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INTER BEAT EMPOLI TO CLOSE IN ON SERIE A TITLE



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RO 1.5 BILLION WORTH OF GUARANTEES RELEASED FOR OQ PLASTICS COMPLEX



P18

MASS IFTARS REFLECT SPIRIT OF BROTHERHOOD



■ MUSCAT

## OMAN FLAYS BOMBING OF IRAN CONSULATE

The Sultanate of Oman condemned the bombing that targeted the Iranian consulate in Damascus, considering it as a violation of the sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic and the international laws and diplomatic immunities, calling for the protection of diplomatic and consular missions. In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman stressed the need to put an end to escalations in the region and reject aggression and other actions that undermine security and stability, expressing its condolences to the families of the victims wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — ONA

## LIVESTOCK EXPORTS RISE BY 45 PER CENT

The value of the Sultanate of Oman's exports of livestock by the end of 2023 increased by 45 per cent to RO 3,206,463, compared to RO 2,217,143 by the end of 2022. The total weight of livestock exported till the end of 2023 stood at 3,363,443 kg, compared to 2,594,211 kg by the end of 2022, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Camels topped the list of livestock exports to the tune of RO 1,829,913, followed by mixed breed goats (RO 715,543), purebred goats (RO 147,350), lamb (RO 128,554) and cattle (RO 105,426). Statistics showed that the United Arab Emirates imported the largest volume of livestock from Oman.

DETAILS ON P2

## RAMADHAN CONCERT SERIES CONCLUDES

The Royal Opera House Muscat concluded its Ramadhan Concert Series with a captivating performance by renowned Egyptian vocalist Ali El Helbawy, accompanied by Oman's own Sami al Subhi. Since the first show on March 18, the Ramadhan Concert Series garnered immense popularity among the local community, drawing hundreds of attendees to different shows. Aimed at fostering spiritual devotion, the series comprised three evenings of sacred music during the holy month of Ramadhan.

DETAILS ON P19

■ FAREWELL TO AMBASSADOR OF CHINA



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office Li Lingbing, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty. The ambassador expressed her thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to her during her tour of duty in Oman from His Majesty, the Government and the Omani people, which had enabled her to carry out her tasks. She also wished His Majesty the Sultan good health, happiness and long life, wishing the Sultanate of Oman further development and growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty. DETAILS ON P2

# Oman, Sri Lanka sign MoU to boost tourism

**COLOMBO:** The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the tourism field with the Sri Lankan Ministry of Tourism and Lands, on Tuesday. The MoU was signed by Ahmed bin Ali al Rashdi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Harin Fernando, Minister of Tourism and Lands of Sri Lanka. The MoU comes within the framework of bolstering bilateral cooperation in the field of tourism between the two countries stemming from the two countries' awareness of the importance of the tourism sector as an effective element in boosting economic growth.

The MoU aims to enhance tourism exchange, activate participation in various tourism activities, coordinate efforts between the competent authorities in the two countries to simplify travel procedures in accordance with the laws and regulations applied by both countries, strengthen cooperation in various fields related to tourism including investments and managing tourist facilities, encourage the private sector to contribute effectively to the tourism development process. PHOTO ON P2

# World plays Israeli strike on aid workers

OMAN, SWEDEN CALL FOR DIALOGUE TO END CRISIS IN MIDDLE EAST

**MUSCAT/GAZA:** Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a phone call from Tobias Billström, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Sweden, on Tuesday.

The ministers discussed fields of bilateral cooperation and ways of fostering them and related agreements. They agreed to hold periodic political consultations on the level of the foreign ministries. They exchanged views on a number of challenges and regional issues most importantly the Palestinian cause and the Ukrainian crisis, stressing the importance of dialogue between all parties and addressing the root causes and seriously dealing with all parties concerned.

Meanwhile, the United States, France and Britain led international criticism of a deadly strike in the Gaza Strip that killed seven charity staff as they unloaded desperately needed aid brought by sea to the war-torn territory.

World Central Kitchen —one of two NGOs spearheading efforts to deliver aid



A Palestinian boy looks at a drone in the sky in the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah on Tuesday, amid the ongoing conflict. — AFP

by boat —said a “targeted Israeli strike” on Monday killed Australian, British, Palestinian, Polish and US-Canadian staff.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged a “swift, impartial investigation” into the airstrike and said Israel needed to do

more to protect innocent civilians.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the strike was “unintentional”. The Israeli army has vowed to hold an investigation and promised to “share our findings

transparently.” French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne, speaking alongside Blinken at a press conference in Paris, said “protecting humanitarian workers is a moral and legal imperative that everyone must adhere to. Nothing justifies such a tragedy.” Earlier, US National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson wrote on X that Washington was “heartbroken and deeply troubled by the strike”. British Foreign Secretary David Cameron — who has been increasingly critical of Israel's war in Gaza — said the country had “called on Israel to immediately investigate and provide a full, transparent explanation of what happened”. UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he was “shocked and saddened” after learning that a Briton was among those killed. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese slammed the “completely unacceptable” attack, and called it a “tragedy that should never have occurred”. SEE ALSO P6



A cable car leading to Wakan village in Wadi Mistal.

(Photo for illustrative purpose only)

# Bids for Wakan cable car project

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

Al Batinah South Governorate has floated a tender for consulting services to prepare designs and documents for the road and cable car leading to Wakan village in Wadi Mistal in the Wilayat of Nakhal.

Wakan village has been witnessing a great turnout of visitors as it is one of the most wonderful tourist attractions. It combines a mountainous and plain nature and boasts archaeological landmarks that are deeply rooted in history.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik during the Cabinet meeting

in January had issued instructions to set a timeframe for the development of Al Jabal Al Abyadh area and the village of Wakan with the prime aim of providing basic infrastructure and appropriate conditions to make use of the areas' potential and tourism landmarks.

Firms involved in urban engineering consultancy and master planning, civil engineering consultancy, architecture consultancy, quantity surveying services and survey services, project management consultancy, electrical engineering consultancy, mechanical engineering consultancy, landscaping design consultancy, and

geographical and continental surveys are eligible to take part in the bid.

Documents can be purchased until April 19 with the last date for submission of the bid is on May 9.

Located 2,000 metres above sea level and in the western Hajar mountains, Wakan is a small mountain village with beautiful terraced gardens overlooking the surrounding mountains above and Wadi Mistal below.

To improve tourist services in the village of Wakan, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has worked on the infrastructure in the village.



# Ambassador of China thanks His Majesty

MUSCAT: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received Li Lingbing, Ambassador of China to Oman, on Tuesday to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty.

The ambassador expressed her thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to her during her tour of duty in Oman from His Majesty, the Government and the Omani people, which had enabled her to carry out her tasks.

She also wished His Majesty the Sultan good health, happiness and a long life, wishing the Sultanate of Oman further development and growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty. HH Sayyid Asaad expressed his utmost appreciation to the ambassador for the efforts she exerted in serving the relations between the two countries, wishing her continuous success. He also wished the Chinese people further progress and prosperity.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General and the adviser at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad. — ONA



HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said with Li Lingbing, Ambassador of China to Oman in Muscat on Tuesday.

— ONA

## VOCATIONAL TRAINING TO BE INTRODUCED IN SCHOOLS

KHALIFA AL RAWAHI  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, stressed the importance of introducing the vocational training diploma in the academic year 2023-2024 by targeting 200 grade 10 students in the governorates of Muscat and Al Batinah North.

The under-secretary made his remarks during his visit to the schools applying the business management and information technology disciplines namely Hafs Bin Rashid School (Boys), Nusaiba bint Kaab School (Girls), in Muscat Governorate and Haleema Al Saadiyah School (Girls) in Al Batinah North Governorate, on Tuesday. The under-secretary commended the efforts undertaken by the schools administrations, the students' positive interaction and their acceptance of the two subjects. He praised the staffs' commitment to instil knowledge and sciences in the students especially when it comes to new fields that are being applied for the first time as a first batch before introducing other specialisations in accordance to a phased methodological plan.

During the visit, he met a number of officials. He listened to an elaborate explanation of the progress of the work plan and inspected the mechanism of applying the two subjects by attending some classes.

The Directorate- General of Education in Muscat Governorate recently held an introductory meeting with school principals and vocational guidance specialists in the five schools applying the technical and vocational education plan for engineering and industrial specialisations in the governorate to clarify the vocational and technical education plan which will be included next year in accordance to a plan devised by the Ministry for select schools to introduce six engineering and industrial specialisations namely engineering maintenance, mechanical manufacturing engineering, maintenance of solid structures, lifting and unloading operations, welding and metal forming.

## INJURED RED FOX RESCUED



Specialists at Environment Authority (EA) have transferred an injured young red fox ( 3-4 months old) to the Biodiversity Centre in the Wilayat of Barka to receive necessary treatment after it was found alone near residential areas in Saham in Al Batinah North Governorate, according to a statement. Red foxes either establish stable home ranges within particular areas or are itinerant with no fixed abode.



### OMAN, SRI LANKA SIGN TOURISM MOU

The MoU was signed by Ahmed bin Ali al Rashdi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Harin Fernando, Minister of Tourism and Lands of Sri Lanka. — ONA

# Livestock exports up by 45% in 2023

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The total weight of livestock exported till the end of 2023 stood at 3,363,443 kg, compared to 2,594,211 kg by the end of 2022, according to preliminary statistics

issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Camels topped the list of livestock exports to the tune of RO 1,829,913, followed by mixed breed goats (RO 715,543), purebred goats (RO 147,350), lamb (RO 128,554) and cattle (RO 105,426).

Statistics showed that the United Arab Emirates imported

the largest volume of livestock from Oman (to the tune of RO 2,257,710), followed by Yemen (RO 454,311), Saudi Arabia (RO 353,198), Qatar (RO 85,849) and Iran (RO 17,100).

The value of livestock re-exports grew by 97 per cent by the end of 2023 to RO 92,335,550 against a total weight of 51,628,948 kilogrammes. — ONA

# Great tourist places in Oman to spend Eid vacation

BALQEES AL ORAIMI  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

With people of Oman eagerly awaiting the announcement of Eid holidays, here are some spots in Oman where one can spend memorable moments with family and friends.

Wadi Bani Habib village in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar

The journey to explore Wadi Bani Habib begins by descending through rocky stairs surrounded by picturesque landscapes among the mountains and trees. When you arrive at the valley, you can lie down to take a rest under the fragrant and leafy shade of peach, almond, walnut, pomegranate and olive trees. If you climb to the heights that overlook this village of abundant beauty, the lanes of ancient houses intertwined with each other will astonish you. A walk around this ancient neighbourhood distinguished by its doors, windows, rooms, stairs, and beautiful roofs will take you back to history.

WADI BANI KHAROUS  
Wadi Bani Kharous, which widens at its end to lead to the historic town



Wilayat of Mahadha

of Al Awabi, has been a centre of civilisation and agricultural progress in Oman for more than hundreds of years. The towering mountains on both sides of the valley are made of limestone formations. Where you can explore the dazzling biodiversity.

OLD MUSCAT  
Old Muscat is associated with nostalgia where the past and the present fuse seamlessly. The Muttrah sea road, souq with its old shops, houses, cafes, and mosques are distinguished by their unique decorations and inscriptions. One

of these beautiful landmarks is the old watchtower in Muttrah, which is surrounded by lights and wonderful fountains. The charming beauty of Muttrah is fragrant with the scent of the beautiful past.

MIBAM VILLAGE IN WADI TIWI  
The village of Mibam in Niyabat of Tiwi is very beautiful. You can reach it using a four-wheel drive vehicle due to the rugged road. The atmosphere in the village is comfortable and inspires peace and relaxation. When you arrive, you can visit the castle, which stands tall and overlooks the

village. You can also walk among its lush orchards, which are interspersed with the waters of the falaj. You can also visit Al Khawr Mosque. In the rainy season, you can see waterfalls descending from the tops of the mountains. Amateurs can swim in it and enjoy the stunning scenery surrounding it. The people of Mibam village are distinguished by their generosity, tolerance, kindness, and welcoming visitors with all their warmth.

AL KHALIDIYAH IN MUSANDAM  
To the southeast of Khasab, there



Niyabat of Tiwi

are open forests in Al-Si Park in Khalidiyah, and acacia trees provide lush shade where tourists can make camping and resting places. During the spring and fall seasons, the area bustles with life again with the various types of birds that come to it. There are also many traditional lock houses for which Musandam is famous, where you can wander through its corridors and spend a beautiful day.

AL BALEED AND THE LAND OF FRANKINCENSE MUSEUM  
Al Baleed Archaeological Site

has been listed as a cultural and archaeological site by Unesco and includes both the archaeological site and the Land of Frankincense Museum. You can view the site from a small boat sailing along the creek or by a private ride that takes you around the archaeological sites. There is also the Land of Frankincense Museum on the site, which includes several halls and sections, including a hall for carved archaeological works in the Al Baleed area and another hall that reflects the maritime traditions of the Dhofar Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman.



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### OMAN, EQUATORIAL GUINEA SET UP DIPLOMATIC TIES

**NEW YORK:** The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Equatorial Guinea signed a joint statement to establish diplomatic relations based on their existing cooperation and friendship relations. The statement was signed by Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, and Anatolio Ndong Mba, Permanent Representative of Equatorial Guinea to the United Nations. – **ONA**

## ‘Infuse culture of volunteering’

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
@lakshmioman

Giving back to society should be embedded in us at an early age, says HH Sayyidah Basma al Said, founder of Not Alone Campaign and Whispers of Serenity Clinic and was the first Arab judge for The Diana Awards.

The Holy month of Ramadhan reminds everyone of this factor and comes as an opportunity every year.

In 2024, HH Sayyidah Basma was again part of the judging team and was seated at the table with Prince William of the UK and she was impressed on how he took time to speak to each young leader. The shared belief is that young people can change the



world with the values of passion, collaboration, integrity, ambition and unity.

“The youth execute their idea and it is after their demonstration of their projects they are awarded. This year the Diana Award recognised 20 successful projects.

I think it is important  
for the children  
to understand the  
importance of  
humanity

HH SAYYIDAH  
BASMA AL SAID

Some of them dealt with mental health, the elderly, for students and so on,” said HH Sayyidah Basma. The governments have to think that students have to do volunteer work, she said.

“In some schools in Oman, they have to volunteer before

they complete graduation. I think it is important for the children to understand the importance of humanity and they should be encouraged to realise that they have a big role to play in this regard,” she noted.

“With Diana Award, there is follow up and mentor ship, so the projects continue to benefit the society. The ideas were vivid belonging to different sectors but all to do with humanity and not with business,” she pointed out.

“So when we ask what youth can do? The government also has to infuse the culture of volunteering in youth so that the youth might find it exciting and competitive. But then again, ideas for humanity are very different from business,” she said.

## Third round of Arabian Horse Tour concludes in Muscat



STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

The third round of the Arabian Horse Tour Championship continued at Al Bustan Palace Hotel arena in Muscat. This is part of the fourth edition of Katara International Arabian Horse Festival which was held in cooperation with the Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation.

‘AS Hareer’, owned by Al Jasmiya Stud won the gold medal in the stallion category, while ‘Rahn Al Shahaniya’ won the silver medal for Shaikha Reem bint Mohammed al Thani from Qatar. Bronze went to ‘AJ Kafa’, owned by UAE’s Ajman Stud.

In the mare’s category, the gold medal was snatched by ‘AJ Kaya’ owned by Ajman Stud. ‘Amarilla’, owned by Al Jasmiya Stud won the silver medal and the bronze medal went to ‘Alexandra RC’, owned by Oman Royal Cavalry.

In the junior category, ‘Bandar Al Jasmiya’ (owned by Al Jasmiya Stud) ‘De Shekhar’ (owned by Dubai Stud) and ‘Hamed Sarmeh’



(owned by Sultan al Harithy from Oman) won gold, silver and bronze medals respectively.

In yearling colts, ‘Afrin Al Shaqab’, owned by Al Shaqab stud from Qatar, clinched the gold. Silver went to Dubai Stud’s ‘De Burkan’ and bronze for Al Wajba Stud’s ‘Hurricane Al Wajba’.

Dubai Stud’s ‘De Nafaes’ won the gold medal in the one-year-

old category.

The silver medal was won by Al Thamer Stud’s ‘Sultana Al Thamer’ and bronze went to Dubai Stud’s ‘De Roua’. The Arabian Horse Tour visited Qatar and Abu Dhabi before its pit stop in Muscat. It will travel to France, the Netherlands, and Italy before concluding in the French capital, Paris.

