



RAMADAN PRAYER TIMINGS	
DHUHR	12:18pm
ASR	3:44pm
MAGHRIB	6:25pm
ISHA	7:35pm
FAJR (TOMORROW)	4:49am

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OFFICIAL VISIT



OIA Chairman conveys HM's greetings to Cuban President

HAVANA: President Dr. Miguel Diaz-Canel of the Republic of Cuba yesterday received Abdul-salman Mohammed Al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) in the Cuban capital city, Havana.

The reception came within the framework of the official visit paid

by the OIA Chairman to Cuba.

The OIA Chairman conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Diaz. His Majesty also wished the people of Cuba further progress and prosperity.

In his turn, the Cuban presi-

dent expressed his heartfelt sentiments to His Majesty and the Omani people. He also wished the bilateral relations further development and growth.

The meeting was attended by Sheikh Abdulaziz Abdullah Al Hinai, Ambassador-at-Large at the Foreign Ministry. — **OMA**

RAMADAN MARKETS ACROSS OMAN SEE SURGE IN CUSTOMERS

With shops remaining open well past midnight, customers are enjoying the freedom to purchase their essentials without worrying about early closing times



Times News Service

MUSCAT: During the Holy Month of Ramadan, markets across the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman are experiencing a significant increase in visitors. Families are venturing out together to shop for their daily needs after breaking their fast, creating a vibrant atmosphere across the nation.

With shops remaining open well past midnight, customers are enjoying the freedom to purchase their essentials without worrying about early closing times. The evening sees a surge in activity, particularly after 8pm, as crowds swell in anticipation of Eid Al Fitr. This period also marks the fruition of efforts by government authorities to establish local

markets, aimed at supporting families and promoting household products.

Eng. Hassan bin Ali Al-Barmani, Director of the Municipality Department in the Wilayat of Shinas, emphasised the significance of creating marketing opportunities for local businesses in collaboration with producers during Ramadan.

He said: "The Ramadan market initiative provides a platform for home business owners to showcase their products and expand their marketing and sales prospects.

"By organising sales activities during Ramadan, awareness of local ventures is heightened, fostering community support and pre-

serving local heritage and culture."

Visitors and residents alike are drawn to the Ramadan market, where they can discover unique products that reflect the diverse heritage and cultural richness of Oman's various wilayats.

It's noteworthy that the Ramadan market exemplifies a commitment to providing sellers with a conducive space to exhibit their offerings during this special time, attracting buyers from both within and beyond the country's borders.

"I look forward to Ramadan every year, not just for its spiritual significance but also for the lively atmosphere in the markets," said Fatima Al Balushi, a resident of Muscat. — **A2**

GAZA DEATH TOLL
as of March 24, 2024



Dozens of colonists storm Al Aqsa Mosque
A7

Deaths **32,226**
Injured **74,518**

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN
Rains forecast

1 A trough of a low system will affect Oman starting from Tuesday, 26 March. — **A2**

OMAN
Municipal Council

2 The Municipal Council of Muscat Governorate held its third meeting. — **A3**

SPORTS
Carlos Sainz wins

3 Ferrari driver Carlos Sainz took the first non-Red Bull win of the F1 season. — **B6**

PRESERVE TREE COVER

Environment Authority launches campaign to protect Dhofar trees

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority (EA) has launched a campaign to protect perennial trees from insect pests in the mountains of Dhofar Governorate.

In its tenth campaign, the EA in cooperation with the Dhofar Municipality and the Nature Conservation Society, plans to combat pests that harm the environment and perennial trees in the mountains of Dhofar Governorate.

The drive aims to preserve the vegetation cover and ensure its sustainability with help from the local community.

The first campaign to combat harmful pests in old trees began in the Hashir area of the Wilayat of Mirbat in 2020, targeting 10 per-

cent of the infected trees. Talib bin Ali Al Abri, Acting Director General of the General Directorate of Environment in Dhofar Governorate, said that the methodology for controlling insect pests depends on a number preventive steps, especially for the 'figs' represented by the Taig, in addition to other species such as baobab, mitan, and sagoot trees.

Field surveys have shown that they are most affected by insects.

Common pests

Al Abri pointed out that the stem borer insect or stem borer beetle/termite/ is one of the most common pests that are controlled in many ways.



Among them is cutting off some dead branches from infected trees, manual cleaning, and spraying trees with insecticides that are

not harmful to plants, in addition to embalming limestone on tree trunks to protect them from insect larvae infiltrating them.

Al Abri explained that the tenth campaign to combat insect pests during the year 2024 targeted more than 1,000 trees in the wilayats of Salalah, Taqah, and Mirbat.

It is expected that the number of targeted trees will reach about 2,000 this year.

The Acting Director General of the General Directorate of Environment in Dhofar Governorate confirmed that the Environment Authority is working on a number of measures to protect and propagate wild plants in Dhofar Governorate through tree nurseries, protected cultivation operations, in addition to planting and dispersing seeds in wild areas, and pruning and protecting perennial trees.

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DECCANI WING OF INDIAN SOCIAL CLUB ORGANISES IFTAR AT CLOCK TOWER, RUWI

More than 5,000 persons including 1,000 women attended the Iftar at Clock Tower Ruwi on March 22. Shaikh Emad Said Al Rawahi, Director of Fatwa Research at the Office of the General Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, was the guest of honour. Amit Narang, the ambassador of India to Oman, was the chief guest. The Iftar was organised by the Deccani Wing of Indian Social Club.



Rainfall expected in Oman from Tuesday

The Civil Aviation Authority advises everyone to take precautions during rain, wadis flow, and reduced visibility

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The latest analyses from the National Multi-hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that a trough of a low system will affect the Sultanate of Oman starting from Tuesday, 26 March 2024 to Wednesday, 27 March 2024.

Clouds advection and formation expected over most governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, with isolated rains of varying



FORECAST: Clouds advection and formation expected over most governorates of Oman, with isolated rains of varying of intensity (10-40 mm) predicted over Al Hajar Mountains. - ONA

intensity (10-40 mm) predicted over Al Hajar Mountains Chain and governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, Dhofar and parts of Al Wusta.

Sea condition will be moderate to rough (1.5-3 metres) along

coastal areas of Sea of Oman and western Musandam, northerly winds (12-25 knots) over most governorates of the Sultanate of Oman that may cause dust rising over desert and open areas.

The Civil Aviation Authority

(CAA) advises all to take precaution during rains, wadis flow and the reduction of visibility. It also urges all to observe the visibility and sea state before sailing and follow the issued weather bulletins and reports.

HONOUR

Order of the Rising Sun conferred on former CEO of Oman LNG



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Embassy of Japan in the Sultanate of Oman hosted a ceremony to confer the Order of the Rising Sun on Harib Al Kitani, former Chief Executive Officer of Oman LNG.

The ceremony, held at Crowne Plaza hotel on 7 March 2024, was attended by a number of distinguished guests from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the State Council, Oman LNG and Japanese companies, as well as his family and friends. Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultan-

ate of Oman, conferred the Order on Harib Al Kitani on behalf of the Government of Japan.

The Government of Japan announced on 3 November 2023, the conferment of the Order on Harib Al Kitani in recognition of his outstanding contribution to forge a long-established Japan-Oman partnerships and networks in the energy field, leading to continued collaboration towards clean energy and new business cooperation.

The Order of the Rising Sun, one of the prestigious decorations in Japan, was introduced in 1875.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Knowledge Oman signs MoU

Times News Service

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to strengthen the community engagement through strategic partnerships, Knowledge Oman has signed a MoU with Techno Plastic Industry SAOC, specialising in the manufacturing of plastic piping solutions to collaborate on community engagement and

social responsibility.

The signing ceremony was held on 19 March 2024 at the Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC.

The agreement was signed by Eng. Omar Ahmed Salim Qatan, CEO of Techno along with Tariq Hilal Al Barwani, Knowledge Oman Founder, in the presence of its senior management and executives of both organisation.

“Supporting community development and education as a whole is rooted in our Techno’s core values. Knowledge Oman’s commitment to enhancing learning opportunities and empowering individuals resonates deeply with our company’s goals,” said Omar bin Sulaiman Al-Bahri, the General Manager of Commercial Affairs at Techno Plastic Industry.

MARKETS COME ALIVE

Shopping for Ramadan

There’s a sense of camaraderie as we shop alongside our neighbours, bonding over shared traditions and culinary delights.”

As night descends, the markets come alive with a kaleidoscope of colours and sounds.

“The sight of lanterns adorning the stalls and the aroma of freshly baked breads and sweets evoke a sense of nostalgia,” remarks Ali Al Mashaikhi, a regular visitor to the Nizwa market.

Navigating through the bustling

alleys at the Muttrah Souq, customers are greeted by the sights and sounds of Omani craftsmanship. Ahmed Al Kulaibi, a resident of Muttrah said: “I love exploring the stalls, admiring the intricate designs of the silver jewellery and the vibrant hues of the textiles as he carefully selects gifts for his loved ones. Each item tells a story of Oman’s rich cultural heritage here in the souq”

Noora Al Kiyumi, a resident of Ibri said that Ramadan shopping

is “a time when the community comes together to celebrate the spirit of giving and gratitude.”

For many, the Ramadan market is more than just a place to shop - it’s a cherished tradition passed down through generations.

Said Al Sharji, a government employee, said: “I remember accompanying my grandparents to the market as a child. Now, as a father, I take my own children, passing on the same traditions and values.”

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COMMENTARY

A sand crystal of eternity



SALEH AL-SHAIBANY

I was wondering what it was like to be a grain of sand on the desert as the wind was blowing dust on my face when I was taking a walk an hour before Iftaar.

I stopped, shielded my face from the dust with my hand and waited long enough for the force of the wind to die down. Then I stepped out of the paved road and grabbed a fistful of sand. I rolled them from one hand to another just to feel their weight.

Then I parted my fingers and let the sand dropped down to the ground. I think people who passed me by thought I was crazy. Probably they were thinking the thirst and hunger pain of Ramadan was having its toll on me.

But I was oblivion to their stares and concentrated on the task in my hands. I looked at my right hand and picked the biggest grain. It was a crystalised grain of sand. I pressed it with my index finger and raised it above from

the rest. I picked up a piece of stray paper and dropped the tiny crystal on it. I let the sun shine on it. It was shining brightly as I rolled it from one side to another. I walked with it slowly towards a bench that faced the beach and sat down. The marvel of it captivated me and made me completely forget myself.

Then a cloud floated from nowhere and moved in front of the evening sun and blocked its golden rays. The tiny crystal on my hand lost its shine, too. That was the end of my admiration that laid on my hand. A few minutes later, the sun started descending fast on the horizon.

A thought passed my head. Why did I pick up a handful of sands? It took me a full minute to understand my impulsive action. We go on with our business and never bother to understand the tiny particles around us that are an integral part of our lives. Sands probably are the only part on earth that will live survive the eternity.

We walk on it while we live and end up buried or strewn in it when we are dead. So

to show my last respect, I gentle laid the crystal down on the beach sands and bid it goodbye. It was time to go back home because the sun was already half buried under the horizon.

While walking back to my car, I was conscious of where and how I placed my feet. I literally looked at my steps all the way to my car. There were sands everywhere. Every size and colour. I reached home in time just before the Iftaar.

In the rituals of breaking the fast, I forgot about the sands for a while and concentrated with other priorities. Until after eight in the evening when I decided to go out shopping.

As I was parking my car in the open courtyard, a truck was unloading sands just about twenty meters away from the car park. I got out of the car and looked at it.

Just less than a minute later, it finally dawned on me that I was getting obsessed with the sands. I smiled at myself and thought that I should find something better to do than marvel the splendid existence of the sands.

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GOVERNORATE OF MUSCAT

Muscat Municipal Council reviews recommendations

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Municipal Council of the Governorate of Muscat on Sunday held its 3rd meeting for 2024 under the chairmanship of Sayyid Saud Hilal Al Busaidi, Governor of Muscat.

