

PRAYER TIMES	
FAJR	04:48AM
DHUHR	12:17PM
ASR	03:44PM
MAGHRIB	06:26PM
ISHA	07:36PM



P12

ENGLAND SEE OFF UKRAINE IN EURO QUALIFYING, RONALDO NETS DOUBLE



P13

INVESTMENTS IN OMAN'S DRONE INDUSTRY TOP \$100 MILLION



P20

JABAL AKDHAR IS NOW A PINK PARADISE AS ROSES BLOOM



■ MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable to him on the death of Princess Al Jawhara Abdulaziz Abdulrahman al Saud. In his cable, King Salman expressed his thanks for His Majesty's sincere sentiments and prayers, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty against all harm. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO MONGOLIA

Nasser bin Mohammed al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the People's Republic of China, presented his credentials to President Ukhnaag-iin Khürelsükh of Mongolia as Non-Resident Ambassador and Plenipotentiary to Mongolia, on Monday. The ambassador conveyed His Majesty's greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to the Mongolian President and further progress and prosperity for the Mongolian people.

PICTURE ON P2



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INSIDE



LEBANON REVERSES DECISION ON DAYLIGHT TIME

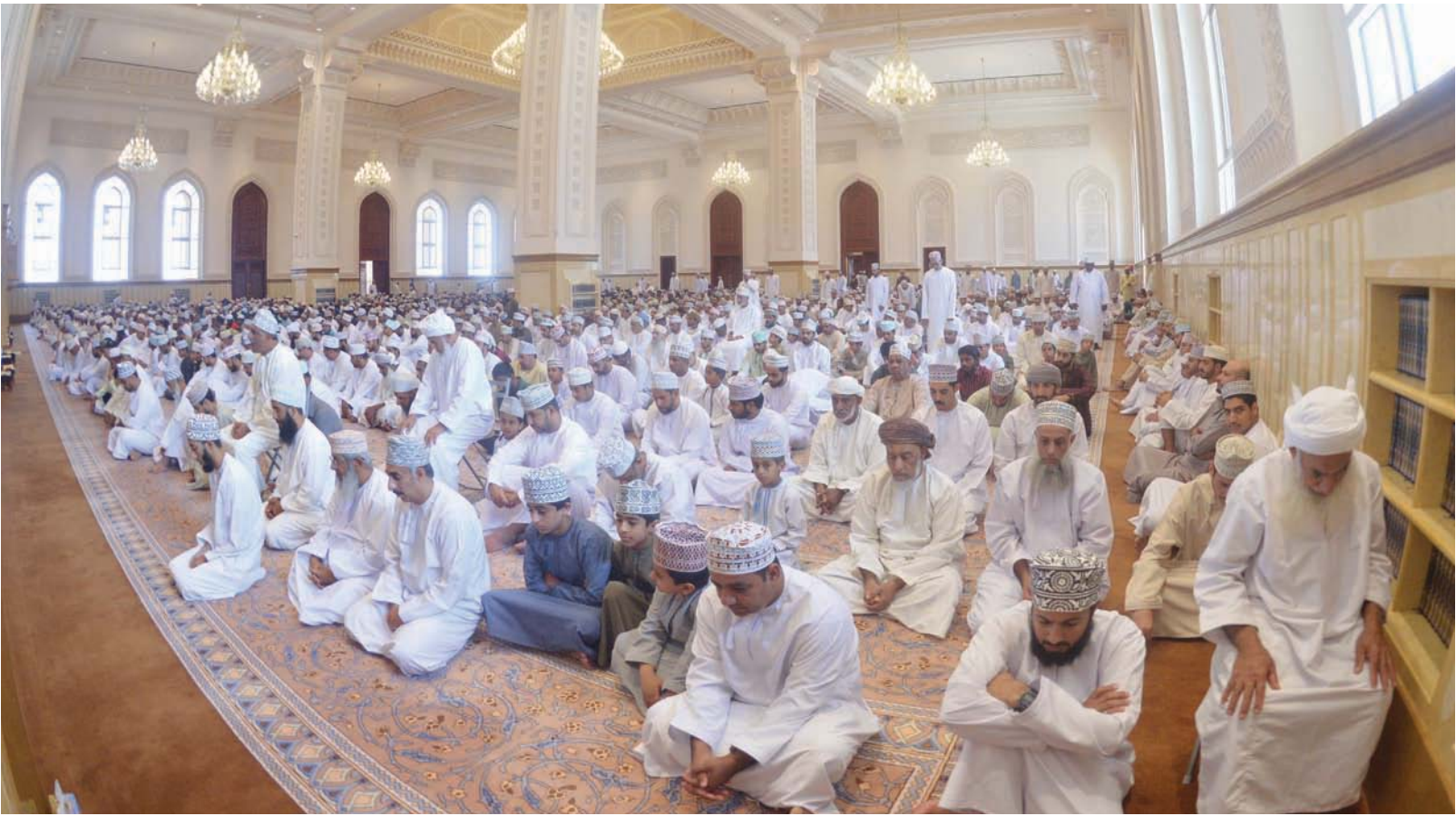
P7



DESANTIS IS GETTING READY FOR PRESIDENTIAL RACE

P9

■ TIME FOR PRAYER



Worshippers during prayers at Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Nakhl on Sunday.

PHOTO BY ABDULWAHID AL HAMDANI

Schools closed in 4 governorates as upper trough brings rains

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

The governorates of Dhofar and Musandam received thunderstorms accompanied by winds on Monday evening as the Ministry of Education issued a decision suspending classes at all public and private schools in the governorates of Musandam, North Al Batinah, Al Buraimi and Al Dhahirah, on Tuesday, as more rains are expected.

The weather forecaster at Oman Met Office said other governorates will also receive rains.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources had called on farmers, livestock breeders, beekeepers, and fishermen in the governorates expected to be affected by rains, to take the necessary precautions to ensure their



Heavy rains were reported from some governorates. — ONA

safety and the safety of their property, and called on everyone to move away from dams and wadis.

Earlier in the day, satellite image showed continuous flow of clouds and sporadic rain in some parts of

the governorates of Al Dhahirah, North Al Batinah and Musandam.

Due to expected heavy thundershowers there are chances of wadis overflowing in many governorates. The peak is expected

to be on Tuesday morning. The upper trough impact is expected to extend to South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Muscat, South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Sharqiyah and later in night towards Al Wusta and Dhofar.

Civil Aviation Authority has requested the public to avoid low-lying areas and not to cross wadis. The alert period ends on Wednesday. The general weather forecast for Tuesday is reported to be partly cloudy to cloudy skies over the governorates of Musandam, Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Muscat, South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta, Dhofar and Al Hajar Mountains with chances of isolated rain and convective clouds occasionally thundershower associated with downdraft and hail.

TRANSPORTATION LAW TO ENSURE SAFETY OF CHILDREN IN SCHOOL BUSES

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has said that it is working on new school transportation law in the wake of accidents involving students that are reported at regular levels in the country.

According to Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary for Education, the ministry currently operates 17,000 buses at a cost of RO80 million annually. He said that if the school bus operations are moved to a private company, the cost of the operation will double to RO180 million.

MoE is also working with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), Royal Oman Police (ROP), and companies in the oil and gas sector to ensure the safety of public transport.

VIRAL VIDEO

Recently, a video of the incident went viral following which the Royal Oman Police arrested a school bus driver. The video was about the incident of a student falling from one of the school buses, whose health condition was stable. Several questions have been raised by citizens and residents about the lack of safety procedures on the bus, such as the absence of supervisors, especially women supervisors in the bus transporting girl students.

ROP has issued guidelines for bus drivers to ensure the safe transportation of students. The instructions are significant because speeding, negligence, bad behaviour and not keeping a safe distance is among the main causes of traffic accidents in the country, according to the latest statistics.

Scientists find water inside glass beads on the Moon

PARIS: Scientists said on Monday they have discovered water inside tiny beads of glass scattered across the Moon, suggesting that one day it could be extracted and used by the “explorers of tomorrow”.

The Moon was long believed to be dry, but over the last few decades several missions have shown there is water both on the surface and trapped inside minerals.

Mahesh Anand, a professor of planetary science and exploration at the UK's Open University,

said that water molecules could be seen “hopping over the lunar surface” when it was sunny.

“But we didn't know where exactly it was coming from,” said Anand, a co-author of a new study published in the journal Nature Geoscience.

The study, carried out by a team led by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said that the glass beads are “probably the dominant reservoir involved in the lunar surface water cycle”.

The team polished and analysed



117 glass beads which were scooped up by China's Chang'e-5 spacecraft in December 2020 and brought back to Earth.

The beads are formed by tiny meteorites that bombard the surface of the Moon, which lacks the protection of an atmosphere. The heat of the impact melts the surface material, which cools into round glass beads around the width of a strand of hair.

As well as finding water in the beads, the scientists detected “a telltale signature of the Sun,”

Anand said. Investigating further, they determined that the hydrogen necessary to make up the water was coming from solar wind, which sweeps charged particles across the Solar System.

The other ingredient for water, oxygen, makes up nearly half of the Moon, though it is trapped in rocks and minerals. This means that solar wind could be equally contributing to water on other bodies in the Solar System lacking an atmosphere, such as Mercury or asteroids, Anand said. — AFP



Military Technological College board reviews progress

MUSCAT: The Board of Trustees of the Military Technological College (MTC) held its annual meeting for 2023 at the College's premises on Monday.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence and

Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the College.

During the meeting, several topics on the agenda were reviewed.

The college aims to achieve excellence in academic and technical education and training by providing specialised

and accredited vocational programmes for the military and security units, as well as civil society. The college also seeks to be among the best academic military institutions in fields of research and internationally accredited in providing technical academic education.

Fak Kurba: Omani donates for seventh year in a row

MUSCAT: A citizen from Al Dhahirah Governorate donated for the seventh year in a row for the release of 38 cases of insolvents who had accumulated debts for various reasons.

The Board of Directors of the Decommissioning Anguish initiative expressed its thanks for the constant cooperation of the philanthropists, individuals and

various institutions for giving prisoners a chance to reunite



with their families as financial issues had prevented them from meeting their families.

It is worth noting that the humanitarian initiative has succeeded in releasing more than 4,969 insolvents, and during this year it aims to release about 1,300 cases with the participation of community members and various institutions. — ONA

OMAN'S AMBASSADOR TO MONGOLIA PRESENTS CREDENTIALS



ULAAN BAATAR: Nasser bin Mohammed al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the People's Republic of China (PRC), presented his credentials to President Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh of Mongolia as Non-Resident Ambassador and Plenipotentiary to Mongolia, on Monday. — ONA

SCHOOL BUS ACCIDENTS: MoE WORKING ON SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION LAW

FROM PAGE 1

Colonel Khamis bin Ali al Batashi, Assistant Director General of Traffic, said, "ROP has taken many measures in coordination with the Ministry of Education and in line with the Traffic Law and its executive regulations. The roads will witness traffic congestion, especially at peak times, and therefore traffic patrols will work to facilitate traffic and deal with all that obstructs traffic,



especially in places with more congestion than others."

"Traffic patrols will facilitate the movement of buses, give

them priority in traffic, and monitor the extent to which the bus driver adheres to traffic rules and regulations, and the number of people allowed on a bus," he added.

He said that all drivers of public and private school buses must be careful when approaching student gathering places and not to move until after making sure that all students have crossed the streets. "They should stop buses in their designated places," Colonel Batashi said.

Healthy Suhoor is equally important during Ramadhan

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@AfrahAlBalushia

The health benefits of fasting are many, but they will not be fully achieved if the fasting person does not have a healthy Suhoor meal rich with vitamins and necessary minerals for the body, along with sufficient amount of water so that the fasting person does not suffer from any problems due to dehydration.

The importance of Suhoor lies in stimulating the digestive system and maintaining the level of sugar in the blood, preventing feelings of fatigue, lethargy and laziness. Suhoor also maintains the general body balance, especially during the long hours of fasting, according to health experts.

The Ministry of Health has

reiterated the importance of Suhoor in the holy month of Ramadhan since having a healthy Suhoor meal relieves the feeling of hunger and thirst, provided that the Suhoor does not contain salty foods, fatty foods with a lot of oils, soft drinks, spices and spicy foods. These items are heavy on the body and increase sweating and cause thirst.

The Suhoor meal must also contain all the important nutrients such as starches, minerals, proteins and vitamins provided that such food items are easy to digest so as not to overburden the stomach.

The importance of pre-emptive Suhoor lies in the fact that it protects people from any problems that may be caused by lack of water or food, such as headaches, dizziness,



constipation, blood pressure problems, and feeling unwell.

The Suhoor meal is ideal for children too, as children who have reached ten years of age are eager to share the fast with their

parents. It is necessary to focus on giving them a healthy Suhoor meal, as it is more difficult to tolerate the fast among children.

Nutrition experts recommend that children's Suhoor meal in Ramadan should include eggs or cheese, with bread, dates, a spoonful of white honey and milk, given that these foods contain important "vitamin B", protein, calcium and starches.

Such recommended food items activate the digestion process in the children, as well as provide them with energy for a long time during the day.

Health experts advise young and old to have Suhoor meal during the last part of the night (shortly before the dawn), in order to enable the body to benefit from all the nutrients for long time.

Prices of commodities up

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Just as the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) launched the Price Monitoring System, prices of many fruits and vegetables have shot up in the retail market, according to a cross section of consumers.

Prices of many of the fruits and vegetables which are high in use these days, such as water melon and bananas, have made nearly 30 per cent rise since last week.

"Prices of many items have shot high in the past few days just as the Ramadhan began," said Mohammed Mostafa, an expatriate based in Muscat.

He said one kilogramme of water melon which he bought for 190 baisa a week ago is now 290 baisa. Similar hike was visible on Yemeni mango and Indian banana which he consumes on a daily basis for breaking fast.

Moreover, the wholesale suppliers, importers and other dealers admitted that there is a slight hike in the prices of some items but they claim to be reasonable and justifiable owing to many factors.

"The Omani water melon is of great demand in countries like Qatar, UAE, and Bahrain and a large portion of exports are to these countries. Our local demand too went high disproportionate to the supply in the initial days of Ramadhan and prices were as high as 290 baisa per kilogramme. However, since we stopped exporting to these countries for the time



being, the prices are back to 190 baisa," Raoof, buyer at Suhul al Fayha, the largest fresh fruit and vegetable supplier to the country's consumption, said.

He further added that a similar rise in price was seen in Yemeni mangoes from RO 1.900 to RO 2.400 whose export too stopped for the time being.

The same is applicable to Indian cavendish banana which went up from RO 2.500 to RO 2.700.



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MANY 'SATISFIED' WITH MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND URBAN PLANNING SERVICES

Measures to speed up procedures



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 27

A survey conducted to measure satisfaction over the services rendered by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning among citizens revealed that some respondents are satisfied with the speed and simplicity of services, while others sought for procedures to be simplified suggesting more services to be done online.

Some of those surveyed said that the ministry's electronic platforms sped up completion of

transactions thus reducing waiting time at the Unified Services Hall. Many agreed that of late the ministry's services witnessed a remarkable improvement.

Real estate brokers said that they are facing some technical problems, but online transactions take less than 10 minutes to be accomplished.

Eng Amani al Balushiyah, Director of the Unified Services Hall at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, said: "We receive around 350 people at the Unified Services Hall daily. The ministry is currently executing

plans to further improve online services and simplify procedures with the aim of reaching a standard execution period of 10 minutes or less for completing a transaction. The ministry is planning to give broader powers to the directorates outside Muscat Governorate.

