world-class customer experience, and we thank Mitsubishi Motors Middle East and Africa for recognising our efforts."

GAC secured itself the award this year (2022) with outstanding CSI and NPS Scores, demonstrating its commitment to customer satisfaction and the quality of services offered to its customers across Oman.

"We are delighted to present GAC with the Best Performance – Customer Experience 2022 Award. This award is a testament to their dedication and commitment to providing exceptional customer service

and experience and always ensuring high levels of customer satisfaction and delight," said Frangos Peter, General Manager, Aftersales Marketing, MMMEA. "GAC's passion for delivering excellent customer service has earned them a well-deserved reputation as one of the leading automotive distributors in Oman."

GAC achieved the top-ranked "Platinum Certification" last year for its outstanding After-Sales Service rendered through its growing nationwide network of 14 Service Centres and 18 Parts Outlets dedicated to the Mitsubishi brand. Over and above the Platinum Certification, this award is a testament to the exemplary customer experience rendered at all GAC outlets.

For more information on the Mitsubishi range of vehicles, visit GAC's Mitsubishi Motors showrooms in Athaibah, Barka, Sohar, Nizwa, Ibri, Sur, Bu Ali and Salalah or follow 'MitsubishiMotorsOman' on Facebook and Instagram or @mitsubishioman on Twitter.

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# FASTING, DRIVING AND TIME TO PRAY

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
[@lakshmioman](#)

The holy month of Ramadhan could be one of the busiest months of the year as individuals want to dedicate more time for prayers, reflect and at the same time, take time for others. All of this while continuing to lead a normal working life.

While most people have their timings of work changed there are certain members of the community for whom the choice of timing is theirs.

**SAMI AL HARTHY** hails from Suwaiq but works in Muscat. He had been working in the private sector but was one of the individuals whose contract ended and was never renewed during the Covid-19 impact on companies.

“A government job provides security in life. When I could not find a job, I decided to drive a taxi.”

He tried for opportunities but since a job opening was not on the horizon he opted for driving a taxi. And that is what he has been doing for more than a year. He is currently tied with a taxi operating company even though he owns his own Orange and White taxi.

“Taxi driving is very rewarding because we meet all kinds of people — Omanis as well as people of different nationalities. The



conversations are enriching and one can learn so much,” said Sami.

There is heavy traffic and soon there is a block. And this is when he practices patience. Ramadhan is indeed special but he works as usual by starting his work in the morning.

“My family lives in Muscat with me so we break the fast together,” he said.

Reading the Quran is important and so during the holy month, he likes to read the Quran after midday Namaz.

He explained an interesting aspect of driving a taxi. “After dropping off the passenger at the destination I look for the nearest mosque and perform my prayers. This has taken me to many mosques, unlike others who would stick to the mosques in the neighbourhood.”

“In the afternoon, if I feel tired I take some rest. Ramadhan in Suwaiq would mean breaking fast with my parents and spending time with my friends in the evenings and working out in the gym. In Muscat I take one hour walk daily,” he noted.

The mosque he took the Observer journalist is Sayyida Fatima bint Ali al Said mosque. Assigned by Late Sultan Qaboos, the place of worship was inaugurated on May 17, 2018, by His Highness Sayyid Shabib bin Taimur Al Said.

The mosque is named after the grandmother of the Late Sultan Qaboos and the mother of Sultan Said bin Taimur.

The mosque is constructed in the

Mameluke architectural style.

Yet the mosque blends harmoniously with the architectural style of Omani mosques. The structure meets all the modern-day building requirements.

**DISTINCT IDENTITY**

The colour of the mosque gives it a distinct identity and another important feature is its location.

The mosque, located in Al Hail North in the Wilayat of Seeb, looks at the Sea of Oman with just the seafront road between the mosque and the beach.

To reach the mosque all you have to do is locate latitude 23.646107 north of the equator and longitude 58.235423 east of Greenwich or take 1683 Way, Seeb.

“Today is a weekday afternoon and as you can see there are people gathered in their official attire. This means there must be an event or presentation of a lecture,” he explained.

The area is 8,000 square meters, and it includes a main prayer hall that accommodates 2,200 worshippers and another hall for women that can accommodate 330 worshippers.

In addition, the mosque has classrooms, a library, a general council, a multi-purpose hall, green areas, parking lots, and service buildings. After proudly describing the mosque Sami said, “Ramadhan is good and fasting is healthy. The good thing about driving a taxi is, you are never alone.”



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# Water supply for mountainous villages in N Al Batinah discussed

**SUHAR:** The Municipal Council of North Al Batinah Governorate held its third ordinary meeting for this year under the chairmanship of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah, on Tuesday.

At the onset of the meeting, the members of the Municipal Council approved the previous meeting's minutes and recommendations pertaining to a set of topics.

The municipal council's members held discussion and exchanged viewpoints with the ministry's specialists on the backdrop of the visual display. They agreed to put the approved recommendations for further discussion.



The council reviewed a number of responses it received from a number of government departments regarding a set of issues that include the construction of a health centre in Mikhileef in the Wilayat of Saham; the provision of basic services for residential layouts in North Al Batinah

Governorate; and implementation of basic projects and facilities along Al Batinah Highway. The council also reviewed replies related to the student accommodation of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences - Shinas situated in the middle of residential quarters.

The meeting discussed a complaint about foul odours emanating from a factory, proposed names of roundabouts, provision of water at mountainous villages, determining times for the council's members for inspecting the development projects in the wilayats.

# Theatre Group Muscat announces new play

**KABEER YOUSUF**

[@kabeeryousef](#)

Theatre Group Muscat, a group for people who love theatre, has announced its 7th drama on World Drama Day on March 27 at the Talent Space in the CBD area.

The play, which makes use of both amateur and professional stage mediums, is happening in Oman after three years of hiatus, although there was a drama fest organised by Bhavalaya, a platform for promotion of art and culture.

Titled 'Safalamee Yathra' means 'Fruitful Journey', the drama is all set for the maiden stage on December 15, according to the organisers of TGM.

"It gives us immense pleasure to announce our 7th stage play, Safalamee Yathra on this

auspicious day, World Drama Day," said Ansar Ibrahim, director of the drama, who has successfully staged 6 other classy plays since 2015.

Written by Jayan Thirumana, the play has a variety of plots and background settings designed by award-winning craftsman Sujathan Master.

Touted to be a mirror to the present day developments of the world, the play is an attempt to portray the diversity in life on a train journey which begins from the south and ends in the north.

The play will have nearly 25 artistes from across the breadth and width of the country giving life to different characters.

TGM manager Manoharan Guruvayoor, Sudha Raghunath and Adv Gireesh were present at the press meet.

# Musandam campaign to boost tourism



**From Page 1**

Seebi Island, located in the Wilayat of Khasab in Khor Sham, is one of the most eye-catching tourist attractions of Musandam Governorate. With a beautiful sandy crescent-shaped beach, the island is a good place for kayaking.

Developing tourist islands of the Musandam Governorate provides ample investment opportunities with excellent revenues that can be exploited

by the private sector as the country is witnessing a renewed renaissance in tourism industry spearheaded by the the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Office of the Governor of Musandam with the aim of upgrading tourism, developing local tourism facilities and diversifying entertainment products to meet the needs of visitors.

The Office of the Governor of Musandam launched a tourism

promotional campaign under the slogan 'Musandam Winter' and is working to create a tourism hub by tapping the governorate's tourism potentials such as the unique nature and cultural richness through various events, activities and programmes that witnessed a big tourist turnout since its launch.

The islands of Musandam Governorate allow visitors an opportunity to spend unforgettable

time on its golden sands, pristine beaches and beautiful rocks. Tourists can also explore rare plants and birds and marine life available only on the islands of Musandam Governorate. Tourists can enjoy deep diving into the sea to explore the sea and learn about its contents. The archaeological sites are yet another tourism treat that shed light on their culture, history and ancient heritage of Musandam.

# MoE training for e-mail services and institutional proficiency

**STAFF REPORTER**

MUSCAT, MARCH 28

The Department of Educational Studies and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Education implemented two training programmes over two days. The programmes were on using the e-mail services in the ministry, and on the institutional proficiency system. They aim to provide the department's employees with experiences and knowledge that contribute to career development.

The first programme "benefiting from e-mail services at the Ministry of Education" included a number of topics: an overview of e-mail, accessing process, identifying e-mail services, installing applications on devices, and applying them in the department.

The trainer focused on the Outlook programme and the email policies of the Ministry of Education.



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# Inspection finds violations in buses



**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology carried out an inspection campaign on school buses in a number of schools across the country under the slogan 'Safe and Sustainable School Transportation System',

on Tuesday.

The campaign aimed to ensure abidance by the Land Transportation Law and its executive regulation as part of the Ministry of Education's keenness to control school transportation.

During the campaign, inspectors issued a number of violations including lack of safety specifications at school buses, failure to register on the Naql platform and non-compliance with the technical specifications approved by the ministry.



**SULTANATE OF OMAN**  
**MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

**The Ministry of Health (Al Masarra Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-**

| Tender Ref.           | Description                                 | Last Date for Collection of Tender Document | Closing Time/ Day/ Date        | Eligibility                                        | Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1145/2023/ MOH/ AMH-2 | Renovation Fountains at Al Masarra Hospital | 09/04/2023                                  | Before 10 AM Sunday 07/05/2023 | Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board | R.O 25/= Per set            |

**Notes:-**

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose Electronic Bank Guarantee issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: **24402200**, Email id [etenderhd@ita.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@ita.gov.om)

# DETERMINED TO SEE FAIR VOTE AFTER QUAKES, TURKS MOBILISE FOR MAY ELECTION

ISTANBUL: Sensing the best chance yet to end President Tayyip Erdogan's two-decade rule in Turkiye, his opponents are mobilising to make sure every ballot is counted in a May election and to guard against any tampering in what is expected to be a tight vote.

With the stakes so high, concerns about potential irregularities have been heightened by upheaval wrought by February's devastating earthquakes in the southeast, where some 50,000 people were killed and millions made homeless.

Yigit, 26, a student from southern Turkiye, said he will watch the polling in his hometown of Antakya, to make sure nobody tries to cast ballots in the name of his parents, who died in the disaster.

"I will wait at the ballot box to make sure that no one else is voting in their place," Yigit said.

An alliance of six opposition parties hoping to unseat the



Election officials open a ballot box to count votes at a polling station in Istanbul, Turkiye. — Reuters file photo

president is planning measures to safeguard a free and fair election, including recruiting professionals such as lawyers to monitor the voting, said Idris Sahin, deputy chair of DEVA Party.

DEVA officials are comparing voter lists from December 31 with the updated registry in

the earthquake zone, he said, including checking whether those who moved away are registered in their new residences and whether those who died have been removed.

Observers should be able to prevent any attempts to cast votes in the names of people who died in the earthquake but who had yet to be removed from the records, Sahin added.

**DISASTER ZONES**

Opposition parties have alleged electoral irregularities in the past, including criticism of measures taken by the High Electoral Board (YSK) and Erdogan's influence over the country's newsrooms.

Non-governmental organisations say the exodus of more than 3 million people from the disaster zone poses extra concerns. The earthquake devastated 11 provinces that were home to 14 million people.

"We have a problem updating the electoral records correctly and ballot box security after such a disaster," said Bekir Agirdir, a board member of pollster KONDA research.

"How many people are actually relocating? How many people will be properly registered on the voter lists?"

The YSK electoral board has said there are no obstacles to holding elections in the southeast, and has announced additional measures such as setting up ballot boxes for voters in temporary shelters and allowing those who moved away to easily change their registered address.

Erdogan was elected in 2018 as the first president under a new presidential system following a constitutional amendment, so the government says that previous terms in office do not count.

Constitutional lawyers are divided on whether or not he can run again.

The final list is to be published in the Official Gazette on March 31. — Agencies

## Bangladesh govt bans plastics in world's largest mangrove forest

DHAKA: Conservationists in Bangladesh said on Tuesday that tourists dropping rubbish in the world's largest mangrove forest had seriously damaged the ecosystem, forcing the imposition of a single-use plastic ban in the World Heritage site.

The Sundarbans forest straddles the Bangladeshi coastline and is home to some of the world's rarest creatures, including the Bengal tiger and the Irrawaddy dolphin.

Some 200,000 tourists visit each year, according to government figures, on top of seasonal visits by fishermen and harvesters of wild honey who depend on the ecosystem's bounties.

"When they visit the forest, they bring in disposable water bottles, one-time use plastic food plates, soft-drink bottles and cans," Abu Naser Mohsin Hossain, a government forest conservator, said.

"It is tough to clean up," he added.

Bangladesh Environment Minister Md Shahab Uddin announced a single-use plastic ban covering 6,500 square kilometres of the forest late on Monday.

"Single-use plastics



Some 200,000 tourists visit Sundarbans each year, on top of seasonal visits by fishermen and harvesters of wild honey who depend on the bounties

have severely damaged the environment and biodiversity of the Sundarbans," the minister said.

His decision was immediately hailed by environmentalists.

"The environment and biodiversity are at stake in the Sundarbans," Monirul Khan, a zoology professor at Bangladesh's state-run Jahangirnagar University, said.

"The gravity of pollution caused by plastics is more than meets the eye. Wild animals often end up eating these plastics."

Part of the Sundarbans was designated a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 1997.

The Sundarbans, located on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers on the Bay of Bengal, also help buffer coastal communities in Bangladesh from the cyclones that frequently strike the country during its annual monsoon.

Conservationists regularly sound the alarm over environmental threats to the Sundarbans, including the construction at its northern edge of a coal-fired power station that began operations last year.

Bangladesh Environment Movement general secretary Sharif Jamil said the plant remained a considerable threat to the ecosystem.

"The government should stop coal transportation and discharging through the forest's rivers," he said.

"Uncovered vessels that carry coal for the power plant through the forest also cause a great deal of pollution." — AFP

## Egypt to allow Iranians visas on arrival in Sinai

CAIRO: Egypt will soon allow Iranians travelling with tour groups to obtain visas on arrival in the south of its Sinai peninsula with a view to extending access to other parts of the country, Egyptian tourism ministry officials said.