The meeting approved the agenda of the 2nd meeting of the council which included several recommendations. It also reviewed other recommendations of several committees and touched on a spectrum of topics.

The Council reviewed the recommendations of the Health and Environment Affairs Committee for advanced boat project, which is supervised by the Oman Investment Authority, represented by the Oman Fish Development Group, and aims to develop the Omani fishing fleet and enable it

to make optimal and sustainable exploitation of living aquatic resources, and maintain the quality of fish products.

The Municipal Council agreed on the be'ah's recommendation for waste management in the Muscat Governorate by creating a unified and common framework among the competent authorities, educating the community about safe waste disposal methods, achieving environmental sustainability and improving the quality of life.

The Council reviewed a summary of the recommendations of its permanent committees, notably the recommendations of the Legal Affairs Committee regarding the challenges of implementing the regulations for scrap collection and trading in the Muscat Governorate.





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» RAMADAN WORDS



“The people will depart separated [into categories] to be shown [the result of] their deeds. So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it” [Quran 99:6-7]



» IFTAR RECIPE

Oneza Tabish

KATLESI ZA NYAMA



INGREDIENTS

- 6 potatoes; boiled and mashed
- 250 gms minced chicken
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp turmeric powder
- 1 tsp cumin powder
- 1/2 tsp coriander powder
- 1 small onion; finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic; minced
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 tbsp fresh coriander; roughly chopped
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups of Vegetable oil

- 1.Mash the potatoes with the back of a ladle .
2. In a pan, add the minced chicken followed by all the spices and cook until it browns.
3. Add in the onion, garlic and chilli. Cook on medium heat until the onions soften .
4. Squeeze in the juice of one lemon and turn the heat off. Set aside until the chicken mixture to cool.

ASSEMBLE:

1. Take 2 tablespoons of the mashed potato and form a patty shape. Cup your hand slightly and shape the potato mix by gently pressing it into your cupped hand.
2. Take a tablespoon of the chicken mixture and add it to the mashed potato.
3. Bring the sides of the potato together and form a ball.
4. Press gently to flatten.
5. In a bowl add two eggs and whisk well
6. Dip patties into the egg , then deep fry for 3-4 minutes each side on low flame till golden brown.
7. Serve hot .

» GOOD DEEDS

ZAKAT, AN ACT OF FINANCIAL CHARITY

By time, verily man is in loss. Except such as have faith, and do good deeds, and (join together) in the mutual enjoining of truth, and of patience and constancy. (Sura Al Asr 103:1-3)

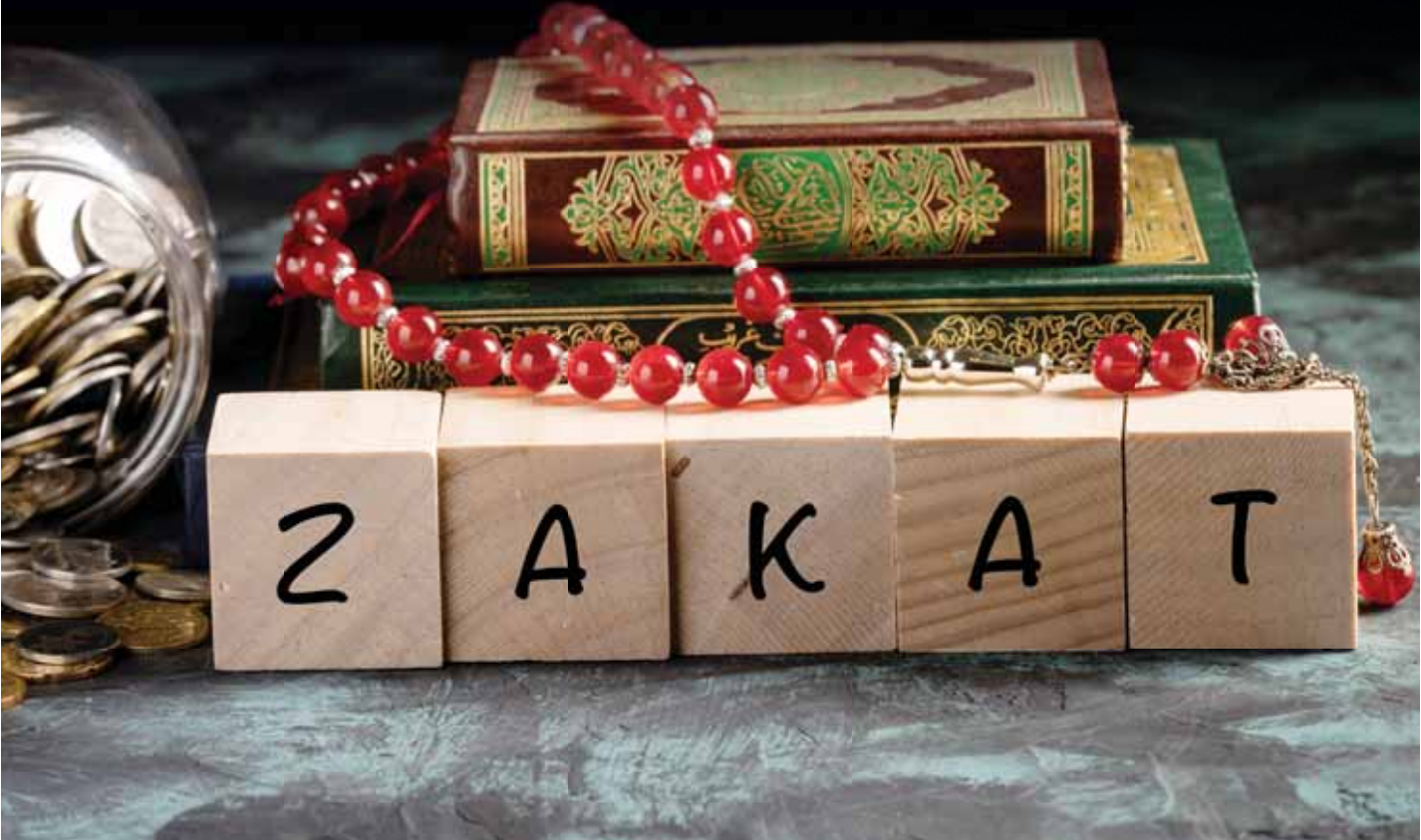
One of the seven pillars of Islam is Zakat, an act of financial charity, which is obligatory for those who have excess wealth.

The literal meaning of Zakat is ‘to cleanse’. In the Islamic faith, Zakat means purifying your wealth for the will of Allah by acknowledging that everything we own belongs to Him and as a means of working towards the betterment of the Muslim Ummah.

The main purpose of Zakat is to provide for the poor so that they can celebrate the festival of breaking the fast along with the rest of the Muslims.

Every Muslim is required to pay Zakat as a token of thankfulness to God for having enabled him or her to observe the obligatory fast.

Though Zakat is not always financial, and can include everything from volunteering your time to giving an encouraging word to your fellow man. However, giving Zakat is not the only way to bless those around you during the Holy Month, and there are other charitable acts that can be performed in the name of Allah and as a blessing on both the giver and the recipient.



IN SINAW

Resources Market Project to boost growth



IBRA: The Resources Market Project in the Wilayat of Sinaw, North Al Sharqiyah Governorate is one of the national projects that would boost economic development and support competitiveness. It will also provide the local and regional markets with various products. The project is currently at the tendering stage after being announced by the Secretariat General of the Tender Board recently. Mahmoud bin Yahya Al Zahli, Governor of North Al Sharqiyah, said that since the administrative level of the Wilayat of Sinaw has been upgraded from niyabat level to the level of wilayat, efforts are being extended for development of the wilayat. The wilayat is considered a key

economic centre at the local level, he said, adding the wilayat would see urban planning and development and would play a major role in food industries. He said that the resources market project would be one of the major projects in the industrial area of the Wilayat of Sinaw. He said that the project to link the road with the industrial area of the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi and the industrial zone in the wilayat of Sinaw is ongoing. The significance of the resources market is that it would meet the requirements of a market specialised in trading of cattle and would serve the various wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman, he added. "We aspire to invest in this field

in the absence of competitors," he said, adding that the project would provide all needs of consumers in terms of meat and would guarantee provision of a spacious area for selling fodder. He said that the project would include basic facilities, mainly a central integrated market, an administration building, shops for sale of birds, veterinary clinic, an open auction area and service and logistics facilities among others. Zubaida bint Salim Al Shizani, spokesperson of the Office of the Governor of North Al Sharqiyah, said that the resources market would provide direct job opportunities for citizens and is expected to create over 150 direct jobs. -ONA

HM sends greetings

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Katerina Sakellaropoulou of the Republic of Greece on her country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Sakellaropoulou and the people of Greece. -ONA



MARCH 21

Ministry celebrates Down Syndrome International Day

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuous Learning and the School of Intellectual Education, celebrated the Down Syndrome International Day, which this year comes under the slogan "Ending the Stereotype." The function was held under the patronage of artist Alia Al Farsi, in the presence of Dr. Thuraiya Al Rashidi, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuous Learning at the School of Intellectual Education. The ceremony coincides with the celebration of the Down Syndrome International Day, which falls on March 21 every year in accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 149/66 of December 2011, which proclaims 21 March as International Down Syndrome Day to be observed annually to raise awareness. The ceremony included the inauguration of the logo of the

School of Intellectual Education, which includes symbolic connotations of the mentally disabled students who need care until they gradually acquire skills. The winning videos were shown carrying a message for people with Down Syndrome. After that, artist Alia Al Farsi, honoured the winners of the competition. The celebration was accompanied by an exhibition aimed at highlighting the artistic works of students with Down Syndrome, and the presentation of the Banan Student Company, which is concerned with printing students' drawings on fabric, in addition to the presentation of the "With Us, Your Lesson is More Enjoyable" initiative. It is an initiative targeting students with mental disabilities, based on the principles of designing interactive electronic content, beginning with the analysis phase and ends with the production phase of interactive lessons in which the student is the focus of the learning process.

DHOFAR GOVERNORATE

OETC signs pacts worth OMR322mn to expand electricity transmission network

MUSCAT: Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) celebrated on Sunday the signing of the agreement of the 'strategic project (Rabt, Phase 2) and the projects on expanding the electricity transmission projects in Dhofar Governorate at a cost of OMR322 million. The celebration was organised at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), under the patronage of Dr. Mansour bin Talib Al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation. The ceremony included the signing of agreements with Larsen and Toubro, Oman National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC), Zawawi Powertech Engineering and Bahwan Engineering. The OMR257 million Rabt, Phase 2 project includes the establishment of three power stations with the capacity of 400 kilovolts and overhead power lines with capacity of 400 kilovolts for



over 590 kilometres. The project is aimed to connect the main transmission network with the Dhofar electricity network through establishment of transmission lines between Duqm industrial station (400/132 KV) and Dhofar power station (400/132 KV) which will be established within the project in the Wilayat of Salalah. This is in addition to the estab-



lishment of Shaleem Electricity Transmission Station. The project also includes establishment of electricity transmission lines (400 KV) to two wind power stations at Ras Madraka (300 megawatts) and Harweel area (200 megawatts) besides connection of Thamrait station (400/132 KV). The project is scheduled to be completed by 2027.

The OMR65 million electricity transmission network projects in Dhofar Governorate include electricity transmission lines (132 KV) for 269 kilometres to connect Wilayat of Al Mazyoona with the Niyabat of Shalh Asaib besides establishment of three electricity transmission stations (132 KV). The project is scheduled to be completed by 2025. -ONA

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Ramadan
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Program

The Prophet (ﷺ) said "Whoever breaks the fast for a fasting person, will have a reward similar to his reward, however, nothing is detracted from the reward of a fasting person".