Al Najd Agriculture  
Development Company

شركة النجد  
للتنمية الزراعية

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

Al-Najd Agricultural Development Company looking for a General Manger responsible for managing the overall performance of Al-Najd Agricultural Development Company, developing strategic plan to fulfil Company's vision and mission. The responsibilities will also include achieving the strategic objectives, performance, and expansion targets, promoting revenue, and profitability. The position holder will be accountable to the Board of Directors for fulfilment and implementation of all plans and policies. Represent the Company to Government and stakeholders.

Key Result Areas

Preparation and achievement of business strategy and business plan for the Company;

Top line and Bottom line of the Company;

Efficiency and sustainability of Company operations;

Effective integration of all functions;

Company finance and administration;

Customer satisfaction, and

Employee's management and development.

Key Tasks

Oversee day-to-day operations

Determine the overall direction, strategy and goals of the Company.

Formulate the long-term objectives, plans and targets of the Company.

Translate the business plan into budget, goals and targets for the Mangers. Direct and coordinate their efforts and monitor achievement.

Review activity reports and financial statements regularly and monitor farms performance continuously to ensure approved business plans are executed successfully.

Direct the growth and business development initiatives of the Company, ensuring adequate resources allocations.

Set out specific performance standards in key areas.

Guide and assist Mangers in all operational issues involving planning, coordination, adherence to target/work schedule, etc., to improve sustainability and increase profitability, consumer reach and productivity.

Evaluate performance of Mangers for compliance with approved policies and objectives of the Company and required performance goals and standards.

Coordinate with the Board of Directors for the evaluation of feasibility of new projects.

Develop and maintain contacts with stakeholders and competent authorities and major customers to further business interests.

Manage selection, development, measurement, motivation, cooperation, and termination of team staff.

Any other responsibilities entrusted by the Board of Directors.

Education Level – Minimum Requirement

Bachelor's degree in agriculture, and

MBA or higher degree( Master/PhD) in Agri-business or related fields.

Work Experience

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

Skills

Knowledge of sustainable crop production in hot dry climate;

Business acumen and commercial orientation

Strong management and business background

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Strategic planning and implementation

Examining and re-engineering operations and procedures

Develop technical, marketing, and financial plans,

analyze, and interpret all related data

Knowledge of profit and loss, balance sheet and cash flow management and general finance and budgeting.

Knowledge of corporate governance and general management best practices

Excellent leadership, project management and people management

Financial awareness to understand and interpret numbers

Excellent written & verbal communication / presentation skills

Excellent written and spoken skills in English..

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# TIME FOR SELF-REFLECTION

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY  
@shadadm

RAMADHAN gives us time to give ourselves a mental break and to temporarily forget about the hundreds of worries and stresses we are constantly bombarded with. In hectic times, this is the valuable time to think about our lives. It is a unique month of self-analysis. According to the people whom the Observer spoke to, Ramadhan is a time to reflect and thank Allah for all the blessings that come along. “Normally in Ramadhan, I reflect on myself and I tell myself that I need to develop into a more thankful person for the little that I have. The other day I was reflecting on a short video about the poor people somewhere asking one of the prominent Islamic scholars in the region if their fast is valid if they did not have anything to eat while breaking their fast. The scholar broke into tears instead. This

makes me cry a lot,” Hassan al Numani, a Muscat resident, said. People have been seeking throughout the ages for acceptable ‘belonging’, for unity, for brotherhood, for equality, but it is sad to see how our brothers and sisters spend their days without food as we watch. “When I see such clips, this gives me a wake up call to thank Allah for what I have on my table to eat,” Al Numani said. For many, fasting is an institution for the improvement of the moral and spiritual character of human beings. They say the purpose of the fast is to help develop self-restraint, self-purification, the spirit of caring and sharing, the love of humanity and the love of Allah. “I do understand that fasting is a universal custom and is advocated by other religions but according to my understanding, Islamic fast is an act of worship and obedience to Allah, thanksgiving, forgiveness, spiritual training, and self-examination,” Obaid al Khaldi, 70-year-old retiree from Barka,

ONE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT FASTING IS NOT A RIGOROUS, UNCOMFORTABLE OR FORCED PRACTICE. IT IS A METHOD AND BELIEF WITH BOTH PRACTICAL AND EMOTIONAL REASONS

said. It is said that a healthy body is a healthy mind. The Islamic fast, recommenced for mental and physical cleansing, dates back to centuries even before modern science and intermittent fasting came up. “When one fasts, there are several physical transformations, the digestive enzymes, liver and intestinal walls go for a hibernation. The blood pressure is reduced and the continuous stress on our digestive-gastric system takes a break,” commented a general practitioner based in Amerat. He said that this trains the mind to be calmer and focused. “There are initial pitfalls but with patience and faith in Allah, the carnal desire resides and gradually beckons the spiritual feeling,” he said. One must understand that fasting is not a rigorous, uncomfortable or forced practice. It is a method and belief with both practical and emotional reasons. Fasting, one of the five pillars of Islam, will definitely make people more humane and bring them closer to Allah.



# World Autism Awareness Day highlights treatment and role of families

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

The National Autism Centre, affiliated with the Ministry of Social Development, celebrated World Autism Awareness Day on Tuesday at its headquarters in Seeb. The event featured a lecture, recreational workshops, and competitions for children.

The event featured a lecture by Arwa al Tawala, an expert at the centre, entitled ‘Available Therapeutic Interventions vs. Evidence-Based Therapeutic Interventions for Autism Spectrum Disorder’. She mentioned the disorders associated with autism spectrum disorder, such as anxiety, epilepsy, sleep disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, gastrointestinal disorders, intellectual disability, obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Following that, the event included several scientific and recreational workshops, such as the ‘My Child’s Advantages’ workshop, the ‘Child’s Board’ workshop, the ‘Request Board’ workshop, and the



The event at the National Autism Center in Seeb featured a lecture, recreational workshops, and competitions for children.

‘My Child’s Personality Aspects Carry Hope’ workshop, as well as colouring pottery and making gift boxes.

These workshops aim to enhance the understanding of families and

those around them of the needs and capabilities of children with autism spectrum disorder and to exploit the strengths to overcome the child’s needs, reduce behavioural problems resulting from poor

communication, and find an effective means of communication between the family and the child.

It also aims to enhance the family’s understanding of autism spectrum disorder from all four

aspects of personality: social, psychological, mental, physical, and health, and to raise awareness among families of understanding and perceiving their child’s behaviours and dealing with them correctly.

On the importance of this celebration, Hussein bin Ali al Kalbani, a vocational trainer at the centre and presenter of the pottery colouring workshop, said that the importance of this day lies in highlighting the autism spectrum disorder group and the need to develop research and services provided to people with disabilities.

Hanin bint Ali al Lawatiyah, a handicrafts trainer at the centre and presenter of the gift box-making workshop, said: “This day revolves around raising awareness among all segments of society about the existence of a disorder that affects some children known as autism spectrum disorder. We always strive, through celebrating this day, to highlight the importance of holding activities that contribute to instilling positive feelings in the souls of pure spirits, and our

presence with them gives them hope and happiness.”

Celebrating with them gives them hope and happiness, in addition to a feeling of encouragement and support from members of society. The importance of the ‘Making Gift Boxes’ workshop lies in defining the logo of autism spectrum disorder and its meanings. It is formed by different colours that have their connotations, where blue symbolises calmness, green natural life, and yellow positive feelings. The composition of the logo represents the commonalities between cases of autism spectrum disorder and their neurotypical counterparts.

Ghaida bint Abdullah al Farsiyyah, a handicrafts trainer at the centre and presenter of the ‘My Child’s Advantages’ workshop, explained that the importance of this day lies in its adoption by the United Nations to highlight these groups and the need to work on more research efforts and services provided to them, to empower and integrate them into society.

# NRAA unveils ‘Al Dhahirah in the Memory of Omani History’

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

The National Records and Archives Authority has released the second part of the book “Al Dhahirah in the Memory of Omani History” as part of the 50th volume of the historical and civilisational series for Oman’s wilayats and cities. The book comprises 350 pages containing nine research papers on various topics related to the culture of Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The book sheds light on the cultural role played by Al Dhahirah throughout its long history. The nine research papers cover a diverse range of subjects, sources, and research methodologies, enriching the book scientifically. Additionally, the book’s introduction provides an overview of the topics covered by the research and studies presented at the conference, along with a brief introduction to each of the nine research papers published in the second part of this edition. The edition includes an appendix of some documents, images, and maps related to Al Dhahirah Governorate from the documentary collections owned by the National Records and Archives Authority. It is expected that this edition will serve as a fundamental reference based on numerous facts benefiting researchers and enthusiasts, in



The book sheds light on the cultural role played by Al Dhahirah throughout its long history

addition to enriching local and international libraries with a range of publications based on documents and facts.

In the book’s preface, Dr Hamed bin Mohammed al Dhawyani, Chairman of NRAA, emphasised the importance of these research papers. He pointed out that today we stand at the threshold of research achievements presented at the Al Dhahirah Conference in the Memory of Omani History, which addressed civilisational, historical, cultural, and economic aspects, highlighting the significance of Al Dhahirah in Omani history over the centuries

and historical epochs.

Its distinguished location at the crossroads of land routes for transporting land trade caravans to the Arabian Peninsula has played an active role in the course of historical and political events. Its people have formed a political weight, contributing to shaping Oman’s political future through the succession of governments and various political elites that ruled Oman. This role continued until the dawn of July 23, 1970, and the beginning of the blessed renaissance. The people of Al Dhahirah through its various wilayats Al Buraimi, Yanqul,

and Dhank, have contributed to the process of construction and development, providing support alongside their Omani brethren in creating progress and development for the Sultanate of Oman.

Today, Al Dhahirah witnesses urban, cultural, and economic development within a continuous modern renaissance, moving forward to catch up with civilisational progress and scientific advancement.

Dr Ahlam bint Hamoud al Jahwariyah, Assistant Director of the Research and Studies Department at NRAA, stated that this edition represents a translation of the vision of the National Records and Archives Authority, which is dedicated to preserving the ancient Omani history.

It is in line with its strategic objectives to encourage scientific research in various civilisational fields. She added that this edition focuses on Al Dhahirah and its three wilayats namely Al Buraimi, Yanqul and Dhank.

It is a culmination of research and studies presented at a specialised historical conference titled Al Dhahirah Governorate in the Memory of Omani History,” organised by the authority in March 2022 in Al Buraimi, as part of its efforts to introduce the civilisational contribution of Omani cities and wilayats.

## Make Ramadhan donations online

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousef

Donations for various charity initiatives and Zakah and Sadaqa, both inside the Sultanate of Oman and for overseas humanitarian efforts of the country, must be made through Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO) which is the only authorised agency, according to the OCO officials. www.donate.com is the only dedicated portal to collect any financial support that one intends to do for various causes including Palestine, or all sorts of charity during the holy month of Ramadhan.

The OCO portal usually accepts supports to various causes, such as orphan support, Iftar, buying Ramadhan provisions, Zakat Al fitr, Eid clothing, sponsoring orphan care, support to a family, donation to any masjid, Yemen Aid, Al Anwa Fund, cash assistance to the poor, therapeutic assistance, Somalia Aid, medical, social welfare, student support, international relief, and environment, among others.

“All charity donations including Zakah and Sadaqa as well as donations for charitable organisations can be made through this www. donate.om which provides an option for donating in a more secure, transparent, easy to

use and convenient way.

All people and companies, organisations and others who have a donation to be made, must do so for the cause of the less fortunate in our community,” Ahmed al Hattali, the in charge of OCO told the *Observer*.

According to Al Hattali, this site is the only official fund-raising platform for nearly 46 charitable organisations including Dar Al Atta’a, Oman Association for Disabled, Environment Society (EA), The Association of the Welfare of the Handicapped, Al Noor Association for the Blind, The International Islamic Charitable Trust, Awqaf, the Association of Early Intervention for Children with Special Needs, National Cancer Association, Oman Hereditary Blood Disorder Association, Al Rahma Charity, House of Funds and Zakah, Omani Association for Elderly Friends, Oman Diabetes Association, Omani Bahjah Orphan Society and Oman Charity Organisation, to name a few. This bilingual portal is made to be easy for Omani citizens and residents who have an account in Omani banks to donate with a single click from anywhere. Alternatively, people can donate via the mobile app, which is easily downloadable from the online portal, Play Store or App Store.

# Beware of riptides while swimming

NAJAH AL RIYAMI  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

While engaging in swimming, snorkeling, kitesurfing, wakeboarding, sailing, diving, it is essential to understand the dangers of the sea.

If you don’t know how to swim, or feel unsafe in the water, there are many things you can do to become a better swimmer. Take swimming lessons with certified teachers. Learn how to float, move

and gain confidence in the water.

Riptides are naturally occurring phenomena that allow the water to find its way back to the sea; creating a strong current that pulls things out from the shore. It is necessary to understand what a riptide current is, and how the water in a riptide current can pull you away from the shore, and to know what to do in this situation. Remember not to worry. It is crucial not to panic, and instead of swimming directly back to the

shore — swim sideways, parallel to the beach. Once you’re out of the strong water, you can swim back to the shore safely. If you need help, just raise your hand and call for a lifeguard or an adult nearby. They’re there to keep you safe! If you are struggling in the water, try to stay calm: take a big breath and don’t panic. Float on Your Back to help you rest and keep your face out of the water. Wave your arms and call out for help if possible, and finally, if you

have a floater or a boogie board, hold onto it. It will help you stay afloat while you wait for help. You can recognise if someone is in trouble in the water in several ways, from quietness, to bobbing up and down in the water, with their head back and mouth close to the water. Wide eyes can also be a good tell; try to recognise if the person’s eyes look afraid, if their hair is over their face, or if it looks like they might be struggling to breathe.



During riptide one must not panic. Instead of swimming directly back to the shore – swim sideways, parallel to the beach. Once you’re out of the strong water, you can swim back to the shore safely.



United Nations staff members inspect the carcass of a car used by US-based aid group World Central Kitchen, that was hit by an Israeli strike in Deir al Balah. – AFP

# World powers condemn indiscriminate killing in Gaza

**PARIS:** The United States and Britain led international criticism on Tuesday of a deadly strike in the Gaza Strip that killed seven charity staff as they unloaded desperately needed aid brought by sea to the war-torn territory.

World Central Kitchen — one of two NGOs spearheading efforts to deliver aid by boat — said a “targeted Israeli strike” on Monday killed Australian, British, Palestinian, Polish and US-Canadian staff.

Washington, Israel’s main ally, said it was “heartbroken and deeply troubled by the strike.” “Humanitarian aid workers must be protected as they deliver aid that is desperately needed,” US National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said the country had

**World Central Kitchen said a “targeted Israeli strike” killed Australian, British, Palestinian, Polish and US-Canadian staff**

“called on Israel to immediately investigate and provide a full, transparent explanation of what happened.”

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he was “shocked and saddened” after learning that a Briton was among those killed.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese slammed the “completely unacceptable” attack, and called it a “tragedy that should never have occurred”.

He offered “sincere condolences” to the family of Australian volunteer Lalzawmi

“Zomi” Frankcom, who was killed in the strike.

“She just wanted to help out through this charity. That says everything about the character of this young woman,” Albanese said. The founder and leader of World Central Kitchen, celebrity chef Jose Andres, said he was “heartbroken and grieving for their families and friends and our whole WCK family”.

“The Israeli government needs to stop this indiscriminate killing,” he wrote on social media. “It needs to stop restricting humanitarian aid, stop killing civilians and aid workers, and stop using food as a weapon.”

The charity said it had coordinated its movements with the Israeli army and was travelling in vehicles branded with its logo.

The EU’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said that “despite all

the demands to protect civilians and humanitarian workers, we see new innocent casualties”.

“I condemn the attack and urge an investigation,” he wrote on X.

Warsaw said it had asked the Israeli ambassador for “urgent explanations” about the incident, which killed one Polish citizen, and offered “condolences to the family of our brave volunteer”.

Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said the country had also opened its own inquiry into the aid worker’s death.

Criticism also came from Beijing, which said it was “shocked” by the strike, and from Madrid, where Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez called it a “brutal attack that has taken the lives of seven aid workers who were doing nothing but helping”.

— AFP

## WHO reports sharp rise in newborn deaths in Gaza

**GENEVA:** Newborn mortality is rising sharply in the Gaza Strip, with babies being born underweight, the World Health Organization said on Tuesday, citing medics on the ground.

“From different doctors, particularly in the maternity hospitals, they’re reporting that they’re seeing a big rise in children born with low birth weight, and just not surviving the neonatal period because they’re born too small,” WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris said at a briefing in Geneva.

She said that at Kamal Adwan, the only paediatric hospital in northern Gaza, “at least 15 malnourished children are coming in per day, and the needs are just getting ever more severe”.