The decision is part of a series of measures announced on Monday aimed at improving access to visas to boost tourism revenues at a time when Egypt has been struggling economically with an acute foreign currency shortage.

It also comes as some Middle Eastern countries including Egypt are taking steps to ease regional tensions. Saudi Arabia and Iran announced this month that they would restore diplomatic relations.

Cairo has mended a rift with Qatar and is re-establishing ties with Turkiye, another country to benefit from new visa rules with Turkish nationals given expanded access to visas on arrival, according to a Egyptian Tourism Ministry statement.

Among the other new visa rules announced were a \$700,



five-year multiple-entry visa, which Tourism Minister Ahmed Issa said was aimed at investors and property owners who are based outside Egypt.

On visas for Iranians arriving in South Sinai, home to the highly secured resort of Sharm el Sheikh, Issa said: "We will evaluate the experience of their arrival in South Sinai as a first step, and building on that, we'll determine if they will be admitted in other places."

Relations between Egypt and Iran have generally been fraught in recent decades although the two countries have maintained diplomatic contacts.

Tourists from China, which Egypt regards as a market with big potential, and Indians resident in Gulf countries will also be granted visas on arrival.

All new visa rules have been approved in principle and will be put into effect soon, a tourism ministry official said. — Reuters

### SHORT TAKES

#### JAKARTA

##### Anak Krakatoa volcano erupts

The offspring of Indonesia's infamous Krakatoa volcano erupted several times on Tuesday, sending a huge volcanic ash tower some 2,500 metres into the sky.

Mount Anak Krakatoa, which means Child of Krakatoa, erupted four times, officials said, with the biggest followed by another that sent a column of smoke and ash 1,500 metres above its crater.

"This is part of an eruption phase associated with the formation of a new body for



the volcano," Oktory Prambada, an official at the Centre of Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation, said. There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage on Tuesday.

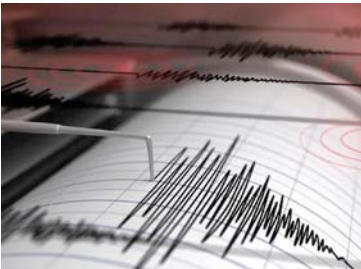
#### TOKYO

##### Magnitude 6.1 quake shakes northern Japan

A magnitude 6.1 quake struck off Aomori in northern Japan on Tuesday, the national weather agency said, but no tsunami warning was issued.

The quake hit at 6:18 pm at a depth of 20 kilometres, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. Major Japanese media outlets carried no immediate reports of damage or injuries.

Earthquakes are common in Japan, which sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity that stretches



through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin. The country has strict construction regulations intended to ensure buildings can withstand strong earthquakes.

#### BEIJING

##### Industrial recovery drives smog surge

A spike in air pollution in China in the first quarter of this year was driven by a post-Covid industrial recovery along with unusually warm weather, a government official said on Tuesday.

Rising industrial output and the pursuit of economic growth in some regions caused a jump in emissions, said Liu Bingjiang, director of the department in charge of air pollution at the Ministry of Ecology and Environment. The consumption of gasoline and diesel also



returned to normal levels after China scrapped its "zero-Covid" restrictions at the end of last year, he said. Liu said some regions had been pursuing high-polluting industrial projects.



## In brief

■ LISBON



### 2 KILLED IN KNIFE ATTACK AT LISBON CENTRE

At least two people were killed and one wounded in a knife attack at the Ismaili Centre in Lisbon on Tuesday, Portuguese police and a community leader said.

Officers shot the attacker after he refused to lay down his weapon and approached them with a large knife. He was arrested and taken to hospital. Police said the attack occurred just before 11 am.

Prime Minister Antonio Costa told reporters everything indicated that it was an isolated act, and it was premature to make any interpretation about the crime.

■ LONDON



### PANEL APPROVES EXCLUSION OF CORBYN

British opposition leader Keir Starmer's move to block Jeremy Corbyn from running to be a Labour MP at the next election has been backed by the party's National Executive Committee (NEC).

A Labour spokesman said the leader's motion passed by 22 votes to 12 on Tuesday afternoon, meaning it is now down to Corbyn to decide whether to run as an independent candidate.

Corbyn, the veteran left-winger who has represented Islington North since 1983, had criticised the move as "undermining the party's internal democracy" before its approval.

■ ACCRA



### HARRIS CALLS FOR MORE AFRICA INVESTMENTS

US Vice President Kamala Harris on Tuesday called for more investments in innovation in Africa in a speech underlining her optimism for the continent where she is on tour.

Her visit to Ghana and later this week to Tanzania and Zambia follows a December summit hosted by President Joe Biden in Washington with African leaders to balance the rising influence of China and Russia on the continent.

After a stop at a music recording studio in Ghana's capital, Harris addressed a crowd of young entrepreneurs and leaders gathered at the Black Star Gate landmark.

# 39 MIGRANTS DIE IN FIRE AT MEXICO FACILITY NEAR US BORDER



Viangly, a Venezuelan migrant, reacts outside an ambulance for her injured husband Eduard Caraballo in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. – Reuters

**CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico:** At least 39 migrants from Central and South America died after a fire broke out late on Monday at a migrant facility in the Mexican northern border city of Ciudad Juarez, the government's National Migration Institute (INM) said on Tuesday.

In a statement, the INM said there were 68 adult men from Central and South America staying at the facility in the city opposite El Paso, Texas, and that 29 of them were also injured in the blaze and taken to four hospitals in the area.

A Reuters witness saw bodies lined up in body bags and confirmed that the fire, whose origins are under investigation, had been extinguished. Many of the migrants at the facility were Venezuelan, according to the witness.

The fire, one of the deadliest

to hit the country in years, occurred as the US and Mexico are battling to cope with record levels of border crossings at their shared frontier.

Recent weeks have seen a build-up of migrants in Mexican border cities as authorities attempt to process asylum requests using a new US government app known as CBP One.

Many migrants feel the process is taking too long and earlier this month hundreds of mostly Venezuelan migrants got into a scuffle with US officials at the border after their frustration welled up about securing asylum appointments.

### BORDER FLOWS

In January, the Biden administration said it would expand Trump-era restrictions to rapidly expel Cuban, Nicaraguan and Haitian migrants caught illegally

crossing the US-Mexico border in an effort to contain the border flows.

At the same time, the United States said it would allow up to 30,000 people from those three countries plus Venezuela to enter the country by air each month.

The blaze in Ciudad Juarez is one of the deadliest incidents to afflict migrants in Mexico in the past few decades.

In December 2021, at least 55 people were killed and the dozens were injured when a truck packed with migrants flipped over in the southern border state of Chiapas.

Seventy-two migrants were massacred by drug cartel gunmen in the northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas in 2010.

Forty-nine children died following a blaze in a daycare center in the northern city of Hermosillo in 2009.

### RECORD TIME

The administration of US President Joe Biden has been hoping to stem the record tide of migrants and asylum seekers undertaking often dangerous journeys organised by human smugglers to get to the United States.

Biden proposed new restrictions on asylum seekers in February, hoping to stifle the rush of migrants to the southern border when Covid-related controls are lifted.

The new rules say migrants who arrive at the border and simply cross into the United States will no longer be eligible for asylum. Instead, they must first apply for asylum in one of the countries they pass through to get to the US border or apply online via a US government app.

The new measures came as Biden was facing accusations from Republicans of having lost control of the border.

— Agencies

## Britain raises domestic threat level for Northern Ireland

**LONDON:** Britain's MI5 intelligence agency has increased the threat level in Northern Ireland from domestic terrorism to "severe" — meaning an attack is highly likely.

The move to return the level to its second highest category follows recent attacks on police offices and comes weeks before political leaders are due to gather in the province to celebrate the 25th anniversary of a peace deal that largely ended three decades of violence.

US President Joe Biden said this month that he had accepted an invitation to visit Northern Ireland in April, and both Bill and Hillary Clinton are due to attend anniversary-related events.

"The public should remain vigilant, but not be alarmed, and continue to report any concerns they have," Chris Heaton-Harris, the British minister for the province, said in a written statement.

The British government said the level had been increased from "substantial" following the recent targeting of police officers, and it was not thought to be linked to the anniversary.

The threat for Northern Ireland had been held at severe since the system was introduced in 2010. It was lowered, for just over a year, in 2022. Chief Constable Simon Byrne of the Police Service of Northern Ireland said his officers would not be deterred from "delivering a visible, accessible and responsive community focused policing service to keep people safe".

While a 1998 peace deal largely ended three decades of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, police officers are still sporadically targeted by small splinter groups of mostly nationalist militants opposed to Britain's rule over the region. An off-duty officer was left seriously injured last month following a gun attack that police said was carried out by the new IRA, a much smaller group than the Irish Republican Army, which disarmed following the Good Friday accord. — Reuters

# Damaged Russian Soyuz capsule lands back on Earth

**MOSCOW:** A damaged Russian Soyuz MS-22 capsule landed back on Earth on Tuesday, three months after coolant began leaking from the craft while it was docked at the International Space Station (ISS).

The module completed the almost two-hour return from the ISS without a crew, landing in the Kazakh steppe on Tuesday afternoon, a few hundred kilometres from the Baikonur cosmodrome, home to Russia's space launches.

The landing was broadcast online by the Russian space agency Roscosmos.

A significant coolant leak was discovered in the capsule last December - caused by a 0.8-millimetre hole in its outer skin. A tiny meteorite is likely to have pierced the structure while it was docked, experts say. Images captured from the exterior of the ISS showed coolant fluid spewing into space, while Roscosmos said



A view shows external damage believed to have caused a loss of pressure in the cooling system of the Soyuz MS-22 spacecraft docked to the International Space Station (ISS), in this image released on February 13. – Reuters

temperatures at one point rose to 30 Celsius inside the capsule. The leaks prompted Roscosmos and the US space agency Nasa to rearrange their schedules and

postpone space walks.

Russia sent a back-up capsule - the MS-23 - to the ISS last month and decided to bring the damaged MS-22 back to Earth

without a crew. The Two Russian cosmonauts and a US astronaut who were due to return to Earth in March will now stay on the ISS until September.

Roscosmos said the capsule returned on Tuesday with 218 kg of cargo, including the results of scientific experiments and equipment from the station that would be analysed on Earth or reused in future missions.

Washington and Moscow have maintained cooperation in space despite relations hitting their lowest in decades, with astronauts stationed together at the ISS, and also ferried back and forth jointly.

Russia has said it will quit the ISS and launch its own independent space station at some time in the future, though plans for how and when remain under discussion.

The space station, a science laboratory spanning the size of a football field and orbiting some 400 km above Earth, has been occupied continuously for more than two decades under a US-Russian-led partnership that also includes Canada, Japan and 11 European countries. — Reuters



# Race to improve food security

Food insecurity has reached an unprecedented level in many regions of the world and shortages have become a regular occurrence in everyday life. Consequently, undernourishment is a looming threat globally!

According to the World Food Programme, nearly 350 million people across 79 countries are currently facing acute food insecurity. This is ten times more than five years ago. Almost one in five of them are struggling to access enough food to survive the day. The prevalence of undernourishment as measured by the UN agencies was 9.1 per cent in 2021.

The impact of the food shock is felt everywhere. The situation, according to the UN News, is expected to worsen, with global food supplies projected to drop to a three-year low. The need is especially dire in 24 countries that are identified as hunger hotspots, 16 of which are in Africa.

Extreme weather events, disruptions in the supply chain, Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war, and rising interest rates resulting in food inflation have all caused an unprecedented shock to the world food system, with the most vulnerable hit the toughest. Global fertiliser prices have climbed even faster than food prices, which remain at a ten-year high themselves.

A perusal of some of the regions in the world brings to the fore the frequency and severity of natural disasters, the level to which wars have wreaked havoc in people's lives, and how they have limited the quantity and quality of food available to people there.

According to available data between October 2022 and February 2023, food price inflation levels rose above 5 per cent in 94.1 per cent of low-income countries, 86 per cent in lower-middle-income countries, and 87.0 per cent in upper-middle-income countries, and many others are experiencing double-digit inflation.

Projections are that nearly 670



Samuel Kutty  
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The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

COUNTRIES LIKE OMAN DEVOTE UTMOST ATTENTION TO THE ISSUE OF FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SUPPLY AND HAVE DEVELOPED A WIDE ARRAY OF PLANS AND PROGRAMMES FOCUSED ON THE SECURITY

million people, which is eight per cent of the world population, will still be facing hunger in 2030 even if a global economic recovery is taken into consideration.

The March 2023 edition of the Agricultural Market Information System Market Monitor underscores the uncertainty hanging over agricultural markets as the war in Ukraine continues. Reduced Ukrainian production suggests that other countries will need to plant additional grains and oilseeds to help rebuild global stocks and ease prices.

Countries in Africa and the Middle East are heavily dependent on wheat imports from these two countries as it is traditionally used in some of the most common food staples.

Food is at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN's development agenda for the 21st century. The second of the UN's 17 SDGs is to "End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture."

Countries like the Sultanate of Oman devote utmost attention to the issue of food security and food supply and has developed a wide array of plans and programmes focused on the security and sustainability of food supply for nationals and expatriates.

According to the latest Global Food Security Index, Oman's food security situation improved the most in the world. It was ranked 35th in the world in the index in 2022 and fourth in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The 2040 Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy in Oman seeks to promote the agricultural sector sustainability, increase economic revenues, create job opportunities for nationals, support rural communities and limit structural imbalances in the agricultural sector.

Similarly, the Food Security Strategy sets forth a set of objectives seeking generally to enhance Oman's food security system in terms of production, import, storage and distribution. It focuses on three key themes, namely food demand, local food production and securing imports.