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UNDERSECRETARY OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Copy of credentials of Zambian envoy received

MUSCAT: Sheikh Khalifa Ali Al Harthy, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs received here on Sunday a copy of credentials of Duncan Mulima, Ambassador of the Republic of Zambia appointed to the Sultanate of Oman.

The Political Affairs Undersecretary welcomed the ambassador, wishing him success in carrying out his duties. He also wished the bilateral relations between the two countries further development and growth.

The meeting was attended by officials from the Foreign Ministry. — **ONA**



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Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Mohamed Issa Al Zedjali
Deputy Editor-in-Chief: Anees bin Essa Al Zedjali
Chief Executive Officer: Ahmed Essa Al Zedjali

EDITORIAL: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24813153, E-mail: editor@timesofoman.com
ADVERTISING: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24812624, E-mail: advertising@timesofoman.com
CIRCULATION: Telephone: 24726666, Fax: 24818270, E-mail: circulation@timesofoman.com

IFTAR PARTY ORGANISED BY QURAN STUDY CENTRE IN RUWI

A special Iftar party, in a spirit of unity and brotherhood, was organised by the Quran Study Centre in Ruwi.

— Pictures by Purushothaman K/Times of Oman



Trump and Biden win respective primaries, gear up for a rematch

As per the latest projections, both Trump and Biden are expected to win with over 88 per cent of the votes

WASHINGTON DC: Former US President Donald Trump, continuing his winning streak in the race to the White House, registered victory in the Republican primaries in the state of Louisiana and Illinois, The Hill reported, citing Decision Desk HQ projections.

President Joe Biden won the Louisiana Democratic presidential primary, according to the projection from Decision Desk HQ.

As per the latest projections, both Trump and Biden are expected to win with over 88 per cent of votes.

There are a total of 47 delegates in the state of Louisiana.

Trump carried Louisiana in the 2020 election, bringing in 58 per cent of the vote, over Biden's 40 percent. He also won the state in 2016 against former Secretary of



State Hillary Clinton, The Hill reported. Earlier this week, Trump also won the Illinois Republican primary.

Notably, Trump has already achieved the required delegate threshold he needs to secure the Republican nominations, and his wins only add to his winning streak on the GOP side.

Trump clinched the Republican nomination for president on March 13, while Biden secured the Democratic nomination a day before.

The long-anticipated rematch of Trump and Biden is expected to

mirror the 2020 campaign, though Trump will run this time under the spectre of 91 felony charges related to allegations that he plotted to overturn his 2020 election defeat, CNN reported.

The charges included that he played a lead role in the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol; illegally took classified documents from the White House; and covered up hush money payments to an adult film star ahead of the 2016 election.

Another looming concern for Trump is the approaching deadline to secure a half-billion-dollar

bond to appeal his civil fraud case in New York, CNN reported, citing multiple sources.

Trump's lawyers acknowledged Monday that he was struggling to find an insurance company willing to underwrite his USD 454 million bond.

Earlier this week, the New York attorney general's office has filed judgements in Westchester County, which is being considered the first indication that the state is preparing to seize Trump's golf course and private estate north of Manhattan, known as Seven Springs. — **DW**

WEST AFRICAN COUNTRY

Guinea-Bissau opposition fears ‘dictatorship’

BISSAU: Since Umaro Sissoco Embalo became president of Guinea-Bissau three years ago, he has gradually led the West African country into a grave political crisis.

Sissoco, as he is popularly known, has systematically clashed with political opponents, parliament and other state institutions.

It began with a failed coup attempt in 2022, to which he responded with a wave of arrests of opposition figures.

In December 2023, the country saw clashes between members of the National Guard and special forces of the presidential guard, which left two people dead.

Sissoco described the violence as an “attempted coup” after which he dissolved the Bissau-Guinean parliament and dismissed the elected government.

He said that the nation had been plunged into crisis and fresh elections would be held.

Umaro Sissoco Embalo, 51, is a former Brigadier General who belongs to the Madem-G15 party, a splinter group of the former liberation movement and the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC).

Before being elected president, Sissoco served as prime minister between 2016 and 2018.

During the presidential elections in December 2019, he won 54% of the votes against his arch-rival from the PAIGC party, Domingos Simoes Pereira.

Many citizens see freedom and democracy at risk and Guinea-Bissau heading towards dictatorship, but few dare to openly criticize the president.

Former Minister of Justice, Carmelita Pires, is one of the few who speaks out without reservation.

Since Sissoco came to power, she feels reminded of the dark times of the Marxist single-party system that was only replaced by



a multi-party system in Guinea-Bissau in 1994.

“Sissoco disregards all principles of our rule of law by consolidating all powers,” Pires said.

“As president and self-appointed prime minister, he controls the executive. At the same time, he puts pressure on the judiciary. And after dissolving the parliament, he also conditions the legislative,” the lawyer said in a video message to DW.

Carmelita Pires suggested that

Sissoco clearly exhibits “dictatorial behavior.”

Bubacar Ture, president of the Guinean League for Human Rights, also sees democracy in danger.

“We have a government that was formed solely at the initiative of the President, without the approval of Parliament,” said Ture.

“This concentrates too much power in the person of the President. Currently, the rule of law and democracy in Guinea-Bissau are

de facto suspended.”

In December 2023, Sissoco dissolved the country's parliament, which had been elected just six months earlier — on June 4, 2023.

The elections did not result in a victory for Sissoco's Madem G15 party but for the coalition PAI TERRA RANKA (“Our Country Forward!”) led by the PAIGC, with an absolute majority.

However, Sissoco refused to entrust the formation of the government to the chairman of the PAIGC, Pereira.

It was only after a significant delay that he appointed the vice-chairman of the PAIGC, Geraldo Martins, as prime minister. However, the government lasted only a few months.

In December 2023, Sissoco used the arrest of several PAIGC government members suspected of corruption as a pretext to dissolve the parliament and thereby dismiss the PAIGC government.

Sissoco announced that new

parliamentary elections will be held later this year, preferably in June. However, according to observers, the conditions for new elections are not met — purely organisationally.

“The National Electoral Commission responsible for organising and conducting elections is legally unable to organize new elections,” lawyer Carmelita Pires told DW.

The terms of the commission members, who would have to be appointed by parliament, have long expired. And since parliament has been dissolved, it is practically impossible for the various parties to agree on the composition of a new electoral commission in the medium term.

“Under these circumstances, we will definitely not be able to conduct free, fair, and legal elections in the near future,” said Pires.

How does Sissoco respond to accusations of wanting to establish a dictatorship?

“This is typical for Africa: If

someone, like me, ensures order and discipline, he is immediately called a dictator. But I am nothing like a dictator! I am a man of the people!” Sissoco said in a video message he spread via Facebook at the end of 2023.

And this week, at a press conference on the sidelines of the weekly cabinet meeting, Sissoco warned political activists in the country not to insult him or his family. People who defame him would be relentlessly pursued, “even to China,” said the president.

Sissoco usually avoids critical journalists. Since taking office, several interview requests from DW have also remained unanswered.

At the same time, Sissoco is trying to polish his image on the international stage.

In July 2022, he assumed the chairmanship of West African bloc ECOWAS for a year and received much praise and respect from heads of state of powerful countries in the region during that time.

Sissoco claimed to have won Senegalese President Macky Sall as a close ally, for example, repeatedly asserting this on social media.

In May 2023, he participated in a mission of six African heads of state who attempted to mediate in Russia's war in Ukraine.

And earlier this month, Sissoco traveled to Israel and the West Bank, where he met with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas and discussed the possibilities of a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

Sissoco enjoys the role of African peacemaker.

“I have succeeded in repositioning Guinea-Bissau on the world stage. Guinea is a small country in terms of the size of its territory, but I have proven that there are no small states,” he told reporters. — **DW**

Death toll from Israeli aggression in Gaza Strip reaches 32,226

The occupation forces committed 8 massacres during the past 24 hours against families in the Gaza Strip, resulting in 84 martyrs and 106 wounded

GAZA: The death toll from the ongoing Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip since October 7 has risen to 32,226 martyrs, the majority of whom are children and women, along with 74,518 wounded, Palestinian medical sources announced. The occupation forces committed 8 massacres during the past 24



hours against families in the Gaza Strip, resulting in 84 martyrs and 106 wounded, Palestinian news agency (WAFA) reported. Sources pointed out that a num-

ber of victims are still under the rubble and on the roads with ambulances and civil defence crews unable to reach them due to preventions of the occupation.

The Israeli occupation continues its brutal aggression against the Gaza Strip by land, sea, and air for the 170th consecutive day, causing a human catastrophe in



the Strip, especially during the holy month of Ramadan.

Dozens of colonists storm Al Aqsa Mosque
Occupied Jerusalem: Dozens of colonists stormed the courtyards of Al-Aqsa Mosque on Sunday, guarded by the Israeli occupation police. Dozens of colonists broke into Al-Aqsa Mosque from the Maghrebi Gate under heavy protection of the Israeli occupation police, amidst extremist colonists from the temple groups, the Palestin-

ian news agency (WAFA) quoted eyewitnesses as saying. The occupation police also tightened procedures at the gates of Al-Aqsa and the main gates of Old Jerusalem. They returned the young men and did not allow them to enter Al-Aqsa in the meantime. The colonists carried out provocative tours in Al-Aqsa courtyards and performed Talmudic rituals, WAFA added. The occupation forces also stormed Al-Qibli mosque to secure the colonists' storming of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque. — ONA

SLOVAKIA

Presidential poll proceeds to runoff

BRATISLAVA: Polls closed in the first round of Slovakia's presidential election on Saturday, with the country headed for a runoff round. The runoff round will pit the Russia-leaning ruling camp, represented by Peter Pellegrini, against pro-Ukraine candidate and liberal ex-foreign minister Ivan Korcook. Korcook seemed to be leading with over 40% of the votes. A runoff, scheduled for April 6, is in order if no candidate secures over 50% of the vote. Slovaks are electing a successor to Zuzana Caputova, the country's first female president, after she decided not to seek a second term. The outgoing president, who has sued the country's Prime Minister Robert Fico for labeling her a traitor, says she does not have the energy to stay on for another five years, citing threats against her family amid a turbulent period in Slovakian politics. Caputova said she hoped her successor would "represent our country abroad well." The presidential post is widely seen as ceremonial, with executive power resting on the prime minister's shoulders. Nine candidates are vying for the role of Slovakia's sixth head of state since it became independent in 1993. — DW

FESTIVAL OF COLOURS

Markets soak in Holi colours, traders see surge in sales

NEW DELHI: On the eve of Holi celebrations, the fervour, frolic, and essence of the festival have hit markets across the country, which are filled with vibrant colours, toys, and different items selling in the market to add up to the festival. People across the country are flocking to markets to purchase sweets, and colors. Streets are filled with temporary shops selling gulal, colours, toys, and other decor. The people of Madhya Pradesh, thronged the markets ahead of the Holi celebration to purchase gulal and different items to decorate their homes. Balloons, water guns, and face masks. Also, shops are seen selling, masks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, touching the political landscape with Lok Sabha polls just around the corner. In addition, the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL) has made an effective impact on the market, as, due to the IPL, water guns with images of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma are in great demand. The shopkeepers hope for good sales in this festive season. Not only the Indians but also the foreign tourists from all over the world can be seen enjoying the festival in different parts of the country.