The WHO is unable to establish precise statistics on child mortality because of the devastation in the Palestinian territory after six months of war between Israel and Palestinians, with Harris saying many people do not even get to hospital.

She cited a stabilisation centre set up last week, saying the inpatients were typically children with medical illnesses as well as malnutrition.

“If you have got an underlying condition, malnutrition will kill you much more quickly, so they become the most urgent

patients,” she said.

On Monday, the Israeli army pulled out of Gaza City’s Al Shifa Hospital after a two-week military operation that left much of the complex in ruins and bodies scattered on the dusty grounds.

The hospital was the biggest in the Palestinian territory.

“Al Shifa Medical Complex is gone forever,” its acting director Marwaan Abu Saadah said in a WHO video filmed at the scene.

Harris added: “It’s no longer able to function in any shape or form as a hospital.”

“Destroying Al Shifa means ripping the heart out of the health system,” she said, noting that it was a major hospital with 750 beds, 25 operating theatres and 30 intensive care wards.

Israel said it had battled Palestinians inside the complex, killing at least 200 and recovering stockpiles of weapons, explosives and cash.

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

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



A woman carrying a baby walks at the site of an air strike on a building, in Rafah. – Reuters

# Palestinians risk death and famine in desperate rush for aid

**CAIRO:** Omar Deeb was nearly hit by Israeli tank fire while searching for food in Gaza, and then saw people killed around him when he set out once more to feed his family in the besieged enclave. But like many Gazans who could soon face famine he has no choice but to embark on what he calls “death missions”, risking his life to provide for his six children, who live in a school shelter. “If I go, we eat. And if I don’t, we don’t eat,” Deeb, 37, who lives in Gaza City.

Securing aid has become a life or death scramble in Gaza during a six-month-old Israeli ground and air campaign that has killed over 32,000 Palestinians and wounding more than 75,000, according to Gaza health authorities.

Israel is carrying out the offensive in retaliation for an attack on southern Israel on

October 7 in which 1,200 people were killed and over 200 people were taken captives, according to Israeli tallies.

The United Nations has warned of a looming famine and complained of obstacles to getting aid in and distributing it throughout Gaza. The US also says famine is imminent.

Deeb hasn’t yet healed from wounds sustained when pieces of a building which were blown apart struck him as he tried grab flour from aid trucks entering northern Gaza.

Deeb also came close to death two other times, he said, first on February 29 when the Gaza health ministry said over 100 people were killed by Israeli fire as they ventured to get aid.

Israel said the deaths were caused when people were trampled over or run over by trucks carrying aid.



A girl reacts at the site of an Israeli air strike on a building, in Rafah. – Reuters

On March 23, he said Israel opened fire at an aid drop point at Gaza’s Kuwait roundabout, where several other people were killed around him, mostly members of the Popular Committees, a body formed of traditional family clans and factions to secure aid convoys. The Israeli military had no immediate comment on the Palestinian allegation that it puts seekers of aid in danger.

The Israeli military said its forces had not fired at people in the aid convoy in the Kuwait roundabout incident, according to its preliminary findings.

Desperate and hungry, thousands like Deeb head to aid drop points when night falls to secure some flour or canned food.

They learn about incoming drops from aid truck drivers who phone it in to their relatives, who in turn spread the word.

— Reuters



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## In brief

■ ALMATY



### KAZAKHSTAN EVACUATES 16,000 AMID WORST FLOODS IN THREE DECADES

Kazakhstan said on Tuesday it had evacuated some 16,000 people after the worst flooding to hit the Central Asian country in three decades.

Waters are set to rise further as snow melts across the vast Kazakh steppe, the country's meteorological agency has warned.

"Rescue operations are continuing and around 16,000 people, including 6,000 children, have already been evacuated," Kazakhstan's emergency situations ministry said.

It described the situation as "complicated" in five regions in the north and east, and said road links had been cut off to 50 settlements. — AFP

■ HELSINKI



### 12-YEAR-OLD OPENS FIRE IN FINNISH SCHOOL KILLING ONE

A 12-year-old opened fire on Tuesday at a school north of the Finnish capital Helsinki, killing a fellow student and seriously injuring two others before being taken into custody, police said.

The Viertola school in Vantaa has around 90 staff and 800 pupils in grades one to nine, or aged seven to 15.

"Today, after 9:00 am, a shooting incident took place at a school... in which a sixth grader, a student of the school, died," Ilkka Koskimaki, police chief said, adding that two others were "seriously injured".

Police had earlier said that both the suspect and the injured were 12 years old. Investigation is under progress. — AFP

■ BERLIN



### GERMANY TO SPEND 9 BN EUROS MORE ON DEFENCE FROM 2028

German Finance Minister Christian Lindner expects up to 9 billion euros in additional defence spending from 2028 if the country can reduce its debt levels, he said on Tuesday.

The additional funds could be freed up if Germany gets its debt below an EU-set target of 60 per cent of gross domestic product from 63 per cent, Lindner said, of the fiscally conservative Free Democrats (FDP). "If we fall below this limit, then the repayment of debt planned from 2028 could be discussed again," he said. "Without having to change the debt brake, I can then see new financial room for manoeuvre." — Reuters

# Blinken says Ukraine needs more support

VERSAILLES: Ukraine is at a "critical moment" in its war with Russia and urgently needs more Western support, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday, bemoaning the stalemate in Congress over a multi-billion dollar military package for Kyiv.

"It is absolutely essential to get Ukrainians what they continue to need to defend themselves, particularly when it comes to munitions and air defences," Blinken told reporters during a visit to France. "It's another reason why the supplementary budget request that President (Joe) Biden has made to (the US) Congress must be fulfilled as quickly as possible."

Biden has urged the Republican-controlled US House of Representatives to endorse the military and financial aid package, but House Speaker Mike Johnson has held up the matter for months, citing domestic priorities. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has said that if Ukraine does not get the aid, his forces will have to retreat "in small steps".

Blinken and French Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu had earlier visited a factory where arms producer Nexter produces Caesar howitzer cannons. Lecornu said Nexter was working to produce 12 Caesar cannons a month compared to six at the moment. French President Emmanuel Macron has in recent weeks adopted a more hawkish stance towards Russia, amid fears that Ukraine is losing ground in the war, notably as US support wanes. Blinken will hold talks with French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne before meeting Macron. Meanwhile, A



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (L) shakes hands with French FM Stephane Sejourne (R) prior to their meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris. — AFP

“It is absolutely essential to get Ukrainians what they continue to need to defend themselves, particularly when it comes to munitions and air defences

ANTONY BLINKEN

US Secretary of State

Ukrainian drone struck Russia's third largest oil refinery on

Tuesday about 1,300 km from the front lines, hitting a unit that

processes about 155,000 barrels of crude per day though an industry source said the damage was not significant.

Russian officials said its jamming devices locked onto a Ukrainian drone near Tatneft's Taneco refinery, which has an annual production capacity of more than 340,000 barrels per day. An industry source who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity said the damage to the unit was not critical while

the personnel was returning to the plant. A fire broke out at the refinery but was extinguished within 20 minutes, the state news agency RIA said, adding that output had not been disrupted.

A source in Ukraine, which has been at war with Russia since Moscow began its two years ago, said in Kyiv that the Taneco refining unit had been hit, causing a fire. The source said the aim of the strike was to reduce Russia's oil revenue. — Reuters

## Senegal's president Faye cites 'profound desire for change'

DAKAR: Senegal's opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye was sworn in on Tuesday as the West African nation's fifth and youngest president ever, promising to restore stability and bring economic progress.

The 44-year-old former tax inspector defeated Amadou Ba, the candidate of outgoing President Macky Sall's ruling coalition, by a landslide in the first round of voting, reflecting high hopes for change in the country of around 18 million.

"The results of the election showed a profound desire for change," Faye said after taking the oath of office at a ceremony he attended.

Over a dozen heads of state and regional representatives attended the inauguration, including Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu, Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo and African Union Commission Chair Moussa Faki Mahamat. The military juntas of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger also sent representatives.

The smooth transition was a welcome boost after three years of unprecedented political turmoil in Senegal that had raised concern about democratic backsliding in the coup-prone region of West Africa.

"Senegal will be a country of hope, at peace, with an independent justice system



Bassirou Diomaye Faye (L) is sworn in as Senegal's President at an exhibition centre in the new town of Diamniadio near the capital Dakar. — AFP

and a stronger democracy," Faye said, promising to manage affairs ethically and to build the economy.

Millions queued for hours to cast their ballot in an election that eventually took place on March 24 after unsuccessful attempts by Sall's government to postpone it from February to December, then June.

The move stoked frustration against Sall, whose popularity dropped over the course of his second mandate due to economic hardship, a crackdown on dissent, and concerns that he would tamper with the constitution to run for a third term.

Anger crystallised around the prosecution of firebrand opposition leader Ousmane Sonko, who came third in the

2019 election but was barred from running again due to a defamation conviction.

"I will work towards preserving peace and national cohesion and make sure we preserve our most cherished resource, our national stability," Faye said.

Expectations are high as Faye, relatively inexperienced in government affairs, becomes president of a young population frustrated with rising living costs and a lack of jobs in a country set to become an oil and gas producer this year.

The new president has vowed to tackle corruption and introduce a series of economic reforms to prioritise national interests, including the re-negotiation of oil, gas and mineral contracts with foreign operators. — Reuters

## N Korea fires one more nuclear ballistic missile

SEOUL: North Korea fired a medium-range ballistic missile on Tuesday, with South Korea, the United States and Japan conducting a joint aerial exercise involving nuclear-capable B-52H bombers just hours later.

Pyeongyang's latest launch comes less than two weeks after Kim supervised a solid-fuel engine test for a new intermediate-range hypersonic missile (IRBM), with experts suggesting the Tuesday launch could be of the same weapon.

Seoul's military said the missile, launched early on Tuesday, flew around 600 kilometres before splashing down in waters between South Korea and Japan.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff said the military was analysing the launch, with a defence official telling the Yonhap news agency that it had likely involved a hypersonic warhead "on top of the delivery system used in the engine test last month".

North Korea has long sought to master more advanced hypersonic and solid fuel technologies, to make its missiles more able to neutralise South Korean-US missile defence

systems and threaten America's regional military bases.

In January, Pyongyang said it had launched a solid-fuel IRBM tipped with a hypersonic warhead, then last month flagged the successful engine test of the "new-type intermediate-range hypersonic missile".

Hypersonic missiles are faster and can manoeuvre mid-flight, making them harder to track and intercept, while solid-fuel missiles do not need to be fuelled before launch, making them harder to find and destroy, as well as quicker to use.

Seoul's defence ministry said it conducted a joint aerial exercise with Washington and Tokyo on Tuesday involving a nuclear-capable B-52H bomber and F-15K fighter jets near the Korean peninsula. The drill aimed to "improve joint readiness against the North's nuclear and missile threats," it said.

The Tuesday launch "appears to be part of Pyongyang's missile development blueprint, including hypersonic weapons," said Han Kwon-hee of the Korea Association of Defence Industry Studies. — AFP



A woman walks past a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul. — AFP

# An economic voyage at dusk



Rumaitha Al Busaidi

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In the peaceful aftermath of a delicious Iftar, as dusk fades into night, I am enveloped in the serene beauty of an Omani evening. The air is thick with the whispers of ancient seas and shifting sands, carrying the echoes of a day that is fading into memory. My mind, however, is still caught up in the currents of a conversation I had earlier in the afternoon about Oman’s economic trajectory in 2023. It was a story as rich and complex as the patterns carved into the hull of a traditional Omani dhow, with themes of resilience, ambition, and transformative change. The release of the GDP figures in March, which stood at the centre of our discussion, unveiled the opening chapter of this compelling saga.

The figures, etching a nominal GDP of RO 41.8 billion, equivalent to the IMF’s estimation of \$108 billion, painted a vivid picture of a nation’s economy steadfast in its resolve. Yet, beneath these numbers lay a more profound tale of juxtaposition—between the dwindling fortunes of petroleum activities and the burgeoning vitality of the non-petroleum sectors, especially services. The conversation lingered on the remarkable 17.6 per cent surge in

transportation and storage activities, a signal of diversification and a testament to Oman’s innovative outlook. As we navigated through the economic landscape of 2023, our dialogue ventured into the demographic transformations that marked the year. The conversation then turned to Oman’s fiscal story, which stressed caution and strategic foresight. The nation’s announcement of a budget surplus for the second consecutive year, amidst a backdrop of a 15 per cent decrease in revenue from the preceding year, stood as a hallmark of its commitment to sustainable economic practices. Moreover, the strategic reduction of national debt to RO 15.3 billion, about 36 per cent of GDP from its peak, underscored Oman’s unwavering dedication to fiscal stability. Our dialogue took on a hopeful hue as we recounted the tourism sector’s resurgence. With visitor numbers cresting at a record 4 million, the narrative of recovery and potential unravelled, painting Oman as a beacon of allure and opportunity.

As the discussion unfolded, we pondered the significance of foreign direct investment, which reached RO 25 billion, predominantly attracted

WITH EACH  
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to the oil and gas sector. This indicated a global confidence in Oman’s economic landscape. The elevation of Oman’s sovereign rating by major credit agencies to just shy of investment grade was a moment of collective pride, affirming the nation’s economic resilience and reformative strides.

Our discourse on Oman’s economic journey in 2023, interwoven with tales of adversity, triumphs, and strategic vision, felt like a reflection of the nation’s enduring spirit. It was a narrative not merely of economic metrics but of a country’s relentless pursuit of sustainability, diversification, and prosperity. In the peaceful silence that followed our Iftar, the substance of our conversation lingered, a testament to the collective endeavour and strategic vision driving Oman forward. With each passing moment, the stories of ancient voyages and the promise of new dawns seemed to merge, echoing the resilience, ambition, and hope that define our beloved Oman. As I retired for the night, the tales of yesteryear and the dreams of tomorrow intertwined, crafting a vision of an Oman steadfast on its path to a brighter, more prosperous future, guided by the stars of its rich heritage and the compass of its ambitious vision.

## Sugar shortage darkens Tunisian Eid festivities

SAMAYIL

In downtown Tunis, dozens of customers stand in a long queue snaking out of a supermarket to buy sugar, essential for the end of Ramadhan celebrations eight days away.

The key ingredient for traditional sweets served to mark the end of the holy month is now being rationed to one to two kg per customer per week.

“I never thought that one day we would form a queue in Tunisia to buy sugar,” said Lamia Bouraoui, 58.

Like other basic foodstuffs in Tunisia, sugar is subsidised by the state. But the dearth of funds in the North African country’s public coffers has made it and other culinary essentials like flour and semolina scarce since late 2022.

For the Eid al Fitr holiday marking the end of Ramadhan, families throughout North Africa make copious amounts of sweets and pastries that often last for days. Without enough sugar, “we are deprived this year of this pleasure,” added Bouraoui. Some, like Sami, 40, queue for sugar accompanied by family members to increase the rations his family can enjoy.

“One day we queue for flour, another for semolina and another for sugar,” he said.

The shortage has also dealt a blow to bakeries. “We rely on sugar in everything we do,” Chokri Bouajila, a bakery worker in Tunis, said.

“If we have sugar, we can work, otherwise we can’t do anything,” Bouajila, who specialises in Tunisian traditional sweets, said customers have been buying less and less of his pastries.

Over the past few years, Tunisians have seen their purchasing power greatly diminish thanks to inflation, a recession and rising unemployment.

The country of 12 million is grappling with debt worth about 80 per cent of its entire economic output, and inflation averaging between eight to 10 per cent a year. A third of its population is estimated to be living under the poverty line. At the shopping centre, the queue only gets longer. “I’ve been here for the past 35 minutes,” said 40-year-old Hassna, another customer waiting in line for sugar.

“Why are we going through all this? How did we get here?” “Let us thank God”, a man standing nearby told her, “we are in a better situation than our brothers in Gaza who are dying of hunger”.

Nonetheless, others hope to make the best of the country’s latest challenge. Nayla, a shopper making her way around the mall, said she would rather change her habits than get in line for sugar, pointing out that it was hardly the healthiest ingredient. “Bitter coffee doesn’t bother me anymore,” she said. — AFP

# Eclipses injured their eyes, and the world never looked the same

GINA KOLATA

A young woman visited New York Eye & Ear Infirmary of Mount Sinai Hospital shortly after the eclipse of Aug. 21, 2017. She told Dr Avnish Deobhakta, an ophthalmologist, that she had a black area in her vision and then drew a crescent shape for him on a piece of paper.

When Deobhakta examined her eyes, he was astonished. He saw a burn on her retina that was exactly the same shape. It was “almost like a branding,” he said.