## FLYING IN A FORMATION



■ A KC-767A tanker aircraft of the Italian Air Force (C) flies in formation with fighter jet aircraft over Rome to mark the 100th anniversary of the Italian Air Force, on Tuesday. – AFP

# The population boon...

An easy way to start a long, heated debate is to mention global population. Thomas Malthus famously ignited furious arguments in the nineteenth century when he warned that, absent fertility-control policies, exponential population growth would outpace improvements in agriculture and cause recurrent bouts of famine and pestilence. Industrialisation would postpone the crisis, but not forever.

These arguments were still raging in the 1960s, when Paul and Anne Ehrlich added fuel to the fire with their bestseller, The Population Bomb. Their fears were reasonable, given the data. By 1975, the global population doubled to four billion – in just under 50 years. It has just doubled again, reaching eight billion last November. This raises a new question: Will the population double again to 16 billion?

The answer is a resounding no. In fact, the global population will not get anywhere close to that level, owing to a paradigm shift in demographics over the past 50 years. The population growth rate peaked in the 1960s and has been falling steadily ever since. Women around the world are choosing to have fewer children, and the global average fertility rate is now just above two children per woman.

Of course, this figure masks large geographic disparities. The number of children per woman is below two in places like Germany and Japan, but much higher in most low-income countries, especially fragile states. Still, the United Nations estimates



Beniamino Callegari

An associate professor at Kristiania University College, is a member of the Earth4All modeling team.



Per Espen Stoknes

Project Lead of Earth4All, is Director of the Center for Sustainability and Energy at the BI Norwegian Business School.

that the global population could peak at 10-11 billion people this century, before starting to decline slowly. That is a huge number of mouths to feed, but it is nowhere near 16 billion.

Moreover, our own analysis in a new report, People and Planet: 21st Century Sustainable Population Scenarios and Possible Living Standards Within Planetary Boundaries, produced for the Global Challenges Foundation in Stockholm, concludes that the global population could peak at a much lower level – around nine billion – by mid-century. And if the world invests more in economic development, education and health, the global population could fall to levels at which everyone on Earth can have sustainable access to clean energy, shelter, food and water. The bomb will have been defused, allowing everyone to live a good life within planetary boundaries. This should be cause for celebration.

Our projections come from a new system dynamics model, Earth4All, which allows us to explore two economic and population scenarios this century. In the first scenario, the world economy continues along a path similar to the one followed during the last 50 years, many of the poorest countries eventually break free from extreme poverty, and the global population peaks at 8.8 billion in the middle of the

century before declining to 7.3 billion in 2100.

In the second scenario, which we call the "Giant Leap," the global population peaks at 8.5 billion by around 2040 and declines to just six billion by the end of the century. This would require unprecedented investments in poverty alleviation and human capital, along with extraordinary policy turnarounds on food and energy security, inequality and gender equity. In this potential future, extreme poverty would be eliminated within a generation (by 2060), with a marked impact on global population trends.

Mainstream demographic projections often struggle to connect population growth to economic development. Yet we know that rapid economic development in low-income countries has a huge impact on fertility rates. Fertility rates fall as girls gain access to education and as women

become more economically empowered through access to paid employment and better health-care and family-planning methods. When we incorporated these factors into our projections, population growth slowed dramatically.

But our findings come with a big caveat. To achieve the Great Leap, governments in low-income countries must commit fully to pursuing economic development based on large investments in education, rather than economic growth driven solely by natural-resources extraction.

Moreover, while defusing the population bomb may be necessary for reducing the risk of future civilisational collapse, it is not sufficient. When we investigated the connection between population and planetary boundaries, we found that – contrary to popular myth – population size is not the primary reason that humanity

is breaching these boundaries (reflected in problems like climate change). Rather, the main driver is consumption by the richest 10 per cent – a cohort that has an extremely large material footprint.

Humanity's big problem is luxury carbon and biosphere consumption, not population. The places where population is rising fastest have extremely small environmental footprints per person, relative to countries that reached peak population many decades ago. If resources were distributed more fairly, today's global population would already enjoy living conditions exceeding the UN's minimum level, and without the need for significant changes in developmental trends.

People and Planet provides a hopeful outlook on global population. Our findings challenge the common misconception that population growth is the main cause of exceeding planetary boundaries. In reality, the world's wealthiest people are the ones driving us towards the cliff.

Through systemic economic change, we could still provide a good life for everyone within planetary boundaries. We hope our report will lead policymakers to re-examine the impact of consumption patterns and prioritise equitable distribution over economic growth for its own sake.

@Project Syndicate, 2022



# sport

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## ESSAM BRACE POWERS OMAN AGAINST LEBANON

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

Oman national team striker Essam al Subhi netted the winning goals as Oman blanked Lebanon 2-0 in an international friendly game on Monday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Al Suwaiq forward Essam put Oman ahead in the 27th minute after heading in a perfect cross from Ahmed al Kaabi.

In the second half, Essam doubled the result as Zaher al Aghbari sent a ground pass to him and then he entered inside the box before nestling the ball into the back of the net with 10 minutes to go in the match.

With the energetic win, Oman team gained some extra points for Fifa world ranking which will publish their new ranking by April. Currently Oman are placed in 75th position with 1321.24 points.

The completion of preparatory match meant, Oman team concluded their domestic training camp on a successful note. The nine days gathering was part of the team's preparations for the forthcoming assignments including the top participation at the AFC Asian Cup championship in Qatar which is scheduled to take place during January 12, 2024 until February 10, 2024 and AFC Asian qualifiers for 2026 Fifa World Cup.

The AFC Asian Cup's draw will

take place on May 11. Oman are placed in the second ranking of the draw. Asian favourites Japan followed by Iran, South Korea, Australia and Saudi Arabia are positioned in the first ranking.

### PLAYERS TESTED

During the warm-up encounter against Lebanon, Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic made several changes in the game by bringing in Arshad al Alawi, Al Munthir al Alawi, Juma al Habsi, Khalid al Buraiki, Musab al Maamari and Abdulrahman al Mushaifri.

The Croatian coach preferred to begin the game with Ibrahim al Mukhaini as the goalkeeper while defenders were Ahmed al Khamisi, Fahmi Dorbeen, Ahmed al Kaabi and Jameel al Yahmadi. Midfield maestro Harib al Saadi monitored the centre besides Abdullah Fawaz, Salah al Yahyaie and Zaher al Aghbari. The duo of strikers — Essam al Subhi and Omar al Malki — took the attacking responsibilities in a 4-4-2 format employed by Ivankovic.

The Red Warriors were the active side throughout the friendly game as they dominated the match and missed several attempts apart from the two goals. The preparatory match was the first presence of the team after their participation in the latest Gulf Cup in Basra, Iraq, where Oman team ended as runners-up.



## Al Seeb dominate Salalah in Ministry's Shield

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

Al Seeb Club achieved a remarkable victory against Salalah Club in the second group competitions of the 13th edition of the Basketball Shield of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth for the 2022-2023 season. The game was held at the sub-hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The match started with Al Seeb taking an early lead with a shot from under the basket by their professional player Ibrahim Degen. Al Seeb's area defence strategy was successful in preventing Salalah from taking advantage of opportunities. Al Seeb's lead was further extended by 7 points from the same player, bringing the score to 9-0. Salalah managed to respond with a triple shot from Caesar al Balushi, closing the gap to 9-3.

In the second quarter, Al Seeb continued to dominate the game offensively and defensively, adding 22 points to their score through Noah

Balushi, Ibrahima Degen, Mazin al Hadidi, Noah al Amri and Moawiya al Harthy. On the other hand, Salalah scored only 5 points through Majid al Balushi and Caesar al Balushi. The first half ended with Al Seeb leading Salalah 43-17.

The third quarter saw Al Seeb continue their attack, scoring 26 points and investing in the experience of their players, while Salalah was only able to score 5 points. At the end of the third quarter, the score was 69-22 in favour of Al Seeb.

In the fourth quarter, Al Seeb continued their dominance and scored 36 points, while Salalah only managed to add 9 points to their score. The match ended with a resounding victory for Al Seeb, defeating Salalah with a score of 106-31.

The match was moderated by Rashid al Mushaifri as the first referee, Al Khalasi as the second referee, and Ali al Salmani as the third referee. The table officials were Miad al Hamdani, Yaqoub al Nadabi and Fatima al Harthy.



## Majan Shipping win Inter-Corporate cricket tourney



KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousef

Majan Shipping lifted the winner's trophy after a tightly contested match played against Majan Travel in the Inter-Corporate cricket tournament organised by the Muscat Overseas Group with Shaikh Saud bin Mustahail al Mashani as the chief guest recently.

The mega sports event organised with the aim of empowering its employees through sporting events saw the participation of 16 teams from various verticals of the group. The final was played between teams of Majan Shipping and Majan Travel. Tarek from Majan Shipping bagged the Player of the tournament. Along with an enterprising and cheering crowd were Abdul Razak, Group CFO, Himansu Mohapatra, Group General Manager (Investments), Balachandran, CEO of MOIMETCO, Ali Abdul Latif, Property Manager, Ali al Gadhani, Senior Manager Group Admin & HR and other prominent members

Shaikh Saud bin Mustahail al Mashani said he was glad to be part of this great event and wished the winners and all the participating teams more successful matches ahead

of the Group.

Shaikh Saud bin Mustahail al Mashani said he was glad to be part of this great event and wished the winners and all the participating teams more successful matches ahead, at the closing ceremony.

The tournament was supported by Papparoti, Majan Travel, Funtopia, Wow Cinemas, Horizon Fitness, Desert Night Camp, Novotel Airport, Sohar Beach Hotel, Barcelo Musannah Resort, Al Falaj Hotel, IFFCO, Al Bayan Water and Badr al Samaa Hospitals.

## SHADAB LEADS PAKISTAN'S CONSOLATION T20I WIN

SHARJAH, United Arab Emirates: Stand-in skipper Shadab Khan gave an all-round performance to guide Pakistan to a consolation 66-run win in the third and final Twenty20 international in Sharjah on Monday but Afghanistan took the series 2-1.

Having lost the first two match by six and seven wickets respectively, Pakistan's new-look side posted a strong 182-7 in 20 overs before restricting Afghanistan to 116 in 18.4 overs.

Opener Saim Ayub led an improved batting show as Pakistan scored 182-7 after their below-par 92-9 and 130-6 in the first two matches.

Shadab then became the first Pakistani and seventh bowler overall to complete 100 T20I wickets in his 87th match, claiming 3-13.

Afghanistan were never in hunt for the stiff target as fiery pacer Ihsanullah dismissed Rahmanullah Gurbaz (18) and Karim Janat (nought) before his sharp bouncer left Najibullah Zadran's chin bleeding.

Najibullah was stable but could not resume his innings. Azmatullah Omarzai, concussion substitute for Najibullah, top-scored with 20-ball 21, hitting a six and two boundaries.



Ihsanullah finished with 3-29.

Mohammad Nabi was run out for 17, Rashid Khan made 16 and Usman Ghani scored 15 before becoming Shadab's 100th T20I wicket.

New Zealand's pacer Tim Southee leads the T20I wicket takers with 134 followed by Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan (131), Afghanistan's Rashid (129), New Zealand's Ish Sodhi (114), Sri Lankan Lasith Malinga (107) and Bangladesh's Mustafizur Rahman (100).

Despite the series defeat, Pakistan can take heart from the fact that they checked their bench strength, having rested regular

skipper Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan, Fakhar Zaman, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf.

Shadab said the motive for the series was achieved.

"The main motive of this series was to give the youngsters a chance, hopefully, they will get confidence from these matches and it will help them in the long run," said Shadab.

### MEMORABLE WIN

Series win, Rashid said, was memorable.

"It's special to be part of this team, it was a great effort from everyone. We won the series, but we have some areas to improve

on," said Rashid.

"Any series after this is a good preparation for us before the World Cup," said Rashid of the 50-over World Cup in India later this year.

Earlier, Ayub hit a solid 40-ball 49 with two sixes and four boundaries while Iftikhar Ahmed scored 31 from 25 balls with two sixes.

Shadab, who made 28, and Abdullah Shafique (23) were the other main run getters.

For Afghanistan spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman was the pick of the bowlers with 2-28.

Afghanistan won the first match by six wickets and the second by seven, also in Sharjah.

The series was arranged in replacement for three ODI matches which Afghanistan were slated to play against Australia this month in the United Arab Emirates.

But Cricket Australia abandoned the series in protest of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban putting a ban on women's education and cricket in their country. — AFP

### BRIEF SCORES

**Pakistan:** 182/7 in 20 overs (Saim Ayub 49, Iftikhar Ahmed 31, Shadab Khan 28, Abdullah Shafique 23; Mujeeb Ur Rahman 2-28) bt **Afghanistan:** 116 in 18.4 overs (Azmatullah Omarzai 21, Rahmanullah Gurbaz 18, Mohammad Nabi 17; Shadab Khan 3-13, Ihsanullah 3-29)

## Christchurch washout hits Sri Lanka World Cup hopes



A general view of the ground as rain falls before the start of the second one-day international cricket match between New Zealand and Sri Lanka at Hagley Oval in Christchurch. — AFP

CHRISTCHURCH: Sri Lanka's hopes of securing automatic qualification for the World Cup took a major blow on Tuesday when heavy rain and gusting winds forced the second one-day international against New Zealand to be abandoned without a ball being bowled.

As a result the two teams split the points which further damages Sri Lanka's designs on a place in the top eight of the Super League, who automatically qualify for the World Cup in India in October and November. Having also lost

the first ODI in the three-match series, Sri Lanka are now ninth in the table with 82 points, six points behind West Indies.

To make the top eight, Sri Lanka must win the third ODI against New Zealand in three days' time and pray that South Africa lose at least once in their series against the Netherlands, and that Ireland fail to beat Bangladesh 3-0 when they meet in May. The teams missing out on the top eight will go into a 10-team tournament in Zimbabwe in June and July from which the final two teams will emerge. — AFP

## Group B features unpredictable teams



If the Group A of the IPL is filled with teams that are known for having a lot of close games, then Group B is exactly the opposite of it. These are those extreme teams, which has the capability of losing an easy game and on its day, winning a difficult game is also a possibility. But with each passing year, most of these aggressive players have also understood that, keeping calm is the way ahead and that's exactly what Chennai Super Kings and Mahendra Singh Dhoni is going to be putting on display.

