

P11

ENGLAND GO DOWN TO TEENAGER'S LATE GOAL



P13

TOURIST ARRIVALS INTO OMAN TO SURPASS 5-MILLION MARK IN 2024



P18

RUSTAQ'S CHARITABLE RAMADHAN TRADITION



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO PRESIDENT OF GREECE

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

HM GREETINGS CONVEYED TO CUBA



President Dr Miguel Diaz-Canel of the Republic of Cuba, on Sunday, received Abdulsalman bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), in the Cuban capital city, Havana. The reception came within the framework of the official visit paid by the OIA Chairman to Cuba. The OIA Chairman conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Diaz. His Majesty also wished the people of Cuba further progress and prosperity. On his turn, the Cuban president expressed his heartfelt sentiments to His Majesty and the Omani people.

MOSCOW

CONCERT HALL ATTACK DEATH TOLL AT 137

The death toll from the attack on the Crocus City Hall concert venue in the outskirts of Moscow has risen to 137, authorities said on Sunday according to state news agency Tass. The state Investigative Committee had earlier put the number at 133 but said the death toll was likely to rise as emergency workers continue to search the rubble. More than 150 people were injured when gunmen fired indiscriminately at concert-goers at the packed venue on Friday evening, with many still in critical condition, according to the authorities. Russia observed a national day of mourning on Sunday. The so-called IS militia claimed responsibility for the attack, but neither Vladimir Putin nor the authorities have so far commented on their claim. Eyewitnesses reported the perpetrators shot indiscriminately at visitors.

Oman on right track in combatting human trafficking

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

The Sultanate of Oman continues its relentless efforts to combat human trafficking as it was one of the first countries to enact legislation to eliminate this menace. Oman recognises human trafficking as a grave violation of human rights, gives utmost importance to combating it, and remains committed

to preserving human dignity. It is also making extensive efforts to improve the working conditions of workers and guarantees rights in terms of occupational safety and health. Oman, represented by the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT), continues to work diligently in tune with domestic and regional laws, treaties, and conventions related to combating

human trafficking to address this phenomenon. As earlier revealed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs and Chairman of NCCHT, Oman is among the pioneers towards in legislations against this inhumane practice as it passed the Anti-Trafficking Law way back in 2008. This significant move highlights

the country's ongoing commitment to abolish such a form of exploitation. "NCCHT has completed drafting a new law against human trafficking. The imminent launch of the National Referral System, development of the National Action Plan (2024-2026), and establishment of bilateral agreements with labour-exporting countries further illustrate Oman's commitment," says Al Harthy. [TURN TO P2](#)

'MADE IN OMAN' SUV THIS YEAR



The Sultanate of Oman's first electric SUV to be manufactured in Al Duqm will be ready for customers by the end of this year. The company, Mays, said through its social media account that the SUV brand 'Alive 1' will hit the market by the end of this year with price in the range of around RO 16,000. The company said that as the number of orders exceeded expectations, it is studying the need to increase production in the first year. The Mays 'Alive 1' will run fully on electric charging and is designed to suit the climate conditions of the GCC region. [DETAILS ON P13](#)

Low pressure system to bring rains from Tuesday

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The latest analyses from the National Multi-hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that a trough of a low system will affect the Sultanate of Oman starting from Tuesday to Wednesday. Clouds advection and formation expected over most governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, with isolated rains of

varying of intensity (10-40 mm) predicted over Al Hajar mountains and governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Dhofar and parts of Al Wusta. The sea condition will be moderate to rough (1.5-3 metres) along coastal areas of the Sea of Oman and western Musandam, northerly winds (12-25 knots) over most governorates that may cause dust rising over desert and open areas. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) advises all to take

precaution during rains and while crossing wadis. It also urges all to follow the weather bulletins issued by official sources. The low pressure caused by upper air trough coming across land from the direction of Saudi Arabia is expected to bring heavy rains in some areas. "The weather will be unstable on Tuesday and Wednesday, bringing heavy rains in some areas," said the weather forecaster.

RO 322 million worth contracts for electricity supply signed

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, March 24

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) marked a significant milestone with the signing of agreements totalling over RO 322 million for the strategic 'Rabt - Phase 2' and Dhofar Governorate projects. The signing ceremony, held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre under the auspices of Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinaï, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), and was attended by key officials representing Nama Holding, OETC, contractors, and consultants.

The ceremony included the signing of agreements with each of Larsen and Toubro, Oman National Engineering and Investment Company, Zawawi Powertech Engineering, Bahwan Engineering Company, Monenco Consulting Engineers and Mott MacDonald.

The strategic 'Rabt - Phase 2' project's total cost reaches up to RO 257 million and includes the establishment of three grid stations with high voltages reaching up to 400 kV, in addition to extending 400 kV overhead lines over a distance exceeding 550 km.

The project aims to connect the main transmission network with the Dhofar electricity network by establishing transmission lines between 400/132 kV Duqm Industrial Grid Station and 400/132 kV Dhofar Grid Station, which will be established in Salalah. In addition, the project includes establishing an immediate switching grid station at Shaleem area to control power and voltages and serve the

The strategic 'Rabt - Phase 2' project's total cost reaches up to RO 257 million and includes the establishment of three grid stations with high voltages reaching up to 400 kV, in addition to extending 400 kV overhead lines over a distance of 550 km

requirements of Dhofar Integrated Services Company and others, alongside serving the potential future generation connections in the governorate.

The project includes extending 400 kV connections to two new wind farms stations planned in the Ras Madrakah area with a capacity of 300 Megawatts and the Harweel area with a capacity of 200 Megawatts. Moreover, it will connect the 400/132 kV Thamrait Grid Station. The project is expected to be finalised by 2027.

Furthermore, the electricity transmission network expansion projects in Dhofar Governorate, which hold a total investment of RO 65 million, include the establishment of 132 kV transmission line spanning across 269 km. These transmission lines will be connecting the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna and Shahab Aseeb, passing by Madhi. Additionally, this project involves the construction of three 132 kV Grid Stations, and it is expected to be finalised by 2026. [TURN TO P3](#)

Israel besieges Gaza hospitals, forcing evacuations

CAIRO: Israeli forces besieged two more Gaza hospitals on Sunday, pinning down medical teams under heavy gunfire and forcing the evacuation from one hospital of most patients and displaced people sheltering there, the Palestinian Red Crescent said.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said one of its staff was killed when Israeli tanks suddenly pushed back into areas around Al-Amal and Nasser hospitals in the southern city of Khan Younis, amid shelling and gunfire.

Israeli armoured forces sealed off Al-Amal Hospital and carried out extensive bulldozing



Palestinians look out from the window of a building hit by overnight Israeli bombardment in Rafah. — AFP

operations in its vicinity, the Red Crescent said in a statement, adding: "All of our teams are in extreme danger at the moment and are completely immobilised."

It said Israeli forces demanded the complete evacuation of staff, patients and displaced people from Al-Amal and fired smoke bombs into the area to try to push out its occupants. Hours later, the Red Crescent said all patients who could be moved as well as displaced people who found refuge from fighting in the hospital compound had been evacuated westwards to Al Mawasi, a coastal beach settlement. — Reuters



Terms & conditions apply



Create a brighter future for your Children

Visit your nearest BankDhofar branch





bankdhofar

2479 1111 | www.bankdhofar.com





Leading the Fight Against Cancer:

Experience Exceptional Care at Our Medical Oncology Department!

Burjeel Hospital, Al Khuwair

omanburjeel | www.burjeelhospitaloman.com

- ✓ Solid Tumor Diagnosis
- ✓ Cancer Chemotherapy & Immunotherapy
- ✓ Clinical, Biochemical & Radiological follow-up
- ✓ Anemia Clinic
- ✓ Hemoglobinopathies Assessment
- ✓ Blood Malignancy Diagnosis
- ✓ Iron Studies & Management

برجيل burjeel hospital

24399777 | 92167571

MOH-955941/2024

Copy of credentials received from Zambia

MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, received a copy of the credentials of Duncan Mulima, Ambassador of the Republic of Zambia to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA



Oman on right track in combatting trafficking

FROM P1

Oman's commitment extends to the protection of human trafficking victims including children, men and women. To facilitate this, Oman has established 'Dar al Wefaq', a safe house providing victims with a range of services such as psychological support, social rehabilitation, and legal assistance. Recognising the need for collective efforts, the government works with the private sector and civil society organisations to support these victims.

Oman has made unrelenting efforts to confront this crime, based on the Basic Law of the State, which guarantees justice and equality for all segments of society, and maintains security and protection for citizens and residents from any transgressions affecting their dignity and legitimate rights.

At a high-level international meeting on combating human trafficking at the United Nations headquarters in New York, the Sultanate of Oman is on the record as stating that human trafficking is not compatible with its principles and values.

As part of the efforts to prosecute crimes related to human trafficking in Oman, dedicated offices have been set up within the Public Prosecution, the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the Ministry of Labour and the Foreign Ministry.

The effort also includes rapid intervention team headed by the Public Prosecution and comprises the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Development and the Royal Oman Police.

According to Public Prosecution, those found trafficking in persons or aiding the same will be imprisoned for a period up to 15 years and could face a fine of RO 150,000. "Creating a website or publishing information on the Internet or means of information technology with the intent to trafficking in persons or facilitate dealing with the same is an offence punishable by imprisonment for a period up to 15 years and a fine up to RO 150,000," the statement from Public Prosecution said.

Also, the department for combating human trafficking at the ROP has been upgraded to an

Rights of domestic workers are protected by laws

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

The Sultanate of Oman is home to 202,368 female domestic workforce of all nationalities and their rights are well defined in the laws, according to the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC).

The OHRC said that laws in the Sultanate of Oman ensure that workers are paid their (agreed-upon) monthly wages within seven days of each month's end, provided with sufficient food and accommodation, and receive medical care from their employer throughout their contract.

In addition, the law also mandates that domestic workers have break time during the day, as well as a weekly rest day, and are entitled to leave after the agreed-upon period in their employment contract.

The law emphasises the importance of providing decent and humane treatment that upholds the worker's dignity. Furthermore, domestic workers are provided with a return ticket to their home country, which is covered by the recruitment agency within 180 days of their arrival if



it is determined that their job is different from the one specified in the recruitment permit, if they are mentally ill or contagious, or if they have a disability that prevents them from performing their duties.

Domestic workers may also be given a return ticket at the employer's expense after the contract period expires or due to the employer's violation of the contract. The Sultanate of Oman enforces a legal framework that ensures the rights of workers in alignment with international labour norms, the Basic Statute of State, the Omani Labour Law, ministerial resolutions, Convention No 105 on the Abolition of Forced Labour, ILO Convention No 29 on Forced Labour, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

administrative unit that includes four departments - monitoring and information gathering, international cooperation, case affairs and coordination and follow-up.

To preserve the values of humanity, maintain the status of people, and protect them from any form of slavery, the Royal Oman Police, represented by the Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations, works to combat the crime of human trafficking, through dedicated and professional work.

The Ministry of Labour also plays an important role in combating human trafficking. It includes a special section for combating human trafficking, which is concerned with investigating complaints related to human trafficking and providing victims with necessary

care.

The section also organises awareness and educational campaigns to prevent human trafficking, cooperates with local and international units in combating human trafficking, and exchanges information and experiences, as well as provides training and vocational rehabilitation for victims to increase their chances of obtaining legitimate and sustainable job opportunities.

Combating human trafficking is a national responsibility in Oman, which requires the solidarity of all members of society to confront it in cooperation with the departments concerned. In this context, NCCHT also plays a leading role in providing protection and assistance to victims.



NO

Against Waste And Extravagance



5-year-old battling rare genetic disorder needs help

MUSCAT: A five-year-old child, Sulaiman al Maskari, from Ibra in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate is suffering from a medical condition that requires collecting money for his treatment.

Donations have poured in from across the Sultanate of Oman even as the Ministry of Social Development's Jood online platform has launched a campaign to raise funds for Sulaiman, who is suffering from Duchenne disease (DMD). He urgently needs an injection of the drug Elevidys to avoid atrophy, muscle weakness, and paralysis. The Jood has started the campaign planned to raise RO 100,000 for the child.



Sulaiman al Maskari

Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD) is a genetic disorder characterised by progressive muscle degeneration and weakness due to the alterations of a protein called dystrophin that helps keep muscle cells intact. DMD is one

of four conditions known as dystrophinopathies. The other three diseases that belong to this group are Becker Muscular dystrophy (BMD, a mild form of DMD); an intermediate clinical presentation between DMD and BMD; and DMD-associated dilated cardiomyopathy (heart disease) with little or no clinical skeletal, or voluntary, muscle disease.

DMD symptom onset is in early childhood, usually between ages 2 and 3. The disease primarily affects boys, but in rare cases, it can affect girls. Jood is an electronic platform created to serve volunteer charitable associations and teams in the Sultanate of Oman.

Officials review scrap collection and trading

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

Officials reviewed scrap collection and trading regulations in Muscat Governorate last week. The meeting was attended by officials from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), the Royal Oman Police and Muscat Municipality. The meeting was convened in response to the complaints by residents in several neighbourhoods about nuisance caused by collection of scrap by some unlicensed traders in trucks.

The meeting was headed by MoCIIP Director-General Mubarak bin Mohammed al Dohani. The officials discussed environmental pollution from worn-out vehicles and unscientific management of scrap. The meeting comes within the framework of an effort to ensure the effective implementation of the regulation and provide a suitable environment



The meeting was convened in response to the complaints by residents in several neighbourhoods about nuisance caused by collection of scrap

for safe living for the residents of Muscat Governorate.

Regulations stipulate that a licence is needed to engage in scrap collection and handling activities, which must be renewed before expiry.

A licence fee of RO 305 is collected by the governorate at the time of application, including an application fee of RO 5. The licence renewal fee is RO 300. Additionally, the establishment must pass a technical audit to ensure environmental safeguards

and conditions are met.

The penalty for operating a scrap dealership without a licence ranges from RO 50 and RO 500 which is doubled for a repeat violation. Scrap from which steel and copper is extracted can be collected and traded only in industrial zones.

The decision bans dealers from collecting and buying scrap from residential areas. A fine of RO 500 will be collected from dealers collecting scrap in residential areas and RO 100 for non-Omanis in the profession.

SHINAS MARKET BUZZES WITH ACTIVITIES DURING RAMADHAN



SHINAS: The Ramadhan Market for Productive Families in Shinas, located in Al Batinah North Governorate, pulsates with vibrant commercial activity during Ramadhan. Spearheaded by the Shinas Municipality, the market serves as a beacon of support for productive families showcasing a diverse array of household products.

Eng Hassan bin Ali al Barmani, Director, Municipality Department in Shinas, underscores the significance of this initiative, emphasising its role in providing a platform for home project

owners to exhibit their goods during Ramadhan. By establishing the Ramadhan market, the municipality aims to bolster the presence and backing of productive families across various sectors.

This initiative not only amplifies awareness of local projects but also cultivates community support for them. Constructed from environmentally friendly materials such as palm leaves, the market stands as a testament to the rich heritage and culture of Shinas. Visitors and residents alike are invited to peruse and purchase distinctive products that

authentically reflect the essence of the state.

The Ramadhan market serves as a focal point for showcasing the endeavours of productive families, aligning with the overarching goal of facilitating organised sales processes and providing a designated outlet for marketing during the holy month. Operating in the afternoon, the market garners interest from buyers both within and beyond the governorate, offering entertainment activities and competitions, ranging from Ramadhan-themed food to agricultural products. —ONA

RO 322 million power transmission contracts signed

FROM P1

The strategic 'Rabt - Phase 2' includes four projects in total, in which the first project involves the construction of 400/132 kV Duqm Industrial Grid Station (GS) and its associated transmission lines of a total length of 40 km. The second project entails the construction of 400 kV overhead lines stretching 290 kilometres from the 400/132 kV Duqm Industrial GS to the 400 kV Shaleem Switching Station. Following that, the third project involves establishing 400 kV overhead lines spanning approximately 260 kilometres from the 400 kV Shaleem Switching Station to the 400/132 kV Dhofar GS.

Additionally, the fourth project under the 'Rabt - Phase 2' initiative encompasses the construction of the 400 kV Shaleem Switching Station. The project includes setting up the 400/132 kV Dhofar GS.

On the other hand, the network expansion projects in Dhofar Governorate includes a total of three grid station projects. The first project involves the construction of 132/33 kV Mudhi GS, which includes an extension of Thamrait GS and an 84km 132 kV overhead line connecting Thamrait GS to Mudhi GS. The second project includes the construction of 132/33 Al Mazyouna GS, as well as 103km of 132 kV overhead lines from Mudhi GS to Al Mazyouna GS. Finally, the third project includes the construction of 132/33 kV Shahab Aseeb GS, in addition to 82 km of 132 kV



overhead lines from Mudhi GS to Shahab Aseeb GS.