"The ministry pays attention to the training of its frontline employees by providing internal training workshops to help them improve the procedures and services provided by the ministry. Besides, the ministry devised initiatives to evaluate and

develop staff performance. This is in addition to the performance measurement programme that measures the average waiting time and daily achievement," she said.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning attaches great importance to customer service and seeks continuous improvement and development of its services and upgrading its levels through 22 service halls distributed in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman where more than 250,000 customers availed services in 2022.



Oman, Mauritania discuss cooperation in higher education

MUSCAT: Dr Rahmabint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation met on Monday Moctar Ahmed El Yedaly, Minister of Digital Transition, Innovation and Modernisation of Administration in Mauritania to discuss aspects of cooperation and ways of enhancing them between the two countries.

During the consultative meeting, the Mauritanian delegation was briefed on the areas of digital transition in the ministry, represented by the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC), the ministry's website (ASAS), the Omani Network for Scientific Research and Education (OMRN), the Omani Research Repository (Shuaa), in addition to the (Ejaad) platform, which links the academic and research sector

with the industrial sector.

The meeting also touched on the ministry's efforts to ensure the quality of higher education, promote scientific research and innovation, support the projects transfer into start-ups in cooperation with supporting agencies, and establish centres for innovation and technology transfer in private higher education institutions.

The Mauritanian side expressed its desire to benefit from the Omani experience in various fields of digital transition and procedures pursued by educational institutions in joining the global rankings.

The meeting was attended by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and officials from both sides. — ONA

2,700 blood donors needed during Ramadhan

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 27

The Department of Blood Banks Services has said that the Central Blood Bank will need more than 2,700 blood and 260 platelet donors during the holy month of Ramadhan.

Blood donation timings during the month of Ramadhan will be from Sunday to Thursday from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm, and in the evening period daily from 7:30 pm to 11:30 pm.

The Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) blood bank is available during working hours from Saturday to Thursday.

To register as a donor or register to donate blood, use the



'Register as a donor' button in the Blood Bank application and find out information about blood donation campaigns.

At the same time, the director

of Blood Bank Services praised the role of donors and said the increasing number of blood donations is due to community awareness of the importance of

blood donation, as well as the media bodies in conveying this humanitarian message.

Interested donors have to log in to the eHealth portal by clicking on the login button at the top of the page and they have to register as a donor to register to donate blood, use the "Register as a donor" button in the Blood Bank application.

The Central Blood Bank has been urging the community to continue donating blood to maintain a safe stock of blood units as health services continue to be expanded in the country.

The Central Blood Bank in Bausher had earlier said that there is a daily need for more than 15 platelet donors.

Value of real estate trading hits over RO 447m in Feb

MUSCAT: The value of real estate trading in the Sultanate of Oman until the end of February 2023 stood at RO 447.3 million compared to RO 381.1 million until the end of February 2022, comprising a growth of 17.4 per cent compared to the same period in 2022, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) data.

The total fees collected from all legal actions stood at RO 12.5 million, an increase of 22.8 per cent compared to the same period in 2022.

The value of sale contracts stood at RO 207.5 million, whereas the value of mortgage



contracts stood at RO 238.3 million. The value of the swap contracts stood at RO 1.5 million.

According to the NCSI statistics, as many as 39,079 title deeds were issued by the end of February 2023. The number of title deeds issued for GCC citizens reached 210, compared to 148 title deeds as at the end of January 2022, comprising an increase of 41.9 per cent.—ONA

44 PER CENT OF OMAN'S POPULATION UNDER 17

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, MARCH 27

The Sultanate of Oman's government is eager to assist different age groups to play roles and meet their needs by enacting various measures that guarantee them the rights and provide necessary aid and tools that allow them to take control of their lives.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information's (NCSI) most recent periodic survey, children account for 44 per cent of the Sultanate of Oman's population. Between 2017 and 2021, the population of children increased by 16 per cent, rising from 1,051,862 to 1,221,751.

Muscat and Batinah North have 39 per cent of the children (0 to 17 years old), while Musandam and Wusta have only 2 per cent.

The number of living Omani newborns decreased by 15 per cent from 33.5 in 2017 to 27.3 in 2021, while the mortality rate of infants (less than 5 years old) decreased by 23 per cent during the same period.

According to NCSI, between 2017 and 2022, approximately 765,000 children are enrolled in kindergartens throughout the Sultanate of Oman, while 733,900 are enrolled in private and government schools.

The survey, on the other hand, revealed that there are 455,983 Omani youth in the Sultanate



of Oman, accounting for 19.4 per cent of the total population. 97,980 are enrolled in various higher education institutions, with 20,967 graduating in the academic year 2020/2021. There are approximately 171,500 employed youth, 60 per cent of

whom work in the private sector and 40 per cent in the government sector.

75 per cent of youth are job seekers, with 34 per cent holding a general diploma, but the rate of job seekers has decreased by 33 per cent between 2020 and 2021.

84 per cent of the owners of vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman are male youth while 34 per cent of the land owners are women.

In regards to the number of cases of abuse among Omani children monitored by the Child Protection hotline, the number increased by 9.3 per cent from 562 cases in 2020 to 584 cases in 2021. The most common types of abuse experienced by children are 46 per cent (negligence), 30 per cent (physical abuse), and 24 per cent (others). Muscat and Al Batinah North governorates accounted for 69 per cent of the observed cases of abuse.

Meanwhile, the survey indicated that approximately 45 elderly people reside in the Social

Welfare Home in Al Rustaq in 2021. 3,308 old people receive social care services from the government.

The number of females increased by 11.9 per cent in the years 2017 to 2021, it account for approximately 49.6 per cent of the total population. 60 per cent of those with bachelor's degrees or higher are females; 18 per cent of women are self-employed, and 28 per cent contribute to the labour force.

The report also focuses on people with disabilities, with 57 per cent having a congenital disability and 57 per cent having a hearing or physical disability. 18 per cent of all disabilities occur during birth, with Al Batinah North housing 22 per cent of all disabled people.



DRIVER’S FATIGUE CAN BE FATAL



MAI AL ABRI

FASTING during Ramadhan is a practice that entails abstaining from eating and drinking for a set period of time. While fasting has many potential benefits, it causes physiological changes in our bodies that affect our cognitive and physical abilities. One of the most significant changes is a decrease in blood glucose levels, which is our brain’s and muscles’ primary source of energy. As a result, our brain and body may become fatigued, lose concentration, and have slower reaction times, resulting in impaired driving abilities.

In addition to the direct effects of fasting, other factors such as dehydration, hunger, and lack of sleep

can also contribute to fatigue and reduced alertness. When combined, these factors can increase the risk of car accidents, particularly during long drives or high-risk driving situations.

According to the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the vehicle crosses 83 metres without seeing anything when the driver closes his eyes for three seconds at a speed of 100 km/h. For this reason, it has urged drivers to exercise caution while driving during Ramadhan because lack of water and sugar in our bodies while fasting may cause fatigue. Driving fatigue can have serious consequences, including accidents and injuries. Signs of driver’s fatigue include difficulty keeping eyes open or focusing on the road, yawning or rubbing the eyes frequently, feeling restless or irritable,

drifting out of the lane or hitting rumble strips, missing exits or turns, feeling drowsy or sleepy, having trouble remembering the last few miles driven, slow reaction times or difficulty making quick decisions.

ROP advises drivers that if they experience any of these symptoms while driving, they should stop and rest before continuing on the road. This can help avoid collisions.

To reduce the risk of car accidents during fasting, it is essential to take precautions such as avoiding long drives or high-risk driving situations, maintaining adequate hydration levels, and getting enough rest. It is also important to break the fast with healthy and balanced meals that provide enough energy and nutrients to sustain cognitive and physical abilities.



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US apex court turns away challenge to Trump's tariffs on steel imports

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court on Monday declined to hear a challenge to US steel import tariffs imposed in 2018 under former President Donald Trump - a policy he touted as defending American national security - and largely maintained by President Joe Biden.

The justices turned away an appeal by a group of US-based steel importers of a lower court's ruling rejecting their challenge to the Trump administration's imposition of tariffs under a Cold War-era trade law.

At issue in the case was whether the findings in a 2018 report to Trump that recommended he impose steel tariffs were subject to second-guessing by courts under federal administrative law.

The report by then-Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross determined that excessive steel imports were threatening US national security, with the imports causing



US President Donald Trump gives out pens he used to sign presidential proclamations placing tariffs on steel and aluminium imports to workers from the steel and aluminium industries at the White House in Washington. — Reuters File

domestic steel plants to close and undermining the US "ability to meet national security production requirements in a national emergency."

In March 2018, Trump ordered a 25 per cent tariff on steel imports from most nations. He also ordered

a 10 per cent tariff on aluminium imports.

Several companies that import steel products, including subsidiaries of Colmar, Pennsylvania-based Dorman Products Inc and Turkish steel producer Borusan Mannesmann

, sued in the US Court of International Trade. They argued that the Ross report was "arbitrary and capricious" under a federal law called the Administrative Procedure Act.

The trade court in 2021 ruled against the steel importers, finding that the Ross report could not be challenged in court because it was not a "final agency action."

On appeal, the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit broke with the trade court, ruling that the Ross findings did constitute a final agency action. However, the Federal Circuit found that the report's findings were not subject to court review under administrative law and that the policy otherwise complied with federal law.

The Biden administration, which has largely maintained Trump's tariff policy, urged the justices not to take up the appeal. Trump is a Republican and Biden a Democrat. — Reuters



People sit amid debris, following a landslide in Alausi, Ecuador. — Reuters

At least 16 dead in Ecuador landslide

QUITO: At least 16 people have died in a landslide in the south of Ecuador caused by months of heavy rainfall, the government said on Monday.

The mudslide happened late on Sunday night, burying dozens of homes, injuring 16 people and affecting around 500, the Risk Management Secretariat (SNGR) said in a statement.

It comes just over a week after 15 people, including a Peruvian, were killed when a strong quake struck in the southwestern border region with Peru.

Since January, heavy rains have been responsible for the deaths of 22 people.

Ecuador President Guillermo Lasso said on Twitter that firefighters had been deployed to the village of Alausi in Chimborazo province, around 300 kilometres south of the capital, "to attend to the affected citizens."

Images shared on local media showed dozens of rescuers and

civilians trying to clear debris in the dead of night with only torches for light.

Heavy rains since the beginning of the year have destroyed 72 homes and damaged more than 6,900, according to the SNGR.

There have been close to 1,000 dangerous events, such as landslides and flooding, caused by the rains this year.

The earthquake on March 18 in the provinces of El Oro and Azuay caused 22 landslides that blocked roads

Afterwards, the government called a two-month state of emergency in more than half the country, allowing economic resources to be redistributed from other areas to provide aid to those affected.

In February, the rains forced oil pumping in the country to be suspended for five days because an oil pipeline was in danger due to the risk that a bridge would collapse. — AFP

■ HIGH COST OF LIVING SPURS PROTEST



Opposition supporters push a car they use as a barricade during clashes with Kenya Police Officers in Nairobi. Kenya's opposition leader Raila Odinga called on his supporters to participate in countrywide protests every Monday and Thursday to demand that President William Ruto lowers the cost of living while questioning last year's presidential elections results. Kenyans face economic hardship following the government's recent tax measures and increased food and fuel prices. — AFP

Pakistan defers decision on drug price rise as pharma firms struggle

KARACHI: Pakistan on Monday deferred a decision on a request by pharmaceutical firms to raise the prices of more than 100 medicines, prolonging a stand-off with an industry struggling to stem losses from soaring inflation and a weakened currency.

The request was discussed during a meeting of the finance ministry's Economic Coordination Committee, but no decision was taken, a ministry statement said. It was unclear when the matter would be discussed again, officials said.

Since June, local and multinational companies, including Sanofi SA, have been lobbying the government to raise prices through industry lobby groups the Pharma Bureau and the Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturer's Association (PPMA).

Ayesha Tammy Haq, Executive Director of the Pharma Bureau, said some member companies have completely shut down, while others have cut output to offset production costs that have risen by 60 per cent over the last six months. "We may hear of more shutdowns if things do not get better," she said.



A customer buys medicine from a medical supply store in Karachi. - Reuters

Data from the statistics bureau compiled showed the industry had cut overall output by 55 per cent since June 2022.

PPMA Chairman Farooq Bukhari said production could fall further. "If the government does not agree to adjust prices ..., the PPMA cannot keep telling pharma companies to continue production."

In addition to a global increase in the price of raw materials, the pharma companies have been hit by fiscal measures aimed at staving off economic collapse and

securing more than \$1 billion in funds from an International Monetary Fund bailout.

These measures include the removal of an artificial exchange rate for the rupee, which has fallen in value against the dollar by about a fifth since the start of the year. The country also suppressed imports, including inputs for the pharma sector earlier in the fiscal year as foreign exchange reserves dropped.

Inflation is also surging, hitting a 50-year-high of 31.5 per cent in February, raising

overall costs. "The industry is asking for an across the board increase in prices on the basis of high inflation and unprecedented devaluation," a representative of Sanofi Aventis Pakistan Ltd said, declining to be named as company officials were not authorised to speak to the media.

Health Minister Abdul Qadir Patel recently met representatives of several pharma companies and discussed their demands, a spokesman told Reuters, without elaborating. — Reuters

MOORE STEPHENS
NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF JOHNSON CONTROLS AND CO LLC
(AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1486)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Johnson Controls and Co LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1052203, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Members on 16 February 2023. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

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

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

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Johnson Controls and Co LLC
(Under voluntary liquidation)

MOORE STEPHENS LLC
NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF TURNER AND TOWNSEND LLC
(AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1486)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Turner and Townsend LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1144182, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Members on 5 March 2023. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

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

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Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Turner and Townsend LLC
(Under voluntary liquidation)



World’s highest railway bridge on Chenab soon to be operational

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

The world’s highest arch railway bridge, which is 35m taller than Paris’ Eiffel Tower, is set to open over the Chenab River in India. The bridge is built at a height of 359 m (1,178 ft) over the river, and most likely to open for traffic in early 2024.

The arch bridge is located between Bakkal and Kauri in the Reasi district, in Jammu and Kashmir according to news agency ANI. After opening the rail bridge would be the vital link between Katra and Banihal.

According to official sources, the bridge has cleared all the necessary tests. The bridge is part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway Link (USBRL), which will help link the Kashmir valley to the remaining parts of the country.

I course of the inspection of the bridge on Saturday, Ashwini Vaishnaw, Union Railways Minister, said, : “Two more tests of running a motor trolley and bolero customised rail operation will be held. The safety checks that have been carried out so far include high-velocity winds test, extreme temperatures test, earthquake-prone test, and hydrological impacts due to rise in water level.”

“The USBRL, which

links Jammu with Srinagar, will be completed by December 2023 or January 2024...all the tests have been successful. Now, the bridge is ready for operation. This is the greatest thing for J&K,” he said.

The bridge was built with an investment of \$425 million (Rs 350 billion), and is ready for commissioning after necessary approvals.

Work on the main arch was completed in April 2021, while the base was finished in November 2017, as per ANI. The steel and concrete arch bridge completed a milestone in August 2022 with the completion of the overarch deck.

