

Biden signs spending bill

US President Joe Biden on Saturday signed a spending bill that averted a partial government shutdown, the White House said in a statement. Biden acted after the US Senate on Friday approved spending legislation for several government agencies just hours before current funding was due to expire. Earlier, Senate narrowly averted a partial government shutdown on Friday, as the chamber approved spending legislation for several government agencies just hours before current funding was due to expire.



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FERNANDES, RASHFORD PENALTIES GIVE MAN UTD 2-0 WIN OVER EVERTON



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SALALAH PORT A STRATEGIC HUB FOR RED SEA LOGISTICS CHALLENGES: EXPERT



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THE COSMIC AND ARTISTIC INSPIRATIONS BEHIND VENUS WORLD



MUSCAT

4 FIRMS TO PROVIDE E-INSURANCE

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has approved four companies to provide integrated insurance services electronically through various platforms. These companies are Arabia Falcon Insurance Company, Gulf Insurance Group, Integrated Solution Insurance Broker and Insurance House. The CMA said that the approval of these platforms came after studying and analysing their requests and ensuring that they fulfil all the requirements in the regulation regulating electronic insurance operations, which was approved in the last quarter of 2023. **DETAILS ON P5**

MARITIME HERITAGE FESTIVAL CONCLUDES

The activities of the Maritime Heritage Festival, organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism from February 25 to March 8, concluded on Saturday in the Wilayat of Sur in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. The festival, which was held in conjunction with the selection of Sur as the Arab Tourism Capital 2024, included heritage, cultural, artistic, social, sporting and entertainment activities aimed at highlighting the maritime historical role of the wilayat in the past and in the present, and promoting the tourism components that characterise the Arab Tourism Capital. **DETAILS ON P5**

ISLAMABAD

ZARDARI IS NEW PAKISTAN PRESIDENT



Pakistan's former president Asif Ali Zardari won a second term on Saturday, supported by the ruling coalition in a vote by parliament and regional assemblies, the election presiding officer said. As president, Zardari will also be the supreme commander of the country's armed forces. Presiding officer Justice Amir Farooq announced the winner in a live TV broadcast. Zardari got 411 votes, easily defeating the 181 votes cast for nationalist leader Mehmood Khan Achakzai. **DETAILS ON P7**

RAMADHAN MOON SIGHTING COMMITTEE MEETS TODAY



The main committee for the sighting of Ramadhan crescent for the year 1445 AH will convene on Sunday at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, will preside over the meeting. The ministry urged citizens and residents to take part in the moon sighting in cooperation with the field teams in the wilayats or to keep in touch with the subcommittees at the walis' offices. — **ONA**

Oman welcomes UN Security Council resolution on Sudan

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the Security Council's adoption of a majority resolution calling for a cessation of hostilities in the brotherly Republic of the Sudan, considering it an important resolution and a crucial step towards achieving stability and peace in Sudan.

In a statement issued on Saturday, the Foreign Ministry stressed the importance of dialogue and

a political solution as a means of ending conflicts and fostering national unity in Sudan in order to achieve peace and stability for the brotherly Sudanese people.

The United Nations Security Council on Friday called for a ceasefire in Sudan to coincide with the holy month of Ramadhan as conditions in the country continue to deteriorate.

Fourteen countries backed the

resolution, proposed by Britain, with only Russia abstaining on the vote that called on "all parties to the conflict to seek a sustainable resolution to the conflict through dialogue."

Fighting has been raging in Sudan since April 15, 2023, pitting the army of General Abdel Fattah al Burhan against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of General Mohamed Hamdan

Daglo, the former number two in the military establishment. It has left thousands dead and millions displaced. The text seen called on all sides to adopt an immediate "cessation of hostilities" ahead of Ramadhan.

It also calls on the warring parties to allow "unhindered" humanitarian access across borders and battle lines.

Sudan's ambassador to the UN

said Burhan had welcomed the initiative, but questioned how a ceasefire could be enforced should RSF forces continue to attack "civilian" areas.

At a Security Council meeting on Thursday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for "all parties in Sudan to honour the values of Ramadhan by honouring a cessation of hostilities."

— **Agencies**

DO NOT CROSS WADIS AND LOW-LYING AREAS

HEAVY RAINS REPORTED IN MANY WILAYATS

CLASSES SUSPENDED IN 4 GOVERNORATES

9 CENTRES ACTIVATED AND 138 EVACUATED

CAA issues heavy rain alert

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi, South Al Batinah, North Al Batinah, Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, North Al Sharqiyah, South Al Sharqiyah, and Musandam will experience heavy rains and strong winds on Sunday. At the time of going to print, heavy rains are lashing parts of Muscat.

The CAA advised all to take precautions during thundershowers and heavy rain. It also urged people not to cross wadis, avoid low-lying areas and not venture into the sea during the heavy rains.

Classes will be suspended in all public, private and foreign schools in the governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South on Sunday and will resume on Monday. The latest radar images indicate Muscat is expected to receive rains on Saturday night and Sunday morning.

"There are certain factors why we are seeing the amount of rainfall in certain areas. There



Heavy rains are reported from various governorates.

is a band of cloud in the affected areas especially from Al Hajar Mountains and the southern part of Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi, Al Dakhiliyah and other governorates," said the meteorologist at the Civil Aviation Authority.

Abdullah bin Rashid al

Khaduri, Director-General of Meteorology at the Civil Aviation Authority, said, "The Civil Aviation Authority, represented by the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre, continues to follow up on all updates and developments

in this weather condition."

He said that there is a delay in the rainfall, which was expected to begin on Saturday morning, stressing that updates to numerical models and analysis still indicate that the amount of rain expected could range from 30

to 150 mm, as it will lead to the flow of wadis.

The National Emergency Management Committee and its subcommittees in the governorates are closely monitoring the developments of the weather condition in Oman. **TURN TO P3**

Aid boat readied as Gaza fighting rages

GAZA STRIP: A boat laden with food for Palestinians in war-ravaged Gaza was 'ready' to set sail from Cyprus, an NGO said on Saturday, as fighting raged ahead of Ramadhan. The sea route aims to counter aid access restrictions, which humanitarians and foreign governments have blamed on Israel, more than five months into the war which has left Gaza's 2.4 million people struggling to survive. The United Nations has repeatedly warned of looming famine, particularly in the Palestinian territory's north where no overland border crossings are open.

Spanish charity Open Arms said its boat, which docked three weeks ago in Cyprus's



The Open Arms vessel, carrying 200 tonnes of food aid to Gaza, is seen docked in the Cypriot port of Larnaca on Saturday. — **AFP**

Larnaca port, "will be ready" to embark later on Saturday but awaits final authorisation. It would be the first shipment along a maritime corridor from Cyprus — the closest European Union country to Gaza — that the EU Commission hopes will open on Sunday.

Open Arms spokeswoman Laura Lanuza said that Israeli authorities, which have welcomed the Cypriot sea corridor initiative, were inspecting the cargo of "200 tonnes of basic foodstuffs, rice and flour, cans of tuna". US charity World Central Kitchen, has teams in the besieged Gaza Strip who were "constructing a dock" to unload the shipment, Lanuza said. **SEE ALSO P6**



Oman gets first genetic lab in private sector

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Marking yet another milestone in the Sultanate of Oman's healthcare sector, the first genetic laboratory in the private sector was opened thanks to the initiative of Dr Saad al Junaibi, founder and chairman of Fosenergy, recently.

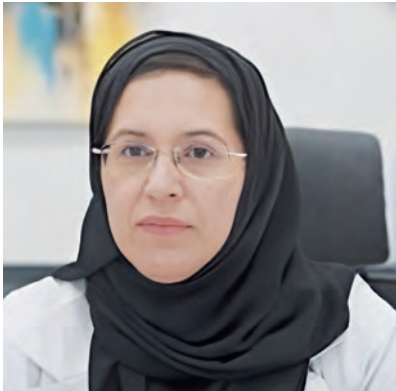
This state-of-the-art facility is expected to revolutionise the landscape of genetic testing in the country by eliminating the need to send samples abroad.

Bion Genetic Laboratory is one of the advanced genetic testing centres in the region and



Dr Saad al Junaibi helps Oman to be self-reliant in terms of genetic testing.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Al Junaibi highlighted the significance of the facility for



Dr Abeer al Saegh Oman. "With over 80,000 births every year in Oman, genetic testing plays a crucial role in identifying and managing genetic disorders. With the



Dr Saimak Saber first of its kind laboratory, we committed to supporting the healthcare sector in Oman by providing accurate and reliable genetic testing services,"

The establishment of Bion Genetic Laboratory has been a collaborative effort, with Dr Saimak Saber, Bion Chief Medical Officer and genetic scientist, playing a pivotal role in its development. "Genetic testing can provide valuable insights into an individual's risk of developing certain diseases including sickle cell anaemia. By understanding these genetic predispositions, individuals can take proactive steps to mitigate their risk and lead healthier lives," Dr Saber said. "By making advanced genetic testing services locally available, we are empowering

healthcare providers to make more informed decisions and improving access to cutting-edge medical care for the people of Oman," said Dr Abeer al Saegh of Bion. Genetic tests can help in identifying risks of certain diseases. While genetics can influence disease risk, lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise, and smoking can also play a significant role. Epigenetic changes, influenced by lifestyle and environmental factors, can affect the way genes are expressed and contribute to disease development.

OHRC chairperson meets British Embassy officials

MUSCAT: Prof Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairperson of the Oman Human Rights Commission, met Gillian Oxenheim, Head of the Mission Office at the UK Embassy of Oman.

During the meeting, the commission was introduced, along with its powers, its system, the monitoring mechanism, and receiving complaints related to human rights, in addition to the role that the commission plays in communicating and



coordinating with international organisations concerned with human rights and the human rights awareness and education programmes that are implemented in Oman, targeting

various segments of society. The meeting was attended by Othman Raja of the British Embassy and Shatha al Zadjali, Director of at the Oman Human Rights Commission.

OAA Museum hosts craft exhibition

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, MARCH 9

To promote handcrafts, a two-day exhibition was held at the Oman Across Ages Museum, which concluded on Saturday. About 30 craftspeople and craft organisations from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman displayed their work at the museum premises.

The exhibition was organised by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development. It was opened by Halima al Zari, Head of ASMED, in the presence of Wali of Manah, the Director-General of the Oman Across Ages Museum and the shaikhs of the governorate.

The crafts in the exhibition ranged from palm leaf weaving, wood, natural stones, pottery, textiles, leather, soap making, perfumes and paper making.

The exhibition was accompanied by various workshops on pottery making, and clay sculpting for children. It was also accompanied by traditional music and a dialogue session.

ASMED's Al Zari said: "We are very happy with these events and activities that we held in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, which is considered the destination for entrepreneurship



A woman displays her craft at the expo

in the Sultanate. The week was truly filled with many activities, starting with the entrepreneurship evening, in which we celebrated young and old entrepreneurs. The Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, and especially the Wilayat of Nizwa, is a role model and we learn from them too." She added: "The meeting with the entrepreneurs on the second day was an opportunity to

listen closely to the owners of small and medium enterprises, entrepreneurs about their aspirations and challenges, what they seek, and what improvement we can offer them in services. The exhibition is also an outcome of training programmes. "We are proud of the improvements and development of product design in the craft industries sector in the Sultanate of Oman."

Press Release



GOLDEN TULIP MENA / LOUVRE HOTELS GROUP HAS ANNOUNCED ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL OPENING OF OUR SECOND HOTEL, KYRIAD HOTEL, IN SALALAH, THE CAPITAL CITY OF SOUTHERN OMAN'S DHOFAR REGION.

The hotel will be operated under the Kyriad brand by Golden Tulip MENA, part of the Louvre Hotels Group said Mark Abboud the Cluster General Manager of Kyriad Hotel Salalah and Tulip Inn Majan Hotel Salalah.

The Kyriad Hotel Salalah features 197 tastefully decorated rooms and suites, offering easy access to businesses, shopping, and leisure spots within and around the city. After an exciting day, guests can unwind at our Lobby Library Café, which offers a unique coffee experience blended with an extensive selection of books in Arabic, English, and other languages.

Le Bistro restaurant located at the first floor offers an all-day dining experience with international cuisines complemented by a local touch. Panorama Resto-Café & Shisha on the rooftop provides a mesmerizing mountain view, Abboud added

As an ideal base for business travelers, Kyriad Hotel Salalah offers state-of-the-art meeting and conference facilities equipped with the latest technology. Additionally, there is a Keep-fit Gym on the rooftop with separate sections for ladies and gents. Two separate swimming pools that cater to adults and kids, ensuring a fit lifestyle. Guests can also pamper themselves at the Tulip Spa & Turkish Bath for fitness and rejuvenation.

The spokesperson for the owning company, M/s. Overseas Hotel Management, expressed satisfaction with the successful opening of Tulip Inn Majan Hotel & Suites Salalah a year ago. They have now entrusted Louvre Hotels Group / Golden Tulip MENA to manage the recently opened Kyriad Salalah. The spokesperson emphasized the strategic relationship with Louvre Hotels Group, expressing pride in the association with the Kyriad brand. Louvre Hotels Group's strong presence, experience in the Middle East & North Africa, and worldwide, along with its equity, leadership, and loyalty program, make it their preferred brand.

Amine E. Moukarzel, the President of Golden Tulip MENA/Louvre Hotels Group, expressed delight in adding a second hotel in the strategic capital city of Southern Oman's Dhofar. He highlighted its appeal as a great tourist destination and for MICE planners, emphasizing the strong marketplace. Moukarzel also expressed the group's commitment to Omani ladies and gentlemen, contributing to the Omanization drive. He looks forward to a successful hotel operation and thanked M/s. Overseas Hotel Management for their trust in managing Kyriad Hotel Salalah.

GOLDEN TULIP Louvre Hotels MENA GROUP

UPCOMING HOTELS IN THE REGION

1. Golden Tulip Muscat, Oman
2. Kyriad Prestige Doha, Qatar,
3. Kyriad Prestige Le Patio, Ain Benian, Algeria,
4. Kyriad Bejaia, Algeria,
5. Kyriad Prestige City Center, Tunis, Tunisia
6. Tulip Russikada, Algeria,
7. Golden Tulip President, Hammamet, Tunisia
8. Tulip Tower Makkah, Saudi Arabia
9. Tulip Residence Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia
10. Golden Tulip Umm Ul Qurrah Makkah, Saudi Arabia
11. Tulip Carthage, Tunis, Tunisia
12. Royal Tulip, Algier, Algeria



Louvre Hotels Group is a major player in the global hospitality industry, with a portfolio that now includes about 1,700 hotels in 60 countries.

It has a full hotel offering, spanning 1 star to 5 stars, with the brands: Première Classe, Kyriad, Kyriad Direct, Tulip Inn, Tulip Residences, Campanile, Golden Tulip, Royal Tulip; the 5 brands of the Sarovar network in India and the French Group Hôtels & Préférence. The group also has a distribution agreement with the Barrière Group.

Louvre Hotels Group is a subsidiary of Jin Jiang International Holdings Co., Ltd., the 2nd hospitality group in the world.

Omani extracts biofuel from mushrooms

ABDULLAH AL NASRI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

Zumurrud al Siyabi's project to extract biofuel from mushrooms has won the first prize in the engineering forum held at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat recently.

Her project was among 48 entries from various Arab countries. Al Siyabi stated that the project aims to find clean alternatives to fossil fuels, and to keep the environment free of harmful carbon emissions.

Al Siyabi also clarified that biofuel is an excellent option to reduce carbon emissions and can be used in cars, airplanes and power stations.

Through the experiments she did and the devices she used at the College of Agriculture at Sultan Qaboos University, she found out that the biofuel



extracted from mushrooms matches the international specifications for biofuels. The percentage of fuel extracted and recovered was about 25 per cent.

Al Siyabi said she's currently working on increasing the percentage of fuel extracted using bacteria. The research is also focussing

on developing new fungal strains that help increase the biofuel output.

Al Siyabi said the project will improve biofuel production procedure using more effective and sustainable technology, and expanding the usage of the mushroom as a source for biofuel in various areas such as transportation and energy.



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Wadi Dayqah dam was opened on Friday to release excess water from heavy rains

Stop excavation and outdoor work: MoL

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour in a tweet asked companies and businesses to stop excavation and other outdoor work due to heavy rains and winds in several governorates.

It urged them to stay updated with official weather alerts and ensure employees are informed.

It also issued several guidelines to save lives of workers and property

1. Secure lightweight equipment in outdoor areas.
2. Ensure the security of lifting equipment and cranes.
3. Advise employees to remain indoors and avoid low-lying areas during adverse weather.