These projects aim to enhance reliable, secure, and sustainable electricity supply by completing the connection of the electricity network in northern Oman with the south, alongside expansion of electricity transmission network in Dhofar Governorate. Moreover, they contribute to achieving the Carbon Neutrality Goal by 2050 through reducing carbon emissions by more than 110,000 tonnes in total on an annual basis. Furthermore, the projects aim to reduce operational costs by reducing diesel usage and saving up to over 40 million litres of diesel annually.

Eng Saleh al Rumhi, OETC's CEO, pointed out the company's devotion to enhance the reliability, safety, and sustainability of the electricity transmission network across various governorates of Oman, to align

with the desired development and growth in various sectors, and to contribute to progress in the developmental journey to achieve national targets at all levels.

Al Rumhi added: "Our aspirations and vision are reflected through various projects undertaken by the OETC, aiming to contribute to achieving the Carbon Neutrality Goal by 2050, enhancing the strength, reliability, security, and availability of electricity supply to serve growth in various fields. Furthermore, this aims to empower the development in the Sultanate of Oman, and enrich the economic sector by fostering its development and enhancing the business environment to attract more local, regional, and global investments in line with Oman Vision 2040, aiming to make Oman one of the strongest economic and investment destinations globally."

Omani-Bahraini Friendship Society organises bazaar

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousuf

The Omani-Bahraini Friendship Society organised the second edition of the Omani-Bahraini bazaar under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion at the Mall of Oman that took place from March 21 to 24.

Organised in cooperation with the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain in the Sultanate of Oman, the event was graced by Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Sultanate of Oman, Rudayna bint Amer al Hajriyah, President of the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Society, and a number of their Excellencies and officials in



The Omani-Bahraini bazaar exhibition stems from the objectives of the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Society which is devised to strengthen the bilateral trade relations.

the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, businessmen from the two brotherly countries, the exhibition audience and representatives of the local press.

The Omani-Bahraini bazaar exhibition stems from the objectives

of the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Society which is devised to strengthen the bilateral trade relations in various fields, especially exhibition tourism, as well as to maximise the volume of partnerships between entrepreneurs and to develop bridges of communication between the two brotherly countries.



About 38 exhibitors from entrepreneurs and small and micro enterprises from the two brotherly countries participated in the Omani-Bahraini bazaar and included displays of Omani and Bahraini products for which both countries are known, including incense, perfumes, frankincense, food products,

traditional clothing, silver jewellery, precious stones, and others.

"The Omani-Bahraini bazaar reflects one of the manifestations and images of cooperation between the two brotherly countries, which aims to support and develop the entrepreneurial segment within the framework of the plans and objectives

of the Kingdom's Vision 2030," Dr Juma told the *Observer*.

"This exhibition is the fruit of the cooperation of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Sultanate of Oman and the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Society, as the association aims to bring the two peoples closer together by holding events, exhibitions, seminars and conferences," he added.

Rudayna confirmed that the exhibition comes within a package of activities included in the association's annual plan for the year 2024. She appreciated the efforts of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Sultanate of Oman in facilitating the mission of the Association and Bahraini entrepreneurs to participate in this exhibition.



Follow us on instagram: [omanobserver](#)

KITCHEN SAFETY TIPS DURING COOKING



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

During the sacred month of Ramadhan, the preparation of special Ramadhan cuisine sees a significant rise. However, this surge in culinary activity also heightens the risk of kitchen fires, primarily attributed to the intense heat generated by gas stoves used for cooking, heightened by the presence of various electrical appliances essential in the kitchen.

During Ramadhan, the number of meals decreases as instead of three basic meals, it becomes a single meal, in addition to Suhoor. However, studies and annual reports issued during the holy month confirm that women spend from 40 to 60 per cent of their time in the kitchen to prepare iftar.

It is therefore natural for them to be more exposed to risks, especially with children in the kitchen with them, where

attention is distracted.

It is necessary to take safety precautions, especially since this holy month is associated with recognised social customs, as most home fire incidents during the month occur during the afternoon, which are the result of not taking caution during cooking operations and not checking the gas cylinder or as a result of children messing around.

Be careful to avoid fire risks resulting from oil coming into contact with flammable sources, by not filling frying pans to the brim with oil, especially since oil turns into flammable steam at a temperature of 240 degrees Celsius.

Housewives must be careful when heating foods in the microwave, by constantly monitoring and not using metal utensils inside them, and by inspecting the gas extensions and electrical connections and performing the necessary maintenance on them.

The General Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance confirmed that with the advent of the holy month and its

special characteristics, and in light of the increased use of heat sources in kitchens for long periods of time, it is necessary to follow preventive and public safety measures to avoid accidents.

The authority noted that caution should be taken during cooking operations, that the gas cylinder should be inspected, that the electricity should be disconnected after finishing using electrical appliances, and that sharp tools and dangerous materials should be placed out of the reach of children.

It is also noted that housewives and domestic workers should not wear loose clothes or made of highly flammable materials while preparing food.

They should also check the safety of gas pipelines and turn off electrical switches after preparing the food.

Amid the push and bustle of kitchen activities, many women can make some common mistakes. Therefore, you should know it, to avoid falling into it. It is true that the kitchen is the place designated for preparing food, but it can sometimes turn



FIRST AID TIPS

- AVOID FORCEFULLY REMOVING CLOTHING AS STUCK TO THE BURN
- IF THE BURNED AREA IS LARGE, AVOID PLACING IT IN COLD WATER
- ENSURE THE PRESENCE OF VITAL SIGNS SUCH AS BREATHING, COUGHING OR MOVEMENT
- RAISE THE BURNED PART ABOVE THE LEVEL OF THE HEART IF POSSIBLE
- COVER THE BURNED AREA WITH A CLEAN, DAMP CLOTH OR TOWEL

into a dangerous area that causes wounds, burns, and other injuries. To avoid these risks, one must adhere to general safety standards.

It is recommended as necessary of providing safety supplies, manual fire extinguishers, and smoke and gas leakage detectors in all home kitchens, and learning how to use them during emergency situations.

It is also necessary to be familiar with first aid in cases of burns, including first and second-degree burn first aid, in which you have to:

- Cool the burned part with cold water for 10-15 minutes or until the pain subsides. Also, cover the burned part by placing a dry, sterile bandage on the affected part. One can also give the injured person a pain reliever.

However, it is not recommended to put pieces of ice on the burned part, so as not to increase tissue damage. It is also wise to transport the injured person to the nearest medical centre immediately if the burned part is large.



KO, Techno sign MoU for community collaboration

MUSCAT: Knowledge Oman has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Techno Plastic Industry, specialising in the manufacturing of plastic piping solutions, to collaborate on community engagement and social responsibility.

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

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

“Knowledge Oman’s commitment to enhancing learning opportunities and empowering individuals resonates deeply with our company’s goals.

It is indeed our honour to collaborate with Knowledge Oman on community engagements. This collaboration is a step towards achieving sustainability and social development for the country and what the company’s leadership



Eng Omar bin Ahmed bin Salim Qatan, CEO of Techno, signed the agreement with Tariq bin Hilal al Barwani, Knowledge Oman founder.

aspires to in conjunction with achieving the Oman Vision 2040,” says Omar bin Sulaiman al Bahri, General Manager of Commercial Affairs at Techno Plastic Industry.

“One of the aims of Knowledge Oman’s new strategic direction is to form and work closely with like-minded organisations for the benefit of the society.

We are proud to partner and work closely with Techno to fulfil the mission,” says Balqees al Hassani, Knowledge Oman President.

The signing of the MoU marks an important milestone in the collaborative efforts of Knowledge Oman and Techno to leverage

their combined resources and expertise for the betterment of the communities and the society as a whole. Building upon their shared values and objectives, the MoU solidifies their commitment to working together on a variety of community-focused initiatives, and a dedication towards making a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals and families.

As part the recent changes and development within the community knowledge-sharing platform, Knowledge Oman will be announcing new initiatives in April 2024 specifically aimed at enriching the society with positive values.

Poetic anthology from school curricula released

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development, issued an ‘Afaneen’ booklet of poetic chants, (Poetry Chants from the Memory of the Omani Curricula).

The booklet aims to achieve several educational objectives, including providing various sources for reading for first-year students and employing them in classroom activities.

This also includes documenting the poetic texts included in the educational curricula in Oman throughout the developmental stages that the curricula go through for grades (1-4) to enrich students linguistically and culturally.

The anthem booklet was classified according to school grades, and the presentation includes the poetic text as stated in the schoolbook. This is documented by the school grade in which the anthem appears along with the date of publication of the book.

The booklet includes 161 pages, with about 140 anthems. The first-grade section included 48 hymns, the second-grade section included 36 hymns, the third-grade section included 30 hymns, and the fourth-grade section had 26 hymns. The chant booklet also provides meanings for some ambiguous vocabulary.

The booklet is supported by a barcode of chant clips for some songs, and is also included on the educational technology website in the educational portal.

Poetry is one of the literature forms and a source of wisdom, education, and refinement. Out of this great value of poetry, the presence of poetic text in the school textbook was an inevitable necessity, as the



Book cover of 'Afaneen', a booklet of poetic chants

The booklet aims to achieve educational objectives of providing various sources for reading for first-year students and employing them in classroom activities

subject. Poetry also had some presence in other academic subjects such as Islamic Education, Social studies, and musical skills for grades 1-4.

Throughout the process of developing the Omani curricula, the Ministry of Education focused on selecting poetic texts that enhance the linguistic, psychological, and social development of students.

The curricula of the Arabic language, Islamic education, and musical skills witnessed the process of developing wonderful and diverse examples of these purposeful poetic texts.

Down Syndrome International Day marked



School of Intellectual Education marks Down Syndrome International Day.

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuous Learning, and the School of Intellectual Education, celebrated the Down Syndrome International Day, which this year comes under the slogan ‘Ending the Stereotype.’

The day was marked under the patronage of artist Alia al Farsi, and in the presence of Dr Thuraiya al Rashidi, Director-General,

Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuous Learning. The celebration took place at the School of Intellectual Education.

The ceremony coincides with the celebration of the Down Syndrome International Day, which falls on March 21 every year in accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 149/66 of December 2011, which states ‘to proclaim

March 21 as International Down Syndrome Day, to be observed annually beginning in 2012; to raise awareness of Down syndrome.

The ceremony included the inauguration of the logo of the School of Intellectual Education, which includes symbolic connotations of the mentally disabled students who need care until they gradually acquire skills with their own care.



Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following tender:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
2024/1278	Building the general warehouse of the General Directorate of Health Services in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate	Before 10 am on Sunday 07/April/2024	Before 10 am on Tuesday 30/April/2024	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25 Per set

● All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.

● Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24402200
Email id: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

TENDER NOTICE



Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources (Directorate General of Agriculture and Livestock Research) Announces the following Tenders:-

Tender No.	Description	Tender Documents Price (R.O)	Class	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Documents
193/2024/ MAFWR/ DGALR-27	Cleaning and servicing the building of General Directorate of Agricultural and Livestock Research and its affiliated centers	25/-	Specialized	Monday 15/4/2024	Sunday 5/5/2024
194/2024/ MAFWR/ DGALR-28	Supply and installation standby generator for Animal Health Research Center	25/-	Specialized	Monday 15/4/2024	Sunday 5/5/2024
196/2024/ MAFWR/ DGALR-29	Rehabilitation and maintenance of the breeding room in Bahla	25/-	Four	Sunday 14/4/2024	Saturday 4/5/2024

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- Preference will be given to companies whose bid includes the largest percentage of Omanization and possible purchase of national products.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration (regarding the exemption from submitting a bid bond in tenders).
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

SUB-TENDERS COMMITTEE

DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK RESEARCH

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



Russia mourns victims of deadly concert hall attack

MOSCOW: Russia lowered flags to half-mast on Sunday for a day of mourning after scores of people were gunned down with automatic weapons at a rock concert outside Moscow in the deadliest attack inside Russia for two decades.

President Vladimir Putin declared a national day of mourning after pledging to track down and punish all those behind the attack, in which 133 people were killed, including three children, and more than 150 injured.

"I express my deep, sincere condolences to all those who lost their loved ones," Putin said in an address to the nation on Saturday, his first public comments on the attack. "The whole country and our entire people are grieving with you."

IS group claimed responsibility for Friday's attack, but Putin has not publicly mentioned the group in connection with the attackers, who he said had been trying to escape to Ukraine. He asserted that some on "the Ukrainian side" had prepared to spirit them across the border.

People laid flowers at Crocus City Hall, the 6,200-seat concert hall outside Moscow where four armed men burst in on Friday just before Soviet-era rock group Picnic was to perform its hit "Afraid of Nothing".

The men fired their automatic weapons in short bursts at terrified civilians who fell screaming in a hail of bullets.

Long lines formed in Moscow to donate blood. Blood banks said on Sunday they now had enough blood supplies for four to six months.

Across Moscow, billboards carried a picture of a single candle, the date of the attack and the

I express my deep, sincere condolences to all those who lost their loved ones. The whole country and our entire people are grieving with you.

VLADIMIR PUTIN
Russian President

words "We mourn". In other cities, people laid flowers.

Countries around the world have expressed horror at the attack and sent their condolences to the Russian people.

Putin said 11 people had been detained, including the four gunmen, who fled the concert hall and made their way to the Bryansk region, about 340 km southwest of Moscow.

"They tried to hide and moved towards Ukraine, where, according to preliminary data, a window was prepared for them on the Ukrainian side to cross the state border," Putin said.

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said the gunmen had contacts in Ukraine and were captured near the border.

The suspects have been brought to Moscow and may appear in court later, according to local news agencies.

In video footage published by Russian media and Telegram channels with close ties to the Kremlin, one of the suspects said he was offered money to carry out the attack. — Reuters



People line up to lay flowers at a makeshift memorial to the victims of a shooting attack set up outside the Crocus City Hall concert venue in Moscow. – Reuters

Türkiye heads to local elections

ISTANBUL: Turks will vote next Sunday in local polls as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, buoyed by a strong showing in last year's general elections, sets his sights on winning back Istanbul.

Erdogan has entrusted his former environment minister Murat Kurum to run for mayor of Istanbul in the March 31 election.

He is seeking to avenge the worst political defeat of his two-decade rule, when CHP arch rival Ekrem Imamoglu took the town hall.

The powerful president bounced back last year to win a tough presidential election that came in the throes of an economic crisis and a massive earthquake that claimed more than 53,000 lives in Türkiye.

Now, Erdogan has set his sights



Justice and Development (AK) Party's supporters attend an election campaign rally in Ankara on March 23. – AFP

on winning back Istanbul -- the city where he grew up and where he launched his political career as mayor in 1994.

Imamoglu edged out an Erdogan

ally in a 2019 election that gained international headlines for being controversially annulled.

He won a re-run vote by a massive margin that turned

him into an instant hero for the opposition and a formidable foe for Erdogan. The 52-year-old is widely seen as the opposition's best bet at winning back the presidency from Erdogan's AKP party in 2028.

"Imamoglu is an effective political operator and at this point in time represents one of the very few glimmers of hope for constituents who oppose Erdogan and the AKP," Anthony Skinner said, director of research at geopolitical advisory firm Marlow Global.

"The underperformance of the political opposition at the May 2023 elections demonstrated its failure to effectively challenge the political status quo and, by extension, the resilience and resourcefulness of Erdogan," Skinner said. — AFP

Senegal votes for new president after years of crisis

DAKAR: Senegal voted on Sunday for a new president in a delayed election that follows a political crisis and years of unrest, with the two favourites both claiming confidence in an outright win.

The winner will be tasked with steering Senegal, viewed as a beacon of democracy in coup-hit West Africa, out of its recent troubles and managing revenues from oil and gas reserves that are shortly to start production.

Two favourites have emerged among the 17 candidates who include a sole woman: the governing coalition's former prime minister Amadou Ba and anti-establishment candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye.

Both were once tax inspectors but Ba, 62, now stands for continuity while the 43-year-old Faye promises profound change and left-wing pan-Africanism.

Both have also pitched themselves as the best candidate for young people in a county where half the population is under 20.

"I voted for Diomaye without thinking," said Diaraaf Gaye, a 26-year-old shopkeeper. "It's time for the country to start on a new footing with young people" in power.

But 23-year-old Ndeye Penda Faye, a housekeeper, said she was pinning her hopes on the government's candidate.

"(President) Macky Sall has done a lot of work and that's why I'm going to vote for Amadou Ba, to continue the work," she said.

Senegal was originally due to vote on February 25, but an 11th-hour postponement by Sall triggered the worst political crisis in decades that left four dead. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

MAIDUGURI

Nigerian army rescues abducted Kaduna students

The Nigerian army on Sunday rescued students and staff who were abducted by gunmen from a school in the country's north earlier this month, the military said, days before a deadline to pay a \$690,000 ransom.

Military spokesperson Major General Edward Buba said 137 hostages — 76 females and 61 males — were rescued in the early hours of Sunday in neighbouring state of Zamfara.