The bridge is designed to withstand Zone-V earthquake forces (8 on Richter scale), which is the seismic zone’s highest intensity in India. It has wind resistance capability of 260 kmph and a lifespan of 120 years, said the official sources.

The construction work of the 1.3-km bridge began in 2004. The work was halted almost for two years in from 2008-09 due to safety reasons. The base of the bridge was finished in November 2017, and the main arch was completed in April 2021. The steel and concrete arch bridge completed a milestone in August 2022 with the completion of the overarch deck.

Israeli govt in chaos as judicial reform plans draw mass protests

TEL AVIV: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s coalition plunged into chaos on Monday, after mass overnight protests over the sacking of his defence chief piled pressure on the government to halt its bitterly contested plans to overhaul the judiciary.

Amid reports his nationalist-religious coalition risked breaking apart, Israel faced one of the biggest waves of industrial action seen in years after the Histadrut union called for a general strike.

Netanyahu had been expected to make a televised statement on Monday morning announcing the plans, which he says are needed to restore balance to the system of government but that critics see as a threat to democracy, had been suspended.

The statement was postponed, however, as Netanyahu met heads of the coalition parties.

Justice Minister Yariv Levin, who has been leading the process, said that as a member of the ruling Likud party he would respect whatever decision Netanyahu reached.

A Likud official and another source closely involved in the legislation said Netanyahu would suspend the overhaul, which has ignited some of the biggest street demonstrations in Israel’s history and drawn a rare intervention by the head of state.

Netanyahu, himself on trial on corruption charges which he



Passengers wait for their flights during a strike at departures hall in Ben Gurion International airport near Tel Aviv. –AFP

denies, has promised to ensure civil rights are protected but has not backed down from the central thrust of the reforms.

However the stark warning by Herzog underlined the alarm caused by the proposals, which would tighten political control over judicial appointments and allow parliament to overrule the Supreme Court.

It followed a dramatic night of protests in cities across Israel following Netanyahu’s announcement that he had

decided to dismiss Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for opposing the plans.

A day earlier, Gallant had made a televised appeal for the government to halt its plans, warning that the deep split it had opened up in Israeli society was affecting the military and threatening national security.

With the army reinforcing units in the occupied West Bank after a year of unrelenting violence that has killed more than 250 Palestinian gunmen

and civilians and more than 40 Israelis, the removal of the defence minister fed accusations that the government was sacrificing the national interest for its own.

As opposition spread, the head of the Histadrut labour union called for a general strike if the proposals were not halted.

Take-offs from Ben Gurion airport were suspended, while Israel’s main seaports, banks and hospitals and medical services were set to strike. —Reuters

India’s parliament adjourned after protests over Rahul expulsion

NEW DELHI: India’s parliament was adjourned twice on Monday after lawmakers held protests and threw paper at the speaker following the expulsion from the house of top opposition figure Rahul Gandhi.

Gandhi lost his parliamentary seat on Friday after being convicted in a case that critics say shows how the rule of law is under threat in the world’s largest democracy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The speaker called off proceedings less than a minute after opposition MPs wearing black erupted in shouting, some of them throwing bits of paper at him.

“I want to run the House with dignity,” Speaker Om Birla said.



Indian lawmakers from various opposition parties wear black as they hold a protest after the Congress party as leader Rahul Gandhi was disqualified. – Reuters

Opposition MPs have been demanding a probe into potential links between the prime minister and the business empire of tycoon Gautam Adani, which has been hit by allegations of accounting fraud.

Debates have also descended into shouting matches over comments made by Rahul in Britain in early March that Indian democracy is “under attack”.

Opposition lawmakers from

different parties also staged protests in New Delhi on Monday, the latest in a series of recent demonstrations.

Piyush Goyal, trade minister and a member of Modi’s ruling BJP, on Monday accused the opposition of “cheap politics” and “trying to mislead people”.

Rahul Gandhi “has no right to consider himself above the law of the country”, Goyal told reporters.

The lower house of parliament ruled Rahul ineligible to sit as an MP, a day after he was sentenced to two years for defamation.

A BJP spokesman said Thursday the court acted with “due judicial process” in arriving at its ruling in the case, one of several Gandhi is facing. — AFP

KABUL

Six killed in Afghan suicide attack

A suicide attack on Monday near Afghanistan’s foreign ministry killed six civilians and wounded several others, the interior ministry said. Security has dramatically improved since the Taliban stormed back to power in August 2021, ousting the US-backed government and ending their two decade insurgency.

The attacker was identified by Afghan forces who shot at him in front of a business centre near the foreign ministry, interior ministry spokesman Abdul



Nafy Takor said. No group has claimed responsibility for the suicide attack. Monday’s blast was the second attack near the foreign ministry in Kabul in less than three months. — AFP

ASTANA

Ruling party takes majority of seats

Kazakhstan’s ruling party secured nearly two-thirds of seats in the Central Asian country’s parliament, according to final election results published on Monday.

The snap vote was called by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as he moved to turn the page after deadly riots last year.

A new system was introduced for this election, with 69 deputies — out of the 98 in the Majilis, the lower house of parliament — elected by proportional



representation.

The other 29 were elected by the first-past-the-post system with independent candidates on the ballot for the first time in nearly two decades. — AFP

RIYADH

Saudi and Iranian foreign ministers to meet

The Saudi and Iranian foreign ministers have agreed to meet during the holy month of Ramadhan, following a deal the two countries reached to resume diplomatic relations.

Saudi Arabia’s Faisal bin Farhan received a phone call from his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian, during which they agreed to meet during Ramadhan, which began last week.

It did not specify the date and location of the anticipated



meeting, which is the first step in the rapprochement plan reached earlier this month in China.

After the meeting, they should re-open embassies within two months. — dpa



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In brief

■ LONDON



PRINCE HARRY APPEARS IN UK COURT

Britain's Prince Harry made a surprise appearance at London's High Court on Monday as he and six other high profile figures began their lawsuit against the publisher of the Daily Mail paper over years of alleged phone-tapping and privacy breaches.

Harry, the younger son of King Charles, has brought a lawsuit against Associated Newspapers, as have singer Elton John, his husband and film-maker David Furnish, and actors Elizabeth Hurley and Sadie Frost.

The prince, who flew in from his Californian home, sat just feet away from a large group of reporters.

■ PARIS



MACRON HOLDS CRISIS MEETING ON PROTESTS

President Emmanuel Macron summoned government ministers for a crisis meeting on Monday, as tensions ran high a day before another major day of strikes and protests against his pension reforms.

Nearly two weeks after Macron rammed the new law through parliament using a special provision sidestepping any vote, unions have vowed no let-up in mass protests to get the government to back down.

They have called for another big day of action on Tuesday, the 10th such mobilisation since protests started in mid-January against the controversial law, which includes raising the retirement age to 64 from 62.

■ LONDON



HUMZA YOUSAF WINS SCOTTISH LEADERSHIP RACE

Scottish nationalists picked Humza Yousaf to be the country's next leader on Monday after a bitterly fought contest that exposed deep divisions in his party over policy and a stalled independence campaign.

The 37-year-old practicing Muslim will succeed Nicola Sturgeon as leader of the governing Scottish National Party (SNP) and, subject to a vote in the Scottish parliament, take over as head of the semi-autonomous government.

Yousaf's victory was confirmed at Edinburgh's Murrayfield rugby ground on Monday afternoon after a six-week campaign.

Ukraine plans response as battle shifts to 'post-apocalyptic' Avdiivka

KYIV: Ukraine's ground forces commander said on Monday Kyiv was planning its next move after Moscow shifted the focus of its offensive from a flagging assault on the eastern city of Bakhmut to another town further south, described as post-apocalyptic.

The Ukrainian military aims to wear down Russian forces as much as possible before launching a counteroffensive in the coming weeks or months — seeking to end the all-out war launched by Russian President Vladimir Putin 13 months ago.

Ukrainian ground forces commander Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi, who said last week that the counterattack could come "very soon", visited front line troops in the east on Monday and said his forces were still repelling Russian attacks on Bakhmut.

Defending the small city in the industrialised Donbas region that Russia has tried to seize for months was a "military necessity", he said, praising Ukrainian resilience in "extremely difficult conditions".

"We are calculating all possible options for the development of events, and will react adequately to the current situation".

Commander-in-Chief General Valery Zaluzhnyi said on Saturday the situation was being "stabilised" around Bakhmut, where Russian forces say they are fighting street by street.

Last week, the Ukrainian military warned that Avdiivka, a smaller town 90 km further south, could become a "second Bakhmut" as Russia turns its attention there. Both towns have been reduced to rubble in fighting that both sides have called a "meat grinder".



People react in the aftermath of deadly shelling of an army office building, amid Russia's attack, in Sloviansk, Ukraine, on Monday. — Reuters

"I am sad to say this, but Avdiivka is becoming more and more like a place from post-apocalyptic movies," said Vitaliy Barabash, head of the city's military administration. Only around 2,000 of a pre-war population of 30,000 remain and he urged them to leave.

A Ukrainian military video showed smoke billowing from ruined apartment blocks and dead soldiers on open ground and in trenches in Bakhmut. Two people were killed and 29 wounded on Monday after Russian forces fired two S-300 missiles at the eastern city of Sloviansk northwest of Bakhmut, according to regional

governor Pavlo Kyrylenko. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted a video of smouldering debris and vowed that "Ukraine will not forgive" such attacks. Moscow denies targeting civilians.

Inside Russia, the defence ministry said it had downed a Ukrainian drone on Sunday, adding three people were injured and apartment blocks were damaged in the attack south of Moscow.

Kyiv does not generally comment on reports of attacks inside Russia. The latest reported attack, on the town of Kireyevsk, in Tula region 220 km south of Moscow, appeared to be one of the

closest yet to the Russian capital.

NUCLEAR PLAN

As the war Putin launched to "demilitarise" Ukraine has flagged, he and other top Russian officials have played up the prospect the war could escalate to involve nuclear weapons: on Saturday he said he had struck a deal to station tactical nuclear weapons in neighbouring Belarus.

The Belarus plan, while not unexpected, is one of Russia's most pronounced nuclear signals yet and a warning to Nato over its military support for Ukraine, which has called for a meeting of the UN Security Council in response.

"Russia's nuclear rhetoric is dangerous and irresponsible," Nato spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said on Sunday.

"Nato is vigilant and we are closely monitoring the situation. We have not seen any changes in Russia's nuclear posture that would lead us to adjust our own."

Putin likened his Belarus plan to the United States stationing its weapons in Europe, insisting that Russia would not violate its nuclear non-proliferation promises. However, Lungescu said Putin's non-proliferation pledge and his description of US weapons deployment overseas were way off the mark.

"Russia's reference to Nato's nuclear sharing is totally misleading. Nato allies act with full respect of their international commitments," she added in a statement.

"Russia has consistently broken its arms control commitments."

Ukraine's security chief, Oleksiy Danilov, said Russia's plan would destabilise Belarus, which he said had been taken "hostage" by Moscow. Others condemning Putin's plan included Lithuania, which said it would call for new sanctions against Moscow and Minsk, while EU policy chief Josep Borrell urged Belarus not to host the weapons and threatened more sanctions.

Belarus and Russia have close military ties, and Minsk allowed Moscow to use its territory as a staging point for the latter's war on Ukraine last year.

Experts see Russia's move as significant since it had been proud, until now, of not having deployed nuclear weapons outside its borders, unlike the United States. — Reuters

Lebanon's cabinet reverses decision to delay daylight savings time

BEIRUT: Lebanon's caretaker premier said the cabinet had voted to move clocks one hour ahead on Wednesday night, reversing his decision to postpone the move to daylight savings time by a month that had sparked uproar across the country.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati said on Monday the decision had been taken after a "calm discussion" and that the state needed 48 hours to re-adjust their operations.

Mikati angered many Lebanese when he decided last Thursday not to start daylight savings time over the last weekend of March but instead to roll clocks forward an hour on April 20.

That decision came after a meeting with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri in which Berri asked him to postpone the time switch, according to footage of the meeting seen by Reuters.

It was seen as an attempt to score points among the faithful who are fasting until sunset during the holy month of Ramadhan. Moving clocks forward means Muslims would have to fast an additional hour as sunset would be at a later time on the clock. But the move was defied by Lebanon's top Christian authority as well as



Clock towers are pictured near the government palace in Beirut, Lebanon, on Monday. — Reuters

some schools, media outlets and businesses, which rolled their clocks forward on Saturday night.

Mikati even faced objections from within cabinet, including the justice minister who said Lebanon had more important challenges to focus on. The country has been without a president for five months and

a protracted financial crisis has brought most public institutions to a standstill.

Mikati referred to the crises in his comments on Monday.

"Let us be clear. The problem is not winter or summer time... Rather, the problem is the vacuum in the top post in the republic," he said. — Reuters

Nationwide strikes severely hit travel in Germany

BERLIN: Airports and bus and train stations across Germany were at a standstill on Monday, causing disruption for millions at the start of the working week during one of the largest walkouts in decades as Europe's biggest economy reels from inflation.

The 24-hour strikes called by the Verdi trade union and railway and transport union EVG were the latest in months of industrial action which has hit major European economies as higher food and energy prices dent living standards.

Terminals were largely deserted as airports, including two of Germany's largest in Munich and Frankfurt, suspended flights, while rail services were cancelled by railway operator Deutsche Bahn. Striking workers wearing yellow or red high-visibility jackets blew horns, sirens and whistles, held up banners and waved flags during protests.

The Airports Association ADV estimated that 380,000 air passengers were affected. In Frankfurt alone, almost 1,200 flights for 160,000 passengers were cancelled and stranded travellers slept on benches. In Cologne, the lack of city trains prompted a dash for taxis.

Employees are pressing for



Employees in the public transport sector organised in the verdi union stage a strike in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, on Monday. — AFP

higher wages to blunt the effects of inflation, which reached 9.3 per cent in February. Germany, which was heavily dependent on Russia for gas before the war in Ukraine, has been hard hit by higher prices as it scrambled for new energy sources, with inflation rates exceeding average in recent months.

Persistent cost pressures have pushed central banks to a series of interest rate increases, though policymakers have said it is too early to talk of a price-wage spiral. Verdi is negotiating on behalf of around 2.5 million employees in the public sector, including in public transport and at airports, while EVG negotiates for around 230,000 employees at Deutsche Bahn and bus companies.

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Making the time for earth

Sixty seconds, sixty minutes or beyond an hour Earth needs our time and the world observed one hour of darkness from 8.30 to 9.30 pm marking Earth Hour on March 25. Global leaders, role models, influential celebrities and not to forget youth groups and businesses from over 190 countries and territories participated and what could be the result? According to World Wild, 410,000 hours of planet-positive activities were pledged as part of Earth Hour’s ‘Hour Bank’. WWF has warned that, “Alarming and unprecedented rates of nature loss are putting species at risk of extinction, with an increasing number of communities across the world set to lose their homes and access to basic necessities like food, clean water and a livable environment.”

Is it not amazing how the world come together for such a cause with numerous ideas and projects. Recognising the importance of protecting ecosystems, and climate ecological systems from pollution and environmental degradation, and reducing the negative impact of global warming and climate change, Environment Authority of Oman marked the day by sending out the pledge for the public to enrol via social media which stated, ‘I commit to be part of the change, and to participate in turning off unnecessary lights and electronic devices during Earth Hour from 8.39 to 9.30 pm.’

