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A GUIDE TO
HEALTHY SUHOOR
PRACTICES IN
RAMADHAN



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO MAURITIUS PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Prithvirajsing Roopun of the Republic of Mauritius, on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Prithvirajsing Roopun and the people of his country further progress and prosperity.

OMAN WELCOMES LIBYA PEACE EFFORTS

The Sultanate of Oman welcomed the outcomes of the meeting held under the umbrella of the Arab League on the invitation from the Secretary-General of the Arab League to the chairman of the Presidential Council, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the chairman of the High Council of State in Libya. In a statement issued on Tuesday, the Foreign Ministry affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's stance in support of the unity and sovereignty of the Libyan territories as well as the efforts aimed to achieve security and peace in Libya and ensure its continuous growth and prosperity for the brotherly Libyan people.

OCEC TO GET ROOFTOP SOLAR POWER PROJECT



The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) has officially signed an agreement with TotalEnergies Renewables Distributed Generation Middle East and Africa, a wholly-owned affiliate of TotalEnergies, to develop a rooftop solar photovoltaic project that will enable OCEC to become Oman's premier green venue. The 4.6 megawatt-peak (MWp) solar rooftop is expected to produce over 7,000 megawatts-hours (MWh) providing sufficient energy to significantly cover the OCEC's annual electricity consumption. As part of this initiative, supported by Omran Group, the OCEC will become one of the leading green venues in the region, enabling its events to be powered by solar energy.

DETAILS ON P2

PICTURESQUE WADI AL SARMI



An aerial view of Wadi Al Sarmi in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah. The governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South on Tuesday experienced heavy rains (30 mm) accompanied by hail and active downdraft wind between 10 and 60 knots.

PHOTO BY MOHAMMED AL DARMAKI

Oman affirms support to women's empowerment

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman has affirmed its keenness to support the role of women, empower them socially and economically and enhance their status in power and decision-making positions.

This was unveiled during the Sultanate of Oman's participation in tasks of the 68th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Oman was represented at the CSW session, held in New York until March 22, by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

Heading Oman's delegation, Dr Laila said that the Sultanate of Oman devised policies, legislative systems and institutional frameworks to enhance the status of women, preserve their rights and provide them with a decent life.

In her speech, Dr Laila underscored the attention accorded to women by leaders of GCC states, and their recognition of women's role and contributions to the comprehensive national development in their respective countries.

Dr Laila also delivered the Arab statement issued at the Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting. The statement, issued

The Sultanate of Oman devised policies, legislative systems and institutional frameworks to enhance the status of women, preserve their rights and provide them with a decent life

DR LAILA BINT AHMED AL NAJAR
Minister of Social Development

via videoconferencing, stressed the need for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. It also rejected the forced displacement of the Palestinian population and the importance of allowing humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip without any obstacles.

The statement also warned against an ongoing incitement campaign targeting the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

The statement laid emphasis

on Arab countries' keenness and efforts to ensure a decent life for women and girls.

The 68th annual Commission on the Status of Women, the UN's largest annual gathering on gender equality and women's empowerment, is held under the priority theme, "Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective". The world is at a crucial crossroad for gender equality. Globally 10.3 per cent of women live in extreme poverty today, and they are poorer than men. Progress towards ending poverty needs to be 26 times faster to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Accelerated progress requires investment. Data from 48 developing economies shows that an additional \$360 billion is needed per year to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment across key global goals, including to end poverty and hunger.

In this decisive year, as 2.6 billion people go to the polls to cast their votes, they have the power to demand higher investment in gender equality.

— ONA

Fees to set up private hospitals cut

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

To bring more investment to the private health sector, the Ministry of Health slashed charges to set up hospitals in Oman. The recent decision of Dr Hilal al Sabti, the Minister of Health, also cancels fees for more than 12 services, including fees for setting up hospitals, ambulance fees, fees for approving medical reports, and sick leave fees in the private health sector.

Licensing fees for institutions have

been reduced and a longer period given for the validity of the licence. The new fees also cover pharmacies, pharmaceutical factories, registration of pharmaceutical companies, health preparations, and the licences of the Omani medical and paramedical employees to encourage Omanisation in private health institutions.

The new fees for issuing or renewing a hospital licence, regardless of the location is RO 3,000 instead of RO 5,000 in Muscat and RO 2,500 for outside the capital. To set up a pharmaceutical factory, the fees

have been reduced from RO 2,000 to RO 1,500. To set up a pharmacy, the new fees will be RO 300 for three years, while it was RO 300 for Muscat and RO 200 outside Muscat.

The licence for a private health institution to employ doctors working in government health institutions has been reduced to RO 300 from RO 500. The fees required to obtain a licence to practice the medical profession for Omanis have been reduced to RO 20 from RO 100 and for expatriates, it has been reduced to RO 100 from RO 200 for every two years in private health institution.

Jaywalking is an offence and can be punished

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Jaywalking or crossing the main roads at places not designated for the same, is an offence, and one can be fined and legal action can be taken if found repeating the offence.

Jaywalking is illegal and a danger to the community for it invites accidents jeopardising the lives of self as well as others, a Royal Oman Police (ROP) official said.

According to the Director General of Traffic, there will be a fine of RO 10 for those who jaywalk, which can be go up to three months in jail for repeat offenders.

"It is all about creating harm and risking one's life as well as others. Pedestrians should not jaywalk in such a way that it hampers traffic and puts lives in danger," the source added.

There are occasions when people cut across main roads risking their lives just to save few

minutes, which, they often don't realise that it is at the risk of their lives.

However, although cars may be identified by their number plates, it is often difficult to report a jaywalker.

Statistics indicate that the number of pedestrians getting killed has risen in the recent past mostly due to ignorance of those who are crossing the roads or due to their reluctance to use pedestrian bridge near them.

"Jaywalkers who are victims of

road accidents often are ignorant blue collar workers or those who are reluctant to use the pedestrian bridge just near them leading to accidents that can be fatal for both the motorists and the pedestrians," the source said.

According to Royal Decree No 38/2016, walking on the road is defined by crossing at appropriate place for pedestrians, including marked pedestrian crossings, squares, corridors, tunnels and bridges and any attempt to cross the road anywhere else is a crime.



Aid ship sails to Gaza as war grinds on

A ship carrying 200 tonnes of aid for Gaza left Cyprus on Tuesday in a pilot project to open a sea route to deliver supplies to a population aid agencies say is on the brink of famine. The charity ship Open Arms was seen sailing out of Larnaca port, towing a barge containing flour, rice and protein. The mission was funded mostly by the United Arab Emirates and organised by US-based charity World Central Kitchen (WCK). The journey to Gaza takes about 15 hours but a heavy tow barge could make the trip take considerably longer, possibly up to two days. Cyprus is just over 320 km north-west of Gaza.

DETAILS ON P6



Framework to regulate smart cities this year, says TRA chief

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The regulatory framework for smart cities is likely to be ready by the end of this year, according to a top official.

Speaking to the *Observer* recently, Omar al Ismaili, CEO of TRA, said, “There is no limit on how this concept of smart cities will evolve. It is based on guidelines, including that from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the ISO standard. There is a national effort regarding the smart city and this is a good example of a collaborative regulation.” It has been prepared in cooperation with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT).

Oman Vision 2040 identifies smart cities as a strategic national



Picture for illustrative purpose only

initiative that acts as a source of economic growth, creating jobs and a tool to diversify the economy.

The Oman National Spatial Strategy (ONSS) has been developed to accelerate Oman's smart city journey of urbanisation and to capitalise on the potential for social, economic and environmental development.

A Smart City system is about

the integration of all the utilities, infrastructure, and citizen services on a single platform and a unified dashboard for the efficient, reliable and resilient operation of the city.

“There is a need to create and suggest frameworks to achieve the interoperability among all the devices and layers at every interface in the networks, be it a smart home network, a smart

building network, a smart city/ community network, or the smart grid network. Development of smart cities infrastructure and services is reliant on a strong Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure and governance framework where the roles and responsibilities of all entities that contribute to ICT governance are set out clearly and transparently,” the TRA said.

The TRA will regulate the following areas as per the approved strategy, which includes competition in the smart city sector, creating a level playing field for all ICT service providers, imposing obligations to ensure an effective and competitive environment, monitoring the players in the market to ensure that they don't engage in anti-competitive practices, ensure fairness and transparency of tariffs for ICT products and services.

OMAN AFFIRMS SUPPORT TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman has affirmed its keenness to support the role of women, empower them socially and economically and enhance their status in power and decision-making positions. This was unveiled during the Sultanate of Oman's participation in tasks of the 68th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Oman was represented at the CSW session, held in New York until March 22, by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development

ROP carries out raids across the country to combat crimes



MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police carried out security raids in a number of governorates to combat crimes and maintain safety of citizens and residents.

Meanwhile, the ROP, represented by the Coast Guard Police Command, in cooperation with the Environment Authority and the concerned authorities, dealt with the damage caused by the commercial boat that ran aground near Al Ghubra Beach in the Wilayat of Bausher in order to avoid pollution, oil spill or any environmental damage.

The ROP, represented by the Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation, apprehended five people of Arab nationalities for committing fraud. The defendants created a fake website resembling an official website to dupe victims into providing bank account information in exchange for

certain services. The culprits then used the victims' bank accounts' information to withdraw from their accounts and invest them in the trading of cryptocurrency.

The Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation said it had detected a new fraudulent method targeting young people by using fake job advertisements via SMS to convince victims to carry out certain online transactions after transferring money to the fraudsters.

The Al Sharqiyah North Governorate Police Command, with the support of the Ibra Special Tasks Police Unit, arrested a person of Asian nationality in possession of more than 20 kg of crystal meth. In Dhofar Governorate, the Coast Guard Police arrested four people of an Arab nationality while attempting to smuggle more than 870 packages of khat.

OCEC TO BECOME SOLAR-POWERED

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 12

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) has officially signed an agreement with TotalEnergies Renewables Distributed Generation Middle East & Africa (DG MEA), a wholly owned affiliate of TotalEnergies, to develop a rooftop solar photovoltaic project that will enable OCEC to become Oman's premier green venue. The 4.6 megawatt-peak (MWp) solar rooftop is expected to produce over 7,000 megawatt-hours (MWh) providing sufficient energy to significantly cover the OCEC's annual electricity consumption.

As part of this initiative, supported by OMRAN Group, the OCEC will become one of the leading green venues in the region, enabling its events to be powered



The OCEC will become one of the leading green venues in the region, enabling its events to be powered by solar energy

by solar energy. TotalEnergies Renewable DG MEA's strong expertise and highest industry standards will deliver strong sustainable results for OCEC as it takes innovative steps in its sustainability journey. This new initiative is in line with OCEC's commitment to reducing its carbon impact on the environment in accordance with the government's

target of Net-Zero emissions by 2050.

Commenting on the initiative, Said al Shanfari stated: “We are grateful to be working closely with OMRAN and TotalEnergies Renewables DG MEA on this project, enabling us to achieve our net-zero carbon objectives and become a green venue in the region. Thanks to this new initiative,

we will not only host events, but also lead by example in the field of sustainability. This project echoes other initiatives created at the OCEC, via the OCEC Green Team, to reduce our impact on the environment.”

Mohamed Tribak, Middle East and North Africa Zone Director at TotalEnergies Renewables DG MEA, said: “The collaboration between TotalEnergies REN DG MEA and OCEC demonstrates our company's capabilities and commitment to support our valued partners in their energy transition. This milestone reinforces our pioneering position in the development of sustainable energy sources for businesses in Oman.”

Also present at the agreement signing were Dr Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of OMRAN Group, and Sergio Giorgi, Country Chair, TotalEnergies Oman.

Dams preserve water for agriculture, foster biodiversity

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Recent rains have not only filled many dams of Oman, but also the hearts of farmers. Dams play an important role in sustaining agriculture, providing potable water and avoid preventing flash floods. Recently, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources proposed setting up 56 dams across Oman. It also called for rehabilitation of wadis and preparation of flood maps for governorates of Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South. Oman has 174 check dams for underground recharge, 3 dams for protection against floods, and 115 dams for surface storage.

Authorities in Oman began studying flood risks for the first time since the 1980s as economic development, population increase and urban growth made many urban settlements and infrastructure vulnerable to flood risks.

Cyclones such as Gonu (2007),

Phet (2010), Mekunu (2018) and Shaheen 2021 led to plans to establish a protection system from flood risks by building dams for protection and rehabilitating channels of wadis.

It should be noted that there are 3 types of dams in the Sultanate of Oman: underground recharge dams, surface storage dams and protection dams. The government implemented plans to establish dams based on studies.

“These dams play a great role in agriculture. Dams also support biodiversity with the expansion of green areas that were dry and arid years ago. The growth of plants and trees helped animals, birds, insects and other living creatures,” a specialist in biodiversity told the *Observer*. Some of these dams including Wadi Dayqah Dam in Qurayat, which overflowed more than three times in the last one year, has become a picnic spot for families. These dam premises are an ideal meeting place for gathering friends and family members.



There are 3 types of dams in the Sultanate of Oman: underground recharge dams, surface storage dams and protection dams



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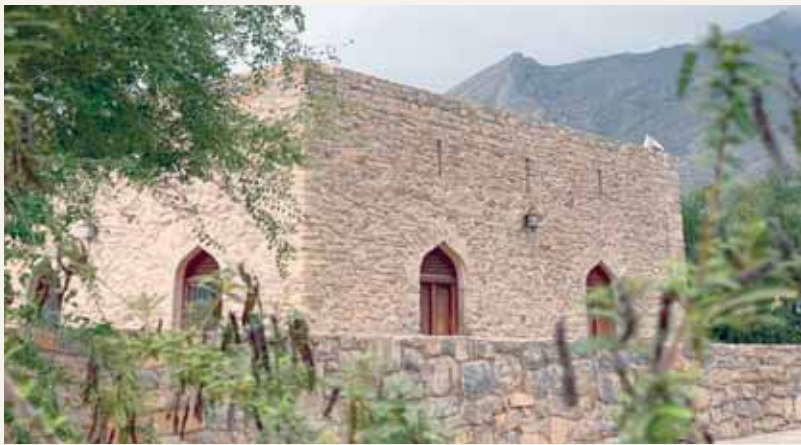
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AL YAARUBAH MOSQUE: A SYMBOL OF OMAN’S GREAT HERITAGE

ZUWAINA AL SULAIMANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 12

Al Yaarubah Mosque, which is located in the Shari’a area of Birkat Al Mouz in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, is a prominent example of religious and architectural significance in Oman. It was built by Imam Sultan bin Saif al Yaarubi in 1649. Over many years, the mosque has witnessed several expansions. It was expanded during the era of the Al Busaidy dynasty, by Mohammed bin



Over many years, the mosque has witnessed several expansions. – Photos by Jamal al Darai, insta: @jamal.aldarai



Imam Ahmad bin Said al Busaidy in the early 13th century. It also underwent restoration during the reign of late Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1998. True to the architectural style of interior Oman mosques, Al Yaarubah Mosque lacks the grand minarets, domes, and protruding mihrab typical of other mosques. Its exterior facade, constructed primarily of stone and sarooj, overlooks the Falaj Al Khatmain, embodying simplicity and grace. The mosque has two wooden

doors on its eastern side. The prayer hall comprises two galleries, each supported by cylindrical columns connected by arches. The mihrab, simple and unadorned, seamlessly integrates into the qibla wall without embellishments or inscriptions. One of the distinguishing features of the mosque is its strategic location, connecting to the Falaj Al Khatmain, Wadi Al Ma’eedin, and Bait Al Rudaydah Fortress, making it an appealing destination for visitors.

ROHM to host devotional singers

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 12

The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) announced its Ramadhan programmes, which includes organising 3 special evenings for music that celebrates love and reverence for Allah the almighty, and adherence to Islamic values. During the holy month, ROHM hosts international groups known for devotional and Sufi music. They will be joined by singers from various parts of Oman highlighting the artistic richness with their distinctive tones. The programme begins on March 18 with the Ibn Arabi Band from Morocco and the Al Zawiya Band from Jordan. The Ibn Arabi Ensemble specialises in Sufi chanting, with a focus on well-known Sufi poems of Ibn Arabi, Ibn Al Farid, Rabi’a Al Adawiya, Al Suhrawardi, and others. The second programme

on March 25 will feature the Mawlawis and Levants of Syria, a quartet of singers that includes musicians and a choir. The group will be joined on stage by Khalid al Ariami, the most inspiring vocalist in the Sultanate of Oman. On April 1, ROHM will host Egypt’s Ali Al Helbawy who followed in the footsteps of his father, the well-known devotional vocalist Mohamed Al Helbawy. He has participated in many concerts and has also sung at the Cairo Opera House and the Library of Alexandria. By bringing together famous international bands and Omani participants, the concerts continue to establish authentic international partnerships through culture and the arts. The three evenings will be held at the Royal Opera Theatre, House of Musical Arts, at 9:30 pm.