"In the early hours of 24 March 2024, the military work-



ing with local authorities and government agencies across the country in a coordinated search and rescue operation rescued the hostages," Buba said in a statement. — Reuters

SOFIA

Bulgarian FM Gabriel says no agreement on govt

Bulgarian Foreign Minister Mariya Gabriel, of the centre-right GERB party, said on Sunday no agreement had been reached on forming a new government with the We Continue the Change (PP) party.

Gabriel agreed to try to form a government following the resignation of Prime Minister Nikolai Denkov of the PP party on March 5 to allow the GERB to lead the government for nine months, as agreed after last year's elections.



"There were three days of talks ... we say no to permanent conditions," Gabriel said in the capital Sofia. Negotiations failed due to demands by the PP for the post of interior minister. — Reuters

PETROPOLIS

Rescuers race to find trapped people as storms kill 20

Rescuers in boats and aircraft raced against the clock on Sunday to help isolated people in Brazil's mountainous southeast after storms and heavy rains killed at least 20 people.

With more rain predicted on Sunday, the deluge pounded the states of Rio de Janeiro and Espirito Santo, where authorities described a chaotic situation due to flooding. The death toll rose there from four to 12 on Sunday as rescuers advanced.

The most affected municipal-



ity is Mimoso do Sul, a town of almost 25,000 inhabitants located in the south of Espirito Santo, where at least 10 people died in floods, though officials fear the toll may yet rise. — AFP



omanobserver.com/podcast

gaza

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

MONDAY | MARCH 25 | 2024

7

ISRAEL BESIEGES TWO MORE GAZA HOSPITALS



A man carries children injured in Israeli bombardment, at the al-Najjar hospital in Rafah. – AFP

GAZA: Israeli forces besieged two more Gaza hospitals on Sunday, pinning down medical teams under heavy gunfire, the Palestinian Red Crescent said, and Israel said it had captured 480 people in continued clashes at Gaza's main Al Shifa hospital. Israeli forces say hospitals in the Palestinian enclave where war has been raging for over five months have frequently been used as strongholds of fighting groups harbouring bases and weapons. A claim which Palestinian groups and medical staff deny this.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said one of its staff was killed when Israeli tanks suddenly pushed back into areas around Al-Amal and Nasser hospitals in the southern city of Khan Younis, amid heavy bombardment and gunfire.

Israeli forces were now demanding the complete evacuation of staff, patients and displaced people from Al Amal's premises and were firing smoke bombs into the area

Israeli armoured forces sealed off Al-Amal Hospital and carried out extensive bulldozing operations in its vicinity, the Red Crescent said in a statement, adding: "All of our teams are in extreme danger at the moment and are completely immobilised."

It said Israeli forces were now demanding the complete evacuation of staff, patients and displaced people from Al Amal's premises and were firing smoke bombs into the area to force out its occupants.

The Israeli military said its forces were hitting

"infrastructure" in Khan Younis used as gathering points for many groups. Palestinian groups deny using hospitals for military ends and accuses Israel of war crimes against civilian targets.

The health ministry in Gaza said dozens of patients and medical staffers had been detained by Israeli forces at Al Shifa in Gaza City in the enclave's north that has been under Israeli control for a week.

Al Shifa is one of the few healthcare facilities even partially operational in north Gaza, and - like others - had also been housing some of the

nearly 2 million civilians - over 80 per cent of Gaza's population - displaced by the war.

Khan Younis residents said Israeli tanks also advanced in a western neighbourhood near Nasser Hospital under cover of heavy fire from the air and ground.

In Rafah, Gaza's southernmost town on the Egyptian border town that has become the last refuge for half of Gaza's uprooted population, an Israeli air strike on a house killed seven people, health officials said.

At least 32,226 Palestinians have been killed, among them 84 in the past 24 hours, and 74,518 injured in Israel's air and ground offensive into the densely populated coastal territory since Oct. 7, its health ministry said in a Sunday update. — **Reuters**

Negotiators leave Qatar following truce talks

DOHA: US intelligence chief Bill Burns and his Israeli counterpart David Barnea left Qatar late on Saturday following talks on a Gaza truce and captives release deal, a source briefed on the talks said.

The CIA and Mossad chiefs "departed Doha to brief their respective teams back home on the latest round" of talks, the source said on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the discussions.

"The talks focused on details and a ratio for the exchange of hostages and prisoners", the knowledgeable source added, explaining that "technical teams remain in Doha".

US, Qatari and Egyptian mediators have been engaged in weeks of behind-the-scenes talks in efforts to secure a second truce in the war between Israel and Palestinian groups and the release of captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners being held in Israeli jails.

Israel had said on Friday that the head of its spy agency was to return to Doha for his second trip in a week after talks were restarted following failed efforts to secure a truce before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Deep differences exist between Hamas and Israel in negotiations for a Gaza truce deal, an official

from the Palestinian group with knowledge of the talks said on Saturday.

"There is a deep divergence in positions in the negotiations between Hamas and the occupation (Israel) because the enemy understood the flexibility shown by the movement as weakness," said the official.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant was to leave for talks in the United States, the government said, amid growing tensions between the allies over the war in Gaza.

Gallant will meet with US counterpart Lloyd Austin, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan "and additional senior officials", a statement said.

Israel's military has waged a retaliatory offensive that has killed 32,226 people, most of them women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry.

Palestinian groups seized about 250 Israeli and foreign captives during the October 7 attack on Israel, but dozens were released during a week-long truce in November.

Israel believes about 130 remain in Gaza, including 33 who are presumed dead — eight soldiers and 25 civilians. — **AFP**



Relatives and supporters of Israeli captives attend a demonstration in front of the Defence Ministry in Tel Aviv. – AFP

Fighting rages amid 'horror and starvation'

GAZA: Heavy fighting raged in Gaza on Sunday as Israel has vowed to push on with its ground war in the territory's far south despite US objections and truce talks.

UN chief Antonio Guterres said "horror and starvation stalk the people of Gaza" and urged an immediate ceasefire and the release of all captives held since October 7.

The health ministry in the Gaza Strip said another 84 people had been killed over the past 24 hours, raising the total death toll in the nearly six-month-old war to 32,226.

Israel had launched more than 60 airstrikes as well as artillery bombardment on Gaza City, the southern urban centre of Khan Yunis and other areas.

Israel's military said fighter jets had struck about 65 targets "including a terror tunnel used to carry out attacks, military compounds where armed terrorists operated and additional military infrastructure".

In Gaza's far-southern Rafah city, local resident Hassan Zanoun looked sadly at the remains of his building, reduced to a jumble of broken concrete and rubble by an airstrike.

"My children and I were sleeping here," he said. "I was surprised, we didn't hear the sound of a rocket and suddenly everything was unleashed over our heads... strikes, screams."

"I got out from under the rubble, and my daughters got out from under the rubble too. What more can I say?"

Israel has faced ever greater global scrutiny and opposition to its military campaign as Palestinian civilian deaths have soared and its siege has brought widespread malnutrition and hunger.

Guterres urged an end to the "non-stop nightmare" endured by Gaza's 2.4 million people in a visit on Saturday to the Egyptian border with the coastal territory.

He said "nothing justifies"

either the October 7 attack or the "collective punishment" of Palestinians, and demanded Israel allow vastly more aid into Gaza.

Writing on social media platform X, he said "horror and starvation stalk the people of Gaza. Any further onslaught will make everything worse."

Worse for Palestinian civilians, for the captives, for all people of the region. "It's more than time for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire & the immediate release of all captives."

Israel has vowed to destroy the Palestinian groups, who seized about 250 captives, of whom Israel believes around 130 remain in Gaza, including 33 presumed dead.

Relatives and supporters of the captives, demanding greater efforts to bring them home, rallied on Saturday outside the defence ministry in Tel Aviv in a protest that saw scuffles between demonstrators and police. — **AFP**



A Palestinian family break their fast amidst the rubble of their home, during the holy month of Ramadhan in Rafah. – AFP

In Oman values and principles come first



EDITORIAL

MANY international organisations pretend to care for human rights and some media institutions are ranting about the liberal thoughts fundamentally based on the idea of human rights. Notwithstanding, they have absolutely lost credibility after their shameful silence and sometimes connivance with the massacres committed by the Zionist entity in the Gaza Strip.

However, it is crucial to respond to all reports issued by these rights organisations or media houses to refute their allegations and expose their lies and utilisation of double standards.

No-one is still unaware of that and even the Western peoples are experiencing a new state of awareness outside the media-made alienation zone in which they lived for ages.

Among the reasons why we should react to these reports is that other organisations that measure political, economic and human rights indicators rely on such reports especially when they go unanswered.

The media misinformation or even disinformation arising from false information received by some organisations for profit purposes or political goals, draw a distorted picture of the reality which is always totally different from that stereotypical image that some institutions attempt to create. Plato's city exists only in papers while real life is teeming with challenges and violations that need to be controlled by the laws and constant oversight to limit transgressions and errors to the minimum level possible.

Even so, the absence of utopia or idealism from the reality of the world at any time does not mean violating the values and principles that could, at the very least, put this world on the path to idealism. What is happening today in the world in terms of the erosion or complete collapse of all values, including values of professionalism, is a call to the whole world to declare a state of extreme danger. A world devoid of principles and values is completely meaningless, chaotic and devastated.

If the values and principles are essential for the world to continue, then the values of professionalism, including media professionalism, are essential and their absence poses a danger to the entire world as every single word may be equal to life or peace or, at the same time, they may be equal to war and destruction.

Above all, lanterns began lighting in many countries despite remnants of darkness somewhere. These lamps are not under the control of nationalist or ideological classifications or even the idea of North, South, East and West, but rather they are the result of convictions, principles and values that societies insist on preserving and consolidating.

THE OMANI SOCIETY IS ONE WITH FIRMLY-ROOTED VALUES AND HAS MAINTAINED ITS ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES FROM WHICH IT SETS OFF ON THE PATHS OF THE FUTURE

What pleases us in the Sultanate of Oman is that the Omani society is one with firmly-rooted values and has maintained its Islamic principles from which it sets off on the paths of the future. The laws are there to protect these values and principles and preserve them from any attempts to tamper with or distort them. Regarding the issue of human rights, the Sultanate of Oman is one among the world countries that respects human rights. This is not a passing structural ruling, but rather a fact that can be construed deeply when we understand the

meaning of human rights. Human rights are basic standards that are indispensable for a person to live in dignity. These rights include the right to life, the right to freedom, the right to education, the right to health, the right to proper housing, the right to quality education, as well as the right to live free from discrimination and torture, and the right to get a job. These rights are guaranteed by the laws applied in the Sultanate of Oman and cannot be bypassed without legal accountability. These rights are well-established in the Omani society and are part of the values that regulate this society within its social framework. Owing to the fact that life evolves and becomes more complicated in every new stage, the laws in the Sultanate of Oman continue to develop in order to keep pace with the changes that take place around the world. Still, they are based on the same values and principles that elevate the status of man, preserve his dignity and seek to establish the values of justice and equality among people and protect them, whether citizens or residents, from any attempt to degrade their humanity, dignity or undermine their right to equality.

Nasa touts space research in anti-cancer fight

PAUL NOLP

Experiments in the weightless environment of space have led to ‘crazy progress’ in the fight against cancer, Nasa officials said at a recent event highlighting an important and personal initiative of US President Joe Biden. Space is “a unique place for research,” astronaut Frank Rubio said at the event in Washington. The 48-year-old, a physician and former military helicopter pilot, conducted cancer research during his recent mission to the International Space Station (ISS), orbiting some 400 kilometres above the Earth’s surface. Not only do cells there age more rapidly, speeding up research, their structures are also described as “purer.” “They all don’t clump together (as they do) on Earth because of gravity. They are suspended in space,” enabling better analysis of their molecular structures, Nasa chief Bill Nelson said in an interview. Research conducted in space can help make cancer drugs more effective, Nelson added. Pharmaceutical giant Merck has conducted research on the ISS with Keytruda, an anti-cancer drug that patients now receive intravenously. Its key ingredient is difficult to transform into a liquid. One solution is crystallisation, a process often used in drug manufacturing.

In 2017, Merck conducted experiments to see if the crystals would form more rapidly in space than on Earth. Nelson used two pictures to demonstrate the difference. The first showed a blurry, transparent spot. But on the second, a large number of clear gray spots had emerged. That photo showed that smaller, more uniform crystals were forming in space — and “forming better,” Nelson said. Thanks to such research, researchers will be able to make a drug that can be administered by injection in a doctor’s office instead of through long and painful chemotherapy treatments, he added. Merck identified techniques that can help it imitate the effects of these crystals on Earth as it works to develop a drug that can be stored at room temperature. Still, it can take years between research in space and the wide availability of a drug developed there. Cancer research in space began more than 40 years ago but has become “revolutionary” in recent years, said Nelson, a former Democratic senator who travelled into space himself in 1986. — AFP



Lisa Miller

The author is a former writer with New York Magazine

For Catherine, living a public life in a public body, privacy is illusory

To be clear, there is nothing private about having cancer. A diagnosis requires referrals and a bewildering number of scans and tests. There are ultrasounds, MRIs, PET scans; colonoscopies, bronchoscopies, endoscopies. There are needle biopsies, razor biopsies or liquid biopsies. Most of the tests require getting beneath a robe, sometimes waiting in a large room full of other terrified strangers also in robes, before presenting oneself to strangers who push, jab, thread and insert tools into or onto body parts that are not normally explored. Frequently, these tests have to be repeated, or different tests ordered, to rule something out. “I’ve been naked in front of so many people in my life at this point. You sort of lose some of that sense of ‘My body is private,’” said Isabel Blumberg, who is my gynaecologist. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2019, Blumberg was the first person to call me. She told me that she had had cancer, too.

In the video Kensington Palace released on Friday, Catherine, Princess of Wales, revealed her cancer status after more than six weeks of silence and pleaded for privacy. “We hope that you will understand that, as a family, we now need some time, space and privacy while I complete my treatment,” she said while wringing her thin hands. A princess no doubt bypasses the waiting rooms and receives a level of medical care inaccessible to most. But she cannot evade the intrusions and indignities of cancer — the anxious waiting for pathology reports, the shock of the news, the series of treatment decisions that no young, healthy person has ever imagined having to make. The treatment can feel like a gruelling, interminable invasion. And because Catherine, also known as Kate, is a princess, the violations went further: the wild and incessant speculation about what



The Prince and Princess of Wales and the Duke of Sussex surprise members of the public with a joint public appearance to view the tributes to Queen Elizabeth II outside Windsor Castle, in Windsor, England. – **NYT File**

IN ANY PERSON, A DIAGNOSIS OF CANCER COMES WITH A RECOGNITION OF MORTALITY. IN MANY PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY YOUNG HEALTHY PEOPLE, IT FEELS LIKE BETRAYAL

had gone wrong with her body, the alleged unauthorised infiltrations of her medical files, which the London Clinic, where she underwent “major abdominal surgery,” is investigating. “There is no place at our hospital for those who intentionally breach the trust of any of our patients or colleagues,” Al Russell, the clinic’s CEO, said in a statement. Even in health, privacy is difficult for a public figure to attain, and since she married Prince William in 2011, Kate Middleton has lived under a microscope. Her physical body — her legs, her hair, her behind, her clothing — has been scrutinised in the way of every female celebrity but also because of her royal function and role. Long ago, she traded her independence for rank, and her most important job has been to perpetuate the monarchy by bearing its heirs.

In a very real way, her body is under inspection because it belongs to her nation, and to its future. In becoming royal, a person secures a lifetime of luxury and comfort. But also, “you become a public body, the site of enormous projection, everything from longing to disdain. People pick you apart,” Susie Orbach, a psychoanalyst in London and New York who treated Princess Diana, said in an interview. “There are so many different aspects of what it means to be a royal body — which obviously no one understands when they start going out with a prince.” Guarding against incursions into privacy — controlling who has an interest in and access to the female royal body (for certainly no one is as obsessed with King Charles III’s health as they are with Kate’s) — is at least four centuries old. Elizabeth I “spent an enormous amount of time authorising images of her body,” strategically projecting an image of potent virginity to avoid marriage in order to amass and preserve power, explained Jean Howard, a Renaissance scholar at Columbia University. Working with court painters, the image makers of the time, Elizabeth I created “a virginity that everyone fetishised,” and unattainable. “She adorned herself with pearls of purity. — **The New York Times**

Sharing moments and rituals...

Generally, people are sociable by nature and very much like to celebrate different occasions and enjoy the good moments together. The yearly calendar is full of various moments and days, some of which are very special either to us or loved ones and even those publicly celebrated festivities. Probably, joining family members, friends, colleagues or neighbours to commemorate one of those celebrations or just for the sake of enjoying being together are just to name a few reasons to join the crowd and celebrate get-togethers.

Thus, there are many of those special days and moments, which bring social and spiritual impact on people’s personal and social life alike. Though, people experience a different impact when moments sometimes happen during seasonal or spiritual period of time in the year. Case in a point, the holy month of Ramadhan comes on top of the distinguished seasons of celebration. Ramadhan signifies more of people getting together than other times of the year.