4. Consider postponing non-essential driving and work-related trips.

5. Pause all excavation work until weather conditions improve.

6. Temporarily halt operations in outdoor areas.

8. Ensure proper storage and safety measures for chemicals and hazardous materials.

9. Avoid elevated areas and scaffolding during adverse weather.

10. Warn employees against risky behaviour such as crossing wadis.

11. Share emergency contact numbers with employees in case of any emergency.

KHASAB GETS 81 MM OF RAIN IN 24 HOURS

MUSCAT: Rain and strong winds lashed Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Batinah South and Al Batinah North, Al Dhahirah and Al Dakhiliyah on Saturday. Rainfall is likely to continue in these governorates till Sunday.

The wilayats of Khasab and Shinas witnessed heavy thunderstorms.

Khasab recorded 81 mm during the past 24 hours, while Adam received 65 mm of rainfall and Nizwa 32 mm of rainfall.

Motorists travelling towards the UAE (Hatta Border) were urged to exercise caution due to heavy rains.

The Ministry of Social Development has suspended activities in governmental, private, and private rehabilitation centres and nurseries, except in governorates of Al Wusta and Dhofar on Sunday.

The intensity is expected to persist to varying degrees on Sunday. Additionally, the flow



Wilayat of Shinas

and formation of clouds with scattered rainfall are expected in the governorates of Al Wusta and Dhofar. This weather condition is expected to be accompanied by heavy rainfall (30-150), which may lead to flash floods and water

logging.

Strong downdraft winds (15-50) may result in the dispersion of loose materials

Intense hail could cause damage to properties and vehicles. The sea waves are expected to be rough (2-

3m) along most coastlines.

According to the Director General of Oman Meteorology, "There is a delay in the peak of the weather condition, but the northern governorates will continue to be affected by heavy

thunderstorms during the coming hours."

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) urged people to stay away from low lying areas, water bodies, and wadi streams during rain.

The rescue teams in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate were able to rescue a person from a wadi in the Wilayat of Ibra, and he is in good health.

Oman Meteorology said that heavy rain fell on Saturday, ranging from 30 to 150 mm, in Al Buraimi, Musandam, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Sharqiyah South and Al Sharqiyah North, Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South, accompanied by hailstorm.

The Wilayat of Bahla and the villages of Al Dakhiliyah witnessed rainfall ranging from moderate to heavy due to the effects of the low-air depression.

In the wilayat of Al Hamra, heavy to moderate rain was concentrated in Jabal Shams.

CAA issues heavy rain alert

FROM P1

Col Zayed bin Hamad al Junaibi, Head of the National Centre for Emergency Management, said they are following up the weather system. The committee and its subcommittees are also following up on developments in the situation and dealing with its effects.

Hamoud bin Mohammed al Mandhari, coordinator of the relief and shelter sector at the National Emergency Management Committee, said that 203 centres were set up in the governorates that are expected to receive extremely heavy rain of which 9 centres have been activated, and 138 citizens and residents have been evacuated.

Why we are seeing more hailstorms?



Representational Image

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

During the recent thunder showers and low pressure systems experienced in the Sultanate of Oman, hail stones have been an important feature more than ever before as seen in Al Hamra and other wilayats.

Meteorologist, Jaffer bin Hamad al Busaidy, of Civil Aviation Authority, said the current depression will bring in rain storms, strong winds and hailstones.

Replying to the question from

the *Observer* on how and why hailstones occur, "The hailstones occur when droplets inside the cloud go through a dry layer between the cloud and the earth during the stage it freezes and falls down to the land as hail stone. The contributing factors could be dry layers or temperature drop at the top of the cloud as it is drastic."

"It is not the place — land, mountain, sea, or the desert. It is actually the convective clouds or supercell clouds that determine whether we will have a hail storm.

So are we seeing hailstorms more frequently now?

"Yes, this happens when we have more heat in the period between morning and midday and when we have huge convective clouds as experienced in March, April and before arrival of winter and during summer," he pointed out.

Wind driven hail storms can damaging property, especially vehicles. It can even cause severe injury to people and animals. During a hail storm it is best to stay at home and if one is on the road, it has been advised to slow down or stop, because the roads may become slippery and difficult to control.

Togetherness Company announces selling the following lands and properties:

- 1- R/C Land with an area of 2934 m² in Ghala Heights.
- 2- 5 Agricultural plots in Barka, a total area of 84,000 square meters, each plot with an authorized well.
- 3- R/C Building with an area of 1883 square meters in Saham, with a commercial Showroom on it.
- 4- R/C Building with an area of 547 square meters in Buraimi, a building containing 8 shops and 10 apartments
- 5- Residential Plot in the state of Bidayah - area 96,847 square meters.
- 6- Farm with Well & Tourism permit with area 45,000 square meters at Bidayah.
- 7- R/C shops, with an area of 1944 square meters, it includes a market consisting of 19 shops in wilayat bidyah.
- 8- R/C Land with an area of 1044 square meters and an existing Running hotel in the Wilayat of Mahut/Hajj.
- 9- R/C building, with an area of 1,572 square meters, it includes hotel apartments and shops (running condition) in wilayat bidyah.
- 10- R/C Land in Masairah located at centre with area 600m².
- 11- 4 Industrial plots in Duqm, total area 30,000 square meters.
- 12- R/C Land with an area of 750 square meters in Duqm.

Contact at: - +968 92822040, 97365897
www.togethernessrealstate.com



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

As Ramadhan approaches, people have begun their preparations for this holy month. Homes are decked up with decorations, and markets are crowded with shoppers looking for the best deals and discounts on their Ramadhan supplies.

One of the positive aspects of Ramadhan is the increased opportunities for discovering hidden talents and skills. People start exploring their creative sides by engaging in various activities, whether it be cooking, learning, or even returning to hobbies they may have left behind for a while.

Between the sounds of the Fajr prayer and the fragrance of food, Ramadhan encourages people to explore new facets of themselves. Some return to the art of cooking, as families gather around the table to share traditional dishes and recipes. During this holy month, the kitchen becomes a laboratory for discovering various cooking skills that one may not have been aware of before.

Mohsin Ambusaidi, a student studying in the United States, shares his plans and preparations for Ramadhan. He expresses his decision not to order food from restaurants

during this month. He and his colleagues plan to gather to prepare the Iftar meal, where they will share cooking experiences and try new recipes. He says that he always learns new recipes during this month and that in recent years there have been many cooking programmes on television and social media. Watching them encourages him to try the recipes and invite his friends to try them.

PERFECT OPPORTUNITY

With the return of Ramadhan sports competitions, some people find themselves rediscovering their passion for playing and competing. Whether it be football, volleyball, or even padel, this month provides the perfect opportunity to revive the sporting spirit and explore new sporting talents.

Saif al Risi, a volleyball player, says, “The Ramadhan sports atmosphere is always different, as there are many competitions during this month. This encourages us to return to playing sports and overcome challenges.”

Yousef al Salmi, a bodybuilding enthusiast, says, “I always set many goals during Ramadhan. This year, I designed a daily exercise programme for myself and others to encourage each other to persevere and

**THE HOLY
MONTH IS
A GREAT
OPPORTUNITY
TO LOOK
INWARDS,
BUILD
PERSONALITY
AND COME
CLOSER TO
OTHERS**

achieve our goals during the month.” He adds that gyms are always full as many people are looking to lose weight and improve their fitness, and Ramadhan is the best time for that.

Al Salmi points out that Ramadhan can be used to acclimatise the body to harsh conditions, gain strength, and the ability to overcome challenges while maintaining muscle mass, losing fat, and even improving overall health and hormone levels.

During Ramadhan, volunteer work increases among young people in all its forms. Omar al Ameri, a social expert, says, “In Ramadhan, we see a great turnout of young people volunteering and doing good, which is a positive behaviour with great benefits for the volunteer and the community.”

Regarding the benefits of volunteer work for young people, Al Ameri points out that it has many benefits, as it contributes to building the young person’s personality and providing them with various life skills. It also allows them to learn about the reality of society and its needs. This makes their outlook on life more realistic, brings them closer to others, and increases their sense of belonging to their country and community.



Embassy honours health, social workers

MUSCAT: In a tribute to the heroes of healthcare and social welfare, the Embassy of Pakistan in Muscat organised a special event to recognise the invaluable contributions of Pakistani doctors, healthcare and social workers in Oman. The event, held on the eve of Pakistan Day celebrations was the third of a series of gatherings aimed at celebrating the spirit of solidarity and service.

Rudaina bint Amur al Hajriyah, the chief guest at the event, distributed certificates among the awardees. Abdul Latheef Uppala, member BoD of OCCI and owner of Badr As Sama Group, and Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Ajmi were the guests of honour at the event.

The event was well attended by diplomats, community leaders and Pakistanis from all walks of life.

The doctors who were recognised had served in Oman with compassion for several years. They are the healers



Rudaina bint Amur al Hajriyah, the chief guest at the event, distributed certificates among the awardees.

of humanity who had specifically exhibited great commitment during the difficult times of pandemic and were the frontline warriors. Their service touched countless lives embodying the finest traditions of the medical profession.

Around twenty five social workers of Pakistani community from all across Oman were recognised in the event and awarded certificates. These community leaders are the helping hands of the Embassy is supporting the much needed community service



all across Oman.

Imran Ali, Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman, expressed admiration at the remarkable contributions made by the awardees.

He reaffirmed the Embassy's unwavering commitment to support

and empower Pakistani professionals in Oman.

The gathering was enthralled by heart touching performances of children of Pakistan Schools depicting the culture and arts of different regions of Pakistan.

CMA approves four firms to provide e-insurance

MUSCAT: The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has approved four companies to provide integrated insurance services online through approved platforms.

These companies are Arabia Falcon Insurance Company, Gulf Insurance Group, Integrated Solution Insurance Broker and Insurance House.

CMA said that the approval of these platforms came after studying and analysing their requests and ensuring that they fulfil all the requirements in the regulation regulating electronic insurance operations, which was approved in the last quarter of 2023.

It represents a regulatory and legislative framework for providing digital insurance services in the Sultanate of Oman, and the regulation obligates every insurance company to establish its electronic platform concerned with providing integrated digital insurance services and allowing insurance broker offices to create an electronic platform to provide licensed services.

CMA said the insurance services provided by electronic platforms include selling insurance policies, marketing products, collecting premiums, managing claims, submitting complaints, and following them up through an electronic digital platform, whether through websites or smartphone applications.

ISC's Rangrez Group holds art exhibition today



MUSCAT: The Indian Social Club Oman's (ISC) Rangrez Group is organising an art exhibition, titled 'Bioscope Reimagined Posters', commemorating 100 years of cinema.

The event will be held on Sunday, at Platinum Hall, 3rd floor, Oman Avenues Mall, Muscat.

Reena Jain, First Secretary (Culture), Embassy of India, and Dr Humaid bin Said al Ameri, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Film Society will be the guest of honour for the evening.

The 'Bioscope Reimagined Posters' exhibition is a celebration of artistic interpretation and pays homage to the rich history of cinema.

Featuring a stunning collection of reimagined posters from iconic films spanning the past century, this exhibition promises to be a captivating journey through the evolution of visual storytelling.

The programme is scheduled at 7.30 pm and the invitees are requested to be seated by 7 pm to celebrate cinematic artistry at the 'Bioscope Reimagined Posters' exhibition. For details, kindly get in touch with Shalini Kartik on GSM 95143267.

'Pillows with a Purpose' to raise funds for OCA

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Ever thought of what happened to the unused materials for face masks which got piled up in factories post Covid-19 pandemic? A high school student in Muscat has initiated a project to make use of these materials to make pillows and raise funds for the Oman Cancer Association (OCA).

Named 'Pillows With Purpose', this initiative is committed to repurposing unused materials from a mask factory for a noble cause, in partnership with the Oman Cancer Association.

Supported by Hospitalshop. Com, this initiative embodies the spirit of youth-driven change. And by repurposing these materials, the carbon footprint



can be reduced while promoting a sustainable, circular economy. Each product showcases the beauty of creativity and sustainability, demonstrating the potential for change through innovation.

Taking surplus materials from Al Farsi Medical Supplies, these unused resources are given a new lease on life as comfortable cushions and pillows.

"By upcycling these materials, we prevent tons of waste from reaching landfills, reducing the environmental impact. By using our cushions and pillows, you become an ambassador for our mission, spreading awareness about upcycling and environmental preservation," according to the innovators.

Every purchase inspires conversations about the power of repurposing and its positive impact on our planet.

What makes this all the more humane is the fact that the funds collected through the pillows will be handed over for a noble cause as all profits from the sales support those affected by cancer.

By choosing these products, one is assured of directly

contributing to a meaningful cause that enriches lives.

"The Oman Cancer Association's mission is centred on early detection, prevention, and offering support to cancer patients and their families. Your contribution aids in our tireless work towards a healthier and happier society, with a focus on cancer awareness and prevention," a statement from Oman Cancer Association said.

Pillows With Purpose actively engages the youth of Oman in leadership roles, instilling values of environmental responsibility, charity, and social impact.

The initiative aims to be an example of youth-led movements making a significant difference in the community, inspiring the next generation of change-makers.

Ministry of Education organises training on drone technology

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 10

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development - Department of Educational Technologies, in cooperation with the Ibn Firnas Drone Center, concluded the "Drones Technology Event" in Muscat, last week. Over 100 people took part in this event, which is part of the National Science Week.

The two-day event including presentations and practical workshops on multiple topics



The two-day event including presentations and practical workshops on multiple topics of drone technology

of drone technology, its integration with school curricula, encouraging innovation, and providing opportunities for

training and practical application for specialists in partnership with relevant institutions and bodies, in addition to ensuring safety

and compliance with the laws and legislation regulating drone activity in the Sultanate of Oman.

The second day of the event included a discussion aimed to reach the best methods for adopting drone technology in the educational system, and to come up with practical recommendations for how students can establish it and prepare them for the future when they join higher education or when they engage in the labour market and entrepreneurship.

In addition, the session aimed to contribute in identifying the basic requirements and capabilities through which the

adoption of drone technology can be developed and facilitated in various sectors, including education.

The Ibn Firnas Center carried out a workshop on programming drones using Block and Python.

This was followed by a workshop on types of drones with advanced capabilities were presented, which is used in many scientific, practical, and military fields, in addition to presenting the most prominent examples and results carried out by the company for the benefit of many companies and institutions in the government sector.



Sur Maritime Festival concludes

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 10

The Sur Maritime Heritage Festival concluded on Friday due to rains and strong winds. The decision was taken by the organisers after consultations with the National Committee for Emergency Management's subcommittee in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate to ensure public safety.

The organising company has been told to withdraw all materials, tools

and games equipment from the festival area.

The Maritime Heritage Festival in the Wilayat of Sur in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate attracted large numbers of visitors and tourists as it included activities such as windsurfing, sailing, fishing competition, symposium, traditional boat race, traditional games and sports, in addition to a kite flying.

Tourists to the wilayat also visited Sunaysila Fort, the old market, the

lighthouse, the Al Rayyan Museum, the dhow Factory, the Fatah Al Khair Centre, and the archaeological city of Qalhat, among others.

Visitors also enjoyed the food carnival, which allowed visitors to explore most Omani and international dishes, with a focus on fresh seafood, in addition to the activities of the marine heritage village, through which the visitor learned about the maritime heritage of Sur.

Israel strikes residential tower in Rafah

RAFAH: Israel struck one of the largest residential towers in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Saturday, residents said, stepping up pressure on the last area of the enclave it has not yet invaded and where over a million displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

The 12-floor building, located some 500 metres from the border with Egypt, was damaged in the strike. Dozens of families were made homeless though no casualties were reported, according to residents. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the incident.

One of the tower's 300 residents said that Israel gave them a 30-minute warning to flee the building at night.

"People were startled, running down the stairs, some fell, it was chaos. People left their belongings and money," said Mohammad al Nabrees, adding that among those who tripped down the stairs during the panicked evacuation was a friend's pregnant wife.

A Rafah-based official with the Fatah party, which dominates the Palestinian Authority, said he feared that hitting the Rafah tower was a sign of an imminent Israeli invasion.

Five months into Israel's unrelenting air and ground assault on Gaza, health authorities said nearly 31,000 Palestinians had been killed, over 72,500 were wounded and thousands were trapped under rubble.



Palestinians gather near a building damaged in an Israeli air strike, in Rafah. — Reuters

The 12-floor building, located some 500 metres from the border with Egypt, was damaged in the strike. Dozens of families were made homeless

The offensive has plunged the Palestinian territory, already reeling from a 17-year Israel-led blockade, into a humanitarian catastrophe. Much of it has been reduced to rubble and most of the

2.3 million population have been displaced, with the UN warning of disease and starvation.

Three Palestinian children died of dehydration and malnutrition at the northern Al Shifa Hospital

overnight, said Gaza health ministry spokesman Ashraf al Qidra. Qidra said this raised to 23 the number of Palestinians who had died of similar causes in nearly 10 days.

In a statement summarising its operations in Gaza over the past day, the Israeli military said it conducted arrests, located weapons and killed over 30 Palestinians in Khan Younis in central Gaza and in the area of

Beit Hanoun in the north.