The programme brings together Arab groups with local groups hence highlighting the artistic richness of the country

‘Exercise before Suhoor or after Iftar’

ABDULLAH AL NASRI
MUSCAT, MARCH 12

How should one prepare one’s body for fasting for 30 days of Ramadhan. According to Faisal Abdalla, a coach and an author, Ramadhan, Islamic calendar’s ninth month is for prayer, reflection, community and above all else fasting. Muslims would fast the whole day till sunset and then break the fast with Iftar. Furthermore, he added that it’s also a month that can be used for spiritual reflection, self-improvement and full devotion to worship Allah. Ramadhan can be seen as an opportunity to fulfil religious obligations and improve the body. Abdalla also explained more about the exercises he did and the lessons he learned through decades of practice. Abdalla started fasting for the first time when he was 11 years old after observing the fasting of his family. Abdalla did training in the gym during Ramadhan, and as time passed by he cut down high intensity workouts. He said that Ramadhan is bigger than training and that this is life. “There’s no one size fits all approach, but for people looking to maintain muscle mass, I would



limit your cardio-based sessions to once a week,” says Abdalla. Abdalla explained that people can do workouts during their fasting and the best time to do workouts is before Suhoor between 4 am and 5 am. He also suggested calories and fluids before fasting begins. Abdalla says a more common approach is to train your body after Iftar. “You can either train lightly before Iftar, so you can go straight into eating and refuel your body, or you can break your

fast with something very small. Typically, during Ramadhan, this will be dates and some coffee. Once you’ve trained you can get all of the nutrients with full meals,” says Abdalla. In a 2012 study, it was found that Muslim athletes who fast during Ramadhan should use overnight opportunities to consume foods and drinks that can aid in supplying the nutrients needed to maintain performance. ‘Because of the benefits of being able to consume at least

You can either train lightly before Iftar, so you can go straight into eating and refuel your body, or you can break your fast with something very small

FAISAL ABDALLA
A coach and an author

some of these nutrients before, during or after a training session, the schedule of exercise should be shifted wherever possible to the beginning or end of the day, or during the evening when some nutritional support can be provided,’ says the study. Abdalla stated about his personal approach, which he would train as he normally would, is to train smarter. One must listen to his/her body and avoid pushing too hard. “The goal isn’t exercise until you pass out.”

Provision of Iftar meals is act of compassion

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

During Ramadhan, there are many initiatives to provide iftar meals to the needy people. These initiatives help the fasting people or the needy ones to break the fast on the go instead of rushing home to do so. This will help in reducing traffic chaos and accidents as iftar time approaches. Such initiatives, which are considered a charity and volunteer initiative for men and women, have opened up the horizons of partnership between



Such initiatives have opened up the horizons of partnership between the institutions supporting the initiative and its beneficiaries

the institutions supporting the initiative and its beneficiaries. Many institutions and companies provide such meals that come under corporate social

responsibility. A number of charitable societies and volunteer teams are active during the holy month of Ramadhan in raising funds to provide Iftar meals in many public places across where Muslim workers gather. Some volunteer teams and charitable organisations use social media and popular websites to send invitations to philanthropists to participate in Iftar initiatives. The Oman Charitable Organisation distributes Ramadhan supplies to many needy families in cooperation

with a number of governmental and voluntary institutions. It also distributes food supplies to eligible families according to the lists given by the Ministry of Social Development. The OCO said it will receive Ramadhan donations for 2024. During the holy month of fasting, providing Iftar is a noble act of compassion. Feeding the poor and needy is an act that bestows many blessings. According to Hadith, a person who provides Iftar to a fasting person will have the same reward (Thawab) as the fasting person.

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- 10- R/C Land in Masairah located at centre with area 600m².
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SAY GOODBYE TO SMOKING

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

RAMADHAN is a month for spiritual elevation and to practise good deeds which can be replicated through the rest of the year. But it is also a month when one can try to quit some bad habits like smoking.

Dr Manar al Zeedi, Senior Specialist in Family Medicine at the Ministry of Health (MoH), the major reason one should quit smoking is because it entails inhaling over 5,000 chemicals directly to the lungs and to the other parts of the body jeopardising one's life.

"Ramadhan is a month to abide by the divine principles and to observe moderation in everything and to stay away from actions which are forbidden to mankind," Dr Manar said.

According to her, stopping smoking during the month is easier than we think and all one needs to have is faith in the Almighty.

"If the fasting person can go without a cigarette, sheesha or other tobacco products for almost 16 hours every day during Ramadhan it is a great achievement. S/he will also be able to quit forever," she said.

Dangers of smoking "It may sound cliché but advanced studies have found that tobacco use harms every organ of the human body. Believe it or not, besides nicotine, more than 5,000 chemicals including cancer-causing agents, are directly delivered into your lungs, blood and organs while using tobacco." Such colossal damage caused by smoking results in shortening one's lifespan significantly. In many countries, smoking is the number 1 cause of preventable deaths. Pregnant women who smoke put their foetuses at risk. Other possible effects

on pregnancy include ectopic pregnancy, a life-threatening condition when the embryo implants outside the uterus; miscarriages; stillbirths; congenital conditions such as cleft palate; and low birth weight.

After having decided to quit that habit, one should write them down on a paper about what makes you smoke. Patches and gums are advisable but they are not good over a long period of time because their consumption over a period of time can cause damage.

SMOKING-RELATED ILLNESS

Statistics show that millions of people lose their lives to smoking and in the US alone, every year, roughly 480,000 people die from smoking-related diseases. That means that for every person who dies from smoking, at least 30 others live with a serious smoking-related illness.

Alternatives are danger too Contrary to what many people have believed that smoking a cigar is safer than smoking a cigarette, cigar smokers too face many of the same potential risks as cigarette smokers, including cancer. Also, smokeless tobacco contains almost 30 cancer-causing chemicals.

The e-cigarettes also known as vapes, which are fast catching up with the youth, are not safe either. Vaping delivers more concentrated nicotine than cigarettes in a smokeless inhaled mist (vapour). Health risks from vape products range from asthma to COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) and cancer.

"Remember, the right decision that a smoker can take this month is to choose to quit smoking which is a huge step toward living a healthy life. Ramadhan is the most ideal month to stop such habits that harm one's health," said Dr Manar.

PEOPLE LOSE THEIR LIVES TO SMOKING AND IN THE US ALONE, EVERY YEAR, ROUGHLY 480,000



If the fasting person can go without a cigarette, sheesha or other tobacco products for almost 16 hours every day during Ramadhan, it is a great achievement. S/he will also be able to quit forever

DR MANAR AL ZEEDI
Senior Specialist, Family Medicine, Ministry of Health



Wanton debris dumping harms environment, spoils ambience

RUQAYA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 12

Wanton dumping of construction debris is harmful for the environment and spoils the beauty of urban ambience.

Abdullah al Mufarji, environment specialist at the Environment Authority, said many contractors or landlords tend to throw or dump construction debris in randomly wadis, roadsides, landfills, and desert areas as they the easiest and least expensive ways to dispose such waster without paying attention to the negative impact of such actions.

“The negative consequences of the random and improper throwing of construction and demolition waste go beyond distorting the country’s landscape. This may become breeding ground for insects, rodents, unpleasant odours, and the accumulation of dust and dirt,” he said.

Over time, as Abdullah pointed out, these areas become dumping yards for food waste that attract stray animals and birds “This waste can spread to the beaches that threaten marine life of all kinds. Also, random dumping in wadis and public squares



The impact of improper throwing of construction and demolition waste go beyond distorting the country’s landscape



blocks the natural flow of water causing floods during rains, affects the course of wadis or pollutes groundwater,” he said. Al Mufarji said, “These debris contains flammable materials such as wood, cork, remnants of electrical wires, asbestos, dyes, varnishes, and expired liquid chemicals such as insecticides and others, which poses risks of fires.”

Responsible handling of debris is the only solution to manage this problem. “There are 27 sites across Oman to receive construction and demolition waste. There are also nine sites for recycling such debris using modern crushers,” he said. The scientific disposal of this kind of waste comes as a final step in the effective management of this waste.

“Recycling is a great way to preserve the environment and not cause soil pollution.” You can also donate unwanted building materials instead of hoarding or accumulating them. You can donate the iron pieces to a blacksmith shop near you, or donate pieces of wood to a carpenter as well.

The Environment Authority, in cooperation with many competent local authorities, is keen on proper management of this waste, as well as finding solutions to control random disposal.

As he highlighted, the Authority has launched the National Waste Management Registry System as the first national platform for registering waste and its safe disposal.

“Work is currently underway to find solutions using modern technologies and activating tracking systems for transporting trucks in order to facilitate the monitoring process and arrest violators,” Al Mufarji said Environmental inspectors and monitors are working to control and record violations. In addition, the competent authorities are updating laws and enhancing penalties to tackle wanton dumping.

Five arrested for creating ‘fake’ official website

MUSCAT: The ROP has arrested five people of Arab nationalities for committing fraud by creating a fake website identical to one of the official websites.

The intention was to lure victims to provide their bank information in exchange for obtaining certain services

According to official sources, the fraudsters aimed to seize sums of money from bank



accounts and invest them in the digital currency market.

Legal procedures are being completed against them.

GLOBINVEST The Global Omani Investment Company SAOC ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

The Board of Directors of The Global Omani Investment Company SAOC is pleased to invite the Company’s shareholders to attend the company’s ordinary Annual General Meetings, to be held at 2:00 pm on **Wednesday, 27/03/2024**, via the electronic platform to hold general meetings which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, a second annual ordinary general meeting will be held on **Monday 01/04/2024** at the same time and place to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ report for the financial year ended December 31, 2023.
- To consider the Auditors’ Report and to approve the Financial Statements, Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account, for the financial year ended December 31, 2023.
- To consider and approve the transactions entered into by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended December 31, 2023.
- To consider and approve the transactions the company will enter into with related parties during the financial year ending on December 31, 2024.
- To approve the sitting fees of the Board meetings paid to the Board members for the financial year ended on 31/12/2023, and to determine the sitting fees for the next financial year ending on 31/12/2024.
- To consider and approve the proposal of distributing the total sum of RO 342 Thousand as remuneration for the Board of Directors of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2023.
- To appoint the Auditors for the Company for the financial year ending December 31, 2024, and to determine their fees.

According to the Company’s Articles of Association and the controls of holding General Meetings using electronic plat form, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Juristic persons only, have the right to appoint a natural person as a proxy to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDCC.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder’s shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information, please contact Mr. Jamal Ahmed Al-Shanfari on phone 24489009 GSM: 92839933

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Consultante

Mega dance performance in Suhar on April 19

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](mailto:kabeeryousef)

Billed as the largest group dance performance in Oman, over 400 women will take part in Kerala’s popular dance form of Thiruvathira in Suhar on April 19. The mega Thiruvathirakali will be hosted by Sohar Malayali Sangham (SMS) in association with Indian Social Club Sohar.

“By far, this is going to be a record-making dance programme in Oman with the highest number of participants in a single dance performance,” said Jyothi Murali, Ladies Wing Coordinator, SMS.

Girls above 13 are eligible to register and take part in this mega dance event.

Thiruvathirakali is a unique dance performed in the Indian state of Kerala on the auspicious day of Thiruvathira. The dance transcends mere movements and embodies the essence of grace and heritage.

During the dance, groups of women clad in traditional Kerala sarees and elegant blouses form a graceful circle with their steps synchronised to the rhythmic beat of ancient melodies. With each sway and turn, Thiruvathirakali weaves a tale of reverence and devotion.

The women, with their hands clasped in unity, create a symphony of motion and a harmonious blend of tradition. In this dance, the essence of Kerala’s rich cultural tapestry comes alive, captivating onlookers with its enchanting beauty and timeless elegance.

Those interested can get in touch with the organisers to register for the event and get trained for the event.

As the dance requires good practice, further registration cannot be accepted once the dance practice starts, according to Jayan Menon, Programme Convenor of SMS.



P.O. Box: 147, Jawharat A' Shatti, PC 134, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24073800, Fax: 24698496, Website: www.soharpower.com

Audtied Financial Statement for the year ended 31 December 2023

BOARD OF DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Sohar Power Company SAOG (“Sohar Power” or the “Company”), I am pleased to present you with the Nineteenth Annual Report of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2023.

On 21st March 2023, Sohar Power Company shareholders held their Annual Ordinary General Meeting (“AOGM”) to approve the 2022 Financial Statements and other related issues. On the same day, the shareholders held Extraordinary General meeting to approve the proposal to wait until the release of the power tender 2024 to address the expected power demand from April 2024, which was announced in April 2023 to evaluate the tender outcome and propose a recommendation.

On 22nd May 2023, the Company in a market disclosure detailing the resolutions of the Board of Directors meeting, enumerated the efforts made by the Company in obtaining a viable future. Having determined that there are no further options available, the Board resolved to call for an Extraordinary General Meeting (“EGM”) to approve the Company to start the bankruptcy proceedings. This EGM was held on 12th July 2023 in which the Shareholders provided their approval. The Court process is currently ongoing.

Health & Safety

The year 2023 has seen excellent Health and Safety performance for Sohar Power. There were no Lost Time Accidents (LTA), accumulating to 3,988 days without LTA at the end of the year. The Health and Safety of our employees, contractors and visitors remains the utmost priority for the Company and its operator Sohar Operations & Maintenance Company LLC (“SOMC”).

Operations

Since the end of the PWPA term on May 15, 2022, the plant has been mothballed (preserved) by the O&M Operator SOMC under a Preservation Contract, in the hope that the Company may be able to undertake future operations under frameworks then under discussion with the Authorities. However, following the filing of bankruptcy in July 2023, the Company re-negotiated the Preservation Contract with a view to reducing the cash outflow, yet retaining value for an eventual sale / operation of the Power Plant. The Plant continues to be preserved under the amended Preservation Contract.

Earlier in February 2023, the Company sold its stock of fuel oil in its three storage tanks with a view to generating cash to cover its expenses.

Financial Performance

The Board of Directors would like to announce that the Company has ended the year with a net loss of RO 3.7 million compared to a net loss of RO 14.8 million in 2022. The reduction in net loss in 2023 compared to 2022 is mainly due to no impairment charge made in 2023 compared to 2022.

The revenues for the period amount to NIL against OMR 11.4 million for the same period last year. This is mainly

due to the expiry of the PWPA on 15 May 2022 (i.e., no operational revenue in 2023 compared to 4.5 months in 2022).

The direct and indirect costs have decreased from OMR 7.6 million in 2022 to OMR 1.9 million in 2023. This is due to a reduction in other costs including plant insurance costs, operational cost and others, considering that the Plant is under preservation since 15 May 2022.

Due to lack of revenue generation, no principal amount was paid in the year 2023. The interest was settled for Q1 2023 only and no interest payment was made from April to December 2023. The finance costs increased by OMR 0.5 million in 2023 in comparison to 2022 which was mainly due to increase in interest rates.

Due to the commencement of bankruptcy proceedings, trading in the company’s shares has been suspended on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) since July 2023.

Corporate Governance

In line with efforts deployed in previous years, the Company ensured that its organization, systems, policies, and procedures follow the highest standards of governance to always comply with the Code of Corporate Governance promulgated by CMA, including the new Code requirements effective since July 2016.

After the resignation of the internal auditor of the Company, the Audit Committee and the Board has appointed, after obtaining CMA approval, an external firm to perform the IA activities of the company until the end of 2023.

Corporate Social Responsibility

In 2023, Sohar Power was able to contribute to local projects intended for the local communities and the people of the Sultanate of Oman through a financial contribution amounting to 2000 OMR. This initiative covers contributions to Oman Charity organisation.

Outlook for 2024

The Company has been in close contact with its secured creditors through the process of discussions with the Authorities and OPWP. After filing for bankruptcy, the Company, with the concurrence of its creditors issued tenders for sale of the entire plant with a view to saving time for a potential court appointed liquidator. This process is currently ongoing.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to thank our valued shareholders for their continued support, trust, and confidence. I would also like to thank all the personnel associated with the operation and maintenance of the plant in Sohar and the staff of the Company for their loyalty, dedication and commitment.

I would also like to express our gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Government for their continued guidance, support and encouragement to the private sector.

Miklos Almasy
Chairman of the Board

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2023

	31 Dec 2023 RO'000	31 Dec 2022 RO'000	31 Dec 2023 USD'000	31 Dec 2022 USD'000
ASSETS				
Property, plant and equipment	7,012	7,531	18,213	19,563
Right-of-use asset	4	66	10	171
Inventories	-	817	-	2,121
Other receivables	665	328	1,728	852
Cash and cash equivalents	1,110	2,246	2,883	5,831
Total assets	8,791	10,988	22,834	28,538
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity:				
Share capital	22,101	22,101	57,405	57,405
Legal reserve	4,373	4,373	11,358	11,358
Accumulated losses	(60,613)	(56,905)	(157,445)	(147,812)
Total equity	(34,139)	(30,431)	(88,682)	(79,049)
LIABILITIES				
Employee end of service benefits	20	18	53	46
Lease liability	-	79	-	206
Provision for decommissioning costs	2,141	2,014	5,562	5,232
Term loans	34,110	38,929	88,598	101,113
Trade and other payables	1,714	296	4,459	775
Amount due to related parties	4,945	83	12,844	215
Total liabilities	42,930	41,419	111,516	107,587
Total equity and liabilities	8,791	10,988	22,834	28,538
Net assets per share	(0.154)	(0.138)	(0.401)	(0.358)

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2023

	Year ended 31 Dec 2023 RO'000	Year ended 31 Dec 2022 RO'000	Year ended 31 Dec 2023 USD'000	Year ended 31 Dec 2022 USD'000
Revenue	-	11,436	-	29,705
Cost of revenue	(1,907)	(8,584)	(4,955)	(22,298)
Gross (loss)/profit	(1,907)	2,852	(4,955)	7,407
Other income	991	48	2,576	125
Impairment of property, plant and equipment	-	(15,177)	-	(39,421)
General and administrative expenses	(629)	(675)	(1,633)	(1,749)
Operating loss	(1,545)	(12,952)	(4,012)	(33,638)
Finance costs	(2,450)	(2,244)	(6,366)	(5,830)
Loss before tax	(3,995)	(15,196)	(10,378)	(39,468)
Tax credit	287	385	745	1,001
Total comprehensive loss for the year	(3,708)	(14,811)	(9,633)	(38,467)
Loss per share	(0.017)	(0.067)	(0.044)	(0.174)

Note: The complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent to any shareholder by mail within 7 days of receipt.