For that reason, Ramadhan is becoming a month during which people usually practice many rituals and learn significant values such as patience, giving, mercy and compassion. Most importantly, it is a month about appreciating, reviving and strengthening relations between people. The spirit of Ramadhan essentially brings the strong feeling of sharing togetherness and being close to family in particular.

As a matter of fact, Ramadhan is of high significance for Muslim communities all over the world. This month is basically about sharing spiritual moments of Ramadhan with others. Family relatives, friends, colleagues and neighbours are mostly the ones we share moments of joy and spirituality with. The importance of sharing moments in Ramadhan is marked through different forms of gatherings some of which are during iftar (breaking fast), Taraweeh prayers (special religious ritual in Ramadhan) and evening meetings where most people are spending their night



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

RAMADHAN IS A GREAT TIME FOR TOGETHERNESS AND EXPERIENCING THE TRADITION OF SHARING MOMENTS AND SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS RITUALS AS WELL

time together by exchanging visits. Men, for instance, prefer to break their fast together in Masjids with other Muslims regardless of their nationality, language or origin. What brings them all together is being all brothers of Islam and practicing their worship and religious rituals similarly as Muslim brothers. Such scenario mirrors the commendable unity and harmony of Muslims, just in one religious ritual, which is always observed wherever they converge and meet for prayers and worship the Almighty Allah. Another thrilling situation of people’s interest to frequently get together during Ramadhan is the daily commuting to hometown. Some people like those who work outside their hometowns commute everyday back and forth to home just to have the pleasure of breaking their fast with their families and loved ones. They intend not to miss the lovely moments of sharing iftar with family, not even for a single day. For those ‘homesick’ people especially during Ramadhan, it is a unique feeling indeed as they set around their relatives or loved ones at home enjoying the spirit of Ramadhan together during iftar, dinner or Suhur (late meal before the dawn). Being at home at such times is one of the much-liked experiences that people strive hard not to miss during Ramadhan. Friends and workmates also portray another image of sharing spiritual moments of Ramadhan together. Every now and then, they come together to break their fast, have dinner or spend their evening either at home or outside. For them, Ramadhan is a significant occasion to meet, share moments and spirits and strengthen their ties. Ramadhan is always a great time for togetherness and experiencing the tradition of sharing moments and social and religious rituals as well. All the enjoyable moments that people share with family, friends, colleagues or neighbours will definitely etch in their minds and last forever. They will be stored in the box of memories and will be recalled someday in the years to come. Just remember that life is not what we gain, but what we give for others; the moments you share with others are what really matters.

DRESSED FOR THE OCCASION!



A participant poses during the Macau International Parade in Macau, China, on Sunday. – AFP

China doubles down on green tech

Amid an onslaught of grim climate news, China’s recent decision to pursue a faster green transition is a rare bright spot. In early March, at the annual National People’s Congress, Premier Li Qiang announced that the country would accelerate investment in clean-energy projects. The plan is for a “new trio” of industries – solar panels, electric vehicles (EVs), and lithium batteries – to drive economic growth, replacing the “old trio” of clothing, furniture, and appliances. Although investment in the targeted industries will not be enough to reverse the country’s ongoing economic slowdown, the West should appreciate the implications of Li’s announcement. A global green transition is already well under way; at this stage, countries and firms are largely on board with the shift to clean energy. According to the International Energy Agency, annual additions to renewable capacity increased by nearly 50 per cent in 2023, to 507 gigawatts, the fastest growth rate in the past two decades. The European Union, the United States, and Brazil, in particular, installed record amounts of renewable-energy capacity. But China experienced the largest growth by far, commissioning as much solar PV in 2023 as the entire world did in 2022, and increasing its wind capacity by 66 per cent year on year. China’s decision to ramp up spending could further accelerate this epochal shift and help achieve long-term climate goals by bringing



Stuart P M Mackintosh
The writer is Executive Director of the Group of Thirty

CHINA RECENTLY ANNOUNCED THAT IT WILL INCREASE INVESTMENT IN CLEAN-ENERGY PROJECTS

forward the peak in fossil-fuel use and lowering greenhouse-gas emissions. Moreover, it suggests that place-based industrial policies are facilitating, not impeding, decarbonisation. US President Joe Biden ushered the world into a new era of industrial policy when he passed his \$800 billion Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which includes \$391 billion in energy and climate spending, and his \$1.2 trillion Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). This strategy pushed the EU to implement its own raft of green subsidies. And now, China is addressing its economic woes by channelling even more resources into decarbonisation. At the same time, an increased supply of low-cost green products from China — a likely outcome of the country’s bet on emerging technologies — would not flow to the US, owing to its embrace of industrial policy. The US government has already imposed tariffs on strategic Chinese imports. And with the IRA and the BIL pumping massive sums into domestic clean-energy manufacturing and deployment, the Biden administration is considering new protectionist measures to prevent China from undercutting the US market. This is frustrating for ardent advocates of free trade, as it means that cheap Chinese solar panels, EVs, and batteries will not be

available in America any time soon. A Donald Trump victory in November would only make things worse: the former president has proposed a staggering 60 per cent tariff on all Chinese imports. Although the energy transition is coming at a high price for Americans, it is a price worth paying. By defending its domestic industries, the US government will likely divert Chinese products to other countries, especially in the developing world, which would allow consumers to buy clean-tech products at low prices. More importantly, if developing countries seize this opportunity, they could accelerate their own green transitions. For example, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose

plan for reaching net-zero emissions by 2070 is highly insufficient, should take advantage of China’s green-tech surge. In the short term, that means using Chinese products to plug the gaps in India’s clean-energy industry. Modi should also convince Chinese companies to build additional production facilities in India, which would facilitate technology transfer, create jobs, and lower the cost of green tech. African leaders should likewise electrify their economies using China’s green products and technologies. Just as many African countries have leapfrogged to mobile networks, skipping landline development, they must do the same with clean energy, bypassing fossil fuels. While certainly a

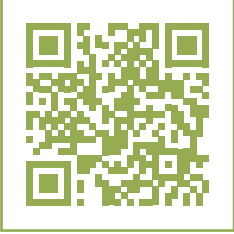
challenge, such an approach is well-suited for a continent with abundant solar and wind resources and a need for distributed-energy solutions. Moreover, African countries with a large supply of rare earths should work with Chinese firms to move up the value chain and create more jobs. Whenever CEOs and policymakers meet at climate conferences or in Davos, a common refrain is that the green transition must be just. That would require \$1 trillion in annual clean-energy investment in low- and middle-income countries – a seven-fold increase from current levels. While there is a desperate need for more financing, China’s increased investment in clean energy could be an important part of the solution. Ultimately, China and the US (as well as the EU) must reach an agreement on what constitutes fair and free trade of green goods. But in the meantime, given the existential imperative to achieve net-zero emissions, we should welcome China’s investment plans, even as we worry about their implications for US industry. For now, I can drive an American-made EV from Ford or Tesla, but I hope one day to have the option of purchasing an EV built by China’s BYD. Either way, I will be on the road to a less polluting future.



A global green transition is already well under way.

sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports



OMAN U19 DEFEAT KUWAIT 3-1 IN FRIENDLY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

The Oman Under-19 football team beat the hosts Kuwait 3-1 in the first friendly game late on Saturday, at Al Shabab Stadium as part of the current team's overseas camp in Kuwait. The 'Red Warriors' goals were netted by Masoud al Bahri, Fahad al Mukhaini and Al Hussain al Qasmi, while the only goal of Kuwait team scored by Abdullah Faris. The underway external warm up camp, which is under the watchful eyes of the national experienced coach Ahmed al Alawi, is part of the team's

preparations for the forthcoming participation including: West Asian Championship which will be held in Saudi Arabia in the middle of the current year. Then, the team will take part in the AFC U20 Asian Cup 2025 Qualifiers in September 2024, while the finals of 2025 AFC U20 Asian Cup is scheduled to take place in February 2025. Despite Kuwait's leading in the first half by 1-0, Oman boys registered a strong come back in the second half as they registered three goals to seal the victory. The match was crucial for the team players to raise the harmony among them and to enter into the official matches



mood ahead of upcoming events. Oman team will conclude the current abroad camp with a another preparatory game against Kuwait, which will take place on Monday. Coach Ahmed al Alawi worked out to maximise the output of the friendly fixture as he tested different faces during the game. It is expected that the second match will have some changes in the starting line up of the match as some of the players did not play and these faces will get the chance to compete in today's game. Then, it will be great opportunity for the coaching staff to do a proper evaluation on the players

technical capabilities and began to put some insights on the team's starting line up.

OMAN SQUAD
Majid al Farsi, Masoud al Bahri, Ghassan al Masrouri, Basha al Muharabi, Rabee al Sunaidy, Abdullah al Jabri, Said al Ghanbousi, Jawad al Azi, Adnan al Mashaeferi, Ali al Alawi, Mohammed al Sameen, Ahmed al Shanfari, Al Hussain al Qasmi, Oadi al Manwari, Muhannad al Saadi, Mamoun al Soli, Yousef al Shabibi, Rashad al Dheen, Yassar al Balushi, Fahad al Mukhaini, Fahad Awadh, Shihab al Mukhaini, Abdullah al Mamari and Ziyad al Jaalani.

OOC to hold General Assembly meeting on Tuesday

MUSCAT: The General Assembly of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) will convene its regular meeting for this year on Tuesday, at Crowne Plaza Hotel in Al Irfan city, the meeting will be chaired by Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, OOC president. During the meeting, the minutes of the previous meeting of OOC General Assembly, that held on March 28, will be ratified, which includes a report on the administrative situation and the committee's activities for the year 2023. Several events were organised domestically, notably hosted GCC NOCs Presidents in Muscat in October 2023, and organised

"Step Forward" programme for female sports leaders, and the programme on the importance of physical activity and proper nutrition in Al Buraimi, Saham and Salalah. The Athletes Forum was held in Salalah, Sur and the Olympic Committee headquarters in Muscat, as well as the Sohar Walk event, and the Physical Activity Day event organised in Musandam Governorate, were also highlighted. Additionally, the report includes the major administrative actions and decisions taken by the Board of Directors, the Executive Office, and internal committees during their meetings



Oman Olympic General Assembly meeting of 2023.

throughout the year. It also includes reports and technical results of the committee's external participations, represented by the 15th Arab Sports Games that was

and events for the current year 2024 will be discussed, including external participations such as the 7th Arab Women's Clubs Games that was held in the United Arab Emirates in February 2023 and the 1st GCC Youth Games, which will be held in the United Arab Emirates in April. Additionally, the 33rd Summer Olympic Games (Paris 2024), the 1st Gulf Indoor Sports and Martial Arts Games to be hold in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the 6th Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games to be hold in Thailand in November. Also, an overview of the internal events and programmes approved by the Board of Directors to be held 2024, such as Olympic Day, the

approved programmes of Oman Olympic Academy for 2024, a range of sports, awareness, and social events included the activity of the assisting committees of the Board of Directors. The meeting will review the financial statements for the fiscal year ending in 2023, the auditor's report for the previous year, and the proposed budget for the current fiscal year 2024 will be presented and approved by the General Assembly. The General Assembly meeting will be concluded by a discussion of proposals submitted by members of the Assembly, if any, according to the provisions of OOC Statute.

England go down to teenager's late goal

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, MARCH 24

England's preparation for the European championship in Germany later this summer, suffered a setback as Brazil's wonderkid, Endrick — on as substitute in the 71st minute — hit the only goal of the friendly match for his side to emerge victorious.

England manager, Gareth Southgate, somewhat hid his disappointment and said: "I don't like losing but there were lots of very good individual performances from players who have hardly played for England. In the end it was that ruthless moment that decided it. We controlled long parts of the game and had as many attempts as they did, so I'm not unhappy."

Asked about the absence, through injury, of his main striker, Harry Kane who plays for Bayern Munich and was at the match, Southgate said: "He will go back, he won't be fit for Tuesday (against Belgium). But I was really pleased with the players who came in. We need to find out about them. We need to know where we might head if we don't have Harry for a big match."

Regarding debutant, Anthony Gordon and substitutes Ezri Konsa and Kobbie Mainoo who came on in the 20th and 75th minute respectively, Southgate said: "Anthony was very good. Both sides of his game looked very accomplished."

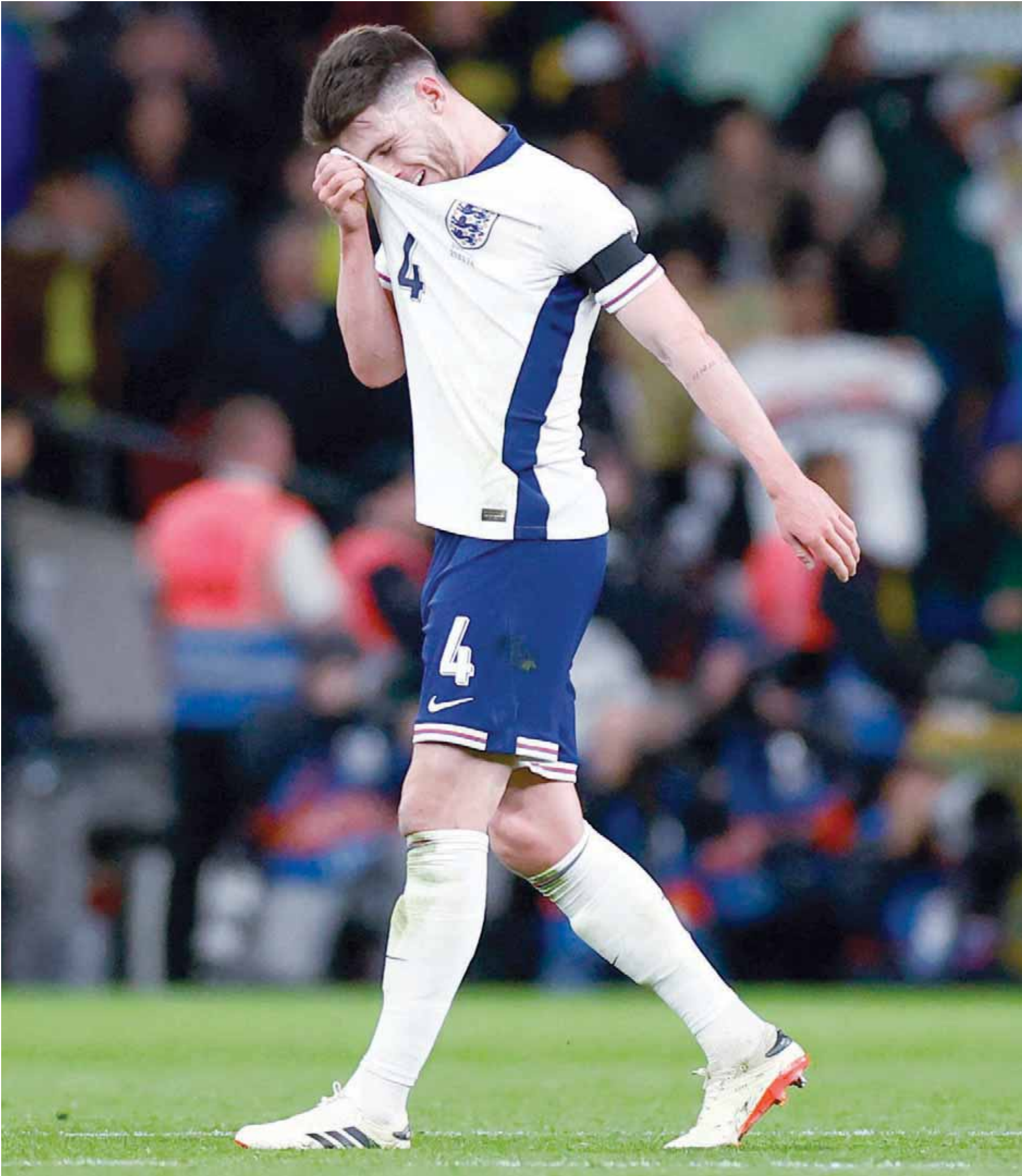
For Ezri to come in at the moment he did and to deal with players of that quality, I thought he was also excellent, showed real composure and he should be really happy with his debut. We were really pleased with him. To get Kobbie on the pitch was also clearly a brilliant moment for him and his family."

Despite the long spell without a goal the game was pacy at times and the myriad missed chances by both sides, particularly by Brazil, kept the game in focus throughout. The visitors could have scored as early as the 12th minute but Kyle Walker who later went off injured in 20th minute, ran back to clear a weak shot from Vinicius Jr off the line and his team-mate Lucas Paqueta hit the left post in the 35th minute.

After the break he curled a fine effort just wide and Raphinha missed the best chance putting his shot wide from 10 yards after seizing onto a mistake by Harry Maguire in a close tussle. For England, Ollie Watkins missed the best chance from close range after Conor Gallagher had lifted the ball through to him.