Gaza's health ministry said at least 82 people were killed in Israeli attacks across the Gaza Strip in the last day. In Khan Younis, medics said at least 23 people were killed in military raids on homes and in Israeli shelling of a housing project in the Hamad area of the city. In the northern Gaza Strip, Israeli fire killed a Palestinian fisherman along the beach, medics said. — **Reuters**

Aid boat readied to sail from Cyprus before Ramadhan

GAZA: A boat carrying desperately needed aid for war-ravaged Gaza, where the UN has repeatedly warned of famine, prepared to sail from Cyprus as deadly fighting raged on Saturday between Israeli troops and Palestinians ahead of Ramadhan.

The sea route aims to counter access restrictions, which humanitarians and Western governments have blamed on Israel, more than five months into the war which has left Gaza's 2.4 million people struggling to survive, particularly in the Palestinian territory's north.

A US charity, World Central Kitchen, said it was loading aid onto a boat in Cyprus — the



Humanitarian aid for Gaza is loaded onto a platform next to a Spanish NGO Open Arms rescue vessel, at the port of Larnaca, Cyprus. — Reuters

closest European Union country to Gaza — in the first shipment along a maritime corridor the EU Commission hopes will open on Sunday.

"Our tugboat stands prepared to embark at a moment's notice," said Open Arms, an NGO partner in the effort.

With ground access limited, countries have also turned to airdrops of aid. Canada became the latest to say it would join such missions.

The health ministry in Gaza said three more children had died from malnutrition and dehydration, with the total of such deaths now 23.

Another 82 people were killed

in strikes over the previous day, the ministry said, bringing the number of fatalities in Israel's bombardment and ground offensive of Gaza to 30,960, mostly women and children.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has warned that the volume of aid that can be delivered by sea will do little if anything to stave off famine in Gaza.

Still, the aid vessel was preparing in the Cypriot port of Larnaca.

"World Central Kitchen teams are in Cyprus loading pallets of humanitarian aid onto a boat headed to northern Gaza," it said in a statement. — **AFP**

Biden's port for Gaza might not be ready for 60 days

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden's plan to build a floating US military port to speed up aid to Gaza could take up to 60 days to become a reality and involve more than 1,000 American troops, the Pentagon said.

The Pentagon offered the timeline a day after Biden announced the initiative in his State of the Union speech.

The United Nations has warned that widespread famine in the Gaza Strip is "almost inevitable" without urgent action. A formal conclusion that famine has arrived in the coastal enclave of 2.3 million people could come next week. The UN has said that once famine is declared, it is too late to help many people.

"Children in Gaza cannot wait to eat. They are already dying from malnutrition and saving their lives is a matter of hours or days — not weeks," said Jason Lee at Save the Children.

Some US lawmakers and aid organisations said the floating pier system masked the bigger issue: the failure to get Israel's government to allow more aid to enter Gaza by land, which is the fastest, most efficient option.

"This is not a logistics problem; it is a political problem," said Avril Benoît, executive director for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) in the United States.

"Rather than look to the US military to build a work-around, the US should insist on immediate humanitarian access using the roads and entry points that already exist."

Air Force Major General Patrick Ryder, the Pentagon's chief spokesperson, described the planning for the port system as still in its early stages, with deployment orders just starting to go out to those troops who will head to the Middle East.

The Pentagon said it had also not yet determined how the landing site for the floating port system would be secured against any threats and said it was in discussions with partners. — **Reuters**

Gaza war has 'ruptured any sense of a shared humanity': ICRC

GENEVA: The war in Gaza has "ruptured any sense of a shared humanity," the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross said on Saturday.

ICRC head Mirjana Spoljaric called for an urgent ceasefire in Gaza, saying warring sides must respect international law and protect civilians caught up in their conflict.

She said getting a steady, substantial flow of desperately needed aid into the besieged Palestinian territory — where the United Nations says more than 90 per cent of the population is on the brink of famine — was "only part of the solution."

"Alleviating the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza starts with a clear will and measures that safeguard civilian life and human dignity, meaning both sides must conduct their military operations in a way that spares the civilians

who are caught in the middle," Spoljaric said.

"The only way to achieve this is that the parties strictly adhere to international humanitarian law, which means preserving the life, dignity and humanity of all people affected by armed conflict, regardless of which side they are on.

Five months into the war, an international effort is gathering pace to get humanitarian relief into the densely populated enclave by sea, in a bid to counter restrictions on access by land that have been blamed on Israel.

The UN says 2.2 million of Gaza's 2.4 million people are on the verge of famine and desperately short of drinking water.

"As an occupying power, Israel must provide for the basic needs of the population or facilitate the safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian relief," Spoljaric said.

The war had "ruptured any sense

of a shared humanity," she said.

"The situation in the Gaza Strip degenerates by the hour. There is nowhere safe for people to go. The civilian death toll and the ongoing captivity are shocking and unacceptable," Spoljaric said.

"In the face of such deep suffering," the ICRC called urgently for a ceasefire to allow "a steady, robust flow of humanitarian aid" to reach people in Gaza.

It urged Hamas to release the captives it was still holding, care for their safety and medical needs, and allow the ICRC to visit them.

It said the ICRC must be "notified" of any Palestinians detained by Israel and allowed to visit them, stressing Israel had a duty to treat them "humanely" and allow them to "communicate with family". Spoljaric urged world leaders to make respect for international law a "political priority." — **AFP**



Pro-Palestinian activists and supporters wave flags and carry placards on a march through London. — AFP



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In brief

■ JAKARTA



10 DEAD, 10 MISSING AFTER FLOODS, LANDSLIDE

At least 10 people were killed and 10 others were missing after flash floods and a landslide on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, a local official said on Saturday.

Torrential rains triggered the floods and landslide that hit Pesisir Selatan regency in West Sumatra province, forcing around 46,000 people to evacuate to temporary shelters.

“Ten people were found dead. Two victims were found in Langgai village, Sutera subdistrict, seven victims were found and identified in Koto XI Tarusan subdistrict and one other victim was found in the Lengayang subdistrict,” Pesisir Selatan agency said. — **AFP**

■ BUDAPEST



HUNGARY'S ORBAN SUPPORTS TRUMP AFTER MEETING

Hungary's right-wing nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban lent his support to his long-time ally Donald Trump's bid to return to White House after meeting the former US president in Florida late on Friday.

The two discussed “a wide range of issues affecting Hungary and the United States, including the paramount importance of strong and secure borders to protect the sovereignty of each nation,” according to a statement.

“We need leaders in the world who are respected and can bring peace. Come back and bring us peace, Mr. President!” Orban said. — **Reuters**

■ ATHENS



PARLIAMENT APPROVES PRIVATE FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES

Greece's parliament narrowly passed a bill early on Saturday that will allow foreign private universities to set up branches in the country, bucking weeks of protests by students who say the move will devalue degrees from public universities. The legislation was approved by 159 lawmakers in the 300-seat parliament.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said it will help reverse an exodus of tens of thousands of Greek students to universities abroad.

The bill will help align Greece with the rest of the European Union and boost higher education, he said. — **Reuters**

Russia says destroyed 47 Ukrainian drones



Ukrainian service members fire a 120-mm towed 2B16 “Nona-K” artillery-piece mortar towards Russian troops, near the town of Bakhmut in Donetsk region, Ukraine. — **Reuters**

MOSCOW: Russia said on Saturday it had destroyed 47 Ukrainian drones over its southern regions overnight, mostly in the Rostov area bordering Ukraine.

Kyiv has regularly launched drones into Russia during Moscow's military offensive in Ukraine, now in its third year.

“Air defence systems on duty intercepted and destroyed over the territories of Belgorod region (one drone), Kursk region (two drones), Volgograd region (three drones) and Rostov region (41 drones),” the Russian army said on social media.

The southern Rostov region is a hub for the Russian army to plan its military operations in Ukraine.

Rostov governor Vasily

Golubev said on social media that a drone attack had hit the city of Taganrog, on the Azov Sea.

He said a rescue worker was wounded but there were “no dead”.

Social media channels close to the Russian army said Ukraine had targeted an aviation plant in Taganrog.

“In Taganrog, in all likelihood, the target of raid was the Beriev aviation plant,” Telegram channel Rybar, with close army links, said.

The channel also alleged that another target was a military air base further into Russia in the town of Morozovsk.

Authorities in the Kursk region, which lies further north and also borders Ukraine, said a clinic had

been damaged in the main city of Kursk.

Rostov governor Vasily Golubev said on social media that a drone attack had hit the city of Taganrog, on the Azov Sea.

Regional governor Roman Starovoyt posted a video of himself outside “polyclinic number 6 in Kursk”. The top of the green building was visibly damaged.

Meanwhile, Ukraine said on Saturday a Russian bomb landed near a block of flats in the southern city of Kherson overnight wounding a child, while a teenaged boy died in shelling elsewhere.

Russia's attack has dragged on for more than two years, with fierce fighting in the east and regular attacks away from the frontline.

“Last night, the Russian army struck the city with a bomb. The shell landed near a five-storey building,” Kherson's administration said on social media.

It published a video of a destroyed building, with a large crater outside it.

“A seven-year-old boy who suffered from the shelling is under medical supervision,” authorities said, adding that “the child's life is not in danger.”

Officials in the central Dnipropetrovsk region said Russian shelling killed a teenager in the village of Chervonogrygorivka on the Dnipro river.

“A 16-year-old boy was killed. Another 22-year-old is in hospital,” Sergiy Lysak, the region's head, said.

Kyiv's air force said earlier it had downed 12 out of 15 drones launched by Russia over the eastern Donetsk region and central Dnipropetrovsk and Poltava regions. — **AFP**

Macron's camp launches European election campaign

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron's centrist alliance was due on Saturday to launch off its campaign for European Parliament elections in the northern city of Lille, as he tries to curb the rapid rise of the far right and hammer home the importance of greater support for Ukraine.

The European elections are seen as a key milestone ahead of France's next presidential election in 2027, when far-right figurehead Marine Le Pen is expected to mount a fourth bid for the top job and Macron cannot stand again due to term limits.

Le Pen's National Rally (RN) party leads Macron's alliance by a wide margin in polls on the European elections in June, and members of the centrist alliance say privately that narrowing the gap will not be easy.

“The main subject will be support for Ukraine,” the leader of Macron's Renaissance party in parliament, Sylvain Maillard, said on Friday of the campaign launch. Macron, who plans to join the campaign at a later stage, has asked his ministers to fight



France's President Emmanuel Macron appears in a ceremony, at the Place Vendome, in Paris. — **AFP**

the RN “every step of the way” and has sought to cast Le Pen's forces as bedfellows of Russia.

“In an election which is taking place in a historic moment for our continent and our country, with the war at the gates of the European continent, the central question is ‘Are we voting for pro-European forces which want to strengthen Europe,’” said Stanislas Guerini, a close Macron ally.

The French president has picked Valerie Hayer, the 37-year-old head of the Renew group in

the European Parliament, to lead his camp in the polls.

Hayer, who is relatively unknown to the French public, was expected to underline the “need for Europe,” the official slogan of the campaign, and question the far-right's overtures to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

By contrast, the head of the National Rally's list for the European elections is 28-year-old Jordan Bardella, a rising star of far-right French politics.

— **AFP**

Pakistan's former president Zardari wins another term

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's former president Asif Ali Zardari won a second term on Saturday, supported by the ruling coalition in a vote by parliament and regional assemblies, the election presiding officer said.

The role of president is largely ceremonial in Pakistan but Zardari is known as a master of reconciliation and could help the governing coalition partners reach a consensus to steer the broken economy on a stabilisation path ahead of seeking a new IMF bailout.

As president, Zardari will also be the supreme commander of the country's armed forces.

Presiding officer Justice Amir Farooq announced the winner in a live TV broadcast.

Zardari got 411 votes, easily

defeating the 181 votes cast for nationalist leader Mehmood Khan Achakzai, according to a statement from the parliament. Achakzai was backed by jailed leader Imran Khan's party.

The president is elected by votes in the lower and upper house of the parliament and four provincial legislative assemblies. Zardari is the widower of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto and gained political stature after his wife's assassination in a suicide bombing in December 2007, taking control of the PPP Party, in line with wishes expressed in her will.

He became president in 2008 and served until 2013, a period in which a US special forces raid inside Pakistan found and killed Osama bin Laden in 2011. — **AFP**



Asif Ali Zardari

The man who would not leave the house



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

A twenty-six-year-old man came to the clinic with his father. The son was studying at a local college five years ago but developed a dislike for attending college which gradually included a total dislike of leaving the house.

He would spend the whole time inside his bedroom but sometimes would sit in the living room or do some gardening inside the house. He became very anxious and distressed if he was asked to go outside the house either for prayers, shopping, or social gatherings.

He describes having a rapid heart rate, and difficulty breathing and his head starts shaking noticeably when he tries to step outside the house. The symptoms would also appear when guests came to visit. His family tried to persuade him to see a doctor but he refused; it was only when a religious relative managed to convince him to get help.

This young man suffered from a severe form of social anxiety that had a significant impact on his life. Yet other forms of social anxiety can present

differently, for example, Hikikomori, a condition in which a person stays at home and does not participate in society for six months or longer, without having other mental disorders which can cause this form of social withdrawal.

This condition was first proposed by the Japanese psychiatrist Dr Tamaki Saito in 1998 in his book ‘Hikikomori – Adolescence without End’. Initially, Hikikomori was believed to be exclusive to Japan, where excessive dependence and overprotection of children were deeply ingrained in Japanese society.

However, this phenomenon has been documented in other nations, including Oman. A recent survey from Japan conducted in 2022 estimates that 1.46 million persons have Hikikomori with a significant increase from previous years. This increase has been attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic when working from home and Online classes become the norm. Research also showed that people with Hikikomori had the highest risk of having gaming disorder and depression.

One might ask, do we need to worry about

“HIKIKOMORI, A CONDITION IN WHICH A PERSON STAYS AT HOME AND DOES NOT PARTICIPATE IN SOCIETY FOR SIX MONTHS OR LONGER, WITHOUT HAVING OTHER MENTAL DISORDERS WHICH CAN CAUSE THIS FORM OF SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL.”

people who have Hikikomori or social anxiety if they are happy being at home and can enjoy their time through the internet? In my professional opinion, yes we do need to help people overcome their social anxiety because it will have several psychological, social, and economic impacts in the short and long term.

Young people who are housebound tend to be dependent on their parents for their income, often suffer from loneliness, have a higher risk of developing mental health problems, and may have difficulties meeting future partners and having a family.

People who spend long hours on the internet eventually lose social skills such as meeting people in person and having a conversation with strangers. One may argue that you can still make friends online who would be available for you when you need their support yet we all know virtual friends are not a substitute for real ones.

Finally, If you know someone with Hikikomori or social anxiety please advise them to seek professional help so they can overcome this condition and be able to enjoy life.

Dinar ban sparks cash crunch for Kosovo Serbs

ISMET HAJDARI

Serb communities in parts of Kosovo are struggling to get their hands on dinars, jeopardising the salaries, pensions and social security payments that thousands there get from Belgrade.

Frustrations are spiking more than a month after a controversial new rule made the euro the only legal currency in Kosovo, effectively outlawing the use of the Serbian dinar.

The move sparked anger in Belgrade, which does not recognise Kosovo’s independence and continues to finance a parallel health, education and social security system for Serbs there.

But the Kosovo government has repeatedly blocked currency shipments at the border, hoping to choke off the supply of cash that authorities claim is the lifeblood for organised crime groups across the north where most Serbs live.

Kosovo’s roughly 100,000 Serbs have clung tight to the dinar since a brutal late-1990s war between Serbia and ethnic Albanian insurgents saw Serbian troops and government personnel withdraw from the breakaway province that declared independence in 2008.

Those living near the northern border with Serbia have greater connections to Serbian government institutions and still have access to a trickle of dinars.

But it is much harder for enclaves further from the frontier already more integrated into the Kosovo system.

Cash had run out for Serb communities south of the northern city of Mitrovica by Thursday, according to Serbian state broadcaster RTS.

AFP was not able to independently verify the claim.

In Gracanica — home to a 14th-century Orthodox church seen as a spiritual and political stronghold for generations of Serbs — the dinar regulation has been hitting the surrounding community hard.

Long lines have been forming at Serbia’s Postal Savings Bank — the only place where Serbs could receive pension payments and salaries for work in Serbian institutions in the area.

With its cash reserves dwindling, the bank has imposed a 10,000-dinar (85-euro) withdrawal limit. “The pension is late, but the bills are not. I don’t know how we will make it,” said Snezana Vujovic, a 43-year-old nurse.

“The economic situation is already difficult, and without the money from Serbia it is even more harsh,” Momir Jeftic, a 68-year-old pensioner said as he stood next to an empty cash machine.

— AFP

Is it time to abandon Netanyahu?



Mohammed Jameel Ahmed

It is abundantly clear that under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel is heading towards a catastrophic end unless this course is altered through internal and external arrangements, particularly by the United States.