Charity ship leaves Cyprus as Palestinians on brink of famine

LARNACA: A ship carrying 200 tonnes of aid for Gaza left Cyprus on Tuesday in a pilot project to open a sea route to deliver supplies to a population aid agencies say is on the brink of famine.

The charity ship Open Arms was seen sailing out of Larnaca port in Cyprus, towing a barge containing flour, rice and protein. The mission was funded mostly by the UAE and organised by US-based charity World Central Kitchen (WCK).

The journey to Gaza took about 15 hours but a heavy tow barge could make the trip considerably longer, possibly up to two days. Cyprus is just over 320 km north-west of Gaza.

The US military said its vessel, the General Frank S. Besson, was also en route to provide humanitarian relief to Gaza by sea.

With aid agencies saying deliveries into Gaza have been held up by bureaucratic obstacles and insecurity since the start of the war and even Israel's allies demanding easier aid access to the enclave, attention has shifted towards alternative routes including sea and air drops.

Tuesday's mission was the culmination of months of preparation by Cyprus, the EU member state closest to the conflict. It is keeping a wary eye on spillover effects from upheaval in the Middle East and is already seeing migratory inflows from Lebanon increasing.



Displaced Palestinians collect food donated by a charity in Rafah. — AFP

Aid agencies saying deliveries into Gaza have been held up by bureaucratic obstacles and insecurity since the start of the war demanding easier aid access to the enclave

With the lack of port infrastructure, WCK said it was building a landing jetty in Gaza with material from destroyed buildings and rubble. This is a separate initiative to a plan announced by US President Joe Biden last week to build a temporary pier in Gaza to facilitate aid deliveries by sea. Construction of the jetty was "well underway", WCK founder Jose Andres said in a post on X. "We may fail, but the biggest failure will not be trying!" he wrote, posting a picture of work with bulldozers apparently levelling out ground close to sea.

Prior to the outbreak of the war, about 500 trucks entered Gaza a day, with 100 of those carrying aid and the rest commercial supplies, such as fuel and cooking gas, according to UNRWA, the main UN aid agency in Gaza.

The UN estimates a quarter of the population in the pulverised enclave is at risk of starvation, and aid is barely scratching the surface of daily needs. The UN has previously accused Israel of blocking aid to Gaza. The war has displaced most of Gaza's 2.3 million people, with many cramped into makeshift tents. — Reuters

Qatar says warring sides 'not near a deal' on truce

DOHA: Israel and Palestinian groups are not close to a deal to halt the fighting in Gaza and free captives, mediator Qatar said on Tuesday, warning that the situation remained "very complicated".

Despite weeks of talks involving US, Qatari and Egyptian mediators, the Muslim holy month of Ramadhan began on Monday without the start of a truce and captives exchange they had aimed for.

"We are not near a deal, meaning that we are not seeing both sides converging on language that can resolve the current disagreement over the implementation of a deal," said foreign ministry spokesman Majed al Ansari.

All parties were "continuing to work in the negotiations to reach a deal hopefully within the confines of Ramadhan", Ansari told a news conference.

But he added that he could not "offer any timeline" on an agreement while the conflict

remained "very complicated on the ground".

The war started with the October 7 attack that resulted in about 1,160 deaths in Israel, according to a count based on Israeli official figures.

The Palestinian groups also took around 250 captives, dozens of whom were released during a week-long truce in November. Israel believes 99 captives remain alive in Gaza, along with the bodies of 31.

Israel's retaliatory bombardment and ground offensive have killed 31,112 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry.

Qatar previously mediated a one-week break in fighting in late November that led to the release of scores of Israeli and foreign captives, as well as aid entering the besieged Palestinian territory.

Ansari was asked whether Qatar had exerted pressure on Palestinian groups in efforts to reach a truce. — AFP



A boy walks past a Palestinian woman sitting at a camp for displaced people backdropped by the minarets of a mosque, in Rafah. — AFP

War grinds on Gazans



The Palestinian Al Naji family prepare to break their fast during the first day of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadhan sitting amidst the ruins of their family house in Deir el Balah. — AFP

GAZA: The first day of Ramadhan came and went in Gaza, with residents marking a joyless iftar against a backdrop of famine, disease and displacement as the war in the besieged territory ground on more than five months after it began.

As the Muslim world welcomed the start of the holy month on Monday, Gazans faced continued Israeli bombardments and a spiralling humanitarian crisis.

With the flow of food and other assistance slowed to a trickle, a UN report citing the territory's Hamas-run health ministry said 25 people have now died from malnutrition and dehydration, most of them children.

In Gaza's southern border city of Rafah, where 1.5 million people have sought refuge, the usual generous iftar meal marking the end of the day's fast was replaced by "canned food and beans", said displaced Khan Yunis resident

Mohammad al Masry.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on Monday for "silencing the guns" during the Muslim holy month and said he was "appalled and outraged that conflict is continuing".

In Gaza City, surrounded by collapsed buildings, one family gathered around a table next to the ruins of their home to break the fast on Monday.

"Today is the first day of Ramadhan. We decided to come and break the fast here in our home that was struck, despite the destruction and the rubble," said Om Shaher Al Qta'a.

Earlier in the day, Zaki Abu Mansour said in Rafah that his last meal before the fast began had been meagre.

Israel's retaliatory bombardment and ground offensive has killed 31,112 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's

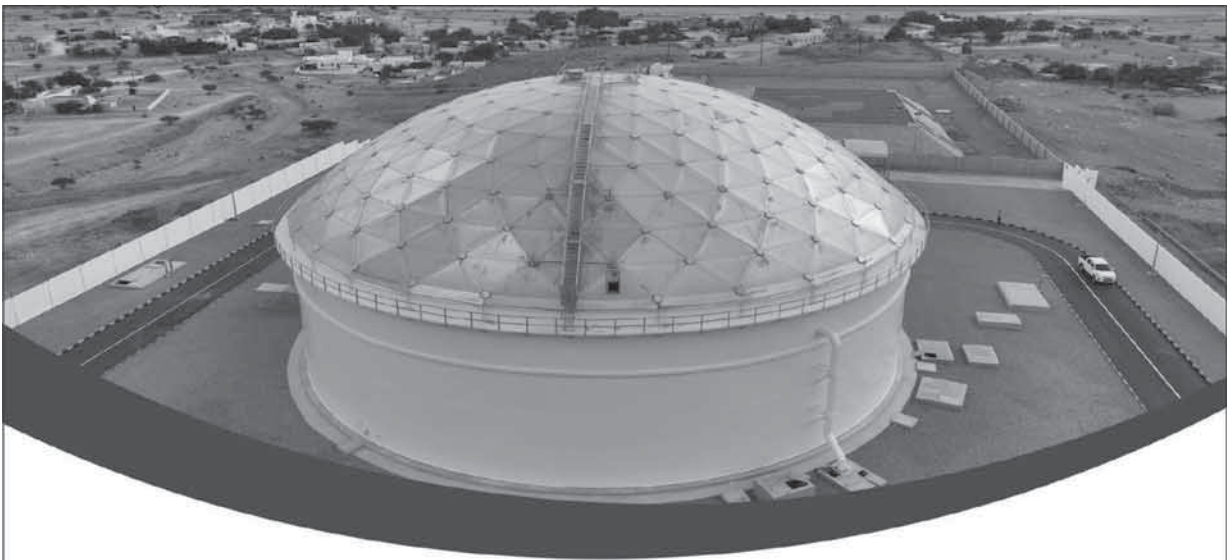
health ministry. Israel also carried out strikes against Palestinians ally groups deep inside Lebanese territory, with the governor of the local Baalbek-Hermel region saying one man had been killed.

The Israeli military later confirmed its jets had hit two sites in the area "in retaliation to aircraft attacks launched towards the Golan Heights".

Since November, Yemeni groups have been attacking ships in the Red Sea, in professed solidarity with Palestinians during the Israel's war against Palestinians in Gaza.

The attacks have sent insurance costs spiralling for vessels plying the key trade route and prompted many shipping firms to take the far longer passage around the southern tip of Africa instead.

Since January, the United States and Britain have launched repeated strikes on targets in Yemen. — AFP



TENDER NOTICE

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

Tender No.	Description	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2596959/2024	Call off Contract for Supply and Delivery of Flanged Pressure Reducing Valves & Gate Valves & DI Strainers for two years	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 1500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	28/3/2024	22/4/2024
T/2592966/2024	Supply and Installation of Tankers Management System in Sewage Treatment Plants and Treated Effluent Water Filling Stations	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	RO 1500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	28/3/2024	25/4/2024
T/2551978/2024	Call-Off Contract for Supply and Delivery of HDPE Fittings for Two Years	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	RO 500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	28/3/2024	22/4/2024
T/2577959/2024	Commissioning and Connecting New Emergency Wells in Nuber Well Field at Wilayat Liwa in AL Batinah North	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O. 50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	28/3/2024	22/4/2024

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

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

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

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

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



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In brief

■ GENEVA



FOOD AID FOR REFUGEES COULD END NEXT MONTH

Food aid for hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees in Chad, some of whom are close to starvation, will be suspended next month without more funding, the World Food Programme (WFP) said.

The WFP is struggling to feed them all and many are already skipping meals. Nearly half of refugee children under five-years-old are suffering from severe anaemia.

“We’ve already cut our operations in ways that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago,” said Pierre Honnorat, WFP’s Representative. “We need donors to prevent the situation from becoming an all-out catastrophe.” — **Reuters**

■ MALE



TROOPS BEGIN MALDIVES PULLOUT AFTER QUIT ORDER

India has begun withdrawing military personnel operating surveillance aircraft in the Maldives after the new president ordered them to leave, defence authorities said on Tuesday.

An official of the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) said 25 Indian troops deployed in the southernmost atoll of Addu had left the archipelago ahead of March 10, the official start of the withdrawal agreed by both sides.

“We can confirm that the Indian troop withdrawal is underway,” the MNDF said in a statement. The two sides had agreed to complete a withdrawal of 89 troops and support staff in the Maldives by May 10. — **AFP**

■ MANILA



EU STATES BACK SECOND TERM FOR IMF GEORGIEVA

All 27 EU countries have endorsed a second term for International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva, Belgium’s finance minister said on Tuesday.

Bulgarian economist Georgieva, 70, said last week she would be “honoured” to lead the Washington-based financial institution for a second five-year term.

Her current term expires on September 30. “I’m very happy to announce that all European member states actually expressed that support for Kristalina,” Belgium Finance Minister Vincent Van Peteghem said. — **AFP**

Pro-Ukraine groups attack Russian border

KYIV: Pro-Ukrainian groups staged a brazen cross-border raid on Tuesday, claiming to take control of a Russian village, as Kyiv launched one of its largest drone attacks since the start of the war.

Groups of pro-Kyiv volunteer fighters, made up of Russians who oppose the Kremlin, said that they had broken into the Kursk and Belgorod regions, while Moscow said it had fired rockets and artillery to foil the attempted incursion.

“The village of Tyotkino, Kursk region is completely under the control of Russian liberation forces,” the Freedom of Russia legion, a groups that claims to be made up of Russian citizens fighting on behalf of Ukraine, said in a post on Telegram.

It published a video purporting to show a handful of Russian troops fleeing across a snowy field.

Moscow denied that the fighters had made ground, saying its forces had thwarted multiple attacks.

“At about 3:00 am, Ukrainian groups, after intensive shelling of civilian sites, tried to attack Russian territory in three directions,” Russia’s defence ministry said.

“All the Ukrainian attacks were repelled. The enemy was hit by aircraft, rockets and artillery,” it added. Another attack at 8:00 am at Tyotkino was also foiled, it added.

Russia’s defence ministry said it halted the last attack at 8:25 am, but a spokesperson for the Freedom of Russia region said that fighting was ongoing.

Moscow also reported a wave



Ukrainian service members prepare a D-20 howitzer before firing toward Russian troops, in Donetsk region. — **Reuters**

Groups of pro-Kyiv volunteer fighters, made up of Russians who oppose the Kremlin, said that they had broken into the Kursk and Belgorod regions

of Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian border regions overnight and throughout Tuesday. In one statement it said it had shot down four Ukrainian drones over the Kursk region in the space of an hour. Kursk Governor Roman

Starovoyt said there had been a shoot-out in his region.

The neighbouring Belgorod region was also hit in a series of drone attacks on Tuesday — including a strike on Belgorod city hall, the regional governor said.

Russia’s FSB security service said that since Sunday it had repelled a number of attempted cross-border attacks in the Belgorod and Kursk regions.

A spokesman for Ukraine’s military intelligence, Andriy Yusov, said the fighters were not acting under orders from Kyiv.

Kyiv launched one of its most significant drone strikes on Russia so far in the two-year war.

Two Russian energy sites, including one of the largest oil refineries some 800 kilometres from the border, were hit overnight, Russian officials said.

Ukraine has justified attacks on Russian energy sites as legitimate targeting of infrastructure used to fuel the attack. It did not claim responsibility for Tuesday’s strikes. — **AFP**



Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa administers the oath of the office of the President of Pakistan to Asif Ali Zardari, while PM Shehbaz Sharif and Pakistan’s outgoing President Arif Alvi attend the event, in Islamabad. — **Reuters file photo**

Pakistan PM appoints cabinet to take country out of economic crisis

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced the key members of his cabinet, tasking them with leading the country out of a crippling economic crisis fuelled by debt, spiralling inflation and a feeble rupee.

Pakistan’s 19 new ministers took their oath of office on Monday, after an election marred by allegations of vote rigging.

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb — chief of a leading Pakistan bank, with a background in international finance — was one of the only technocrats to be appointed among a group of Sharif loyalists.

Second-time-PM Sharif heads an alliance backed by his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party’s long-term rivals, the Pakistan

Peoples Party (PPP).

Sharif told his cabinet on Monday they would need to perform “deep surgery” on the nation’s finances, adding that: “The foremost challenge our nation confronts is inflation.”

PPP refused to assume any ministerial positions, instead taking only the president’s role for party leader Asif Ali Zardari.

The two family dynasties combined to keep lawmakers loyal to jailed ex-prime minister Imran Khan from power after they won the most seats in the February general election.

The Sharif family have ruled Pakistan for lengthy stints, with Shehbaz’s eldest brother Nawaz Sharif also serving as prime minister on three separate occasions. — **AFP**

Haitian PM to resign after Jamaica talks

KINGSTON: Haiti’s prime minister, Ariel Henry, will step down once a transition council and temporary replacement have been appointed, he said on Monday, after leading the Caribbean country since the 2021 assassination of its last president.

Armed gangs massively grew their wealth, influence and territory under his administration, prompting Henry to travel to Kenya in late February to secure its support for a United Nations-backed security mission to help police.

However, the conflict dramatically escalated in his absence and left the 74-year-old neurosurgeon stranded in the US territory of Puerto Rico while regional leaders called for a swift transition.

“The government that I am leading will resign immediately after the installation of (a transition) council,” Henry said in a late night video address. “I want to thank the Haitian people for the opportunity I had been granted.”

“I’m asking all Haitians to remain calm and do everything they can for peace and stability to come back as fast as possible,” he added.

Henry is set to be replaced by a presidential council that will have two observers and seven voting members, including representatives from a number of political coalitions, the business



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets with Jamaican PM Andrew Holness prior to an emergency meeting on Haiti at the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Jamaica. — **Reuters**

sector, civil society and one religious leader.

Regional leaders met on Monday in nearby Jamaica to discuss the framework for a political transition, which the US had urged last week to be “expedited” as armed gangs sought to topple his government.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had earlier on Monday said the council would be tasked with meeting the “immediate needs” of Haitians, enabling the security mission’s deployment and creating security conditions necessary for free elections.

Haiti declared a state of emergency early this month as clashes damaged communications and led to two prison breaks after

Jimmy “Barbeque” Cherizier, a leader of an alliance of armed groups, said they would unite and overthrow Henry.

Henry’s resignation comes alongside regional talks over participation in an international force, which he had requested to help police fight the gangs, whose brutal turf wars have fuelled a humanitarian crisis, cut off food supplies and forced hundreds of thousands from their homes.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said earlier on Monday the United States would contribute an additional \$100 million to this force and \$33 million in humanitarian aid, bringing the US’ total pledge to the force to \$300 million. — **Reuters**

Beauty beyond disruption



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi
khalidalharibi@gmail.com

The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

If there is one common goal that I wish all of us focus on right now for the sake of humanity is to pursue beauty beyond disruption.

Originally, the concept of disruptive strategy was popularised by one the greatest modern strategy thinkers, Clayton Christensen in his masterpiece ‘The Innovator’s Dilemma’. His work focused on the areas of serving underserved markets. However, for the past thirty years, instead of critically refining the disruptive strategy theory, top educational and business schools, global consultancy firms and the Silicon Valley have idolised the terms disruption, disruption strategy and even disruptive innovation as the most effective way to achieve exponential economic success and beat the competition. I believe that disruption is NOT the only way to achieve innovation, and that we need to take a closer look at how to work towards progress that does not negatively impact how we make a living, where we work, or what we do.

Beyond disrupting jobs

According to research published by McKinsey consultancy firm in 2020, as high as 40 per cent

of jobs in the Arab world could be disrupted or displaced by technology advancement within a few years. So far, we have not invested in a universal initiative to upgrade our digital skills to mitigate this job disruption. Therefore, we need to rethink jobs and come up with more flexible ways of revenue generation that respects the value shared by any human being, whether digital or not.