Brazil played some fine football. They combined well in midfield, exchanging short passes which were accurate while some England passes were either intercepted or just that bit out of reach.

On their performance they fittingly went ahead finally in the 80th minute. It came about after a poor header from substitute Lewis Dunk went straight to Andreas Perera. His pass then beat John Stones and was picked up by Vinicius whose shot rebounded of goalkeeper Jordan Pickford and fell in the path of the 17-year-old Endrick to guide the ball into the net to become the youngest scorer against England at Wembley and the youngest for Brazil since Ronaldo (17y 229d) in 1994.



England's Declan Rice after the match. — Reuters

Germany beat France 2-0 after record-breaking Wirtz goal

LYON, France: Florian Wirtz scored Germany's fastest international goal after seven seconds as the Euro 2024 hosts earned a confidence-boosting 2-0 friendly victory over France on Saturday to bag their first win in their last four games.

Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann was desperate for a good start to the year ahead of the tournament on home soil in June and that is exactly what he got.

Wirtz surprised the French with his long-range effort for his first international goal after a well-practised move and pass from Toni Kroos, back from a three-year international retirement.

The goal was a few hundredths of a second faster than the previous German best, Lukas Podolski's seventh-second goal against Ecuador in 2013.

The hosts gradually took control and Kylian Mbappe forced a fine save from Germany's Marc Andre ter Stegen to protect their lead in the 26th minute.

"We had a very good start and the kickoff was planned exactly that way," Germany's Nagelsmann said.

"It was important to protect the lead and after the break we improved further and carved out more chances. I am very satisfied with the way we fought. It is what we wish, to

give it all every time.

"We got a confidence boost from this game. We are on a good path and played a very good game today."

France pushed for an equaliser with Ousmane Dembele and Adrien Rabiot but it was the Germans, under pressure to improve after only two wins in their last 10 matches before Saturday, who scored again.

They doubled their lead early in the second half with Wirtz picking out Jamal Musiala with a cross and he cut back for Kai Havertz to finish the move.

France ran out of ideas in the second half and had to wait until late in the game for substitute Olivier Giroud to miss two chances before Germany defender Antonio Ruediger hit his own post as he tried to clear a ball.

"We weren't there, that's obvious," said France coach Didier Deschamps after his 150th game in charge. "The Germans played a high level match today. When we see our start to the match, with this goal, we are standing still."

"The Germans did things better than us. In terms of commitment and aggression, we were below. The first person to blame is me," he added.

Germany play the Netherlands on Tuesday when France face Chile. — Reuters



Kai Havertz (R) celebrates after scoring Germany's second goal. — AFP

Tadej Pogacar wins Tour of Catalonia after fourth stage victory

BARCELONA: Tadej Pogacar sprinted to an impressive fourth stage victory of the week as he sealed his Tour of Catalonia triumph on Sunday.

The Slovenian two-time Tour de France champion edged a chaotic sprint to take stage seven, adding to his stage two, three and six triumphs, blowing away his general classification competition.

Pogacar emerged ahead of French duo Dorian Godon and Guillaume Martin, second and third respectively, in a frenzied finish to the 143.5 kilometre stage, which started and finished in Barcelona.

“I’m so happy to take the win — it wasn’t the original plan,” said Pogacar.

Pogacar’s UAE team-mate Joao Almeida had a move shut down in the final kilometres but Pogacar snatched victory.

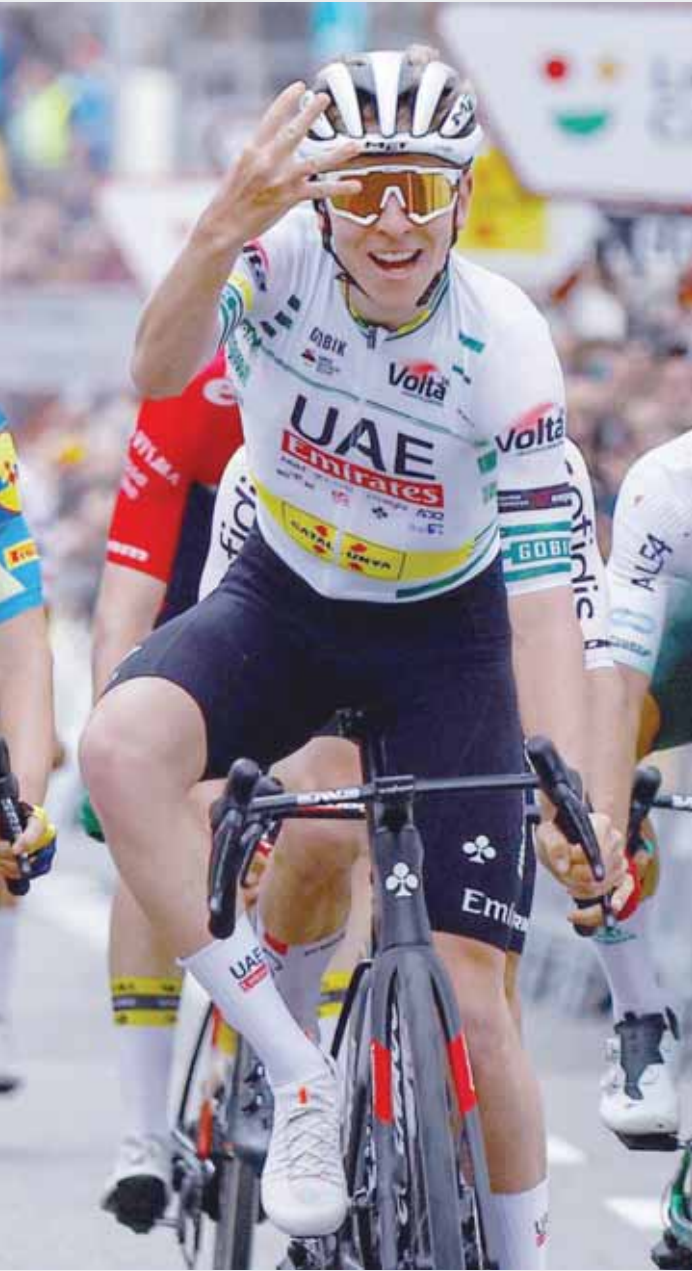
“Joao Almeida set a good pace on the climb and we were a small group in the front,” added Pogacar.

“He made a good attack on the last small climb and almost came to the finish. I wish he could arrive, but I’m happy to take this win, too.”

The UAE Team Emirates rider won the race by three minutes 41 seconds from Spaniard Mikel Landa, with Egan Bernal third, a full five minutes and three seconds behind Pogacar.

The 25-year-old carved out a big lead on the second stage and nobody threatened to depose him for the rest of the week.

Pogacar is aiming for an ambitious Giro-Tour double in 2024, hoping to become the first man to win both since Marco Pantani in 1998. — AFP



Sainz wins Australian GP in Ferrari 1-2 as Verstappen fails

MELBOURNE: Ferrari’s Carlos Sainz surged to victory at the Australian Grand Prix on Sunday to snap Red Bull’s winning start to the season after three-time world champion Max Verstappen sensationally failed to finish.

The Spaniard, who had appendicitis surgery two weeks ago, took the chequered flag 2.3 seconds ahead of teammate Charles Leclerc, with McLaren’s Lando Norris a bold third.

It was his third grand prix win and first since Singapore last year.

“I’m happy to be in a one-two with Charles here. It shows that hard work pays off,” said Sainz, who missed the last race in Saudi Arabia and was bed-ridden for a week afterwards.

“Life sometimes is crazy ... the podium in Bahrain, then the appendix, the comeback, the win. It’s a rollercoaster but I loved it and I’m extremely happy.”

While he celebrated, it was a disastrous day for pole-sitter Verstappen, who limped out with smoke billowing from his car after being passed by front-row partner Sainz on lap two.

The Dutchman blamed a brake issue for his first retirement in two years.

“What we can see so far from the data is that as soon as the lights went off the right-rear brake just stuck on,” he said.

“It just caused the damage and it kept on increasing so it was also basically driving with the handbrake on.”

It was also a horror race for Lewis Hamilton in his inconsistent Mercedes, with the British seven-time world champion suffering engine failure on lap 17.

To add to Mercedes’ woes, teammate George Russell crashed heavily on the last lap with the car ending on its side.

Russell climbed out unscathed, with Aston Martin’s Fernando Alonso faulted for “potentially dangerous” driving over the incident and slapped with a 20-second penalty.

Verstappen emphatically won the opening two grands prix of the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, with both a Red Bull 1-2, and was hot favourite to make it three from three.

He had been aiming to match his own record set last year of 10 consecutive wins — one more than Sebastian Vettel in 2013 — and was unbeaten in his last 18



Ferrari’s Carlos Sainz Jr celebrates with the trophy. – REUTERS

starts from pole position.

But while Verstappen was favoured to win, the Ferraris had proved highly competitive in practice and qualifying on the fast and flowing Albert Park track.

Despite not being fully fit, Sainz, whose seat at Ferrari is to be taken by Hamilton next year, topped Q1 and Q2 to fire a warning shot.

INCREDIBLE WEEKEND

Oscar Piastri in the other McLaren was fourth ahead of Red Bull’s Sergio Perez. Alonso dropped to eighth after his penalty with teammate Lance Stroll elevated to sixth and RB’s

Yuki Tsunoda to seventh.

Haas pair Nico Hulkenberg and Kevin Magnussen rounded out the top 10.

“It feels good mostly for the team of course, first and second didn’t happen since Bahrain 2022,” said Leclerc. “Carlos has had an incredible weekend to come back from his surgery, he’s done an amazing race.”

Verstappen made a clean start and pulled clear of Sainz when the lights went out, with Norris holding onto third as they jostled for position.

But his lead didn’t last with Sainz opening his DRS on lap two to slice past before smoke started pouring out of the Red

Bull and the Dutchman retired.

Sainz led from Norris and Leclerc before the first pit stops.

Sainz put on fresh rubber on lap 17 and had a 2.6sec lead from Leclerc at the halfway mark, closely followed by Piastri and Norris.

With no Verstappen to contend with, the Spaniard gradually built the gap as Norris passed Piastri to move into third.

Leclerc pitted again and he came back out in fifth on hards, but quickly surged back to second.

Sainz also pitted for a second time and retained his narrow lead to cruise home in front of 130,000 fans. — AFP

Sabalenka exits Miami, Alcaraz starts in style

MIAMI: A traumatic week for world number two Aryna Sabalenka came to an end with a third round, three set loss in the Miami Open to Ukrainian Anhelina Kalinina on Saturday. The 6-4, 1-6, 6-1 win for the 36th ranked Kalinina prompted Sabalenka, who had kept her emotions in check through both of her games at Hard Rock Stadium, to smash her racket violently into the court.

On Monday, Belarusian Sabalenka’s former boyfriend, ex-NHL player Konstantin Koltsov, died in Miami after what police called an “apparent suicide.”

The pair had been in a relationship until recently and Sabalenka only announced they were no longer together following

the death. On Friday, she looked in control as she defeated her close friend Paula Badosa of Spain in straight sets.

But given the late slot on the main stadium court, Sabalenka looked to be feeling the strain more as she struggled for any kind of consistency. After losing the opening set, she utterly dominated Kalinina in the second, with her serve and powerful backhand too much for the Ukrainian.

But once Kalinina broke in the third, Sabalenka’s focus and composure deserted her and her opponent took full advantage.

“It’s really tough with nerves. But I managed in the tough moments to deal with it,” said Kalinina. “So I’m a little bit proud of myself today.”



Carlos Alcaraz (ESP) waves to the crowd. – USA TODAY Sports

World number one Iga Swiatek had no trouble in beating Italy’s Camila Giorgi 6-2, 6-1 as the rain impacted tournament packed in the big names including postponed matches from Friday.

“I was feeling really pretty confident and I just wanted to see how I’m going to feel the surface. It was all really comfortable, so I’m happy,” said Swiatek.

In the ATP event, top seed Carlos Alcaraz was simply too much for his compatriot Roberto Carballes Baena as he powered to a 6-2, 6-1 win in 85 minutes.

SUNSHINE DOUBLE

Like Swiatek, Alcaraz is looking to complete the “Sunshine Double” after his victory in Indian Wells last

week and the two-time Grand Slam winner looked in formidable form.

The 20-year-old was on top from the start, powerful from the baseline but willing to approach the net as he hit 10 winners to one in the opening set. He saved all three break points that he faced against his 64th ranked opponent, who asked some tough questions at times but usually received an emphatic response. Alcaraz will next face French veteran Gael Monfils, a 6-7 (3/7), 6-1, 6-2 winner over Australian Jordan Thompson.

Italy’s Jannik Sinner, the Australian Open champion ranked third in the world, made a confident start to his bid in Miami with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over compatriot and qualifier Andrea Vavassori. — AFP



CUBAN PRESIDENT RECEIVES CHAIRMAN OF OIA



HAVANA: Dr Miguel Diaz-Canel, President of the Republic of Cuba, yesterday received Abdul salam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) in the Cuban capital city, Havana. The reception came within the framework of the official visit paid by the OIA Chairman to Cuba. The OIA Chairman conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Diaz-Canel. His Majesty also wished the people of Cuba further progress and prosperity.

On his turn, the Cuban president expressed his heartfelt sentiments to His Majesty and the Omani people. He also wished the bilateral relations further development and growth. The meeting was attended by Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador-at-Large at the Foreign Ministry. – **ONA**

‘Made in Oman’ SUV to be ready this year

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

The country’s first electric SUV to be manufactured at Al Duqm will be ready for customers by the end of this year. The company, Mays, said through its social media account that the SUV brand Alive 1 will hit the market by the end of this year with prices in the range of around RO 16,000.

The company said that as the number of orders exceeded expectations, it is studying the need to increase production in the first year.

The Mays Alive 1 will run fully on electric charging and is designed to suit the climate conditions of the GCC region.

The company is focusing on



using locally available parts and reducing manufacturing costs to reach the market faster. The Made in Oman product will open up job opportunities in the field of maintenance and spare parts, the company said. It may be noted that several governments have proclaimed that 2030-2050 fossil fuel-powered cars will be phased out between 2030 and 2050. The prototype has been introduced in the governorates of Al Batinah North and Muscat.

Tourist arrivals into Oman to surpass 5-million mark in 2024

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

Affirming the positive outlook surrounding Oman’s rapidly rebounding tourism sector, a new report by BMI, a Fitch Solutions company, has projected tourism arrivals to surge by 24.7 per cent year-on-year in 2024 to breach the 5-million mark for the first time.

This compares with a figure of 4.3 million arrivals in 2023, the report noted, citing data published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

“We forecast Oman’s arrivals to grow by 24.7 per cent y-o-y in 2024 to a total of 5.3 million. The 2024 arrivals levels will be a new high, building on the most recent historic peak in 2023. Arrivals will continue to expand over the remainder of our medium-term forecast period (2024-2028) to reach a projected 10.8 million by 2028.

Our forecasted arrivals growth trajectory for Oman indicates that the market will achieve its target of 11.0 million tourists by 2040,” BMI stated in its latest report on the Sultanate of Oman.

According to the market research firm, arrivals from the GCC states totalled around 1.6 million in 2023, followed by an estimated 610,000 visitors from India. Germany came next with a figure of 150,000, while Mainland China accounted for 118,000 arrivals.



Oman represents an attractive market for luxury holiday options: Report

OMAN IS EASILY ACCESSIBLE FOR TRAVELLERS FROM ITS KEY SOURCE MARKETS ACROSS THE GCC DUE TO REGIONAL PROXIMITY AND STRONG TRANSPORT LINKS.

Significantly, Oman’s longer-term goal of targeting a peak of 11 million tourists annually by 2040 — a key goal of the country’s Vision 2040 Strategy — appears to be within reach, BMI notes.

“Our projected medium-term (2024-2028) arrivals growth trajectory indicates that the country will be on track to achieve this target. We forecast Oman’s arrivals growth to be robust over the medium term, growing by an annual average of 20.4 per cent y-o-y between 2024-2028, to reach 10.8 million arrivals in

2028.

Increased arrivals over the medium term will be driven by key source markets across the GCC, as well as Asia-Pacific and European markets.”

The report however cautions that weaker global economic growth can pose a potential “downside risk” for arrivals into Oman, particularly from the Asia Pacific and European markets during 2024.

High living costs and tighter credit conditions are likely to constrain discretionary spending in these markets, with the result that travellers may choose short and medium-haul travel, while skipping long-haul destinations, such as Oman, it warns.

Nonetheless, the overall outlook for the industry continues to be bright, says BMI.

“We expect Oman’s tourism sector to remain resilient, particularly over the medium-to-long term. Oman is easily accessible for travellers from its key source markets across the GCC due to regional proximity and strong transport links.

Low barriers to entry to Oman will be supported by high household disposable incomes across markets in the region. This will drive demand for experiential products and services such as travel and hospitality.”

Importantly, Oman also represents an attractive market for tourists eyeing luxury holiday options, BMI points out.