**CHENNAI SUPER KINGS (CSK)** - Founded in 2008, the team plays its home matches at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai. The team is owned by India Cements Limited through the Chennai Super Kings Cricket Limited holding company. The team was suspended for two years from the IPL starting July 2015 due to the involvement of its owners in the 2013 IPL betting case. The team is captained by MS Dhoni. In January 2022, CSK became India's first unicorn sports enterprise. The Super Kings have won the IPL title four times (in 2010, 2011, 2018, and 2021), and have the highest win

percentage of matches among all teams in the IPL (58.98 per cent). They hold the records of most appearances in the playoffs (11) and the final (nine) of the IPL. In addition, they have also won the Champions League Twenty20 in 2010 and 2014. Coach Stephen Fleming is backed by Michael Hussey (batting coach), Dwayne Bravo (bowling coach) and Rajiv Kumar (fielding coach). CSK is known for backing the experienced players and providing them with a long run, but with majority of the seniors retired or not retained, the old warhorse Mahendra Singh Dhoni is looking towards the all-rounder theory (Ravindra Jadeja, Ben Stokes, Moeen Ali, Shivam Dube and Dwaine Pretorius), which would allow the legend to have more options to choose from. Chennai had a miserable season last season and that resulted in many changes and suddenly it looks like a very dangerous side.

**PUNJAB KINGS (PBKS)** - Established in 2008 as the Kings XI Punjab (KXIP), the franchise is jointly owned by Mohit Burman, Ness Wadia, Preity Zinta and Karan Paul. The team plays its home matches at the Indrajit Singh Bindra Stadium, Mohali. Kings broke their purse to get the English all-rounder Sam Curran under their belt. But one thing that will be concerning them will be the injury of Jonny Bairstow and they will be having high expectations from Mathew Short, who is named as his replacement. Punjab is probably one of the strongest



batting sides of Group B, but despite the presence of Kagiso Rabada and Arshdeep Singh, they fail to impress in the bowling department. With an average season last year, Punjab will be looking to get a lot of things right this season.

**SUNRISERS HYDERABAD** - The franchise is owned by Kalanithi Maran of the SUN Group and was founded in 2012 after the Hyderabad-based

Deccan Chargers were terminated by the IPL. The team is currently coached by Brian Lara and captained by Aiden Markram. Their primary home ground is the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium, Hyderabad, which has capacity of 55,000. Hyderabad is a team that is labelled as underdogs of this competition for almost ever, and this could probably be because they have always tried the approach of winning games through their

bowlers at home and those pace bowler friendly wickets required them to have good quality technically correct batters like Kane Williamson and Mayank Agarwal. Although, this season, they have looked to further strengthen their batting by bringing in some really quality aggressive batters. It goes without saying that, the crowd always prefers to see big sixes, over wickets and that's something that might be different this season.

**ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE (RCB)** - It was founded in 2008 by United Spirits and named after the company's brand Royal Challenge. The Royal Challengers have not won the IPL but finished runners-up on three occasions between 2009 and 2016. The team holds the records of both the highest and the lowest totals in the IPL - 263/5 and 49 respectively. It wouldn't be wrong to say that RCB are called the biggest chokers of IPL history and despite their consistent poor show, they have been able to retain a huge and loyal fan base with the kind of entertainment that is provided by some of the world class players that it retains, combined by some extra ordinary marketing skills. The team looked extremely good last season under the captaincy of Faf du Plessis, but the fans believe that the over aggression of Virat Kohli is making life difficult for his team mates, and this could be justified the success that so many players found before and after they played for RCB.

**GUJARAT TITANS (GT)** - Founded in 2021, Gujarat Titans home ground is Narendra Modi Stadium in Motera. The franchise is owned by CVC Capital Partners. The team is captained by Hardik Pandya and coached by Ashish Nehra. The Gujarat Titans are the current IPL champions, having won their maiden title in the 2022 season. Titans is a team that one would never give credit on paper, but the duo of Pandya-Nehra has been able to find a way of bringing the best out of their players in difficult situations. Pandya follows the legacy set by Dhoni, of backing all-rounders over specialists. Although, it will be interesting to see what Gujarat Titans have to offer, since their primary strategy is definitely exposed and most teams would be ready to counter it.

Should I have to choose two teams out of these five to make it to the play-offs, it surely has to be the Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bangalore, considering the hunger, motivation and balance of their sides. Despite being the defending champions, I feel that Gujarat Titans have a few holes of fill and they didn't pick up smart back-up options.

(You could post us your views and question on our social media handles and we will pick the best question in our future articles, TWITTER - @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman OR INSTAGRAM - @OmanObserver @pranav\_mehta\_18.)  
DON'T FORGET TO USE THE #OOIPL2023 FOR BETTER REACH.

# Sabalenka and Tsitsipas surge; Andreescu injured

MIAMI GARDENS: Former US Open champion Bianca Andreescu left the court in a wheelchair at the Miami Open on Monday after sustaining a lower left leg injury that forced her to retire from her last 16 meeting with Ekaterina Alexandrova.

After the opening set was hit by a two-hour rain delay, Canadian Andreescu went down while moving across the baseline during the third game of the second set, grabbing her ankle and screaming in pain.

Andreescu was in tears as the broadcast picked up the 2019 Flushing Meadows champion screaming: “I’ve never felt this kind of pain before”, when the medical staff arrived to treat her.

She was eventually helped to her feet and shared a hug with Russian Alexandrova before leaving Hard Rock Stadium in a wheelchair to a standing ovation from the crowd.

Alexandrova advanced 7-6(0), 0-2 (ret) and will next face Petra Kvitova, who defeated Varvara Gracheva 7-5, 7-6(5).

“I’m just really sorry that it happened to (Andreescu),” Alexandrova said. “Seeing her on the court in so much pain, it’s just painful to watch.

“You cannot help, you just can do nothing, which is terrible. And I think she’s going to be fine soon, and I’m wishing for her speedy recovery.”

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka needed just over an hour to beat former French Open winner Barbora Krejcikova 6-3, 6-2, while Elena Rybakina beat Elise Mertens 6-4 6-3.

Rybakina, who won the Indian Wells crown in California, would become only the fifth woman to win the ‘Sunshine Double’ if she triumphs in Miami.

### LIKE A VACATION

Earlier, Stefanos Tsitsipas beat Chilean qualifier Cristian Garin 6-3, 4-6,

### MIAMI OPEN ATP/ WTA RESULTS

#### MEN (THIRD ROUND)

Adrian Mannarino (FRA) bt Hubert Hurkacz (POL x8) 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/0); Christopher Eubanks (USA) bt Gregoire Barrere (FRA) 6-3, 7-6 (9/7); Quentin Halys (FRA) bt Mackenzie McDonald (USA) 7-6 (7/2), 6-3; Francisco Cerundolo (ARG x25) bt Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN x5) 6-2, 7-5; Lorenzo Sonego (ITA) bt Frances Tiafoe (USA x12) 6-3, 6-4; Karen Khachanov (RUS x14) bt Jiri Lehecka (CZE) 6-2, 6-4; Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x2) bt Christian Garin (CHI) 6-3, 4-6, 6-4

#### WOMEN (FOURTH ROUND)

Martina Trevisan (ITA x25) bt Jelena Ostapenko (LAT x24) 6-3, 6-3; Elena Rybakina (KAZ x10) bt Elise Mertens (BEL) 6-4, 6-3; Jessica Pegula (USA x3) bt Magda Linette (POL x20) 6-1, 7-5; Anastasia Potapova (RUS x27) bt Zheng Qinwen (CHN x23) 6-4, 7-6 (7/4); Ekaterina Alexandrova (RUS x18) bt Bianca Andreescu (CAN) 7-6 (7/0), 0-2 retired; Petra Kvitova (CZE x15) bt Varvara Gracheva (RUS) 7-5, 7-6 (7/5); Sorana Cirstea (ROM) bt Marketa Vondrousova (CZE) 7-6 (7/3), 6-4; Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x2) bt Barbora Krejcikova (CZE x16) 6-3, 6-2

6-4 to set up a meeting with Russian 14th seed Karen Khachanov, who won 6-2, 6-4 against Czech Jiri Lehecka.

Tsitsipas, still dealing with an ongoing shoulder issue and playing his first match of the Miami fortnight following a bye and walkover, respectively, in the opening two rounds, had 12 aces and saved three of four break points in the two-hour match.

“I was waiting for a very long time to get out there and play,” said Tsitsipas. “It almost felt like a vacation this last week, staying in Miami, so I am glad I got started.

“I won’t lie, it was difficult out there against an opponent that has shown good tennis against top players in the past.”

The match remained on serve until Tsitsipas broke for a 5-3 lead in the opening frame before going on to hold at love to grab the first set without facing a break point.

Tsitsipas was tested early in the second set when he fell behind 0-40 and needed to win five consecutive points to hold serve and draw level at 1-1 but could not repeat that escape at 4-5 as Garin broke to love to force a decider.

The Greek squandered two break point chances in the opening game of a third set but got the break he would need at 4-4 when Garin double-faulted while at 40-30 in a game the Chilean went on to lose before Tsitsipas served out the match.

Argentine Francisco Cerundolo stunned fifth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-2, 7-5, while Frenchman Adrian Mannarino knocked out eighth seed Hubert Hurkacz 7-6(5), 7-6(0) and American Frances Tiafoe lost 6-3, 6-4 to Lorenzo Sonego.

In other women’s matches, third seed Jessica Pegula beat Poland’s Magda Linette 6-1, 7-5 in a match where she broke four times during a 28-minute first set and then erased a 5-2 double-break to avoid being pushed into a decider.

Pegula, a Miami semifinalist last year who lives about 30 minutes from the tournament venue, has not dropped a set over her first three matches and will next face Russia’s Anastasia Potapova, a 6-4, 7-6(4) winner over China’s Zheng Qinwen.

Italian 25th seed Martina Trevisan enjoyed a 6-3, 6-3 win over former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko, the Latvian 24th seed, to reach the quarterfinals of a WTA 1000 event for the first time. — Reuters



Bianca Andreescu (CAN) hits a forehand against Ekaterina Alexandrova (not pictured) on day eight of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — USA Today Sports



Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE) reaches for a volley against Cristian Garin (CHI) (not pictured) on day eight of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — USA Today Sports

# OOC AGM discusses selection criteria for national teams

### ADIL AL BALUSHI

MUSCAT, MARCH 28

The General Assembly of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) discussed several topics including the selection criteria for the national teams in different regional and international Olympic events and the challenges of financial budgets to achieve the actual breakthrough and the desired qualitative leap.

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, at the Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC, on Tuesday in presence of OOC board members and OOC General Assembly members.

Representatives of 27 sports associations and members attended the AGM while five members were absent. The meeting started with a speech of OOC chairman, he said:” OCC worked in many projects during the past months and aimed to develop and complete the institutional work system of the Oman Olympic Committee in the administrative, organisational, financial and technical aspects. Also, to establish a solid base for organised work and to achieve



a qualitative performance of the Olympic Committee, enabling it to play its important roles alongside its partners in advancing the sports sector and the Omani Olympic movement in accordance with its terms of reference and the goals for which it was established nationally and internationally.”

The OOC chief added that many committees were established and headed by a number of board members with the membership of volunteer national candidates. “The regulating work of the committees has been developed and approved. These committees have drawn up their annual plans and started activating their various programmes within the limits of their available financial budgets,” he said.

He added: “In order to complete

the organisational structure of the committee in accordance with international standards, a draft financial regulation has been developed for the Olympic Committee. It is one of the important regulations that did not exist previously. A draft regulation for the work of the Omani Committee for Athletes has also been developed, and it was drafted in accordance with the recommendations of the International Olympic Committee in this regard, and by following the best practices in this aspect.

### BUDGET CHALLENGE

Khaled al Zubair pointed out that the financial budgets of the OOC represent the biggest challenge to achieve the actual breakthrough and the desired qualitative leap.

“The changing of the work philosophy and developing the relationship between the various components of the Omani sports and Olympic movement are among our top priorities. The OOC is working on at this stage with the aim of making sports and Omani athletes at the highest level of priority in the work of the various sports bodies and concerned institutions.”

The chairman of OOC emphasised the committee’s keenness to place the supreme interest of athletes and national teams at the top of its priorities, and called on everyone to direct the largest percentage of the available resources to enhance care for athletes and support plans. He hopes the support will enable the athletes to raise the flag of the

Sultanate of Oman high in the upcoming international sports events.

Later, the minutes of the previous meeting of the General Assembly was approved the members. Then, the members reviewed the annual report which includes a report on the administrative status and activities of the committee for the year ending 2022 which featured many domestic and external events, the most important business and administrative decisions. The financial reports of year 2022 was reviewed by the members while the proposed 2023 budget was approved by the General Assembly with a recommendation of raising the budget figures towards enabling OOC to achieve the desired targets from the set plans.

During the meeting, the members discussed on the criteria selection for the national teams in different regional and international Olympic events. OOC officials responded that there is a follow-up and planning committee which is responsible for the selection of the teams to represent the country in the regional and international Olympic committee. There is a technical committees as well to study the request of the national team’s plans and goals in this participation. After an intensive study, the proper recommendation will be taken towards participation of that national team in any external event.

Oman Volleyball Association representative Dr Mohammed al Maamari, raised an inquiry of providing a financial support for the volleyball beach team to reach in top world ranking teams as they are placed in 29th position currently. The OOC chief responded that due to limitation of OOC’s budget, the required support cannot be provided by OOC but will work hard with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth to find a suitable budget for that.



# Oman launches bid round for 7 mining blocks

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals has announced an invitation for companies with experience in local and international mining projects to bid for as many as seven mining concession areas, covering a total area of 12,726 square kilometres and distributed in the governorates of Dhofar, North Al Sharqiyah and Al Buraimi.