Beyond disrupting companies

Who remembers Kodak? Or Nokia? RIM’s Blackberry? These are companies that served us well for a while until they were toppled in their fiercely competitive digitised industry. The question here is: While change is the only constant, is displacing companies the only way to innovate? For every global rapidly expanding company there are disrupted companies. These disrupted companies carry a loss in national balance sheets and local supply chains. Here, supply chain integration to serve stakeholders better could be a better way for growth and impact.

Beyond disrupting industries

First, huge malls and shopping centres displaced neighbourhood grocery stores, then Amazon came

WE HAVE A DUTY TO LEAVE A MORE BEAUTIFUL WORLD TO PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS THROUGH STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN ACHIEVING GROWTH WITHOUT DISPLACING AND DISRUPTING BEAUTIFUL WAYS OF LIFE

and disrupted malls and the retail industry. When an industry struggles a whole community struggles as well and the solution is not revisionist protectionism but in forward-thinking rediscovery of just and sustainable procurement and supply chain. One of the clearest examples of the ugly face of disruption is how the weapons industry is displacing the impact investing world. The US and a few of its allies created in the past the most attractive societies that promoted innovation.

Yet today, they are leading the charge in funding and investing in genocidal mania and white supremacy campaigns, powered by intelligent systems that are murdering innocent people, levelling neighbourhoods, and starving tens of thousands of people to death. While this extreme disruption is now targeting Palestinians it will not end with them.

Authenticity is beautiful and what is even more beautiful is rediscovering the beauty of our ways of life. We have only one planet, so far, and while we are facing conflicts and climate change we have a duty to leave a more beautiful world to present and future generations through striking a balance between achieving growth without displacing and disrupting beautiful ways of life.

Pope hampers peace efforts with Ukraine comments

CLÉMENT MELKI

Pope Francis is a passionate advocate for peace but his latest controversial comments on Ukraine clash with the Vatican’s official line and risk hampering its diplomatic efforts to end the war with Russia.

Ukraine should “have the courage to raise the white flag and negotiate” and do so “before things get worse”, the 87-year-old pontiff said in an interview broadcast at the weekend.

A furious Kyiv accused the pope of ignoring international law, summoned the Vatican envoy and vowed “never” to surrender.

Francis’s comments also attracted a lot of criticism on social networks. Pro-Ukrainian accounts depicted him with the face of Russian President Vladimir Putin or dressed in the colours of Russia, which has seized large swathes of Ukrainian territory since its fully-fledged attack in February 2022. Despite Francis’s repeated calls for peace, he is often accused of sowing confusion.

“It was an unfortunate use of the term ‘white flag’, which is synonymous with surrender,” one Vatican source said. “It surprised a lot of people.”

Secretary of State Pietro Parolin, the pope’s number two, insisted in an interview with the Corriere della Sera newspaper on Tuesday that Francis had called for the conditions for a diplomatic solution which would lead to a lasting peace. This is not the first time that the head of the Catholic Church has sparked controversy with comments on the conflict. At the end of 2022, the Vatican apologised to Moscow after the pope referred to the allegedly cruel behaviour of Russian ethnic minorities.

And in August 2023, Francis invited young Russian Catholics to claim the heritage of the “great Russia” of Peter the Great and Catherine II.

Kyiv accused him of relaying “imperialist propaganda” from Moscow, forcing the Holy See to clarify. Vatican experts are increasingly asked whether these are papal blunders or reflect Francis’s real position. His predecessors had “a culture of Western diplomacy”, said Francois Mabilie, director of the Geopolitical Observatory of Religion at the Institute of International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS) in Paris.

But the Argentine pope has “a non-European outlook, with advantages but also limits”, he told AFP. Vatican expert John Allen said the pontiff’s actions were “neither arbitrary nor irrational”.

“They are a deliberate response to how the Catholic Church is changing — and will continue to change — in the 21st century,” he wrote in the Atlantic, referring to its decline in Europe and growth elsewhere.

— AFP

Are we in the ‘Anthropocene,’ the human age? Nope, scientists say

RAYMOND ZHONG

The Triassic was the dawn of the dinosaurs. The Paleogene saw the rise of mammals. The Pleistocene included the last ice ages.

Is it time to mark humankind’s transformation of the planet with its own chapter in Earth history, the “Anthropocene,” or the human age? Not yet, scientists have decided, after a debate that has spanned nearly 15 years. Or the blink of an eye, depending on how you look at it.

A committee of roughly two dozen scholars has, by a large majority, voted down a proposal to declare the start of the Anthropocene, a newly created epoch of geologic time, according to an internal announcement of the voting results seen by The New York Times.

By geologists’ current timeline of Earth’s 4.6-billion-year history, our world right now is in the Holocene, which began 11,700 years ago with the most recent retreat of the great glaciers. Amending the chronology to say we had moved on to the Anthropocene would represent an acknowledgment that recent, human-induced changes to geological conditions had been profound enough to bring the Holocene to a close.

In the end, though, the members of the committee that voted on the Anthropocene over the past month were not only weighing how consequential this period had been for the planet. They also had to consider when, precisely, it began.

By the definition that an earlier panel of experts spent nearly a decade and a half debating and crafting, the Anthropocene started in the mid-20th century, when nuclear bomb tests scattered radioactive fallout across our world. To several members of the scientific committee that considered the panel’s proposal in recent weeks, this definition was too limited, too awkwardly recent, to be a fitting signpost of Homo sapiens’ reshaping of planet Earth.

“It constrains, it confines, it narrows down the whole importance of the



A historic image of the first nuclear bomb test, on a fence at the Trinity Site at White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico

A PANEL OF EXPERTS HAS IN 2024 VOTED DOWN A PROPOSAL TO OFFICIALLY DECLARE THE START OF A NEW INTERVAL OF GEOLOGIC TIME, ONE DEFINED BY HUMANITY CHANGES TO THE PLANET

Anthropocene,” said Jan A. Piotrowski, a committee member and geologist at Aarhus University in Denmark. “What was going on during the onset of agriculture? How about the Industrial Revolution? How about the colonising of the Americas, of Australia?” “Human impact goes much deeper into geological time,” said another committee member, Mike Walker, an earth scientist and professor emeritus at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. “If we ignore that, we are ignoring the true impact, the real impact, that humans have on our planet.” Hours after the voting results were circulated within the committee early on Tuesday, some members said they were surprised at the margin of votes against the Anthropocene proposal compared with those in favour: 12-4, with two abstentions. (Another three committee members neither voted nor formally abstained.) Even so, it was unclear

on Tuesday whether the results stood as a conclusive rejection or whether they might still be challenged or appealed. In an e-mail to the *Times*, the committee’s chair, Jan A. Zalasiewicz, said there were “some procedural issues to consider” but declined to discuss them further.

The grandly named chapters of our planet’s history are governed by a body of scientists, the International Union of Geological Sciences. The organisation uses rigorous criteria to decide when each chapter started and which characteristics defined it. The aim is to uphold common global standards for expressing the planet’s history.

Geoscientists don’t deny our era stands out within that long history. Radionuclides from nuclear tests. Plastics and industrial ash. Concrete and metal pollutants. Rapid greenhouse warming. Sharply increased species extinctions. These and other products of modern civilisation are leaving unmistakable remnants in the mineral record, particularly since the mid-20th century. Still, to qualify for its own entry on the geologic time scale, the Anthropocene would have to be defined in a very particular way, one that would meet the needs of geologists and not necessarily those of the anthropologists, artists and others who are already using the term. — NYT

Another Ramadhan amid wars

Muslims around the world are on fast during the holy month of Ramadhan, marking a period of religious reflection, spiritual development, family get-togethers and community service.

Still, the power of Ramadhan, I believe, really lies in the fact that believers show a collective act of fasting and waiting for the divine call to break the fast and the congregational prayers.

This collective experience of fasting promotes a sense of unity, brotherhood and shared purpose that not only brings families together, but also reconnects them with each other in particular and with society in general.

Giving to the less fortunate is an important part of Ramadhan. All Muslims are also required to help the poor and needy in their community.

In other words, Ramadhan is a moment to care for each other. Fasting aims to establish equality between the rich and poor.

However, this year's Ramadhan comes under the shadow of conflicts and devastation, contrary to a time of peace. Look at situation in the Middle East to Sudan, and Tunisia to Yemen; hapless people in those war-torn countries are forced to observe Ramadhan without food, potable water, or other essentials.

Gaza is facing significant humanitarian challenges, with innocent civilians facing the harshness of extremism. More than 31,000 people have been killed in the Israeli assault on Gaza, according to Palestinian health authorities in the besieged territory.

Aid agencies have already warned of a looming famine in parts of the Gaza Strip. The United Nations says that lack of humanitarian aid means famine is a growing risk in Gaza, where 2.4 million people are under a near-total siege by the Israeli military.



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THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADHAN PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY TO ALIGN WITH EACH OTHER AND SHOW COMPASSION TOWARDS THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING

The United States and other international mediators had pushed for a Gaza ceasefire to coincide with the start of Ramadhan. Although Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, called for “silencing the guns” during the holy month, there has been no breakthrough yet.

According to Reuters reports, thousands of police have been deployed around the narrow streets of the Old City in Jerusalem, where tens of thousands of worshippers are expected every day at the Al Aqsa mosque compound, one of the holiest sites in Islam.

In Sudan, warring parties are wrangling over how the country will usher in a civilian government following 17 months of military rule. In the war-torn Yemeni capital of Sanaa, prospects for Ramadhan were bleaker, with residents still struggling to buy even basic supplies.

In Syria, very few families still have the energy or resources to make the necessary preparations for Ramadhan this year. So are the sufferings of people from Afghanistan to the Sahel, from the Horn of Africa to Iraq and beyond.

Every day, people in many of these countries are facing images and stories of tens of thousands killed, children starving, and bombs laying waste in cities and institutions. Sadly, the world is not doing more to stop the death and devastation!

The holy month of Ramadhan provides an opportunity for individuals and society to align with each other and show compassion towards those who are suffering.

I hope the serenity of this blessed month is not violated, as was the case on similar past occasions, which witnessed the perpetration of crimes against innocent people. Also, I believe the power of prayer is even greater during Ramadhan.

No doubt, in these trying times, the spirit of Ramadhan is a beacon of hope. I wish all peace and joy.

COTTON CANDY ‘GIRL’



A girl sells cotton candy for iftar on the first day of the holy month of Ramadhan in the northern Syrian city of Al Bab. – AFP

Exploring the tipping point in Gaza conflict

In the realm of social phenomena and organisational behaviour, the concept of the tipping point holds significant relevance. Coined by sociologist Malcolm Gladwell, the tipping point refers to the critical juncture at which a small yet influential change leads to a larger, often unforeseen impact. Understanding the tipping point is crucial in analysing social phenomena, such as conflicts and societal transformations, where seemingly minor events can trigger significant consequences. A case in point here is Bushnell's self-immolation and the looming Israeli assault on Rafah.

Applying the concept of the tipping point to the current situation in Gaza, let us consider the self-immolation act committed by an active USA serviceman, Aaron Bushnell. It will send a ripple through the USA armed forces. Known for their patriotism and commitments, such an act could have only resulted out of inability of USA servicemen and servicemen to reconcile the values they have been indoctrinated with and the acts that they have been asked to commit. They are led to essentially serve Israel's interests rendering the USA interests secondary. While this will have a percolating effect on the domestic landscape of the USA in an election year, it is unlikely to trigger a tipping point in the conflict.

On the other hand, examining the potential of the impending assault on Rafah turning into a tipping point reveals a different picture. Three factors could emerge from this assault that



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AN ASSAULT ON RAFAH MAY BECOME A TIPPING POINT DUE TO THE RESULTANT ESCALATING CASUALTIES EXACERBATING CURRENT HUMANITARIAN CRISES IN GAZA

would prompt Israel and the USA to change their approach to the conflict in Gaza or force them to do so: humanitarian intervention, domestic politics, or concerns over regional stability. While the latter two are self-interest driven and will contribute directly to Netanyahu's political survival or sustained Israel's existence, the likelihood of them occurring is quite high. Human intervention, by contrast, will directly serve to alleviate the plight of the Palestinians. However, it will require concerted international effort to mobilise against Israel and the USA. Alas, this is possible but improbable.

An assault on Rafah may become a tipping point due to the resultant escalating casualties exacerbating current humanitarian crises in Gaza. It may spark global outrage and trigger an evaluation of a possible humanitarian intervention in the form of a military action to save Palestinians from the atrocities committed by Israel with the help of its allies.

Humanitarian interventions are aimed at ending human rights violations of individuals other than the citizens of the intervening state(s). Humanitarian interventions are only intended to prevent human rights violations in extreme circumstances. The situation in Gaza will logically and naturally qualify. Attempts to establish institutions and political

systems to achieve positive outcomes in the medium- to long-run, such as peace-building and development aid, do not fall under this definition of a humanitarian intervention. Humanitarian interventions occur with and without explicit UN authorisation and host-state consent.

Given the complex geopolitical dynamics involved, the likelihood of invoking the principle of humanitarian intervention against Israel remains uncertain. It would require a significant shift in the international community's stance towards the conflict and a consensus on the need for outside intervention to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

In addition, assessing domestic politics within the USA and

Israel as a potential trigger for the tipping point is pivoted on public opinion, protests and electoral considerations that may push leaders to modify their policies to align with popular sentiment or strategic interests. Three separate yet related development suggest that fragmentation and cracks have started to show in the Israeli domestic landscape and international solidarity with Israel: a recent article published by the BBC under the title Netanyahu is a survivor, but his problems are stacking up, the change in attitude of the President of the USA towards the excessive Israeli use of force in Gaza, and the growing protests against Israeli genocide against Palestine.

Domestically, though calls for

Netanyahu to resign are driven by concerns over the fate of Israeli hostages, the outcome, i.e. his resignation, will definitely have a resounding impact on the course of events in Gaza. His confirmation of the assault on Rafah has indicated to the families of hostages that he is prepared to pay any price to achieve his political aims. This could be a tipping point for the internal political landscape. The expected loss of lives on both sides will be catastrophic, at the least. This will be further compounded by a humiliation of Israel armed forces for not achieving their strategic targets.

Finally, concerns about regional stability, security threats, or the risk of border conflict escalation may lead to a reassessment of tactics. The potential for destabilising effects on neighbouring countries or the wider Middle East region could prompt Israel and the USA to seek alternative strategies. Egypt has already indicated its readiness for a retaliation if Israel encroached on its sovereignty. This could destabilise the region and have Israel lose its immediate and strongest Arab ally.

It is essential to recognise that while potential triggers for change in the Gaza conflict are multifaceted and interconnected, only triggers that serve the interests of Israel do have a chance of changing the course of events.



Displaced Palestinians collect food donated by a charity before an iftar meal on the first day of the holy month of Ramadhan in Rafah. – AFP

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AL NAHDA TAKE ON DHOFAR IN HM CUP FINAL

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 12

Al Nahda's Walter Bwalya netted the all-important goal in the first extra time to secure a crucial slot in the final of the His Majesty's Cup, in the semifinal second leg match late on Monday at Al Saada Sports Stadium. Al Buraimi representative club will meet Dhofar, who beat Bahla in semis, in the concluding match of the Coveted Cup which will be decided later.

The only goal in the match scored in the 106th minute following the cross ball from Ahmed al Kaabi and reached to

Bwalya who converted to the goal through strong header. The first leg match ended with a 1-1 draw at Al Buraimi Sports Complex on February 27.

The first half of the tight encounter ended with a goalless draw, despite the scoring attempts from both teams. The result remained the same in the following half although both coaches implemented different playing strategies and made some substitutions but with no change in the scoring.

Later, the match went to the extra half's which occurred some changes as Al Nahda managed to break the deadlock through



Al Nahda celebrated with first title on last edition.

header from Walter Bwalya to deliver a crucial win for his team. The opponent Al Nasr worked hard to equalise but Al Nahda's defending line and the goalie were in perfect positions to break all their attempts.

The match was managed by Qasim bin Matar al Hatmi as field referee and assisted on the lines by the first assistant Hamad bin Talib al Hatmi, the second

assistant referee was Nasser bin Salem Ambusaidi, the fourth referee Hisham bin Abdullah al Awaini. The match supervised by Ahmed bin Hamad al Khsaibi ,while Fayyad bin Sami al Shanfari was the match coordinator.

Al Nahda reached to the semifinals after outclassing Seeb in quarters by 2-1 in the first leg and the second leg match ended at a goalless draw. In the last 16

round, Al Buraimi based team beat Sur to move into quarters. Al Nahdha, coached by Hamed al Azani, who seeking for second title in the row.

Al Nahda Club was crowned champion of HM's Football Cup for the 2022-23 for the first time in its history, after defeating Al Seeb Club 1-0 in the final match held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The final was under the auspices of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, in the presence of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The Lead goal of the match was in 20th minute, after a penalty kick, which was successfully scored by Al Nahda's Ivorian professional, Inters Gui.

Al Nassr exit ACL with shootout loss to Al Ain

RIYAD: Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr crashed out of the Asian Champions League (ACL) in the quarter-finals after the Saudi Pro League side lost 3-1 on penalties to Al Ain in a pulsating game on Monday.

Al Nassr overturned a 1-0 first leg deficit to win 4-3 on Monday but with the contest ending 4-4 on aggregate, the players headed into a shootout from which Al Ain prevailed.