She had looked at the sun during the eclipse without any protection. The burn was an image of the sun’s outer edge.

With every eclipse, ophthalmologists see patients who looked at the sun and complain afterward that their vision is distorted: They see small black spots; their eyes are watery and sensitive to light. Usually, the symptoms resolve, although it may take several weeks to a year.

But the woman’s retinal burns, which Deobhakta and colleagues described in a medical case write-up, would not heal. Her retina was permanently scarred, an example of the severity of injuries that can follow looking at an eclipse without proper precautions.

With the eclipse coming next Monday, ophthalmologists advise people to not assume that short glances at the sun are safe. Damage can occur, they say, in less than a minute.

David Calkins, director of the Vanderbilt Vision Research Center and vice chair of the Vanderbilt Eye Institute in Nashville, Tennessee, said younger people were most at risk of retinal injury, possibly because the lens of their eye is clearer than the lens in older people. He said they also may be a bit more reckless.

But age is no guarantee of safe eclipse viewing.

A study described 20 people ages 15 to 82 in England who complained of symptoms like black spots in their vision or blurry vision after an eclipse



With the eclipse coming next Monday, ophthalmologists advise people to not assume that short glances at the sun are safe. Damage can occur, they say, in less than a minute.

MOST PEOPLE LOOK AT AN ECLIPSE THROUGH SPECIAL ECLIPSE GLASSES. OFTEN THE GLASSES HAVE A CARDBOARD BODY WITH SPECIAL FILM IN THE EYEHOLE THAT FILTERS OUT HARMFUL RAYS. BUT EYE SPECIALISTS ARE DOUBTFUL.

in 1999. Four said they used eclipse glasses; one said she used sunglasses. The rest looked with naked eyes.

Five had visible damage to their retinas. All but four of the 20 were better after seven months.

Not everyone is so lucky. A study published last year involved four young Irish women who looked at the sun during a religious gathering in October 2009. The women, who did not know one another, sought medical attention within a few days of looking at the sun. They complained of blind spots in the centre of their vision and said objects appeared distorted and blurred.

Investigators from Galway University Hospital followed up with the women for an average of more than five years. One was followed for 11 years. Years later, the researchers reported, all of the women still had the

blind spots.

For Deobhakta, the situation with the woman in 2017 is a cautionary tale.

While she did put on protective glasses for part of her viewing of the eclipse, she at first looked at it several times for about six seconds each time without protection.

She felt fine for four hours. Then her symptoms emerged: blurred vision, distorted shapes and colours, and that crescent-shaped black spot in the centre of her vision with her left eye.

Most people look at an eclipse through special eclipse glasses. Often the glasses have a cardboard body with special film in the eyeholes that filters out harmful rays.

Deobhakta said he did not trust many of the eclipse glasses being sold and felt it was not worth taking a chance on them. He prefers an indirect method that involves using pinholes, like in a colander, to cast the sun’s shadow on the ground.

Professional groups say many eclipse glasses are safe but urge caution when buying them. The American Astronomical Society reported that potentially unsafe eclipse glasses flooded the market before the 2017 eclipse. To help people find eclipse glasses, the astronomical society lists reliable sellers and distributors.

Legitimate eclipse glasses must meet specific international safety standards known as ISO 12312-2. Testing measures how much ultraviolet, visible and infrared light gets through. — NYT

# Wasting food from farm to table

In a world where millions go hungry, it is disgraceful that we trash out food indiscriminately. Although many of us do not consider it a big deal, the fact is that we do it when more than 783 million people go to bed on an empty stomach each night!

More importantly, over the past few decades, our society has become more wasteful as a result of rise in income, living standards, consumerism and affordability.

From overbuying to throwing away leftovers, every one of us contributes in some way to this larger issue.

The trend deepens typically during festivals. For example, during Ramadhan, we find that people tend to buy more than their normal requirements.

Due to the limited consumption of food during the fasting month, any additional quantity of food, whether raw or cooked, becomes waste.

It's an irony that though festivals like Ramadhan is the time to show compassion and empathy with fellow beings, they often end up with wasted food that could have helped those who are hungry.

We often forget to keep track of how much food we buy, cook and consume during this period!

So it's essential that, during celebrations, we think of food waste and its impact on society and the economy.

Moreover, it is environmentally and morally offensive that, as a society, we have become so casual about the basic raw materials of life.

According to a UN Environment Programme (UNEP) report, food waste increases by 25 per cent to 50 per cent in the Middle East region during religious festivals, when around 34 per cent of the food served is wasted, with an estimation ranging from 100 to 150 kg/cap of food waste occurring at the household stage.

At the same time, the UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2024 bemoans that, on average, each person wastes 79



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IT'S AN IRONY THAT THOUGH FESTIVALS SHOW COMPASSION AND EMPATHY WITH FELLOW BEINGS, THEY OFTEN END UP WITH WASTED FOOD THAT COULD HAVE HELPED THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY

kilogrammes of food annually. This is the equivalent of 1.3 meals every day for everyone in the world.

Supermarkets, restaurants and cafes make the situation worse due to excessive waste.

Setting up lavish food tables during festivals, weddings, parties, or informal get-togethers has become normal in some countries in the region.

It is not that wasting food is limited to what consumers scrape off their plates or leave to rot in their refrigerators; it is driven by a whole host of factors, including crops left in the field, food that spoils in transportation, and all other food that doesn't make it to a store.

However, the latest report finds that the majority of the world's food waste comes from households, totalling 631 million metric tonnes, or 60 per cent of the total food wasted.

Surprisingly, food waste is a pervasive problem all around the world with no limit to affluent nations.

Despite differences in income levels, there is minimal variation in average levels of household food waste between high-income, upper-middle-income, and lower-middle-income countries.

However, a notable divergence arises between urban and rural populations, with rural areas generally wasting less, possibly due to practices such as food scrap recycling for animal feed and composting.

Look at the environmental repercussions as well. When we throw away edible food, it ends up in landfills, where it decomposes and produces greenhouse gases, contributing to climate change.

While we celebrate the festivals, we should not forget that millions do not have enough to eat and live with empty stomachs, also reminding us of the unequal distribution of wealth and resources within communities.

As we move forward, let the spirit of our festivals shine not just in the grand feasts but in embracing love, compassion, unity and sustainability during these occasions.

## COOLING HERSELF!



A student uses a portable fan outside a school in Manila on Tuesday. More than a hundred schools in the Philippine capital were shut as the tropical heat hit "danger" levels, education officials said. – AFP

# Solar geoengineering is a dangerous distraction

At the most recent United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), held in Nairobi, African countries took a strong stand against potential new technologies that, if developed, could tip an already disrupted climate into chaos.

The continent's leaders, with the support of other developing countries, helped shoot down a resolution that called for more research into the benefits and risks of solar radiation modification (SRM). Also known as solar geoengineering, SRM is the controversial idea that deliberately modifying the atmosphere to reflect some of the sun's rays back into space could help cool a warming planet. Instead, these policymakers supported the International Non-Use Agreement on Solar Geoengineering and emphasised the need for effective and equitable climate solutions.

Geoengineering encompasses a range of speculative technologies, of which SRM is just one, intended to address the effects, not the root causes, of climate change. Many solar-geoengineering techniques have been proposed, but the most contemplated is stratospheric aerosol injection, which envisages fleets of high-flying airplanes continuously spraying large amounts of sulfur dioxide into the stratosphere to mimic the temporary cooling effects of volcanic eruptions. In reality, such measures would likely destabilise an already severely disrupted climate. Consider that volcanic eruptions have historically precipitated extreme weather events and famines. Moreover, climate models have long indicated that stratospheric



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aerosol injection could alter Indian monsoons and cause more frequent and persistent droughts in the volatile Sahel region. According to the UN Human Rights Council, solar geoengineering could "seriously interfere with the enjoyment of human rights for millions and perhaps billions of people."

Some SRM proponents argue that if spraying sulfate aerosols into the stratosphere does not achieve the desired result, it is always possible to stop. But that could prove dangerous: the masking effect of the injected particles would disappear, causing a rapid rise in temperatures. This so-called termination shock would be a nightmare scenario.

Africans see how their continent is being used as a testing ground for these dangerous technologies. Africa is the continent most vulnerable to climate change, the argument goes, and thus would benefit the most from geoengineering. In fact, Africans have the most to lose from failed geoengineering technologies.

Furthermore, disagreements over the use of SRM could exacerbate geopolitical conflicts and even trigger wars. And, given that geoengineering technologies are largely promoted by US-based interests and institutions funded by tech billionaires, African countries have good reason to fear that they would have little to no say in decisions about their deployment.

In addition to concerns about

security and equity, geoengineering raises serious ethical questions. SRM and other related technologies appeal to those who repudiate the need for rapid, transformative societal change to limit global warming. Even entertaining this fantasy could become a dangerous distraction, especially as it gains traction as a tactic of delay for the fossil-fuel industry.

That is why African countries — together with Mexico, Colombia, Fiji and Vanuatu — pushed back forcefully against Switzerland's solar-geoengineering resolution at the UNEA, arguing that research has already demonstrated the catastrophic risks. They advocated for the UNEA to reaffirm a precautionary approach to these speculative technologies and to acknowledge the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment's call for a non-use agreement — a pioneering decision taken in August 2023. But the



African countries advocated for the UNEA to reaffirm a precautionary approach to speculative technologies.

United States, Saudi Arabia and Japan opposed this. Given the lack of consensus, Switzerland was forced to withdraw its resolution.

The negotiations underscored the importance of the call for the International Non-Use Agreement on Solar Geoengineering, an initiative that has been endorsed by more than 500 scholars and backed by almost 2,000 civil-society groups. The agreement concludes that because solar geoengineering poses unacceptable risks and is inherently ungovernable, countries must reject outdoor experimentation, patents, public funding, or deployment of the technology. The international community should adopt a strict ban on solar geoengineering, as it has done for human cloning and chemical weapons, and it must do so before the technology is commercialised. In fact, governments agreed to a de facto moratorium on geoengineering

under the Convention on Biological Diversity more than a decade ago. The Non-Use Agreement would further reinforce this prohibition.

But it is not enough to resist dangerous distractions like SRM. Addressing the climate crisis requires a razor-sharp focus on real solutions and South-South cooperation. Two of us, as part of the Independent Expert Group on Just Transition and Development, recently outlined how African countries can pursue an effective climate and development agenda — and how efforts such as the Least Developed Countries Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Initiative could support this. Likewise, the proposed Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, a binding plan to phase out oil, gas and coal rapidly and equitably, is gaining momentum. We anticipate and welcome a wave of countries joining Colombia, Fiji and Vanuatu in simultaneously championing the International Non-Use Agreement on Solar Geoengineering and the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Susana Muhamad, Colombia's environment minister, put it succinctly in her powerful closing plenary statement at the UNEA: "Pollution is not the solution for pollution." African leaders have warned that the world must not be hoodwinked and find itself on a slippery slope towards catastrophic geoengineering. It is time for the international community to listen.

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# sport

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## Oman bounce back to level series against Namibia



Namibia's Gerhard Erasmus receives the man of the match award.

**MUSCAT:** Oman rebounded from their defeat on Monday to seize victory in the second T20I against Namibia, levelling the five-match series 1-1 at the Oman Cricket Academy ground on Tuesday.

In a match marked again by low scores, Oman edged past Namibia by a margin of six runs.

Facing a target of 138 for victory, Namibia found themselves contained at 131/9 by the formidable bowling attack of the hosts. Led by medium-pacer Mehran Khan, who secured figures of 3/21, Oman's bowlers executed their plans effectively.

Namibia captain, Gerhard Erasmus, stood as a solitary force, crafting a sturdy half-century (58 off 56 balls, 5x4s, 1x6). However, his dismissal by Mohammad Nadeem in the 17th over tilted the scales in favour of the hosts.

Oman began their defence of 137 with gusto, as pacer Kaleemullah dismissed opener JP Kotze in the second ball of Namibia's innings. A pivotal double-wicket over from Mehran within the powerplay further dampened the visitors' spirits, as he sent back Malan Kruger and Jan Frylinck. The early wickets put Oman in command as the visitors were struggling at 18/3 by the end of powerplay.

However, Erasmus and Zane Green (12) built a 29-run stand to steady the ship before skipper Zeeshan Maqsood broke the partnership with the dismissal

of Green. Erasmus then along with David Wiese (14) orchestrated a 47-run partnership for the fifth wicket, and threatened to take the game away but Mehran picked the crucial wicket of Wiese in the 16th over to shift the momentum back to Oman. Erasmus completed his half-century off 50 balls with four boundaries and a six.

Nadeem's subsequent removal of Erasmus in the following over left Namibia reeling at 101/6. Despite a late flourish from Tangeni Lungameni, who struck 12 off just four balls, Oman held on to claim victory in the second match.

### GOOD START

Earlier electing to bat, Oman encountered familiar middle-order struggles.

Despite a solid foundation laid by the opening duo of Kashyap Prajapati (20) and Pratik Athavale (38 off 26 balls, 3x4s, 2x6s), which yielded 34 runs in five overs, the hosts faltered to accelerate despite finishing powerplay at 48/1.

Aqib Ilyas (23) and Athavale's partnership of 49 for the second wicket was the highlight of the innings. However, their departure in quick succession, courtesy of Namibia skipper Gerhard Erasmus, disrupted Oman's momentum.

Subsequent wickets fell quickly, with Oman finding themselves at 104/5 in the 17th over. Ayaan Khan's notable contribution of unbeaten 22 off a run-a-ball and a brief cameo by Rafiullah (15, 8 balls, 2x6s) propelled Oman to a total of 137/7.

Erasmus shone with the ball, claiming three crucial wickets for a mere seven runs, including two wickets in four balls. He found support in Ruben Trumpelmann, who contributed three wickets for 30 runs.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Oman 137/7 (Kashyap Prajapati 20, Pratik Athavale 38, Aqib Ilyas 23, Ayaan Khan 22\*, Gerhard Erasmus 3/7, Ruben Trumpelmann 3/30) beat Namibia 131/9 (Gerhard Erasmus 58; Mehran Khan 3/17, Fayyaz Butt 2/31)



Oman's Mehran Khan bowls a delivery against Namibia.

## Oman Club in key OL tie against Al Shabab today

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

In an exciting match, football fans will turn their eyes to Seeb Stadium on Wednesday, where the home team Oman Club will host a crucial match against Al Shabab Club, in the first match of 15th round of the Omantel League.

This match comes after mixed performances from both teams in previous rounds, as each team seeks to win and regain confidence and balance in their league journey.

Oman Club are looking to make up for their loss in the previous round against Seeb. They are aiming to improve their position in third place in the league.

The team currently has 26 points and is looking to win to regain second place.



Dhofar and Sohar players in action during Round 14 of Omantel League.

Al Shabab Club enter the match with high morale after their crushing victory over Al Nasr. Al Shabab is looking to confirm their recovery in the league and continue their victories to climb the standings.

Al Shabab have 15 points and sit in ninth place.

The Week 15 matches will continue on Thursday when Al Wahda will meet Sohar at the Sohar Sports Complex.

Al Wahda are looking to continue their revival and steal points for the match to get out of the relegation zone.

The team has 10 points in the



A Seeb player celebrates after scoring against Oman Club.

second-to-last place. Sohar will enter the match trying to make up for their loss in the previous round to maintain fourth place as they have 22 points.

### AL NAHDA EYE WIN

Sur Club will meet Al Nahda Club at the Al Buraimi Complex. Al Nahda are looking to win and

continue their chase of the leaders as they have 29 points in second place. Sur need the points to move away from the relegation zone as they have 13 points in 10th place.

Dhofar Club will face Bahla Club at the Nizwa Sports Complex. Dhofar are aiming a win to move up the ladder as the team has 19

points in sixth place. Bahla enter the match with six points and sit in last place.

Al Rustaq will face Seeb at the Seeb Stadium. League leaders Seeb enter the match trying to complete their winning streak as the team has 38 points. Al Rustaq enter after the euphoria of winning in the last round, advancing in the league standings as they have 17 points in eighth place.

The last match of Round 15 will be between Ibri Club and Al Nasr Club at the Al Saada Complex. Ibri are looking to make up for their loss to maintain their position in the league standings as the team has 17 points in seventh place. Al Nasr are looking to earn points and continue their pursuit of fourth-placed Sohar Club, as Al Nasr have 21 points in fifth place.

# Boult stars for Rajasthan as Mumbai slip to third loss



Rajasthan Royals Trent Boult makes an appeal against Mumbai Indians at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. – IPL

**MUMBAI:** Pace bowler Trent Boult returned figures of 3-22 to set up a crushing six-wicket victory for Rajasthan Royals in the IPL match against winless Mumbai Indians on Monday.