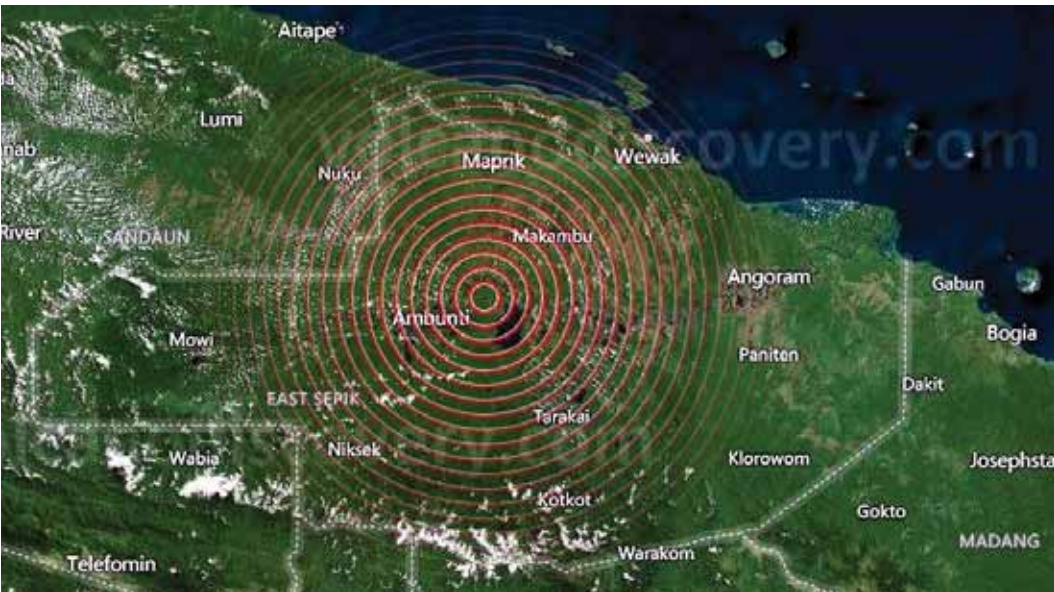
Ahead of the Holi celebrations, tourists were seen flocking to Pushkar to get a taste of the famous 'Pushkar ki Holi'. One of the tourists who visited Pushkar expressed his happiness and said that he was very excited to celebrate the festival of colours here. "Today, I feel very happy to be here. It's a very holy place. I feel good energy from the local people. It just feels very nice. I am excited to feel the festival here," he told ANI.

Streets are decorated with lights and colours all over the country on the occasion of Holi. Every year, Holi is celebrated with a whole lot of pomp and grandeur all over the country. One of the most popular pilgrimage sites where Holi is celebrated with great fervour and enthusiasm is the Mahakaleshwar Temple in Ujjain. People in Ujjain celebrated 'Phoolon Wali Holi' on Sunday. A huge number of devotees thronged the temple to witness

the frenzied version of Holi. The 'Ganwar Maar' dance ritual was also performed at Phagun Madai in Dantewada, Chhattisgarh, ahead of Holi. Holi, a festival celebrated with as much fervour in the country as it is overseas, will be marked on March 25, Monday, this year. The festival is preceded by a ritual of lighting bonfires called Holika Dahan, signifying the burning of the demon Holika. Some of the country's oldest and most popular pilgrimage

sites, such as Vrindavan, Mathura, and Barsana, draw revellers on this day, smearing themselves with the colours of Holi. The festival is dedicated to Lord Krishna, who is believed to have spent a considerable amount of time in a region called Braj in Uttar Pradesh. It not only replicates the spirit of Holi but also impersonates the timeless love of Radha and Krishna. Braj Ki Holi is one of the most vibrant of all Holi celebrations in the country. — ANI

PACIFIC TSUNAMI WARNING CENTRE



6.9-magnitude earthquake strikes Papua New Guinea

PORT MORESBY: An earthquake measuring 6.9 magnitude on the Richter scale on Sunday hit northern Papua New Guinea, according to US Institute of Geophysics. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre said that there is no threat of a tsunami due to the earthquake which occurred at a depth of approximately 35 km. The earthquake occurred about 88 km southwest of Wewak, a town of 25,000 people and the capital of East Sepik Province in Papua New Guinea, the US Geo-

logical Survey (USGS) said. There were no immediate reports of casualties or material damage, and the intensity of the earthquake was reduced after it was initially declared a magnitude of 7.

Sparsely populated
Although earthquakes rarely cause widespread damage in the country, which is dominated by forested highlands and sparsely populated, they sometimes cause devastating landslides. At least seven people were

killed in April last year (2023), when a 7-magnitude earthquake struck a forested area inside the country. Papua New Guinea is located in the so-called Ring of Fire, a region that extends along the coast of the Pacific Ocean and is characterized by high seismic and volcanic activity. This region includes 90 percent of the active volcanoes in the world. A devastating earthquake rocked the country in February 2018, leaving at least 100 people killed, and dozens of villages buried. — ONA



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SPORTS

Samson powers Royals to victory



Rajasthan skipper's unbeaten knock of 82 coupled with disciplined bowling help the hosts beat Lucknow Super Giants by 20 runs

JAIPUR: Captain Sanju Samson smashed an unbeaten 82 (52 balls) and some brilliant powerplay and slog-overs bowling led Rajasthan Royals (RR) to get off to a winning start with a 20-run win over Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) in the IPL 2024 at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur on Sunday. Samson and Riyan Parag (43 off 29) stitched a brilliant 93-run stand off 59 balls to help Royals post a competitive 193/4. Rajasthan pacers, Trent Boult and

Nandre Burger, then set the tone with three wickets in the powerplay while Sandeep Sharma, R Ashwin and Avesh Khan bowled brilliantly in the slog overs to stall Lucknow's fightback as they defended 60 off the last five overs. Chasing 194, LSG were jolted early as Boult picked up a wicket in the first over, sending back Quinton de Kock. He made it two in two overs, cleaning up Devdutt Padikkal with a beauty. Burger then picked up his maiden IPL wicket as he had Ayush Badoni caught at mid off. LSG sent in Deepak Hooda as their Impact Player, replacing Yash Thakur. He started off aggressively straight away, hitting a six and a four off his first three balls. He got together with KL Rahul and took the aggressive route, bringing up LSG's 50 in the seventh over. Yuzvendra Chahal was brought into the attack, and the leg-spinner struck in the first over, dismissing Hooda. After a couple of frugal overs, Nicholas Pooran and Rahul upped the ante as Rahul took the attack to Burger, cracking a six and a couple of fours to

take 17 runs off his over. Pooran, too, changed gears as he smashed a couple of sixes and a four to take 20 runs off Boult. Rahul brought up his fifty off 35 balls. The pair added 85 runs, but with 49 needed off 24, Sharma provided a crucial moment in the match, having Rahul (58 off 44) caught at deep point. Royals struck again in quick succession as R Ashwin had Marcus Stoinis caught at deep mid-wicket. In between, Pooran brought up his fifty off 30 balls. With 38 needed off 12, Pooran cracked a couple of fours off Sharma, but it was still a good over for Rajasthan as it went for just 11. With 27 required off 6, Avesh Khan bowled a superb last over to give away just six runs to secure the win. Pooran remained unbeaten on 64 off 41 balls. Earlier, the home side were jolted early as Naveen-ul-Haq had Jos Buttler caught behind in the second over. Yashasvi Jaiswal and Samson mixed caution with aggression and added 36 off 18 balls. The pair had hit a four and two sixes off the fifth over from Mohsin Khan, but the LSG pacer

bounced back to dismiss the dangerous Jaiswal (24 off 12). The LSG spinners slowed down things, but the introduction of pacer Yash Thakur saw Samson and Parag up the ante as they hit three sixes in the 9th over to accumulate 21 runs. While Krunal Pandya kept things tight and finished his spell with figures of 4-0-19-0, Samson and Parag went after Ravi Bishnoi, cracking a couple of sixes to bring up the team's hundred in the 11th over and the 50-run stand as well. Samson brought up his half-century off 33 balls. The pair added 93 off 59 balls before Naveen finally provided the much-needed breakthrough dismissing Parag (43 off 29) in the 15th over. Bishnoi then had Shimron Hetmyer caught behind. Samson and Dhruv Jurel, though, continued the momentum and took the team to 193/4. Jurel stayed unbeaten at 20. **Brief scores:** Rajasthan Royals 192/4 (Sanju Samson 82*, Riyan Parag 43; Naveen-ul-Haq 2-41) beat Lucknow Super Giants 173/6 (KL Rahul 58, Nicholas Pooran 64*, Trent Boult 2-35, Sandeep Sharma 1-22). - Agencies

KOLKATA VS HYDERABAD

Klaasen's effort in vain as KKR clinch a thriller



KOLKATA: Heinrich Klaasen of Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) nearly stole victory away from Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) at Eden Gardens on Saturday, but the 22-year-old Harshit Rana successfully defended 12 off the final over to take the hosts over the line in a last-ball thriller.

With momentum on their side, Sunrisers had a dream start to the 20th over when Klaasen pulled Harshit for six over square leg. But the seamer followed it up with two singles, two wickets and one dot in the next five balls to seal the deal. Earlier, it was Sunil Narine's 1 for 19 in four overs on a batting-friendly surface - the spell included zero boundaries - which kept Sunrisers quiet through the middle overs. His economy of 4.75 was a complete outlier on a surface where bowlers, whether experienced or not, went for a lot. That had given KKR the upper hand with three overs to go, with Sunrisers needing 60 in 18 balls. But Klaasen's 29-ball 63, laced with eight sixes, dragged Sunrisers back into the contest.

KKR also had Andre Russell, Phil Salt and Ramandeep Singh to thank for their first-innings score of 208. From 51 for 4, the hosts rebuilt courtesy Salt's 40-ball 54 on KKR debut and a 17-ball 35 from Ramandeep. Russell put the finishing touches to the KKR innings by smacking seven sixes in his 25-ball, unbeaten 64. Later KKR skipper Shreyas Iyer said that he backed pacer Rana in the final over. "Right from the 17th over, I had but-

TODAY'S MATCH

Royal Challengers Bengaluru vs Punjab Kings

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terflies in my stomach. Felt anything could happen in the last over. They needed 13 runs and we didn't have the most experienced bowler. But I had the belief in him (Harshit), and I told him to back himself and it doesn't matter what happens. He was a bit nervous coming in, and I just looked him in the eye and told him 'this is your moment, buddy.' Told him to back himself and it doesn't matter what happens in the game." Talking about performances of Russell and Sunil Narine, with the latter not giving a boundary in his spell, Iyer said "They have such experience. Great to see Andre perform with bat and ball, and even Sunny (Narine) was splendid with the ball. Fantastic to have them around." He added: "Always gives you motivation when you start with a win. This game also gives us a lot of learnings, there is a lot we will take from this ground. I think fielding is an area we need to improve on." **Brief scores:** Kolkata Knight Riders 208/7 in 20 overs (Andre Russell 64*, Phil Salt 54; T Natarajan 3/32, Markande 3/39) beat Sunrisers Hyderabad 204/7 (Heinrich Klaasen 63; Harshit Rana 3/33). - Agencies



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MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER

The MSX index closed at 4,793.14 points, up by 0.04 per cent from previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.40 per cent at 439.46 points. Dhofar Generating, up 9.68 per cent, was the top gainer while Oman Cables Industry, down 4.46 per cent, was the top loser.

Passenger air traffic surpasses pre-pandemic levels: ICAO

Demand this year is forecast to be around 3 percent above 2019 levels and could reach 4 percent if the pace of recovery strengthens in the routes that have not yet reached pre-pandemic levels



MONTREAL: In the first quarter of 2024, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) projected that passenger air traffic levels will be around 2 percent higher than in 2019, with airlines expected to sustain their operating profitability seen in 2023.

Demand this year is forecast to be around 3 percent above 2019 levels and could reach 4 percent if the pace of recovery strengthens in the routes that have not yet reached pre-pandemic levels. This translates to a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of around 0.5 percent over the 2019-2024 period.

“The commitment of ICAO’s Member States to aligning their pandemic responses with the guidance developed by the ICAO Council has been crucial to the recovery of their air services,” remarked ICAO Council President Salvatore Sciacchitano. “The implementation of ICAO’s post-pandemic guidance is now equally crucial to ensuring the resilience and sustainability of this recovery.”