Al Nassr's foreign imports Miroslav Brozovic, Alex Telles and Otavio all failed to score from the spot as the side from the United Arab Emirates advanced to the semi-finals, where they will face either Al Hilal or Al Ittihad —both from Saudi Arabia —next month.

Al Ain goalkeeper Khalid Eisa made amends for a disappointing display when he saved Brozovic's opening penalty and, with Soufiane Rahimi, Kaku and Sultan Al Shamsi all converting, Otavio's miss meant Al Nassr were eliminated.

The shootout brought a dramatic end to a thrilling clash at Al Awwal Park that featured seven goals and a red card, with Al Ain building on their first leg lead during the opening 45 minutes.

Rahimi, scorer of Al Ain's first leg winner, put the visitors in control with goals in the 28th and 45th minutes but Abdulrahman Ghareeb's strike five minutes into injury time kept Al Nassr's hopes alive.

Otavio's low drive was redirected into his own goal by Khaled Eisa six minutes after the restart and Alex Telles levelled the aggregate scores 18 minutes from time with a low free kick that flew through a crowd of players to beat Eisa.

Al Nassr's Ayman Yahya was sent off for a vicious two-footed lunge on Bandar Al Ahabbi eight minutes into extra time and, a minute later, Al Shamsi thought he had scored the winner when he capitalised on Raghid Najjar's handling error to poke home.

But Ronaldo scored from the penalty spot with two minutes remaining, after the Portuguese striker was taken down in the area by Saeed Jumaa, to take the game to a shootout.

Ronaldo was the only one of Al Nassr's four penalty takers to successfully convert as Al-Ain advanced to the last four for the first time since 2016.

In the eastern half of the draw, South Korean sides Jeonbuk Motors and Ulsan Hyundai will meet on Tuesday after sharing a 1-1 draw last week.

On Wednesday, Harry Kewell's Yokohama F Marinos side will hope to defend a 2-1 lead on home soil when they face Chinese Super League side Shandong Taishan. — Reuters



Cristiano Ronaldo reacts during the AFC Champions League.

Nardi stuns Djokovic in Indian Wells upset

INDIAN WELLS: Qualifying lucky loser Luca Nardi scored the biggest win of his young career on Monday, stunning world number one Novak Djokovic 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 at the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters.

The world number 123 from Italy ended the 11-match win streak of the veteran Serb at Masters events, with Nardi bettering the childhood tennis idol whose poster hung above his bed from the age of eight.

The 20-year-old was not awed by the big game of Djokovic, and broke Djokovic for a 4-2 lead in the deciding set before pounding out the victory three games later with a match point ace.

The Italian finished with 36 winners and 41 unforced errors while Djokovic had 31 errors in just under two and a half hours.

“Before this night no-one knew me,” Nardi said in an on-court interview after his win. “I hope the crowd enjoyed the game; I’m super happy with this one.”

Asked how he had pulled off the biggest win of his career, Nardi replied: “I don’t know. I think it really is a miracle. I’m a guy ranked outside the top 100 in the world and now I’m beating Novak — crazy, crazy.”

Nardi only reached the main draw in Indian Wells after a withdrawal. He had been beaten by Belgium’s David Goffin in the final round of qualifying.

In other games on Monday, seventh seed Holger Rune finally made it onto court after a first-round bye and a walkover in the second round against injured Milos Raonic.

The 20-year-old Dane got off and running in the event with a 6-2, 7-6 (7/5) defeat of Italy’s Lorenzo Musetti, earning revenge for a loss on grass last June at Queen’s Club, London.

“It feels great to finally get started,” he said after reaching the fourth round here for the first time.

“The wait is finally over, I was so eager to play, though I did get two extra practice days.” Norway’s ninth seed Casper Ruud advanced past Arthur Fils of France 6-2, 6-4.

SABALENKA, GAUFF ADVANCE

French showstopper Gael Monfils ended the run of 2021 champion Cameron Norrie, with the 36-year-old winner and the Briton playing a massive 31 break points in a match won by Monfils 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/5), 6-3.

Tommy Paul, who next faces Nardi, earned a home win with his 6-4, 6-4 defeat of Dubai champion Ugo Humbert.

Taylor Fritz joined him, 6-2, 6-2 over Argentine Sebastian Baez.

In the women’s draw, reigning women’s Grand Slam champions Aryna Sabalenka and Coco Gauff reached the fourth round with challenging straight-set wins.

But former number one and 2018 tournament winner Naomi Osaka failed to join them, with the Japanese player eliminated 7-5, 6-4 by Elise Mertens, who now takes on Gauff.

The Belgian saved three break points in the final game, advancing on her second match point which drew an Osaka error.

Osaka, a four-time winner at the majors, is making her return to tennis this season after giving birth.

Earlier, double Sabalenka defeated Emma Raducanu 6-3, 7-5 but double-faulted on a match point and needed three more winning chances before finally going through.

“I was super-happy to close this match in two sets; the last game was tight,” Sabalenka said. “If I had lost that game it would give her emotionally much more belief and confidence - going to the tiebreak you never know, it’s 50/50.”

Gauff, who won the US Open last September as a teenager, overcame Lucia Bronzetti 6-2, 7-6 (7/5) as she closed out victory in a tiebreaker with a minimum of drama.

The US Open champion, who turns 20 on Wednesday, won her sixth straight match against an Italian opponent.

“She played really well,” the winner said of Bronzetti. “But I was much better than in my last match - I’m improving with each one.” — AFP



Luca Nardi (ITA) hits a shot as he defeats Novak Djokovic (SRB). – USA TODAY Sports

Jokic leads Nuggets fightback over fired-up Raptors



Gradey Dick (1) looks to pass as Christian Braun (0) and Nikola Jokic (15). – USA TODAY Sports

LOS ANGELES: Nikola Jokic grabbed a 35-point triple-double as the Denver Nuggets staged a dramatic second-half fightback to defeat the short-handed Toronto Raptors 125-119 on Monday.

Two-time Most Valuable Player Jokic produced a towering display to drag Denver back into contention after the NBA champions trailed by 22 points in the second quarter.

A fired-up Toronto looked poised to score a notable upset after starting strong to open up a double-digit advantage.

But Serbian star Jokic seized control of the game in the third, scoring 19 points as Denver outscored Toronto 42-30 to trim the visitors’ lead to five points heading into the fourth.

Denver’s domination continued into the fourth and they finally took the lead midway through the final frame when Jamal Murray’s layup put them 108-107 ahead.

Denver outscored Toronto 32-21 in the fourth quarter to close out the win.

“In the first half they scored a lot and we didn’t play any defence,” said Jokic after completing his 21st triple-double of the season.

“We just needed to match and exceed their physicality and that’s how we turned the game to our advantage.

“We were just fighting. The whole crew showed their character today. We’re not quitters.”

Jokic led Denver’s scoring while point guard Murray added 26 points with 12 assists and five rebounds. Aaron Gordon and Michael Porter Jr finished with 19 points each. R J Barrett led Toronto’s scorers with 26 points, with Kelly Olynyk chipping in with 24.

DURANT LEADS SUNS PAST CAVS

While Denver were forced to dig deep for their win, there were no such problems for Eastern Conference leaders Boston, who coasted to their 50th win of the season with a 121-99 blowout on the road against the Portland Trail Blazers.

Jaylen Brown led the Celtics with 27 points while Jayson Tatum finished with 26.

In Cleveland, Kevin Durant finished with 37 points with eight rebounds and six assists as the Phoenix Suns overturned a 19-point deficit to down the Cavaliers 117-111.

Devin Booker added 27 points for Phoenix while Bradley Beal weighed in with 24 to give the Suns a battling victory on the road.

Darius Garland led Cleveland’s scoring with 30 points.

Cleveland surged into a big early lead after a 41-point first quarter, extending their advantage to 63-44 with just under five minutes remaining in the second.

But Phoenix roared back to outscore the Cavs 19-7 in the final minutes of the half to close the gap to within seven points.

Phoenix kept up that momentum in the third period, outscoring the Cavs 34-21 to take the lead and then holding on down the stretch to close out the victory.

Phoenix improved to 38-27 to remain in sixth place in the Western Conference.

In San Antonio, the Golden State Warriors shook off a slow start to take down the Spurs 112-102, two days after losing 126-113 to the Texan club.

San Antonio led by 11 points in the first quarter and held a 10-point lead early in the third. But a trademark high-scoring third quarter from Golden State — outscoring the Spurs 32-18 — swung the game back in the visitors’ favour. — AFP



Chelsea's Mykhailo Mudryk celebrates scoring their third goal. – REUTERS

Chelsea beat Newcastle 3-2 as Palmer stars again

LONDON: Chelsea eased some of the pressure on coach Mauricio Pochettino with a 3-2 home win over fellow mid-table side Newcastle United in the Premier League on Monday with Cole Palmer, the Blues' best player this season, creating one goal and scoring another.

Chelsea's Senegal striker Nicolas Jackson diverted a Palmer shot past goalkeeper Martin Dubravka in the sixth minute before the hosts allowed Newcastle to get an equaliser in the 43rd when Alexander Isak curled a shot beyond the diving Djordje Petrovic.

Chelsea, urged on by their fans after some had turned on Pochettino and the club's US owners in a 2-2 draw at Brentford nine days ago, restored their lead in the 57th when Palmer, the Blues' top scorer this season who is in contention to go to the Euros with England this year, scored from outside the box.

Substitute Mykhailo Mudryk made it 3-1 in the 76th minute when the Ukrainian danced through Newcastle's defence, rounded Dubravka and slotted home. A fierce shot by Jacob Murphy gave the visitors hope in



Chelsea's Mykhailo Mudryk celebrates scoring their third goal. – REUTERS

the 90th minute but Chelsea held on.

The win left Chelsea in 11th position, a point and one place behind Newcastle but with a game in hand. Another three points would push the Blues up to eighth and within sight of qualifying for the Europa League or the Europa League Conference.

Both clubs have failed to live up to the hopes of their deep-pocketed owners with Newcastle manager Eddie Howe under just as fierce a spotlight as Pochettino at Chelsea.

It was the Argentine who could breath a sigh of relief on Monday as the home fans left Stamford Bridge singing the Bob Marley song chorus "Don't worry

about a thing", a sign perhaps that most of them remain patient with Pochettino's attempts to build a team from his expensive but young squad.

"We played a very good team with amazing players, it was really tough," he told the BBC. "We made the victory, but we keep looking forward and moving forward - the most important is the three points.

"We are building something different and we need to accept it. Today the fans were good, we need to keep moving and being strong."

Chelsea's only hope of silverware now lies in the FA Cup and they have a last-eight tie against second-tier Leicester City at home on Sunday. Newcastle must try to bounce back in time for their own quarterfinal - a trip to Manchester City on Saturday.

Howe said he was frustrated that Newcastle were undone by sloppy defending.

"I thought we were good in lots of aspects of our play tonight," he told talkSPORT radio. "You can't concede goals like that, home or away, and expect to win the game, simple as that."

— Reuters

LIVERPOOL APPOINT EDWARDS AS CHIEF EXECUTIVE

LIVERPOOL: Fenway Sports Group, owners of Premier League title contenders Liverpool, announced on Tuesday the appointment of the club's former sporting director Michael Edwards as their chief executive of football.

FSG said in a statement that the 44-year-old would assume a broad range of responsibilities "including leading efforts to identify and recruit new leadership" for Liverpool's football operation. Edwards arrived at Anfield in 2011 as Liverpool's head of analytics before eventually taking on the role of sporting director in 2016. He left following the expiry of his contract in 2022.

The club need to find a replacement for manager Juergen Klopp, who announced in January that he would be leaving at the end of the season, and are also currently without a sporting director. Liverpool are level on 64 points with league leaders Arsenal, but behind on goal difference, and one point ahead of champions Manchester City.

"He returns to us in a role with greater seniority than he held previously and with a wider remit," said FSG president Mike Gordon in a statement. "He will take over responsibilities I have previously held regarding oversight and management of Liverpool F.C.'s football operation.

"Fulfilling that role has been one of the greatest privileges of my life and handing it over and returning to a more traditional role in ownership is something I have been hoping to do for some time, but only if we could find the right individual or structure." Edwards looked forward to fresh challenges and opportunities, including FSG acquiring a second club. — Reuters



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12 usufruct contracts signed to support food security, SME projects

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 12

In a step towards bolstering food security and economic diversification in general, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) signed 12 usufruct contracts with total investment value of RO 2.6 million.

The agreements, forged in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) and the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises, encompass projects in both the agricultural and industrial sectors distributed across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Six of the contracts prioritise agricultural endeavours. These projects, covering a total investment of RO 1.9 million and encompassing an area of 1.3 million square metres, are strategically distributed across Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South and Al Sharqiyah North governorates.

Aligned with Oman's ambitious vision, these initiatives aim to invigorate the agricultural sector and bolster domestic food production.

Demonstrating a commitment to fostering a vibrant SME landscape, MoHUP also signed six usufruct contracts geared towards small and medium enterprises.

Totalling around RO 738,000 in investment, these pacts encompass industrial projects situated in Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South governorates.

The agreements leverage the

Six projects backed by Riyada card-holders were signed as well.

“Choose and Invest” service within the Haq system and the Tatweer platform to streamline the investment process and empower SMEs.

The signing ceremony witnessed participation from key stakeholders, including high-levels officials from the MoHUP, MoAFWR's Department of Agriculture, and the SME Authority's In-Country Value Department.

In remarks at the event, Ahmed al Kamyani, Director-General of Lands at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, said: “These agreements underline the Ministry's commitment to developing various economic sectors and creating new job opportunities for citizens. Six agricultural projects are designed to bolster food security and generate new jobs in the agricultural sector. The other six have been assigned to

SMEs holding the Riyada card, aimed at supporting entrepreneurs and fostering private sector growth.”

Looking ahead, Al Kamyani announced the launch of roughly 800 investment opportunities that will become available around Oman during 2024.

These opportunities will be accessible through the ‘Tatweer’ e-platform, designed to streamline the investment process and attract domestic and international investors.

Additionally, the Ministry will offer 200 investment plots this year through the ‘Choose Your Project’ programme, which provides pre-designed plans for high-quality investment projects.

Pact signed to set up furniture production factory in Buraimi Industrial City

MUSCAT: Al Buraimi Industrial City, affiliated with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), signed an investment contract with the Golden Palaces for Trade and Investment Company, to establish a furniture production factory in the city, with an investment estimated at RO 7 million, on an area of 17,000 square metres.

The factory aims to integrate traditional craftsmanship with modern technology, use sustainable wood and environmentally friendly materials and provide modern furniture designs characterised by high quality and precise details to meet the needs of the local market by 10 per cent, and export 90 per cent of its products to European and American markets and Middle Eastern countries. — **ONA**

Prepaid water metres to strengthen water use management in Oman

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 12

Prepaid water metres unveiled earlier this week represent a significant step forward in Oman's water management landscape, promising efficiency, transparency, and customer empowerment, according to a key official of Nama Water Services, the state-owned water utility.

Ahmed bin Saeed al Harthy, CEO of Commercial Services, emphasised the key advantages of the prepaid metre system. He highlighted that subscribers can expect prompt water supply based on their prepaid balance, with quantities dispensed within an hour of topping up.

Moreover, a unique feature allows subscribers to activate

Oman is the first in the Middle East to leverage cutting-edge technology in its water services sector.

water flow instantly by pressing the metre for ten seconds after refilling the balance.

The subscription process for this innovative service is streamlined through Nama Water Services' mobile application or website. Once set up, residential subscribers benefit from direct balance top-ups

and receive water in convenient increments, catering to their specific needs.

This initiative represents a significant leap forward for the GCC countries, making Oman the first in the Middle East to leverage cutting-edge technology in its water services sector.

TURN TO PAGE 15

NOTICE AND INVITATION TO ATTEND THE EXTRA ORDINARY
GENERAL MEETING & ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of NATIONAL BANK OF OMAN SAOG (the "Bank") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Extra Ordinary General Meeting & Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Wednesday at 05:00 PM on 27/03/2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om) and will be held in this location (Online). If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Extra Ordinary General Meeting & Annual General Meeting shall be held on Thursday at 05:00 PM on 28/03/2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om) and will be held in this location (Online) to discuss the following agenda:

Extra Ordinary General Meeting Agendas:

- To approve the establishment of a Sukuk programme of OMR 50 million (the "Programme") for Muzn Islamic Banking, the Islamic window of National Bank of Oman S.A.O.G. and issuances thereunder in one or more series which Sukuk issuances shall be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange in accordance with the applicable rules and regulations, and the requisite regulatory and Shari'a approvals. The Sukuk issuances will be in Oman via private placement or public issuance. The Sukuk issuances under the Programme may be in different amounts, maturities, profit rates, issued on different dates and with varying terms and conditions.
- To authorise the Board of Directors of the Bank or such person or persons as delegated from time to time by the Board of Directors of the Bank or the relevant authorised signatories acting pursuant to any limits as set out on the commercial register of the Bank together with the executive management of the Bank (together the "Authorised Signatories" and each an "Authorised Signatory"), to take any and all required steps, decisions and actions, without any restrictions, which may in the sole discretion of the relevant Authorised Signatory(ies) be deemed necessary or desirable, for the establishment of the Programme and the issuances thereunder (or any element thereof), including but not limited to approve the structure, terms, conditions, timing, issue price, profit rate, allocation, the final size of the Programme and the issuances thereunder, establish a special-purpose vehicle for the issuance and renewal thereof, renewal for the Programme and issuances thereunder, to give effect to any appointments of advisors (and deciding their professional fees), liaise with or make submissions or filings to any regulator or exchange, make updates to the Programme or issuances thereunder, issuance terms and negotiation thereof, amendments (including issuance size, maturity, profit rates and other terms and conditions, however fundamental) as per prevailing market conditions.
- To authorise the relevant Authorised Signatory(ies) to negotiate, agree and approve the entry into, execution and performance of any documentation relating to the Programme and the issuances thereunder that may be necessary or desirable to give effect to the Programme and the issuances or any element of them, and prepare, execute, deliver, publish and distribute or cause to be prepared, executed, delivered and filed any documents, applications, exhibits, notices, supplements and/or amendments (and related documents) in connection with the Programme and the issuances thereunder;
- To appoint the Muscat Clearing & Depository SAOC as the Sukukholders' agent.