The new blocks are home to industrial minerals such as gypsum, limestone, phosphate, dolomite and clay, as well as metallic minerals including gold, silver, copper, chromite and basalt.

Of the 7 mining blocks on offer in the latest bid round, three are located in Dhofar Governorate: Block 71 with an area of 5,638 square kilometres, Block 73



spanning an area of 1,551 square kilometres, and Block 77 covering an area of 1,355 square kilometres. These blocks are designated for extracting gypsum, limestone, dolomite, clay, and phosphates. A further three concession areas are located the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah: Block 22-B with an area of 1,144 square

kilometres, Block 22-D covering an area of 790 square kilometres, and Block 22-E encompassing an area of 810 square kilometres. The concessions are intended

THE NEW BLOCKS ARE HOME TO INDUSTRIAL MINERALS SUCH AS GYPSUM, LIMESTONE, PHOSPHATE, DOLOMITE AND CLAY, AS WELL AS METALLIC MINERALS INCLUDING GOLD, SILVER, COPPER, CHROMITE AND BASALT.

for extracting gold, silver, chrome, copper, and basalt.

Located in the Governorate of Al Buraimi is Block, 11-A, with an area of 1,438 square kilometres. This concession is intended for extracting gold, silver, chrome, copper and basalt.

The latest bid round builds on renewed efforts by the Ministry to attract investment and technology in the commercialisation of Oman's mineral wealth.

Recently, the Ministry signed an agreement with the British

company Knights Bay granting it the concession to explore and develop mineral resources, including valuable nickel ore, in Block 21 in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

It was the first direct concession agreement with an international investor. Knights Bay has committed to spending between \$25 – 30 million during the initial 3-year appraisal phase, covering the 1,444 square kilometre block.

If successful in unearthing commercial quantities of minerals, chiefly nickel ore, Knights Bay will build, develop and process battery minerals (nickel and cobalt) in the Sultanate of Oman to meet the global demand for nickel through electric car manufacturers.

Meanwhile, the deadline for submission of offers in response to the latest bid round is May 28, 2023.

## ASEAN AMBASSADORS VISIT 'INVEST IN OMAN' LOUNGE



**MUSCAT:** A delegation of ambassadors of Asean countries accredited to the Sultanate of Oman (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam) yesterday visited the 'Invest in Oman' lounge, during which they learned about the incentives offered to investors and the investment mechanism and procedures in the Sultanate of Oman.

The visit aims to strengthen economic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Asean countries. It also comes as a translation of the economic diplomacy carried out by Foreign Ministry in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to attract foreign investments and introduce the investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

The delegation was briefed on the sections of the 'Invest in Oman' lounge and learned about the most important services and facilities it provides to the investors wishing to invest in the Sultanate of Oman, the investment mechanism and the parties related to the lounge, the enablers and information it provides to investors. The most prominent opportunities available in various economic sectors in the Sultanate of Oman were also reviewed. — **ONA**

# Berlin Energy Transition conference looks at switching to renewable sources

**BERLIN:** Represented by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman is taking part in 'Berlin Energy Transition' conference. The two-day event draws a large number of foreign ministers, energy ministers and experts in energy and related policies from the private sector.

Oman is represented at the conference by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, who was jointly invited to the conference by Annalena Baerbock, Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, Germany, and Dr Robert Habeck, Vice-Chancellor of Germany and Minister of Economic Affairs and Climate Action in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The conference seeks to discuss the challenges facing the world in



the field of energy and means of switching to renewable and more sustainable energy sources.

The approach gains impetus in the backdrop of a global trend to embrace a green future and apply the best practices in this field.

The conference provides an opportunity to exchange experiences and ideas about measures of achieving a safe and environmentally responsible global energy transition.

Sayyid Badr's participation in the event reflects Oman's commitment to consolidate international cooperation and national approaches aimed to espouse policies for addressing the impacts of climate change and realising carbon neutrality by 2050.

It demonstrates that Oman is keeping pace with global trends aimed at cutting down carbon emissions. — **ONA**

# Manah-I Solar project to power 75,000 homes in Oman

**Decarbonisation: 500 MW solar scheme to offset 1.1 million tonnes of CO2 annually when it commences operations in 2025.**

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

EDF Renewables Middle East, the regional arm of leading international energy giant EDF Renewables, celebrated on Monday the award of a mandate to develop a 500 MW solar PV based Independent Power Project (IPP) at Manah in Oman's Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

A consortium led by Abu Dhabi-based EDF Renewables ME, together with Korea Western Power Co Ltd (KOWEPO), a key player in South Korea's power sector, signed agreements with the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the state-owned single owner of electricity and water output in the Sultanate of Oman.

Taking part in the signings were Eng Yaqoub bin Saif al Kiyumi, CEO – OPWP; Francois Dao, Vice-President of the Middle East and Africa for EDF Renewables; and Kang Se-hoon, Director – KOWEPO.

"We are thrilled to announce that we have been officially awarded the development of a major solar power plant in the Sultanate of Oman," said EDF Renewables ME in a post. "The consortium led by EDF Renewables Middle East and Korea Western Power Co., Ltd will design, build and operate the first 500MW solar IPP project for the EDF group in the country."

The project award marks EDF Renewables' maiden foray into Oman. The company already has a major presence around the Middle East, with a portfolio of around 3 GW of sustainable renewable capacity in operation or development in the GCC.

They include world-scale sized ventures, such as the 2 GW solar scheme at Al Dhafra in Abu Dhabi and a 400MW wind farm at Dumat



Al Jandal in Saudi Arabia.

"The Manah solar power plant is part of our strategy to support the region's Net-Zero ambitions, and to contribute to the Omani nation's Clean Energy Goals, through the diversification of the country's energy mix aiming at 40 per cent of renewable generation by 2040,"

said EDF Renewables.

"Once fully operational in 2025, the project will considerably contribute to the greener future of Oman by powering over 75,000 Omani homes with clean electricity, while offsetting over 1,100,000 metric tonnes of CO2 per year," the developer added.

Consortium partner KOWEPO will supervise Manah-I Solar IPP's operations and maintenance after completion, the Korean energy firm had stated in an earlier statement.

Significantly, Manah I Solar IPP is one of two grid-connected solar projects each of around 500 MW,

that will be built side-by-side at Manah. Recently, the consortium of Singapore's Sembcorp Industries Ltd and China-headquartered Jinko Power Technology Co Ltd, announced that it had secured the award for Manah II Solar IPP, a similar-sized venture, also slated for launch in 2025.

The Manah solar power plant is part of our strategy to support the region's Net-Zero ambitions, and to contribute to the Omani nation's Clean Energy Goals, through the diversification of the country's energy mix aiming at 40 per cent of renewable generation by 2040.

**EDF RENEWABLES**

# Oman Shell partners with Oman Charitable Organisation to power lives

MUSCAT: As a company that upholds the principles of honesty, integrity, and respect for people, Shell Oman Marketing Company (Oman Shell) has earned widespread reverence for its ethical, community-centric conduct. Committed to furthering its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme and in line with its commitment to Powering Lives, the company recently extended a generous donation to the Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO).

The donation grant ceremony was held earlier this month at the OCO headquarters in Al Khuwair.

Representing Oman Shell at the ceremony was Mahmoud al Abri, General Manager of Corporate Relations at Oman Shell (interim), who extended the support to Badr al Zaabi, Assistant Chief Executive Officer of OCO. The grant ceremony also witnessed the presence of key officials from Oman Shell's management and CSR team as well as senior executives from OCO.



Al Abri said, "Oman Shell, through its diverse endeavours, has been at the forefront of nurturing an inclusive, equitable, and self-reliant society. We believe that people are the most important

assets of a nation and their health, safety, and wellbeing are critical parameters to achieving sustainable progress.

Acknowledging the fact that OCO provides significant support

in the form of financial aid to those in need, Oman Shell's donation will play an impactful role in helping the organisation further its programmes and initiatives across a wider section of society.

Through such thoughtful partnerships with leading charitable organisations, Oman Shell will continue to reaffirm its commitment to the Shell Powering Progress strategy while simultaneously being active players in the journey towards achieving Oman Vision 2040 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals."

Oman Shell's strategised CSR policies emphasise community upskilling and enterprise development, environment, and the holistic well-being of people. Along with executing its targeted social investment initiatives, Oman Shell takes concerted efforts to remain relevant to the evolving needs of the public.

By establishing clear channels of communication and encouraging open dialogues, it continuously engages with NGOs, charities, and other stakeholders to understand their needs, collectively address challenges, and drive qualitative action to enrich the local society.

## ahlibank launches systematic investment plan



MUSCAT: Renewing its commitment to assist and support customers in their long term financial goals, ahlibank is introducing a comprehensive Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) for Private Banking and Wealth Management clients.

The investment channel will provide an effective platform for investors to augment their financial goals with periodic investments in funds that have demonstrated their market potentials.

The key objective is to 'invest today for a better tomorrow' by investing small amounts at regular intervals into different global mutual funds. SIP is structured to enhance customers' wealth with calculated investment opportunities.

## Ford unveils exclusive benefits in Season of Generosity campaign

MUSCAT: This season own your favourite Ford and get exclusive benefits including service 5 years / 100,000 kms and registration 1 year. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Ford showroom.)

In Oman, Ford has an impressive range of powerful and dependable vehicles that cater to range of desires. Including vehicles with enough space for families to drive out together, or thorough off-roaders for the adventure-seekers and more. The range of vehicles include the Taurus, Explorer, Edge and Bronco.

The Ford Taurus blends seamless connectivity, high on-road performance, and an entirely new sleek modern design. Boasting an all-new design, on an entirely different platform, the all-new Taurus still exudes refinement with numerous premium touches. Featuring 19-inch, 10-spoke polished alloy wheels, a new flatter streamlined hood, and a power-deployable door handle, Taurus is sleeker in its stance.

Equipped with 4x4 capability, impressive space, comfort and a host of features and technology,



the Ford Explorer always rises above and makes a fine mark on every terrain. The Explorer is equipped with a revised 2.3-litre turbocharged EcoBoost engine that produces 300 horsepower and 420Nm of torque.

The stylish and powerful Ford Edge is a perfect SUV to make your journeys fun and memorable.

The Ford Edge has a refined and classy exterior and class leading space for 5 adults and luggage. The Ford Edge is equipped with a 2.0L turbocharged four cylinder engine outputting 250hp. This engine pairs with a front wheel drive and the new 8-speed automatic transmission.

The Ford Bronco WildTrak delivers maximum 4x4 go-anywhere, anytime capability and confidence.

The Bronco is equipped with fantastic features that elevate off-road experiences for drivers, including off-road mapping and drive technologies.

In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co LLC. Please log on to [www.fordoman.com](http://www.fordoman.com), or [www.facebook.com/FordOman](http://www.facebook.com/FordOman) or [www.youtube.com/FordOmanChannel](http://www.youtube.com/FordOmanChannel) or [www.instagram.com/ford\\_oman](http://www.instagram.com/ford_oman) for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.

## OAB marks Ramadhan with a month of 'giving and doing' in communities

MUSCAT: This Ramadhn, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) will celebrate the true spirit of the season with a wide-ranging programme of community events every week during the holy month. Across four weeks, the bank will support good causes and charitable organisations to help spread goodwill across the country.

The first week will be marked with a visit to the Royal Hospital in Muscat to hold an Iftar gathering and a walking carnival with gift distribution and entertainment for young cancer patients and their families.

A traditional Qaranqashoo celebration follows in the second week at the Children Care Centre. Several organisations will come together to present the third week's activities, with an Eid Exhibition at the bank's head office for OAB staff.

The event is in coordination with three non-profits: Oman Association for the Disabled which will exhibit products made by its members; Kiswa Oman, encouraging staff and visitors to donate clothes; and Oman Food Bank, which will be raising



awareness of its activities.

In the final week of the holy month, OAB will lead Eid preparations at the Social Care House in Al Rustaq, to celebrate early with the elderly.

Sulaiman al Harthy, Chief Executive Officer at OAB, said: "This Ramadhan, we wanted to create a calendar of thoughtful events to make a difference every week during the Holy Month. We are looking forward to contributing to this extremely important initiative, as we all demonstrate what really matters during Ramadhan. It's not just what you give, it's also what you do."

He added, "We want to foster

community spirit and believe that volunteering is a great way to build relationships, develop new skills and enhance personal growth. We are encouraging OAB staff to play an active role in improving the lives of others."

The programme of events is part of OAB's ongoing strategy to make a positive impact in communities across the Sultanate of Oman — something that the bank has strived to achieve throughout its 50-year history.

The initiative continues the bank's tradition of annual Ramadhan events, which have highlighted the importance of donating and giving during the Holy Month.

## Bank Muscat hosts special event for customers in Suhar

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to strengthen partnership and communications with customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, hosted a special event for customers based in Al Batinah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi.

The event was attended by Abdulnaser N al Raisi, General Manager – Personal Banking and senior bank officials. It provided a good opportunity to showcase the bank's latest products and services catering to different customer needs.

Speaking on the occasion, Taya

Eid Bait Sabeea, Deputy General Manager – Interior Regions, Bank Muscat, said: "At Bank Muscat, we are always delighted to meet our valued customers, share ideas and get their feedback as we continue together on our journey of cooperation and partnership.

As a pioneering financial services provider in Oman, Bank Muscat is always keen to further develop the banking sector by providing world-class products and services, which keep pace with the latest technological developments and global financial trends."

Addressing the gathering,



Radhiya bint Hassan al Lawatiyah, Head of Sales, Bank Muscat, spoke about the various changes and developments being witnessed across different sectors due to

the requirements of the modern age. She stressed on the digital improvements in the present era and said that the bank is continuing to keep pace with

these changes.

She also noted that North and South Al Batinah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi governorates have been witnessing tremendous economic growth, which is leading to further progress for the community.