In their tweet, Environment Society of Oman, ESO, reminded that this week, ‘the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had published its sixth report, which draws on the studies of more than 200 scientists over eight years and provides the most comprehensive scientific assessment of climate change. The report clearly warned that the current pace and scope of our actions are not sufficient - and scale of our actions are insufficient to tackle climate change. But the IPCC also offers hope.’

The report has identified the readily available and highly cost-effective



Lakshmi Kothaneth
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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

TREES ARE LUNGS OF OUR PLANET, AND WE NEED THEM TO HELP REVERSE THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

actions that can be undertaken now to reduce emissions, scale up carbon removal and build resilience. ESO tweeted, ‘While the window to address the climate crisis is rapidly closing, the IPCC affirms that we can still secure a safe, livable future. But we must act now.’

Earth Hour day had set off in the year 2007 when it was first observed in Sydney, Australia. It was first put forward by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The objective of the event was to create awareness about environmental degradation and encourage people to take action to protect the planet. Since then the event has grown and today has 192 nations partaking in the initiative. Australia urged people to plant and protect trees. There are 24 global deforestation fronts. The Deforestation Fronts report offers an in-depth analysis of 24 ‘deforestation fronts’ around the globe. Did you know that nine of these clusters of deforestation hotspots are located in Latin America, eight are in sub-Saharan Africa and seven are in Southeast Asia and Oceania. Earth Hour organisation stated, “Trees are lungs of our planet, and we need them to help reverse the impacts of climate change. Now is the time to press pause and work together to protect nature and restore what we have lost.’

Of course we cannot forget desertification which has its own ways to expand. The biggest cause of deforestation is agriculture, according to the experts. Behind almost every imbalance it happens to be man. Our ever increasing demand for food and water has a cost and nature has been paying for it.

We have seen the consequences of climate change and physical features of land. Even the soil is seeking protection as the latest conference in Oman highlighted the pressure soil is undergoing not to forget the fact that our nutrients come from what is provided by the soil. In other words our health depends on the quality of the soil.

A LIGHT IN THE SKY!



Lightning flashes over Kuwait City during a thunderstorm on Sunday night. – AFP

DeSantis is getting ready for the presidential race

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, widely regarded as the top contender to challenger former President Donald Trump’s bid for the presidency in 2024, hasn’t formally declared his interest in running for president, but his recent State of the State speech to legislators in Florida capital of Tallahassee, suggests that he will be playing the right-wing tune for his election campaign.

DeSantis has in the past cited his plans for Florida as an example for the rest of the country. Florida’s Blueprint for America’s Revival is the subtitle of his most recent book, The Courage to Be Free, which elaborately expresses his point of view on this matter.

For sure, along with the Florida success model, the right wing vision will be the main tenet of his campaign. He is trying to appear more and more conservative in his approach.

Under DeSantis, state lawmakers want to extend a contentious ban on discussions on gender identity in the classroom to eighth-graders, who are typically 12 or 13 years old. The ban is currently in place through third grade. DeSantis also approved a law that forbids teachers from introducing specific concepts related to race education in public schools.



Imran khalid

The writer is a freelance columnist on international affairs

DESANTIS HAS IN THE PAST CITED HIS PLANS FOR FLORIDA AS AN EXAMPLE FOR THE REST OF THE COUNTRY

Along with extending gun rights, limiting diversity initiatives at state-run universities, ending the “medical authoritarianism” of Covid-19 vaccine mandates, the state legislature is led by him in its efforts to pass these measures.

DeSantis is highly unlikely to formally launch a presidential campaign before the culmination of the Florida legislature’s session in May. Donald Trump and Nikki Haley have officially declared their candidacy for the Republican nomination and both of them have already embarked upon high octane campaigns.

DeSantis nonetheless appears to be laying the groundwork for a presidential bid.

Last week, he took part in a prominent donor retreat in Florida before travelling to California to deliver a speech criticising what he believed to be liberal excesses.

Particularly, Trump appeared to be very pumped up during his last month’s speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Maryland (CPAC). Trump, as expected, is going full-throttle to slander and bully his opponents – particularly Nikki Haley and DeSantis.

Trump seems to be reverting back to his old tactics of excessively bullying his opponents, which he profligately employed 2016 and 2020, to grab the attention of voters through populist sensationalism. In his desperate attempt to win the presidency in 2024, he has taken a belligerent stance towards all of his rivals, both inside and outside the Republican Party.

Whether it is the deep state, Democrats, or the Republican Party establishment, he is getting ready to engage in a direct



DeSantis is highly unlikely to formally launch a presidential campaign before the culmination of the Florida legislature’s session in May.

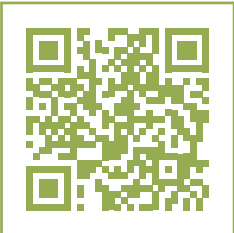
confrontation with each of them. The Twitter is now stormed by the tweets from the allegedly fake accounts in favour of Trump. Along with praising the former leader, the fake accounts are mocking Trump detractors from both parties and attacked Nikki Haley, a former governor of South Carolina and US ambassador to UN for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, an ambassador who is taking on her former boss.

When it came to Ron DeSantis, the bots aggressively asserted that

the Florida governor couldn’t defeat Trump but would make a fantastic running mate. Whoever created the bot network is trying to tip the scales as Republican voters evaluate their candidates for 2024. They are doing this by utilising online manipulation strategies and taking advantage of Twitter’s algorithms to increase their reach.

Trump is also targeting President Biden for his generous financial and military support to Ukraine. Trump says he’d end the war in Ukraine in one day and avert World War III, while DeSantis is keener on waging a culture war than a proxy one to save a foreign democracy.

However, DeSantis also favours the Republican Party’s isolationist tendencies in the global arena. But beyond this, DeSantis is almost clueless about American foreign policy. In his recent book “The Courage to be Free,” DeSantis completely ignores the Ukraine war. But he does criticise the mantra laid out by president George W Bush in his second inaugural address — that “the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on liberty in other lands.



IRAN THRASH JAPAN TO CLINCH TITLE

Oman secure third place in Asian Cup

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 27

The Oman national team secured third place in the AFC Asian Cup beach soccer 2023 by defeating the United Arab Emirates (UAE) 4-2 at Jomtien Arena in Pattaya on Sunday.

This marks the second consecutive time that Oman have won third place in the tournament.

Also on Sunday, Iran thrashed Japan 6-0 in the final to emerge

the Asian champions.

The win saw Iran draw level with Japan on three titles each, with both teams now casting their eyes on preparing for the Fifa Beach Soccer World UAE 2023 in November. In the play-off for third place, the UAE team opened the scoring with Rashid Yaqoub in the first minute itself.

The two teams exchanged attacks throughout the minutes of the first half, but without scoring again.

In the same scenario, the

second half started with an Omani goal from a shot that came from the kick-off also, which was successfully executed by Khaled al Araiimi in the 13th minute. Yahya al Muraiki added the second goal for Oman from a penalty kick that he hit to the left of the goalkeeper in the 21st minute.

Rashid Yaqoub returned and scored the equalising goal for the UAE with a direct kick in the 24th minute.

In the third half, the Red Warriors were the best and

advanced again through Sami al Balushi with a close-range shot that hit the net in the 25th minute, and in a similar way, Sami hit the fourth goal in the 26th minute. Oman defended their 4-2 lead till the end to take home the third place.

OMAN WIN FAIR PLAY AWARD

Oman also won the fair play award for their neat game throughout the tournament.

During the press conference

after the match, Oman national team coach Hilal bin Talib expressed his happiness with the team's performance, stating that they had worked hard and diligently to achieve their first goal of qualifying for the World Cup.

"We tried to achieve the second goal, which is to win the championship title, but things got difficult against Iran."

Hilal emphasised that achieving third place was a significant accomplishment for the team.

"I told the players that achieving

third place is good, so they showed their abilities and energy and managed to achieve that."

"We have a great group, and they are a mixture of experience and youth, and I think the players have great future."

Talib, expressed confidence in the team's future and noted that the coming period would be important. Oman will take part in the Arab Cup and the World Beach Games in Indonesia's Bali, which would serve as preparation for the World Cup.

Naples paints town blue for first Scudetto since Maradona era

SOUTHERN TEAM HAS CRUSHING LEAD OVER SERIE A RIVALS

NAPLES, Italy: The face of a young Diego Armando Maradona gazes down from a mural in Naples' Miracles Square, watching the city gear up for a celebration it hasn't enjoyed since the Argentine soccer star was at his peak more than 30 years ago.

Miracles for Neapolitans, who grew up in a city steeped in mysticism and superstition, are happening on the pitch, as their team cruise towards a third Serie A triumph and prepares for their first ever quarter-final in the Champions League.

"This comes from the soul of Maradona. It is him, watching us from above," said Raffaele Cardamone, a 51-year-old truck driver, indicating the newly completed mural portraying the stocky soccer genius, who died in 2020.

"It is the hand of God," he added, referring to the famous goal Maradona that scored with his hand in the 1986 World Cup quarterfinal, which helped Argentina knock out England.

Maradona was also the driving force behind the Napoli team at that time, helping the city win its first league title in 1987 and its second just three years later in 1990.

CELEBRATORY FLAGS, MURALS, FIGURINES ALREADY ON DISPLAY



With 11 games left to play, the southern Italian side have a 19-point lead over second-placed Lazio and their title dream could become reality as early as the second half of April, more than a month ahead of their final league fixture. Neapolitans are already celebrating

the third Scudetto — literally 'shield' — as the Italian league title is known, seeing it as revenge on the wealthy northern cities of Turin and Milan, whose teams Juventus, Inter and AC Milan have dominated Serie A for the past three decades.

NAPOLI ALSO CHASING CHAMPIONS LEAGUE GLORY

EUPHORIA SPREADS

Locals have dropped their traditional 'scaramanzia', an array of rituals rooted in popular culture to keep away bad luck, which normally include not claiming victory before having secured it. The city's craftsmen have created figurines of the city's new heroes. Cardboard silhouettes of the players line the city's Spanish Quarters, as vespas weave through the narrow lanes and blue flags flutter in front of the shops. Posters show Maradona in heaven, handing over the Scudetto to Nigerian striker Victor Osimhen and Georgian winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia — the two main stars of the current team.

Residents have launched fundraising initiatives to finance a Scudetto party that they say will last for days and aim to paint the city's walls and streets in the club's blue hue. "The euphoria is impossible to contain," said Antonio Sarracino, 55, who keeps a collection tin for donations inside his shop. Neapolitans hope sporting glory can be a boost to a city where poverty remains widespread, but where life is improving on the back of growth in tourism, with research institute Demoskopika estimating a 13 per cent increase in arrivals this year compared to 2022. — Reuters



Mumbai Indians' players celebrate as they lift the Women's Premier League (WPL) trophy in Mumbai. – Reuters

WPL hailed as 'game-changing' for women's cricket

NEW DELHI: Indian cricket administrators and pundits on Monday hailed the Women's Premier League as a huge success after the inaugural tournament ended in fireworks with the Mumbai Indians winning the trophy in front of a huge crowd.

Franchise and media rights for the women's version of the Indian Premier League sold for around \$700 million, making it the second-most lucrative domestic women's sports competition after US professional basketball.

Mumbai beat the Delhi Capitals by seven wickets in a thrilling final on Sunday to conclude the three-week Twenty20 extravaganza of the newest addition to women's cricket.

England's Nat Sciver-Brunt hit the winning runs to trigger wild celebrations at Mumbai's Brabourne Stadium, which was nearly full to its capacity of 20,000. "It was like a festival for women's cricket which the entire world was celebrating. The atmosphere at the stadium was at par if not better than any big tournament final," IPL chairman Arun Dhumal said.

"The way the tournament was conducted, the response to the matches, it went off

as one of the best women's cricket tournaments, even if you compare with the recently held World Cup. "As far as TV ratings are concerned, as far as competitive cricket is concerned, it was a great tournament."

West Indies all-rounder Hayley Matthews was named player of the series for her 16 wickets and 271 runs.

Australia's Meg Lanning, who led Delhi from the front with 345 runs including 35 in the final after being cruelly run out, scored the most runs in the competition.

Dhumal called the competition "game-changing" for the women's game in the cricket-obsessed country of 1.4 billion. "It will pave the way for many young girls (in India) to make a career in the sport," he said.

Former England men's captain Michael Vaughan predicted a bright future for the WPL, tweeting: "The #WPL has been fantastic... Only going to get bigger & bigger."

Mumbai and India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur said the WPL will make home players improve.

"The pressure that comes with playing at this level and how to stay calm is what the Indian payers should learn from their overseas team-mates." — AFP

'Wonderful' Afghanistan thump Pakistan to claim T20I series



SHARJAH, United Arab Emirates: Afghanistan overcame late nerves in the closing overs to beat Pakistan by seven wickets in the second Twenty20 international on Sunday and take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-game series.

Needing 30 off the last three overs, and 22 from the last two, Najibullah Zadran and Mohammad Nabi hit a six each off pace bowler Naseem Shah in the penultimate over to reduce the target to five runs.

Zadran then hit the winning boundary off Zaman Khan's last over to chase down the 131-run target with one ball to spare.

"It's a great honour and pleasure to lead this wonderful team," said Afghanistan skipper Rashid Khan.

"It was a great effort with the ball, and then we took it deep and finished it"

He added: "I think 130 was a good total. We tried our best

to take it deep and finish it. Our strategy was to go out there and make sure you take responsibility. We have players to finish it like Nabi and Najib"

Pakistan's 130-6 in 20 overs was built around a sedate 57-ball 64 not out by all-rounder Imad Wasim — his maiden T20I half century.

This was Afghanistan's first bilateral T20I series against any of the top six teams — India, England, Pakistan, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

They have previously won a T20I series each against the West Indies and Bangladesh and five in five against Zimbabwe.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz (44 off 49 balls) and Ibrahim Zadran (38 off 40 balls) set the platform during their 56-run second wicket stand.

However, their slow batting left Afghanistan needing to score 46 off the last 30 balls.

Najibullah (23) and Nabi (14) remained unbeaten to seal the victory. "Our motive for this series was to check out talented young players and we have to back them in the future," said Pakistan captain Shadab Khan.

IMAD LEADS RECOVERY

Earlier, Pakistan's recovery was led by Imad who hit two sixes and three boundaries to rescue Pakistan from 63-5 after winning the toss and batting.

Imad and Shadab (32) added 67 for the sixth wicket.

Pakistan had got off to a disastrous start with left-arm pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi claiming Saim Ayub and Abdullah Shafique, both for nought, in the first over of the innings.

Farooqi finished with 2-19 in his four overs.

Shafique has now been dismissed for nought on four

successive occasions in five T20Is since making his debut in November 2020. Mohammad Haris hit a six and two boundaries in his nine-ball 15 while Tayyab Tahir scored a 23-ball 13.

The stockily built Azam Khan, who rose to fame with his power hitting in the recent Pakistan Super League, fell to spinner Rashid Khan, scoring just one after his nought in the first game.

Shadab, who is deputising for rested skipper Babar Azam, hit three boundaries in his 25-ball knock. Imad's previous best of 47 had come against Sri Lanka in Lahore in 2019. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan 130-6 in 20 overs (Imad Wasim 64 not out, Shadab Khan 32; Fazalhaq Farooqi 2-19) v Afghanistan 133-3 in 19.5 overs (Rahmanullah Gurbaz 44, Ibrahim Zadran 38)

A look at Group A teams of IPL



On paper, there is not much that you can differ from on of these sides in IPL. Each side looks like one better than the other. But two things that will come into major consideration is their current form and environment. Even though we will screen the teams in their pre-match analysis on match day, its always good to know what the actual teams are?