Global demand expressed in Freight Tonne-Kilometres (FTK) is forecast to be around 2 percent below 2019 levels for the full year

2024. This decline is mainly reflective of anticipated reductions in demand due to overall economic weakness worldwide.

“The aspirational goals agreed upon by governments towards the decarbonisation of air transport by 2050 are supporting the environmental sustainability of the recovery and future development of the global air transport network,” remarked ICAO Secretary General Juan Carlos Salazar.

“This is further driven by initiatives led by ICAO to accelerate the development and implemen-

tation of the technologies, operational improvements, and cleaner aviation energies that decarbonisation requires. ICAO’s latest air traffic forecasts are promising for global development and a reminder that the global community must accelerate its sustainability efforts, particularly to assure the production and deployment of sustainable aviation fuels in sufficient quantities.”

These forecasts come with the caveat that risks affecting international air transport do not escalate from current levels.

ICAO’s latest analysis also reveals new insights into aviation for the previous year 2023, revealing that air traffic on most routes had already reached or surpassed pre-pandemic levels by the end of the year. This is aligned with ICAO’s earlier prediction of an almost complete recovery of passenger air traffic, namely around 95 percent of 2019 pre-pandemic levels globally by the end of 2023.

The major regional routes which surpassed the 2019 levels by the end of 2023 are Intra-Europe; Europe to/from North America,

Middle East, South West Asia and Africa; North America to/from Latin America and the Caribbean, South West Asia, South East Asia, and Pacific; and Middle East to/from South West Asia and Africa.

Most international Asian routes, except for those serving South West Asia, continue to have substantially lowered traffic levels in 2023 compared to pre-pandemic levels. Cargo traffic expressed as FTK in 2023 is estimated to be 3 percent below 2019 pre-pandemic levels reflecting the world economy.

Despite high fuel prices and economic uncertainties, airlines’ 2023 total operating profits are estimated at \$39 billion, in line with the 2019 levels. This profit is mainly due to increased passenger yields and productivity gains achieved by the industry. Similarly, compared to previous years, airlines in North America and Europe captured the majority of the industry’s profits.

ICAO produces a Monthly Monitor that provides aviation stakeholders with access to comprehensive snapshots and in-depth analysis of economic and aviation indicators, empowering them with actionable insights to navigate the complexities of the aviation landscape.

Through monthly updates and customisable features, the Monthly Monitor allows stakeholders to stay up-to-date on data that facilitates informed decision-making and strategic planning. -WAM

‘THE LITTLE ENTREPRENEUR’



Alizz Islamic Bank and SME Development Authority continue to raise financial awareness among children

MUSCAT: As part of the joint efforts to raise awareness of entrepreneurial culture at a young age and to enhance the quality of life for future generations; Alizz Islamic Bank joined hands with the SME Development Authority recently to launch a mobile game for children.

“The Little Entrepreneur” mobile game is available for download on the Apple App store and the GooglePlay store and is an educational game that provides a virtual experience where children can learn the concepts of savings and entrepreneurship skills. The game enables children to engage and interact with entrepreneurial challenges. The game includes developing skills such as financial planning, organising project resources, tools and educates children about the value of saving and investment.

With a strong belief in supporting Omani SMEs; Alizz Islamic Bank and the SME Development Authority collaborated with FRAMEZEN a local Omani SME on the Development of the mobile game. The bank has always worked hand in hand with Omani talents to achieve common goals.

Alizz Islamic Bank’s continuous efforts on raising financial awareness across various initiatives because it is imperative for today’s children and youth to have a solid understanding of basic financial concepts and skills to navigate their way through a successful and sustainable future.

The idea of sharing knowledge in a fun and exciting approach was the key element while developing the mobile game. The aim of the concept was to empower children and have them experience a jour-

ney of entrepreneurship through modern ways.

Speaking about the concept of the game, Asaad Al Kharusi, Chief Operating Officer at Alizz Islamic Bank said “financial concepts like saving, spending and financing, investing are key for building the foundation of financial literacy and in this modern era there is no better way for a child to learn than via interactive methods. We are honoured to have partnered with the SME Development Authority to give children a fun way to learn about entrepreneurship and the importance of saving.”

Also touching upon the importance of financial literacy Qais Al Tobi, General Supervisor of the Promising Omani Start-ups Programme of the SME Development Authority said “The SME Development Authority constantly works on initiatives to increase financial awareness and entrepreneurial culture through various initiatives. This comes from a dedicated vision in instilling this culture in children and youth so that they have a strong understanding of the basic financial skills to prepare for a successful future.”

Alizz Islamic Bank has embarked on many projects that have a positive impact on society. The goal being to strive to provide a better life for the people beyond their banking needs. Accompanied by a belief that investing in sustainable initiatives is the decisive element in creating a brighter future for the country and its people.

It is worth noting that the bank recently launched ‘Alizz Business’ a special value proposition for SMEs that meets all their banking requirements.

SUSTAINABLE ROLE

Dar Al Atta’a launches two programmes for renewable energy, water treatment

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Dar Al Atta’a Association has launched two programmes in San’a Bani Ghafar within the Al Khaburah region, in a neighbourhood named ‘Hay Al Ata’a’, targeted to support families previously affected by Cyclone Shaheen.

In partnership with bp Oman and Nafath Renewable Energy, the first programme aims to provide 10.5 kW solar energy systems to 36 houses, 20 kW to a mosque and a multipurpose hall, as well as 10 solar-powered street lighting units.

Maryam Al Zadjali, Member of the State Council and Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Association remarked, “We are delighted for our partnership in implementing these programmes, given its prominent and sustainable role in reducing operational costs for the beneficiaries. This contributes to environmental conservation and raises awareness in the community about the importance of green energy.”

This environmentally friendly system is expected to displace approximately 640 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions and toxic substances annually as well as reduce the electricity costs in general, aligning with comprehensive environmental goals aimed at promoting the use of re-



newable energy.

Abdullah Al Saidi, CEO of Nafath Renewable Energy added, “We take pride in implementing this programme, as we believe in its numerous benefits in enhancing living conditions through the implementation of sustainable and renewable energy solutions.”

In partnership with bp Oman and 4 Elements, the second programme, ‘Kubota Jokhasou’, focuses on installing a decentralised wastewater treatment system capable of producing 1.4 cubic me-

ters of treated water daily, promoting sustainable reuse practices.

Moosa Al Khatri, General Director of 4Elements said: “We are thrilled to launch the ‘Kubota Jokhasou’ programme, which reflects our commitment towards sustainability. Our main aim is to become a pioneer in water reuse, establishing a benchmark for responsible resource management.”

“Moreover, through this initiative, we aspire to foster positive consumption habits to build a greener future by

adopting sustainable practices.”

Ibrahim Al Hinal, Social Investment Manager at bp Oman, Kuwait and Qatar, commented: “Our partnership with Dar Al Atta’a aligns with bp’s sustainability aims and our purpose to reimagine energy for our people and planet.”

“The programmes reflect the priorities outlined in Oman’s 2040 Vision concerning environmental considerations, natural resource management, and sustainable development goals.”

CHINA FOCUS

European enterprises eye investment opportunities in China’s Hubei Province

WUHAN: The 2024 Cherry Blossom Viewing: Business Cooperation & Fortune Global 500 with Hubei, a talk platform, held a series of activities in Wuhan, central China’s Hubei Province, with an eye on international cooperation between European enterprises and Hubei.

More than 600 attendees, including diplomatic envoys, representatives of domestic and overseas governmental agencies and international economic organisations, as well as executives of Fortune Global 500 enterprises and

well-known multinational companies, were involved in discussions on deepening investment in the Chinese market, promoting green and open development, and enhancing supply chain efficiency. Hubei is a vital growth pole for the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt. It has great market vitality and serves as the financial and technological centre of central China.

Over the years, the province has been working closely with European countries to facilitate the expansion and improvement of

bilateral trade and investment.

According to the provincial department of commerce, Hubei’s total foreign trade volume with Europe was 124.12 billion yuan (about \$17.5 billion) in 2023, up 28.3 percent year on year.

There are about 700 European companies that have invested in Hubei, including 74 Fortune Global 500 firms. Ezhou Huahu Airport, located in the city of Ezhou in Hubei, has successfully opened international freight routes to countries such as Belgium and Germany, and China-

Europe freight trains now serve 109 cities in 40 countries across Eurasia, with over 1,000 train trips operated last year.

“We’ve been deeply involved over 40 years in the Chinese market, and we are one of China’s largest foreign investors in electricity generation with nuclear power,” said Fabrice Fourcade, chairman and CEO of EDF (China) Holding Ltd., at a celebration of the 10th anniversary of an agreement to build the Sino-French Wuhan Ecological Demonstration City. -Xinhua

MARKET

MSX index ends higher

Dhofar Generating, up 9.68 per cent, was the top gainer while Oman Cables Industry, down 4.46 per cent, was the top loser



MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,793.14 points, up by 0.04 per cent from previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.40 per cent at 439.46 points. Dhofar Generating, up 9.68 per cent, was the top gainer while Oman Cables Industry, down 4.46 per cent, was the top loser. Shares of Oman & Emirates Investment were the most active in terms of number of shares traded as well as in terms of turnover. A total number of 960 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating turnover of OMR6.03 million, with more than 53.97 million shares changing hands. Out of 47 traded securities, 19 advanced, 15 declined, and 13 remained unchanged. At the session close, GCC & Arab investors were net sellers for OMR2017,000 while domestic investors were net buyers for OMR1840,000, followed by foreign investors for OMR176,000 worth of shares. Financial Index closed at 7,436.14 points, up 0.03 per cent. Prices of Muscat Finance, Taageer Finance, Bank Nizwa, Sohar International Bank, Oman United Insurance were up by 2.13 per cent, 1.85 per cent, 1.01 per

cent, 0.89 per cent, 0.70 per cent respectively. Prices of United Finance, Al Sharqia Investment, Ominvest, Bank Muscat were down by 1.72 per cent, 1.35 per cent, 1.29 per cent, 0.36 per cent respectively. Industrial Index closed at 5,823.59 points, down 0.41 per cent. Prices of Al Anwar Ceramics, Gulf Mushroom Products, Raysut Cement, Galfar Engineering were up by 1.52 per cent, 1.38 per cent, 0.82 per cent, 0.65 per cent respectively. Prices of Oman Cables Industry, A'Saffa Foods, Al Maha Ceramics, Jazeera Steel Products were down by 4.46 per cent, 3.65 per cent, 0.55 per cent, 0.37 per cent respectively. Services Index was down by 0.19 per cent before closing at 1,867.78 points. Prices of Dhofar Generating, Muscat Gases, Barka Water & Power Company, National Gas, SMN Power Holding were up by 9.68 per cent, 9.65 per cent, 9.42 per cent, 5.95 per cent, 3.37 per cent respectively. Prices of Phoenix Power, Al Batinah Power, Sembcorp Salalah, Al Suwadi Power, Al Jazeera Services were down by 3.33 per cent, 2.63 per cent, 1.82 per cent, 1.30 per cent, 0.45 per cent respectively. — United Securities

OMAN STOCKS

INDICES

Index

High

Low

Value

Prev. Value

Diff

Diff %

MSX 30 INDEX

4,809.04

4,784.72

4,793.14

4,791.38

1.76

0.04

FINANCIAL INDEX

7,467.09

7,428.58

7,436.14

7,434.14

2.01

0.03

Industry Index

5,864.05

5,819.16

5,823.59

5,847.80

-24.22

-0.41

Services Index

1,887.90

1,863.82

1,867.78

1,871.35

-3.57

-0.19

MSX Shariah Index

441.28

438.92

439.46

441.21

-1.75

-0.40

MSX TR INDEX

6,357.02

6,324.87

6,336.01

6,333.68

2.33

0.04

FINANCIAL TR IDX

8,147.96

8,105.95

8,114.20

8,112.01

2.19

0.03

SERVICES TR IDX

2,114.39

2,087.42

2,091.85

2,095.85

-4.00

-0.19

INDUSTRIAL TR IDX

6,296.88

6,248.66

6,253.42

6,257.21

-3.79

-0.06

FIXED INCOME INDEX

1,025.49

1,025.49

1,025.49

1,025.49

0.00

0.00

Trading Summary

Volume

Turnover

Trades

Market Cap

Up

Down

Equal

Sec. Traded

53,975,531

6,026,737

960

24,116,862,836

19

15

13

47

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 24

SECURITY NAME

VOLUME

TURNOVER

TRADES

OPEN PRICE

HIGH

LOW

CLOSE PR.