Boult's sensational spell of left-arm pace helped restrict hosts Mumbai to 125-9, a total Rajasthan overhauled with 27 balls to spare for their third win of the season in three matches.

Five-time winners Mumbai, who named Hardik Pandya as captain in place of veteran Rohit Sharma, fell to their third loss to stay bottom of the 10-team table.

Pandya had another unforgettable evening after he met with boos at the toss by the home fans, prompting presenter

Sanjay Manjrekar to say "behave".

"Yes, a tough night, we didn't start the way we wanted to start," Pandya said after the loss.

Pandya top-scored with 34 for Mumbai but admitted his wicket made them slip.

"I wanted to counter, we were in a decent position to get us around 150-160," said Pandya.

"But my wicket allowed them to get back more into the game, I needed to do a lot more."

In-form Rajasthan batter Riyan Parag hammered an unbeaten 54 off 39 balls for his second successive fifty as he steered the team to victory with two sixes and a four.

But Rajasthan bowlers ruled with Boult's lethal opening burst

giving way to Yuzvendra Chahal's 3-11 with his leg-spin.

Boult claimed three wickets including Rohit in the space of four deliveries across his first two overs to silence the home crowd at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium.

**GOLDEN DUCKS**

Rohit, Naman Dhir and Brevis, all three got out for a first ball duck and another wicket by left-arm quick Nandre Burger made Mumbai slip to 20-4 inside four overs.

Boult got Rohit out caught behind on the fifth ball of his opening over and then trapped Dhir lbw before a hat-trick was avoided in the next over but the Kiwi sent back Dewald Brevis

soon after.

Brevis was sent as impact substitute in place of Dhir but the move flopped.

Burger had the left-handed Ishan Kishan caught behind with a nasty seaming delivery as the bowler leapt in the air in celebration.

Left-handed Tilak Varma and Pandya counter-attacked in their 56-run stand as the left-right duo raised their fifty in 32 balls.

Chahal broke the stand as he got Pandya to go for a big one only to be caught in the deep by substitute Rovman Powell and Mumbai lost their fifth on 76.

Tim David made 17 and Mumbai hung on to play out their 20 overs. — AFP



Sri Lankan players celebrate after the dismissal of Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan during the fourth day of the second Test in Chittagong. – AFP

## Sri Lanka close on victory in second Bangladesh Test

**CHITTAGONG, Bangladesh:** Prabath Jayasuriya, Lahiru Kumara and Kamindu Mendis each claimed two wickets as Sri Lanka came within grasp of another resounding victory in the second and final Test on Tuesday.

Bangladesh were 268-7 at stumps on the fourth day in Chittagong, still needing 243 runs for an improbable win.

Mehidy Hasan Miraz played an unbeaten knock of 44 to take the game into the fifth day with Taijul Islam accompanying him on 10.

Mominul Haque was the only other batsman to put up a fight, making 50 off 56 balls before he was dismissed by the spinner Jayasuriya in the last over before tea break.

Shakib Al Hasan and Liton Das put on 61 runs for the fifth wicket after Mominul's dismissal.

Off-spinner Kamindu broke the stand as Nishan Madushka took a brilliant reflex catch at slip point to dismiss Shakib for 36.

Liton got the bottom edge in an attempt for a pull shot off Kumara to depart three overs later for 38.

Kamindu broke another promising partnership of 46 runs between Mehidy and

Shahadat Hossain, trapping the latter leg before for 15.

Mahmudul Hasan (24), fellow opener Zakir Hasan (19), and skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto (20) were all sent back cheaply.

Jayasuriya bowled Mahmudul to break the 37-run opening stand.

Zakir gave a catch to Dhananjaya de Silva off Vishwa Fernando at slip, and Lahiru clipped the bail of Najmul's off-stump.

Resuming on 102-6, Sri Lanka batted for a little over an hour to add 55 runs to their overnight score before declaring at 157-7.

Angelo Mathews, unbeaten on 39 overnight, top-scored with 56 runs. He was bowled by Shakib after making his 41st Test fifty.

Jayasuriya was unbeaten on 28 when the declaration came, along with Vishwa Fernando, who was eight not out.

Debutant pace bowler Hasan Mahmud finished with 4-65 for Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka were missing Dinesh Chandimal in the field after he returned home for a family emergency.

Sri Lanka, who have never lost a Test series to Bangladesh, thrashed the hosts by 328 runs in the first Test at Sylhet. — AFP

### SCOREBOARD

|                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sri Lanka first innings -----531</b>                                              | <b>Bangladesh second innings</b>                                                                                                       |
| <b>Bangladesh first innings -----178</b>                                             | Mahmudul Hasan b Jayasuriya 24                                                                                                         |
| <b>Sri Lanka second innings</b>                                                      | Zakir Hasan c De Silva b V Fernando 19                                                                                                 |
| N Madushka c Mehidy b Hasan -----34                                                  | Najmul Hossain b Kumara -----20                                                                                                        |
| D Karunaratne b Hasan -----4                                                         | Mominul c Kumara b Jayasuriya-50                                                                                                       |
| Kusal Mendis b Khaled -----2                                                         | Shakib c Madushka b Kamindu-36                                                                                                         |
| A Mathews b Shakib -----56                                                           | Liton Das c Kusal b Kumara -----38                                                                                                     |
| D Chandimal c Shahadat b Hasan -----9                                                | Shahadat lbw Kamindu --15                                                                                                              |
| D de Silva c Liton b Hasan -----1                                                    | Mehidy Hasan not out-----44                                                                                                            |
| Kamindu Mendis c Liton b Khaled -----9                                               | Taijul Islam not out-----10                                                                                                            |
| P Jayasuriya not out -----28                                                         | Extras (b9, lb1, nb2)-----12                                                                                                           |
| V Fernando not out -----8                                                            | <b>Total (seven wickets; 67 overs) 268</b>                                                                                             |
| <b>Extras (b5, lb1)-----6</b>                                                        | <b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-37, 2-51, 3-94, 4-132, 5-193, 6-197, 7-243                                                                   |
| <b>Total (7 wickets dec; 40 overs)-----157</b>                                       | <b>Bowling:</b> V Fernando 10-0-39-1, A Fernando 12-1-52-0, Lahiru 11-2-41-2, Jayasuriya 20-1-79-2, De Silva 7-1-25-0, Mendis 7-0-22-2 |
| <b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-12, 2-15, 3-60, 4-72, 5-78, 6-89, 7-132                    |                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Bowling:</b> Khaled 11-2-34-2, Hasan 15-2-65-4, Shakib 10-1-39-1, Taijul 4-0-13-0 |                                                                                                                                        |

# Stokes rules himself out of England's T20 World Cup title defence

**LONDON:** Test captain Ben Stokes has ruled himself out of England's T20 World Cup title defence, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced on Tuesday.

The 32-year-old said he was skipping the tournament in the United States and the West Indies to make sure he could be a fully-fledged all-rounder in Test cricket.

"Opting out of the IPL (Indian Premier League) and the (T20) World Cup will hopefully be a sacrifice that allows me to be the all-rounder I want to be for the foreseeable future," Stokes said in an ECB statement.

Stokes's withdrawal was something of a surprise given that, when asked last month if he would participate in the T20 World Cup in June, he said he had "not even thought about that but I'm available".

It is understood Stokes has not

suffered any setbacks after briefly returning to bowling last month during a Test tour of India where England lost a five-match series 4-1. There is no lingering discomfort in his left knee following surgery in November.

But although he has long been one of England's leading multi-format cricketers, Stokes has decided to prioritise his role as Test captain, in the hope of being able to play a full role with both bat and ball during six Tests — three against the West Indies and three against Sri Lanka — in the upcoming home season.

The first Test against the West Indies at Lord's starts on July 10, less than two weeks after the June 29 T20 World Cup final in Barbados.

**'BEHIND IN BOWLING'**

That congested Test schedule has prompted Stokes to follow up



England's Ben Stokes in action during the fifth Test against India in Dharamshala, India on March 9. – Reuters

his withdrawal from the lucrative IPL T20 franchise tournament by also pulling out of the T20 World Cup in a major blow for England white-ball captain Jos Buttler and coach Matthew Mott.

"I'm working hard and focusing on building my bowling fitness back up to fulfil a full role as an all-rounder in all formats of cricket,"

Stokes said.

He added: "The recent Test tour of India highlighted how far behind I was from a bowling point of view after my knee surgery and nine months without bowling. I'm looking forward to playing for Durham in the County Championship before the start of our Test summer.

"I wish Jos, Motty and all the team the best of luck in defending our title."

England begin that title defence against Scotland in Barbados on June 4, before further group matches against Australia, Oman and Namibia.

Stokes was a central figure as England won the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia.

The left-handed batsman's 42 against Sri Lanka in Sydney took England into the knockout rounds, while his unbeaten 52 — his first fifty in international T20 cricket — secured victory over Pakistan in the final in Melbourne.

That match was the last of his 43 T20 international appearances, but had Stokes been available he would undoubtedly have been included in England's 15-man World Cup squad.

Stokes delayed an operation on

a longstanding left knee problem to play in last year's 50-over World Cup in India, where reigning champions England suffered an embarrassing exit before the knockout stages after winning just three of their nine group games.

After undergoing surgery at the end of last year, Stokes was an ever-present in England's 4-1 defeat in India although he sent down only five overs — all of them in the last Test, where the paceman bowled India captain Rohit Sharma with his first competitive delivery in some nine months.

After the two Test series at home to the West Indies and Sri Lanka, England will tour Pakistan and New Zealand.

England then have a 2025 featuring two showpiece series, with five Tests at home to India followed by an Ashes tour of Australia. — AFP

Inter Milan's Federico Dimarco celebrates scoring their first goal. – Reuters



# INTER BEAT EMPOLI TO CLOSE IN ON SERIE A TITLE

**MILAN:** Inter Milan took another step towards the Serie A title on Monday with a straightforward 2-0 win over struggling Empoli which maintained their 14-point lead at the top of the league.

Federico Dimarco put Inter ahead after five minutes at the San Siro before substitute Alexis Sanchez sealed the points in front of delighted home fans with nine minutes remaining.

Monday's comfortable victory left Inter needing just 11 more points from eight matches to beat second-placed AC Milan to a 20th Italian league crown.

Inter have a huge lead on their local rivals thanks in large part to academy product Dimarco, whose first-time strike from Alessandro Bastoni's neat clipped pass separated the hosts from their spirited opponents for most of the match.

It was Bastoni's third assist in as many league matches and the Italy defender joked: "It was the worst of the lot, Dimarco's finish made it look much better!"

"We're really happy with the win because we've just come off the international break and it's never easy winning after travelling around the world," added Bastoni.

Simone Inzaghi's side were far from the scintillating form they showed before being knocked out of the Champions League by Atletico Madrid last month.

But Inter have dropped only two points since the turn of the year and Monday's win was a good way to end what has been a difficult couple of weeks.

Francesco Acerbi was cleared late last month of racially abusing Napoli defender Juan Jesus, an ugly episode which dragged on through the international break as the Italy defender and Inter denied the accusation.

Acerbi started the game after avoiding a potential 10-match ban due to the Italian Football Federation's disciplinary tribunal deciding there wasn't enough evidence to punish him.

A fourth straight defeat without scoring a goal left Empoli back in the relegation zone on goals scored, swapping places with 17th-placed Frosinone who drew 1-1 with Genoa on Saturday.

"If that run had knocked our confidence you'd have seen it tonight with a bad performance but that didn't happen," said Empoli coach Davide Nicola.

## BOLOGNA CHARGE ON

Bologna cruised past Serie A's bottom side Salernitana 3-0 to continue their charge towards a first-ever appearance in the Champions League.

Stunning first-half strikes from Riccardo Orsolini and Alexis Saelemaekers and Charalampos Lykogiannis' fine finish in stoppage time ensured that Bologna would stay in fourth place, five points above Roma who were held to a goalless draw at Lecce.

Thiago Motta's side have won eight of their last nine matches and not only look a good bet to reach Europe's top club competition, but also have Juventus in their sights.

Juve are just two points ahead of Bologna in third following their last-gasp defeat at Lazio on Saturday and have been dragged back into a battle for the Champions League.

Bologna currently sit in the final spot but

Serie A is firmly in the running for an extra place in next year's revamped tournament, meaning fifth may well be good enough.

Both Bologna and Roma host Juve before the end of the season.

"We're doing really well at the minute, with the way that we're playing and the results we're getting," said Motta to Sky Sport.

Although the seven-time Italian champions played one round in the old European Cup in 1964, the same year that they most recently won the Scudetto, they have never participated in the modern Champions League.

Last season's ninth place was the highest Bologna had finished in Serie A for over a decade and they are well on course for their best placing in years.

"Obviously we're looking at the table but that's not what matters to us, what's important is putting in the work in training and the performances on the pitch," said Saelemaekers.

Stefano Colantuono could not turn around Salernitana's fortunes in his first match in charge, his team falling to their third straight defeat as they sink towards Serie B.

Salernitana have not won a single game since the turn of the year and are 12 points from safety. — AFP

## ITALIAN SERIE A TABLE AFTER MONDAY'S MATCHES (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):

|             |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|-------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Inter Milan | 30 | 25 | 4  | 1  | 73 | 14 | 79 |
| AC Milan    | 30 | 20 | 5  | 5  | 57 | 34 | 65 |
| Juventus    | 30 | 17 | 8  | 5  | 44 | 24 | 59 |
| Bologna     | 30 | 16 | 9  | 5  | 45 | 25 | 57 |
| Roma        | 30 | 15 | 7  | 8  | 55 | 35 | 52 |
| Atalanta    | 29 | 15 | 5  | 9  | 54 | 32 | 50 |
| Lazio       | 30 | 14 | 4  | 12 | 37 | 33 | 46 |
| Napoli      | 30 | 12 | 9  | 9  | 44 | 36 | 45 |
| Torino      | 30 | 11 | 11 | 8  | 29 | 26 | 44 |
| Florentina  | 29 | 12 | 7  | 10 | 42 | 34 | 43 |
| Monza       | 30 | 11 | 9  | 10 | 32 | 37 | 42 |
| Genoa       | 30 | 8  | 11 | 11 | 32 | 37 | 35 |
| Lecce       | 30 | 6  | 11 | 13 | 26 | 45 | 29 |
| Udinese     | 30 | 4  | 16 | 10 | 29 | 45 | 28 |
| Verona      | 30 | 6  | 9  | 15 | 27 | 40 | 27 |
| Cagliari    | 30 | 6  | 9  | 15 | 30 | 51 | 27 |
| Frosinone   | 30 | 6  | 7  | 17 | 38 | 61 | 25 |
| Empoli      | 30 | 6  | 7  | 17 | 22 | 45 | 25 |
| Sassuolo    | 30 | 6  | 6  | 18 | 34 | 57 | 24 |
| Salernitana | 30 | 2  | 8  | 20 | 23 | 62 | 14 |

**NOTE:** Top four qualify for the 2024/25 UEFA Champions League group phase; fifth goes into Europa League group stage; sixth goes into Europa Conference League play-offs; Bottom three relegated to Serie B unless the teams in 17th and 18th finish on the same points, in which case a play-off will decide which team is relegated

## ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS

### On Monday

Bologna 3 (Orsolini 14, Saelemaekers 44, Lykogiannis 90+2) Salernitana 0

Cagliari 1 (Sulemana 74) Verona 1 (Bonazzoli 30)

Inter Milan 2 (Dimarco 6, Sanchez 81) Empoli 0

Lecce 0 Roma 0

Sassuolo 1 (Defrel 41) Udinese 1 (Thauvin 44)

### Played Saturday

Florentina 1 (Duncan 50) AC Milan 2

(Loftus-Cheek 47, Leao 53)

Genoa 1 (Gudmundsson 30-pen)

Frosinone 1 (Reinier 36)

Lazio 1 (Marusic 90+3) Juventus 0

Napoli 0 Atalanta 3 (Miranchuk 26, Scamacca 45, Koopmeiners 88)

Torino 1 (Sanabria 69-pen) Monza 0



Inter Milan's Chilean forward Alexis Sanchez celebrates after scoring their second goal against Empoli in Milan. – AFP



Ladies Account

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# Omani-Australian mining JV secures expanded exploration block

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

An Omani-Australian joint venture behind the recent successful launch of a copper-gold project in Al Mudhaibi has announced a substantial expansion of the acreage granted to it by the Omani government for exploration in potentially mineral-rich Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

Alara Resources Ltd, the Australian partner in the joint venture, said on Tuesday that it has been awarded 1,452 sq km of additional acreage for exploration by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in the wilayat.

Titled Block 22-B, the acreage is still subject to negotiations leading to an Exploration and Mining Concession Agreement enshrining exclusive rights for the exploration, and development within the site.