MUMBAI INDIANS (MI) - The most successful team of the tournament with 5 IPL titles and 2 champions league titles. Founded in 2008, the team is owned by India's biggest conglomerate, Reliance Industries, through its 100% subsidiary Indiawin Sports. Since its establishment, the team has played its home matches in the 33,000 plus capacity Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. After the promotion of Mahela Jayawardene as the Global Head of Performance, this year the team is coached by Mark Boucher, while Kieron Pollard (batting coach), Shane Bond (bowling coach), James Pamment (fielding coach) will be his prime deputies.

Although injury concerns have struck Mumbai Indians even before the start of IPL 2023. It started with Jasprit Bumrah pulling out due to a back issue and it was followed by Jhye Richardson due to his hamstring. Wayne Parnell is being considered as

a replacement to Jhye, but official announcements are still awaited. Mumbai Indians finished last on the table in IPL 2022, with just 4 wins from 14 games and this is their year they will be looking to make a comeback.

RAJASTHAN ROYALS (RR) - Founded in 2008 as one of the initial eight IPL franchises, the team is based at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur. The Royals are known to unearth obscure, high potential talent, as well as for their involvement in a number of controversies and scandals. The team won the inaugural edition of the IPL under the captaincy of Shane Warne, despite being written off as a title contender by the media and fans. The Royals were also the runners-up of the 2013 Champions League Twenty20 under Rahul Dravid's captaincy. This team is co-owned by Manoj Badale, Lachlan Murdoch, Gerry Cardinale and legendary leg spinner late Shane Warne.

The team is coached by Kumar Sangakkara, while Trevor Penny (assistant coach), Lasith Malinga (fast bowling coach), Siddhartha Lahiri (support coach) and Dishant Yagnik (fielding coach) will be his prime deputies.

The pace attack of Rajasthan Royals is likely to be dented by the absence of Indian ace pacer Prasidh Krishna due to a back injury. Sanju Samson led royals had a brilliant last season, until they were struck by the brilliance of Gujarat Titans in the finale and this year, they would love to have a ticket to the finale with the luck being on their side.



KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS (KKR) - Founded in 2008 as one of the initial eight IPL franchises, the team is based at the 68,000 capacity Eden Gardens in Kolkata. The franchise is owned by Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan, actress Juhi Chawla and her spouse Jay Mehta. They became the IPL champions in 2012 and 2014. The Knight Riders hold the record for the

longest winning streak by any Indian team in T20s (14). The untimely injury of Shreyash Iyer, which has raised major concerns over lack of other leadership options in the team.

KKR had a disappointing IPL 2022 and are expecting to make a comeback in full flow under the guidance of the new coach Chandrakant Pandit. James Foster

(batting coach), Bharat Arun (bowling coach), Abhishek Nayar (assistant coach), David Hussey (mentor), Omkar Salvi (assistant bowling coach), Ryan ten Doeschate (fielding coach) and Chris Donaldson (strength and conditioning coach) will form his prime deputies.

DELHI CAPITALS (DC) - The franchise is jointly owned by the GMR Group and the JSW Group. The team's home ground is Arun Jaitley Stadium, located in New Delhi. The team is coached by Ricky Ponting. The Capitals appeared in their first IPL final in 2020. The capitals which had an average outing in 2022 and is considered to be as one of the weakest teams in the IPL history, is expecting a miraculous dream run in this 2023 season with majority of its players in peak form, despite missing the likes of their all-star player and captain - Rishabh Pant.

Mitchell Marsh, Prithvi Shaw, Sarfaraz Khan, Axar Patel, Rilee Rousouw and their new captain David Warner have all been shining bright. Delhi Capitals has a rich support staff to support the head coach Ricky Ponting and this includes, Pravin Amre (assistant coach), Ajit Agarkar (assistant coach), Shane Watson (assistant coach), James Hopes (fast bowling coach) and Biju George (fielding coach).

LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS (LSG) - The Lucknow franchise which was formed in 2021. Sanjeev Goenka is its principal owner. The team is captained by KL Rahul and coached

by Andy Flower. The team mentor is Gautam Gambhir. Lucknow Super Giants qualified for the play-offs in its debut season. The team is owned by RPSG Group, who previously owned the Rising Pune Supergiant franchise between 2016 and 2017. This team is expected to play its home matches at the BRSABV Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow. Coach Andy Flower is backed by Gautam Gambhir (mentor), Vijay Dahiya (assistant coach), Morne Morkel (bowling coach) and Jonty Rhodes (fielding coach) as their support staff. Overall, LSG is a very balanced team, which is expected to give competitive matches. You wouldn't see blow away match winners. But majorly, they would have the major concern of the lack of desired form of their captain KL Rahul at the moment, but we all know that could change very quickly.

If I have to chose two teams amongst these five based on their on-paper capabilities to make it to the play-offs, then I have to be tilting towards DC and RR. I would be very tempted to say MI, but I am not sure of how they would recover from the fact that they have lost their premium bowling attack. What do you think?

(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.)
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England see off Ukraine in Euro qualifying, Ronaldo nets double

PARIS: Harry Kane scored again as England made it two wins from two in Euro 2024 qualifying by beating Ukraine 2-0 at Wembley on Sunday, while Cristiano Ronaldo extended his international goals record to 122 with a double as Portugal thrashed Luxembourg.

Captain Kane, who broke Wayne Rooney's all-time England goalscoring record in midweek, turned home his 55th international goal from Bukayo Saka's cross in the 37th minute.

In-form Arsenal winger Saka all but ended Ukraine's resistance three minutes later, turning from Jordan Henderson's pass and curling a sublime strike from outside the area into the top corner.

The victory takes England three points clear at the top of the early Group C table after winning in Italy for the first time since 1961 on Thursday.

"Two wins out of two is all we asked for at the start of the camp," midfielder Jude Bellingham told Channel 4. "We've followed up a really good result in Italy with another one tonight and when you do that, it feels rewarding."

Gareth Southgate's men produced an accomplished performance in their first home game since an agonising World Cup quarter-final defeat by France last December.

Kane missed one great early chance before he gave England the lead. Ukraine failed to muster a shot on target and Conor Gallagher, Harry Maguire and Jack Grealish all went close to netting a third for the hosts late on.

England, still waiting for a first major tournament title since 1966, return to qualifying action against

RESULTS IN EURO 2024 QUALIFYING ON SUNDAY:	
GROUP C	
England 2 (Kane 37, Saka 40)	Ukraine 0
Malta 0	Italy 2 (Retegui 15, Pessina 27)
GROUP H	
Kazakhstan 3 (Zaynutdinov 73-pen, Tagybergen 86, Aymbetov 89)	Denmark 2 (Hojlund 21, 35)
Slovenia 2 (Sesko 56, Di Maio 60-og)	San Marino 0
Northern Ireland 0	Finland 1 (Kallman 28)
GROUP J	
Liechtenstein 0	Iceland 7 (Olafsson 3, Haraldsson 38, A. Gunnarsson 48, 68, 73-pen, A. Gudjohnsen 85, Ellertsson 87)
Luxembourg 0	Portugal 6 (Ronaldo 9, 31, Felix 15, B. Silva 18, Otavio 77, Leao 88)
Slovakia 2 (Mak 13, Haraslin 40)	Bosnia and Herzegovina 0

Malta and North Macedonia in June. The top two teams in each group will automatically book a place in next year's European Championship in Germany.

Reigning champions Italy bounced back from their loss to England with a straightforward 2-0 away win over Malta.

Argentine-born forward Mateo Retegui followed up his debut goal against England by opening the scoring early on. Monza midfielder Matteo Pessina made it two before the half-hour mark and Italy comfortably saw out the victory.

RONALDO ON SONG

Ronaldo marked his record-breaking 197th international appearance in midweek with two

goals against Liechtenstein and he repeated the trick as Portugal thumped Luxembourg 6-0.

The 38-year-old diverted in Nuno Mendes' headed pass to give Roberto Martinez's men a ninth-minute lead.

Goals from Joao Felix and Bernardo Silva put the game to bed inside 18 minutes, before Ronaldo slotted home his second from Bruno Fernandes' through ball in the 31st minute. Ronaldo has now scored 11 goals against Luxembourg in his career. Late strikes from substitutes Otavio and Rafael Leao, who also missed a penalty, rounded off a fine performance from Portugal who are already clear at the top of Group J.

Elsewhere in the group, Iceland bounced back from their opening defeat by Bosnia and Herzegovina by thrashing Liechtenstein 7-0.

Slovakia moved into second place behind Portugal with a 2-0 win over the Bosnians.

DENMARK SHOCKED

Denmark blew a two-goal lead to crash to a surprise 3-2 defeat in Kazakhstan.

The Euro 2020 semifinalists appeared to be cruising to victory in the Group H match as Atalanta youngster Rasmus Hojlund netted twice in the first half after scoring a hat-trick against Finland on Thursday.

Kazakhstan had started their bid to qualify for a first ever major tournament with a home defeat by Slovenia.

But Bakhtiyor Zaynutdinov's 73rd-minute penalty gave the hosts hope of a famous turnaround in Astana. — AFP

Alcaraz powers into last 16, Ruud ousted at Miami

MIAMI GARDENS: World number one Carlos Alcaraz moved into the last 16 of the Miami Open after beating Serbia's Dusan Lajovic 6-0, 7-6 (7/5) on Sunday as he remains on track for tennis' "Sunshine Double."

The 19-year-old Spaniard, who beat Daniil Medvedev to win the title in Indian Wells last week, looked in top condition as he outclassed Lajovic in the first set to keep his Miami title defence on track. But the Serb was able to provide some tension towards the end of the second set, breaking to make it 5-5 with Alcaraz paying the price for a sloppy return.

Alcaraz was 6-2 up in the tie-break, but Lajovic won the next three points before the Spaniard's big back-hand winner settled the 91-minute contest.

"Everything was under control or I thought it was but, you know, in the match it's never easy," Alcaraz said.

"The nerves came out. I made a few mistakes that I hadn't done during the whole match. So it was tough to win the match. But I'm really happy with the level that I'm playing and it was a good match," he added.

Alcaraz will face Tommy Paul in the last 16 and the American

goes into that game on the back of a 12-match winning streak against Spanish players including wins over Alcaraz and Rafael Nadal last year.

"I lost the first and only match that I played against Tommy. I know that he's a really talented and really tough player, so I have to play at my best and let's see what's going to happen," said Alcaraz.

In the front row of the crowd was Miami Heat NBA star Jimmy Butler who embraced Alcaraz after the match.

Alcaraz said that dealing with his magnified profile is something he has yet to get fully used to.

"I feel great seeing celebrities watching my matches. It's unbelievable. I feel a little bit nervous when I see a person like Jimmy and the celebrities when I was playing in the US Open," he said. "In a certain way, I can't believe that these people enjoy watching my matches. For me, it's crazy," he said.

FRITZ THROUGH

American Taylor Fritz rolled into the fourth round for the third consecutive year after clinching a 6-4, 6-4 win against Canada's Denis Shapovalov.

In a hard-hitting encounter,

with both players blasting from the baseline, Fritz did not face a break point during the 81-minute encounter.

Fritz has already won one tournament in Florida this year, taking the title last month at Delray Beach and in the fourth round, the American will be up against 19-year-old Holger Rune in who beat Argentine Daniel Schwartzman 6-4, 6-2.

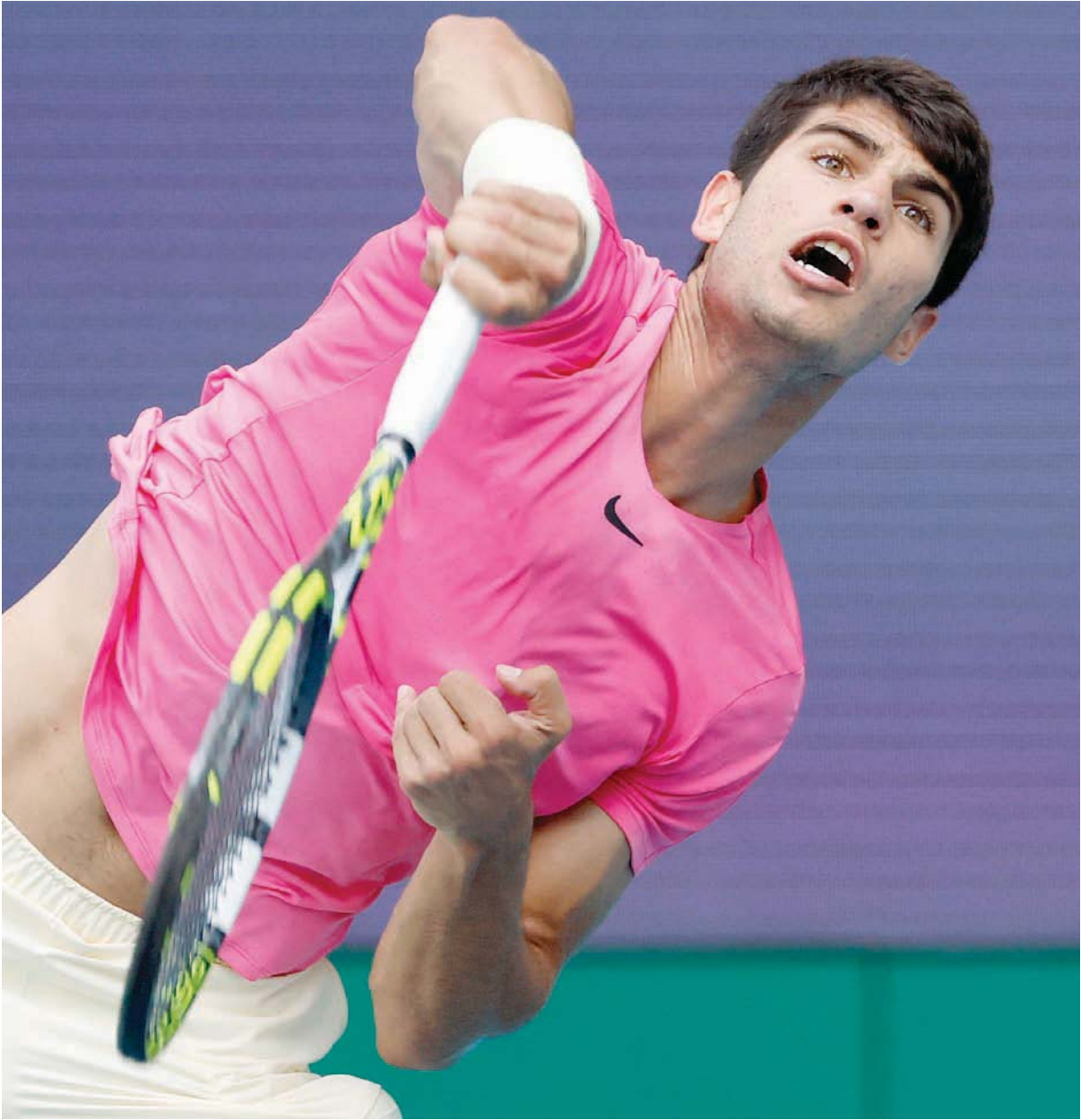
As always at Miami, there is a large contingent of Argentine tennis fans and they were vocal in their support for Schwartzman.