PREV. CLOSE

DIFF. RD.

DIFF %

LAST PD.

LAST BD.

LAST OFF.

PREV. VALUE

MARKET CAP

REGULAR MARKET

OM0000004248

SMN POWER HOLDING

4,728,133

1,490,814

217

0.307

0.326

0.301

0.307

0.297

0.010

3.367

0.307

0.307

0.309

0.100

61,288,129

OM0000002168

AL ANWAR CERAMIC

439,779

87,873

43

0.199

0.201

0.196

0.201

0.198

0.003

1.515

0.201

0.201

0.201

0.100

44,220,000

OM0000003398

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL BANK

915,987

103,375

40

0.114

0.114

0.112

0.113

0.112

0.001

0.893

0.113

0.107

0.113

0.100

617,871,401

OM0000001152

OMAN NATIONAL ENGINEERING & INVESTMENT

329,115

40,090

16

0.122

0.122

0.120

0.122

0.121

0.001

0.826

0.122

0.121

0.122

0.100

18,300,000

OM0000001087

OMAN UNITED INSURANCE

173,100

20,653

8

0.286

0.288

0.286

0.288

0.286

0.002

0.899

0.288

0.286

0.288

0.100

28,800,000

OM0000001681

OMAN EMBRATES HO.

30,466,612

2,010,851

3

0.055

0.066

0.055

0.055

0.055

0.000

0.000

0.055

0.054

0.058

0.100

6,703,125

OM0000001749

OMAN CEMENT

210,854

106,401

49

0.504

0.505

0.502

0.505

0.505

0.000

0.000

0.505

0.504

0.505

0.100

167,090,719

OM0000002549

BANK DHOFAR

33,772

5,404

1

0.160

0.160

0.160

0.160

0.160

0.000

0.000

0.160

0.000

0.163

0.100

479,416,230

OM0000003000

AL MAHA PETROLEUM PRODUCTS MARKETING

13,899

15,567

7

1.120

1.120

1.120

1.120

1.120

0.000

0.000

1.120

1.100

1.124

0.100

77,280,000

OM0000003026

OMAN TELECOM

47,350

51,380

5

1.085

1.090

1.085

1.090

1.090

0.000

0.000

1.090

1.085

1.090

0.100

617,500,000

OM0000003125

GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO.

50,200

3,113

3

0.063

0.063

0.062

0.062

0.062

0.000

0.000

0.063

0.059

0.068

0.100

12,400,000

OM0000004768

MADINA TAKAFUL

682,945

60,112

49

0.088

0.089

0.087

0.088

0.088

0.000

0.000

0.088

0.088

0.088

0.100

15,400,000

OM0000003968

OOREDOO

9,000

2,791

7

0.311

0.311

0.310

0.310

0.311

-0.001

-0.322

0.310

0.310

0.320

0.100

201,792,711

OM0000002796

BANK MUSCAT

927,195

226,383

41

0.277

0.278

0.275

0.276

0.277

-0.001

-0.361

0.276

0.276

0.277

0.100

1,073,768,589

OM0000002176

JAZEERA STEEL PRODUCTS

25,665

6,907

11

0.265

0.270

0.265

0.269

0.270

-0.001

-0.370

0.270

0.270

0.270

0.100

33,597,551

OM0000002226

ALJAZEERA SERVICES

18,600

4,153

4

0.224

0.224

0.223

0.223

0.224

-0.001

-0.446

0.223

0.222

0.223

0.100

13,648,553

OM0000005005

ALMAHA CERAMICS

45,779

8,332

11

0.182

0.182

0.182

0.182

0.183

-0.001

-0.546

0.182

0.182

0.182

0.100

10,010,000

OM0000001538

OMINVEST

2,500

967

4

0.398

0.398

0.382

0.383

0.388

-0.005

-1.289

0.383

0.382

0.386

0.100

255,983,968

OM0000002440

AL SHARQIA INVESTMENT HO.

78,889

5,769

13

0.075

0.075

0.073

0.073

0.074

-0.001

-1.351

0.073

0.073

0.073

0.100

63,700,000

OM0000002374

UNITED FINANCE

36,725

2,121

3

0.058

0.058

0.057

0.057

0.058

-0.001

-1.724

0.057

0.057

0.058

0.100

20,299,256

Total

20

39,242,799

4,313,055

535

Parallel Market

OM0000007407

DHOFAR GENERATING

308,488

20,378

27

0.064

0.068

0.064

0.068

0.062

0.006

9,677

0.068

0.062

0.066

0.100

15,112,320

OM0000001179

MUSCAT GASES

187,290

20,825

10

0.116

0.125

0.116

0.125

0.114

0.011

9,649

0.125

0.110

0.125

0.100

3,750,000

OM0000003141

BARKA WATER AND POWER

600

91

2

0.151

0.151

0.151

0.151

0.138

0.013

9,420

0.151

0.145

0.000

0.100

24,160,000

OM0000001160

NATIONAL GAS

10,000

856

4

0.083

0.089

0.083

0.089

0.084

0.005

5,652

0.089

0.084

0.089

0.100

1,765,000

OM0000007084

MUSCAT CITY DESALINATION

300

22

1

0.073

0.073

0.073

0.073

0.071

0.002

2,817

0.073

0.071

0.073

0.100

1,353,179

OM0000001590

MUSCAT FINANCE

543,399

26,073

14

0.048

0.048

0.047

0.048

0.047

-0.001

-2,128

0.048

0.047

0.048

0.100

14,740,024

OM0000003291

TAGEER FINANCE

5,000

550

3

0.110

0.110

0.110

0.110

0.108

0.002

1,852

0.110

0.108

0.110

0.100

2,500,000

OM0000002267

GULF MUSHROOM PRODUCTS

229

50

1

0.220

0.220

0.220

0.220

0.217

0.003

1,382

0.220

0.214

0.234

0.100

10,068,476

OM0000007910

AMAN REAL ESTATE

55,500

5,384

3

0.097

0.097

0.097

0.097

0.096

0.001

1,042

0.097

0.000

0.097

0.100

19,400,000

OM0000004420

BANK NIZWA

91,628

9,090

7

0.099

0.100

0.099

0.100

0.099

0.001

1,010

0.100

0.100

0.100

0.100

223,695,303

OM0000004018

SEBMCORP SALALAH

13,500

1,652

4

0.123

0.123

0.122

0.123

0.122

0.001

0.820

0.123

0.122

0.123

0.100

24,600,000

OM0000003521

GALFAR ENGINEERING & CONTRACTING

13,100

2,028

5

0.156

0.156

0.154

0.154

0.153

0.001

0.654

0.154

0.150

0.168

0.100

31,259,913

OM0000008934

ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES

664,902

212,180

34

0.320

0.321

0.319

0.320

0.319

0.001

0.313

0.320

0.320

0.320

0.100

246,464,000

OM0000002672

OMAN OIL MARKETING

450

396

1

0.880

0.880

0.880

0.880

0.879

0.001

0.114

0.880

0.800

0.880

0.100

53,922,000

OM0000004772

ALANWAR INVESTMENT

984,393

82,692

28

0.085

0.085

0.084

0.084

0.084

0.000

0.000

0.084

0.084

0.090

0.100

17,304,000

OM0000002029

GULF INTERNATIONAL CHEMICALS

1,200

98

1

0.082

0.082

0.082

0.082

0.082

0.000

0.000

0.082

0.080

0.085

0.100

1,722,000

OM0000008710

BARKA DESALINATION

56,000

7,280

5

0.130

0.130

0.130

0.130

0.130

0.000

0.000

0.130

0.130

0.140

0.100

8,917,860

OM0000009072

OQ GAS NETWORKS

1,316,133

189,862

82

0.144

0.145

0.143

0.145

0.145

0.000

0.000

0.144

0.144

0.144

0.100

627,940,468

OM0000004933

AL SUWADI POWER

3,325,724

249,903

24

0.078

0.078

0.075

0.076

0.077

-0.001

-1,299

0.076

0.074

0.084

0.100

54,294,882

OM0000004735

SEBMCORP SALALAH

2,836,650

291,187

54

0.110

0.115

0.108

0.108

0.110

-0.002

-1,818

0.108

0.108

0.114

0.100

103,953,771

OM0000007870

THE PEARL REIF

17,940

2,163

6

0.120

0.121

0.120

0.120

0.123

-0.003

-2,439

0.120

0.120

0.122

0.100

60,972,426

OM0000004925

ALBATINAH POWER

3,347,467

245,198

49

0.074

0.076

0.073

0.074

0.076

-0.002

-2,632

0.074

0.073

0.076

0.100

49,941,670

OM0000005963

PHOENIX POWER

721,577

41,955

40

0.060

0.060

0.058

0.058

0.060

-0.002

-3,333

0.058

0.057

0.058

0.100

84,830,885

OM0000002804

ASAFA FOODS

31,294

9,075

7

0.290

0.290

0.290

0.290

0.301

-0.011

-3,654

0.290

0.291

0.290

0.100

34,800,000

OM0000001707

OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY

250

525

1

2.100

2.100

2.100

2.100

2.198

-0.098

-4,459

2.100

2.099

2.199

0.100

188,370,000

Total

25

14,313,114

1,419,512

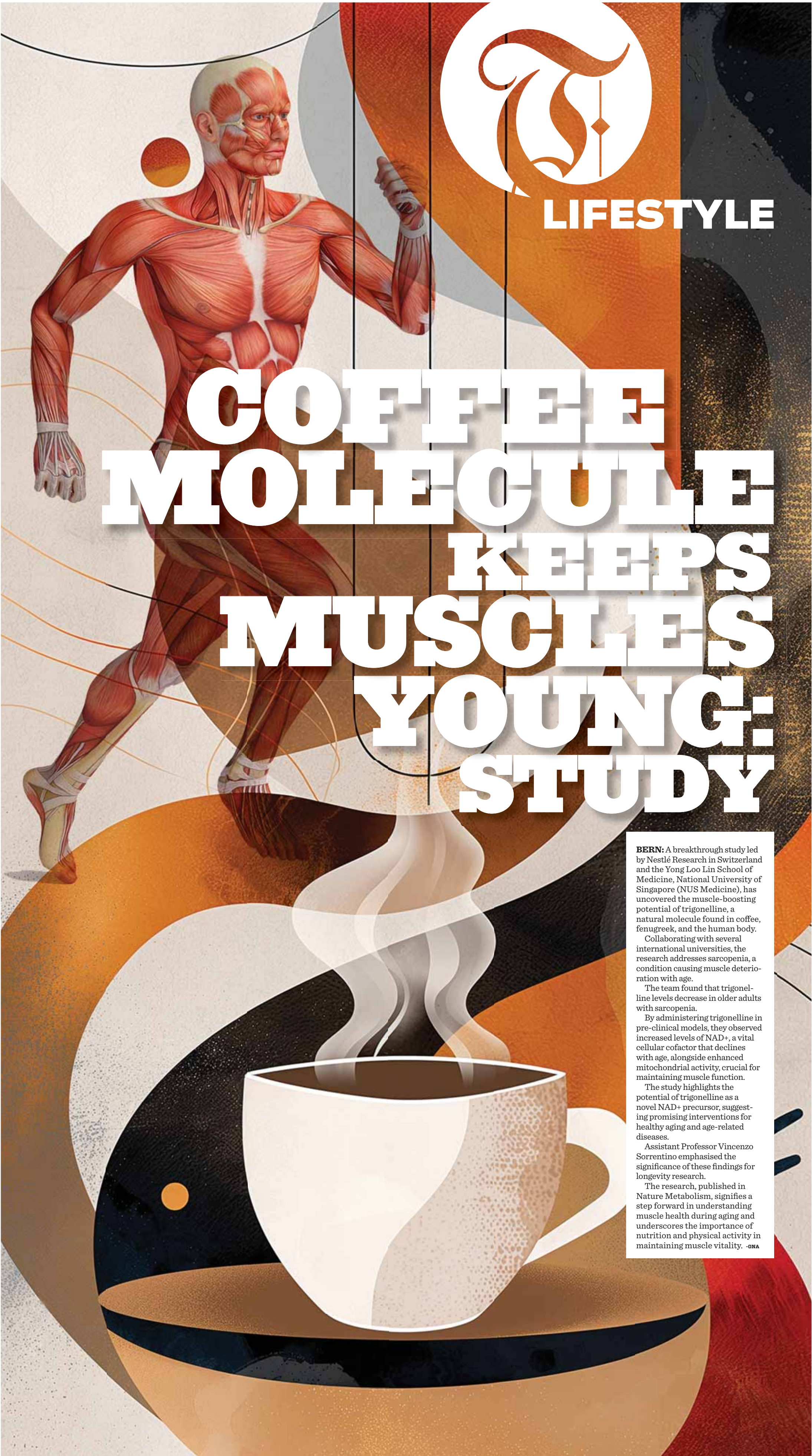
413

CIVIL SUIT

US sues Apple over ‘smartphone monopoly’