Welcoming the exploration award, Atmavireswar Sthapak, Managing Director — Alara, commented: “Alara securing an additional area for mineral exploration in Oman demonstrates the government’s faith and trust in the company and its JV partners.

“This exciting moment is the result of Alara’s strong, decade-long commitment and unwavering effort, in alignment with the Omani government’s vision for mining, by investing in and conducting state-of-the-art mineral exploration campaigns, discovering



New copper concentrator plant currently under commissioning at the Washihi site.

multiple instances of base metal mineralisation in the country and developing an operating copper mine.”

“Extended Block 22-B, which includes the existing Washihi-Majaza copper-goldmine and an ancient mine and copper mineralisation intersected at Mullaq, has tremendous potential for further mineral discoveries adjacent to the company’s existing processing facility.

“The timing of the grant of this concession fits well into Alara’s overall Oman copper development strategy,” he further added.

Last month, Alara’s 51 per cent owned Al Hadeetha Resources Limited commenced copper concentrate production from its Al Washihi Majaza project in Al Mudhaibi — the first by an international mining firm to exploit copper and associated gold resources since the enactment of a revamped mining law in Oman.

It follows the successful start of commissioning of 1 million tonnes per annum capacity concentrator plant at the heart of the mining project.

Significantly, the Washihi copper-gold deposit (covering a 39 sq km area) and an ancient copper mining site at Mullaq (covering 41 sq km) is already located within the newly rejigged Block 22-B area.

It was created by combining the former Blocks 22-A and 22-B into a newly consolidated Block that includes exploration licences previously granted to Al Hadeetha Resources LLC (AHRL) in which Alara holds a 51-per cent interest.

The remainder of Block 22-B will be represented by a new JV company comprising Alara (27.5 per cent), Al Hadeetha Resources, Al

Naba Group and Al Tasnim Group (each also holding 27.5 per cent) with the remaining 17.5 per cent to be offered to South West Pinnacle, an existing Alara JV Partner in Alara Resources.

Areas already explored within Block 22-B are believed to abound with upper-crustal rocks similar to those in the Semail Ophiolite which are considered to be rich in promising base metal resources.

“There are reports of several old copper workings in the north-western section of the Block, old gold and chromium workings in the northern section and a small number of old iron workings in the western section,” Alara added in its statement.

# RO 1.5 billion worth of guarantees released for OQ Plastics Complex

MUSCAT: Global Integrated Energy Group OQ announced the completion of testing the required production capacity of the OQ Plastics Complex, with an investment value of approximately RO 2.7 billion, in accordance with the requirements of lenders from local and international financing bodies, as the complex exceeded the targeted production capacity according to standards required and agreed upon with project lenders.

This led to the fulfilment of all requirements related to raising the guarantees estimated at RO 1.5 billion allocated by the Government of the Sultanate of Oman to finance the construction of the OQ Plastics Complex.

The OQ Plastics Complex supplies the petrochemical industries sector with the production of 880,000 tonnes annually of polyethylene, which represents about 40 per cent of the total various polymer uses in the industry, and about 300,000 tonnes annually of polypropylene.

This will raise the Sultanate of Oman’s production of the two materials to 1.5 million tonnes annually which is marketed to more than 60 countries around the world.

– ONA



# Masirah Oil initiates major offshore drilling in Block 50

JOMAR MENDOZA  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

Masirah Oil Limited (MOL) has announced a significant development in its offshore operations in Oman with the commencement of a new drilling programme in the Yumna Field located in Block 50. The company is focused on enhancing production from its wholly-owned Block 50 licence by targeting hydrocarbon prospects in this offshore field off Oman’s east coast.

Under this new initiative, MOL has partnered with Northern Offshore Ltd, a prominent offshore drilling services firm, to deploy a jack-up drilling rig for a multi-well drilling programme. The Energy Emerger drilling rig, with a maximum drilling depth of 9,120



The programme aims to maximise the recovery of hydrocarbon resources from the reservoir, ultimately boosting production levels.

metres, will play a key role in this strategic endeavour.

The drilling campaign will involve the drilling and completion of a new in-field well, as well as workovers of two existing production wells in the Yumna Field.

This comprehensive approach aims to maximise the recovery of hydrocarbon resources from the reservoir,

ultimately boosting production levels.

MOL’s proactive stance towards increasing production is evident in its previous efforts, including a recent drilling campaign that concluded in Q4 2022. During this campaign, the company undertook a workover of the Yumna-3 well and successfully drilled the Yumna-4 well,

further demonstrating its commitment to operational excellence and efficiency.

The Yumna Field, which became operational in February 2020, has been a key asset for MOL, marking significant milestones such as the approval of its Field Development Plan and Declaration of Commerciality in July of that year.

By the end of 2022, the total production from the field had reached 7.1 million stock tank barrels of oil, highlighting its growing importance in MOL’s portfolio.

Additionally, MOL has reported that in February 2024, the gross production from the Yumna Field averaged 1,430 stock tank barrels per day, showcasing its consistent performance in the region.

MOL holds 100 per cent interest in Block 50.

## Tender Announcement

E-Tender 05/2024/OPAZ

الهيئة العامة للمناطق الاقتصادية الخاصة والمناطق الحرة  
Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones  
Sultanate of Oman  
سلطنة عمان

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones & Free Zones (OPAZ) invites the reputable and experienced International & Local (Omani and Saudi JV Companies) for the following tender; through an E-Tendering Portal.

CONSTRUCTION OF ROADS AND INFRASTRUCTURE OF DUQM FISEHRIES INDUSTRIAL ZONE (FIZ) PHASE-1

|                                                                  |                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Place of Buying and Collecting the Softcopy of Tender Documents: | Through E-Tendering System<br><a href="https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om">https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om</a> . |
| Start of Tender Document Sale (Date):                            | Wednesday, 3rd April 2024 (09:00AM)                                                                                       |
| End of Tender Documents Sale (Date):                             | Tuesday, 23rd April 2024 (06:00PM)                                                                                        |
| Site showround / Visit (for all bidders):                        | Wednesday, 24th April 2024 10:00 am at SEZAD HQ -DUQM                                                                     |
| Tender Closing (Submission) and Opening of Technical Bids Date:  | Wednesday, 08th May 2024 (12:00 PM, Muscat Time)                                                                          |
| Cost of Tender Documents:                                        | OMR. 1,800.000 (Omani Rial One THOUSAND Eight Hundred only)                                                               |

- All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender Board participate and get the specification and conditions of the above tender from the following website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Participants from International companies/bidders are (required) to have registered with the Oman Tender Board (TB); website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Bidders should submit their bids online on the given website Signed and Sealed. The Bidders shall submit Tender Bond electronically through the e-tendering system, which will verify the validity of the submitted bond and this Bid bond shall be issued from Local Bank in the Sultanate of Oman of not less than (1%) of the Tender Value, valid for (180) days from the Proposals submission date, addressed to H. E. THE CHAIRMAN, OPAZ Tender COMMITTEE (OTC).
- OPAZ is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bid, and reserves the right to accept or reject any offer without giving reasons.

For further clarifications, you may contact:  
Tel. +968 24402200 and/or,  
Email: [etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om)

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# Toyota’s Biggest Excitement announces new raffle draw winner

MUSCAT: Saud Bahwan Automotive recently announced one more winner of the Toyota Crown in Oman’s most popular automotive campaign — Toyota’s Biggest Excitement. Salim bin Saleh bin Saif al Wahaibi from Muscat who purchased a Land Cruiser 3.5 TT VX 7 Prestige was the winner of one of the 5 Toyota Crown Raffle draw.

Customers purchasing their favourite Toyota vehicle can during Toyota’s Biggest Excitement campaign, can look forward to a chance to enter the raffle draw & win one from 5 Toyota Crown cars and avail exclusive benefits including service from 3 years / 30,000 km up to 10 years / 100,000 km (whichever is earlier), insurance 1 year and free registration. Apart from that customers can also avail attractive instalments.



The campaign is valid from March 3, 2024 up to May 21, 2024 (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. EMI

calculated are for base models with 20 per cent down payment for 10 years. Loan approval is based on the sole discretion of banks.

Terms & Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details.)

Expressing his excitement, Salim said, I am extremely happy to win this beauty — the Toyota Crown. It is definitely something I will keep with me for a long time.”

Sharing his thoughts about his experiences with Toyota he said, “Since my younger days, I have been a fan of Toyota.

My family has been their loyal customers and that has made me experience everything about Toyota, including the inspiring customer service extended to customers by Saud Bahwan Automotive.



## Visa confers achievement award to BankDhofar

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, Oman’s leading financial institution, has been honoured by Visa with an award for its outstanding achievement in enabling Visa’s Tap-to-Phone technology, commonly known as SoftPOS.

BankDhofar’s dedication to implementing and promoting this innovative solution has not only enhanced the digital payment landscape in Oman but has also empowered local businesses to thrive in an increasingly digital economy.

Soft POS, or Software Point of Sale, is a paradigm shift in the way merchants handle transactions.

Unlike traditional POS systems that rely on dedicated hardware, Soft POS leverages software applications running on android smartphones there by eliminating operational costs to the merchants.

Any android smartphone can be used as a payment terminal and customers can get their receipts via an SMS reducing Carbon footprint.

The solution gives businesses access to a host of added benefits that include contactless cards; 24/7 access to history, statements and reconciliations; direct push notifications for alerts, web links and in-history adverts; integration with loyalty by facilitating coupons and point redemption; pre-transaction controls on the amount, frequency, and time restrictions; chargeback resolutions by flagging transactions; and assistance with calculating and recording taxes as well as tip amounts with transactions.

Bilal bin Faiz bin Mohammed al Raisi, AGM — Cards & Bancassurance at BankDhofar, expressed the institution’s delight in being honoured with an award from Visa. This accolade recognises BankDhofar’s dedication to fostering digital adoption in harmony with Oman Vision 2040.

The bank’s Soft POS solutions have seen widespread acceptance among a diverse range of merchants, including home-based businesses, delivery services, gas delivery agents and taxi drivers, “This award underscores our ongoing commitment to deliver innovative, convenient, and secure payment options that address the changing needs of our clients and play a pivotal role in the economic development of Oman”.

Manish Gautam, Visa’s Country Manager for Oman, said: “According to Visa’s recent Value of Acceptance survey, 65 per cent of small businesses in Oman have reported an increase in both revenue and customer traffic since they began accepting digital payments. This highlights the significant impact that acceptance solutions like Visa’s Tap to Phone can have on business growth and competitiveness.

We are therefore delighted to recognise BankDhofar’s efforts in bringing Tap to Phone to local businesses and driving the digital transformation of Oman’s retail sector.”

This accolade reinforces the bank’s position as a customer focused bank in the digital banking landscape and underscores its dedication to providing innovative and convenient banking experiences to its customers. The Bank has a nationwide branch network of more than 118 branches and 340 ATM’s/MFK’S/ CDM’S.

## OAB launches innovative corporate Internet banking platform

MUSCAT: In a significant leap forward for business online banking, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has launched its innovative Corporate Internet Banking platform (CIB), designed to bolster government and corporate clients with financial management capabilities.

Unveiled during OAB’s annual Merchant Event, which brought together over 700 industry leaders, this latest addition to OAB’s corporate solutions aims to further foster a collaborative and supportive environment between the bank and the business community. The newly launched CIB platform offers significant advantages for businesses and business owners, focusing on enhancing financial management and operational efficiency.

Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of Oman Arab



Bank, highlighted the platform’s significance in reinforcing partnership values: “Our new

CIB Platform is a key milestone in our ongoing digital transformation journey. It underscores our belief in the power of partnerships and collaboration, enabling us to deliver a solution that not only meets our clients’ evolving needs but also drives shared growth and value creation.”

The successful launch of the platform was further amplified by the success of OAB’s Merchant Event.

Its proactive approach to digital innovation, readiness to address the dynamic needs of its customers and partners and its continuous commitment to uphold the highest standards of service, resonated with all its event guests further emphasising its position as a leader in Oman’s financial industry.

## Ramadhan Iftar drive with Maserati Grecale



MUSCAT: Maserati Oman held an exclusive Iftar gathering at The Kitchen Restaurant in Kempinski Hotel Muscat, during which guests had the chance to test drive the Maserati Grecale.

This adventure revealed the Maserati Grecale GT, an extraordinary SUV for everyday use, offers a unique driving pleasure that truly

needs to be felt personally. With its adaptable nature, generous space, and smart features, it stands as the perfect companion for any occasion.

As the latest jewel in the luxury car maker’s crown, the Maserati Grecale GT blends stunning design, powerful engine capabilities, and lavish amenities, epitomising Italian elegance and vigour.

Equipped with a 300-horsepower, four-cylinder mild hybrid engine, this vehicle exudes timeless elegance and sporty allure, drawing all eyes to it. Its distinctive, chic silhouette and personality, remarkable performance, and high-quality cabin finishes—crafted from select, superior materials—set it apart.

The Grecale GT shines as a top contender in its category, excelling in roominess and comfort with its comprehensive range of high-

end features. This standout SUV measures 4,846 mm from end to end, with a wheelbase of 2,901 mm, a height of 1,670 mm, and a total width of 2,163 mm when you include the wing mirrors.

A rear wheel track of 1,694 mm lends it a sporty appearance without sacrificing comfort, notably seen in the ample rear seating space. Aimed at those who value a seamless mix of understated elegance, vitality, and driving pleasure, the Grecale epitomises sophisticated luxury.

The Maserati Grecale excels in drivability and handling, attributed to its advanced suspension and lightweight materials like aluminium and carbon fibre.

Overall, the Grecale GT stands out as a top SUV, perfectly balancing sportiness with elegance, and packed with innovative features for an outstanding driving experience.

# MHD Automobiles presents unmatched Ramadhan offers

MUSCAT: MHD Automobiles, distributors of the iconic Stellantis brands — Jeep, RAM, Dodge, and Alfa Romeo, are delighted to extend their exclusive Ramadhan offers to customers.

With this limited-time offer, customers can enjoy unparalleled benefits on a wide range of vehicles, making it the perfect time to drive home in a new car. The offers vary from model to model

**Pay 50% now and 50% in 12 months with 0% interest**

To make owning a new vehicle more affordable than ever before, MHD Automobiles offers the unique option for customers to pay a 50% downpayment and the

balance 50% in 12 months with 0% interest.

This is subject to credit approval from the selected bank and finance company.

**Free service up to 5 years or 120,000 km (whichever is earlier)**

For added peace of mind, customers purchasing select models will receive service packages depending on the model.

Customers purchasing Jeep Wrangler, Dodge Charger, and Challenger models will receive 3 years or 60,000 km service package.

Similarly, Jeep Grand Cherokee, Grand Wagoneer,

Dodge Durango, and the RAM 1500 range buyers will benefit from 5 years or 100,000 km service package.

The Alfa Romeo models come with 5 years or 120,000 km service package.

**Warranty up to 7 years or 200,000 km (whichever is earlier)**

All Jeep, Dodge, and RAM models will be covered by 5 years or 100,000 km warranty, while Alfa Romeo models will enjoy a generous 7 years or 200,000 km warranty.

**Roadside assistance and additional incentives**

Additionally, customers will benefit from 5 years or

100,000 km roadside assistance, complimentary first-year insurance and registration.

Moreover, visitors to the showroom stand a chance to win one of two iPhones through the “Walk In & Win” raffle, further adding excitement to the Ramadhan campaign.

“We are pleased to offer these exclusive Ramadhan benefits to our valued customers,” said Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles.

“This campaign not only provides unbeatable value but also reflects our commitment to delivering exceptional customer satisfaction.”



Don’t miss out on these incredible benefits! Visit the showroom at Al Hail today to take

advantage of these limited-time offers and drive home in your dream vehicle this Ramadhan.



## Energy Development Oman outlook revised to positive



**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

Leading international rating agency S&P Global Ratings has revised wholly Omani government-owned Energy Development Oman's (EDO) outlook to positive from stable.

It comes on the heels of S&P's recent revision of its outlook on Oman to positive from stable, based on the view that the government's balance sheet will strengthen and the economic reform programme could lead to faster-than-expected deleveraging in many state-owned enterprises — without dampening economic growth outcomes — and boost the economy's resiliency to adverse oil price shocks. "Given EDO's integral link with the government and because we think the government can influence the company's strategic plans via its significant presence on the board, we cap our rating on EDO at the level of the sovereign under our criteria.

"In light of the upgrade to the sovereign, our issuer credit rating on EDO is one notch below our assessment of the company's 'bbb-' stand-alone credit profile (SACP)," the rating agency stated.