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agendas :

- To consider and approve the Board of Director's Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider the Auditor's Report and to approve the Financial Statements (Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account) of the Bank for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To notify the general assembly on the Sharia Compliance Report of Muzn Islamic Banking for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the proposed cash dividend to the shareholders, as on the date of the meeting, amounting to 8.5 baiza for each share for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To ratify the sitting fees paid to the board of directors and its subcommittees during the financial year ended 31 December 2023, and determine the sitting fees for the financial year 2024.
- To consider and approve the proposal of distributing the total sum of RO 300,000 as remuneration for the Board of Directors of the Bank for the year ended 31 December 2023.
- To approve the sitting fees paid to the members of the Sharia Board for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023 and to determine their sitting fees for the financial year ending on 31 December 2024.
- To notify the general assembly of the related parties' transactions during the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To consider the amounts allocated and spent for the company's social responsibilities for the year ended on 31/12/2023.
- To discuss and approve the proposed allocation of RO 200,000 to fulfill the Company's Corporate Social responsibilities for the year ending on 31 December 2024.
- To appoint the auditor and Sharia auditor for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and approve their fees.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on telephone No 95108251 or email: jawaheraltamami@nbo.om

Chairperson
Ms. Amal Suhail Bahwan

Legal Advisor
National Bank of Oman

External Auditor
KPMG L.L.C

البنك الوطني العماني
NBO

Marafiq launches Young Leaders Programme 2024

MUSCAT: Marafiq, an OQ company affiliated with the Oman Investment Authority, proudly announces the launch of its Omani Young Leaders Programme 2024.

This transformative initiative aims to equip Omani youth with the skills and capabilities to assume leadership roles within the company in the near future.

The programme is tailored for new employees of Marafiq Company holding university degrees and boasting a minimum of five years of experience.

Eng Abdullah bin Mohammed al Hashimi, Managing Director of Marafiq, underscored the company's steadfast commitment

to nurturing Omani talent to fill various pivotal positions. He highlighted Marafiq's substantial investments in the Economic Zone at Duqm, particularly in the electricity and water sectors.

Marafiq's investments include the integrated power and water plant, supplying electricity to Duqm Refinery and oil storage facilities in Ras Markaz, and providing industrial water services to Duqm Refinery.

Additionally, the company manages the gas turbine power production plant, meeting the electricity needs of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, and oversees the drinking water sector



The programme is tailored for new employees of Marafiq Company holding university degrees and boasting a minimum of five years of experience

in the area.

Al Hashimi emphasised Marafiq Company's indispensable role in bolstering investments in

and sustain growth while benefiting from the expertise of foreign professionals.

The Young Leaders Programme features a comprehensive series of training workshops conducted by experts in human resources, leadership, and management.

Seasoned executives and pioneers who have been instrumental in Marafiq's journey from its inception also contribute to the programme, offering invaluable guidance and insights to participants.

Through interactive sessions and forums, the programme aims to refine communication, leadership, and problem-solving

skills, equipping participants with the tools to thrive in a dynamic work environment.

Furthermore, individual qualification and development plans are approved for each employee, ensuring personalised growth trajectories.

Al Hashimi reiterated Marafiq's dedication to attracting and nurturing Omani talent.

He commended the company's past training programmes, which have significantly contributed to high Omaniisation rates within Marafiq. He applauded the dedication of Omani resources in realising the company's goals and objectives.

NBO, Talabat offer 50% discount during Ramadhan



MUSCAT: As a testament to its commitment to its customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has partnered with Talabat to offer exclusive discounts, embracing the spirit of giving throughout the Holy Month of Ramadhan until Eid.

All customers with NBO Credit and Badeel Travel Cards can avail of a 50 per cent discount on transactions made through the Talabat App for food and grocery orders.

Valid throughout the month of Ramadhan until the conclusion of Eid, this unique half-price deal underscores NBO's dedication to enriching customer experiences and delivering significant benefits.

Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager and Head of Retail Products at NBO, said: "We, at National Bank of Oman, are deeply committed to the well-being of our customers. We believe in enhancing their experiences and sharing in the joy of special occasions.

The Holy Month of Ramadhan is a month of giving and compassion, and we are delighted to offer this special discount to our customers.

Our partnership with Talabat is a gesture of gratitude, aiming to extend meaningful savings and added joy to our customers as they celebrate this sacred time.

We encourage all our existing and new customers to take advantage of this limited-time offer, available until the conclusion of Eid. NBO credit cards also help our customers save every time they shop, with cashback in form of rewards & NBO offers.

Also they can enjoy complementary chauffeur service to and from airport, lounge access, 50 per cent discount on Vox cinema and many such offers."

Sohar International onboards Bima to enhance insurance offerings

MUSCAT: Sohar International, the fastest-growing bank in Oman, recently entered into a strategic partnership with Insurance House LLC (Bima), the only digital insurance aggregator licenced to operate in Oman.

This collaboration aligns with Sohar International's mission to transcend conventional banking boundaries and establish itself as a world-leading Omani service company with a holistic ecosystem dedicated to enriching lives.



Abdulqadir bin Ahmed al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer, and Said bin Salim al Rashidi, CEO and founder of Bima, have officially endorsed the strategic partnership

By onboarding Bima to the 'My Life/My Goals' section of Sohar International's mobile banking app, the bank aims to offer individuals enhanced access to a multitude of insurance solutions that cater to their diverse needs.

Bima's extensive network includes partnerships with 13 out of the 18 insurance companies operating in Oman, presenting Sohar International mobile banking users with a plethora of options and flexibility when it comes to choosing insurance coverage.

Abdulqadir bin Ahmed bin Mohammed al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer, and Said bin Salim al Rashidi, CEO and founder of Bima, have officially endorsed the strategic partnership. The signing ceremony was attended by several executive members from both organisations.

Commenting on the partnership, Abdulqadir

al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer at Sohar International said, "The integration of Bima's platform into our digital ecosystem reflects our dedication to harnessing technology for the benefit of the broader community.

By enabling effortless access to insurance products, Sohar International endeavours to elevate the convenience quotient for individuals by facilitating easy comparison and purchase of insurance policies through a centralised platform. These enhancements significantly streamline processes, ultimately leading to time savings and enhance overall efficiency."

Al Sumali added, "At Sohar International, we recognise the crucial role of the insurance sector in promoting socio-economic development. Through our partnership with Bima, we aim

to contribute to this progression by offering proactive protection in a seamless and competitive manner.

Our innovative approach and commitment to digitalisation not only transforms the banking landscape but also empowers individuals and businesses to navigate uncertainties with confidence."

Said bin Salim al Rashidi, CEO and founder of Bima, expressed his enthusiasm about the collaboration, stating, "Partnering with Sohar International is a significant step towards revolutionising insurance accessibility in Oman. Our digital platform, integrated seamlessly into Sohar International's mobile banking app, not only offers a diverse range of insurance solutions but also emphasises the importance of innovation in enhancing customer experience.

MG Motors announces exclusive Ramadhan offer in Oman



MUSCAT: This Ramadhan, MG Motors Oman is thrilled to unveil a spectacular array of offers for its valued customers, ensuring a joyous celebration filled with exciting rewards.

The limited-time Ramadhan promotion includes a host of benefits aimed at enhancing the overall car ownership experience.

In celebration of Ramadhan, MG Motors introduces an exclusive offer that guarantees customers scratch & win rewards for services spanning 60,000 to 200,000 kilometres.

With every purchase, exciting prizes such as smart phones, smart watches, smart TVs, fuel cards, and travel vouchers are assured.

As part of this special Ramadhan period, customers also benefit from complimentary insurance and free vehicle registration.

MG Motors goes the extra mile by ensuring customers receive comprehensive roadside assistance, enhancing the overall ownership experience.

Additionally, to make ownership more accessible, MG Motors has negotiated special

finance rates with leading finance companies.

But that's not all! A visit to any MG showroom during Ramadhan entitles customers to 'Walk In & Win' scratch cards, offering a chance to win smart watches, smart phones, or even window tinting.

The most thrilling aspect of this Ramadhan offer is the opportunity to win back your car through a Raffle draw. This exclusive promotion is applicable solely to 2024 model year vehicles, adding an extra layer of excitement to this special Ramadhan celebration.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, remarked, "Ramadhan is a time of giving, and at MG Motors, we are delighted to extend our generosity to our valued customers in Oman. This special offer is our way of expressing gratitude and enhancing the joy of this holy month."

The Ramadhan promotion is available at all MG Motors showrooms in Oman. Don't miss this opportunity to make your Ramadhan truly special with MG Motors.

Bank Muscat's Sayyarati auto finance option comes with best financing facilities for customers

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat's Sayyarati Auto Finance Option constitutes one of the financing products that appeal to customers.

On the occasion of the Holy Month of Ramadhan, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, commits to providing customers with the best financing offerings to keep pace with the high demand of both new and pre-owned cars and allow these customers to avail the offerings and features provided by various car centres across the country.

In this regard, Bank Muscat has launched an attractive Sayyarati auto finance promotion with the best rates in the market that start at just 3.75 per cent on both new and pre-owned cars for Omani nationals and expatriates.

With this year's "Sayyarati" offer, customers may start paying after 2 months of loan disbursement.

It must also be noted that Sayyarati has some of the best interest rates in the country

including 4 per cent for a period up to 2 years and 4.25 per cent for loan tenors of 3 years and 4.5 per cent for a 4 year loan tenor.

Customers can now benefit from the offer by applying for the "Sayyarati" loan financing product online through the Bank's Internet Banking and Mobile Banking Application.

The special rates are available for Omani individuals employed in government, quasi — government, Tier 1 and Tier 2 companies and expatriates individuals employed in government and quasi-government institutions as well as Tier 1 companies.

The "Sayyarati" financing product features multiple advantages including enabling customers to apply for a loan up to RO 60,000 for both new and used vehicles, a tenor up to 8 - 10 years for Omani nationals, and free third-party insurance in case of pre-owned car financing.

On this special occasion, Abdullah bin Tamman al Maashani, General Manager,



Products, Bank Muscat, said: "Bank Muscat's Sayyarati is the most popular financing option in Oman and it has received great and positive feedback from customers. Hence, Bank Muscat is always keen to

follow up on the latest developments in the sector to meet our valued customers' needs by continuously launching new features and attractive rates in order to enable our customers to purchase their dream vehicles.

We have ensured highly attractive terms and rates during the Holy Month compared to rates offered in the previous year, so that more customers have a chance to benefit from this special offer."

Abdullah al Maashani further added: "Bank Muscat is dedicated to keeping pace with the latest advancements witnessed by the banking sector, aiming to satisfy the various needs and aspirations of customers in line with the Bank's customer-centric vision "To serve you better, everyday."

Due to customers' positive feedback on the various financing offerings Bank Muscat provides them with, the Sayyarati" financing product comes with attractive and special offers during the holy month of Ramadhan."



In brief

WASHINGTON

US CONSUMER
INFLATION UP
UNEXPECTEDLY

Consumer inflation posted a surprise acceleration in February, US government data showed on Tuesday, a development that could give policymakers pause as they mull the timing to start interest rate cuts.

The annual consumer price index (CPI) came in at 3.2 per cent last month, the Labour Department said, while the “core” measure stripping out volatile food and energy prices edged down slightly to 3.8 per cent.

“The index for shelter rose in February, as did the index for gasoline,” said the Department of Labour in its report. — AFP

LONDON

OIL PRICES STEADY AS
DEMAND WOES OFFSET
GEOPOLITICAL RISK

Oil prices held steady on Tuesday as concerns over conflict in the Middle East were offset by bearish demand sentiment ahead of monthly reports from oil agencies.

Brent futures for May delivery were up 3 cents at \$82.75 a barrel by 1226 GMT. The April US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude contract was down 1 cent at \$78.38.

Hopes of a ceasefire in Israel's war against Hamas have faded, with negotiations deadlocked in Cairo while the conflict threatens to widen as Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah continue to exchange fire. — Reuters

FRANKFURT

CONTINUED
COMMERCIAL PROPERTY
TURMOIL THROUGH 2024

Deutsche Bank's chief executive officer said on Tuesday that he expects the current crisis in commercial real estate to continue in 2024 and that provisions for loan losses will be at the upper end of its projected range.

There won't be “overall big relief” to the challenges facing commercial real estate in 2024, CEO Christian Sewing said at a financial conference.

Deutsche Bank is Germany's largest lender and also has the most in outstanding loans to the commercial real-state sector among its domestic competitors, data shows.

“There is no deterioration but there is also not... signs of improvements,” Sewing said of the sector. — Reuters

Abraj Energy contract orderbook
swells to RO 600 million in 2023

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, MARCH 12

Delivering its maiden annual report post its landmark Initial Public Offering (IPO) last year, Abraj Energy Services — Oman's leading oilfield services company — says its contractual orderbook has soared in value to a total of around RO 600 million at the end of 2023, underscoring its strong positioning in the domestic and regional energy services industry.

Muscat-based Abraj Energy — a subsidiary of integrated Omani energy group OQ — achieved revenues totalling RO 144.3 million last year, which was up 5.3 per cent over the previous year's total of RO 137.0 million.

Total net expenditure including tax climbed 6.9 per cent to RO 128.8 million, up from RO 120.5 million a year earlier. Net profit for the year inched up to RO 16.6 million, up 0.3 per cent from the previous net of RO 16.5 million.

“Abraj had sustainably performed well throughout the year 2023, with good steady results from the Drilling and Workover services and a remarkable contribution from Well Services.

“Building on the strong recovery post-Covid-19, the company has continued to grow in revenue, net profit and market share,” said Ayad al Balushi, Chairman.

Last March, Abraj Energy



Abraj Energy says it is keenly exploring opportunities in the wider Gulf and Middle East markets.

created history of sorts at the time when its IPO garnered more than \$2 billion in gross orders for its share, which was oversubscribed 8.7 times.

The public listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) also attracted institutional investors for the first time from Europe and other GCC countries.

A leading provider of onshore drilling, workover, well testing, well intervention, cementing, fracturing, coil tubing and integrated project management, among other oilfield services, Abraj reported a significant increase in its orderbook in 2023.

“Amidst challenging market

conditions, the company has achieved over 10 per cent growth in secured contracts from a revenue standpoint. The contractual backlog is very strong with the total value of secured contracts around RO 600 million.

“In addition, Abraj is retaining the highest market share in Oman's drilling market as well as pioneering in the Well Services market by offering high end products and services to our clients. Our clients are very diverse, serving the major national and international operators of Oil and Gas Exploration and Production (E&P) sector,” the company stated.

A notable highlight of its operational performance last year was its successful overseas foray when it secured a first-ever contract to provide drilling rigs to Kuwait. Buoyed by this success, the company is now keenly eyeing opportunities in cementing, hydraulic fracturing and coiled tubing in the wider region.

“The company was successfully prequalified for conventional cementing services by Kuwait Oil Company and continuously working on Aramco pre-qualifications in Saudi in line with its strategic growth plans to expand regionally and globally,” it added.

Oman's Islamic finance
industry poised for growth

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, MARCH 12

The Islamic finance industry in the Sultanate of Oman has shown remarkable growth and resilience throughout 2023, setting a solid foundation for further expansion in the year ahead.

As outlined in the recent country report by Islamic Finance News 2024 annual guide, key insights provide a preview of what to expect in Oman's financial landscape for the current year.

One of the standout achievements in 2023 was the significant growth of Islamic banking assets, with total assets of Islamic banks and windows reaching RO 7.2 billion (\$18.65 billion) by August 2023.

This impressive 13.3 per cent year-on-year increase underscores the strength and stability of the Islamic finance sector in Oman, which accounted for nearly 18 per cent of the total banking assets in the country by October 2023.

Additionally, financing provided by Islamic banks saw a substantial 12.9 per cent year-on-year growth, reflecting a growing demand for Shariah-compliant financial products and services in the market.

In Q4 2023, OQGN launched a groundbreaking IPO in Oman. It was the largest ever in the country, raising RO 288.2 million (\$746.39 million) and oversubscribed by 14 times, with orders of RO 4 billion (\$10.36 billion).



Regulatory initiatives introduced by the CMA and CBO have played a crucial role in supporting the growth of the Islamic finance industry.

Notably, it was the first Shariah-compliant IPO in the country. Regulatory initiatives introduced by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) and the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) have played a crucial role in supporting the growth of the Islamic finance industry.

The introduction of the crowdfunding regulations has paved the way for the emergence of nine crowdfunding platforms in Oman, signifying a more diverse and inclusive financial ecosystem in the country.

Moreover, the CBO's implementation of the Wakalah money market instrument has enhanced liquidity management for Islamic banks and windows, addressing short-term liquidity needs effectively.

Going forward, Oman is poised to witness continued advancements in its financial

sector. Notable transactions on the horizon include the anticipated issuance of the Omantel Sukuk and other Sukuk offerings by Omani corporate entities.

The Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) market is also expected to attract new players and bolster its presence in the Muscat Stock Exchange index, indicating a growing interest in real estate investments in the country.