Radhiya al Lawati explained that Bank Muscat was committed to remaining the bank of first choice for government institutions and corporates as well as their employees.

Hence, the bank would continue to leverage its experience and technology and provide the best possible products, services,

benefits and features to meet the diverse requirements of its customers including new employees joining various government and private sector entities.

She added that with 174 branches and more than 800 ATMs, CDMs and other devices, the bank offers unmatched reach and excellent quality of service, which is provided by well qualified Omani cadres. Bank Muscat's distinctive services and products reflect its commitment to market leadership in the Sultanate of Oman's banking sector.

# Dealmakers predict more muted M&A activity



ANDY JALIL  
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

The muted levels of mergers and acquisitions and equity fundraising activity – which forced most major investment banks to cut jobs in 2022 – is expected to continue in 2023, according to a survey of more

than 500 dealmakers. Half the dealmakers surveyed by data provider Refinitiv expect M&A volumes to remain the same or decrease compared with 2022. Meanwhile, nearly half (45 per cent) said they believed equity capital markets (ECM) activity would remain the same this year as was last year, while 12 per cent predicted a decrease. Of those who thought there would be an increase in M&A activity, the average expected rise was 6.6 per cent compared with 2022. Those anticipating growth in ECM activity expected a 6.4 per cent increase. So far this year, M&A activity has slumped by 57 per cent compared with a year earlier to \$282.9 billion. Last year, deals worth \$3.7tn were announced, but this was a 35 per cent decline

compared with 2021. ECM activity has tumbled even further, with a weak initial public offering market pulling down volumes by 65 per cent last year. The slump in deals has prompted large investment banks to cut jobs for the first time since the onset of the pandemic and rein in pay for dealmakers after a record 2021 when banks hauled in \$130 billion. ECM bankers have been at the sharp end of many of these layoffs and many are predicting further cuts if dealmaking activity does not rebound this year. M&A activity has been stymied by rising interest rates, gridlocking leveraged finance markets, surging inflation and the war in Ukraine. Matt Toole, head of deals intelligence at Refinitiv, said there needs to be “significant

signs of improvement for a boom to return”. He said: “While financing is more expensive and stock prices have pulled back, there can also be opportunities for M&A as valuation move lower and companies look for growth, but a clear business outlook and strong rationale for a deal will be required.” A poll was done of top dealmakers in the UK about the outlook for 2023 investment banking activity in December. Most said they expected activity to return in the second half of the year, while the first six months of 2023 would remain challenging. Meanwhile, HSBC is planning to hire dealmakers in the Middle East this year, as the UK lender anticipates a surge in activity in the region.

The lender is “developing more resources” in the Middle East on the back of improved performance for dealmakers in 2022, its chief executive Noel Quinn told journalists during its fourth quarter results presentation. “We are developing more resources for the Middle East, which is a good growth opportunity,” Quinn said. “That is not just for the short term, but I see good growth opportunity over the medium and long-term, so we are increasing our investment in the Middle East.” Profit in HSBC’s global markets unit in the Middle East and North Africa hit \$861 million last year, an increase of 7 per cent compared with a year earlier. In Saudi Arabia, which remains one of the smallest markets, profit jumped 46 per cent to \$95

million. Quinn’s comments followed earlier remarks by Greg Guyett, HSBC’s head of global banking and markets, who said last month that the bank would increase head count in Saudi Arabia by between 10 per cent and 15 per cent and would be hiring dealmakers “as fast as it can”. The Middle East has not been immune to the downturn in dealmaking, with fees slipping by 32 per cent to \$1.4 billion in 2022, according to data provider Dealogic. However, initial public offerings in the region surged by 56 per cent to \$23.7 billion in 2022, amid a global downturn during which the value of raised equity capital dropped by 72 per cent. Citigroup and Goldman Sachs have also said they want to recruit bankers in the region.

## China’s 2023 crude oil imports set for 6.2% rise, but risks prevail

CLYDE RUSSELL

China’s crude oil imports will average 10.8 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2023, matching the previous record high from 2020, according to the think tank of the country’s leading energy group. Imports will rise 6.2 per cent from last year to 540 million tonnes, while refinery processing will gain 7.8 per cent to 733 million tonnes, equivalent to 14.66 million bpd, China National Petroleum Corporation’s Economics and Technology Research Institute (ETRI) said in its annual industry outlook released. The forecasts are largely in line with those of private analysts, who have tipped a rebound in China’s fuel consumption as the world’s second-largest economy reopens after ending its strict zero-Covid policy late last year. The ETRI forecast is for crude oil imports to rise by 630,000 bpd in 2023, which is below the 900,000 bpd expected by the International Energy Agency, but above estimates from some analysts, such as Wood Mackenzie and S&P Global Commodity Insights. Forecasts are useful insofar as they provide insight into the expectations of participants in the market, but it’s also useful to look at some of the risks around the estimates. What is interesting with the ETRI forecasts is that they would seem to show that China’s refiners are still expecting to add crude oil to stockpiles over 2023. Assuming domestic oil production remains relatively steady over 2023 at the 4.23 million bpd achieved in the first two months of the year, it implies that a total of 15.03 million bpd will be available to refiners from imports and local output. This is some 370,000 bpd more than the ETRI forecast for refinery throughput of 14.66 million bpd. If these sort of volumes are added to inventories in 2023, it

would be lower than the 740,000 bpd added to storage tanks in 2022. China doesn’t disclose the volumes of crude flowing into or out of strategic and commercial stockpiles, but an estimate can be made by deducting the amount of crude processed from the total of crude available from imports and domestic output. It’s likely that some of the oil heading for storage will go to build working inventories for new plants expected to be commissioned this year. Two new refineries — PetroChina’s Guangdong Petrochemical and Jiangsu Shenghong Petrochemical with a combined capacity of 520,000 bpd — are expected to enter commercial operation in the coming months, industry sources said last month. A third new plant, Shandong Yulong Petrochemical’s 400,000 bpd project, may also begin crude imports for possible test runs by the end of the year, a company source said. Flows in, or indeed out of, either commercial or strategic reserves are the biggest X-factor for China’s crude oil imports. The assumption of modest inventory builds as part of the commissioning of new refining units is a safe choice, but it’s worth noting that China’s refiners and the authorities in Beijing tend to use stockpiles to smooth out prices, even if they don’t talk about this in public. Imports could rise by more than expected if crude oil prices drop and remain low, a situation that is possible if the world economy goes into recession, or a banking crisis ensues after the collapse of two US lenders and the forced sale of Credit Suisse. Conversely, if global oil demand growth is robust and prices head higher, Chinese refiners may choose to reduce imports and dip into their reserves. Another factor that isn’t subject to market imperatives is the level of fuel exports, which is set by the government through the issuing of permits. — Reuters

# Silicon Valley Bank’s collapse chills startup funding



ERIN GRIFFITH

The author is a New York Times journalist based in the San Francisco bureau, where she reports on technology start-ups and venture capital.

Jonathan Nelson had lined up commitments for \$2 million in new funding for his financial technology startup, HFCapital, from two investors last month. He was aiming for \$2.5 million and thought securing the rest would be “perfunctory.” Then 67 investors turned him down. In mid-March, his initial investors backed out, too. Nelson was initially confused by the cold shoulder. But two days later, when Silicon Valley Bank, the most prominent bank for startups and venture capital firms, collapsed after tech investors and startups set off a bank run, it all made sense. “I was scratching my head, saying, ‘Why did they just ghost?’” he said. “Then the bank run happened and I was like, ‘Ah, they’re terrified.’” The same realisation is rippling through the startup world in the wake of SVB’s sudden failure. After a harrowing 2022, when the easy money for startups dried up, leading to slashed valuations, lowered ambitions and widespread layoffs, many hoped things would bounce back this year. But SVB’s collapse has stoked even more anxiety and dread, which is beginning to manifest in startup deal-making throughout Silicon Valley. Late on Sunday, SVB was acquired by First Citizens BancShares. The failed bank’s former parent company, SVB Financial, filed for bankruptcy on March 17 and plans to run a separate process to sell various units. Over the past two weeks, while



regulators scrambled to find a buyer for SVB, companies that relied on it for lines of credit have scrambled to secure a new source of debt. Investors, wary of risk, have increasingly chosen to sit on the sidelines or are too busy helping to shore up existing startups to entertain new deals. And some young companies are doing what they can to avoid raising new funding so they do not have to face lower valuations, onerous terms and stringent due diligence. The result is that a chilly environment for tech startups has rapidly gotten chillier. “People are realising it’s probably not going to get better,” said Mathias Schilling, an investor at the venture capital firm Headline. “It was a big shock to the system.” He said the bank run that led to SVB’s demise showed how much fear was already in the market. Investors wouldn’t have set off such a panic if they weren’t already on edge, he said. SVB’s collapse was not directly caused by the tech downturn, and the startups that banked there won’t lose their deposits since the Treasury Department and Federal Reserve eventually guaranteed all of SVB’s deposits. But the institution’s implosion followed a 61 per cent drop in venture funding in the last three

months of 2022 from a year earlier, according to PitchBook, which tracks startups. Kyle Stanford, a PitchBook analyst, said he expected SVB’s collapse to “hasten” the market downturn that was already happening. “We’ve been in a venture slowdown for a year now,” he said. “This is just kind of the extra problem the market didn’t need.” In a survey of 870 founders last week by the venture capital firm NFX, 59 per cent said the collapse of SVB would make an already tough fundraising market tougher. Twenty-two per cent said they were concerned that they wouldn’t be able to raise any funding this year. Techstars, a startup investment firm that has backed 3,500 startups, advised its companies to call their shareholders for more money before pitching new investors, said Maëlle Gavet, the firm’s chief executive. Techstars has also tried to reduce entrepreneurs’ expectations of how much their company is worth, urging them not to think of lowering their valuations as a failure but as a positive sign that someone is willing to invest in their company at all. Gavet said she expected many conversations to take place this summer over whether startups should shut down or sell.

“The whole SVB thing created a heightened sense of danger,” she said. Bijan Salehizadeh, an investor who has stakes in a dozen venture capital funds, said from a quarter to a third of the companies his funds had backed would run out of money in the next six months. He called this “the worst time in recent memory to raise new venture funds” and added that he had seen many investors “sitting on their hands” recently because they were nervous. Ayham Ereksousi was planning to raise \$4 million for his startup, Stomio, which offers software to help companies test new products with their customers. But he has lowered his expectations. He had been in touch with between six and eight investors who expressed interest in investing late last year. But in recent weeks, as he tried to raise money, many did not respond or said they had changed their investment strategies. Now Ereksousi is contemplating raising less money from his existing investors and returning next year for a larger round of fundraising. This year is likely to be a “dud,” he said, and concern over the health of banks is “dropping ice water on the entire funding ecosystem.” — The New York Times

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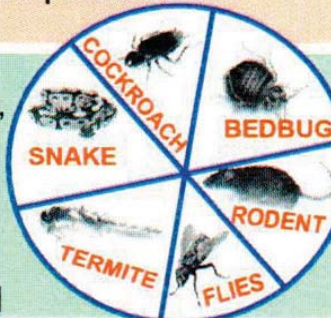
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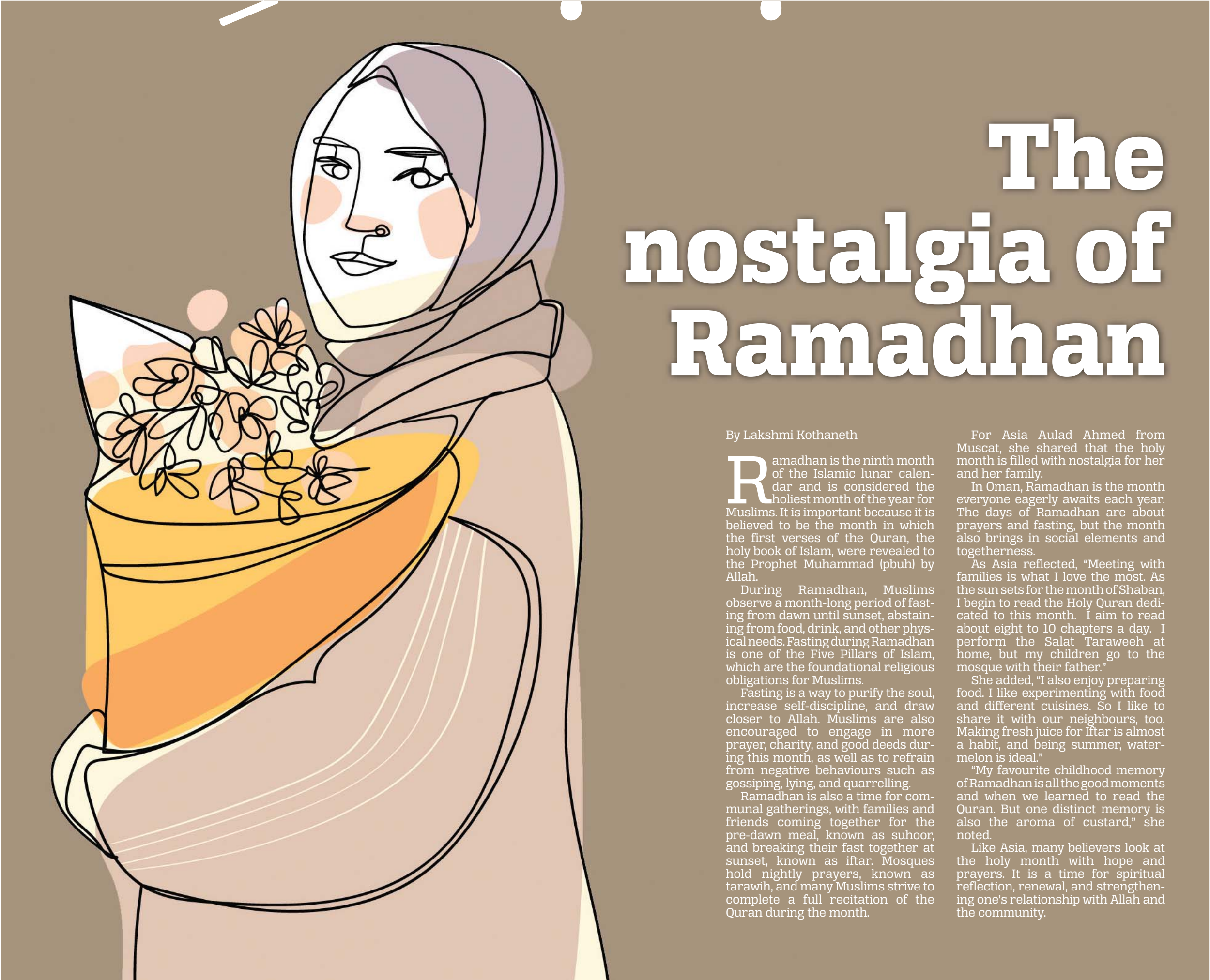
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# ramadhan



## The nostalgia of Ramadhan

By Lakshmi Kothaneth

Ramadhan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar and is considered the holiest month of the year for Muslims. It is important because it is believed to be the month in which the first verses of the Quran, the holy book of Islam, were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) by Allah.