The invitation extended to Minister Benny Gantz to visit Washington instead of Netanyahu may be seen as a step in this direction. The question remains: to what extent can the containment policies pursued by the American Democratic administration succeed in isolating Netanyahu’s policies, given his deep understanding of American policies and the influence of the Zionist lobby in alleviating pressure on him?

The US invitation to Gantz has undoubtedly irked the latter, who had been expecting an invitation from Washington.

This invitation represents an unprecedented departure from previous US administrations, indicating a clear lack of regard for Netanyahu. It is apparent that the United States is sending a message through the visit, possibly fuelled by Vice President Kamala Harris’ harsh criticism of Netanyahu’s policies in overseeing the conflict for the past four months.

As we have mentioned in several articles, the conflict in Gaza is on the brink of escalation and eruption. If not resolved by costly means such as the creation of a viable Palestinian state, it may lead to a regional war that could potentially escalate into a global conflict, given other related issues tied to the conflict in Gaza.

Despite the diligent efforts and marathon negotiations by Arab and international mediators to reach a deal leading to a prolonged ceasefire through an agreement between Israel and Hamas for the release of prisoners before Ramadhan, all have thus far failed. The likelihood of continued failure until the advent of Ramadhan remains high, with the month forecasted to be hot in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Palestinian territories, posing a significant challenge to Israel due to the potential for an uncontrollable escalation in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

This looming threat is a cause of



Israeli Emergency cabinet minister and opposition politician Benny Gantz

THE US INVITATION TO GANTZ IS AN UNPRECEDENTED DEPARTURE FROM PREVIOUS US ADMINISTRATIONS, INDICATING A CLEAR LACK OF REGARD FOR NETANYAHU. IT IS APPARENT THAT THE UNITED STATES IS SENDING A MESSAGE THROUGH THE VISIT, POSSIBLY FUELLED BY VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS’ HARSH CRITICISM OF NETANYAHU’S POLICIES IN OVERSEEING THE CONFLICT FOR THE PAST FOUR MONTHS

concern for both the United States and Europe, who have condemned the actions of extremist settlers in the West Bank, actions that are expected to worsen amidst the Israeli War Cabinet’s rejection of the recommendations made by the extremist right-wing Minister Ben Gvir to restrict the movement of worshipers and prevent Palestinians from entering the holy sites during Ramadhan.

The US seems determined to halt the conflict before Ramadhan at any cost, given the intense disagreements between Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi and Netanyahu regarding the halt in the invasion of Gaza.

Gaza will continue to simmer despite the juxtaposition of the new American approach to empower Gantz as a future alternative to Netanyahu, and opposition against Netanyahu

reaching a critical mass.

This is mirrored by Hezbollah and Ansar Allah skirmishes on multiple fronts, despite the ongoing efforts of America and Europe to sever the Lebanese front from the Gaza front, and the attempts of the United States, Britain, and Europe on the other hand, to confront the tensions fuelled by the Ansar Allah in the Red Sea on behalf of Iran.

In our estimation, the current situation will persist, as President Joe Biden’s efforts to shift the blame onto Hamas as the obstructing factor in completing the prisoner exchange deal bring unwarranted absolution to Israel, which shows no resolve to end the conflict. On the other hand, Hamas clearly insists on a ceasefire, Israeli military withdrawal from Gaza, return of displaced individuals, and reconstruction of Gaza as prerequisites for finalising the prisoner exchange agreement.

With each passing day, the conflict in Gaza escalates dangerously, and with the United States Benny Gantz in such a provocative manner to challenge Netanyahu, we may witness a new chapter in the forthcoming transformations within the Israeli landscape. While the American plan has yet to mature, the US decision to abandon Netanyahu has become more evident today than ever before. The United States has now become aware of the threat posed by Netanyahu’s escalatory policies to regional and global security.

Translated by Badr al Dhafri
The original version of the article was published in Arabic in Oman newspaper on March 7.

The light that is Ramadhan...

I was recently asked whether Ramadhan is as relevant today as it has always been for the Islamic faith. I answered that ‘as the faith is still strong, I guess the answer lies in its purpose,’ and my following thought was, “What’s not to like about reflection?”

Reflection, taking the time to think about what we have done, and what we will do, is, I understand, a key part of the Ramadhan experience, as a believer is asked to demonstrate self-control and restraint in all things; to demonstrate compassion for, and mindfulness of, those who suffer from a paucity of food and water, and their circumstances; to regard the month of Ramadhan as an opportunity for physical and spiritual cleansing and renewal. That remarkable artist, Claude Monet, observed that it is the strength of our observations and reflections that we ‘find a way,’ and in that brief exhortation offered a small window to his own impressionist reflections, and the beauty they have wrought upon a transformed artistic landscape. He created not only a new and different way to paint, but a unique way for the beauty of the world to be seen.

A former student of mine, Anwar, now in the USA, explained once that “Not eating or drinking, the things non-Muslims focus on, are only one part of the Ramadhan experience, this tiny sacrifice and inconvenience rightly compelling us to be more thoughtful and compassionate about others, especially those who are suffering or in need.” She was being quite thoughtful and unselfish, because Ramadhan had impacted upon her, and her peers’ exams experience significantly, so to be thinking of others while under her own pressures indicated a maturity and clarity of thought, perhaps attributable to this contemplative time.

Iman, in India, always finds the first few days the hardest, as she works in a large multi-cultural office environment. “Being in the same place with people who take



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THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADHAN IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL CLEANSING AND RENEWAL

their coffee breaks as normal is a bit of a pain. It’s not that anyone is antagonistic or anything like that, but to be honest, when someone brings in donuts for their birthday ‘shout,’ or something like that, I honestly would ‘die’ for just a little bite,” she laughed. “But it’s all part of it, isn’t it?” She explained that once she settled into a routine it was all ‘easy as pie,’ and that living in a big city, seeing many people homeless and in need, her Islamic obligations were tangible, so easy to deal with. “Just being a Muslim in this environment is challenging, but sharing Ramadhan with billions of others, almost makes it easier.”

Another working away from home, in Australia, is Mohammed. He has only a small Islamic community to bond with in the Northern Territory, but depends upon them, as the time differences with his family are almost totally different. He said he gets confused during Ramadhan, but does manage to stay in touch, and this year intends to return home for the Eid, to make up for the somewhat disjointed last three years. More importantly though, he definitely feels that both “Personally, and in my faith, I am a better man for being tested,” as he has, and is looking forward to both Ramadhan and the Eid.

Finally, William is a European Muslim, a convert: “This religion has changed me,” he said. “I was selfish, stupid, and was so self-centred. I took drugs, stole from my parents, and thought the world owed me a living. I found Islam in prison, and though people tell me I am a better man now, I don’t need to hear it because I have the certainty of my faith. Ramadhan is a time to reflect upon the life I have found, and to understand how I can change others’ lives too. I see my old self in so many others, and my prayer and deliberation gives me the strength to take the Prophet’s name to dark places, knowing I am safe, sure of the message of the Holy Quran.”

Ramadhan then, does appear to be globally relevant, and sustainable. Certainly, it appears as strong and resilient as ever. Ramadhan Mubarak.

SPORTS DAY MARATHON



In this aerial view, people take part in the first edition of the Kuwait Sports Day marathon, along the Shaikh Jaber al Ahmad al Sabah Causeway in Kuwait City on Saturday. – AFP

The big push needed to escape poverty

What do poverty, climate change, and conflict have in common? They are among the biggest challenges confronting Africa, and they all disproportionately affect women living in poverty or on the margins of society. Both research and experience have demonstrated that these women have enormous potential to improve the well-being of their families and communities.

African countries seeking to drive sustainable development — and address the triple challenge of poverty, climate change, and conflict — must help women in poverty realise their potential. By investing in and scaling up evidence-backed interventions that increase women’s control over income, ownership of productive assets, and decision-making in the household, policymakers can boost human capital, improve gender equality, and expand inclusive economic opportunities.

One approach that has been working in several countries is to provide people living in extreme poverty with a productive asset (such as cows, goats, or supplies for small-scale trade like a sewing machine), support to meet their basic needs, and intensive coaching for a roughly two-year period. Often referred to as the Graduation approach, this set of interventions was developed by the Bangladesh-based NGO BRAC (of which I am Regional Director of Africa for its international arm) to give people the multifaceted “big push” they need to



Rudo Kayombo

The writer is Regional Director of Africa at BRAC International

WITH A MULTIFACETED APPROACH, AFRICAN POLICYMAKERS CAN BOOST HUMAN CAPITAL AND IMPROVE GENDER EQUALITY

escape poverty and build long-term resilience.

Women, in particular, have benefited greatly from the Graduation approach. For starters, there is rigorous evidence that it can increase women’s productivity. In Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, Graduation interventions contributed to an increase in women’s off-farm enterprise employment and, thus, the labour supply. In Bangladesh, they significantly increased earnings from women-led income-generating activities. Research has also demonstrated that enabling women in extreme poverty to build sustainable livelihoods can encourage positive behaviour changes that help households prepare for and cope with temporary shocks.

Moreover, a multifaceted approach that includes gender-sensitive coaching, life-skills training, and community engagement can help women in poverty overcome the psychological and social challenges stemming from gender-based discrimination, social exclusion, and limited education. For example, women who received psychosocial support through the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme reported improvements in psychological well-being and social cohesion, as well as a reduction in domestic violence. And after a Graduation

pilot in Kenya provided women in poverty with mentorship and training (and engaged with male community members to assuage concerns about shifting gender roles), women’s empowerment — as measured by confidence, leadership, and local-committee membership — increased significantly.

Such progress in social and economic empowerment has had positive spillover effects. In Kenya, the two-year Rural Entrepreneur Access Program (REAP) — which provided training, mentorship, and asset grants to small groups of women to start businesses — yielded substantial economic benefits for both participants and their non-enrolled neighbours. This is partly because REAP increased the value participants placed on

economic advancement, which they passed along to other women in their communities.

Recognising the importance of a big-push approach, several African governments, including Kenya, Rwanda, and South Africa, are exploring Graduation-style programmes and how to incorporate them into existing systems. For example, the government of Rwanda launched a national Graduation strategy in 2022 to empower people in more than 900,000 households in poverty to develop sustainable, long-term livelihoods, as part of a broader strategy to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030.

Another evidence-backed BRAC initiative that shows promise at scale is the Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA)

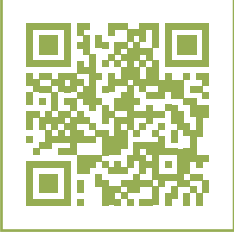
model, whereby young women and adolescent girls work with “near peer” mentors who provide training sessions on life skills including reproductive and sexual health, as well as financial literacy and entrepreneurship. In Uganda, adolescent girls in communities with ELA programmes were more likely to earn a livelihood, while their rates of teen pregnancy and early marriage fell sharply. This community-based model has already reached more than 200,000 participants across Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda, and it is continuing to expand. Building on these proven approaches, BRAC, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, has devised Accelerating Impact for Young Women. This five-year programme aims to equip adolescent girls and young women with age-appropriate entrepreneurship, employability, and life-skills training, as well as the tools they need to start and scale up their own businesses. In 2023 — the first year of implementation — more than 70,000 participants enrolled in the programme in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda, and more than 630 savings groups were formed. Participants have collectively saved \$140,000, and nearly 20,000 of them have received support to start their own livelihoods.



Women, in particular, have benefited greatly from the Graduation approach.

sport

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CYCLE KOM SWEEP OCA LEAGUE HONOURS

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

Cycle KOM's Mohammed al Wahibi capped his brilliant run in the Oman Cycling Association (OCA) League Championship 2023-24 by emerging the overall winner after the seventh and final race on Friday.

Mohammed took the red jersey for overall champion as well as white jersey for the topper of the under-23 category with 491 points from the seven races. Cycle KOM captain Paul Willcox completed the dominance of his team in this season when he claimed the green jersey for overall winner in the 40 plus category with 439 points.

Said al Rahbi of the Royal Army of Oman (468 points) came overall second while Salalah Club's Mundher al Hasani (465) was third. Willcox finished fourth while Royal Army of Oman's Hussam al Rawahi ended fifth overall with 435 points.



Podium of seventh race

In the concluding road race at the Knowledge Oasis for 61.2 km, Royal Army of Oman's Mishari al Khalili came top with a time of one hour 27 minutes and 48 seconds followed by Willcox on same time and Salalah Club's Mundher al Hasani (1:29:26) in third position.

Cycle KOM's British rider David Hynes was fourth while Oman Club's Egyptian rider Islam Ayad finished fifth with the same timings.

Willcox said Cycle KOM riders executed their strategy perfectly to sweep the honours in General Category.

CAT AND MOUSE RACE

"On only the second lap with 54 km to go, I saw an opportunity and decided to take it and broke away. I had Mishari with me, a good sprinter, but this was too good an opportunity with both our respective teams the strongest, and us out front I knew they wouldn't work to chase us down. So, I kept a high pace and the two of us stayed out front. I kept on the front mostly knowing my TT strength would maintain a gap. With over 2 laps remaining, the last 2 laps were 'cat and mouse' between us, but Mishari just got the better of me on the finish line in what was a great race overall for me personally and the team today," Willcox explained the race experience.

In the team standings, the Royal Army of Oman topped the League with 1,490 points, followed by Cycle KOM with 1,431 points in second while Salalah Club (1,325) finished third.

Oman Club (800) came fourth and Wave Riders (490) were fifth in the 15-team OCA League.

In the Under-23 section, Mundher came second while Ayad (405) finished third overall. In the 40 plus category, Cycle KOM's Daniel Baldwin (357) claimed the second spot and team-mate Gregory Pollard came third overall with 164 points.



Willcox takes lead in the race

Silhavy announces Oman football squad for Malaysia test

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

The newly appointed head coach of Oman national football team, Jaroslav Silhavy, announced on Saturday the first squad of Red Warriors under his charge. The declared squad featured recalling of several former players for national team squad namely: Mohammed al Musallami, Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Hatim al Roshdi and Mohammed al Ghafri.

The first official assignment for the Czech coach will be the joint qualifiers for World Cup 2026 and Asian Cup 2027, as Oman team will meet Malaysia twice in the third and fourth round of the double qualifiers respectively. The Red Warriors will take Malaysia in Muscat on March 21, and then

play away in Kuala Lumpur on March 26.

Oman team players will began their actual technical preparation for the matches by a domestic camp which will start on Wednesday under the supervision of the recently appointed coach Jaroslav Silhavy and his assistant coaching staff.

Oman, under the new coaching staff, will eye on a different show and beginning a new chapter that will ensure the team's presence in the top footballing event represented in Fifa World Cup 2026. Oman is gearing up for the third and fourth games in the Asian joint qualifiers for the AFC Asian Cup and Fifa World Cup in group D which featured Malaysia, Kyrgyzstan and Chinese Taipei. Oman's game against Malaysia in Muscat on March 21 will be played at Sultan Qaboos Sports



Jaroslav Silhavy, head coach of Oman national football team

Complex and the game will start at 10:00 pm (Oman time), while the away match in Kuala Lumpur on March 26 will take place in the national stadium Bukit Jalil in Kuala Lumpur city and the match will begin at 6:00 pm (Oman time).

The national team's campaign started with a 2-0 win against Chinese Taipei but then shocked with a 1-0 defeat against Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek in their second match. The 62-year-old coach will work during this camp on shaping the players readiness for the forthcoming essential matches. The Czech coach observed many players during the couple days ago in Muscat during the top flight league and the HM Cup matches.

Coach Silhavy signed a two-year contract with the Oman Football Association (OFA)

in February to replace the Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic whose contract was not renewed after the AFC Asian Cup in Qatar. He served as manager of the Czech national team from 2018-2023.

Oman Squad: Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Fayez al Rushedi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Fahmi Dorbeen, Mohammed al Musallami, Ghanim al Habshi, Khalid al Ghatrefi, Hassan al Ajmi, Ali al Busaidi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Abdulaziz al Shomosi, Harib al Saadi, Hatim al Roshdi, Abdullah Fawaz, Salah al Yahyaei, Omar al Malki, Zaher al Aghbari, Arshad al Alawi, Jameel al Yahmadi, Abdul Rahman al Mushefri, Musab al Mamari, Mohsin al Ghassani, Mohammed al Ghafri, Abdulaziz al Maqbali and Essam al Subhi.



India's Ravichandran Ashwin acknowledges the fans and celebrates his five-wicket-haul with teammates. — REUTERS

India crush England by an innings to seal Test series 4-1

DHARAMSALA: Ravichandran Ashwin took a five-wicket haul in his landmark 100th Test as India hammered England by an innings and 64 runs in the fifth match to seal the series 4-1 on Saturday.

England's James Anderson reached 700 Test wickets early in the day to be just the third bowler to achieve the feat, but the tourists were never in the game.

Off-spinner Ashwin returned figures of 5-77 to help bowl out England for 195 inside three days at the picturesque Dharamsala stadium, overlooked by snow-capped Himalayan mountains, after India posted a mammoth 477.