But Dane Rune converted all four break points he earned in the hot afternoon sun.

"My focus was really to step in every time I could and play my game. I think there were a few rallies where I didn't, but 95 per cent of the match was played on my terms, which was what I wanted," he said.

Dutchman Botic van de Zandschulp triumphed for the third time in four meetings with Norway's world number four Casper Ruud, emerging with a 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 victory.

Italian Jannik Sinner continued his strong start to the year, defeating Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov 6-3, 6-4. — AFP





Omani crude output averages 1.06 mbpd in February

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's production of crude oil and condensate oil during the month of February reached 29.7 million barrels, which translates to a daily output of 1.06 million barrels, thus maintaining the production rate witnessed in January — a trend that affirms Oman's commitment to Opec+ output curbs designed to balance global supply and demand

The total quantities of crude oil exported in February amounted to 23.67 million barrels, or a daily average of 845 thousand barrels, an increase of 0.6 per cent compared to January 2023.

Dr Saleh bin Ali al Anbouri (pictured), Director General of the Directorate General of Exploration and Production at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, stated the average price of Oman's benchmark crude on the DME rose by 1.6 per cent in February 2023, compared to January 2023.

The average price of Omani crude (for April delivery) amounted to \$82.23 per barrel, an



increase of \$1.31, compared to the price (for March delivery), with the trading price ranging between \$78.31 per barrel and \$85.19 per barrel.

The increase is due to several reasons, the most important of which is: the continued recovery of demand for crude oil in China after lifting the restrictions imposed as

a result of the Covid-19 epidemic, and Russia's announcement of plans to reduce production by 500K barrels per day, which reflects its inability to sell all of its oil.

Crude oil flows from the Turkish port of Ceyhan were disrupted by the devastating earthquake, he further explained.

Natural gas production in

February amounted to 140.5 million cubic metres per day, while exports of LNG totalled around 999.3 thousand metric tonnes, undertaken in 15 shipments. Exports of natural gas liquids amounted to 16.3 K metric tonnes, undertaken in three shipments.

Dr Al Anbouri noted that average daily consumption of



natural gas for electric power generation and water desalination plants, industrial zones, industrial projects and oil fields amounted to 143.4 million cubic metres in February.

LPG output during the month amounted to 2.754 metric tonnes, and the average daily exports in the same month amounted to 1.115 metric tonnes.

Meanwhile, the ministry launched its 2023 oil and gas bidding round for three blocks: Block 15, which is located in Al Dhahirah Governorate, Block 36 on the southeastern edge of the Empty Quarter Basin, and Block 54 in the eastern edge of the salt basin in the south of the Sultanate

of Oman.

Meanwhile, natural gas and condensate production has also commenced from the Mabrouk field in Block 10, output from which will support local industries and the LNG plant. Production is expected to reach more than 0.5 billion cubic feet per day by mid-2024.

Further, with the launch of the Bisat oilfield with a production capacity of 60,000 barrels per day, OQ Group's total share of national production will rise to 220,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day, representing about 13 per cent of the top-quartile contribution to GDP, said Dr Al Anbouri.

Also noteworthy is the inauguration of the Rima water treatment plant, built at a cost of RO 87 million. Covering an area of 25 sq km, the facility processes about 375,000 barrels per day of produced water, thereby saving 10 GW-hours of electricity and eliminating 48,000 tonnes of gas emissions annually. — ONA

Consumer watchdog releases consumables price list

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 27

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) launched an online version of its consumables price list on Monday. The database, known as the 'Price Observatory', contains information of more than 750,000 food items and luxuries in 21 commercial outlets in the Muscat Governorate.

Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority, Sulayem bin Ali bin Sulayem al Hakmani, explained that the "Price Observatory" is expected to facilitate consumer shopping by comparing goods offered in several trading centres.

He added that the CPA is currently working on expanding the number of commercial outlets in the database in Muscat Governorate, which will later extend to all

governorates in the country.

By digitising the database, the Authority seeks to prevent fraud and instances of price hiking in the market.

Earlier last week, CPA reaffirmed its commitment to regulating and monitoring any cases of abuses or breaches in the market during the month of Ramadhan. In addition to verifying the legitimacy of promotional offers in the market.

The authority also launched a Ramadhan food basket for families in need in 11 commercial centres in the country.

"The Ramadhan Family Pack includes several essential food items and is priced between RO 9.500 and RO 10.500. The objective of the food basket is to ensure fast and safe shopping for both locals and residents," noted the Authority.

New ministerial decision to help indebted firms stay open while restructuring

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 27

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has issued Ministerial Decision 250/2023, specifying a fee of RO 10 for restructuring requests from businesses that defaulted on the payment of their debt.

In a statement, the ministry noted that the Bankruptcy Law enables indebted firms to restructure their businesses while committing to settle their outstandings.

The Law sets guidelines for the collection of proceeds from indebted merchants who have defaulted on their debt repayments. It takes into account



the rights of creditors while also seeking to prevent protracted and time-consuming litigations.

The importance of issuing the Bankruptcy Law also lies in enhancing the confidence of local and international investors, strengthening the economy forward, and enabling the financial reorganisation of troubled establishments,

to overcome their financial difficulties, settle all debts and honour obligations, without disrupting production.

Asila bint Salem al Hussainiya, Head of the Commercial Establishments Control Department at the ministry, commented: "The Bankruptcy Law was issued by Royal Decree 53/2019 on July

7, 2020, effectively annulling Chapter 5 of the Commercial Law issued by Royal Decree 55/90.

The Law includes a set of rules and provisions regulating the declaration of bankruptcy by the merchant, while initiating proactive that would help them emerge from their financial and administrative turmoil after paying debts and reconciling with creditors in accordance with the restructuring plan."

It calls for the appointment of an arbitrator between the debtor merchant and the creditors to avoid declaring bankruptcy based on a request submitted by the debtor merchant in what is called 'protective composition'.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Investments in Oman's drone industry top \$100 million

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 27

The rapid uptake of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) technology in the Sultanate of Oman has spawned the growth of a domestic drone industry that has garnered over \$100 million in investments, according to a new report.

Titled, 'Examining the Impact of Oman's Drone Industry on its Growing Economy', the report has been published by TS2 Space, a leading international provider of telecom services that utilises global satellite constellations.

"The Sultanate of Oman is rapidly developing its drone industry, and its economic impact is becoming increasingly evident.

In the past few years, this small country has seen a rapid expansion in the number of companies specialising in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology, with investments totalling over \$100

million.

This growth has positioned Oman as an emerging leader in the region for drone-related technologies, with potential for further development and increased economic benefit," TS2 Space noted in its report.

According to the satellite communications firm, the emerging drone industry in Oman is unleashing direct and indirect benefits for the wider national economy. New startups in this space are helping create jobs for Omanis, introduce high-tech applications and services to the local market, and support economic growth.

One sector that has benefitted significantly from the widespread application of UAV technology is agriculture, says TS2.

"Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are being used to monitor crops, detect pests, and improve irrigation. For example, UAVs can



be used to identify water-stressed crops, detect weeds, and map out crop health.

This helps farmers make more informed decisions when it comes to planting, harvesting, and disease control," the report points out.

Noteworthy is the example of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

(MoAFWR), which has been deploying drones to spray ultra-low volume (ULV) pesticides to fight the Dubas bug and red palm weevil currently plaguing date farms in parts of Oman.

The ministry has roped in Omani SMEs Phoenix Space and Technology and Modern Star to assist in the drive.

In the pivotal energy sector, drones are increasingly being used to inspect and monitor power lines, pipelines, and other energy infrastructure.

"UAVs can provide a cost-effective way to inspect hard-to-reach areas and detect potential problems before they become major issues. This helps reduce costs and improve the efficiency of energy production and distribution.

Additionally, drones can be used to monitor environmental conditions, such as air and water quality, which can help ensure compliance with environmental regulations," according to the report.

Majority state-owned Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has tapped local Omani startup Esbaar to provide Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) Services for routine surveys, inspections, and surveillance tasks across

PDO's operations areas.

Similarly, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has turned to local drone startups to carry out aerial and marine surveys across its vast hub. The Authority has earmarked an 18 sq km site with the SEZ for activities and investments related to artificial intelligence (AI), which includes UAV technology.

Likewise, a number of Omani-based startups are preparing to offer drone-based parcel delivery services in select locations.

Muscat-based Mandoob Delivery Company, for example, has signed an agreement with leading global drone operator UVL to provide delivery services using drones here in Oman. ITHCA, the ICT-centric arm of Oman Investment Authority, has also invested in drone technology solutions of Omani owned start-up Horizon Oman.

Alizz Islamic Bank honoured with award of excellence in CSR



MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank has been recognised for its outstanding commitment to corporate social responsibility. At the awards ceremony held during the Oman Forum 2023, the bank was honoured with the prestigious ‘Excellence in Corporate Social Responsibility’ (CSR) award at the Alam Al-Iktisaad Sustainability Leadership Awards 2023. The event was held under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. Ali al Mani, General Manager, Alizz Islamic Bank accepted the award on behalf of the bank.

Ali al Mani confirmed that the bank has adopted a new strategy, specifically relating to the initiatives it offers. He believes that continuing to implement sustainable initiatives is crucial for leaving a lasting benefit to society, especially during a time when there is a major shift in project focus. The General Manager who is directly supervising these initiatives himself highlighted the importance of social responsibility for Alizz Islamic Bank and how it aligns with the bank’s mission to achieve exceptional and sustainable results for shareholders.

KR Eshraqa distributes 10,000 Ramadhan boxes across wilayats



MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to contribute to community welfare, Eshraqa, the social development arm of Khimji Ramdas (KR), has expanded its support to local communities by distributing 10,000 boxes of Ramadhan essential food supplies to low-income households across wilayats, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD). As part of the outreach project, the KR Group, MoSD, Wali’s offices, committees, and charity teams jointly collaborated in the distribution process. The Ministry made arrangements and coordinated with specific committees, headed by the wali of each wilayat. These committees in turn worked with charity teams to distribute the boxes, ensuring that they reach the intended recipients; those who need them the most. Nailesh Khimji, Director of KR Group, mentioned: “At Khimji Ramdas, we strongly believe that synergy between the public and private sectors will better our corporate social responsibility objectives, ensuring the efficient execution of social initiatives. At Eshraqa, we have built a team that is committed to enhancing the spirit of generosity and togetherness in our society. Ramadhan is a time for giving and reflection, and we are fortunate to have stakeholders who collaborate with us to achieve our common goals of doing good.”

Bank Muscat wins Gold Award at Oman Sustainability Week Awards

MUSCAT: In recognition of its pioneering role in the field of sustainability, Bank Muscat won the Gold Award in the Mid to Large Business category at the Oman Sustainability Week Awards 2023, held recently at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC). The award was handed over by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auqi, Minister of Energy and Minerals to Hamza bin Abbas al Ajmi, Deputy General Manager – Credit, Bank Muscat, at a glittering ceremony, which was attended by top government officials as well as CEOs and senior executives from some of the top institutions and corporates in Oman. Held under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the second edition of Oman Sustainability Week aimed to highlight Oman’s commitment to leadership in sustainability through innovative strategies, which are aligned with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the landmark Oman Vision 2040. The event brought together



key stakeholders including policy makers, sustainability experts and industry leaders to focus on sustainability as a national objective and to develop a new model of sustainable development that benefits Oman and its people. The Awards event was part of the Oman Sustainability Week and provided a platform for the participating organisations to map out their current sustainability status in comparison to industry peers and identify medium and long-term risks and opportunities. The in-depth evaluation of

participating organisations was conducted by highly specialised sustainability assessors from the US-based Centre for Sustainability and Excellence. Hamza bin Abbas al Ajmi, Deputy General Manager – Credit, Bank Muscat, said, “We are delighted to receive this prestigious award, which reconfirms Bank Muscat’s pioneering role in promoting sustainability in Oman. In the past, the bank has undertaken many initiatives to promote sustainability including development of its employees and national human resources. It is also continuously incorporating other sustainable practices within its business operations like replacing lamps with LED lights, reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions, water and paper consumption as well as electronic waste. Going ahead, the bank will continue to strengthen cooperation and partnership with various government and private sector institutions to strengthen sustainability as part of its long-term strategy, which is closely aligned to Oman Vision 2040.”

SBA’s Nissan door-to-door service appointment gains popularity

MUSCAT: Suhail Bahwan Automobiles’ Nissan service appointment pick up and drop off service has proved to be a hit among customers with its popularity continuing to soar. To use the pick-up and drop-off service, customers need to pre-book it at a nominal fee through various channels such as Nissan Oman toll-free number 80050011, Nissan Oman website www.nissanoman.com, sending SMS to 9982 5454, writing email on appointment@sbigh.com or by WhatsApp on 9769 2689. Once the service is booked, SBA will take care of everything related to the car, including servicing, repairs, tyres, wheel alignments, and all services under



the manufacturer’s warranty. The service is currently available in the capital area. Providing of this service reflects SBA’s commitment to enhancing the customer experience.

It is aligned with customer feedback and SBA’s own efforts to make a difference to the ownership experience. With this offering, SBA aims to provide customers with the convenience of getting their necessary vehicle work completed without stepping out of their home or office. A SBA senior official said, “We are delighted offer this service to our valued customers. Our goal is to provide top-class after-sales service to every customer purchasing a Nissan vehicle. This offering ensures that our customers receive the best possible care for their cars. We guarantee the advantage of well-trained experts, consistency, and support during after-sales service, which

ascertains Nissan’s performance and resale value in the years to come.” With the pick-up and drop-off service for Nissan service appointments, Suhail Bahwan Automobiles is taking another step forward in providing customers with an exceptional ownership experience. Customers can be rest assured that they will receive top-quality care for their cars, and the service will ensure that they don’t have to take time off work or adjust their plans. For more information on the pick-up and drop-off service or to book an appointment, customers can contact SBA through the various channels mentioned above.

Lulu announces 1st and 2nd draw winners of Ramadhan Shop and Win promotion

MUSCAT: Lulu Hypermarket announced the first two set of winners of its ongoing Ramadhan Shop and Win promotion. The first draw was held on March 8 at Lulu Al Bandar and the second draw was held on March 15 at Sohar branch. The promotion, which started on March 1, 2023, will run till April 29, 2023, at all Lulu stores in Oman. In addition to cash prizes, there will be huge discounts and exclusive offers on all essential commodities, including fresh and frozen foods, grocery items, electronics and home appliances etc during the promotional period. As part of the Shop and Win promotion, customers get a chance to win cash prizes worth RO 100,000 during the entire promotional period. Customers who spend RO 10 or more in a single receipt at any of the Lulu outlets in Oman or purchase



from Lulu online stores are eligible to be part of the electronic draws. The cash prizes include a grand prize of RO 10,000 and weekly cash prizes of RO 100, 200, 500, 750 and 5,000. Weekly draws will be held for 8 consecutive weeks to pick a total of 281 winners. Eight customers get a chance to win the first prize of RO 5,000 each. There will be 8 second prizes of RO 750 each, 24 third prizes of

RO 500 each, 80 fourth prizes of RO 200 each and 160 fifth prizes of RO 100 each. Commenting on the Ramadhan promotion, Shabeer K A, Regional Director – Lulu Hypermarkets, Oman, stated, “We have announced the first two sets of winners of our Ramadhan Shop and Win promotion, held in two consecutive weeks at different outlets of Lulu. We congratulate all the winners who were lucky enough to win cash prizes right at the start of this promotion. I believe this is the perfect time to shop with us, as there are six more draws left for our shoppers to win big during Ramadhan,” he added. Lulu has also lined up several other offers and deals to enhance customer experience and to make shopping a memorable and fun-filled experience during Ramadhan.