It further added: "We consider EDO a government-related entity (GRE) with a moderately high likelihood of government support and expect it will remain a key player in Oman's energy sector. Our assessment reflects our view that the company has an integral link with the government, given the state's 100 per cent direct ownership of EDO. "The government also has a strong influence on the company's strategic plans, via its significant presence on the board, which the minister of energy and minerals chairs.

"The assessment also reflects our view that EDO plays a very important role for the Omani government because it is the largest oil and gas producer in Oman — through its 60 per cent ownership of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO; contributing about 50 per cent of hydrocarbon production — and therefore a significant employer."

According to S&P, EDO's stand-alone credit profile (SACP) remains at 'bbb-' and is supported by the company's leading share in Omani hydrocarbon production and overall good cash flow visibility.

Factored into the agency's business risk assessment is EDO's access to large reserves, with more than 1.5 billion barrels of oil equivalent in 1P reserves and include more than 60 per cent of Oman's 1P oil and non-associated gas condensate (NAGC) reserves; leading domestic share of hydrocarbon production; and broadly low operating cost structure. The company has ongoing and new expansion projects in both oil and gas to develop and upgrade existing wells, noted S&P.

# Oman's space industry players announce collaboration

**HIBBA AL KINDI**  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

ETCO Space, the company behind Oman's first successful satellite, has announced an upcoming collaboration with Etlag, the region's first spaceport, proposed to be established by National Aerospace Services Company (NASCOM) at Duqm.

It follows the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two companies, to collaborate on research and development, foster local innovation and boost national cadres.

The MoU was signed by Azzan bin Abdullah al Maamari, Vice-President of ETCO Space, and Essam bin Abdulrahman al Zadjali, Chief Commercial Officer of Etlag.

Under the terms of the MoU, Etlag Spaceport is committed to providing R&D facilities, while ETCO Space is expected to contribute with its satellite and space propulsion technology expertise.

Moreover, the MoU will enable ETCO Space to use the Duqm-based spaceport to launch its future payloads from Oman. Additionally, the partnership is expected to develop a skilled Omani workforce and boost the local value within the local space sector.

Last March, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaitani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information



High-level representatives attending the MoU signing last week.

## ETCO gets TRA licence to set up ground station

**MUSCAT:** The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has issued a third-category licence to the Emerging Technologies Company (ETCO) to establish a ground station connected to a satellite network.

TRA said that it issued a third-class licence to ETCO to establish a ground station connected to a satellite network for monitoring, tracking, and directing commands to the satellites.

ETCO will gather photography from space, which will be analysed for use in some



applications, including mapping, environmental monitoring, resource management and disaster management.

In January, the Satellite Aman-1, owned by ETCO Space company, relayed images of the

Sultanate of Oman captured from low altitude on the earth's orbit.

The mission focuses on ground observation and remote sensing.

The first image shows the Port of Sohar and parts of the Sohar Freezone, while the second image monitors a large section of Al Hajar Al Gharbi mountain range along the Wilayat of Ibri.

ETCO Space, an Oman-owned company, said in a statement that the image signals the consummation of operations since the moment Aman-1 was shuttled into the earth's orbit.

Technology for Communications and Information Technology, revealed that the Sultanate of Oman garnered over RO 20 million worth of investments in the space sector over the last two years. The Etlag Spaceport is

expected to be the first spaceport in the MENA region.

According to officials, the Duqm-based complex will allow for the assembly, testing and launch of commercial, professional and educational rockets.

Construction of the complex is expected to begin in the second quarter of 2024, and will be fully operational by 2026. Moreover, ETCO Space also plans to launch a local satellite manufacturing joint venture in Oman.

# Omani climate tech start-up harnesses peridotite for carbon capture

**JOMAR MENDOZA**  
MUSCAT, APRIL 2

Omani award-winning climate tech start-up 44.01 has captured the attention of industry experts by leveraging the unique properties of peridotite for carbon capture in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

WIRED Middle East recently brought the news to light, highlighting 44.01's innovative approach to decarbonising industries with challenging emission profiles, such as steel production.

The Hajar Mountains, a rugged mountain range stretching across Oman and the eastern UAE, are composed of peridotite, an igneous rock capable of naturally trapping carbon dioxide in the presence of fresh water. This natural process of carbon sequestration was discovered in Oman as far back as 2008, sparking interest in its potential application on a larger scale.

Ehab Tasfai, Chief Technical Officer at 44.01, envisions a future where peridotite formations could hold vast amounts of carbon dioxide, potentially offering a sustainable solution to reducing emissions.

With each cubic metre of peridotite capable of trapping significant amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>, the start-up is poised to revolutionise



44.01's facilities in Fujairah. © WIRED Middle East

the carbon capture landscape.

Partnering with the UAE oil and gas giant ADNOC Group, as highlighted by WIRED, 44.01 has embarked on its second and largest pilot project in Fujairah, further cementing its commitment to environmental stewardship.

By accelerating the natural mineralisation process that occurs in the mountains during rainfall, the project aims to sequester captured carbon dioxide underground, preventing its release into the atmosphere.

The pilot project in Fujairah features a direct air capture

unit to collect CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, as well as the utilisation of captured carbon from other facilities for testing purposes. Powered by solar energy to minimise its environmental footprint, the project showcases a holistic approach to carbon capture and storage.

Sophie Hildebrand, Chief Technology Officer at ADNOC Group, emphasises the importance of collaborative efforts in accelerating decarbonisation technologies. By combining ADNOC's industry expertise with innovative start-

ups like 44.01, the project aims to achieve significant milestones in carbon capture and emission reductions.

While the project is in its early stages, WIRED reported that initial estimates suggest promising results, with the team projecting high levels of mineralisation within a relatively short timeframe.

Hildebrand acknowledges the potential of carbon capture technologies as a critical tool in the fight against climate change, citing the efficiency of capturing CO<sub>2</sub> from high-intensity sources in heavy industries.

## National Finance completes largest debt capital market issuance in Oman



**MUSCAT:** National Finance Company SAOG (or National Finance), the largest finance company in the Sultanate of Oman, has successfully completed the issuance of its tier 1 perpetual bonds in accordance with the applicable regulatory requirements in Oman.

The issuance with a base issue size of RO 25 million received solid response from investors resulting in an over-subscription of 1.8x. Consequently, National Finance elected to exercise the greenshoe option of RO 10 million, resulting in a total issue size of RO 35 million.

The order book was well-diversified with investor participation across various segments. The issuance will strengthen National Finance's capital base to support further growth as the company continues to capitalise on a resilient Omani economy.

National Finance is the only finance and leasing company in Oman that has managed to successfully raise tier 1 perpetual bond, twice and the successful closure of the issuance further solidifies its position as a market leader.

As disclosed in the Prospectus, the tier 1 perpetual bond will carry a coupon of 7.75 per cent p.a. and will be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Notably, National Finance had redeemed its previous issuance of perpetual bonds on the first call date on March 15, 2023 i.e. at the end of 5 years from the date of issuance of March 15, 2018.

Expressing gratitude, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer, National Finance, said: "The successful closure of the transaction reflects the confidence and trust of the investors in National Finance's strong fundamentals.

Our sustainable growth and our market recognition as the premier finance and leasing company in the country has been further bolstered by this successful transaction.

"We welcome our new investors and thank them for being a partner in National Finance's journey of growth and success in Oman."

On the successful completion of this transaction, Khalifa bin Abdullah al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager, Investment Banking and Capital Markets, Bank Muscat, said: "We are pleased to have delivered a sizeable and well-structured transaction in the challenging market conditions with a well-diversified investor base consisting of institutions as well as HNIs.

"This issuance further strengthens our strong track record of successful delivery in the investment banking business underpinned by the strength and experience of the investment banking franchise."

# Finance chiefs optimistic about business growth



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

Financial services bosses are confident about their second-quarter results, according to a survey of more than 150 senior executives, despite the squeeze from inflationary pressures forcing them to cut costs.

An opinion poll commissioned by KPMG found 88 per cent of leaders were “confident” about overall business growth for the period between April and June, ticking up one per cent from its previous survey in January.

A total of 87 per cent had a positive outlook on profitability, a four percentage point boost from January.

Optimism among bankers rose five percentage points to 94 per cent, while confidence among asset and wealth managers fell to 83 per cent from 89 per cent.

Meanwhile 79 per cent of insurance executives were confident on the next quarter.

Financial services firms continue to feel squeezed by interest rates being at a 16-year high and inflationary pressures that have pushed up operational costs forcing them to make cost-cutting plans.

Nearly 40 per cent of leaders named cost pressures as the biggest challenge facing their business in the coming quarter, followed by inflationary pressures and borrowing costs.

More than a third of leaders planned to reduce costs through reviewing suppliers (37 per cent) and generative AI (35 per cent).

Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) planned to make savings by cutting jobs and reigning in hiring, altering their real estate footprints and reviewing staff pay.

Global and UK head of financial services at KPMG, Karim Haji, said: “While financial services leaders are keeping an optimistic outlook, they do so

with caution as costs are still a concern, and the sector continues to eye up savings in response to economic pressures.”

There is, however, some concern as manufacturers are facing the prospect of two years of “anaemic growth”, research suggests.

Make UK said latest forecasts indicate the sector will remain “flat” this year and grow by just half the rate of the economy in 2025.

Its survey of more than 300 companies also found orders are “consistent but subdued” while recruitment and investment plans are fairly strong.

Firms in electronics, aerospace and food and drink are more optimistic, while the South East and Wales are said to be performing substantially better than other regions.

According to Make Up, these are becoming permanent, with the strong performance of

manufacturing in the South East yet further evidence that levelling up is “failing to address” regional economic imbalance.

Senior economist at Make UP, Fhaheen Khan, said: “While manufacturers’ own confidence remains robust, the overall prospects for the sector are weak for the foreseeable future.

“While there are clearly external factors at play, the UK economy has a fundamental growth problem which a business-as-usual policy process simply will not address.

The next government of whatever colour must address this fundamental problem as a matter of national urgency, beginning with a long-term industrial strategy which will really shift the dial on the UK economic performance.”

Head of manufacturing at BDO, which helped with the report, Richard Austin, added: “Manufacturers have continued

to show their ability to overcome wave after wave of challenges, but they cannot continue to do this indefinitely without some more long-term support from the Government.

“We have reached a tipping point where the ramifications of regional disparity may permanently affect the manufacturing sector, which could hamper future growth.”

The end of 2023 was marked by a downturn, with UK manufacturing falling into a deeper contraction.

Director at S&P Global Market Intelligence, Rob Dobson, said: “UK manufacturing output contracted at an increased rate at the end of 2023.

“The demand backdrop remains frosty, with new orders sinking further as conditions remain tough in both the domestic market and in key export markets, notably the EU,” he added.

# Poor nations are writing a new handbook for getting rich



PATRICIA COHEN

The author is a global economics correspondent for The New York Times based in London.

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

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

The Asian Tigers and China succeeded by combining vast pools of cheap labour with access to international know-how and financing, and buyers that reached from Kalamazoo to Kuala Lumpur.

Governments provided the scaffolding: They built up roads and schools, offered business-friendly rules and incentives, developed capable administrative institutions and nurtured incipient industries.

But technology is advancing, supply chains are shifting, and political tensions are reshaping trade patterns. And with that, doubts are growing about whether industrialisation can still deliver the miracle growth it once did.

For developing countries, which contain 85 per cent of the globe’s population — 6.8 billion people — the implications are profound.

Today, manufacturing accounts for a smaller share of the world’s output, and China already does more than one-third of it. At the same time, more emerging countries are selling inexpensive goods abroad, increasing competition.

There are not as many gains to be squeezed out: Not everyone can be a net exporter or offer the world’s lowest wages and overhead.

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

THE RECIPE – CUSTOMISED IN VARYING WAYS BY HONG KONG, SINGAPORE, SOUTH KOREA, TAIWAN AND CHINA – HAS PRODUCED THE MOST POTENT ENGINE THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN FOR GENERATING ECONOMIC GROWTH. IT HAS HELPED LIFT HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY, CREATE JOBS AND RAISE STANDARDS OF LIVING



Workers are seen at a garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The country is facing challenges with automation, which is affecting employment opportunities. – NYT

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

The process can be seen in Bangladesh, which the World Bank’s managing director called “one of the world’s greatest development stories” last year. The country built its success on turning farmers into textile workers.

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

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

These workers don’t have training, she said. “They’re not going to turn into coders overnight.” Recent global developments have accelerated the transition. Supply chain meltdowns related to the Covid-19 pandemic and to

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this new era, Rodrik said, “the industrialisation model — which practically every country that has become rich has relied on — is no longer capable of generating rapid and sustained economic growth.”

Nor is it clear what might

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

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

Such centres are expected to generate 500,000 jobs nationwide in the next two to three years, according to the consulting firm Deloitte.

They are joining hundreds of biotech, engineering and information technology companies including homegrown giants like Tata Consultancy Services, Wipro and Infosys Limited. Four months ago, the American chip company AMD unveiled its largest global design centre there.

“We have to move away from the idea of classic development stages, that you go from the farm to the factory and then from the factory to offices,” said Richard Baldwin, an economist at the International Institute for Management Development

in Geneva. “That whole development model is wrong.”

Two-thirds of the world’s output now comes from the service sector — a mishmash that includes dog walkers, manicurists, food preparers, cleaners and drivers, as well as highly trained chip designers, graphic artists, nurses, engineers and accountants.

It is possible to leapfrog to the service sector and grow by selling to businesses around the world, Baldwin argued.

That is what helped India become the world’s fifth-largest economy.

In Bengaluru, formerly known as Bangalore, a general rise in middle-class living attracted more people and more businesses that, in turn, attracted more people and businesses, continuing the cycle, Baldwin explained.

Covid sped this transition, by forcing people to work remotely — from a different part of town, a different city or a different country.

In the new model, countries can focus growth around cities rather than a particular industry. “That creates economic activities which are fairly diverse,” Baldwin said.— **The New York Times**

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## HADITH

GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Anas and Abu Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with both of them, reported that the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, said:

"None of you will attain perfect faith until I am more beloved to him than his child, his parent, and all people".

## FATWA



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HAMAD AL KHALILI  
GRAND MUFTI OF OMAN

An elderly sick, who is very poor, couldn't fast in the past two years and he is not able to feed others to compensate his lost fasting days during Ramadhan. What should he do?

If he cannot feed people because of certain inability, Allah will forgive him. "Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear". (Surat Al Baqarah/verse 286)

## QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

When there comes God's victory, and conquest. And you see the people entering God's religion in multitudes. Then celebrate the praise of your Lord, and seek His forgiveness. He is the Acceptor of Repentance.

(An-Nasr)



# Ramadhan

WEDNESDAY

APRIL 3, 2024

RAMADHAN 23, 1445 AH



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## MASS IFTARS REFLECT SPIRIT OF BROTHERHOOD

By Kabeer Yousef  
@kabeeryousef

While the social iftars organised by various public and private entities and individuals across the country are gaining much popularity, iftars organised by the labourers for the labourers are proving to be testimonies of brotherliness and solidarity between human beings as the holy month enters its

like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and many more, who are hosted by the highly hospitable Omanis.

Recently, Rusayl Industrial Area, as well as the largest fruits and vegetable market, Central Market, witnessed two of the largest iftars in the country, and they stood out for the participation of a number of labourers, workers, and blue-collar workers who joined the rest of the society in celebrating the holy month.



third and final phase.

On any given day, one can witness a plethora of social iftars across the country where people from diverse backgrounds sit shoulder to shoulder in unanimity and harmony, awaiting the call for prayers to break their fasting with their brothers and sisters at smaller congregations and tents across the breadth and width of the country, which are real testimonies of a united world as the feeling of hunger binds them together.

The iftar gatherings hosted by various organisations in the Sultanate of Oman give a whiff of bonhomie among the believers from different countries

Organised by Suhul al Fayha, the iftar was a gathering of the labourers from the Mawaleh Fruits and Vegetables Market. Organised at the huge warehouse in Mawaleh, the iftar witnessed nearly 3,000 people from different backgrounds and nationalities under one roof and is noted for its immaculate and flawless coordination.

"Our annual iftar on Friday was marked for its variety of participants from Asia to the Far East and from CEO to labourers under one roof as Islam stipulates unity among diversities in front of Allah Almighty," Abdul Wahab, MD of Suhul al Fayha, said.

The second one, the Kannur

Konnnect iftar, organised by like-minded people who are driven by goals of mutual support for members at times of need, the iftar witnessed nearly 600 industrial workers, employees specialised in scrap and automotive repairing, as well as people doing odd jobs at the Rusayl Industrial Area on Saturday.

"The iftar was a perfect amalgamation of people from across the world but who were working in the industrial area," said Rekha Prem, Chief Coordinator of the mass iftar.