He rocked England's top and middle-order after the tourists began their innings 259 runs behind and lost five wickets for 103 runs by lunch.

After the match, Ashwin said he was "very happy" with his performance.

"Win the Test and take wickets, what more can a bowler ask for?" he added. Jonny Bairstow, also in his 100th Test, attempted to take on the spinners and hit Ashwin for three sixes but finally fell lbw to Kuldeep Yadav after his 31-ball 39.

At the stroke of lunch Ashwin bowled skipper Ben Stokes for two, taking down the star all-rounder for the 13th time in Tests.

Joe Root resisted with his 84 and was the last man to go. He was dismissed by Yadav, who took seven wickets in the match and scored 30 crucial runs to be named man of the match, as India celebrated and the players shook hands.

Ashwin finished with nine wickets in the match and his 36th five-wicket haul in a career which began in 2011.

Skipper Rohit Sharma did not take the field due to a "stiff back", with fast bowler deputy Jasprit

Bumrah in charge and taking two wickets of his own.

INDIA'S YOUNG GUNS

India missed its top stars including Virat Kohli, who was out due to the birth of his second child, and KL Rahul, who was injured, but new talent stood up to deliver.

Twenty-two-year-old India opener Yashasvi Jaiswal remained the leading batsman in the series with 712 runs, including double centuries in matches two and three.

Batsmen Sarfaraz Khan, Devdutt Padikkal, wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel and fast bowler Akash Deep made impressive debuts in the series and Rohit was all praise.

"All these guys are short on experience but they've played a lot of cricket," Rohit said.

"We've got to nurture them and make them understand the game. When put under pressure they re-

sponded pretty well." Earlier, Anderson got Yadav caught behind for 30 to become the first pacer and third bowler overall to the 700 mark, after spinners Muttiah Muralitharan of Sri Lanka (800 wickets) and late Australian great Shane Warne (708).

The 41-year-old held the ball aloft to the crowd as teammates gathered around him and England fans stood to cheer.

It ended Yadav's stubborn 49-run ninth-wicket overnight stand with Bumrah.

Spinner Shoaib Bashir soon wrapped up the innings in the fifth over of the day when he got Bumrah stumped for 20, completing the 20-year-old's second five-wicket haul in his debut series.

Rohit (103) and Shubman Gill (110) set up the huge victory on the second day with a 171-run second-wicket stand to put the England bowlers on the back foot. — AFP

Alcaraz rallies to subdue Arnaldi in Indian Wells opener

INDIAN WELLS: World number two Carlos Alcaraz got off to a stuttering start in his Indian Wells Masters title defence on Friday but turned the tables to beat Matteo Arnaldi 6-7 (5/7), 6-0, 6-1.

The second-round success served as a welcome fitness test for the 20-year-old Spaniard, who rolled his ankle a fortnight ago in Rio and retired from his first-round match there.

Alcaraz gathered his forces after dropping the opening set against Arnaldi, cutting his unforced error count from 23 in the first set to a mere eight for the remainder of the contest.

The reigning Wimbledon champion lost just one more game as he came through in two and a quarter hours, concluding with 22 winners.

Alcaraz said his ankle felt better than expected.

"Honestly, it surprised me," he said. "I felt great, moving normally without thinking about it."

"It was a really good match to realise that I am better than I imagined," added Alcaraz, who next plays Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime.

Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek swept into the third round with identical runaway scorelines.

But there was no joy for former number one Andy Murray, who

suffered a 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 loss to fifth seed Andrey Rublev to exit the event where he lost the 2009 final to Rafael Nadal.

Australian Open champion Sinner dominated Thanasi Kokkinakis 6-3, 6-0 while women's world number one Swiatek did the same to American Danielle Collins.

Italy's Sinner, seeded third, backed up his debut Grand Slam title in Melbourne with a victory in the ATP 500 level tournament at Rotterdam last month.

He remains undefeated this season and completed a 13th consecutive match victory while improving to 4-0 over Kokkinakis.

Top seed Swiatek, the 2022 Indian Wells champion and last year's Roland Garros winner who will start her 94th week on the top WTA ranking on Monday, broke Collins four times and wrapped up victory on her second match point.

Reigning Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova also advanced with ease, beating American Bernarda Pera with the loss of just two games. Vondrousova took just 64 minutes to dispatch Pera 6-0, 6-2.

But Elena Rybakina's WTA title defence ended without a ball struck as she withdrew before her scheduled opener with a gastrointestinal issue. — AFP



PKA concludes First Friendship Karate Championship

MUSCAT: The Qudrah Karate Club was crowned champion in the first open Friendship Karate Championship, organised by the Pioneers Karate Academy (PKA) on Friday, at the sub-arena of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Boshier.

Champ Academy claimed the second place, while Kuwait Force Academy and Pioneers Karate Academy secured the third place jointly.

Twenty-two clubs from various Gulf, Arab, and foreign countries were participated in the first edition, with a total of 250 male and female participants across different age categories, starting from 5 years old and above. The tournament included both kata (demonstration) and kumite (sparring) categories, with weight divisions determined

by the organising committee according to the international karate federation system. The kata categories were also subdivided.

It is worth mentioning that, children with Down syndrome participated in this championship for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman. The participants were Zaid bin Ahmed al Jabri, Abdullah bin Masood al Hanai, Abdullah bin Saif al Ghafri, Abdullah bin Ibrahim al Baharani, Qusai bin Salim al Rabei and Laith bin Hamad al Rashidi.

The participants showcasing their skills in the kata discipline.

The competition was officiated by a group of Omani, international and regional referees, including representatives from other Arab and foreign countries.

Ahmed bin Said al Zakwani, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Pioneers Karate Academy and the Executive Director of the championship, expressed sincere thanks to the event's sponsor, retired Brigadier Abdulmalik bin Ghassan al Mazrouei, the head of the Omani Taekwondo Committee, as well as the supporting companies – Salim Airlines, Al Meera Oman, Oman Aviation Academy, Oman Palm Development Company, and Shakara for Sports Apparel.

Al Zakwani emphasised that the goal of hosting this championship is to elevate Omani karate by providing players the opportunity to compete with athletes from other countries, enhancing the capabilities of coaches and referees.



India's Ravichandran Ashwin acknowledges the fans and celebrates his five-wicket-haul with teammates. — REUTERS



Al Mutasim bin Yahya al Abri grabbed Gold and bronze medals.

PENALTIES GIVE MAN UTD 2-0 WIN OVER EVERTON

MANCHESTER: Bruno Fernandes and Marcus Rashford fired in penalties to give Manchester United a 2-0 win over Everton on Saturday, their first Premier League victory in three games and one that will no doubt fan the embers of their top-four hopes.

Erik ten Hag's team remain sixth but with 47 points they crept closer to fourth-placed Aston Villa on 55 with a game in hand. Fifth-placed Tottenham, who host Villa on Sunday, have 50 points and two games in hand. Sean Dyche's Everton — winless in 11 straight league games — are 16th on 25 points, five points above the drop zone.

Both penalties came courtesy of clumsy tackles in the box on Alejandro Garnacho and both were against the run of play, with Everton the dominant team for long stretches against a United midfield that repeatedly gave away the ball.

"We have to win every single game," Garnacho told TNT Sports. "The manager wants me to go one V one, to shoot, to dribble. I won two penalties. It's important."

"It's like a dream with my age. A full Old Trafford stadium chanting my name is incredible. I am very proud and happy," he said.

Fernandes fired in the first from the spot in the 12th minute, and United's captain then handed the ball to Rashford to take the second in the 36th minute. Rashford stutter-stepped before sending keeper Jordan Pickford the wrong way.

Fernandes became the club's all-time leading scorer from penalties with 29 conversions, ahead of former striker Ruud van Nistelrooy's 28.

The Portuguese international almost had a second goal with a beautiful free kick in the first half that Pickford had to leap high to bat away.

Garnacho almost had a goal of his own when Fernandes played him in the second half, but the 19-year-old launched it just over the bar.

Everton had 23 shots to United's 15 but squandered their chances with poor finishing touches, including a terrific late chance that saw Lewis Dobbin send a pass across goal that a sliding Dominic Calvert-Lewin was just a step too slow to connect with.

Everton are now one defeat or draw away from tying their record for consecutive Premier League games without a win (12 in 1994).

United were coming off successive league losses, to Fulham and Manchester City, that had ended an unbeaten run of four league games.

"We lost the last two games, it's important to be there," Garnacho said. "We want to be in the Champions League next season so I am very happy (with this win)."

United were missing several key players including Rasmus Hojlund, who had scored in six consecutive games before suffering a muscle injury that has sidelined him since he netted two in United's 2-1 win at Luton Town on February 18. — Reuters

Marcus Rashford in action.
— REUTERS



Bruno Fernandes celebrates scoring their first goal with team-mates.
— REUTERS





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OPAZ eyes expansion of Salalah Free Zone and Raysut Industrial City to meet investor demand

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

Dr Ali bin Masoud bin Ali al Sunaidy (pictured), Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), underscored the government’s unwavering commitment to cultivating an alluring investment landscape that caters to the diverse needs of new investors.

Responding to media queries from *Oman Daily Observer*, Dr Al Sunaidy said the Authority has sought additional land to support the growing demand for premium industrial space at Salalah Free Zone and Raysut Industrial City.

“The Salalah Free Zone’s strategic positioning, coupled

with the advantageous trade agreements forged with our esteemed partners in the Gulf and Arab regions, presents a compelling proposition for forward-thinking industrialists,” Dr Al Sunaidy asserted.

He further elaborated on the zoning strategy implemented within the Salalah Free Zone.

“The zone is meticulously divided into two distinct sections,” he explained.

“The first, ideally situated on the coast, caters specifically to industries that necessitate immediate port access.

The second section, positioned strategically away from the port, is designated for industries that thrive independently of such proximity.”



Dr Al Sunaidy emphasised OPAZ’s commitment to ensuring a transparent and merit-based land allocation process.

“Our primary focus,” he declared, “is to prioritise the allocation of land to demonstrably deserving companies established within Salalah or the broader Dhofar Governorate.”

He further revealed the establishment of alternative,

strategically chosen sites in Thamrait and Al Mazyouna to accommodate the burgeoning needs of the wider industrial community.

Shifting the conversation towards the burgeoning digital economy and the evolving landscape of crypto mining centres, Dr Al Sunaidy alluded to a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

This fruitful partnership, he revealed, has yielded the successful implementation of a pioneering digital project in Salalah last year, with an equally transformative project slated for the Sohar Free Zone in the near future.

“These groundbreaking initiatives,” Dr Al Sunaidy elucidated, “are specifically designed to leverage Oman’s abundant and competitively priced renewable energy resources, further solidifying the nation’s position as a premier destination for forward-thinking investors.”

In closing, Dr Al Sunaidy reiterated the government’s commitment to harnessing renewable energy resources in line with its goal to become carbon neutral by 2050.

An example of this commitment is evident in the 50 megawatts wind power farm at Harweel area, he added.

OSC to roll out carbon market, GHG monitoring platform

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

Oman Sustainability Centre (OSC), tasked with orchestrating the delivery of the country’s Net-Zero strategy, has embarked on the development of two key initiatives: a Carbon Market to support trades in carbon credits, and a platform for measuring and reporting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

OSC Project Director Khalid bin Salim al Ghammari said the initiatives are part of the Centre’s broad mandate to support Oman transition into a Net-Zero economy by 2050.

Participating in a panel discussion hosted by the Oman-French Association, Al Ghammari said the Centre has already begun coordinating with various government entities and stakeholder institutions on strategies to deliver on its chief goal.

The Centre, he explained, has three key functions: Firstly, it will advise the policymaker – the Ministry of Energy and Minerals – on the importance of ensuring that decarbonisation guidelines and regulations are harmonised across different sectors of the economy.

The second function enshrines a commitment to ensure that GHG-emitting industries, while decarbonising their operations, continue to contribute to the country’s



Energy sector executives participating in a panel discussion held as part of the Oman-French Energy Forum.

THE CENTRE PLANS TO DRAW UP A DETAILED CARBON-REDUCTION PLAN COVERING THE NEXT 25 YEARS THROUGH TO 2050. THIS WILL BE DONE IN COORDINATION WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING THE POLICYMAKER, INDUSTRIES AND CORPORATE SECTOR PLAYERS,

economic development.

Thirdly, achieving the all-important Net-Zero goal will necessitate a commitment from all sections of the economy, including members of society.

To this end, OSC will support capability-building and strengthen awareness through initiatives encompassing schools all the way to universities and the wider community as well, he said.

Also as part of its remit, the Centre plans to draw up

a detailed carbon-reduction plan covering the next 25 years through to 2050. This will be done in coordination with all stakeholders, including the policymaker, industries and corporate sector players, the Project Director noted.

He added that decarbonisation will be sought to be achieved through the deployment of effective technologies and innovative solutions, thereby ensuring that industries do not view carbon mitigation as a burden.

Furthermore, in tandem with decarbonisation efforts, the Centre will identify emerging business opportunities that can be harnessed during the transition journey.

These opportunities, notably in the field of carbon capture and utilisation, will not only drive economic growth, but support job creation as well, he pointed out.

Reflecting OSC’s broad-based mandate, the Centre has been collaborating with the Ministry of Finance in the formulation of a Sustainable Finance Framework to help clean energy and carbon-mitigation initiatives secure green finance.

At the same time, opportunities to monetise carbon credits linked to clean energy and decarbonisation projects will be actively explored as well, he said, adding that a framework for a new carbon market will be established too.

Additionally, the Centre plans to work with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals on the issue of carbon certification standards for the benefit of Omani exporters targeting jurisdictions such as the United States, European Union and Japan, among others.

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Invitation and Agenda to the Extraordinary General Meeting and Annual General Meeting of Taageer Finance Company SAOG

The Board of Directors of Taageer Finance Company SAOG (the “Company”) has the pleasure to invite the Shareholders of the Company to the Extraordinary General Meeting (“EGM”) and Annual General Meeting (“AGM”) to be held at 5.00 p.m. on Sunday, 24th March 2024 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which you may access through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC (“MCD”) website (www.mcd.gov.om).

Failing quorum of either of the two general meetings, AGM and/or EGM shall be convened on Thursday, on 28th March 2024, at 5 p.m., on the e-portal for convening general meetings which you may access through the MCD website (www.mcd.gov.om), to discuss and consider the following agenda:

Firstly: Agenda for the Extraordinary General Meeting

- 1) To consider and approve the amendment of Articles of Association of the Company and reduce the number of members of the Board of Directors to (7) seven members. (appendix 1).

Secondly: Agenda for the Annual General Meeting

- 1) To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ Report for the Company’s activity and its financial position during the financial year ended December 31, 2023.
- 2) To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- 3) To consider and approve the Auditor’s report and the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- 4) To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2023 and to determine the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the next financial year 31 December 2024 (Annexure 1).
- 5) To notify the General Assembly with transactions carried out with related parties during financial year 31 December 2023 (Annexure 2).
- 6) To notify the General Assembly of donations disbursed to support community services during the financial year end 31 December 2023 (Annexure 3).
- 7) To consider and approve the allocation of a budget of RO 30,000/- (Omani Rials thirty thousand and only) during the financial year ending 31 December 2024 as corporate social responsibility initiative.
- 8) To consider the proposal to determine and distribute cash dividend of 7 Baisas per share to the Company’s Shareholders on the date of this meeting for the financial year ending 31 December 2023.
- 9) To consider and approve the distribution of free shares to the shareholders as of the date of the general meeting amounting 2.75% of the company’s capital (2.75 shares for 100 shares). the distribution of the free shares would increase the company shares form (263,835,036) to (271,090,500).
- 10) To consider the payment of Directors’ remuneration for an amount of RO 300,000/- (Omani Rials three thousand only) for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- 11) To consider and approve the report of Evaluation of Board Members by Independent Third Party.
- 12) To appoint the statutory auditors of the Company for the financial year ending December 31, 2024 and approve their fees.
- 13) To elect a new Board of Directors for the Company from the shareholders and non-shareholders.

Any person who wishes to be nominated to the Board of Directors of the Company is required to fill in a Director’s Nomination Form. Such a form can be obtained from the Company. The completed Form should be delivered to the Company at least five (5) days prior to the date of the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Company (by the end of business hours on Tuesday, March 19, 2024). The Company will not accept any application received after this date.

According to the Commercial Companies Law and the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means issued by CMA, we would like to call your attention to the following:

- (a) only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/ resolutions of the general meeting, through electronic means, provided such natural person must have an investor number at MCD;
- (b) voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the general meeting at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the date of the meeting. If a shareholder’s balance is changed either by increase or decrease the voting process shall stand canceled and must revoke on the date of the meeting.

Please log on to the e-portal at least 30 minutes prior to the AGM.

For more information, please contact Mr. Mustafa Al Lawati of Taageer Finance Company, SAOG, on telephone no. (+968) 24839810.