However, it would need to “compete” with a number of GCC markets that are also currently expanding their tourism product offerings as part of a wider

Santani properties to boost Oman’s wellness tourism offering

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

In a move poised to revolutionise the wellness tourism sector in Oman, Santani, a globally renowned wellness retreat based in Sri Lanka, has unveiled its ambitious plan to develop eco-wellness resorts in the picturesque landscapes of Oman.

The CEO of Santani, Vickum Nawagamuwage, sat down for an exclusive interview with *Oman Daily Observer* to shed light on the upcoming projects and the unique experiences they will offer to guests.

The partnership between Santani and the Omran Group, a leading developer in Oman, marks the genesis of this groundbreaking collaboration.

Nawagamuwage revealed that the idea stemmed from the overwhelming demand of Omani guests who experienced the tranquillity and rejuvenation at Santani in Sri Lanka.

This led to the introduction of Omran Group as a partner, facilitated by BPOS Global LLC, a prominent Omani business development company.

The journey began with the Santani Jabal Shams project, followed by a visit from Omran’s top management, which culminated in the endorsement

The Jabal Shams resort will offer the world’s first Astro Wellness experience, leveraging the region’s unparalleled stargazing opportunities.



A rendering of Santani, Jabal Shams. © Santani Wellness Resorts/Omran Group

of a second project on the idyllic beaches of the Dhofar Governorate.

When asked about the distinctive wellness treatments and experiences awaiting guests at the upcoming resorts, Nawagamuwage emphasised Santani’s core philosophy of Human Sustainability.

Unlike conventional wellness approaches that address stress as a symptom, Santani delves deeper into the root causes, focusing on adapting humans to the rapid pace of the modern world.

This innovative approach

has garnered global acclaim for Santani, making it a sought-after destination worldwide.

Moreover, the Oman properties will introduce a blend of Ayurveda, international therapies, and indigenous Arabian practices tailored to the region’s cultural heritage.

Notably, the Jabal Shams resort will offer the world’s first Astro Wellness experience, leveraging the region’s unparalleled stargazing opportunities.

Integrating Oman’s natural splendours and cultural heritage into the guest experience lies at

the heart of Santani’s ethos.

Nawagamuwage emphasised a minimalistic approach to architecture, utilising the natural landscapes as focal points while preserving the environment’s integrity.

The Jabal Shams project will harmoniously incorporate the mountains’ natural features, with underground facilities blending seamlessly into the terrain.

Cultural immersion will extend to bespoke uniforms, culinary offerings, and wellness programmes, showcasing Oman’s rich heritage at every touchpoint.



With sustainability at its core and innovation at its helm, Santani’s foray into Oman heralds a new chapter in the realm of wellness tourism, inviting travellers to embark on a holistic odyssey amidst Oman’s breathtaking landscapes.

VICKUM NAWAGAMUWAGE
CEO, Santani

Reflecting on Santani’s global wellness ethos, Nawagamuwage highlighted the brand’s commitment to anticipatory service and taste-based nutrition.

These principles, honed at the Sri Lankan retreat, will be elevated at the Oman properties,

offering unparalleled guest experiences and culinary delights.

Moreover, with an eye on future expansions, Santani envisions a global footprint in partnership with governments, family offices, and institutional funds.

The surge in demand for holistic wellness solutions underscores the need for Santani’s unique approach, positioning the brand as a frontrunner in the evolving wellness landscape.

As Santani embarks on this transformative journey to bring eco-wellness tourism to Oman, Vickum Nawagamuwage’s vision encapsulates a harmonious blend of nature and culture, promising guests a sanctuary for rejuvenation and self-discovery.

With sustainability at its core and innovation at its helm, Santani’s foray into Oman heralds a new chapter in the realm of wellness tourism, inviting travellers to embark on a holistic odyssey amidst Oman’s breathtaking landscapes.

This story of Santani’s pioneering initiative in Oman epitomises the convergence of luxury, well-being, and cultural immersion, setting a new standard for eco-conscious travellers seeking a transformative escape.

Bion Genetic Laboratory partners with Oman Down Syndrome Assoc for support and education

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

Bion Genetic Laboratory, Oman's first and only genetic laboratory in the private sector in Oman, has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Oman Down Syndrome Association of Oman at an event held at the genetic centre recently. Through this understanding that is aimed at supporting individuals with Down Syndrome through various educational initiatives and subsidised genetic tests, children with Down Syndrome and members of the association will be able to get services at subsidised prices and

discounts and facilities for various genetic tests that they require from time to time. Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Saad al Junaibi, Founder and Chairman of the Board at Bion Genetic Laboratory, expressed his enthusiasm for the collaboration, stating, "We are honoured to partner with the Down Syndrome Association of Oman to provide essential support and resources to individuals with Down Syndrome and their families." He further said that through this agreement, they aimed at enhancing the quality of life for these individuals and contribute to their well-being. "This collaboration with



Bion Genetic Laboratory will significantly benefit our members and children with Down Syndrome. Access to subsidised genetic

Jabry, Chairman of Oman Down Syndrome Association said. According to Dr Saimak Saber, Chief Medical Officer and genetic scientist, who emphasised the importance of early detection and intervention, "Genetic testing plays a crucial role in diagnosing and managing Down Syndrome. By offering these tests at affordable rates, we hope to facilitate early intervention and improve outcomes for individuals with Down Syndrome because early intervention is very crucial in such situations" Dr Abeer al Saegh, Senior Consultant and genetic scientist, highlighted the impact of Down Syndrome on individuals and families, stating, "Down Syndrome is a genetic condition that affects how a person's brain and body develop. It is important to raise awareness about this condition and provide support to those affected." The cooperation between Bion Genetic Laboratory and the Down Syndrome Association of Oman underscores a commitment to supporting individuals with Down Syndrome and promoting their inclusion in society. Through this partnership, a positive impact can be made on the lives of individuals with Down Syndrome and their families, according to both parties to the MoU.

Dhofar Islamic offers attractive profit rates on auto finance

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic Banking window of BankDhofar, launched Ramadhan auto finance offer with attractive profit rates. Customers can take advantage of this attractive offer till April 30, 2024 to own their dream car during the holy month of Ramadhan with profit rates starting from 4%. This offer, which can be availed by customers to finance the purchase of both new and used cars, comes with several benefits which include fast approval process as well as flexible



repayment options of up to 10 years. To avail the offer, customers may visit any of Dhofar Islamic branches to apply for the auto finance with the assistance of a dedicated support team.

Commenting on the offer, Amor Said al Amri, DGM and Head of Dhofar Islamic Retail Banking said: "This Ramadhan, we're making it easier than ever to drive away in your dream car with our competitive financing options and flexible terms. We're committed to helping our customers achieve their financial goals during this holy month." Dhofar Islamic offers a comprehensive suite of innovative and best in class banking solutions that cater to the needs of its retail and corporate customers.

Swarovski celebrates Ramadhan with Moonlit Wonder

MUSCAT: As we celebrate the month of Ramadhan, Swarovski warmly embraces this time of reflection, gratitude, and unity with a selection of mesmerising new additions to its Constella family. This phase of the lunar calendar encourages us all to find joy in the beauty that surrounds us and provides an opportunity to seek connection and community with those we hold close. **MOONLIT WONDER** Taking cues from the night sky, the exquisitely cut crystals of the Constella family capture the light and cast a luminous glow over Ramadhan looks. The luxurious pairing of gold-toned metal and

vivid green crystals epitomises grounded elegance while reflecting nature's wonder. The radiant green hue honours Ramadhan traditions while radiating serenity, renewal, and prosperity. Each piece is meticulously crafted: round cut prong-set stones are linked by articulated hardware to form delicate bracelets and necklaces, and asymmetrical earrings echo the subtle shimmer of the stars. A bolder choice, the circle of pavé white zirconia surrounding a central stone in the Constella pendant and stud earrings serves as a joyful reminder of the power of self-reflection. At its core, each design showcases the



brand's mastery of light and unmistakable savoir-faire. Together, these exquisite additions serve as a radiant reminder of the moonlit wonder of this special festival. The Ramadhan exclusives are available to purchase in Swarovski stores across the Middle East and online at www.swarovski.com



OAB champions future of workforce, supports new Dawam App

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank, a leading financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, takes a significant step towards realising Oman's Vision 2040 by sponsoring the Dawam App, an integrated solution for employment and freelance opportunities. This pioneering digital platform is designed to bridge the gap between talent and career opportunities, thereby catalysing the growth of Oman's economy. The Dawam platform, with over 150,000 users and 3,000 registered companies, plays a critical role in shaping a vibrant labour market. It offers a wide range of services, from connecting job seekers to potential employers to providing self-employment portals and training programmes. Dawam's effectiveness is evident in its 6,000 success stories and collaborations with over six educational institutions.

Sulaiman al Harthy, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, said, "Dawam App is more than just a corporate initiative to us; it's a testament to our dedication to Oman's future. By supporting this platform, we are empowering the Omani workforce, especially the youth, to explore diverse career paths and excel in their chosen fields. This aligns perfectly with our ongoing commitment to community development, as seen in our Ruwad al Arabi internship programme and Launchpad initiative." The collaboration between OAB and the Dawam App underscores a shared vision of economic progress and workforce empowerment. It reflects OAB's broader strategy to invest in initiatives that nurture talent, promote digital innovation, and contribute to the national economy.

MUSCAT: Lynk & Co, the premium automotive brand, jointly owned by Volvo & Geely is revolutionising the roads of Oman with its exceptional models. Engineered to redefine the driving experience, Lynk & Co represents the perfect blend of cutting-edge technology, superior craftsmanship, and remarkable performance. Committed to enhancing driving experiences across Oman, Lynk & Co is thrilled to announce unbeatable offers and test drive opportunities on its lineup of models. Now, owning a Lynk & Co model is more attainable than ever, with EMI starting at just RO 118 /month. This Ramadhan, seize the Ramadhan season offer to become a proud Lynk & Co owner and elevate your driving experience like never before! Exclusive Ramadhan season offer highlights for Lynk & Co models in Oman: Explore unbeatable offers on Lynk & Co models 01, 03, 03+, 05, and 09 across Oman. Enjoy peace of mind with a 6-year/unlimited kilometres warranty, along with 6 years or 60,000 kilometres of service, whichever comes earlier. Drive with confidence knowing you're covered by 6 years of AAA roadside assistance. Additionally, benefit from complimentary registration for the first year and a generous 600 litres of fuel with each vehicle purchase. As a special bonus, receive a gift voucher worth RO



50 with your purchase. These exceptional offers are valid from February 19, 2024, to May 18, 2024. It's a perfect opportunity to drive home your dream car with unparalleled benefits and savings. **Lynk & Co 01: The stylish SUV** Lynk & Co 01, the stylish SUV model, sets a new benchmark of excellence for the residents of Oman. Experience unmatched urban driving with the Lynk & Co 01 which blends style with advanced technology, enjoy smart connectivity, city-smart design, and cutting-edge safety features like traffic jam assist. **Lynk & Co 03 & 03+ : For racing excellence** Experience racing excellence

with the Lynk & Co 03 and 03+. Crafted on the advanced CMA platform, these championship-winning sports sedans boast efficient 2.0-litre turbocharged engines and advanced suspension systems for a smooth ride with absolute control. **Lynk & Co 05: Your ultimate adventure companion** With its powerful Drive-E 2.0TD T5 turbo engine, the Lynk & Co 05 model delivers impressive performance and efficiency for thrilling off-road experiences. Safety features like adaptive cruise control and queuing assistant (ACCQA) and door opening warning (DOW) ensure unbeatable security, while the smart adjustable powertrain+ (SAP+) system and 8-speed automatic transmission guarantee

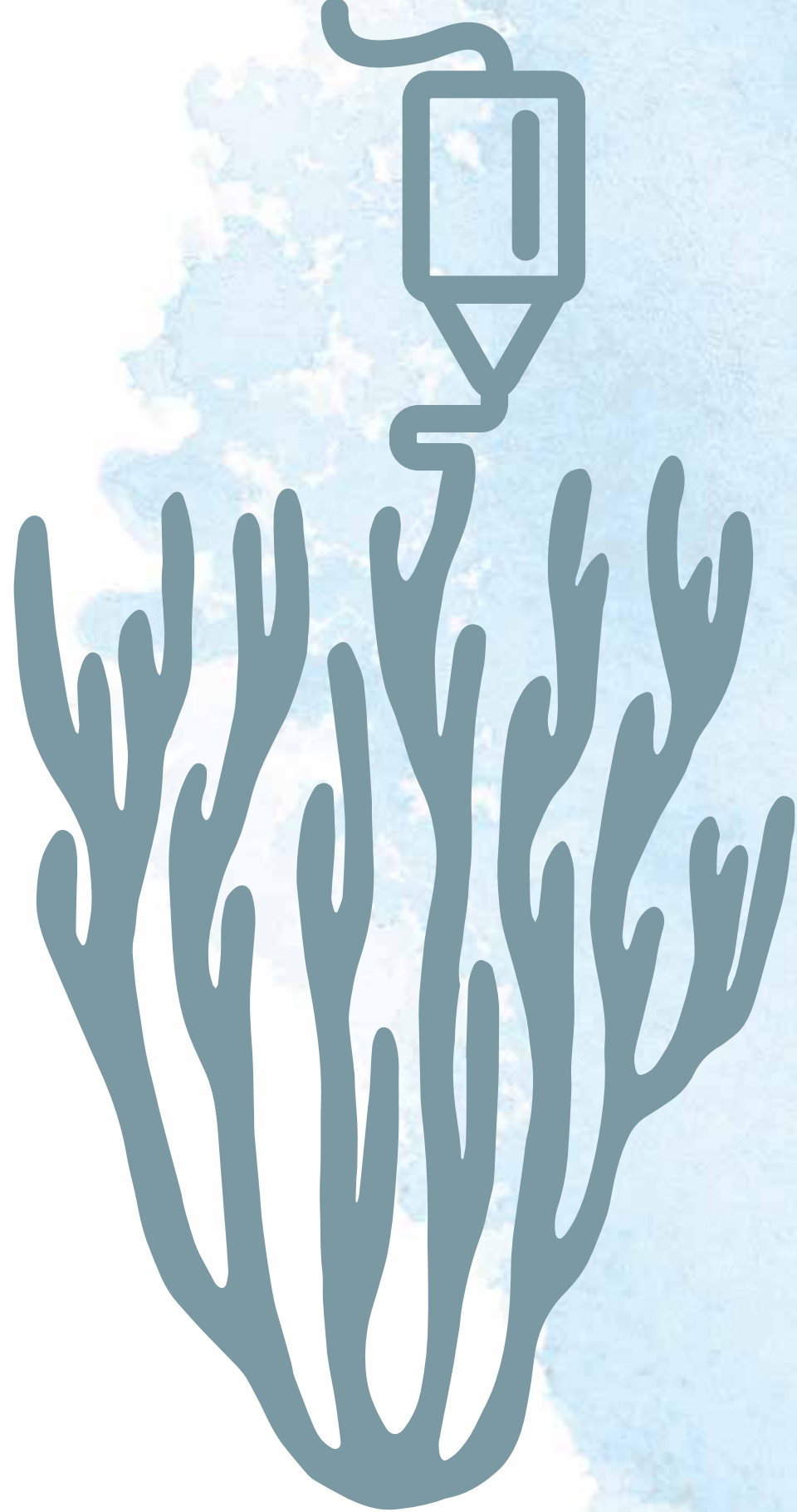
smooth drives. **Lynk & Co 09: Perfect SUV for family vacations** Lynk & Co 09 is a luxurious seven-seat full-size SUV that redefines sophistication in the automotive industry. With its blend of progressive technology, striking design, and unmatched comfort, the 09 captivates car enthusiasts across Oman, offering an unforgettable experience on every journey. Available in elegant shades of gray, black, and white, the 09 combines luxury and performance seamlessly. The brand invites all automotive enthusiasts to visit the new showroom at Ghala Heights, Muscat, or call 71611137 to explore these remarkable vehicles and take advantage of these exclusive offers.

3D PRINTED CORAL REEFS

REVOLUTIONISING MARINE CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN OMAN

25%

OF CORAL REEFS AROUND THE WORLD HAVE ALREADY DISAPPEARED DUE TO WARMING WATERS, POLLUTION, OCEAN ACIDIFICATION AND OVERFISHING



14,000

ARTIFICIAL CORAL REEF HAVE BEEN PLACED IN

154

DIFFERENT LOCATIONS IN OMAN

3D PRINTED ARTIFICIAL CORAL REEF CAN BE PRODUCED IN JUST

8 HOURS

PER PIECE, COMPARED TO TRADITIONAL METHODS THAT TAKE

36 HOURS

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

In the realm of marine conservation, a groundbreaking innovation is making waves — 3D printed artificial coral reefs. Studies have shown that 25% of coral reefs around the world have already disappeared due to warming waters, pollution, ocean acidification and overfishing. As natural coral reefs face unprecedented threats, the urgent need for sustainable solutions has never been clearer.