Furthermore, the regulatory focus on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards is set to drive the issuance of sustainable Sukuk, aligning Oman's financial market with global sustainable finance trends.

The forthcoming regulations on virtual assets will open up new opportunities in the crypto and virtual asset market, positioning Oman as a progressive player in the digital financial landscape.

Madayn launches 'Green
Industrial Cities' initiative
at Samayil Industrial City

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 12

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has launched the 'Green Industrial Cities' project in alignment with a national initiative led by the Environment Authority to plant 10 million wild trees across Oman.

Madayn, in cooperation with the Authority, has commenced planting Samar, Sidr, Ghaf and Shua trees in Samayil Industrial City, with plans to expand these efforts gradually to all the industrial cities under its purview.

Eng Ibtisam al Shanfari (pictured), Environmental Affairs Specialist Manager at the Head of Operations Sector Office in Madayn, stated that the 'Green Industrial Cities' initiative is a key component of Madayn's ongoing efforts to enhance a healthier living and working environment.

“This initiative is pivotal in ensuring the sustainable preservation of the environment against air, soil and water pollution, while addressing the challenges posed by climate change.

“Additionally, the initiative aims to raise environmental awareness and align with the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to

Prepaid water
meters to
strengthen water
use management
in Oman

FROM PAGE 13

Qais al Zakwani, CEO of Nama Water Services, underscored the company's commitment to enhancing customer service through technological advancements.

He emphasised that the prepaid meters, incorporating global best practices, signify a major advancement in water management.

To ensure a smooth rollout, Nama Water Services conducted a pilot phase, providing valuable insights into managing the new system and addressing potential challenges.

Drawing upon successful prepaid water initiatives worldwide, the company is confident in the service's success and plans to expand it across all governorates served.

Al Zakwani highlighted the benefits of the prepaid meter system, including empowering subscribers to manage their water consumption effectively and eliminating the issue of accumulating debt.

Leveraging Internet of Things (IoT) technology, these smart meters offer real-time usage data, allowing customers to monitor and control their consumption conveniently, he said.

Existing customers can transition to the prepaid meter system at no extra cost, while new connections incur standard fees.

The system seamlessly integrates with Nama Water Services' mobile app and online portal, offering users a comprehensive platform to manage their meters electronically.



achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, particularly within the industrial sector, through the advancement of clean energy technologies,” Al Shanfari pointed out.

She added that Madayn, in cooperation with its partners, is actively engaged in enhancing awareness among investors in the various industrial cities to promote the adoption of safe, sustainable and innovative alternative sources.

These efforts focus on several keys areas, including hazardous and non-hazardous waste management, disposal of liquid waste into marine environments, reduction of air and noise pollutant emissions, proper handling and usage of chemicals (storage, transportation, and loading), storage of hazardous materials, building demolition and disposal of asbestos, mitigation of land pollution, and optimisation of water and energy consumption.



Saplings of indigenous trees being planted at Samayil Industrial City.

Fintech firms in Ireland in line for 40m euros funding



ANDY JALIL
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The author is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

Three top executives of Waystone, the Dublin-headquartered financial services group, who left the organisation in 2023, have launched a new investment venture to invest in Irish fintech firms.

DataOps has already provided 17.5 million euros in investment to a number of firms with further deals to close shortly.

The rationale behind the investment vehicle is that there is a deep pool of innovators in Ireland that are constrained in achieving their potential due to a lack of available funding through the venture capital and private equity markets.

Derek Delaney, who formerly led Waystone and who departed along with its then chief financial officer Glen McGee, and chief operating officer Paul Cahill last

year, are behind DataOps which is a sister investment vehicle to ComOp, an agri-tech businesses investor.

Among those firms to secure funding via DataOp are FundRecs, a company that has developed cloud-based reconciliation software, and ID-Pal, an identity verification provider.

Delaney said DataOp was founded to provide funding to early-stage companies that might otherwise struggle to secure funding.

He said: “We were very much focused on ComOp and are currently in discussion with two national governments about the creation of carbon credit exchanges. But it is a very nascent business and so while we have been working on it, we have been getting approached by lots of Irish early-stage firms which

are struggling to raise from a VC market that has largely dried up.”

He added: “This led us to decide to look at having a separate investment vehicle to run alongside ComOp that is focused on investing on early-stage fintech and data ops firms that are stuck for expansionary capital.”

Delaney and DataOp will write cheques from one million euros upwards with four deals closed to date and a further three due to complete shortly.

He said: “Typically, these businesses would get investment easy enough but the VC market is against them at the moment. In such a situation, the options open to them are to cut back on staff but this is the exact optimal time for them to be expanding so it is great for us to come in and back them.”

He further said: “Overall, we have our own capital up to

about 40 million euros and also have soft commitments for an additional 100 million from other investors should we wish to avail of it.

We won’t invest less than one million in a company and the biggest deal we have done to date is 7 million euros.”

Alan Meaney, co-founder and chief executive of Fund Recs, said DataOP “immediately added value to the business” when it invested in late 2023.

“They’ve challenged our ambition for the business in a positive way and provided pragmatic, no-nonsense advice since investing. It’s encouraging to see people of their calibre reinvest a significant portion of their net worth after a successful exit back into Irish companies,” he said.

Meaney added: “Hopefully, it’s an example we can follow ourselves if we can achieve

similar levels of success. We don’t see enough of this type of reinvestment by successful Irish founders who could have a much bigger impact doing similar instead of investing in rent-seeking investments like property. I’m hopeful their success can kickstart a wider trend.”

There was considerable surprise when Delaney, McGee and Cahill departed Waystone in 2023.

Formed as a merger between two Dublin-headquartered companies — MontLake and DMS and MDO, a Luxembourg-based UCITS management firm and alternative investment fund management — it had grown rapidly under Delaney’s management.

At the time of Delaney’s departure, it was serving clients with assets under management totalling more than \$2 trillion.

China’s exports are surging Get ready for the global backlash



KEITH BRADSHER
The author is the Beijing bureau chief for *The New York Times*, part of a team of *Times* reporters covering a wide range of news in China.



A solar farm in Shilin Yunnan, China. – The New York Times

China’s factory exports are powering ahead faster than almost anyone expected, putting jobs around the world in jeopardy and triggering a backlash that is gaining momentum.

From steel and cars to consumer electronics and solar panels, Chinese factories are finding more overseas buyers for goods.

The world’s appetite for its goods is welcomed by China, which is enduring a severe downturn in what had been the economy’s biggest driver of growth: building and outfitting apartments.

But other countries are increasingly concerned that China’s rise is coming partly at their expense and are starting to take action.

The European Union announced last week that it was preparing to charge tariffs, which are import taxes, on all electric cars arriving from China. The European Union said that it had found “substantial evidence” that Chinese government agencies have been illegally subsidising these exports, something China denies.

The amount of the tariffs will not be set until summer but will apply to any electric car exported by China to the bloc from March 7 onward.

During a visit to Beijing in December, European leaders warned that China is compensating for its housing crisis by building far more

factories than it needs.

China already produces a third of the world’s manufactured goods, more than the United States, Germany, Japan and South Korea combined, according to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

The European Union has also been mulling import restrictions on wind turbines and solar panels from China. India announced in September that it would impose broad tariffs on steel from China. Turkey has been complaining that China is lopsidedly sending it exports while buying little.

The Biden administration, which has kept former President Donald Trump’s tariffs in place, has imposed an ever-lengthening list of restrictions on American high-tech exports.

“I’ve made sure that the most advanced American technologies can’t be used in China, not allowing to trade them there,” President Joe Biden said in his State of the Union address on Thursday.

China’s exports, measured in dollars, rose 7 per cent in January and February over last year. But falling prices for many Chinese products — because of a glut of output in China — mean that the quantity of exports and their global market share are rising much faster.

China has found ways to bypass some tariffs. Chinese components go in rising volumes to countries like Vietnam, Malaysia and Mexico. These countries process the goods, so that they count as their own products and not as made in China.

These countries then ship the goods to the United States and European Union, which charge them low tariffs or even no tariffs. The United States and European Union are becoming concerned.

Katherine Tai, the US trade representative, warned last week in comments at a Brookings Institution event that the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which replaced NAFTA, was up for review in the summer of

2026.

She hinted that the United States might insist on tightening rules on the origin of components, notably for cars — a position also espoused in autumn by Robert E Lighthizer, who was Trump’s trade representative and is now the leading trade adviser to Trump’s election campaign.

China “already is a really important element of tension and concern” in North American trade relations, Tai said.

In addition to looming tariffs on imported clean energy products, Europe will soon phase in a tax on imports from all over the world based on the quantity of climate-changing carbon dioxide emitted during their production.

The new tax is known as a carbon border adjustment mechanism, or CBAM. But it has been nicknamed the “C-bomb” in Europe because it will fall heavily on imports that come directly or indirectly from China.

Two-thirds of the electricity in China is generated by burning heavily polluting coal, which

means many of its exports to Europe could be hit with the new tax. Europe and the United States also face threats from China to their long-standing economic relationships in developing countries, which increasingly choose cheaper Chinese goods.

Across much of Latin America and Africa, countries now buy more from China than nearby industrial democracies, and the United States and Europe can do little about it.

“There are no rules to stop dumped and subsidised products from undercutting your exports to the rest of the world,” said Susan C Schwab, who was the US trade representative under President George W Bush.

For their part, Chinese officials expressed concern during the annual session of the country’s legislature, which ended on Monday, about what they perceive as a wave of unfair protectionism.

Commerce Minister Wang Wentao cited a recent International Monetary Fund study that found the number

of trade restrictions around the world had nearly tripled in the past four years, many of them aimed at China.

Foreign trade officials and economists generally cite three aspects of China’s industrial policy that help exports. State banks give loans for factories at low interest rates. Cities transfer public land for factory construction at little or no cost. And the state electricity grid keeps prices low.

According to China’s central bank, new lending for industry soared to \$670 billion last year from \$83 billion in 2019. By contrast, net lending for real estate was \$800 billion in 2019 but shrank \$75 billion last year, as mortgages and other real estate loans were repaid faster than new loans were issued.

Zheng Shanjie, China’s top economic planner, reaffirmed China’s industrial policy on Wednesday, saying that “land and energy will be channelled to good projects.”

China’s explosion in exports is visible in its trade surplus in

manufactured goods, which is the largest the world has seen since World War II.

Those surpluses correspond to deficits in other countries, which can be a drag on their growth.

The widening surplus is not only about rising exports. China has reduced or stopped buying many manufactured goods from the West as part of a series of national security and economic development measures over the past two decades.

Western economists, and even some economists in China, have been calling for China to do more to help consumers instead of increasing factory output. Premier Li Qiang, China’s second-highest official after Xi Jinping, told the legislature in his annual speech last week that he would move in that direction, but his steps were small.

He said that China would raise minimum government pensions for seniors, for example, but only by \$3 a month. That would cost less than a tenth of a per cent of the country’s economic output.

— The New York Times

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HADITH

GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Abu Huraira (Allah be pleased with him) reported:

When any one of you gets up in the morning in the state of fasting, he should neither use obscene language nor do any act of ignorance. And if anyone slanders him or quarrels with him, he should say: "I am fasting, I am fasting."



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FATWA

If one cannot fast, can he/she ask another person to fast on their behalf?

If one cannot fast, he/she should feed a needy person for each day he/she lost, but fasting on behalf of someone else is not correct from the legality of fasting.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY



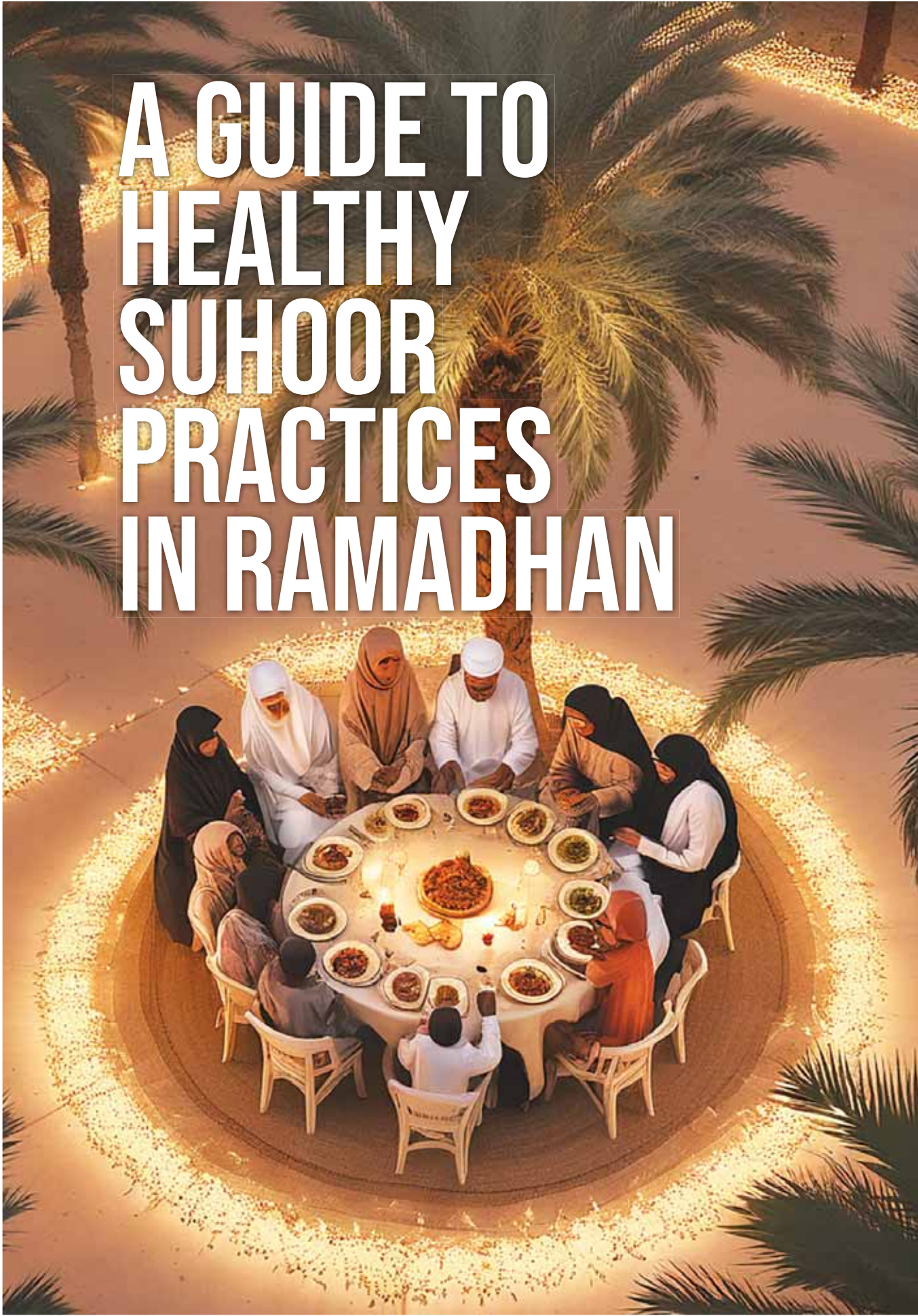
The Compassionate has taught the Quran. He created man. And taught him clear expression.

(al Rahman, 1-4)

Ramadhan

WEDNESDAY | MARCH 13, 2024 | RAMADHAN 2, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om

A GUIDE TO HEALTHY SUHOOR PRACTICES IN RAMADHAN



BY BALQEES ALORAIMI

For many Muslims, one of the most challenging parts of Ramadhan is fasting during daylight hours. This means abstaining from food, drink, and other physical needs from dawn until sunset. This can be particularly difficult in regions where the days are long or the weather is hot. Additionally, managing work, school and daily responsibilities while fasting can also be challenging, especially during the initial days of adjustment. However, despite these challenges, Ramadhan is also a time of spiritual reflection, self-discipline and community bonding, which helps many Muslims find strength and motivation to observe the fast. During the holy month, families typically gather before dawn to partake in suhoor, engaging in several common practices to ensure a fulfilling and nourishing meal before the day's fast. Many families seize the opportunity to share personal stories, exchange Ramadhan traditions, and reinforce cultural values, strengthening familial bonds and creating cherished memories during this sacred time.

Preparing a list of healthy foods for suhoor during the month of Ramadhan is essential. This preparation aids in maintaining stable sugar and energy levels throughout the fasting hours, preventing lethargy and laziness, and alleviating hunger and thirst throughout the day of fasting. Suhoor offers a range of healthy food options distinguished by their benefits for the body, providing energy and relieving the feeling of thirst for the fasting individual.

The suhoor meal should comprise vegetables, a moderate amount of carbohydrates like bread, and protein-rich foods. Including legumes such as beans and oats in suhoor can prolong the feeling of fullness due to their high fiber content, aiding digestion and regulating the digestive system.

Dates are rich in three types of sugar: glucose, sucrose and fructose. Glucose elevates blood sugar levels,

while fructose and sucrose help maintain stability. Their high fiber content makes dates a healthy suhoor choice during Ramadhan. Fruits and vegetables are essential components of a healthy suhoor and breakfast as they are rich in fiber, vitamins, calcium and minerals, providing the necessary energy for fasting during Ramadhan. Opt for vegetables with high water content.

Brown rice is recommended for suhoor due to its complex carbohydrates, which

Incorporate leafy vegetables, fruits and whole grains rich in fiber into your suhoor meal.

Opt for fresh or dried fruits over sugar-sweetened foods to satisfy sweet cravings. Overeating should be avoided to prevent discomfort and heaviness.