Chairman

Auditor

Legal Adviser

Malabar sets RO 240,000 for Ramadhan ESG activities

MUSCAT: Emphasising its commitment to being a socially conscious and responsible organisation, Malabar Gold and Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally, has announced the community welfare activities the brand will be carrying out for the month of Ramadhan.

The brand has committed RO 240,000 towards the distribution of iftar meals among the needy during the holy month.

These initiatives are planned in addition to the ESG initiatives conducted by the group throughout the year in the 13 countries of operation.

The brand will associate with embassies, authorities, NGOs, and like-minded organisations to carry out community welfare and empowerment acts throughout the holy month, including the distribution of iftar meals and food provision kits to deserving families and individuals. These endeavours by Malabar Gold and Diamonds are anticipated to significantly benefit the underprivileged segments of our society.

Over 180,000 iftar meals will be distributed as part of this year's Ramadhan food distribution drive across the UAE, KSA, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Malaysia, Singapore, the USA, the UK, Canada, and Australia.

In Oman, iftar meals will be distributed among labourers in



Muscat, Barka, Nizwa, Sohar, and Salalah.

Chairman of Malabar Group, M P Ahammed, shared the following regarding the company's ESG initiative, "Our dedication to championing social welfare initiatives has been a central component of our operations since our inception in 1993 and has remained steadfast over the years.

With Ramadhan reflecting the spirit of piouness and generosity, we are reaffirming our commitment to bringing about a positive impact in the community through our food kit distribution.

This noble endeavour, spanning across all 13 countries we operate in, ties into our larger objective of creating a Hunger-Free World, which is one of the key tenets of

Malabar Group's ESG objectives".

While Vice Chairman of Malabar Group, Abdul Salam K P, shared the following, "The month-long welfare activities that we carry out every year during Ramadhan are spearheaded by the goodwill of our entire team.

Right from identifying communities that require our assistance to participating in the distribution of iftar meals, our team members actively volunteer for every aspect of this initiative.

This further reflects the fabric of social responsibility that is dominant among our organisation. As this initiative commences, we express our heartfelt appreciation to our esteemed customers whose patronage enables us to initiate

such noble endeavours."

Furthermore, the managing director of international operations, Shamlal Ahamed, commented the following, "Malabar Gold and Diamonds have always been more than a jewellery retailer.

The community empowerment initiatives that we have undertaken over the years are reflective of our motto of ensuring the collective growth of all our stakeholders, with society being among the most crucial.

The iftar meal distribution is carried out on a large scale by our organisation every year, and as always, we sincerely hope that our actions will leave a lasting impression and motivate other organisations to carry out similar activities".

ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) initiatives have been the primary commitment of Malabar Group since its inception in 1993, with 5 per cent of net profits set aside towards such initiatives in each country of operation.

The key focus is in the areas of Health, Hunger-Free World, Housing, Education, Women Empowerment & Environment. Integrating the principles of responsibility and sustainability into its core business, the ESG goals of Malabar Group are periodically strengthened to remain a socially conscious and responsible organisation.

Sohar International honours enduring partnership with PDO



The event was attended by Ahmed al Musalmi, CEO at Sohar International and Haifa al Khaifi, Finance Director at Petroleum Development Oman.

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman's fastest-growing bank, hosted a memorable event at Sheraton Oman to celebrate its enduring relationship with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

The occasion paid homage to the long-standing connection between the two entities, showcasing the significant collaborative efforts that have elevated their partnership to new heights.

The event was marked by heartfelt recognition of the extensive collaboration between Sohar International and PDO, underscoring the vital contributions made by both parties and highlighting the milestones achieved through their robust partnership.

The event was attended by Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer at Sohar International, Haifa al Khaifi, Finance Director at Petroleum Development Oman, and members of the executive management from both entities.

Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer at Sohar International, said, "At Sohar International, we are driven by a profound ethos that transcends the conventional boundaries of banking; it is a steadfast dedication to nurturing enduring partnerships founded upon trust and unwavering commitment, exemplified by our esteemed partnership with Petroleum Development Oman. We are committed to adeptly addressing the various challenges of serving our diverse clients.

Today, we stand resolute in our firm dedication to provide innovative solutions and unparalleled service, thereby ensuring an unmatched standard of excellence that pervades every aspect of our client's journey.

Together, we embark upon a grand and ambitious mission to redefine the very essence of banking, both within the Sultanate of Oman and beyond, transcending borders and reshaping industry paradigms."

As a token of appreciation, 49 outstanding staff members from Sohar International and PDO were honoured during the event for their dedication and contribution to the partnership's success.

Their determined efforts and exemplary performance have been instrumental in fostering mutual growth and prosperity.

Finance Director at Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) Haifa al Khaifi said: "The leadership spirit, PDO witnessed in Ahmed Al Musalmi was seen through his entire organisation which was very impressive and a testament for his effective direction.

Sohar International Bank demonstrated their commitment in terms of assuring a seamless integration, assessing associated risks and ensuring that there are proper mitigation measures in place, while safeguarding PDO's payment process towards employees and vendor community.

Despite the obstacles and challenges that are prevalent in any type of project merger scale, Sohar International offered a lot of agility in terms of finding solutions, as failure was not an option which PDO was ready to tolerate.

We are so grateful to both teams from both organisations for that tenacity. We recognise that this step is just the beginning of a strategic partnership with Sohar International. PDO acknowledges all the extended support offered by Sohar International not only in this project, but also the desire to co-create and customise solutions that would be mutually beneficial to both entities in the future."

Ahlibank honours employees for completing 10 years in service



MUSCAT: Ahlibank, one of the leading financial institutions in Oman, recently celebrated its employees who marked a decade of service with the bank.

This acknowledgment stands as a testament to Ahlibank's unwavering dedication to cultivating a flourishing workforce, underscoring the institution's success in nurturing enduring employee relationships.

The felicitation ceremony, attended by employees and senior management, was held at Ahlibank's head office in Wattaya. Ahlibank's success in retaining top talents can be attributed to its robust employee development programmes, comprehensive benefits, and strong corporate culture that upholds values of fairness, equality, and individual growth.

The bank's commitment to investing in its employees, coupled with a targeted focus on providing a work environment that fosters critical thinking, innovation, and collaboration, has fuelled a dynamic atmosphere that promotes professional progress, employee well-being, and a strong sense of belonging.

This steadfast commitment to

a conducive work environment aligns seamlessly with Ahlibank's impressive Omanisation rates.

In 2023, the bank achieved a notable Omanisation rate of 94.7 per cent, affirming the bank's commitment to recruiting, and developing local cadres.

With a keen focus on fostering holistic growth, Ahlibank's people engagement initiatives embrace inclusivity, a testament to the bank's inherent commitment to supporting individuals with diverse needs. In alignment with this philosophy, the bank hosted a summer camp for its employees' children, offering an engaging environment for the employees and their children.

This strategic initiative not only reflects the bank's dedication to cultivating a family-friendly workplace but also reinforces a profound sense of community among its employees.

Furthermore, in a focused effort to empower its female workforce, Ahlibank regularly implements several targeted programmes and events. In October, Ahlibank organised a workshop that delved into the significance of achieving a harmonious work-life equilibrium.

OSC to roll out carbon market, GHG monitoring platform

FROM PAGE 13

The goal, he said, is to help local industries navigate the complex and disparate regulatory regimes expected to be in force in these markets.

Another key initiative already making headway is a platform that will help industries and businesses ascertain their

greenhouse gas (GHG) emission intensity.

Designed to ensure transparency in decarbonisation efforts, this platform will also play an important role when the Capital Market Authority begins enforcing ESG disclosure guidelines for listed companies starting from 2025.

Win 5 Toyota Crown this Ramadhan

MUSCAT: Toyota has some fantastic benefits for customers planning to own a brand-new Toyota this Ramadhan.

With the biggest excitement campaign, customers can now get a chance to enter the raffle draw & win 5 Toyota Crown cars and avail exclusive benefits including service from 3 years / 30,000 kms up to 10 years / 100,000 kms (whichever is earlier), insurance for one year and free registration.

Apart from that customer can also avail attractive instalments. Toyota has an exciting range of vehicles in Oman.

They include sedans, SUVs, Pick-ups and more. The popular models include the inspiring Corolla, the iconic Camry, the powerful and impressive Hilux, and the legendary all-terrain conqueror the Land Cruiser.

The **Corolla** is a reliable partner for every journey. It is equipped with a perfect combination of power, fuel-efficiency, space and safety features. Allowing owners to make the most of every



journey. Powering the Corolla is a 2.0-litre four-cylinder dynamic force engine which produces 168 hp and 20.39 kg-m of torque.

The **Camry** with its stylish profile and aggressive profile make a fine impression. It is available with a choice of three power train options.

They include a 2.5-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg-m of torque which is paired with an eight-speed Direct-Shift Multi-mode automatic

transmission.

The **Toyota Hilux** is the tried and tested workhorse that has become a benchmark and an impressive travel partner for unbeaten journeys and remarkable experiences. The exciting and capable Hilux Adventure is equipped with a powerful 4.0 Litre V6 Engine with 235 HP & 38.3 Kg-m Torque. It has an auto disconnect differential to keep the tempo going. The 4.0 Litre V6

The legendary **Toyota Land**

Cruiser is the perfect vehicle to navigate even the most challenging terrains.

Powering the Land Cruiser is a choice of two powertrain options. The V6 twin-turbo 3.5-litre petrol engine achieves class-leading performance that surpasses a conventional V8, producing 409 hp and up to 650 nm. This is paired to a 10-speed automatic transmission.

Also available is a naturally aspirated 4.0-litre V6 petrol engine that produces 271 hp and up to 385 nm paired to a 6-speed automatic transmission.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade.

Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories. Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications.



Salalah Port a strategic hub for Red Sea logistics challenges: Expert

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, MARCH 9

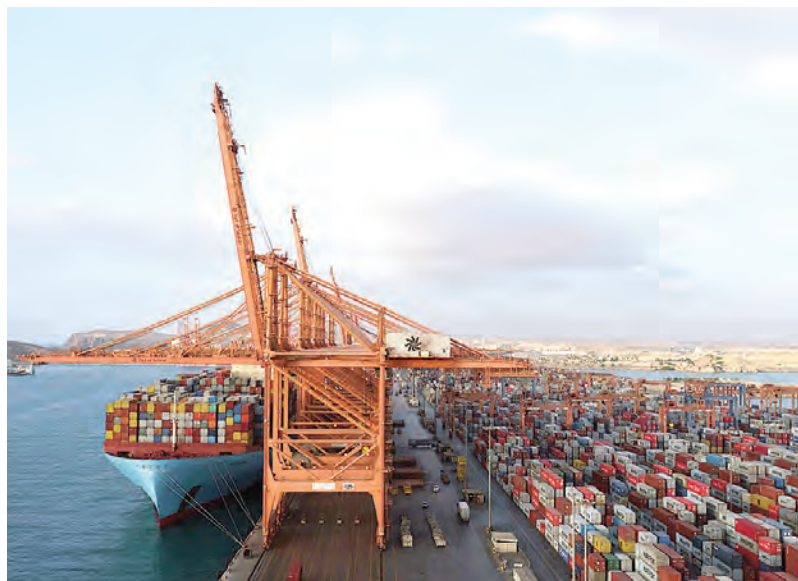
In a recent event hosted by Oman American Business Council, titled 'Oman Logistic Update — The Red Sea: Navigating Stormy Waters' held at the Sheraton Hotel Muscat and sponsored by RA Logistics, key stakeholders in the logistics sector gathered to gain valuable insights from a discussion on the current challenges and opportunities in Red Sea logistics.

The event focused on navigating the complexities of the logistics situation in the region amidst ongoing challenges, providing valuable takeaways for industry players.

Initiating the discussion, Colin McKinlay, Founder and Managing Partner of RA Logistics, shed light on the evolving dynamics of Red Sea logistics and shared important observations on the current landscape. One of the significant points highlighted was the impact of the crisis on shipping routes in the Red Sea, with vessels facing security threats in certain areas.

McKinlay emphasised the need for proactive measures to address these challenges and ensure the safety of cargo and vessels.

As the crisis in the region persists, McKinlay discussed the changing tactics used by threat actors, noting the shift from traditional methods to more sophisticated approaches such



By terminating trips in Salalah, companies can avoid potential delays and disruptions that may arise along the original shipping route in the Red Sea region.

as drones with explosives and underwater capabilities. This shift has prompted vessel operators to reconsider their routes, with many opting to reroute around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa to ensure the safety of their assets.

The talk also addressed the impact of these challenges on the global trade landscape, with approximately 30% of global trade routing through the Red Sea.

McKinlay outlined the longer transit times and carrier rate increases experienced on various trade lanes as a result of the crisis, emphasising the need for adaptability and resilience in the face of market fluctuations.

In light of the disruptions caused by the crisis, McKinlay

advised industry players to adopt proactive strategies to mitigate risks and streamline logistics operations. He emphasised the importance of working in advance, maintaining round-the-clock accessibility, and developing contingency plans to navigate uncertainties in the market effectively.

Furthermore, McKinlay highlighted the significance of collaboration and communication among stakeholders in the supply chain to ensure smooth operations and minimise disruptions. He recommended exploring alternative port options, such as terminating trips in Salalah, to address delays and optimise logistical efficiency.

By choosing to terminate trips

in Salalah, companies can avoid potential delays and disruptions that may arise along the original shipping route in the Red Sea region. This strategic decision allows for the timely delivery of goods and services, reducing the impact of delays on supply chain operations.

Furthermore, by optimising logistical efficiency through rerouting trips to Salalah, companies can streamline their operations, minimise costs, and improve the overall performance of their logistics networks.

This approach enables the effective management of resources, enhances customer satisfaction, and ensures business continuity in the face of logistical challenges.

Reflecting on the event, Rebecca Olson, CEO of OABC shared, "This event is a testament to the commitment of our members, in this case, RA Logistics, to provide valuable insights for fellow members and to the wider business community in Oman through the platform OABC creates. The session has undoubtedly enriched attendees' understanding and equipped us all with actionable strategies to navigate the current and future logistics situation effectively."

CBO foreign assets rises 0.1% by end of 2023

MUSCAT: Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) show that the total foreign assets at the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) rose by 0.1% to RO 6,734.1 million at the end of 2023, compared to the corresponding period in 2022, when it was RO 6,727.5 million.

On the other hand, the narrow money supply (M1), which consists of the total cash outside the banking system in addition to current accounts and demand deposits in the local currency, increased by 6.6%, recording RO 5,981.1 million, compared to RO 5,611.5 million, at the end of 2022.

Initial data issued by the NCSI



showed that broad money supply (M2) at the end of 2023 stood at RO 23,001.8 million, an increase of 13.1% compared to the corresponding period in 2022.

Narrow money supply, which consists of total cash outside the banking system in addition to current accounts and demand deposits in local currency, increased by 6.6% to RO 5,981.1 million, compared to RO 5,611.5 million at the end of 2022.

17.1% increase in revenues of 3-5 star hotels

MUSCAT: The revenues of 3-5-star hotels in Oman stood at RO 24.751 million at the end of January 2024, up by 17.1% compared to the same period in 2023. Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) show that the total number of hotel guests rose by 20.5% to 215,660 by the end of January 2024, compared to 178,945 during the corresponding period in 2023.

Meanwhile, hotel occupancy rate registered a growth of 16.2%. According to the NCSI report,

among the nationalities, Omanis topped the number of guests in hotels, with their numbers reaching 75,219. As many as 73,325 were European citizens (an increase of 17.9%), and 27,191 were Asian guests citizens (up by 27.8%).

The number of guests from GCC countries increased by 10.5% to 11,961 and the number of American guests reached 7,231. The number of guests from Oceanian countries surged by 4% to 3,877 and those from African countries rose by 38.8% to reach 1,148.

Vodafone Oman celebrates 2nd year anniversary, posts 174% revenue increase

MUSCAT: Vodafone Oman is celebrating the second anniversary of its operations in the Sultanate of Oman with exceptional results that earned it approximately 10% of the market.

Building on its impressive first year, the digital operator focused on fast-tracking its 5G Next Level network reach, doubling its sites to 1,500 and increasing 5G population coverage by 120% while gaining a 42% growth in its customer base, resulting in a 174% revenue increase.

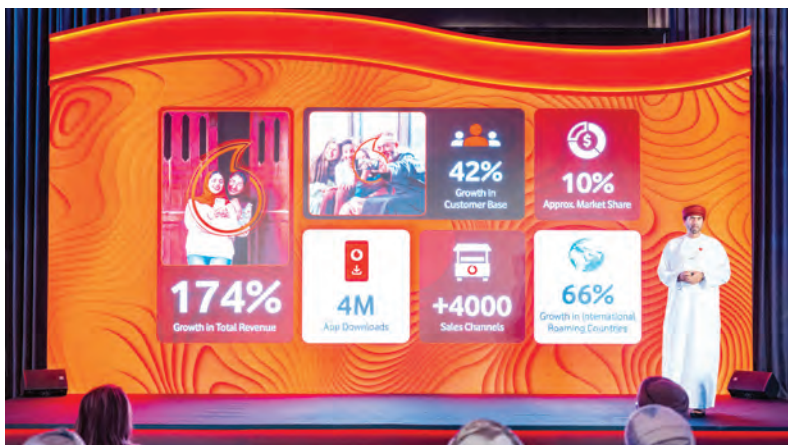
The company's pre-paid market share was also on the rise closing at around 11% in 2023. In addition, Vodafone Oman reported 4 million App downloads as well as increasing its sales channels to over 4,000 and its international roaming countries by 66%.