They say Ramadhan brings in a whiff of love, harmony and unity among diversity, and with the Ramadhan fasting progressing to the culmination by next week, the days of bolstering humanitarian chords, loving each other, caring for each other, and feeling the pangs of hunger and abstinence from material pleasures are making humans united, and that is Ramadhan.

The Muttrah Souq iftar:

The daily social iftar conducted by the shopkeepers and workers of the traditional Muttrah Souq remains a hope for those who visit Muttrah for tourism as well as business needs, and the regular iftar is an epitome of perfect coordination and sacrifice of many youngsters.



"We have been catering to hundreds of passersby every day with dates, water, juice, laban, and the like for more than two decades now. All these are possible with the support of the traders and other small-scale vendors inside the souq," Abdul Latheef, a volunteer at the Muttrah Souq, told the Observer.

The workers of the souq organise and supply iftar kits, comprising dates, fruits, and laban, as well as the suhoor food, a major food comprising biryani and other dinner varieties, on a daily basis to the passersby as well as to the labourers of Muttrah Souq.

### ENTERTAINMENT

## 'Godzilla x Kong' tops N America box office with \$80m haul

"GODZILLA X KONG: The New Empire" roared to the top of the North American box office on its debut weekend, pulverising competition with a huge \$80

million haul in ticket sales, according to industry watcher Exhibitor Relations.

"The final numbers may change by Monday, but whatever they are, this is a fantastic opening," analyst David A Gross said, with ticket sales 2.5 times the average for a sequel to a monster flick.

The enormous gorilla and reptilian giant set their differences aside in the movie, teaming up to save their species and humans in the latest MonsterVerse installment.

In second place with an estimated \$15.7 million was "Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire," co-written by Jason Reitman, whose father Ivan Reitman directed the original "Ghostbusters" in 1984.

The film teams a new cadre of ghost catchers (Paul Rudd, Carrie Coon) with the veterans (Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Ernie Hudson) as they take on a fright-



ening deity trying to launch a new Ice Age.

Meanwhile, Warner Bros.' sci-fi epic "Dune: Part Two," about war and survival on an inhospitable sand-covered planet, managed third place, taking in an estimated \$11.1 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period.

In fourth, dropping one spot from last weekend, was Universal and DreamWorks Animation's martial arts comedy "Kung Fu Panda 4," at \$10.2 million.

"Immaculate," a new psychological horror film from indie studio Neon and starring Sydney Sweeney, placed fifth at \$3.3 million.

Rounding out the top 10 were: "Tillu Square" (\$2.5 million) "Arthur the King" (\$2.4 million) "Late Night With the Devil" (\$2.2 million) "Crew" (\$1.7 million) "Imaginary" (\$1.4 million). — AFP

## HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF MUSLIM FAITH

644 - 656

Uthman ibn 'Affan succeeds Umar to become the third caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate.

Uthman ibn 'Affan's succession to become the third caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate marked a significant period of expansion and consolidation for Muslims. His reign saw the compilation of the Quran into a standardised text and the establishment of administrative structures. Uthman's era remains crucial for its contributions to Islamic governance, scriptural preservation, and the shaping of early Islamic history.

## DOS & DONTs: ETIQUETTE GUIDE DURING THE HOLY MONTH

### SEEK LAYLAT AL-QADR

Make extra effort to seek Laylat al-Qadr (the Night of Decree) which falls in one of the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadhan. It is a night of great significance and worship on this night is equivalent to worshipping for a thousand months.

## RAMADHAN AROUND THE WORLD

### MALAYSIA



Islam arrived in Malaysia in the 13th century through Arab traders. The faith spread gradually, with the Malacca Sultanate adopting Islam as the state religion in the 15th century. During British colonial rule, Islam continued to flourish, and upon gaining independence in 1957, Malaysia became a predominantly Muslim nation.

Today, Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, with approximately 61.3 per cent of the population identifying as Muslim.

Ramadhan, the holiest month in Islam, holds significant importance in Malaysia. It is a time of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community. One of the most important traditions is the Taraweeh prayers, performed every night during Ramadhan.

During Iftar, Malaysians enjoy a variety of traditional dishes, including Bubur Lambuk (rice porridge), Nasi Lemak (fragrant rice cooked in coconut milk), Rendang (spicy beef stew), Ayam Percik (grilled chicken with spicy coconut gravy), and various types of kuih (sweet snacks). Dates and water are typically the first items consumed to break the fast, following the tradition of Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him.

## RAMADHAN TRIVIA

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE HOLY MONTH

HOW MANY RAKAT ARE TYPICALLY PRAYED DURING THE SPECIAL NIGHT PRAYERS IN THE LAST 10 DAYS OF RAMADAN?

Answer to previous trivia: Laylat al-Qadr



## AL SUBHI AND EL HELBAWY WRAP UP NIGHTS OF CHANTING AT ROHM



KHALID AL BALUSHI  
@KHALID\_ALBALUSHI

In an atmosphere filled with spirituality, manifested by the remembrance of Allah and prayers upon the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him, the Royal Opera House Muscat concluded a series of Ramadhan evenings of chanting and praise amidst the presence of Omani, Arab, and foreign audiences.

The Omani chanter Sami al Subhi, accompanied by the Awtar Al Sharq group, delivered three beautiful chanting sessions at the Opera House, with the magnificent chorus singers Obaida al Subhi and the Al Yaarubi brothers, Mohammad and Mutaz, echoing the chants behind the lead chanter, adding nuances and melodies. The enchanting performance was further enhanced by the mesmerising performance of qanun player Wahab al Dhanki, who captivated the audience with his mastery of the instrument's strings at the beginning of each chanting session, accompanied by oud player Nibras al Malahi, nay player Muhannad al Busaidy, and percussionist Naim al Balushi, all contributing to delivering the religious chants to the listeners with a heightened sense of emotion, delighting the audience. Expressing his joy, Sami al Subhi stated, "I am extremely pleased to be present at the Royal Opera House Muscat, which has provided me with the opportunity to present these chanting sessions with my ensemble, Awtar Al Sharq group, and the wonderful group of singers, hoping that we have succeeded in reaching the artistic taste of the audience."

Al Subhi proudly expressed, "This is the first time I stand on the stage of the opera house, feeling proud to stand on this stage where I felt the grandeur of the place, which gave us a sense of responsibility to present our best."

Al Subhi, carefully selected his chants after sitting with the ensemble members, choosing the ones that best suited the spiritual atmosphere of this blessed month.



The renowned Egyptian artist Aly El Helbawy, son of the great chanter Mohammed El Helbawy, along with his ensemble, delighted the local audience, who filled the tickets to listen to his delightful chants praising Allah. His generosity, and praising the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him and his morals and good deeds.

El Helbawi allowed the audience to join him in reciting and applauding in most of his chanting sessions, gaining their trust and declaring the enthusiasm of that night, as the group presented nearly 11 chanting sessions accompanied by the Egyptian chorus Ahmed Abdel Fattah, Zakaria Farag, and Abdullah Ahmed. The audience also enjoyed the performance presented by each musician with their musical instruments during the artistic sessions, starting with qanun player Ragi Kamal, violinist Mahmoud Shehata, percussionists Mustafa Mohammed and Ibrahim Labib, keyboard player Mohammed Helmi, in addition to the most enthusiastic guitarist bass, Ashraf Ehab. The ensemble was also joined by oud player



Bassem Darwish in the last three sessions, who came from Germany to participate with his friends in presenting this performance at the Royal Opera House Muscat.

El Helbawy expressed his happiness at being in Oman, expressing his joy at the invitation from the Royal Opera House Muscat, which allowed him and his friends the opportunity to meet the local audience in the Sultanate of Oman, who appreciates and craves religious chanting. The chanting evenings played a role in cultural exchange, with the participation of Arab and Omani artists, culminating in the participation of talented Omani chanters who presented their chants to the audience with their resonant voices, such as Khalid al Arami, from the historical maritime city of Sur, and the Al Zawiya ensemble, which participated in many religious evenings and special occasions, enlivening some nights during religious occasions such as Ramadhan and the Prophet's birthday, and various religious occasions accompanied by chanting and accompanying remembrance circles.



# MEET THE CULINARY DUO REDEFINING DINING EXPERIENCES AT SHANGRI-LA

BY YERU EBUEEN  
Instagram: @yru\_here

Something exciting is happening at Shangri-La Barr al Jissah as two new faces are joining the leadership team, combining their expertise and innovative approaches to revolutionise the culinary experience at this iconic property. Chef Erick Fettke and Nabil El Nakib, both seasoned professionals in the Middle Eastern hospitality scene, are ready to revitalise the dining experiences at the renowned resort. With years of experience under their belts, including stints in Jordan and various properties in the region, they bring a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm to their roles.

The duo is excited about the vast opportunities presented by Shangri-La Barr al Jissah, which boasts many dining options spread across its expansive property. From signature restaurants to all-day dining outlets, the resort offers something for every palate. Erick and Nabil plan to leverage their expertise to reinvigorate existing concepts while introducing new and innovative ideas to the table.

Their focus on collaboration and fresh perspectives sets them apart, as they aim to work closely together to elevate the dining experience at the resort. With a keen eye on market trends and guest preferences, they plan to breathe new life into the culinary offerings, ensuring both quality and consistency across the board.

One key aspect of their vision is sustainability, a growing movement within the hospitality industry. Erick and Nabil are committed to sourcing locally and supporting Omani suppliers wherever possible, emphasising the use of organic, sustainable ingredients. From seafood to fruits and vegetables, they aim to empower local producers while reducing the resort's environmental footprint.

Additionally, the duo recognises the importance of catering to both international guests and the local market. Striking a balance between showcasing Oman's rich culinary heritage and offering diverse international cuisines is a priority. With a diverse team representing 28 different nationalities, they plan to infuse authenticity and creativity into every dining experience, ensuring a memorable stay for guests from around the globe.

## THE NEW F&B TANDEM TO WATCH OUT

Nabil El Nakib brings a wealth of experience in hospitality management, particularly in food and beverage, honed through prestigious roles at renowned establishments like Marriott International and The Fat Duck Group.

His tenure as the Director of Food and Beverage at the Shangri-La Hotel in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, underscores his exceptional leadership and operational prowess. Nabil's adeptness in combining local and expatriate talent, coupled with his strategic rebranding efforts and revenue-driving initiatives, positions him as a transformative force in Muscat's hospitality industry. His track record of spearheading innovative concepts and achieving culinary excellence makes him an invaluable asset to the food scene.

Complementing Nabil's expertise is Chef Eric Fettke, an accomplished Executive Chef with over 25 years of culinary experience spanning multiple continents. Eric's leadership shines through diverse market segments, showcasing adaptability and a commitment to culinary excellence. With notable achievements including spearheading IHG's Culinary Task Force for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and implementing sustainable farm-to-table practices, Eric's culinary prowess, coupled with his dedication to innovation and operational excellence, makes him an ideal candidate to deliver exceptional dining experiences in Muscat.

Oman Daily Observer sat down with these two culinary giants to understand better what Muscat can look forward to with their new collaboration.

## GOING DIRECTLY TO THE POINT, WHAT CAN OMAN EXPECT FROM YOUR COMING ONTO THE SCENE?

EL NAKIB: Chef Fettke and I, we're very similar in a lot of things, especially in what we want to see. I think it's unique that you get an executive chef and someone in charge of the F&B service at the same time. I think this is exciting. There's a lot of energy and new ideas and it's a great opportunity for us literally to come in together as partners with no preconceptions and build together in terms of new things. I think what we're looking at in terms of the concepts may bring some things back to life. There is a lot of competition in Oman. In terms of direction, our goal is to reinvigorate what's been here. We're

looking into what's working and what's not. We're reviewing the concepts and closely looking at what the market wants and delivering on that.

FETTKE: Coming to Shangri-La, we know that there's a great foundation for us to build up. With two sets of fresh eyes and ideas, we can bring out a lot of good changes not just to the restaurant but the in-room service, amenities and other products. I think the top teams are quite ready to bring in some nice good changes.

You know sustainability is massive at the moment. We have lots of programmes within Shangri-La. We have 'roots in nature' which encourages us to use locally sourced organic sustainable items which we want to bring into our menus and across the board as well.

We're looking into invigorating and energising ourselves and focusing on the strength of our teams. We also want to invigorate and bring back to life some great Omani touches. We want to push a little further, looking at what we have and how we can enhance the overall experience.

## F&B-WISE, WHAT'S THE MOST EXCITING PART FOR YOU ABOUT BEING IN THE MUSCAT PROPERTY?

EL NAKIB: I don't think anyone can offer as much as we can in terms of space, amenities and restaurants, including unique dining setups. The Clifftop dining that we do is phenomenal. You look around this property, and you will see a lot of potential right away. We have so many different landscapes, which means a lot of different opportunities. Creating these unique experiences is something that I'm sure we're going to continue. The possibilities are endless. We've been given this awesome thing, and I think we're going to run with it.

## WITH OMAN VERY CLOSE TO DUBAI AND THE GROWING TREND OF HIGH-END RESTAURANTS COMING TO MUSCAT, IS THERE PRESSURE TO ALSO SET YOUR EYES ON GETTING MICHELIN STARS?

FETTKE: I think my goal is to start with the basics and make sure that the foundation is where it needs to be. Once we create that foundation, then that's when we aspire for things in the future. My focus right now is to make sure we're doing things consistently and

making sure that every day is an elevated experience. I wanted to make sure that there was always something exciting going on — some pop-ups here and there not only attracted the guests to the hotel, but also brought people from the city. And I think that's the reputation that we want.

## HOW ESSENTIAL IS IT FOR YOU TO INTEGRATE ELEMENTS OF LOCAL CULTURE, PARTICULARLY FROM OMAN IN THE FOOD SERVED AT THE PROPERTY?

EL NAKIB: In places like Oman and Saudi Arabia, local markets play a substantial role in the dining and customer experience, whereas the UAE leans heavily towards an international clientele. For guests, especially at this property, there's a genuine interest in experiencing a taste of Oman, showcasing loyalty to local markets and culture. This loyalty is evident during Ramadhan, a bustling period in Middle Eastern hotels, where locals consistently seek out traditional foods. Catering to both local and international tastes without overwhelming either group is essential. Achieving this balance involves respecting local culture while meeting the diverse expectations of guests, which is a challenge we're actively addressing. With a team representing 28 different nationalities, there's immense potential to merge cultural elements creatively, catering to both internal and external markets.

## BEING YOUR FIRST TIME WORKING IN OMAN, WHAT IS YOUR IMPRESSION OF THE COUNTRY SO FAR?

FETTKE: Oman has always been on my bucket list ever since I came to the Middle East. I think my mother had some influence on that for some reason. She always had been very fond of Late Sultan [Qaboos]. The amazing thing is, before even coming here, Oman was the one country where there was nothing negative said about it. When you ask people when you think of moving to another country, you will have sort of average idea whether it's good or bad. This is the first country I've ever looked at where everyone has said, you know, you'd be stupid not to go. I keep hearing about good quality of life. Sure you have to drive a little bit because the city is quite long but if that's the worst of it, you know, it's great. I've only seen the hotel so far being here for the last two weeks but I'm looking forward to checking the country out eventually.

## Brussels seeks UNESCO heritage mark for puppetry, flower carpet



**BRUSSELS IS LOOKING** to protect two of its historical traditions: rod puppetry and a 1,680-square-metre flower carpet rolled out every second year in front of the Belgian capital's city hall, by granting them the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage status.

"Those two things are really part of our heritage, of our identity, they're part of our folklore, and we want to make sure they are preserved for the future," said the city's state secretary for heritage, Ans Persoons.

"When we think of protecting the past it should not only be about bricks and architecture, but it should also be about our traditions and our culture."



Following the filings, UNESCO designations might follow in December, 2025.

Nicolas Geal, whose family theatre is the only Brussels venue keeping the centuries-old tradition of rod puppetry alive, said the UNESCO listing might save the art form from oblivion.

"This way, maybe some other people will start new initiatives," said Geal, speaking in his Theatre Toone, which sits in Brussels' historical centre and features several shows a week, its repertoire ranging from Dracula to Faust.



The rod puppetry tradition originates from travelling carnival theatres in the Renaissance and was widely popular during the 19th century. Nowadays, puppeteers concealed behind a screen bring puppets to life during shows by pulling their rods.

Just a stone's throw away is the city's famed historic main square, or Grand Place, the setting for the biennale flower carpet tradition that attracts some 200,000 spectators each time.

Brussels laid its first flower carpet — a scented display that tracks its origins to Mediterranean countries in the 14th century — some 50 years ago. The next one is due in August, with around half a million begonias or dahlias for the design. — Reuters