During Ramadhan, Muslims observe a month-long period of fasting from dawn until sunset, abstaining from food, drink, and other physical needs. Fasting during Ramadhan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, which are the foundational religious obligations for Muslims.

Fasting is a way to purify the soul, increase self-discipline, and draw closer to Allah. Muslims are also encouraged to engage in more prayer, charity, and good deeds during this month, as well as to refrain from negative behaviours such as gossiping, lying, and quarrelling.

Ramadhan is also a time for communal gatherings, with families and friends coming together for the pre-dawn meal, known as suhoor, and breaking their fast together at sunset, known as iftar. Mosques hold nightly prayers, known as tarawih, and many Muslims strive to complete a full recitation of the Quran during the month.

For Asia Aulad Ahmed from Muscat, she shared that the holy month is filled with nostalgia for her and her family.

In Oman, Ramadhan is the month everyone eagerly awaits each year. The days of Ramadhan are about prayers and fasting, but the month also brings in social elements and togetherness.

As Asia reflected, "Meeting with families is what I love the most. As the sun sets for the month of Shaban, I begin to read the Holy Quran dedicated to this month. I aim to read about eight to 10 chapters a day. I perform the Salat Taraweeh at home, but my children go to the mosque with their father."

She added, "I also enjoy preparing food. I like experimenting with food and different cuisines. So I like to share it with our neighbours, too. Making fresh juice for Iftar is almost a habit, and being summer, watermelon is ideal."

"My favourite childhood memory of Ramadhan is all the good moments and when we learned to read the Quran. But one distinct memory is also the aroma of custard," she noted.

Like Asia, many believers look at the holy month with hope and prayers. It is a time for spiritual reflection, renewal, and strengthening one's relationship with Allah and the community.

### QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

{So remember me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me}.

Surah Al Baqara

### HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

The prophet said: 'Actions will be judged according to the intentions (behind them), and everyone will be repaid according to what he intended '

Bukhari, Muslim

### HEALTH TIPS

Just because it's Ramadhan doesn't mean you have to stop all physical exercises. If you are a regular athlete who is used to moderate or vigorous exercise, maintain this by finding the right schedule just before iftar. Make sure to hydrate immediately after your session and eat slowly to replenish your fluid and nutrients.

## The People of the Cave

### ALLAH THE ALMIGHTY SAYS:

{Or have you thought that the companions of the cave and the inscription were, among Our signs, a wonder? (10) [Mention] when the youths retreated to the cave and said, "Our Lord, grant us from Yourself mercy and prepare for us from our affair right guidance." (11) So We cast [a cover of sleep] over

their ears within the cave for a number of years. (12) Then We awakened them that We might show which of the two factions was most precise in calculating what [extent] they had remained in time. (13) -Surah Kahf

The protagonists in this story are a small number of youths, who were the sons of rulers and noblemen they realised that their townspeople were immersed in wrongful practices by worshipping other than Allah. They recognised the truth and secretly shunned the false gods and customs that their elders upheld.

For this, Allah increased their faith and guided them. Each of the youths had originally kept their belief in Allah concealed for fear of repercussions, but within their

secret assembly, they confessed their rejection of idolatry and affirmed their belief in Allah. From that day, they met regularly to worship Allah in secret. Allah guided them to the safety of a cave. Sleep overcame the youths.

Allah caused them to enter into a slumber in the narrow chamber of the cave, a miraculous sleep that lasted for centuries. The Quran describes that the sun would rise on the right and set on the left.

Allah in His wisdom also caused them to turn from side to side during their sleep. Even their dog achieved fame and was mentioned in the Quran.

He had positioned himself at the threshold of the cave, similar to the post of a guard dog, stretching

his forelegs as he slept. Once awake, the disoriented young men realised they had lost track of time, and wondered how long they had been there. One of them suggested perhaps a day or a part thereof, but they agreed that only Allah knew the exact duration. One of them was assigned to buy good and lawful food from town with some silver coins that they had on hand.

They warned him to exercise extreme caution to avoid discovery, for fear that, the townspeople would stone and assault him, or worse, pressure him to renounce Islam. He tried to buy some food with his coins, but the seller did not recognise the currency or the markings on it. The coins were passed from person to person, all

of whom were baffled and unable to identify their origin. He told the townspeople where he was from and the ruler at that time, and his story was so implausible that he was brought to face the Governor to explain himself.

It was also said that the physical proof of the young men, being physically intact after centuries of sleep, was to provide proof to some people of that time who denied the Resurrection.

This evidence was then provided to them for them to witness with their own eyes and will stand as a witness for them or against them as to which path they chose to believe thereafter. As a monument, the townspeople eventually agreed to build a place of worship above where they died.

### STORIES FROM THE QURAN



RECIPE

Bangladesh's beloved Ramadhan staple Chana Masala



**BANGLADESH IS A** country of strong flavours and has some of the most underrated dishes around the world. One of the most popular dishes served during Ramadhan in Bangladesh is “Chana Masala,” which is a spicy and flavourful chickpea curry. Here's a recipe for making Chana Masala:

Ingredients:  
2 cups chickpeas, soaked overnight  
1 onion, finely chopped  
2 tomatoes, finely chopped  
2 green chillies, chopped  
1 teaspoon ginger paste  
1 teaspoon garlic paste  
1 teaspoon cumin seeds  
1 teaspoon coriander powder  
1 teaspoon garam masala powder  
1 teaspoon red chili powder  
Salt, to taste  
3 tablespoons oil  
Water, as needed

Instructions:  
Rinse the soaked chickpeas and boil them in a large pot of water until they are tender. Drain and set aside.

Heat oil in a large pan over

medium heat. Add cumin seeds and let them splutter. Add the chopped onion and fry until it turns golden brown.

Add the ginger and garlic paste and fry for a minute. Add the chopped tomatoes, green chillies, coriander powder, garam masala powder, and red chili powder.

Fry until the tomatoes are soft and oil starts to separate. Add the boiled chickpeas and salt.

Mix well and add enough water to cover the chickpeas. Bring the curry to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and let it simmer for 10-15 minutes until the gravy thickens.

Adjust the seasoning according to your taste, and turn off the heat.

Garnish with chopped coriander leaves and serve hot with rice, roti, or naan.

Enjoy your delicious and healthy Chana Masala during Ramadhan in Bangladesh!



The history of Islam in Bangladesh and their Ramadhan traditions

**ISLAM HAS A LONG** and rich history in Bangladesh, with its influence dating back to the 8th century. Today, Islam is the dominant religion in the country, with around 90 per cent of the population following the faith. The country's Islamic heritage is reflected in its art, architecture, and daily life, and the holy month of Ramadhan is celebrated with great fervour and devotion.

HISTORY OF ISLAM IN BANGLADESH

The spread of Islam in Bangladesh began in the 8th century when Arab traders arrived on the coast of Chittagong. The Sufi saints played an important role in the spread of Islam in the country. In the 13th century, the Sufi saint Shah Jalal arrived in Sylhet and spread the teachings of Islam throughout the region. During the Mughal era, Islam became the dominant religion in the region, and many mosques and religious institutions were built.

In the 19th century, the British East India Company established control over Bangladesh, and the Islamic community faced many

challenges during this time. The British colonial rule was marked by economic exploitation and political oppression, which led to widespread poverty and social unrest. However, the Islamic community in Bangladesh continued to thrive, and many religious leaders emerged during this time.

After the partition of India in 1947, Bangladesh became a part of Pakistan, which was then an Islamic republic. However, the political and cultural differences between East and West Pakistan led to the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. Bangladesh gained independence and became a secular republic, but Islam continued to be an important part of the country's culture and identity.

RAMADHAN TRADITIONS IN BANGLADESH

Ramadhan is the holy month of fasting and prayer for Muslims all over the world, and Bangladesh is no exception. The month of Ramadhan is observed with great reverence in Bangladesh, and many special traditions are

associated with this time.

The first day of Ramadhan is marked by the sighting of the moon, and the month-long fast begins at dawn. Muslims in Bangladesh wake up before dawn to eat a pre-dawn meal called sehri, which sustains them throughout the day until sunset.

During the day, Muslims abstain from food, drink, and other physical needs, and spend their time in prayer and contemplation. Many mosques hold special prayers and sermons during Ramadhan, and Muslims also recite the Quran and perform acts of charity.

The fast is broken at sunset with a meal called iftar, which often includes dates, fruits, and other traditional foods. In Bangladesh, iftar is often a communal affair, with families and friends gathering together to break their fasts and share a meal.

Another important tradition during Ramadhan is the taraweeh prayers, which are performed after the evening prayer. The entire Quran is recited during the month, with one-thirtieth of the book recited each night. The last ten days of Ramadhan are especially important, as they are

believed to be the most holy.

POPULAR AND INFLUENTIAL MUSLIM PERSONALITIES

These individuals have made significant contributions to their communities and have helped to promote social justice, education, and economic empowerment for Muslims in Bangladesh and beyond.

Fazlur Rahman Khan: Fazlur Rahman Khan was a structural engineer and architect who revolutionised the design of skyscrapers. He designed many iconic buildings in the United States, including the Sears Tower in Chicago, which was the world's tallest building at the time of its completion in 1973. Despite his achievements in the field of architecture, he remained committed to his faith and was actively involved in the Muslim community, serving as a board member of the Islamic Center of Chicago.

Muhammad Yunus: Muhammad Yunus is a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and social entrepreneur who is best known for his work in the field of microfinance. He founded the Grameen Bank, which provides small loans to impoverished individuals, mostly women, in Bangladesh. His work has lifted millions of people out of poverty and has been replicated in many other countries.

Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani: Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani was a political and religious leader who fought for the rights of peasants and workers in Bangladesh. He was also an advocate for Islamic socialism and played a significant role in the country's struggle for independence from Pakistan.

New Zealand wool handling ace is a G.O.A.T. among sheep

**IN NEW ZEALAND'S** close-knit shearing community, Joel Henare is regarded as a Lionel Messi, Tiger Woods or Jonah Lomu — a G.O.A.T. in the sheep sheds.

Now 31, he first stepped into the bright lights of competitive shearing at the lambkin age of 12.

Henare has since notched 132 competition victories in wool handling — the high-speed art of separating off-cuts from a sheared fleece.

In his discipline, he is considered to be the best.

He begins his work with an artistic flick, spreading the matted fleece over a table, before expertly trimming, snipping and slicing unwanted parts in rapid succession.

Within 60 seconds, he is on to the next one.

Henare dominated the field at this month's Golden Shears, a prestigious event that draws shearers and wool

handlers from all over the world to Masterton, a provincial farming town with a population of 27,000.

After notching his ninth open wool handling title in a row, drenched in sweat and panting, Henare put his success down to hard work, discipline and quick thinking.

“You need to be fit in your body physically, but you also need to have the mental strength,” he said.

“Consistency is key. You need to have your wits about you at all times.”

New Zealand, home to five million people and 25 million sheep, is one of the world's main wool exporters, last year sending \$284 million worth overseas.

Rising farming costs and falling wool prices have seen national sheep figures dwindle from a high of 72 million in the 1980s.

Yet their specialised skills mean



shearers and wool handlers remain in demand despite falling sheep numbers, Mark Barrowcliffe, president of New Zealand's Shearing Contractors Association, said.

“Shearing is facing many different challenges, including a labour shortage, so there will always be work for a well-trained wool handler or shearer,” he added.

Competitive shearing and wool handling is serious business in New Zealand, which even has a designated federation — Shearing Sports NZ — to oversee

competitions.

PASSING THE CROWN

Professional shearers need dexterity and incredible stamina to clip hundreds of sheep — each weighing around 60 kilogrammes (132 pounds) — during a typical eight-hour working day.

Wool handling also demands a well-organised approach, Henare said, “to do it properly every time, not just up on stage, but anywhere you go in the world”.

Golden Shears organisers paint Henare as “the Jonah Lomu of shearing

sports” — invoking the storied legacy of the New Zealand rugby great.

But this Greatest of All Time quit full-time shearing work four years ago and now competes just as a hobby.

Techniques, tricks and tips on how to handle sheep and their wool are passed down through the generations in New Zealand's sheep sheds, and Henare hails from a dynasty.

His grandmother was a champion wool handler on the plains of Otago. Two of his great uncles were shearers who competed in Golden Shears finals in the 1960s.

Already young pretenders to Henare's status as a Golden Shears champion are emerging.

Among them are teen shearing sensation Reuben Alabaster, who broke the solo world record last December by shearing 746 sheep in eight hours.

Alabaster said he was often worn out at the end of a competition, “but you just push through if it's a dream you're chasing”.