Its dedication to delivering exceptional value was further validated by Vodafone Oman's leadership of the Net Promoter Score for the second consecutive year. Supporting the company's forward trajectory was \$300 million in long-term financing secured through National Bank of Oman, Oman Arab Bank and Bank Dhofar, which catalysed its ambitious 5G Next Level network roll-out plan.

During the company's annual performance update, Bader al Zidi, Vodafone Oman CEO, said, "we are extremely proud of the tremendous growth achieved in our journey as the Sultanate of Oman's first fully digital green-field telecom operator."

Our vision remains unchanged: to digitalise the Omani way of life in a way that empowers individuals and communities to reach their full potential, all the while safeguarding the heritage, culture and the very essence of the Omani character."

Recognising the important role of technology and integrating it into everyday life, Vodafone Oman has helped drive progress and innovation in the country, enhancing communication and



Bader al Zidi, Vodafone Oman CEO, speaks during the company's annual performance update held on Thursday.

connectivity among people and improving access to education and government services to name but a few.

Vodafone's 2023 journey was filled with remarkable stories of innovation, creativity and progress. The company was amongst the first in the world to offer post-paid packages that allow for full digital onboarding thanks to eSIM activation in less than two minutes via the My Vodafone App.

It was also the first and only telecommunications provider in the Sultanate to provide 5G services at Muscat International Airport.

Today, Vodafone Oman is considered a pioneer in integrating artificial intelligence and machine learning within its operations having succeeded in automating many of its network monitoring and cybersecurity processes.

Ensuring its impact goes beyond the telecom sector it was the first telecom company in Oman to sign a long-term partnership with Al Seeb club as the 'Official Sponsor' of its first football team.

The company's socio-economic agenda focused on two main areas. First, fostering a new-generation of Vodafone leaders through its unique International Talent Programme which saw more than

20 employees travel to Vodafone markets including UK, Turkiye, Portugal, Spain, Ireland and Luxembourg, gaining first-hand knowledge from leaders in the field.

Secondly, Vodafone's efforts were directed to building its local partner capabilities and identifying new opportunities of growth together. In addition, the company remained committed to maximise its economic spend in Oman. As a result, its in-country value amounted to RO 66 million in 2023, including large-scale partnerships and short-term projects and contracts awarded to local businesses and SMEs.

Al Zidi went on to add, "Steadfast on delivering our promise for Oman, we continued to evolve as a leading tech-teleco, confidently achieving our objectives, overcoming challenges, and receiving wholehearted support from our partners, communities and customers."

Our achievements were recognised locally, regionally and globally as we received over 17 awards and accolades. Most notably were our recent recognitions with Opensignal, where we dominated the Mobile Network Experience Report claiming 11 of the 14 categories."



REINVENTING 'REUSE' AND 'RECYCLING'-AL THAIL GROUP SHOWS THE WAY.

Oman's vision for environmental sustainability has received a boost from the industrial sector thanks to the recently set up 'used lead acid battery recycling' plant by the Al Thail Group in the Madayn Suhar Industrial Estate. The world class, first of its kind, green field factory in the Sultanate is spread over an area of 20,000 sq.mtrs and engages in smelting of battery scrap and extraction of 99.98% refined lead ingots & various lead alloys. The smelter commissioned in 2023, has a capacity of breaking down and separating up to 18,000

pyrometallurgical process and the production of ingots. They are meticulously monitored by stringent quality measures that regulate the wastewater management and air pollution control systems and ensure maximum recycling with minimum damage to the environment from the hazardous materials, which otherwise can leak out toxic constituents and contaminate groundwater when disposed in an unlined landfill as is the practice in most of the unorganised industry sector. This causes risk of possible human exposure leading to



commented Mohammed Said Abdullah Al Siyabi – Chairman of Al Thail, Oman.

"Going forward, Al Thail Group aims to be at the forefront in providing active support to the Ministry of Environment & Climate Affairs (MECA) as we forge ahead into an era of environment friendly progress for Oman. We are planning to work more closely with the regulatory



tonnes per annum (TPA) of used lead acid batteries and to produce 10000 TPA of lead bullion and 15,000 TPA of refined lead, lead alloys and ingots.

The operations of plant are streamlined into breaking and separation of the batteries and its components, smelting, refining through



various health and safety hazards. Hence the need to not only minimise the residual waste but also to convert them to useful by products through innovative thinking and methods.

The Al Thail Group which started operations in the late nineties as a small scrap trading enterprise has over the years metamorphosed into a major player in Oman's industry sector, actively integrated with the economic progress of the Sultanate, with multiple businesses encompassing metal scrap trading, logistics, construction and manufacturing. The group is an approved supplier of porta cabins for PDO.

"The lead acid recycling plant is yet another milestone in the group's legacy which not only showcases the organization's acumen for pioneering efforts in a niche and specialised field but also its commitment to fulfilling its corporate social responsibility towards a green and environment friendly Oman for the future generation",



authorities in the coming days as we advance towards an era of environment friendly growth and progress for Oman," said Ibrahim Abdul Rahim – Founder and Group Chairman of the Al Thail Group.

For further information on our activities and support our recycling and sustainable waste management efforts, please feel free to get in touch with us via email at recycling@althailoman.com



AL THAIL METAL RECYCLING LLC.
www.althailoman.com

Bitcoin claims the all-time high once again



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The author is a member
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Association

This week, the cryptocurrency market saw significant movements that could reshape its future. Bitcoin (BTC) soared beyond expectations, breaking the \$69,000 mark and setting a new all-time high at \$69,324 on Tuesday.

This breakthrough comes before the anticipated BTC halving, defying the typical expectation of a post-halving bull run observed in past four-year cycles.

Despite potential setbacks from a sell-off following BTC's price spike and the SEC's decision to delay the approval of spot Ethereum (ETH) ETF applications from major players like Blackrock and Fidelity, Ethereum's price has shown

remarkable stability.

This steadiness is attributed to the market's focus on the upcoming launch of Ethereum's Dencun upgrade, indicating strong investor confidence in ETH's prospects.

In a strategic move to capitalise on Bitcoin's current upswing, MicroStrategy announced its intention to raise \$600 million through convertible debt.

The aim is to purchase additional BTC, augmenting its already vast holding of 193,000 BTC. This decision underscores a wider trend of corporate investments in cryptocurrency, reflecting a strong belief in Bitcoin's future value.

Meanwhile, the return of memecoin mania has catapulted six memecoins into the top 100 cryptocurrencies by market cap, including DOGE, SHIB, PEPE,

BONK, WIF, and FLOKI, all of which have posted triple-digit percentage gains. With the total market cap of these memecoins reaching about \$55 billion, this surge highlights a renewed or new wave of retail investor enthusiasm in the crypto market.

Following Bitcoin's short-lived dip after its all-time high, the broader market experienced a ripple effect, impacting numerous cryptocurrencies, including key gaming tokens.

However, as Bitcoin recovered to \$68,000 and Ethereum approached \$4,000, the gaming sector rebounded strongly. Immutable (IMX) led the charge with a 9% increase to \$3.30 and a market cap of more than \$4.5 billion. Gaming tokens linked to networks such as Beam, Ronin, Arbitrum's Xai, and others also saw significant gains, indicating

a strong recovery and growing interest in crypto gaming.

In addition, the DeFi sector has experienced a wave of activity, highlighted by GMX reaching \$1 billion in trading volume on March 4.

With yields ranging from 11.8% to 105.3% across its platforms, GMX exemplifies the appeal of decentralised finance, offering attractive yields in a time of generally low returns from traditional financial markets. This uptick in DeFi activity, coupled with a market-wide average yield hitting 5.4%, marks a key development in the sector's growth.

However, JPMorgan analysts offer a word of caution, suggesting that expectations for Bitcoin to match gold in investment portfolios might be overambitious due to Bitcoin's higher volatility.

While Bitcoin holds a significant place in the market, equating it to gold in notional amounts is seen as unrealistic by the analysts.

They project a more conservative valuation for Bitcoin, underscoring its distinct role within the investment landscape.

As the cryptocurrency market continues to evolve through fluctuations, innovation, and regulatory developments, these trends reflect a dynamic ecosystem on the brink of new narratives and opportunities for investors.

With Bitcoin setting new records, Ethereum maintaining its growth trajectory, and sectors like gaming and DeFi expanding, the market is navigating its path through excitement and scepticism from traditional financial perspectives.

Nickel rout is energy-transition warning for West



ANTONY CURRIE

The author is a financial
journalist at Breakingviews,
Reuters.

Please mine more nickel, okay?" Elon Musk urged, with a nervous chuckle, responding to a question about constraints to making electric batteries.

"Tesla will give you a giant contract for a long period of time," the carmaker's CEO said during a call with investors. That was July 2020. Since then, use of the metal required to power electric vehicles has soared, rising 37% last year to 290,000 tonnes, according to research firm Adamas Intelligence.

Yet this year miners including BHP, Anglo American, Glencore and Wyloo, owned by magnate Andrew Forrest, have been mothballing, writing down, or trying to sell their operations.

Blame the tumbling price of nickel, which by February had fallen below \$16,000 a tonne on the London Metal Exchange, almost half its level a year earlier. That decline tipped half the world's production of the commodity into the red, BHP calculates.

Despite a modest recovery to \$17,700 a tonne in recent weeks, the ructions have lessons for the West's energy-transition hopes.

Nickel increases the energy density of a battery, enabling it to store more power and add more range to electric vehicles than alternative chemistries like lithium iron phosphate.

Up to 50 kilogrammes of the stuff goes into each power pack that uses it. Supply has risen more than two-fifths over the past three years, almost entirely due to Indonesia.

The archipelago increased its output of the metal tenfold over the past decade; most other countries flatlined or reduced production. Last year Indonesia accounted for 50% of the 3.6 million tonnes excavated globally.

Demand has proved less reliable. China last year appeared to use less nickel for steelmaking, which tends to account for around two-thirds of worldwide consumption.

Production of electric-vehicle batteries, which scoop up a tenth of global output at best, is also hard to predict.

Ford Motor, General Motors and other major carmakers have slowed their electric-vehicle

NICKEL INCREASES THE ENERGY DENSITY OF A BATTERY, ENABLING IT TO STORE MORE POWER AND ADD MORE RANGE TO ELECTRIC VEHICLES THAN ALTERNATIVE CHEMISTRIES LIKE LITHIUM IRON PHOSPHATE.



A worker processes nickel at a nickel smelter of PT Vale Tbk, near Sorowako, Indonesia's Sulawesi island. – Reuters

plans.

Separately, power pack makers in the People's Republic, like BYD, and Contemporary Amperex Technology met rising demand for their products in part by raiding their own stockpiled nickel, keeping the amount they bought to the same level as in 2022. Combined, that left global supply exceeding demand by as much as 10%, though new data suggests it may be nearer 4%, analysts at Macquarie argue.

The mismatch masks longer-term shifts. Several years ago Indonesia's government, eager to capture more value from the metal, ceased exporting the raw material and ramped up domestic processing. Incentives like 15-year tax holidays helped suck in investment from China, its main customer.

Firms including Tsingshan and Lygend Resources & Technology built processing plants. The two countries then developed and deployed a way to manufacture Class 1 nickel – defined as being at least 99.8% pure and the only type used in EV batteries – out of the lower-grade Class 2 supplies abundant in Indonesia.

That production came online around the time the

LME experienced a spectacular squeeze in nickel in March 2022. One of the problems worsening that crisis was a shortage of the metal in the bourse's warehouses; the LME only trades in part by raiding their own stockpiled nickel, keeping the amount they bought to the same level as in 2022. Combined, that left global supply exceeding demand by as much as 10%, though new data suggests it may be nearer 4%, analysts at Macquarie argue.

The LME last year started accepting some of it, which shifted pricing power to Indonesia, because the country can turn Class 2 into Class 1 nickel more cheaply than miners in developed countries can dig up the higher-quality metal.

All else being equal, these factors should have been manageable for miners from Australia to New Caledonia to Latin America. Even at \$16,000 a tonne the price was 20% higher than when Musk issued his 2020 plea. Inflation and other outlays, though, have pushed up expenses.

The average cost of production Down Under is now \$17,000 a tonne, 49% higher than in 2019 and 28% more than some Indonesian operations, calculates Mandala Partners in a report for The Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia.

Most solutions so far look piecemeal. France this week agreed to swap into equity 320

million euros of loans to a New Caledonia operation held on French miner Eramet's balance sheet.

That, though, won't do much to improve the profitability of the South Pacific territory's nickel industry, which accounts for 6% of global supply. Glencore is mothballing its part-owned outfit there and wants to sell its stake.

Instead, governments and miners are coalescing around the idea of a green premium. The concept is compelling. Turning lower-grade nickel into Class 1 material requires lots of energy, and Indonesian power relies heavily on burning coal.

This means carbon emissions per tonne of Class 1 Indonesia nickel are up to six times higher than in Australia. Makers of electric cars – and their customers – might therefore pay more for batteries made with greener nickel.

Miners want the LME to take responsibility for the green premium by creating a separate contract for low-carbon nickel. Yet even if the exchange could define the parameters, the idea runs counter to a lesson of the 2022 squeeze: the nickel contract needed more liquidity.

Faced with sluggish EV sales and squeezed margins,

carmakers want to minimise costs and secure supplies. Indonesia is the only region that has markedly increased production in the past 10 years.

That's why Jakarta has successfully wooed auto and battery giants including Ford, LG Energy Solution Volkswagen, Hyundai Motor Group and others to invest in the country's nickel industry – often with Chinese partners.

On the one hand, that's just business. But it's also a consequence of leaving the supply of critical minerals at the mercy of the market. Jakarta telegraphed its intention for years.

Now the world's car industry is dependent on a more carbon-intensive product with China's fingerprints all over it – just as the US and Europe are trying to reduce their exposure to the People's Republic.

Other materials used in EV batteries are also vulnerable. The price of lithium is down 80% in the past year, prompting some producers to slash output. Copper only declined around 15%, but Rio Tinto's return on capital employed digging up the reddish-brown metal halved to just 3%, per LSEG data.

— Reuters

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FASHION

A model presents a creation by fashion designer Prathibha during the Colombo Fashion Week in Colombo. — AFP



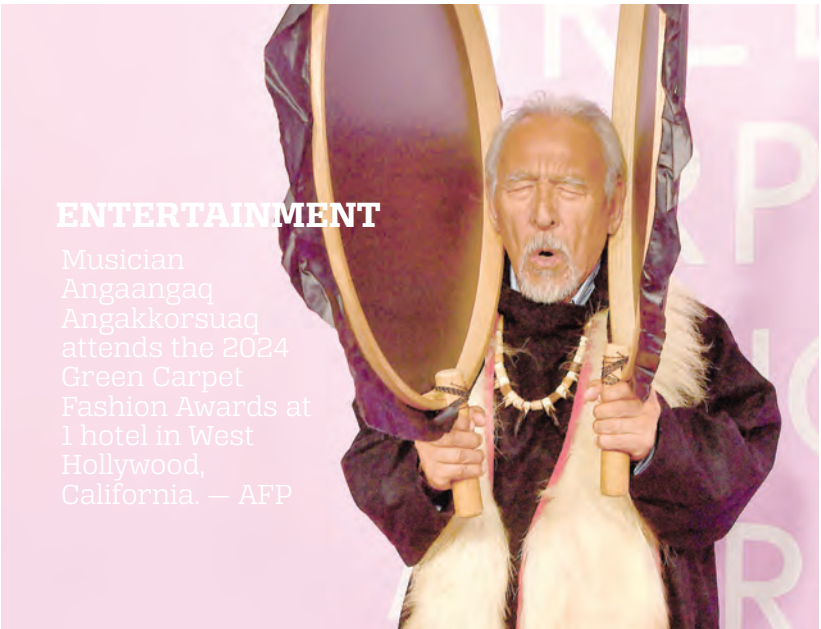
TRENDS

Visitors take a selfie picturing fishes at a tunnel aquarium in Amritsar. — AFP



ANIMAL PLANET

Mother Frimas comes out for the first time with her newborn polar bear cub, at the zoo, in Mierlo. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Musician Angaangaq Angakkorsuaq attends the 2024 Green Carpet Fashion Awards at 1 hotel in West Hollywood, California. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A woman dressed in a mermaid swims in a partly frozen lake in Shenyang, in northeastern China's Liaoning province. — AFP

art & life

SUNDAY | MARCH 10, 2023 | SHAABAN 29, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



Inspired by Venus, Asma al Balushi creates clothing reflecting beauty and cultural heritage. Al Balushi's journey illustrates innovation, blending tradition with cosmic inspiration for a unique fashion vision... P19

FASHION

Nicolas Ghesquiere marks 10 years at Louis Vuitton with fashion show in Paris

LOUIS VUITTON WOMENSWEAR designer Nicolas Ghesquiere celebrated his tenth anniversary at the LVMH-owned label with a fashion show that drew crowds to the Louvre Museum at nightfall on Tuesday, the

last day of Paris Fashion Week. Guests crossed the famous museum's sprawling Cour Carree — some pausing for photos in booths decorated with LV logos — to reach the venue, a tent that filled an inner courtyard. It resembled a 19th century French covered market in iron and glass — but with a hulking, futuristic globe with blinking tubes in the centre. "This is a meaningful evening," the designer wrote in the show notes, a letter to the audience tucked in an envelope left on each seat, recalling the joy of his first show for the label. "Ten years later, this evening is a new dawn." An atmospheric sound track with scratchy noises and buzzing neon sounds culminated in Mirwais' "Disco Science". Models marched down the runway briskly, in rhythm with the music, showcasing voluminous mini-skirts, shimmering dresses, jewel-encrusted jackets and sheer, light-weight trousers.