NEW YORK: The US Department of Justice filed suit against Apple on Thursday, accusing it of monopolising the smartphone market. “Consumers should not have to pay higher prices because companies violate the antitrust laws,” US Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement. “If left unchallenged, Apple will only continue to strengthen its smartphone monopoly.”

What else do we know about the lawsuit? The civil suit, joined by 15 states and the District of Columbia, charged Apple with using its dominance in the smartphone ecosystem to get more money from consumers, developers, content creators, artists, publishers, small businesses and merchants. The lawsuit said it was focused on “freeing smartphone markets from Apple’s anticompetitive and exclusionary conduct and restoring competition to lower smartphone prices for



LIFESTYLE

COFFEE
MOLECULE
KEEPS
MUSCLES
YOUNG:
STUDY

BERN: A breakthrough study led by Nestlé Research in Switzerland and the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (NUS Medicine), has uncovered the muscle-boosting potential of trigonelline, a natural molecule found in coffee, fenugreek, and the human body.

Collaborating with several international universities, the research addresses sarcopenia, a condition causing muscle deterioration with age.

The team found that trigonelline levels decrease in older adults with sarcopenia.

By administering trigonelline in pre-clinical models, they observed increased levels of NAD+, a vital cellular cofactor that declines with age, alongside enhanced mitochondrial activity, crucial for maintaining muscle function.

The study highlights the potential of trigonelline as a novel NAD+ precursor, suggesting promising interventions for healthy aging and age-related diseases.

Assistant Professor Vincenzo Sorrentino emphasised the significance of these findings for longevity research.

The research, published in Nature Metabolism, signifies a step forward in understanding muscle health during aging and underscores the importance of nutrition and physical activity in maintaining muscle vitality. -ONA

SPORTS

Sainz storms to victory amid drama as Verstappen retires

Charles Leclerc finishes second for a Ferrari 1-2 at Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne

MELBOURNE: Ferrari driver Carlos Sainz took the first non-Red Bull win of the season with an impressive display during Sunday's Australian Grand Prix, taking advantage of technical trouble for Max Verstappen in the opening laps that forced the reigning world champion to retire.

Bidding for a record-equalling 10th victory in a row, Verstappen converted his pole position advantage as the race got under way but soon reported issues behind the wheel, with a compromised second lap opening the door for Sainz to get a run on him and make a move for the lead.

From there, Verstappen's brake-related woes got worse and, with plumes of smoke exiting the rear of his RB20, he pulled off the racing line to let the rest of the field overtake him before returning to the



pits and retiring for the first time in two years.

Sainz went from strength to strength in Verstappen's absence, building up a solid lead over Lando Norris, team-mate Charles Leclerc and home favourite Oscar Piastri as the race developed, eventually taking the chequered flag for the third triumph of his F1 career.

Leclerc completed an undercut on Norris in the early stages of the race to rise to a net second and back up Sainz for Ferrari's first one-two finish since the 2022

opener, but the Briton nonetheless recorded a breakthrough maiden podium of the season for himself and McLaren.

Piastri also got the jump on Norris during the initial round of pit stops, only to be asked to move aside for his team-mate and then lose some more time with an off-track excursion, leaving him in a lonely fourth at the finish, followed by the Red Bull of Sergio Perez.

George Russell had been pushing to complete a late move on Fernando Alonso for sixth position

when he dramatically crashed out at the high-speed Turn 6/7 complex, causing extensive damage to his Mercedes and bringing out a Virtual Safety Car to the finish.

The stewards later deemed that Alonso had played a "potentially dangerous" part in the incident, dropping the Spaniard from P6 to P8 with a post-race 20-second penalty.

That decision moved team-mate Lance Stroll up to sixth and RB's Yuki Tsunoda to P7 as Haas took a welcome clutch of points with Nico Hulkenberg in ninth and

'Life sometimes is crazy'

MELBOURNE: Carlos Sainz could not hide his delight as he marked his return to action at the Australian Grand Prix with a commanding victory, making the most of an early-race retirement for Max Verstappen.

The win came just two weeks on from sitting out the Saudi Arabia race with appendicitis and undergoing surgery. "It was a really good race; I felt really good out there," said Sainz. "Of course, [I'm] a bit stiff, especially physically, it wasn't the easiest, but I was lucky that I was more or less on my own.

"I'm happy to be in a

one-two with Charles here. It shows that hard work pays off.

"Life sometimes is crazy, what happened at the beginning of year, then the podium in Bahrain, then the appendix, the comeback, the win... it's a rollercoaster but I loved it and I'm extremely happy."

Kevin Magnussen in 10th.

Williams' decision to put Alex Albon in Logan Sargeant's car did not quite result in points as he took 11th, followed by the other home driver in action, RB's Daniel Ricciardo, and the Alpine of Pierre Gasly, who was hit with a five-second penalty for a pit exit breach.

Kick Sauber endured yet more pit stop problems on their way to 14th and 15th with Valtteri Bottas and Zhou Guanyu respectively, while Esteban Ocon was the final finisher in the other Alpine after Verstappen's early retirement, Russell's late crash and a mid-race engine issue for Lewis Hamilton.

Alonso penalised in Melbourne



MELBOURNE: Aston Martin driver Fernando Alonso was penalised 20 seconds for "potentially dangerous driving" at the Australian Grand Prix on Sunday.

The two-time world champion told stewards he had "got it slightly wrong" in the incident that led to a heavy crash for Mercedes' George Russell.

Alonso admitted he had braked too early at Turn Six and then accelerated again.

Stewards said he had the right to change his approach but punished him for "doing something extraordinary".

The penalty dropped him from sixth place to eighth in the results. He was also given three penalty points on his licence.

Russell said that Alonso's driving on the final lap of the race had been a direct contributor to him losing control through the corner and crashing.

His car came to rest upside down in the middle of the track and led to the race finishing under a virtual safety car.

Russell said: "It caught me by surprise. I was half a second behind him and next thing he slams on the brakes, accelerates again and then slams on the brakes again.

"I was half a second behind and then next thing I am on his gearbox, lost the rear, caught it and then clipped the wall. It was a much more dramatic crash than it should have been.

"I'm OK. It was not a pleasant place to be in the middle of a high-speed corner on the racing line with the VSC [virtual safety car] taking 10-15 seconds to come out.

"It doesn't sound like a lot but you can have three cars coming around the corner in 10 seconds and when you're doing 250km/h and a car in the middle of the road, I was really quite worried."

Baumgartner nets fastest international goal

BRATISLAVA: Christoph Baumgartner scored after six seconds to record the fastest ever goal in international football as Austria beat Slovakia 2-0 in a friendly in Bratislava on Saturday.

The 24-year-old midfielder skipped past three challenges from the kick-off and fired a low shot past home goalkeeper Martin Dubravka.

His effort was a second quicker than Lukas Podolski's strike for Germany against Ecuador in 2013.

Andreas Weimann's late goal confirmed victory for Ralf Rangnick's side.

Baumgartner's remarkable effort was almost equalled later on Saturday evening when Florian Wirtz put Germany ahead in France, with a 25-yard effort that appeared to deflect off Dayot



Upamecano before clipping the underside of the crossbar on its way in.

Meanwhile, Austria, who host Turkey in Vienna on Tuesday, have now won four consecutive matches as they build for this summer's Euros in Germany.

And they could hardly have had a better start in the Slovakian capital with the home fans looking on

in complete disbelief as RB Leipzig's Baumgartner wheeled away to celebrate with his team-mates.

His goal was also two seconds faster than when Davide Gualtieri stunned England by scoring for San Marino after eight seconds in a World Cup qualifier in 1993 and Christian Benteke's goal for Belgium against Gibraltar in 2017.

The earliest goal ever recorded in the Premier League was by Shane Long for Southampton 7.69 seconds into their meeting with Watford in 2019.

Roy Makaay holds that distinction in the Champions League, finding the net for Bayern Munich 10.12 seconds into the second leg of their last-16 tie against Real Madrid in March.

Meanwhile, in February, Croydon FC's Ryan Hall scored a stunning goal straight from kick-off in their game against Cockfosters in the London Senior Trophy that was timed at 2.31 seconds by the non-league side.

However, Guinness World Records could not confirm that it was an official record for the fastest goal scored from kick-off as they do not monitor goals outside of professional football. - Agencies

Teen Endrick scores winner for Brazil against England

LONDON: Brazil's new teenage sensation Endrick struck late on to condemn England to 1-0 defeat in a scrappy friendly at Wembley on Saturday.

The game looked to be petering out into a draw before Vinicius Jr broke clear, the 17-year-old substitute left with a simple finish from close range despite England keeper Jordan Pickford's save with 10 minutes left.

It was England's first defeat at Wembley in 21 games, since they were beaten by Denmark in the UEFA Nations League in October 2020.

Endrick is regarded as the new sensation of Brazilian football and he rewrote Wembley history with his winning goal, becoming the youngest male goalscorer for club



or country at the stadium at just 17 years and 246 days.

He almost added a second with the final kick of the game only to be denied by Pickford, but his exciting cameo as a second-half substitute confirmed his status as a future superstar.

Wirtz scores Germany's quickest international goal

Florian Wirtz scored after seven seconds as Germany ended a three-game winless run with a comfortable 2-0 friendly victory over France in Lyon on Saturday.

The 20-year-old collected Toni Kroos' pass from kick-off and found the top left corner with a deflected effort.

The Bayer Leverkusen midfielder's goal is the fastest ever scored by a German player.

Kai Havertz turned in Jamal Musiala's cutback to confirm victory for Julian Nagelsmann's side.

France's best opportunity came midway through the first half but Kylian Mbappe skewed his shot wide.

Didier Deschamps' side rarely

looked capable of scoring in the second period until late on when Germany defender Antonio Rudiger turned the ball against his own crossbar as he tried to clear.

However, it was a good evening for the visitors, with Kroos, 34, making an immediate impact on his return - three years after announcing his international retirement - by supplying the pinpoint pass to Wirtz to set them on their way. It was the youngest's first goal for his country.