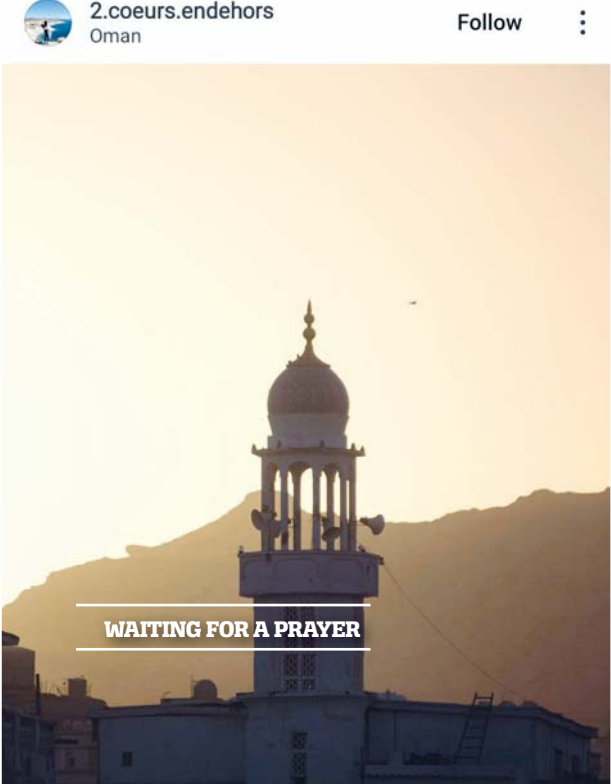
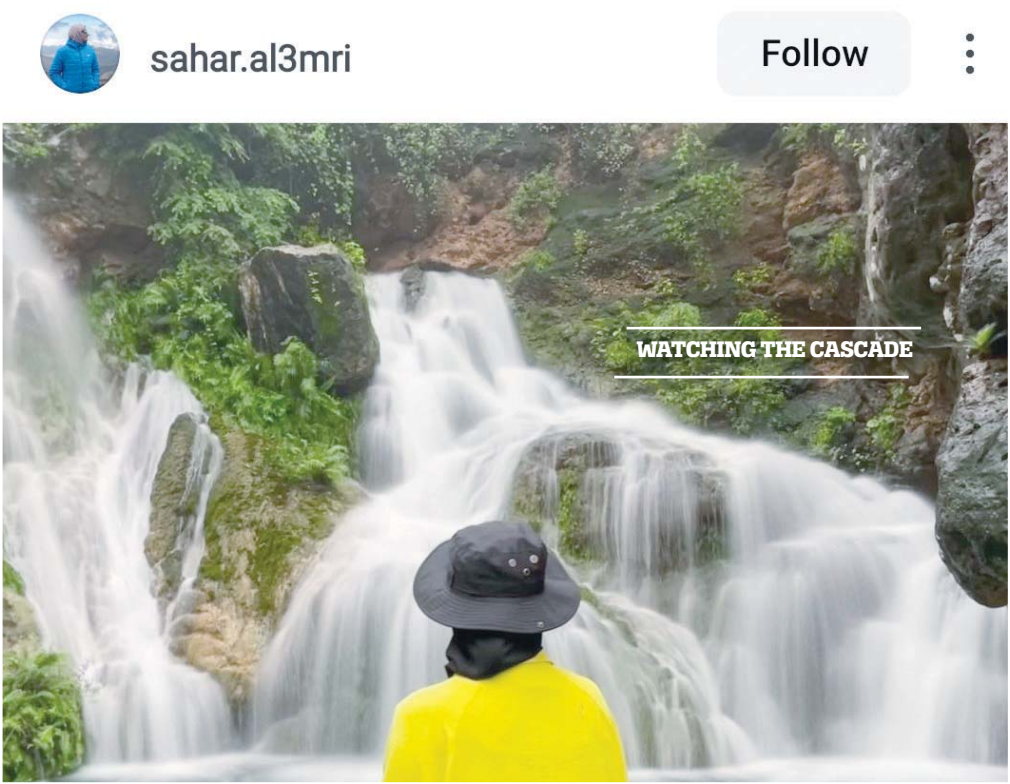
“It's amazing what your body can do,” he added.

Like Henare, the 19-year-old grew up around sheep sheds, learning his trade since childhood from family members such as cousin Sheree Alabaster — the 2008 wool handling world champion.

Shearing also comes down to training techniques. “It's all about positioning, some sheep sit better than others,” said the teenager. “It's a lot nicer for the sheep if you're holding them right too.”

“Some just have an attitude and don't want to be shorn at all.

“Even the best shearers in the world still get kicked.” — **AFP**



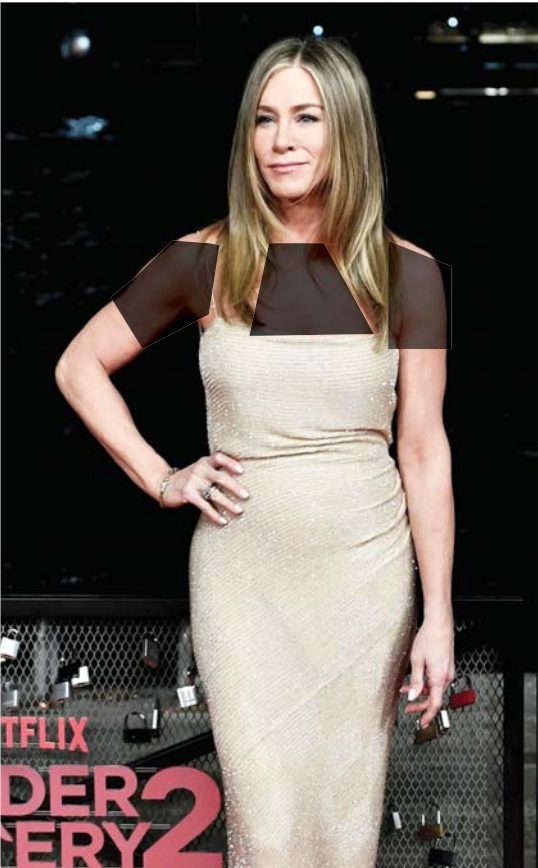
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AROUND THE WORLD

LIFESTYLE

Comedy suffering because 'you have to be careful' now says Aniston



JENNIFER ANISTON said she wishes we could laugh more at ourselves, rather than having to police every word in comedies.

"Comedy has evolved, movies have evolved," the "Friends" star, 54, said in Paris, where her new film "Murder Mystery 2" with Adam Sandler, is set.

"Now it's a little tricky because you have to be very careful, which makes it really hard for comedians, because the beauty of comedy is that we make fun of ourselves, make fun of life," she said.

In the past, "you could joke about a bigot and have a laugh — that was hysterical. And it was about educating people on how ridiculous people were," she said. "And now we're not allowed to do that."

Aniston said the culture had changed dramatically since the days of "Friends" in the 1990s.

"There's a whole generation of people, kids, who are now going back to episodes of 'Friends' and find them offensive.

"There were things that were never intentional and others... well, we should have thought it through — but I don't think there was a sensitivity like there is now."

These issues are perhaps the reason why Hollywood is turning out far fewer comedies in recent years, which Aniston said was a tragedy.

"Everybody needs funny! The world needs humour! We can't take ourselves too seriously. Especially in the United States. Everyone is far too divided," she said.

For co-star Sandler, the other big change has been the budgets, with comedies now expected to look as good as expensive blockbusters and dramas.

"You know what else has changed about comedies? The look," Sandler joked, pointing to his clothes.

"Remember when we used to make comedies? They would give you a budget, not too much money, and say: 'Do whatever you can with that.'

"And now they want us to look pretty awesome. We work harder on that," he said with a laugh.

"Murder Mystery 2" follows the hit Netflix film from 2019 in which Sandler's detective and his wife become embroiled in a whodunnit on holiday.

The sequel, streaming from Friday, sees the duo travel to Paris after a wealthy friend is kidnapped.

— AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

'Dungeons and Dragons' aims to recapture 80s film magic



MORE JOKES AND less reliance on computer effects — the makers of "Dungeons and Dragons: Honour Among Thieves" wanted their blockbuster to be a throwback to the classic family films of the 1980s.

In transferring the beloved role-playing game to the big screen, directors John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein said they wanted the mix of earnest fun and absurd comedy of their childhood favourites like "Raiders of the Lost Ark," "The Goonies" and "The Princess Bride".

They were also bored of overly serious fantasy fare.

"We've seen stoic, humourless portrayals of fantasy characters in almost every other film and television show, and this was our reaction against that," Daley told reporters in Paris.

The film stars Chris Pine as a reformed thief, with Hugh Grant as a slimy villain and "Bridgerton" heart-throb Rege-Jean Page in a scene-stealing turn as warrior Xenk, who is completely impervious to irony or sarcasm.

Pine has experience with cherished fantasy properties, having played Captain Kirk in the recent "Star Trek" reboots, but said he was unafraid of

upsetting the "D&D" fanbase.

"One should be wary of taking anything on, especially with the Internet now being so angry and loud and acerbic," he said.

"But we made a really fun film and we've heard we've put enough in there for diehards, and even people who have never played are surprised how much they like it."

GELATINOUS Cube

It helps that Dungeons and Dragons is a role-playing game in which players — to a certain extent — make up the story as

common" in the world of blockbusters, said Daley.

"Often you hear from studios: 'It's greenlit, let's get to work, we'll fix the script along the way.' And that's a really short-sighted way of working."

Puppets and real-life effects were used where possible to recreate the feel of classic films.

"Audiences have gotten a little tired of over-reliance on CGI (computer-generated images)," said Goldstein.

PINE'S 'GENIUS

As for Grant, he said he was



DISCOVERY

Mexico recovers 43 archaeological artefacts from Italy



MEXICO HAS recovered 43 pre-Columbian archaeological artefacts that were returned voluntarily by Italy, the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Monday.

The artefacts arrived in Mexico City on Monday on an Aeromexico flight from Rome, the Mexican government said.

The items, which belonged to various pre-Columbian groups and mostly date back to the third to seventh century AD, had been recovered by Italian police following a number of investigations, the Carabinieri police said on Monday.

They were handed over to Mexican Culture Secretary Alejandra Frausto in Rome on Friday.

"Today, the friendship between Mexico and Italy is crowned with an extraordinary act of generosity, 43 pieces of Mexican history begin the return to their origin, 43 fragments of ancient cultures that are the essence of the greatness of our country," Frausto said.

The minister also said that over the last four years in particular, Mexico has been speaking out against auctioning of artefacts that belong to Mexican cultures.

"In Mexico, this movement has gained great momentum and is strongly promoted by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador," Frausto said.

She said that this has awakened the awareness of collectors, private companies and citizens from various parts of the world, including Italy and Germany, who have voluntarily returned pre-Hispanic pieces to Mexico.

To this moment some 11,500 archaeological and historical artefacts have been recovered and several auctions cancelled, the minister said.

In 2021, an auction of pre-Columbian art objects from the Americas took place in Munich, much to the annoyance of Latin American nations. Mexico's government had called for the auction to be cancelled, saying 74 of the 324 artefacts involved were the property of the Mexican nation and their sale a crime under Mexican law. — dpa





# ramadhan

## Regional Scene

f t i y n @omanobserver

WEDNESDAY | MARCH 29 | 2023

# Arab creatives take back the narrative in The Pearl Diver's Daughter

At one point in the past, it was one of the things that drove traders to the shores of the Middle East—a traditional practice that has become a major source of economic activity in a place that was desolate and challenged before oil was discovered.

From the Arabian Gulf to the Red Sea, pearl diving was a way of life for different coastal communities, and the pearls they harvested were highly valued for their rarity and beauty.

But while the Arabian Gulf was the centre of the pearling industry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the industry would experience a tremendous decline, and as the region became richer, the culture became but a whisper in the mouths of old men who had seen the better, more triumphant days of the pearling industry.

In *The Pearl Diver's Daughter*, Emirati writer Maitha al Khayyat and composer Eman al Hashimi worked together to breathe new life into this fading industry, exploring the dangers of the profession as well as the strong bond that connects a father to his daughter, putting emphasis on the lengths that a parent would go through in order to secure a child's future.

On March 19, a contemporary performance that mixed dance, poetry, and music had its world debut at the Abu Dhabi Festival, organised by the Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Foundation. Held at the hallowed halls of the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation, *The Pearl Diver's Daughter* was a unique look not just into a beloved tradition and culture but also a great opportunity to showcase what storytellers from the region and the Gulf, in general, are capable of.

The performance, which lasted for about an hour, was relentless, switching between the haunting narrative of Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter Mayssa Karaa and the explosion of movements rendered by the contemporary repertory dance company Company | E.

*The Pearl Diver's Daughter* is the story of a coastal village where the sea always calls on the people with a promise of profound treasures only to drown them when they heed the call. In this story, the sea reveals its secrets to one of the pearl diver's daughters, and without other sources of livelihood to get by, a father eventually would have to make the most generous of sacrifices.

The story flow was a testament to the relevance and deep cultural connection of Maitha al Khayyat to her culture; she has already published more than 170 publications.

On the sidelines of the global premiere, Eman al Hashimi shared that she is very proud of what they have accomplished, having created something very visually stimulating but at the same time very different from what people have gotten used to watching.

She shared that it was even more celebratory to be able to craft a story of the region and the Gulf, preserve the said story for future generations, and share it with the world.

The 20th-anniversary edition of the Abu Dhabi Festival celebrates two decades of many firsts. This year's celebration features ten world premieres, four commissions, and fourteen international co-productions. It has brought Peruvian operatic tenor Juan Diego Florez to the Middle East. It has allowed people in the region access to the critically acclaimed *De Scheherezade a Yo, Carmen*, among other prominent musical and creative personalities from around the world.

With refinement and fine-tuning, *The Pearl Diver's Daughter* is a unique look into a beloved story with the potential to become a classic. The performances were so eager and relentless that, as a viewer, it makes you run out of breath, not being able to process the beauty that was there. With time, its creator will realise the importance of pauses, of a little bit of silence after a whirlwind of emotions. Once the producers realise that silence is just as important as beautiful visuals and performances, they will be able to present a more subtle yet powerful performance worthy of any stage from around the world.