While some individuals rely on caffeinated beverages like tea and coffee during suhoor, these drinks are not recommended as caffeine promotes urine production, leading to



take longer to break down and absorb compared to simple carbohydrates, helping to stave off hunger.

Nutritionists advise including protein in the suhoor meal, which can be sourced from eggs, known for their high protein content that promotes satiety.

Avoid fatty and fried foods as they increase thirst, heaviness, and discomfort during fasting. Adequate water and fluid intake is crucial to prevent dehydration.

Consuming a light snack such as dates, labneh, or a wheat grain helps maintain blood sugar levels and prevents extreme hunger during fasting.

rapid water loss and increased thirst.

Skipping suhoor should be avoided due to its benefits. Delaying suhoor as much as possible helps prevent early feelings of hunger and thirst. Consuming yogurt before fasting is important as it provides 61 calories and 85 per cent water per 100 grammes, aiding in thirst prevention.

Finally, remember that a healthy suhoor meal is essential for a healthy fast, allowing individuals to enjoy the spiritual and health benefits of Ramadhan. Additionally, consider adding calorie-dense foods to your suhoor for healthy weight gain during Ramadhan.

ENTERTAINMENT

'Imbued with flamenco': Spain's Farruquito takes Hong Kong stage

AS HEIR TO ONE of Spain's most renowned flamenco dynasties, dancer Farruquito pairs furious footwork with strumming syncopated beats and verve — bringing the art form's "way of life" to global audiences.

His real name is Juan Manuel

Fernandez Montoya, and at 41, he has followed the steps of his grandfather, legendary dancer El Farruco.

"I was born imbued with flamenco because my family is one of the important houses of flamenco, the Farrucos," Farruquito said in an interview, beaming with pride.

"My grandfather — the maestro — my mother, my aunt, my brothers, my cousins, my father who sang, I was born and the soundtrack of my days was flamenco." Now he's bringing that soundtrack — and his impassioned stage presence — to Hong Kong, where his show has three performances this weekend as part of an arts festival.

Visiting the city for the first time, Farruquito said his performance in the Hong Kong Cultural Centre would hold some traditional elements, "but with a modern update".

An art form that fuses song, dance and emotive showmanship, it was

declared by UNESCO an intangible cultural heritage for Andalusia, a region on Spain's southern coast.

But the dance waltzes across borders, attracting aspiring foot-tappers to popular classes from Bangkok to Tokyo — and now drawing curious audiences in Hong Kong.

"There are a lot of people from Asia who do it very well because they are very disciplined. They have a lot of respect for it." But to truly experience it, one must be "up close to it", he said.

"Flamenco is not just a music — it is a culture, it is a way of life."

- 'STAY ON STAGE FOREVER' -

Born to a Romani family full of artists and musicians, Farruquito was declared a child prodigy when he shared the stage with his grandfather on Broadway in New York at the age of five.

By 18, he was declared "one of the great flamenco dancers of this new cen-



tury" by The New York Times — and anointed the presumptive heir to El Farruco's legacy after his grandfather passed away in 1997.

But his meteoric rise came to a sudden halt in 2004 when he fatally ran over a pedestrian in Spain and fled the scene.

Sentenced to three years in prison, he was released in 2010 — and fearful for the end of his dancing days.

"For a long time, they erased me from the map. But it was understandable at that moment," he said.

The dancer has since rediscovered his place on stage, though he still feels the responsibility of his grandfather's legacy — and pre-performance nerves — three decades into his career.

"There are times when right before going on stage, I want to go home and go to bed," Farruquito said.

"But there are other times when I want to stay on stage forever — I want to die there." — AFP

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF
MUSLIM FAITH

610

Prophet Muhammad receives his first revelation on Mount Hira.

In AD 610, he was meditating in a cave on Mount Hira when the Angel Gabriel appeared and spoke to him. The angel said the word 'Allah' and Mohammed began to recite words which he believed came straight from God. This was his first revelation from God. Over the next 22 years, Mohammed received revelations from God.

RAMADHAN AROUND THE
WORLD

PAKISTAN



Pakistan, rooted in centuries of Islamic legacy, anticipates the holy month of Ramadhan with reverence and joy. Since Islam's advent in the 7th century through Arab traders and missionaries, the faith has thrived, shaping Pakistan's identity. Today, with over 230 million people, Pakistan stands as one of the world's largest Muslim-majority nations, where Islam is practised on their daily life. Ramadhan, a time of spiritual reflection and communal bonding, holds special significance. Families gather for Iftar meals, mosques resonate with prayers, and charitable acts flourish. Despite its diverse cultural landscape, Pakistan unites in devotion to Islam and values of compassion and tolerance. Pakistani Muslims observe the practices of self-restraint and self-discipline during the month of Ramadhan. To achieve this objective, schools, colleges, and offices start early and close in the early afternoon to leave enough time for prayers and Iftar.

RAMADAN
TRIVIA

HOW WELL DO YOU
KNOW THE HOLY MONTH



WHAT IS THE
FIRST PRAYER
OF THE DAY
CALLED?

HEALTH
TIPS

TO GUIDE YOU
THIS RAMADHAN

DON'T OVEREAT DURING
IFTAR (DINNER/BREAK FAST).

After fasting all day, overeating during Iftar can strain the digestive system, causing discomfort, bloating, and indigestion. Moreover, it can lead to an imbalance in nutrient intake, with excessive consumption of fats and carbohydrates at the expense of proteins, vitamins, and minerals, impacting overall health. This pattern of excessive calorie intake post-fast may contribute to weight gain over time. Additionally, overeating may detract from proper hydration, a crucial concern during Ramadhan, necessitating adequate fluid intake during Iftar and throughout the night to prevent dehydration.



EXCEPTIONAL
COLLECTION
OF RAMADHAN
EXPERIENCES
FOR IFTAR
THIS YEAR

BY ADELA ELEEN

As the holy month of Ramadhan approaches, Muscat's hospitality scene is abuzz with anticipation as hotels unveil their latest offerings for Iftar, marking a significant aspect of the sacred season. In a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation, hotels across the city are redefining the Iftar experience to cater to the diverse tastes and preferences

offering them not just a meal but an experience that honours our traditions while embracing modern tastes," he added.

This year, Muscat's hotels are taking their Iftar offerings to new heights, blending traditional dishes with contemporary twists and elevating the dining experience for guests. From lavish buffets featuring classic Omani specialties to innovative fusion cuisines that pay homage to global flavours,



es of guests.

Iftar, the evening meal with which Muslims break their fast during Ramadhan, holds profound significance in Islamic culture. Beyond its religious importance, it symbolizes unity, generosity, and community spirit. It's a time when families, friends, and communities come together to share in the blessings of the season.

"At its core, Iftar is about coming together and sharing blessings with others," shared Rene D. Egle, the Area General Manager of Shangrila.

"In Muscat, where hospitality is deeply ingrained in our culture, Iftar holds even greater significance. It's a time when we open our doors to guests from all walks of life,

there's something to delight every palate. Among the latest trends in Iftar offerings across Muscat's hotels, fusion flavours are taking centre stage. Hotels are blending traditional Omani dishes with international influences, crafting exciting culinary fusions that reflect the city's multiculturalism. Moreover, there's a notable shift towards health-conscious choices, with hotels incorporating more nutritious options into their Iftar menus. This trend caters to guests with dietary preferences and restrictions, aligning with the increasing focus on health and wellness. In addition, interactive dining experiences are gaining popularity, as many hotels introduce live cooking stations and interactive culi-

nary experiences. These initiatives allow guests to engage with chefs and customise their meals according to their preferences, enhancing the overall dining experience. Sustainability is also at the forefront of Iftar offerings, with hotels implementing practices such as sourcing local ingredients and reducing food waste. Lastly, hotels are creating a family-friendly atmosphere by offering special activities and entertainment for children, ensuring that Iftar becomes a memorable experience for guests of all ages.

DIVERSE OFFERINGS

Among the different hotels in the country, there is always an eager anticipation as to what luxury hotels will offer. Every year, the luxurious Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz Carlton Hotel always deliver and this remains true this year.

At Al Khiran Kitchen, guests can embark on an exceptional Iftar culinary journey for RO 26 net per person. Featuring an array of cuisines from Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Morocco, and beyond, this experience promises a feast for the senses.

In addition to a large selection of international delicacies, the famous Ramadhan buffet at the palace boasts signature dishes such as assorted

na. These cabanas, accommodating 4 to 8 guests, offering privacy in a palatial garden, including a food presentation of mezzes, dates, dry fruits and nuts, and refreshing Ramadhan beverages.

The hotel's famous 'Layali Ramadhan' at The Pavilion Gardens presents a special Suhoor experience from 8:30 pm to 2:00 am. Guests can relish traditional dishes like shish tawook, kebab meshui and lahem meshui, accompanied by assorted hot and cold mezze selections. Daily entertainment from 9:30 pm to midnight adds to the ambiance, creating unforgettable moments under the stars.

At Shangri La Barr Al Jissah, Al Tanoor restaurant is serving a delicious Iftar buffet featuring a host of delectable traditional Ramadhan delicacies inspired by local, regional, and international cuisines. The extensive buffet offered at RO 24 net per person showcase live and a la minute stations including hot and cold mezze, Omani specials and a variety of regional dishes. The night also includes live entertainment such as oud players.

This year, Layali has also become bigger with two seating ambiances where guests can choose between Layali Ramadhan tent or their newly launched Sil2 Beach lounge. For those looking for specialised dishes, Aangan by Rohit Ghai offers Indian Iftar and continuing the trend, they also offer private cabanas for Iftar and Suhoor.

Some of the other offerings to watch out for are the buffet Iftar offered by Sheraton, Jumeirah Muscat Bay, and JW Marriott Muscat. These prop-



mezzes and salads from Lebanon, Omani Shuwa, Turkish Doner Kebab, Lahmajoon and Pide. Additionally, live stations offer a variety of Iranian kebabs, spicy curries, and traditional Omani dishes. The dessert buffet is a "to die for" spot for the ones who have a sweet tooth. Guests can enjoy the extravaganza of sweets from Turkish delights and housemade Baklava to freshly baked kunafa and unique ice cream flavours. The Iftar experience at the Palace is crowned with a live oriental music trio performance from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm everyday.

Those seeking intimate Iftar experience can reserve a private cabana by the pool for an additional RO 30 net per caba-

erties put their unique touches to Iftar and Suhoor and not only do they mix well some Arabic and Omani favourites but also lots of international flavours in the mix.

Looking around at some of the stand-alone restaurants, it is amazing to see that all efforts are also made to provide a diverse culinary experience. Not only are the venues geared up with all Ramadhan lightings, but the ambience are totally transformed to depict the spirit of the season.

As Muscat's hotels gear up to host Iftar gatherings throughout Ramadhan, they invite residents and visitors alike to join them in celebrating the spirit of the season and experiencing the warmth of Omani hospitality.



Zakat an essential pillar of society



KHALID AL BALUSHI
@KHALID_ALBALUSHI94

The wisdom of Allah Almighty ordained differentiation among His servants in terms of provisions. There are the wealthy whose wealth exceeds their needs, and there are the poor who struggle to meet their daily needs. Islam came to eliminate this disparity among people through certain commands that preserve society from the conflicts between the poor and the rich people, protecting them from animosity and hatred, as instructed by Allah.

Zakat is a mandatory act in Islam of purification and growth. Scholars define it as a predetermined share that Allah has obligated the wealthy people to spend on specific Zakat channels outlined by Islamic law. The significance of Zakat lies in its role as one of the essential pillars that maintain the balance of society, contribute to its stability, promote the principles of partnership and social solidarity, and strengthen love and affection among different segments of society. Ignoring the payment of Zakat goes beyond a religious error or sin but it extends to harming the entire community. The importance of the role of Zakat committees in the governorates lies in educating people about the role and impact of Zakat.

Abdullah al Amri, a member of the Zakat Committee in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, emphasises, "Paying Zakat is an act of obedience to Allah, where the people with wealth fulfil the obligation imposed on them by spending a small part of their wealth, intending self-purification and mercy towards the poor and needy."

Zakat is obligatory on those whom Allah men-



tioned in the Quran: "The alms are only for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer it, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to free the captives and the debtors, and for the cause of Allah, and for the wayfarer; a duty imposed by Allah, and Allah is Knowing, Wise." (Quran, At-Tawbah: 60).

Nasser al Hinai, another member of the Zakat Committee in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, highlights the conditions of Zakat payment, emphasising that it should be given willingly to those in need. "The payer must have reached the age of maturity and possess mental competence. Zakat is obligatory on all Muslims who meet the specified threshold for one lunar year that has passed since acquiring the wealth. It applies to gold, silver, livestock, crops, trade goods, and the stock market," he said.

The consequence for neglecting Zakat is severe, as stated in the Quran: "And those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend them in the way of Allah, announce to them a painful chastisement." (Quran, At-Tawbah: 34). Al Amri points out that the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs has facilitated Zakat calculation through

websites and mobile applications to determine whether payment is obligatory, making the process efficient and safeguarding the rights of the poor.

Al Hinai proudly mentions that the Zakat Committee in the Wilayat of Al Seeb has enlisted a network of volunteers, around 90 persons of both genders male and female, distributed across the regions and villages of the wilayat. They work to identify eligible families after studying their cases and verifying the information through official documents. The data is then submitted to the committee for approval and storage in a dedicated programme, along with the electronic platform for Zakat services.

He further explains, "The committee responds promptly to any communication about families facing difficulties in a particular area within the wilayat. The administration contacts the volunteers in that area, urging them to visit the family and verify their situation to fulfil the entrusted duty."

"The number of cases benefiting from the programme reached 1,600 Omani families and a small number of families of eligible residents in the Wilayat of Al Seeb," he said.

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EMPOWERING THE ARTISTIC VOICES OF MIDDLE EASTERN, REGIONAL CREATIVES

ART DUBAI, AS A preeminent international art fair in the Middle East, is a dynamic platform that has propelled art from the region onto the global stage, fostering diverse perspectives and transcending traditional Western-centric narratives. By championing discovery and inclusivity, Art Dubai has evolved into one of the most globally diverse art fairs, showcasing not only the cultural richness of the MENASA region but also extending its reach to Southeast and Central Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Functioning as a nurturing ground for emerging talent, Art Dubai has catalysed the careers of countless artists, curators and professionals in the art world. Through its extensive programming and initiatives, the fair continuously celebrates artistic excellence while collaborating closely with partners to innovate and enrich the cultural landscape.

Embedded within Dubai's vibrant art ecosystem, Art Dubai collaborates closely with key institutions such as the Jameel Arts Centre, Ishara Art Foundation and Sharjah Art Foundation, among others, contributing to the thriving cultural fabric of the UAE.

Benedetta Ghione has been serving as the Executive Director at Art Dubai, where she spearheads the strategic vision and execution of the fair. Bringing over 15 years of experience in the art industry, Ghione holds both a BA and an MA in the history of art and contemporary art theory. Prior to her tenure at Art Dubai, she held positions as a director at Luxembourg & Dayan gallery (now Luxembourg & Co) and as head of the department for contemporary art at Bonhams auction house. Since joining Art Dubai in 2015, Ghione has prioritised institutional and public engagement, fostering artistic growth, and advancing the fair's professional development and educational endeavours.

On the sideline of the recently concluded fair, Benedetta shared some insights regarding the future of region-based artists and why she thinks the role of Art Dubai is essential in the growth of art in an international context.

Asked what the local and regional talents are doing right and which areas they needed to improve on, Benedetta said, "I think we are reaching a real moment of reckoning and maturity in our local and broader regional art scene. I feel that a number of artists and projects that have been in the works and have been maturing for close to two decades

now, as long as the art fair has been running, are coming of age. What I really think is special about our scene is that it has a very authentic feel to it, that the practices of the artists are very much rooted and cited in their reality living in Dubai, in the UAE, and in the broader Gulf. And I think what is really important is that we try and maintain that sense of authenticity as we gain increasing international recognition."

She added, "I feel that the eyes of the world are starting to really be on

Cumulatively, all these initiatives have played a significant role in building capacity, attracting talent and opportunities in the creative industries."

Expounding on her observation about local and regional artists, she shared, "I think one of the things that I notice a lot in our local talent is the fact that their practices are usually incubated over a significant amount of time. This is especially true among young artists. There isn't a lot of overnight success here because obvious-

us as a scene and I hope that what they discover is something that feels fresh and somewhat different from some of the main Western art narratives. My great hope is that we don't lose that kind of point of difference and that we continue to grow in terms of awareness, capacity, and recognition, but at the same time stay true to ourselves."

Benedetta and her team have been instrumental in the impressive growth of the fair and Art Dubai in general. Beyond the fair, Benedetta, in an interview with another publication, shared that "the group now encompasses over 30 initiatives, including Dubai Design Week, the Middle East's design platform; Downtown Design, the region's leading design fair with a focus on high quality and original design; Prototypes for Humanity, the world's largest and most diverse assembly of academics addressing social and environmental challenges, among others.

ly, in a maturing scene, it takes time for opportunity to come along."

She added, "This means that artists really have the time to refine their practices and to find their voices. To me, one great point of difference is that even artists who are relatively emerging in terms of their age and career are actually very strong in their voice and identity."

For Benedetta, it is crucial for local and regional artists to have a stronger appreciation of their realities. "I feel that what is very special to our scene is the way in which it questions daily life, traditions, archival histories, and the like. The artists here, in a broader context, are also really relevant. They talk of stories and tell stories of lived experience within a region that has a huge amount of richness in terms of cultural history but also a large amount of questioning and reckoning, and all of that really comes through in the work."