Some wore furry mittens, others had knit hats with a flat fold that bounced down the runway, while handbags came in various shapes and sizes.

A number of the biggest global fashion labels show at Paris Fashion Week, including LVMH's other major label Dior, as well as Chanel, Hermes and Kering's Saint Laurent. — Reuters



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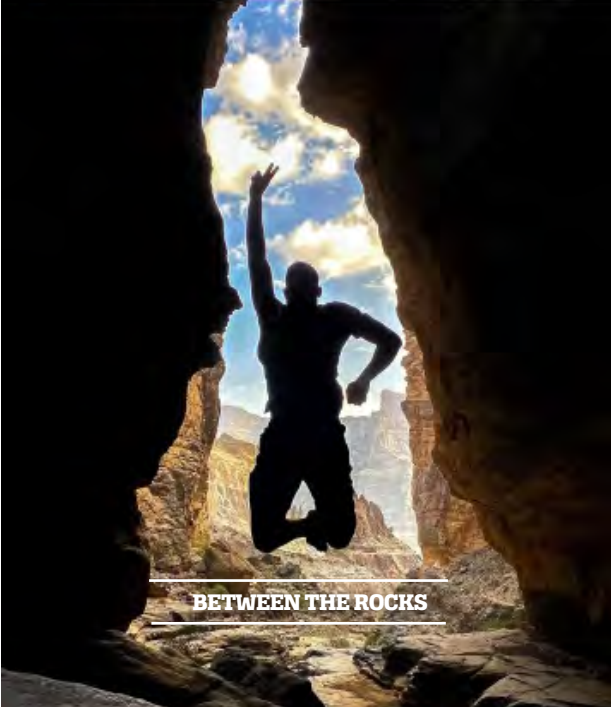
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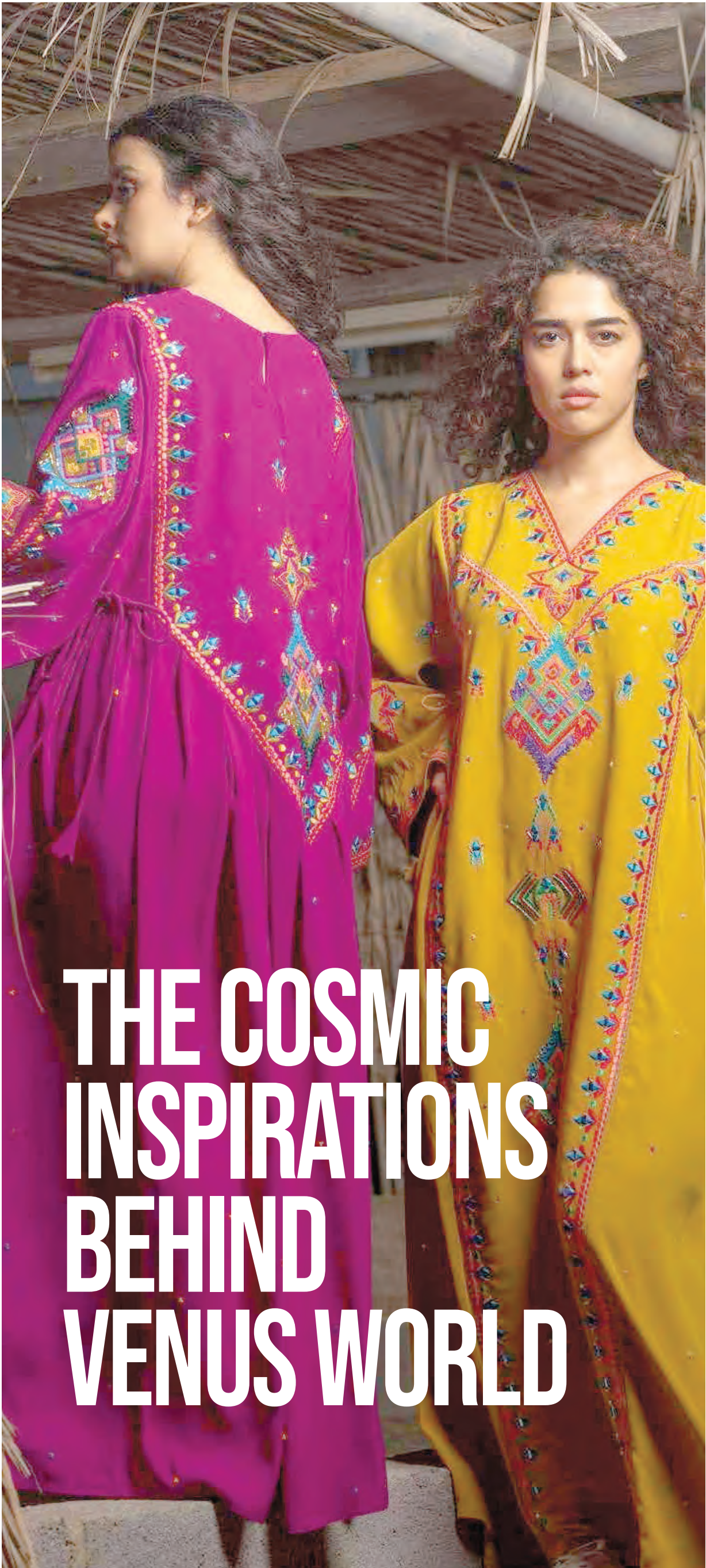
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THE COSMIC INSPIRATIONS BEHIND VENUS WORLD

BY KHATAM AL BUSAIDY

Fashion and astronomy – what could these two fields possibly have in common? For fashion designer Asma Ali al Balushi, they are the two passions that have shaped her creative vision and helped her to better understand her customers. Al Balushi graduated with a major in business administration but has always been fascinated by art and the mysteries of the stars.

“I have loved art since childhood, but I did not find the incentives that would make me improve my artistic skills, and the social environment that supports this type of art was elusive,” Al Balushi said.

Al Balushi established her clothing brand “Venus World” in 2019 during the outbreak of the pandemic. The basic concept of the brand is Venus, the celestial planet, which symbolises beauty, elegance, creativity, and femininity.

“Venus World is not a brand that aims to compete or take others’ spot in the market, but it came to define the genuine qualities of women, highlight their beauty in the best way, and portray their true human nature,” she explained, “although the beginning was jam-packed with challenges, they strengthened us and made us capable of enduring even the most difficult circumstances. Currently, Venus World is only accessible in Omani and the Gulf, yet I am striving to expand the brand internationally and increase brand recognition with its Omani identity and an ancient Arabic touch.”

Al Balushi began to see her customers in a new light. Instead of simply designing clothes that she thought would look good on them, she started to think about their individual personalities, preferences, and lifestyles. By understanding the patterns of their lives, she could create clothing that would truly resonate with them.

Al Balushi said when clients wear one of her designs, they tell her that they feel completely different and very distinct from what they wore before.

What sets Al Balushi apart from others is her ability to maintain the culture and beauty of her home country while incorporating astronomy into her designs. Her designs often feature traditional elements such as intricate embroidery and vibrant colours, which are a nod to her cultural heritage. However, she manages to blend these traditional elements seamlessly with her astronomy-inspired designs, creating something truly unique and beautiful.

“Every design tells a unique story that inspires me. I firmly believe that every work should hold significant meaning and value while inspiring the societal environment. For example, the national scarves designs incorporate Arabic calligraphy (Riqā), which was used by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. This idea instils a sense of value in this type of calligraphy in Omani citizens, touching them with love and gratitude,” she emphasised.

Perhaps most importantly, Al Balushi began to see her customers as individuals, rather than just as a mass of consumers. She began to understand their hopes, fears, and dreams, and she used this knowledge to create clothing that would make them feel confident, beautiful, and empowered.

“Astronomy is another source of creative and innovative ideas.” She added, “Introducing this type of science into fashion reflects energy on the wearer, as each sign has a distribution of specific stars that are reflected in a person’s appearance according to his zodiac sign. There is a saying that says: ‘Man’s reflection is in the sky,’ which means every person has a reflection that he derives from the sky if he can use it correctly.”

In a world where fast fashion dominates, and standard designs are the norm, Al Balushi is a breath of fresh air. She reminds us that fashion is not just about looking good – it’s about expressing our true selves, and connecting with the world around us. By embracing the patterns and rhythms of the universe, she has created a unique and inspiring vision of fashion that speaks to the heart and soul of her customers.

“Not everyone who criticises you understands the work you present or means that his criticism is in the right place.” Al Balushi explained, “Several standards may catch your attention when people criticise you: some criticisms make you take steps forward and work harder to provide what is better, while other criticisms come out of nowhere, so I neglect them because the person presenting them may not be at the intellectual level that makes him a critique.”

Al Balushi started her fashion design career with a limited financial budget, but today has attained a stage of stability both financially and professionally.

Remember that fashion is not just about the clothes – it’s about the people who wear them, and the stories they tell, Al Balushi concluded.





AT 65 YEARS OF AGE, Barbie shows no signs of retiring from her 250 different jobs as a plastic and fantastic doll whose small feet have left a big cultural mark on the human world.

The original Mattel Barbie with her iconic blonde hair, black and white bathing suit and eyes angled to the side, was inspired by creator Ruth Handler's daughter, Barbara, in 1959.

However, in 2024, as Barbie celebrates her 65th anniversary, the dolls are produced in a diversity of colours, hair textures, body shapes and more.

"Barbie used to be a more singular reflection of beauty and more one-dimensional. Today, there are many

Barbies, and we've got multiple views of the brand," Mattel's executive vice president and chief brand officer, Lisa McKnight, told Reuters at the Mattel Design Center in Los Angeles.

Barbies come in 35 skin tones, 97 hairstyles and nine body types, including dolls with wheelchairs, Down Syndrome, vitiligo and plus-sizes as well as gender neutral dolls.

The doll has also become the fashion icon recently inspiring Barbiecore and helping many renowned hair stylists and clothing designers, like Karl Lagerfeld, get their start.

Adding to the brand's evolution, the commercial success of the 2023 8-time

Oscar-nominated "Barbie" movie directed by Greta Gerwig, starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling added a new emotional depth to the doll.

However, these gains didn't come overnight.

"I'm so grateful I didn't grow up with Barbie," women's rights activist Gloria Steinem said in the 2018 Barbie documentary on Hulu "Tiny Shoulders: Rethinking Barbie."

"Barbie was everything we didn't want to be, and were being told to be," she added, referring to her work as a second-wave feminist advocating for equality in the 60s and 70s.

To this day, the doll is still associated



by some with unrealistic body proportions, gender roles and Eurocentric beauty standards.

While considering these concerns, Mattel keeps adding multifaceted dolls to be pretty in pink.

The brand is open to different voices that go beyond that of its designers.

"What's most important for us is that we take on board consultation from all kinds of communities when we're designing," said Kim Culmone, senior vice president (SVP) of design.

While expanding, however, some things remain true for the toy brand, including hand-painting Barbies and using the same sewing machines that have been around since 1959.

Whether it is hand-sculpting new dolls or operating advanced 3D-printers, the brand is open to change.

The 65th anniversary dolls created by Filipino lead designer for Barbie Signature, Carlyle Nuera, are a reimagining of the original Barbie's bathing suit as a black and white gown accompanied by white cat-eye sunglasses.

Rather than just the classic white doll with blonde hair, there's also a Black doll with braids and laid edges, a popular style for Black women that includes soft and sleeked baby hairs. "If we continued to do the same thing that we've done before, over and over again, Barbie would not be the success that she is today," Culmone said. — Reuters

ILLUMINATE BLESSINGS THIS RAMADAN AT SHANGRI-LA BARR AL JISSAH



This Ramadan promises to be unique in flavours at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and the hotel is all set to welcome guests with a range of exciting and impeccable experiences. Friends and family can savour grand Iftar meals at Al Tanoor or in the privacy of our cabanas to Suhoor and post-Iftar in our Layali Ramadan beach tent and at the SiO2 Beach Lounge, the new gem located at Al Bandar. An exquisite array of Ramadan-inspired experiences awaits as you celebrate moments of joy and togetherness.

With expansive venues and space, each Ramadan experience will give guests generous space and privacy; residents of Muscat and beyond are invited to dine on a range of Ramadan classics and global favourites, paired with live performances throughout the month.

"Every year we bring in new savoury collections for Ramadan and diverse options for our guests to ensure an authentic experience. With Chefs coming from countries across the world, our Iftar selections combines unique selections from Oman, Middle East and beyond. Guests can dine while witnessing the live oud players against a perfect backdrop, just a 20-minute drive from the city. We highly recommend the Layali Ramadan with two options of Suhoor, from the traditional tent to the open-sky SiO2 Beach Lounge. commented René D. Egle, the Area General Manager of Shangri-La Barr al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn, Muscat.

Grand Iftar Buffet – Al Tanoor

Al Tanoor restaurant is serving a delicious Iftar buffet, featuring a host of delectable traditional Ramadan delicacies inspired by local, regional, and international cuisines. The extensive buffet

spread will showcase live and A la minute stations including hot and cold mezze, Omani specials, a variety of regional dishes, mixed grill, and classic desserts, along with traditional Ramadan beverages and live entertainment such as Oud players. With the mild weather conditions, Al Tanoor is extending its seating area on the patio enabling guests to enjoy their meals in the gorgeous alfresco setting overlooking the beach.

From sunset until 10.30pm daily, OMR 24 net per person.

Layali Ramadan – Tent and SiO2 Beach Lounge

This Ramadan, Layali is getting bigger with two seating ambiances. Guests and residents of Oman have the options between the air-conditioned Layali Ramadan tent or simply enjoy the mild weather conditions at the SiO2 Beach Lounge. Both venues are located next to each other and are presenting a savoury selection of appetisers paired with the sounds of traditional live music.

Open daily from 8pm to 2am, no minimum spend is required

Indian Iftar at Aangan by Rohit Ghai

Diners are also invited to experience Iftar with an Indian twist at Aangan by Rohit Ghai. The Michelin-star Chef Rohit Ghai has personally curated a 7-course shared menu for two with dishes that include Aloo Tikki, Prawns Masala, Charred Chicken, Chicken Biryani and much more to savour during this Holy month at **OMR 40 net per person.**

Aangan by Rohit Ghai | Daily, from Maghrib time until 10.30pm

Private Cabanas – Iftar or Suhoor

Set against the backdrop of rugged mountains and the Gulf of Oman, families and friends can elevate their iftar or suhoor experience when dining in our beautifully adorned cabanas. Facing Al Bandar's beach, four cabanas, each up to 8 persons, and boasting a contemporary Arabian décor is ideal for those who want to dine in privacy with their closed ones. The menu features a selection of appetisers, main courses along with desserts and traditional beverages.

Daily, from Maghrib time at OMR 30 per person

Exclusive Ramadan Staycation

This Ramadan, relax, unwind, and recharge in the spacious and tranquil setting of Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn. Guests will enjoy complimentary Iftar and Suhoor as well as early check-in and late check out. The resort's large playground is perfect for the ultimate retreat whether with families or couples.

Prices start from **OMR 84 ++ per night** for two adults including Iftar and Suhoor.

Exclusive Shangri-La Circle Member Discount

Shangri-La Circle members residing in Oman avail 20% off on their consumptions at the resort, when visiting us during this Holy Month. The discount is applicable on all dining experiences and staycations including forthcoming Eid celebrations.

To enrol and enjoy members benefits and rates, enrol through [Shangri-La Circle](#).

Learn more about the Ramadan experiences from Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah by calling +968 2477 6565 or emailing fbreservation.slm@shangri-la.com