Opportunity Oman: Fisheries and aquaculture



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Oman is becoming an increasingly important regional fish producer. With over 3,165 kilometres of coastline on four different bodies of water — the Arabian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea and a very long coastline compared to its neighbouring gulf countries.

Oman has an exclusive economic zone area of 535,912 sq km with a shallow continental shelf (narrow to 10-20km in places) and a shelf area of circa 58,000 sq km.

The fisheries sector in Oman has witnessed a paradigm shift recently with a higher increase in growth than planned in total fisheries volume, value of production and overall contribution to GDP while Al Wusta Governorate's fish reserves is among the largest in the world.

The long coastal line and the different seas adjacent to Oman contribute highly to the fish biodiversity and fish population richness in the country producing

a rich mix of fishes ranging from high value large pelagic fisheries shared amongst coastal states and foreign flagged nations, to low value straddling stocks such as lantern fish shared with neighbouring countries, as well as a complex mix of inshore demersal and pelagic stocks fished domestically.

The Sultanate of Oman's fisheries and aquaculture resources are a potential source of considerable prosperity for all Omanis and the sector is also receiving considerable support from the government, which recognises it as a pillar of economic development due to its renewable resources and in 2015 developed a comprehensive Fisheries and Aquaculture Vision for the next 25 years development.

However, current fisheries industry is underutilised and it has less economic productivity while having the aquaculture industry in its infancy.

The overall objectives for the

fisheries sector are:

- Development and modernisation of fisheries sector
- Development of fisheries exports
- Enhancement of economic diversification of the country through fisheries development
- Development of fisheries-related industry
- Development of aquaculture projects and
- Enhancement of the future production and value of Oman's coastal fisheries and the well-being of the people and coastal communities.

There are countless investment opportunities in the Fisheries Industry Value Chain which can be as follows:

In Upstream

Harvesting (Aquaculture and fishing using Commercial & Coast fishing methods). Supply (Sorting fish quality according to markets and customer requirements and transporting) and Cold Storage (Freezing to preserve the storage

of fish through blast, plate, immersion or spray freezing).

In Mid-stream

Fish Preparation (Freezing to preserve the storage of fish through blast, plate, immersion or spray freezing), Processing (VA) Value add; Smoking, Sundry & Salting, Canning, Jars, Pouches/ filleting, Marinating, Other additions; olive oil, water, oil, vinegar, spicing. In Storing (Storing Fish, Finished products).

In Downstream

Particularly in Distribution/ Retailing in Selling to end Markets/ Consumers In addition, Key projects in fisheries include but not limited to:

- Aquaculture
- Commercial fishing
- Primary products processing like Packaging, cold-chain, warehousing, logistics,
- Processing by-products by fishmeal, fish oil, fertilizer, biofuel
- Seafood processing plant that transforms fish and

other marine organisms to food products (such as burgers, fish fingers, etc.

■ Services such as a fish clinic, laboratory, medicine, and feed

■ Fabrication and maintenance of fishing fleet

■ Manufacturing and recycling of fishing equipment, workers village and support services.

In conclusion, Oman is one of the few countries blessed with a promising and thriving fisheries sector that inspires to lead Oman's economic growth and development.

This makes it a pre-condition to change current traditional practices to be more innovative, creative, and modern.

This can be achieved by joining hands with countries that have taken similar approaches as well as gaining insights and knowledge from multinational companies to ensure that Oman's future ambitious goals are met.

New ministerial decision to help indebted firms stay open while restructuring

FROM PAGE 13

She clarified that the provisions of the Bankruptcy Law are applicable to everyone who carries out a commercial activity in their names and have the necessary wherewithal. It also includes commercial organisations, foreign businesses or branches or agencies operating in Oman that have not yet declared bankruptcy in a foreign country. Not included in this coverage are organised licensed by the Central Bank of Oman and the insurance companies.

Asila stressed that the restructuring can take place in various ways, including reaching an agreement to secure a grace period for settlement of debts, or forgiveness of part of the debts, or both.

Applicants for restructuring must include proposals for emerging from their financial or administrative challenges, and commitments to their obligations or contracts that arise from these proposals.

Further, the applicant must eschew any actions that affects the interests of the creditors, such as engaging in business unrelated to the licensed activity, donating assets or borrowing or lending, or using the assets for mortgage purposes, or any other acts that violate the terms of the restructuring plan.

2023 Cadillac Escalade-V: Auto industry's most powerful full-size SUV arrives in Oman



MUSCAT: Legendary American automaker Cadillac's first SUV in the V-series – the Cadillac Escalade-V 2023 – has made its debut in Oman, its launch heralding a new era in automotive performance, design and innovative technology. Donning the high-performance V-Series badge – a symbol encapsulating Cadillac's signature traits – this full-size SUV is the most powerful in its segment and comes with advanced technological features, refined exterior and luxurious interior. In essence, the 2023 Escalade-V is the purest expression of the passion that exists at the core of Cadillac.

This magnificent machine's arrival in Oman was celebrated with a grand reception at Cadillac's state-of-the-art showroom in Al Wattayah (Muscat) recently, with top officials of Cadillac's Middle East operations, as well as local distributor OTE Group, in attendance. The distinguished gathering included Mr. Kristian Aquilina, Managing Director, Cadillac International Operation and Cadillac Middle East; Sheikh Saad Suhail Bahwan – Chairman, OTE Group; Sheikh Salim Saad Bahwan, Director – OTE Group; and leading personalities from the Omani business sector.

Every facet of the Escalade-V is simply outstanding. Inside and out, the new Escalade-V builds on Escalade's bold, layered design statement and sophisticated, technology-infused passenger environment. On the exterior,

unique front and rear fascias cast a distinctive pose, along with Cadillac's signature Sport mesh grille. The rear fascia incorporates openings for a quad exhaust outlet. Uniquely styled 22-inch wheels are also part of the V-Series content. They help showcase the performance brake system behind them, which includes exclusive Brembo front brakes with Edge Red calipers. Indeed, the Escalade-V's performance-inspired styling coupled with its unmistakable sound make for a head-turning presence whenever it's on the move.

Supercharged legacy and AWD grip

The Escalade-V is powered by a supercharged intercooled 6.2-Litre V8 engine capable of generating an unsurpassed 682 hp at 6,000 engine rpm and 885 Nm of torque at 4,400 engine rpm. The 6.2L hand-built supercharged and intercooled engine builds on a legacy of supercharged V-8 engines offered in Cadillac V-Series models, those being the second- and third-generation CTS-V models, the XLR-V, and most recently, the CT5-V Blackwing.

The Escalade-V's engine shares architectural similarities with the CT5-V Blackwing's supercharged V-8, but features a larger, 2.65L R2650 TVS supercharger that helps overcome the higher inlet and exhaust restrictions on the full-size SUV application. It spins at up to 13,500 rpm to produce approximately 10 pounds of boost and has an electronically controlled bypass

valve for optimal drivability. The supercharger's unique four-lobe rotors are designed to broaden the engine's power band, with great low-end torque production and strong high-rpm power. With these impressive features, the Escalade-V can accelerate from 0-100 km/h in 4.6 seconds.

The Cadillac Escalade-V 2023 engine is accompanied by a 10-speed automatic transmission system. The engine torque received by the transmission is supplied to the AWD drivetrain system.

Unique suspension calibrations and V-Mode

Along with the full-time active all-wheel-drive system, standard Magnetic Ride Control 4.0, Air Ride Adaptive Suspension and exclusive Escalade-V suspension hardware complement the Escalade-V's responsive driving experience. Together, they form the foundation of a heightened feeling of driver control, without sacrificing the isolated precision ride comfort for which the Escalade is renowned.

With this new V-Series SUV, the Air Ride Adaptive Suspension four-corner air springs feature specific, stiff rear air springs. The electronically controlled system also features unique damper hardware tuning and software calibrations, which help make the most of the Escalade-V's four-wheel independent suspension. The electronic limited-slip

differential improves handling and helps to maximize traction.

Drivers can personalize their experience behind the wheel through the exclusive V-Mode, which drivers access via a button on the center console ahead of the transmission shifter. It lets drivers tailor their preferred performance-driving mode and it also automatically lowers the ride height by nearly 0.8 inches (20 mm).

Signature design, craftsmanship and technology

On the technology front, the Escalade-V comes equipped with an industry-first curved OLED with 38 inches of total diagonal display, with twice the pixel density of a 4K television. Another distinctive feature is the 'Gauge View', which not only highlights the speed of the vehicle, but also includes two reconfigurable zones on the left and right of the speedometer. The left zone can display time and date or vehicle information such as tire pressure and brake pad wear, while the right zone can display navigation, radio information and even phone calls.

Also standard across Escalade-V models is an innovative Night Vision System. When the Night Vision tooltip view is selected in the Cluster Display, the Night Vision system can help the driver see beyond your headlights with a thermal image that highlights and alerts

you to detected pedestrians or large animals directly ahead of the vehicle—helping to instill confidence on night drives.

Adding to the impressive array of technologies feature are: Premium infotainment experience with navigation, featuring a 16.9-inch diagonal color information display, Natural Voice Recognition, Wireless Apple CarPlay and Wireless Android Auto4 capability, Connected Apps and more; Augmented Reality, which projects a live image of what is in front of the vehicle on the 14.2-inch-diagonal center cluster display; and Standard AKG Studio Reference 36-speaker audio system, with 3D Surround, Navigation Rendering and more.

"The arrival of the 2023 Escalade-V is the result of a rigorous development program that allows this highly anticipated model to meet the criteria and capability thresholds established by nearly two decades of inspired V-Series performance," said Global Cadillac Vice President Rory Harvey. "Customers and enthusiasts have asked for an Escalade-V, and we're thrilled to bring this high-performance SUV to market in the year of Cadillac's 120th anniversary. We do not deploy the V-Series designation lightly."

Leading automotive firm OTE Group is the exclusive distributor of Cadillac models in the Sultanate of Oman. Check out the latest Escalade-V range at OTE Cadillac Showroom, Wattayah - Muscat.

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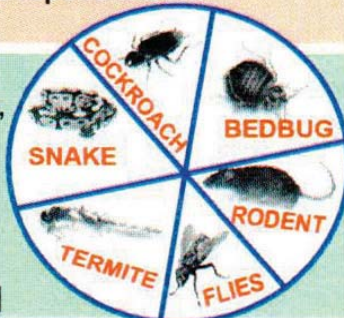
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ramadhan



Photos by Yerru Ebuhen



Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is now a pink paradise as roses bloom

From mid-March to mid-April, the rose bushes in about six to eight villages of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar are usually in full bloom. The annual rose season is an excellent opportunity to witness the traditional practices of rose harvesting and distillation and experience the cultural events that celebrate this beautiful flower **P20**



QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

And worship Allah, and ascribe no partners to Him, and be good to the parents, and the relatives, and the orphans, and the poor, and the close neighbour, and the distant neighbour, and close friends, and the traveller, and your servants. Allah does not love the arrogant show off.

Surah a Nisa', 36

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

'Abdullah ibn al-'as reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Show mercy and you will be shown mercy. Forgive and Allah will forgive you. Woe to the vessels that catch words (i.e. the ears). Woe to those who persist and consciously continue in what they are doing."

HEALTH TIPS

To stay organised during this month, maximise your energy and power by planning your meals and Ramadan dishes in advance. This will also give you plenty of time to select a variety of foods and healthy recipes to delight and nourish the family.



STORIES FROM THE QURAN

People Of The Garden

ALLAH THE ALMIGHTY SAYS:

{Verily, We have tried them as We tried the people of the garden, when they swore to pluck the fruits of the (garden) in the morning. Without saying: Insha'Allah (If Allah wills). Then there passed by on the (garden) a visitation (fire) from your Lord at night and burnt it while they were asleep. So the (garden) became black by the morning, like a pitch dark night (in complete ruins). Then they called out one to another as soon as

the morning broke. Saying: "Go to your tilth in the morning, if you would pluck the fruits." So they departed, conversing in secret low tones (saying): No Miskin (poor man) shall enter upon you into it today. And they went in the morning with strong intention, thinking that they have power (to prevent the poor taking anything of the fruits therefrom). But when they saw the (garden), they said: "Verily, we have gone astray." (Then they said: "Nay! Indeed we are deprived of (the fruits)!" The best among them said: "Did I not tell you: why say you not: Insha' Allah (If Allah wills)." They said: "Glory to Our Lord! Verily, we have been Zalimun (wrong-doers)."

Then they turned one against another, blaming. They said: "Woe to us! Verily, we were Taghun (transgressors and disobedient). We hope that our Lord will give us in exchange a better (garden) than this. Truly, we turn to our Lord (wishing for good that He may forgive our sins and

reward us in the Hereafter). Such is the punishment (in this life), but truly the punishment of the Hereafter is greater if they but knew). (Al-Qalam, 17- 33)

There was a wealthy and pious man. He had a big garden full of green trees laden with fruits. After the fruits were picked, the man used to distribute some fruits among the poor who would gather at the garden every season to take their share. He had many sons who were not as pious as him. When their father died, they did not like the habit of distributing some of the fruits among the poor. They felt as if all their efforts would go to vain if the poor had some share.

One of the sons had a concern. What will they tell the poor people when they gather to take their fruits next time? They thought over its implications, as they were worried about losing their prestige. However, they were not afraid of Allah's wrath. One of them suggested removing all the fruits in the night and

thus clearing the garden before dawn so that nobody could come and ask for his share. Everyone agreed to this suggestion.