Other results: Republic of Ireland 0 Belgium 0, Argentina 3 El Salvador 0, Peru 2 Nicaragua 0, Malawi 0 Kenya 4, Ivory Coast 2 Benin 2, Denmark 0 Switzerland 0, Tunisia 0 Croatia 0 (Croatia win 5-4 on penalties). - Agencies

MIAMI OPEN

Murray and Alcaraz advance to third round; Sabalenka exits

MIAMI: Andy Murray gained a measure of revenge against Tomas Martin Etcheverry by beating the Argentine in the second round of the Miami Open on Saturday.

Etcheverry had beaten the Briton in the first round of the Australian Open earlier this year, but Murray won 7-6 (7-0), 6-3 this time around.

The match resumed at 3-3 after being suspended because of rain on Friday.

Murray secured victory in two hours 16 minutes when Etcheverry, ranked 30th in the world, sent a forehand long and wide on match point. He will play Tomas



Machac, who is 60th in the men's rankings, of the Czech Republic in the last 32. Only eight matches were completed on Friday because of rain and the start of Saturday's



play was delayed by three hours because of the weather.

When play did resume, American Taylor Fritz was beaten 6-3, 6-4 by Brazil's Thiago Seyboth Wild,

while Denis Shapovalov of Canada earned a 6-2, 6-4 win against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Australian Open champion Jan-nik Sinner is through to the next round courtesy of a 6-3, 6-4 win against fellow Italian Andrea Vavassori while top seed Carlos Alcaraz cruised past Spanish compatriot Roberto Carballes Baena 6-2, 6-1.

British No.1 Cameron Norrie, seeded 30th, is through to the third round after a 7-5, 6-7 (4-7), 6-2 win over Italy's Flavio Cobolli.

Norrie will face defending champion Daniil Medvedev of Russia after he progressed to the last 32 with a 6-4, 6-2 victory

against Hungary's Marton Fucsovics.

Briton Jack Draper was knocked out as he suffered a defeat by Nicolas Jarry in three hours 33 minutes. Draper failed to take two match points when serving at 5-4 in the decider before Chile's Jarry won 7-6 (7-5), 4-6, 7-6 (7-2).

Kalinina stuns world No.2

In the women's category, world No.2 Aryna Sabalenka went down 6-4, 1-6, 6-1 to Anhelina Kalinina on Saturday.

In what was her second match following the death of her former boyfriend and ex-NHL player, Konstantin Koltsov, Sabalenka's

emotions spilled over.

Polish world No.1 Iga Swiatek breezed past Italy's Camila Giorgi 6-2, 6-1 in 67 minutes.

Japan's Naomi Osaka, who returned to the tour at the end of last year after giving birth, continued her resurgence with a 6-2, 7-6 (7-5) win over Elina Svitolina of Ukraine.

Sixth seed Ons Jabeur of Tunisia suffered a shock 6-1, 4-6, 6-3 defeat by world No.65 Elina Avanesyan of Russia.

Avanesyan's compatriot Anna Kalinskaya also progressed with a 6-3, 6-1 victory over Latvian ninth seed Jelena Ostapenko. - Agencies

IN PICTURES



Celebration of traditional ‘Tudorita’ holiday held in Targoviste, Romania

People in horse driven carts participate in a horse beauty parade during the celebration of the traditional ‘Tudorita’ holiday, also known as the Easter of Horses, in Targoviste, 80 km north of Bucharest, Romania. Easter of Horses is celebrated by the local Bulgarian community and symbolises the start of agricultural work in the new year.

Xinhua



Holi Festival celebrated in Nepal

Girls smeared with coloured powder take selfies during the celebration of the Holi Festival at Patan Durbar Square in Lalitpur, Nepal. Holi, the festival of colours, marks the beginning of the spring season.

Xinhua



Volunteers from ‘Youth Impression of Syria’ help people on outskirts of Damascus

Young volunteers from the team ‘Youth Impression of Syria’ prepare free meals for the poor on the outskirts of Damascus, Syria.

Xinhua



Heaven Gaia show kicks off Beijing Fashion Week AW2024

A model walks the catwalk for the Heaven Gaia Autumn/Winter 2024 collection show by Chinese fashion designer Xiong Ying during Beijing Fashion Week AW2024 in Beijing.

Xinhua



Activities held to celebrate Huazhao Festival in Hangzhou, East China

Performers in traditional costumes take a boat parade during the Huazhao Festival celebrations in Xixi Wetland in Hangzhou, east China’s Zhejiang Province. The annual Huazhao Festival featuring a series of activities, including a boat parade and a folk ritual, was celebrated in Xixi Wetland.

Xinhua

ROUND-UP

Special Iftar unites ahlibank staff to rekindle spirit of Ramadan

This Iftar comes as an affirmation of the importance of strengthening social relations between employees away from the daily work routine, and deepening the ties that bind them to work more efficiently

MUSCAT: ahlibank recently held its Iftar staff gathering for the holy month of Ramadan, in the presence of Said Abdullah Al Hatmi, CEO of ahlibank, with the aim of enhancing relationships and creating an atmosphere of intimacy and communication between team members outside of the official work environment.

The Iftar was held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre

(OCEC) and witnessed the presence of the bank's executive management and key personnel.

This Iftar comes as an affirmation of the importance of strengthening social relations between employees away from the daily work routine, and deepening the ties that bind them to work more efficiently. Having Iftar in the blessed month of Ramadan has become a valuable religious practice that



enhances the belonging of individuals and allows them to have a deeper spiritual connection during the holy month.

The annual gathering began with a welcome speech followed by a speech from ahlibank's CEO, Said Abdullah Al Hatmi. At the event there was a raffle draw and

fun, light-hearted contests that set the right mood for those in attendance, sharing in the spirit of joyous camaraderie. The staff then sat together for Iftar, enjoying the meal with fellow team members.

ahlibank believes in establishing strong and enduring relationships with its most important

capital; the human cadres. By engaging with the staff in an environment that promotes efficiency and creativity, the bank has invested greatly in an avenue of success. This, in turn, influences employees' performance, delivering better, more innovative services to the Bank's discerning customers.

After another successful staff gathering, ahlibank and its employees are reinvigorated to continue their due course, engaging with customers and setting new benchmarks. The bank carries forth building a brighter, more inclusive future for its staff, customers, and the community at large.

MOBILITY SERVICES

Europcar Oman recognised with Goldcar Award at Europcar Global Conference 2024

MUSCAT: Europcar, a leading mobility services company in Bahrain and Oman has been honoured with the prestigious Goldcar Award at the Europcar Global Conference 2024 held in Berlin!

Nitin Sapre, the CEO had the privilege of accepting this esteemed award, presented by the CEO of Europcar Mobility Group, in recognition of our exceptional service and unwavering commitment to our customers.

Europcar Oman & Bahrain would like to express our gratitude to Europcar Mobility Group for this incredible honour and to our valued customers for their continued trust and support. We remain committed to serving you with excellence and exceeding your expectations every step of the way.

At Europcar Oman & Bahrain, we take great pride in delivering outstanding experiences to our customers every step of the way. This award is a testament to the



hard work, dedication, and passion of our team members who consistently go above and beyond to ensure that each customer receives the highest level of service and satisfaction.

Receiving the Goldcar Award reaffirms our commitment to excellence and our dedication to providing innovative solutions, personalised service, and unbeatable

value to our customers. It reflects our ongoing efforts to exceed expectations and set new standards in the car rental industry.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our entire team for their dedication and contribution to their remarkable achievement. It is through their collective efforts that we have earned this prestigious accolade.

SPONSOR

OAB champions future workforce development by supporting new Dawam app

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB), a leading financial institution in Oman, takes a significant step towards realising Oman's Vision 2040 by sponsoring the Dawam app, an integrated solution for employment and freelance opportunities.

This pioneering digital platform is designed to bridge the gap between talent and career opportunities, thereby catalysing the growth of Oman's economy.

The Dawam platform, with over 150,000 users and 3,000 registered companies, plays a critical role in shaping a vibrant labour market. It offers a wide range of services, from connecting job seekers to potential employers to providing self-employment portals and training programmes.

Dawam's effectiveness is evident in its 6,000 success stories and collaborations with over six educational institutions.

Suliaman Al Harthi, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, said, "Dawam



App is more than just a corporate initiative to us; it's a testament to our dedication to Oman's future. By supporting this platform, we are empowering the Omani workforce, especially the youth, to explore diverse career paths and excel in their chosen fields. This aligns perfectly with our ongoing commitment to community development, as seen in our Ruwad Al

Arabi internship programme and Launchpad initiative."

The collaboration between OAB and the Dawam App underscores a shared vision of economic progress and workforce empowerment. It reflects OAB's broader strategy to invest in initiatives that nurture talent, promote digital innovation, and contribute to the national economy.

ISLAMIC BANKING

Dhofar Islamic offers attractive profit rates on auto finance

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic banking window of BankDhofar, launched Ramadan Auto Finance offer with attractive profit rates. Customers can take advantage of this attractive offer till 30 April 2024 to own their dream car during the holy month of Ramadan with profit rates starting from 4%.

This offer, which can be availed by customers to finance the purchase of both new and used cars, comes with several benefits which include fast approval process as well as flexible repayment options of up to 10 years. To avail the offer, customers may visit any of Dhofar Islamic branches to apply for the auto finance with the assistance of a dedicated support team.

Commenting on the offer, Amor Said Al Amri, DGM and



Head of Dhofar Islamic Retail Banking said: "This Ramadan, we're making it easier than ever to drive away in your dream car with our competitive financing options and flexible terms. We're committed to helping our customers achieve their financial goals during this holy month."

Dhofar Islamic offers a comprehensive suite of innovative and best in class banking solutions that cater to the needs of its retail and corporate customers.

PROMOTION

Kia Oman announces 2 raffle winners of 'Mega Rewards Ramadan' campaign

MUSCAT: Reliable International Automotive, the distributors for Kia in Oman recently announced two winners of the Mega Rewards Ramadan campaign. They won the Kia Pegas.

Kia Oman's latest Ramadan campaign offers customers buying a new Kia an opportunity to embark on winning journeys and enjoy mega rewards. Customers get 9 chances to win a car in raffle. Apart from that they can avail Service from 50,000 kms up to 100,000 kms, Insurance and more. The campaign is valid from 29th February 2024 up to 28th April 2024 (Conditions apply. For details please visit any Kia showroom.)

Sharing his thoughts on winning the raffle, one of the winners said, "Thank you Kia for this unique Ramadan campaign. I have always felt that Kia is one of the few automotive brands that is always giving customers experiences that they



will love. I am a winner and all I can say is that, own a Kia to know the difference and you will definitely be a Kia customer for life."

The second winner who also won the Pegas said, "It has always been a wish to win a car. Today with Kia, I have realised that wish. I am indeed thankful to the Almighty for granting my wish and to Kia Oman for presenting such a wonderful opportunity to be a win-

ner with Kia. My family has always been customers of Kia. That's why I have got an opportunity to drive, feel and experience all that Kia is renowned for."

The next raffle draws are on 25th March, 1st April & 8th April where customers have a chance to win Kia Pegas, and Grand Raffle is on 6th May where one lucky customer can win a Seltos. So Hurry and book today to get mega

rewards from Kia this Ramadan.

The Kia Pegas with its compact size, impressive storage space and comfortable legroom, makes a perfect choice for those in search of a second car. It is ideal to navigate ways around crowded city streets or even fit in the tightest parking spaces. The Pegas is equipped with a range of features, technology and space for fun journeys. Powering the Pegas is an efficient 1.4-liter MPI (multi-point injection) gasoline engine, which produces maximum output of 94PS at 6,000rpm and maximum torque output of 13.5 @ 4,000 rpm. It offers an impressive fuel-efficiency of 17.8 Kms/L.

The Pegas is also immensely practical for storing luggage. The trunk has a capacity of 475 litres, enough to store up to three golf bags, or a couple of large suitcases. As the trunk lid opens, illumination within the trunk also reveals any smaller items that could be forgotten.



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