InnoTech, a pioneering company at the forefront of environmental technology, has ventured into the realm of artificial coral reefs using 3D production technology, heralding a new era in marine ecosystem restoration.

The genesis of the company's foray into artificial coral reefs lies in the recognition of the dire state of natural reefs globally. As these vital ecosystems deteriorate, the need for innovative rehabilitation methods becomes increasingly pressing.

Othman al Mandhari, CEO of InnoTech, shared the company's motivation behind this endeavour: "We saw a critical gap in coral reef restoration efforts and realised the transformative potential of 3D printing technology in creating sustainable solutions for marine ecosystems."

THE ART OF 3D PRINTED ARTIFICIAL CORAL REEFS

The 3D printed artificial coral reefs are meticulously designed to mimic the intricate structures of natural coral formations, providing essential habitats for marine life and bolstering coastal resilience.

Through customised design features tailored to specific ecological requirements, the company ensures that the artificial reefs seamlessly integrate with the surrounding marine environment, promoting biodiversity and ecosystem functionality. The adoption of eco-friendly materials further underscores the company's commitment to sustainability in marine conservation.

The artificial coral reefs are being created through cutting-edge 3D production techniques. This process begins with designing a digital model using specialised software to mimic natural coral formations. Printing materials, such as a specialised concrete mix, are prepared for underwater use.

The 3D printing process involves depositing layers of concrete to build the reef structure with high precision and intricate details. After printing, the structure undergoes a curing process to ensure durability underwater. Once completed, the reef is deployed in the ocean for ongoing monitoring and maintenance to promote habitat colonisation and long-term success.

3D printed artificial coral reef can be produced in just 8 hours per piece, compared to traditional methods that take 36 hours.

TRANSFORMING FISHERMEN'S LIVES THROUGH ARTIFICIAL REEFS

The impact of the artificial coral reefs extends beyond ecological restoration — it is also transforming the livelihoods of local communities, particularly fishermen who rely on healthy marine ecosystems for their sustenance.

Hatem al Mansoori, a local fisherman from Sur, shared with *Oman Daily Observer* his experience on the artificial coral reefs: "Since the installation of the artificial coral reefs off the coast of Oman, our fishing yields have seen a remarkable increase. The reefs attract a diverse array of marine species, providing abundant fishing grounds for us."

The success stories from fishermen like Hatem underscore the tangible benefits of artificial reefs in enhancing fish populations and marine biodiversity. By creating thriving ecosystems that support robust fish stocks, the artificial reefs serve as sustainable solutions for addressing overfishing and habitat degradation, ultimately ensuring the long-term viability of fisheries.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION THROUGH INNOVATION

InnoTech's commitment to environmental conservation extends beyond artificial coral reefs, encompassing a holistic approach to marine ecosystem preservation. Through strategic collaborations with marine biology organisations and conservation groups, the company seeks to leverage its innovative technologies for broader conservation initiatives, fostering synergy between scientific research and technological innovation.

In an interview with *Oman Daily Observer*, Fatma al Harbi, a marine biologist at Marine Science and Fisheries Centre Oman said, "The creation of artificial reefs in the sea favours biological productivity, therefore enhancing the population of fish and invertebrates.

These reefs have the power to attract marine life by offering a habitat. They not only constitute a shelter but are also a valuable reproduction reservoir, which can recreate a whole ecosystem in biological depleted zones."

"These 3D printed structures not only provide essential habitats for marine organisms but also contribute to the overall resilience of coral reef ecosystems. The intricate designs and bio-inspired features of the reefs promote biodiversity and ecological connectivity, enriching the marine environment," she said.

"Researches at Sultan Qaboos University have shown the efficiency of using artificial coral reefs in Oman where the abundance and the biomass of fish has increased," she added.

FUTURE HORIZONS IN MARINE CONSERVATION

Looking ahead, the future of marine conservation holds a myriad of possibilities for InnoTech and its innovative 3D production technology.

Driven by a steadfast commitment to environmental stewardship, the company is poised to explore new frontiers in artificial reef design and deployment, with a focus on scalability and effectiveness in ecosystem restoration. Approximately 14,000 artificial coral reef have been placed in 154 different locations in Oman.

Al Mandhari shared his vision for the future of artificial coral reefs: "Our goal is to expand the reach of our 3D printed reefs to new marine habitats worldwide, catalysing a wave of positive change for marine ecosystems.

Through sustained innovation and collaboration, we aim to forge a legacy of environmental conservation that transcends borders and generations."

InnoTech's pioneering efforts in 3D printed artificial coral reefs epitomise a paradigm shift in marine conservation, ushering in a new era of sustainable ecosystem restoration. By combining cutting-edge technology with a commitment to environmental stewardship, the company is paving the way for a brighter and more resilient future for our oceans and the communities that depend on them.

Europe’s green giant is focusing on safer bets



LISA JUCCA

The author is a European business editor, Reuters Breakingviews.

BUT AS REGULATED BUSINESSES, GRIDS ALSO OFFER MORE PREDICTABLE RETURNS AS INVESTORS RECEIVE A GUARANTEED RATE OVER THE LIFETIME OF THE ASSET

made many projects less profitable, especially in offshore wind. Shares in Denmark’s Orsted have fallen about 70% from their January 2021 peak after multiple headaches.

That said, Iberdrola shares trade roughly where they stood at that point in time. Given that some of that is down to a pre-existing mix of US exposure and regulated assets, Galán’s new investment targets should cement the group’s appeal.

He is allocating 60% of net capital expenditure, or 21.5 billion euros, to power grids. That’s up from 44% in a previous plan, or 16 billion euros. These networks need massive upgrades and changes as ditching fossil fuels requires more electricity.

But as regulated businesses, grids also offer more predictable returns as investors receive a guaranteed rate over the lifetime of the asset.

The other key focus for Iberdrola is the United States. The



Miniaures of windmill, solar panel and electric pole are seen in front of Iberdrola Renewables logo in this illustration. – Reuters

Spanish company admittedly had to abandon its \$8 billion takeover of US PNM Resources in January due to regulatory pushbacks.

But its \$2.5 billion offer to buy, opens new tab out the 18% of \$14 billion US unit Avangrid it does not already own shows a steady commitment to that market. The generous subsidies President Joe Biden’s administration is

handing out for both renewables and infrastructure make the investment worth it.

The International Energy Agency calculates US subsidies exceed, opens new tab those of other countries, and it has earmarked \$50 billion just for electricity networks.

Also, by 2035, the US may need investments of \$1 trillion in

distribution networks and up to \$500 billion in transmission lines, according to an IMPAX Asset Management report.

Shareholders seem comfortable that Galán can hit the top end of his targeted range for 2026 EBITDA, of 16.5 billion euros to 17 billion euros.

Apply a 2026 EBITDA multiple of 7, roughly in line with a Morgan Stanley-compiled average of rivals like Enel and EDP for that year, and Iberdrola should be worth around 120 billion euros, including debt — where it currently trades.

Galán’s strategy is not without risks of its own. Biden’s handouts are inflating construction costs, and presidential hopeful Donald Trump has threatened to axe some green tax credits. Still, with US power networks required to expand by two-thirds to handle surging electricity demand, the Iberdrola boss’s bets look reassuringly logical. — Reuters

China’s plan to spur growth: A new slogan with familiar ideas



KEITH BRADSHER

The author is the Beijing bureau chief for *The New York Times*



People walk at the main shopping area in Shanghai. – Reuters

fairly open discussion of economic policies by Chinese corporate leaders and ministers a day before the opening ceremony, but that, too, did not take place this year. China has moved towards fewer and more scripted public events involving its top leaders.

The annual news conference by the premier at the closing of the legislature in mid-March was also cancelled.

Evan Greenberg, chair and CEO of the Chubb Group, a large American insurer, co-hosted the opening of the conference on Sunday.

The list of attendees included Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, who has been in China the past week trying to reinvigorate iPhone sales, as well as Mike Henry, the CEO of BHP, the Australian mining giant.

In his speech, Li called for enhanced manufacturing and increased services and consumption. He repeated

calls for Chinese households to replace old cars and household appliances, but did not say whether the government would provide money to help them do so.

Consumer spending in China has been lackluster as apartment prices have fallen by one-fifth in the past two years, according to semiofficial data.

The number of housing transactions has also plummeted. Homeowners complain that they must cut prices by up to half if they want to find buyers.

Real estate represents 60% to 80% of household assets, a much larger share than in most countries. So the near collapse of the housing market has left many families feeling less affluent and struggling to meet mortgage payments.

Li mentioned real estate and a related problem, local government debt, only briefly, during a discussion of risks. Over the past four decades, he said,

“risks and challenges have not defeated us.”

The mantra of “new, quality productive forces” is aimed partly at allaying worries in China and abroad that American-led restrictions on high-tech exports to China might stunt its growth.

In briefings before the forum, officials emphasised that manufacturing represents a large part of the country’s economy — more than double the share in the United States.

“In China, you can see it is consistently on the rise and far higher than in other countries,” Shi Dan, a director general of economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a government ministry, said at a briefing.

China’s trade partners are worried that more manufacturing will likely lead to more Chinese exports.

The European Union is preparing to impose tariffs on electric cars from China. The

European Union Chamber of Commerce issued a report on Wednesday warning that the policy could lead to deindustrialisation in Europe, as European companies may not be able to compete with government-backed Chinese businesses.

Companies that have depended on selling commodities to China for housing and infrastructure construction have been watching closely the redoubled emphasis on high-tech manufacturing. But Andrew Forrest, the executive chair of Fortescue Metals Group, an Australian iron ore mining giant, said that China will inevitably continue spending a lot on new roads, rail lines and other infrastructure.

“The situation on infrastructure won’t actually be a switch away from it, it’ll be just an emphasis on manufacturing,” he said in an interview.

— The New York Times

From the top of the government, China is heavily promoting a plan to fix the country’s stagnant economy and offset the harm from a decades long housing bubble.

The programme has a fresh slogan, presented foremost by Xi Jinping, the country’s top leader, as “new, quality productive forces.”

But it has features that are familiar from China’s economic playbook:

The idea is to spur innovation and growth through massive investments in manufacturing, particularly in high-tech and clean energy, as well as robust spending on research and development.

And there have been few concrete provisions for how the government hopes to persuade Chinese households to reverse a prolonged slowdown in spending.

Premier Li Qiang, the country’s No 2 official, laid out the plan on Sunday in a speech to CEOs from around the world, who had gathered in Beijing for the country’s annual China Development Forum. “We will accelerate the development of new, quality productive forces,” he said at the forum’s opening ceremony.

Started in 2000, the China Development Forum is designed to explain to corporate leaders the economic plan laid out each year by the premier on March 5.

In previous years, the forum featured a lengthy, closed-door discussion with CEOs where the premier entertained many questions.

But the premier’s conversation, usually on the event’s final day, was cancelled this year without explanation, prompting some CEOs to skip Monday and schedule their private jets to fly out on Sunday evening.

The China Development Forum also used to include a

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat: 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar: 9731 6218 Salalah: 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
Choose from a wide range of brands & models
PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

اوربٲ
ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

URGENT HIRING

LEADING LAB CHEMICAL/CONSUMABLE/EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION COMPANY IN OMAN
URGENT HIRING
TECHNICAL SUPPORT ENGINEER

- More than 2-year work experience in Oman/GCC
- Degree of bachelor of Mechanical Engineering
- Driving license in Oman preferred.

Suitable candidate can send CV to:
recruitment74@gmail.com

MONDAY

MARCH 25, 2024 | RAMADHAN 14, 1445 AH

Auditors & Accountants

- Audit & Accounting • CFO Services • Secondment
- VAT & Tax Return Filing • VAT Refund Assistance

Contact: 92182750 • Email: contact@umpauditors.com

UMP
UNITED MAWA PROJECTS

ROYAL CARGO

ALL OVER INDIA
INDONESIA ► NEPAL
AIR EXPORT (Port to Port)
SEA EXPORT (Container Booking)
PICK UP FREE ANYWHERE IN MUSCAT 93213206

SERVICES BY AIR & SEA

FOR MORE INFORMATION JUST DIAL CUSTOMER CARE 93213207

SIT. WANTED

INDIAN male 14 years experience light/ heavy driver. Looking for suitable opening currently in Oman. Contact: 77050986/ 91280205, email: kokkadmou@gmail.com

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crococraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309

pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

EAGLE FREIGHT EXPRESS
DOOR TO DOOR COURIER SERVICES
INDIA | NEPAL | BANGLADESH

WORLD WIDE CARGO SERVICE Tel.: 99432926, 78211708, 92319472, 93350126

Head Office (H.O.) Room No.: 218, 1st Floor, Aircargo Complex, Branch Al-Hail, Email: eaglefreightexpress@gmail.com

25 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
FAST DELIVERY
EXCELLENT SERVICES
AIR & SEA CARGO
FREE PICKUP & DUTY SERVICE

FOR RENT

LUXURY offices for rent in CBD for (banks, insurance, finance, telecom company and other) 71177075.

FLAT For Rent In CBD Area 71177075.

FLATS and offices for rent in Muscat. 96379095, 98403020.

IN Ruwi, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, hall, kitchen, with car parking. RO 150 monthly only. Tel: 94402003.

WAREHOUSE / workshop 2,600 sq metres for rent in Misfa near Oman Cement Factory including accommodation contact: GSM 98286899, email: sales@jetsoman.com

SIT. VACANCY

BACHELOR degree in Mechanical or electrical engineering ASNT level 2 (NDT), ASNT level 3 (NDT) additional advantage. LEEA foundation, LEEA lifting accessories diploma (LAC). Contact: pipe2566@yahoo.com

INDIAN male 6 years experience in accounts/ automobile/ admin. Seeking for suitable opening in any field, currently in Oman. Contact: 78988055/ 92850930, email: ullasmon8@gmail.com

ACCOUNTANT & sales Executive, Indian male, 31 years, BA English, specialised in Accounting. 2 years experience in India & 6 years experience in Oman. Seeking position in Accounts/ Sales fields (has Oman licence). Mob: 78805951. Gmail: akhilgopinath2017@gmail.com

A SUDANESE resident in Salalah, Bsc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet). Contact: +968 98510880.

28 YEARS Experience in Oman in sales, marketing and management, Indian with DL and release. Looking for a good job change. Contact: 78501743.

INDIAN Male B.Com, 35 years experience in Office Management, Accounts, Executive assistant, Admin & HR with D/L (Oman) seeking suitable job. Contact: 92558734

PART time/full time Accountant 20 years experience in Muscat. Please contact: 78293476

For Sale

A fully equipped work shop with equipment for maintaining vehicles and heavy equipment is for sale at Misfah Industrial area. Workshop standardized with OPAL requirement

Contact phone number: 9358 7527

SIT. WANTED

PLANNING Engineer, PMP. Indian male 11 years experience in Construction Projects. Well versed with Primavera P6 Software, strong communication skills, Interpersonal skills, EDT Claims, Recovery schedules, project control. Having Omani Driving License. Contact: 78002582, email: engineer4planning@gmail.com

IRAN lady Bachelor degree in law, looking for a suitable job with experience in law office and food distribution company. Currently in Oman, having Investor Visa and Oman driving licence. Contact: +96879242477 Email: shirintaaji@gmail.com

FOR SALE

BUILDING for sale in CBD 71177075

CAFE for sale in Ruwi Rex Road CCTV controlled, 3 visas & investor status, for a good deal, Contact: 78501743.

To advertise on our social media platforms and website

Please Contact our Team
95210257

OMAN OBSERVER
www.omanobserver.com

SALE

SPARE PARTS

A reputed construction company is selling new spare parts from its existing stock.

Location : Ghala, Muscat. Tel : 24526961

The offers should be emailed to :
oman@strabag.com

and submitted in closed envelope to :

STRABAG OMAN LLC

Way 5007, Building 700A,
P.O. Box 444, Muscat, P.C 100
Attn of: the Managing Director - Commercial

ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company (Al Amerat Engineering Trading & Services) which is registered with the Commercial Registration No. 1054601, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials 250,000.000 to 5,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of the Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

OMAN  DAILY

Observer

FREE* CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

* Now FREE CLASSIFIED IN OMAN DAILY OBSERVER ON THE ABOVE CATEGORIES ONLY

Send your advertisement (Only one per coupon & no photocopies), either by mail or in person, with your local identity.

Mailing Address: OBSERVER CLASSIFIEDS SECTION, P.O. Box 974, Muscat, P.C. 100
Location: OEPPA HEAD OFFICE, Medinat Al Alam,
Near Ministry of Information ☎ 24604477 Extn. 2101, 2001
& OEPPA Ruwi Office, Next to Dhofar Bldg, Behind Ruwi Police Station ☎ 24785668

To advertise in Information Ministry channels



To contact

71455532- 71455531- 71455530
adv@omaninfo.om
izdiyar_info izdiyar.info

اردھار
izdiyar



HADITH
GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Abu Dharr, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that he heard the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, saying: "No man accuses another of impiety or disbelief except that it (the accusation) rebounds on him if the one accused is not as he said".