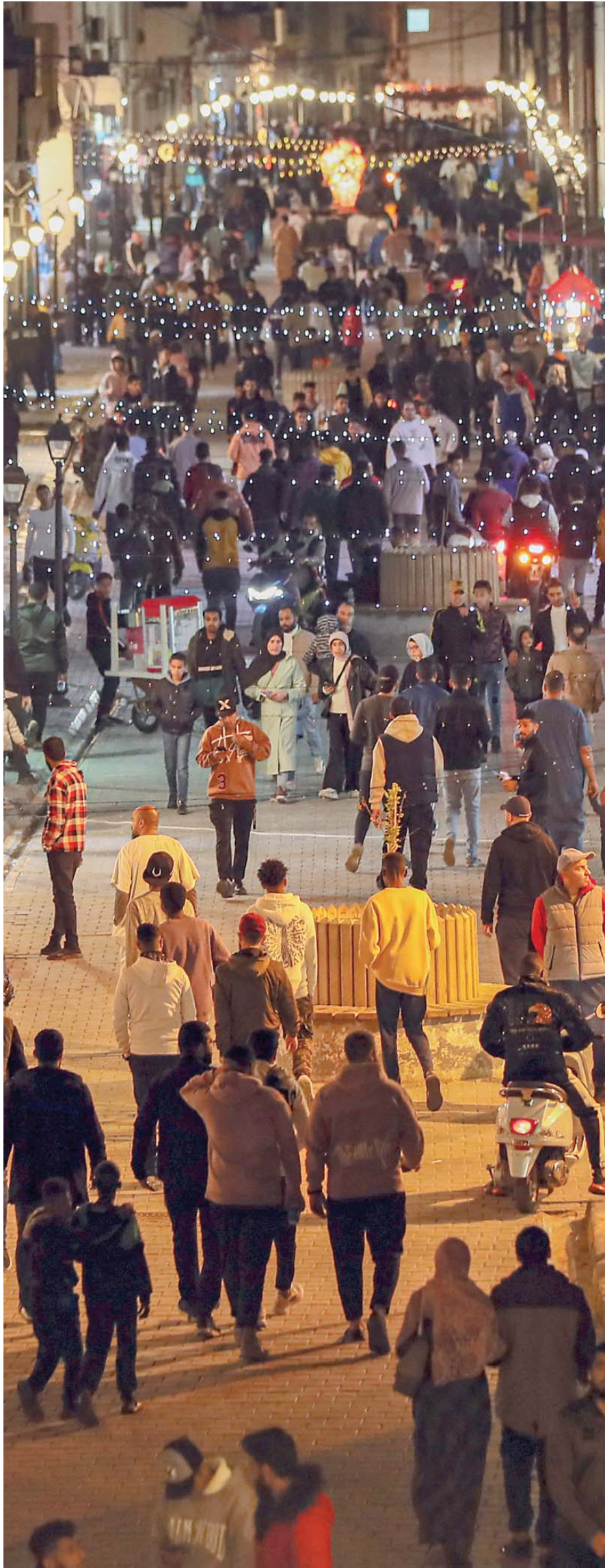
All the brothers went to sleep with a view to getting up early in the morning and gathering the ripe fruits. In the meantime, with the Will of Allah "...there passed by on the (garden) a (fire) from your Lord at night and burnt it while they were asleep." (Verse 19)

In the early morning, all of them got up and hurried up and "...called out one to another as soon as the morning broke, Saying: 'Go to your tilth in the morning, if you would pluck the fruits.' So they departed, conversing in secret low tones (saying), No Miskin (poor man) shall enter upon you into it today." (Verses 21-24)

As they were proceeding towards the garden, they were quite unaware that Allah had willed otherwise. When they reached the garden, they said this was not their garden, and that they had

strayed away from the right path to the garden. They were wonder-struck! Soon they realised the situation and yelled: "Verily, we have gone astray," "Nay! Indeed we are deprived of (the fruits)!" The best among them said: "Did I not say to you 'Why not glorify (Allah)'?" (Verses 26-28). He had been advising them earlier against this act, for he had said it is only Allah who would enhance their fruits if they continued to give away some of them in charity.

All of them felt regretful over their misdeed. They turned, to one another, in reproach and said: "Glory to our Lord! Verily we have been doing wrong, Alas for us! We have indeed transgressed!" All of them, then, sought Allah's pardon and said: "We hope that our Lord will give us in exchange a better (garden) than this. Truly, we turn to our Lord (wishing for good that He may forgive our sins, and reward us in the Hereafter)." (Verses 31-32)



Libya revives cannon salute to break Ramadhan fast



THE BLAST OF A cannon booms across Tripoli, but it doesn't signal another round of fighting in the Libyan capital — rather, the revival of a long-lost Ramadan tradition.

Officers in berets rolled out a red carpet on the iconic Martyrs' Square on Thursday for the 600-year-old weapon, setting of a resounding blast moments before the sunset call to prayer.

The cannon, announcing the end of the first daytime fast of the holy month, is a tradition observed across the Muslim world, but Libya had not seen it since the end of the 1970s as dictator Moamer Kadhafi tried to wipe the slate of Libyan history clean.

But today authorities say they want to bring back the cannon announcing iftar, the meal breaking the fast.

"It's a way to bring joy to the people of Tripoli," said Akram Dribika, the city

official organising the event. "It sends a message that life has returned" to Libya.

BEAUTIFUL SURPRISE

The 2011 revolt that toppled and killed Kadhafi sparked a complex, often violent power struggle that has lasted more than a decade.

But many Libyans long to express the country's rich and ancient heritage.

The origin of the iftar cannon remains unclear, but it was likely born in Ottoman-ruled Egypt in the 19th century, when authorities wanted to inform a population with few watches or clocks that the fast was nearly over.

In Martyrs' Square, Nouri Sayeh said he just happened to be passing when he saw the cannon, a "beautiful surprise".

"This is part of our Ramadan heritage. It's really important and it's a tradition we should

continue," the 32-year-old said.

The cannon firing is part of a wider effort by authorities and civil society to revive the old medina of Tripoli, after decades of neglect during Kadhafi's 40-year rule and the chaos that followed.

Artists, craftsmen and shopkeepers have brought new life to the cobbled alleys, where Roman, Greek and Ottoman subjects walked before them.

LIGHTING UP THE OLD CITY

After breaking fast, Libyan families flock to the old city and Martyrs' Square, buying candyfloss for their children. Young people sit on benches and drink coffee or take selfies in front of the Ramadan decorations.

For the second year running, the municipality has adorned the main

squares and alleys with bunting, traditional lanterns and shapes of the crescent moon, a symbol of Islam.

Rasha Ben Ghara, who grew up in the neighbourhood, said she loves seeing the crowds and lights.

Years previously, people had to use the torches of their phones to pick through the old city's unpaved alleyways, she said.

"People used to come to shop in the souk, but today they come to admire the view and the heritage," the 35-year civil servant said.

Even young people say they love the old city.

Motassam Hassan, a 20-year-old computer science student, said he hoped the rest of Libya could see similar efforts at renovation.

"What we see in the medina should be replicated everywhere, beyond Tripoli, so everywhere lights up like this." — **AFP**

Science Museums Take Stock of 1.1 Billion Objects From Around the World

DOZENS OF THE WORLD'S largest natural history museums revealed on Thursday a survey of everything in their collections. The global inventory is made up of 1.1 billion objects that range from dinosaur skulls to pollen grains to mosquitoes.

The survey's organisers, who described the effort in the journal *Science*, said they hoped the survey would help museums join forces to answer pressing questions, such as how quickly species are becoming extinct and how climate change is altering the natural world.

"It gives us intelligence now to start thinking about things that museums can do together that we wouldn't have conceived of before," said Kirk Johnson, director of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington and one of the leaders of the project. "It's the argument for networking the global museum."

Scientists had created smaller inventory databases before. But the new effort, which included 73 museums in 28 countries, was unparalleled, experts said.

"The analysis is at a global scale that no one else has managed," said Emily

Meineke, an entomologist at the University of California, Davis, who was not involved in the survey.

The survey revealed important gaps in the world's collections. Relatively few objects come from the regions around Earth's poles, which are especially vulnerable to the impact of global warming, for example. Insects, the most diverse group of animal species, were also underrepresented.

Meineke said this survey of large institutions also laid the groundwork for surveys of smaller ones, which might hold even more surprises. "Once these methods are applied down the line to smaller collections, the results are likely to give us a truer picture of biodiversity globally," she said.

Natural history museums got their start in the 1400s as cabinets of wonders in which aristocrats kept precious oddities such as narwhal skulls or glittering crystals. By the 19th century, they had become national institutions that employed cadres of full-time curators.

When a museum gained a new object in



those early days, curators would typically scrawl down some basic information about it on a paper slip. That slip might then get tucked into a box of pinned butterflies, or dropped into a jar holding a preserved shark. Curators would then store the box or the jar in a cabinet and make a note of it in a ledger.

Today, natural museums have amassed vast collections. The Smithsonian Museum of Natural History alone holds 148,033,146 objects. In recent years, some museums have been putting their objects online.

Last year, for example, the US National Herbarium finished uploading photos of nearly 4 million pressed plants. But most objects in natural history museums have yet to be scanned and uploaded to the

cloud — or even recorded in an online catalogue.

With only a rough idea of what was in their own collections, Johnson and fellow museum directors recognised that they had an even murkier understanding of what they shared collectively.

"It occurred to us that we each hold these amazing assets, but we don't have a way to compare them," he said. "We realised that we were presiding over these kingdoms of dark data."

Rather than wait for years until they had all digitised their collections, the museum directors wanted to take stock now. They asked their curators to fill out a survey describing what kind of collections they housed in their museums — plants,

fungi, fossils and so on.

They then estimated how big each collection was, sometimes simply by counting cabinets, and where scientists had gone to collect the objects they contained. The curators also provided the number of objects that had been digitised, how many had been sampled for DNA and how many people had studied different groups of species at each museum. The museums created an online dashboard to explore the survey's results.

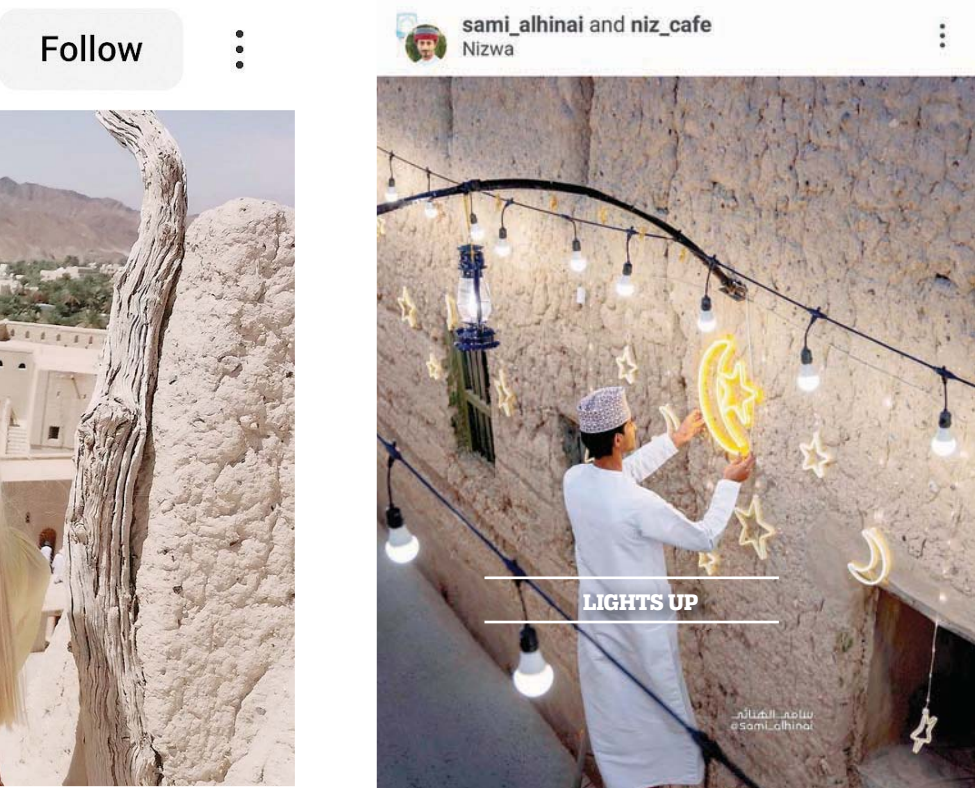
"This is the realisation of a dream I and other people in my role have had for many years," said Michael Novacek, senior vice president of science at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

Johnson said it was surprising just how many scientists study mammals compared with other species. "The pull of the warm fuzzy things was pretty apparent in the numbers," he said.

By contrast, only 10 per cent of the museum scientists studied insects. "This is kind of a deficit," Johnson said. "Insects are the biggest component of terrestrial biodiversity, and also huge pollinators and vectors of disease."

Museums have done relatively little collecting in the Arctic or Antarctica, two regions that are getting hit especially hard by global warming. Novacek said it is important for museums to have a record of the diversity of life there to understand how it is changing with rising temperatures. "It's a call to action," he said.

Knowing what is missing from the world's museums could help them plan new expeditions that can fill in the gaps. "We might be able to make a collecting plan for the 21st century," Johnson said. — **NYT**



AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Nigerian drummer nurtures children to preserve use of local instruments



NIGERIAN ARTIST ADEBAYO Ayodeji is targeting children to play traditional instruments like drums, which he worries could become extinct and erase an important aspect of the culture in Africa's most populous country.



In Nigeria, the drum is not only a musical instrument, but is also used in ceremonial events and rituals like communicating with deities and summoning meetings in villages.

— Reuters

CHANGING WORLD

Artists fight AI programmes that copy their styles



ARTISTS OUTRAGED by artificial intelligence that copies in seconds the styles they have sacrificed years to develop are waging battle online and in court.

to "get a couple of cents while the company gets millions" of dollars, added Ortiz, whose resume includes working for Marvel Studios.

does not make that person an artist. Mostaque has said that if people choose to use generative AI unethically or to break the law, "that's their problem."

SCIENCE

Keanu Reeves' Latest Role? Fungus-Killing Bacterial Compound.



UPON THEIR DISCOVERY that certain bacterial compounds kill fungus, scientists at a German research institute were reminded of lethal action of a Hollywood proportion: specifically, Keanu Reeves in his starring role in the thriller franchise "John Wick."

—NYT

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Local Scene

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Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is now a pink paradise as roses bloom

By Yeru Ebu
Instagram: @yru_here

The flora of Oman is highly diverse and varied, with over 1,200 species of plants recorded. The country has a unique climate, with a hot and arid desert environment, and the vegetation that thrives in the country often reflects these conditions.

Considered the queen of flowers, roses are admired for their beauty and fragrance. The Damask rose is one of the most significant and well-known rose cultivars, valued for its distinctive scent and application in the perfume business. In Oman, it has become an important part of the country's tradition and culture, with the best varieties only growing in the rocky, high-altitude valleys of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. As one wanders through the rose gardens of Oman during this time of the year, it is easy to be mesmerised by the sweet scent permeating the air. From mid-

March to mid-April, the rose bushes in about six to eight villages of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar are usually in full bloom. This "rose bloom" season has in fact become a tourist draw for these villages. The harvesting process for the roses is done entirely by hand. If you're visiting for the purpose of watching a whole village go on a harvest frenzy, the best time to come would be early in the morning before the heat of the day. From previous experiences, some farmers actually start harvesting as early as five in the morning and are usually finished by nine am. The variety of roses growing in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is often referred to as "Damask roses," belonging to a type of ancient rose

that originated in the Middle East and was first cultivated in Syria during the Roman period. The Oman rose, which some also call the rock rose, is known for its distinct aroma, which is described as sweet and musky with a hint of spice. The one grown in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, *Rosa damascena triginipetala*, is said to have a higher oil content, making it an essential ingredient in the perfume industry, as well as a great raw ingredient for medicines and even culinary applications. Some experts also share that the rose petals used in Omani rosewater have a more potent scent compared to other regions, and this is due to the unique climate of the mountain, including the soil, working in tandem to create a powerful, useful variety. Visiting some of the villages that process these roses, it is easy to understand that the damask roses of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar are different, especially in their blooming period, with the flowers lasting for several weeks, unlike other roses. Villagers

believe that when used as medicine, these roses can also relieve stress and anxiety, alleviate menstrual cramps, and aid in digestion. If you're planning to visit Al Jabal Al Akhdhar during this period, it is important to have a good understanding of which villages are in full bloom and ready for harvest. As a visitor, the farmers are usually very warm and welcoming and would even allow you to participate in the rose-picking process and even show you how the rosewater is distilled. The rose gardens in Oman are a must-see if you are a nature lover who enjoys the outdoors and sweet scents. It's fascinating to learn more about Oman rose because of its distinctive smell and significant cultural history. The annual rose season is an excellent opportunity to witness the traditional practices of rose harvesting and distillation and experience the cultural events that celebrate this beautiful flower. Plan a vacation to Oman this spring to experience the captivating beauty of the Oman rose.