HIS EMINENCE
SHAIKH AHMED BIN
HAMAD AL KHALILI
GRAND MUFTI OF OMAN

A person drank water accidentally during Imsak. He realised this during Al Fajr. What should he do?

If he was aware that the period of Imsak has already begun, he should make amends for that slip on the same day.

QURAN
VERSE OF THE DAY

We have given you plenty. So pray to your Lord and sacrifice. He who hates you is the loser.

(Al Kawthar)



Ramadhan

MONDAY | MARCH 25, 2024 | RAMADHAN 14, 1445 AH

OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om



RUSTAQ'S
CHARITABLE
RAMADHAN
TRADITION

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

Muslims fast during Ramadhan as one of the five pillars of Islam, abstaining from eating and drinking from dawn until sunset. During this sacred month, Muslims strive to perform good deeds that draw them closer to God, aiming to merit Paradise.

In Omani society, selling charitable dishes before or during Ramadhan is a widespread practice. This event serves as an opportunity to support needy and impoverished families, extending the joy of Ramadhan to all.

While all members of society participate, women play a crucial role in its success. Saleh al Sakhbouri, Head of the media committee of the Al Rustaq Charitable Team and the Zakat Committee in Al Rustaq, emphasised, "The women's role in this event is pivotal. They prepare delicious dishes, send them to the event area, where the organising team prices and oversees their sale, and collects the proceeds for those in need."

The team announce the date and location of the event well before its start to ensure that people are prepared to participate.

Al Sakhbouri shared, "When the event begins, people of all ages donate and purchase dishes, with some families sending multiple batches for sale on the same day." He recalled an exceptionally lucrative day, stating, "One year, on a scorching Ramadhan day, our tented setup in an open area yielded over 7 thousand Omani riyals."

This event isn't exclusive to Ramadhan; Omani society's ethos prioritises benevolence and solidarity with the less fortunate year-round.

Al Sakhbouri elaborated, "The event occurs at various times, including Ramadhan, Haj days, and throughout the year, with diverse objectives. Proceeds may fund mosque construction, aid orphans, or distribute food baskets to the impoverished."

The Al Rustaq Charitable Team and the Zakat Committee operate tirelessly to ensure the event's success and the equitable distribution of aid in Al Rustaq. Al Sakhbouri



explained, "We maintain a database of eligible families, integrating the event's proceeds with other aid received to execute our assistance programmes systematically."

During Ramadhan, food baskets containing essentials like rice, flour, milk, oil, and meat are distributed to qualifying groups, such as low-income individuals, the unemployed, divorced women, and widows.

Helping the poor is considered one of the greatest acts of worship in Islam, and the life of the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him, the Messenger of God and the role model for Muslims is full of situations from which a Muslim learns the importance of providing assistance to others. The Prophet said that, "The most beloved people to God Almighty are the ones who are most beneficial to people, and the most beloved of deeds to God Almighty is the joy that you brings to a Muslim, or relieves distress from him, or pays off a debt for him, or drives away hunger from him."

Selling charitable dishes is a wonderful event that brings the community together to help others and enhance the spirit of cooperation and giving in the holy month of Ramadhan, but it is not the only form of solidarity among community members in Ramadhan.

ENTERTAINMENT

Filmstrip,
Hungary's
old-school
projectors
children love

TABLETS AND MOBILE phones may have to be prised from the fingers of children elsewhere, but in Hungary storytime can be all about a 100-year-old piece of tech — filmstrip.

Generations of kids there have been enthralled with stories told with the help of a projector.

Alexandra Csosz-Horvath turns off the lights and reads "Sleeping Beauty" from a series of still captioned images projected

onto the bedroom wall — her three- and seven-year-old clearly under her spell.

"We're together, it's cosier than the cinema yet it's better than a book," said the 44-year-old lawyer.

Filmstrip — a century-old storytelling medium that was killed off in the West by the video cassette in the 1980s — is not just hanging on in Hungary, it is thriving with a new wave of enthusiasts charmed by its slower-paced entertainment.

Printed on rolls of film, the still images were never meant to move.

Long tradition

"Between the 1940s and the 1980s filmstrips were used worldwide as a cost-effective visualisation tool in education and other fields," Levente Borsos, of Seoul's Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, said.

But while it was surpassed by more advanced technologies in the West, it became a popular form of home entertainment in the Soviet bloc where TVs and videos were harder to come by.

When communism collapsed, filmstrip



began to disappear — except in Hungary, where the since privatised Diafilmgyarto company survives as the country's sole producer.

"Continuous filmstrip publishing and slide shows at home can be considered a

of classic fairy tales or children's books.

One bestseller, Hungarian classic "The Old Lady and the Fawn" about a woman taking care of a young deer, has been in the top 10 since its release in 1957, according to Diafilmgyarto's managing director

Hungarian peculiarity, a special part of the country's cultural heritage," Borsos said.

REVIVAL

Producer Diafilmgyarto has seen sales rebound from 60,000 in the 1990s to 230,000 rolls last year.

Each film — produced solely for the domestic market — costs around five euros (\$5.50), less than a cinema ticket. Most are adaptations

Gabriella Lendvai.

The company also commissions artists, including some famous Hungarians, to create exclusive content for its filmstrips.

It's "an irreplaceable tradition in Hungarian culture", said Beata Hajdu-Toth, who attended a recent filmstrip screening in a Budapest cinema along with her son to celebrate Diafilmgyarto's 70th anniversary.

"I am very happy it's part of our life and hopefully I will be able to narrate to my grandchildren as well," the 37-year-old added.

At her home in the Budapest suburbs, Csosz-Horvath also hails the tradition, preferring it to fast-paced cartoons, which she said drive the children "wild".

"They just can't understand that what happens in three seconds on the screen happens in three hours in real life," she said.

With filmstrips "they don't believe that everything happens in the blink of an eye."

— AFP

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF
MUSLIM FAITH

629

Battle of Mu'tah: A clash between Muslim forces and Byzantine

The 629 Battle of Mu'tah was a significant event in Islamic history, marking a clash between Muslim forces led by Zaid ibn Harithah and Byzantine forces near the village of Mu'tah in present-day Jordan. Though outnumbered, the Muslims fought bravely, and while they didn't secure victory, their resilience earned respect. The battle demonstrated the early Muslim community's commitment to defending their faith and land against external threats.

DOS & DONTs:
ETIQUETTE
GUIDE DURING THE
HOLY MONTH

MAINTAIN GOOD
BEHAVIOUR

Ramadhan is a time for spiritual reflection and self-discipline. Muslims strive to enhance their moral character by practicing patience, kindness, and forgiveness. It's important to avoid engaging in arguments, conflicts, or any negative behaviour during this sacred month.

RAMADHAN AROUND THE
WORLD

CHINA



Islam has a rich history in China, dating back to the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) when Arab traders and diplomats first introduced the religion to Chinese ports. Over the centuries, Islam spread primarily through trade routes, intermarriage, and migration, particularly during the Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. The Hui ethnic group, predominantly Muslim, is the largest Muslim community in China today. Additionally, there are Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang and other Muslim minorities like Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks.

The current population of Muslims in China is estimated to be around 23 to 30 million. During Ramadhan, important cultural practices include fasting from dawn to dusk, increased prayers, charity, and gatherings for iftar (the meal to break the fast). Common iftar dishes among Chinese Muslims include lamb skewers (yang rou chuan), beef noodle soup (niu rou mian), steamed dumplings (baozi), and various types of bread and pastries.

Islamic cultural practices in China have blended with local traditions, resulting in a unique Chinese Muslim identity celebrated during Ramadhan and throughout the year.

RAMADHAN
TRIVIA HOW WELL DO YOU
KNOW THE HOLY MONTH

WHAT WAS REVEALED TO THE
PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PBUH)
IN RAMADHAN?

Answer to last trivia: Zakat



A TRADITION ENHANCING
COMMUNITY COHESION

BY AMAL AL RIYAMI

Iftar gatherings during the holy month of Ramadhan are distinguished by their unique atmosphere, characterised by both spiritual and social values. They represent an annual tradition and one of the defining scenes of this blessed month in villages and cities, offering families, friends, and neighbours the chance to convene in a beautiful social setting. The ambiance is imbued with a communal spirit and a sense of unity.

Various official and private entities eagerly organise Ramadhan iftar gatherings each year, recognising the opportunity they afford for community engagement and the promotion of unity. Alongside individuals, companies, and charitable organisations, it is common for community members to opt for collective breaking of the fast, whether in the streets, neighbourhoods, mosques, parks, or public squares.

The timing of breaking the fast, determined by the Maghrib Adhan, facilitates the coordination of these gatherings.

Al Ghafat Heritage Village in the Wilayat of Bahla, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, epitomised the social and spiritual values of Ramadhan by adorning the locale with Ramadhan lights and traditional decorations, fostering a sense of brotherhood and joy among attendees. The venue was bedecked with Ramadhan lights and traditional ornaments, creating a distinctive atmosphere of camaraderie and happiness among participants. During the iftar, a diverse array of delectable meals was served, showcasing the rich culinary diversity of Omani society and encouraging cultural exchange among attendees.

A local resident who hosts iftar gatherings near his home explained that this Ramadhan tradition has been observed since his youth, recalling his involvement in serving and preparing food alongside his father. He inherited the practice from his father, who used to host such gatherings around which families and passersby would converge, noting the collective efforts of



relatives, friends, and neighbours in food preparation and arrangement. Now, his son actively participates in the organisation, underscoring the intergenerational transmission of such customs.

Saleh bin Zayed al Hinai, head of the Al Koor Charitable Team, remarked, "This marks the second iteration of our event under the name 'Ramadhan Tent,' organised by the Al Koor team in Al Ghafat. The impetus behind our gathering is twofold: a social motive, encompassing societal interaction across various demographics, and a historical and cultural motive, aimed at reviving the locale, reconnecting with the past, and acquainting the younger generation with the contributions of their forebears to the area." The event garnered significant enthusiasm from the townsfolk, with over 150 attendees spanning different age groups, including the elderly, youth,

and children.

Al Hinai further elaborated, "Considerable efforts were invested in preparing and outfitting the event venue well in advance of the holy month, with local youth contributing over 80 hours in volunteer activities spanning two months. Notable figures such as Shaikh Dr Al Khattab bin Ghalib bin Ali al Hinai, the former Vice President of the State Council, Shaikh Dr Hilal bin Ali bin Zaher al Hinai, and Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Zaher al Hinai, the former State Adviser, graced the occasion. Such events merit regular organisation and repetition owing to their social dimensions and their efficacy in nurturing



bonds and fostering a cohesive, fraternal, collaborative, and constructive society." The event witnessed robust attendance from both residents and visitors alike, underscoring its significance as a distinguished social affair.

The Omani community at large continues to uphold its age-old Ramadhan traditions, which serve to strengthen cohesion and social interaction during this blessed month.



SPRINKLERS AND DRIP IRRIGATION HELP IRAQIS BEAT DROUGHT

AFTER FOUR YEARS of drought, Iraqi farmer Mohammed Sami was about to abandon his father's parched land, but then a water-saving irrigation system revived his crops and his hopes.

He is among hundreds of farmers in the country battered by heat-waves, scarce rain and depleted rivers to benefit from new water management systems brought by the UN World Food Programme.

The systems use automated sprinklers and drip irrigation to ensure scarce water is used in the most efficient way and is not lost as run-off or evaporated under the blazing sun.

"Since 2019, due to the water scarcity, we have been unable to farm the land," said 38-year-old Sami in his village of Al Azrakiya in the central province of Anbar.



Crushed by the drought that was turning his 10 donums, or about one hectare, of land into desert, Sami started working in a nearby city as a day labourer several years ago.

"I thought about giving up farming for good," he said.

But then, two years ago, Sami's prospects changed, and his land has flourished again.

The WFP helped with a new automated irrigation system that waters his field for just two hours per day, two to three days a week.

"I now irrigate 10 donums with the same amount of water that I used for one donum before," he said, adding that his wheat harvest had shot up from seven to 12 tonnes per year.

Last year the WFP project helped more than 1,100 farmers "in areas

most affected by climate change and drought," said Khansae Ghazi from the UN agency's Baghdad office.

The new irrigation systems "use 70 per cent less water than traditional methods such as flooding" — the vastly more wasteful method used for millennia.

The modern techniques allow farmers to grow diverse crops year-round, also including barley, cucumber, watermelon and eggplant, and reduce "the reliance on unpredictable rainfall", the WFP said.

LAND OF TWO RIVERS

Iraq, still recovering from years of war and chaos, is one of the five countries most impacted by some effects of climate change, according to the United Nations.



year," said the WFP.

State authorities have restricted water use for agriculture to ensure sufficient drinking water for Iraq's 43 million people.

To fight the problem, the ministry has also started offering sprinkler systems that farmers can pay off over a decade, with the state covering 30 per cent of the cost.

"At first, it was difficult for the farmer to switch to modern irrigation," said Khazai.

But now the ministry hopes to boost harvests to more than six million tonnes of wheat in 2024, from five million last year.

This would exceed Iraq's domestic needs and present a big jump from around two million tonnes in 2022.

The UN agency warns there are limits to the gains brought by new

techniques.

"While modern irrigation systems can significantly improve water efficiency and agricultural practices in Iraq, it may not be sufficient to tackle the complex issue of drought," it said.

But for now, farmers are happy with the gains they are seeing, among them Souad Mehdi in the village of Al Azrakiya near the Euphrates, who said she has doubled her harvest.

The 40-year-old grows wheat and barley in the winter and corn, tomatoes and eggplant in the summer on her one-hectare plot.

"It used to take us two days to water our crops," she said. Now, she fills a basin with river water then turns on the sprinklers, a task that "doesn't take more than two hours".

— AFP

Gwendal Poullennec: the Michelin man with the power to make or break restaurants



AS DIRECTOR OF THE Michelin Guide for the past five years, Gwendal Poullennec has the power to make the most hardened kitchen masters tremble in their chef's hat.

Poullennec's motto, according to team members, is "On the move" — which he applies to himself as much as the famous red guidebook he has helped spread around the world.

The 44-year-old walks fast and likes to burn off all the calories on his bike — he has 14,000 km on its counter.

One bitter chef also remarked that he can spend as little as 30 seconds on the phone with those who lose one of the Michelin Guide's intensely coveted stars.

Poullennec's power can be measured by the great number of "no comments" that his name arouses when AFP asks for comment from people in the industry.

But that is the power of the Michelin Guide rather than the man himself, he insists.

"I'm just passing through, I'm here to ensure continuity," he said.

Growing up between western France and the outskirts of Paris, Poullennec's family did not frequent a lot of restaurants.

But after studying business, he joined the Michelin group, hoping to be part of its gastronomic guide.

After a stint in the tyre factory, he got his wish.

The key trait you need, he says, is a "good appetite" and, as AFP witnessed over lunch in Paris, to enjoy finishing other people's dishes out of curiosity.

He recalled his first — gargantuan — meal after joining the guide's team. It was in Burgundy, the mecca of French gastronomy, where he was served an "entire casserole of tripe" and a "salad bowl of chocolate mousse".

SIMPLE AND COMPREHENSIBLE

Poullennec's break came when he was sent to Japan in 2006 to launch the Michelin's Tokyo edition — not a simple task in a country so protective of its codified culinary traditions.

As well as getting to eat "sushi by the tonne", he saw the edition become a big success.

"We sold half a million copies, more than Harry Potter!" he said.

By 2018, he had worked his way up the ranks to be named director of the guide following the retirement of American Michael Ellis.

Poullennec has overseen a new era, including an inevitable shift to an online-first strategy, the acquisition of upstart young competitor Le Fooding, and the spread of the guide to new destinations around the world.

Before his trip to Japan, there were only 10, all in Europe. Today, there are 45 editions across several continents.

It is also expanding into hotels. One of Poullennec's first moves was to buy booking website Tablet, and in the next few weeks Michelin will launch its first hotel reviews (the best receiving keys instead of stars).

Father of five daughters, Poullennec likes cooking family meals and making his own bread. In restaurants, he looks for "simple and comprehensible cuisine" but "with mastery".

He refuses to name his favourite dish for fear of being served it ad nauseam, and he generally keeps quiet about his views on particular meals.

Inevitably, the job has made him some enemies.

Star chef Marc Veyrat tried to sue the guide in 2019 after a vehement dispute over a supposed touch of cheddar in his soufflé (cheddar being considered far too cheap an ingredient for a respectable French chef) and the loss of his third star.

There was also an outcry when the Michelin downgraded some restaurants in 2021 at the height of the industry's nightmarish Covid-19 slump.

In order to remain respected by readers, such incidents are "difficult but necessary," said Poullennec.

He knows many of France's top chefs personally, sometimes exchanging recipes with them, but insists he keeps a distance from them when it comes to the guide.

A recommendation from Michelin "is based on talent, not on reputation, and even less on how influential they are," he concluded. — AFP