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SEEB GRABS MINISTRY'S SHIELD



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OMAN AMONG TOP 5 MENA STATES WITH SIZABLE CO2 CAPTURE POTENTIAL



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HOW A NUTRITION EXPERT REALLY EATS



■ **MUSCAT**

**HM GREETINGS TO BANGLADESH**

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Mohammad Abdul Hamid of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, on the occasion of Annivers- ary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere senti- ments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Abdul Hamid. His Majesty also wished the people of Bangladesh further development and growth.

**OMAN, UN ENVOY DISCUSS YEMEN**

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Monday received in Muscat, Hans Grundberg, UN Special Envoy for Yemen. During the meeting, the two sides discussed developments regarding international efforts exerted to bring about a compre- hensive reconciliation and peace in Yemen. The foreign minister stressed the keenness attached by the Sultanate of Oman to Yemen's stability, security, unity and its sovereignty. **SEE ALSO P2**

**LOW PRESSURE IMPACT LIKELY FROM TODAY**

**LAKSHMI KOTHANETH**  
@lakshmioman

The impact of trough of low pres- sure is expected to begin today with warnings already in place for rough sea and strong winds effect- ing visibility.

Expectations continue with the chances that the atmosphere will be affected by an air depres- sion today and tomorrow, March 26 and 27, as clouds are expected to form over most of the gover- norates of Oman with chances of scattered rain, and with increasing possibilities of rainfall of varying intensity (10-40 mm) over Al Hajar Mountains, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, Dhofar, and parts of Al Wusta Governorate.

On Tuesday, the General Weather Forecast states that it is expected to be partly cloudy to cloudy skies over most of the gov- ernorates with clouds advection and isolated rains with varying intensity occasionally thunder- shower. There is chance of dust rising over desert and open areas.

HIS MAJESTY ISSUES THREE ROYAL DECREES

Financial Services Authority established

**MUSCAT:** His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued three Royal Decrees. Royal Decree No (18/2024) amends the Criminal Procedures Law.

Article (1) states that the attached amendment shall be made to the Criminal Procedures Law.

Article (2) says that this Royal Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publication.

Royal Decree No (19/2024) promulgates the Sultan Qaboos University System.

Article (1) states that the provisions of Sultan Qaboos University System attached to this Decree shall be enforced.

Article (2) says that the Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University shall issue necessary regulations and decisions to

**Royal Decree promulgates Sultan Qaboos University System, which states that the Vice Chancellor shall issue necessary regulations and decisions to implement the provisions**

implement the provisions of the attached System. Till such time, the existing regulations and decisions shall continue to be enforced without prejudice to the provisions of the System attached to this Decree.

Article (3) cancels Sultan Qaboos University Law issued by Royal Decree No 71/2006. It also cancels all that contradicts the System attached to this Decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (4) says that this Royal Decree

to the Council of Ministers and it shall be governed by the provisions of the System attached to this Decree.

Article (2) states that the Financial Services Authority shall have its headquarters in the Governorate of Muscat and that, by virtue of a decision from the Authority's board of directors, the Authority may establish branches in other governorates.

Article (3) stipulates that all allocations, origins, rights, obligations and assets of the Capital Market Authority shall be transferred to the Financial Services Authority, and that all employees of the Capital Market Authority shall be transferred to the Financial Services Authority, along with their financial grades. **TURN TO P3**

■ **HM GREETINGS CONVEYED**



Santiago Peña, President of the Republic of Paraguay, received Talal bin Sulaiman al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Federative Republic of Brazil who presented his credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Non- resident Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Paraguay. The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the President alongside his wishes of good health and long life to him and his wishes of further progress and prosperity for the friendly Paraguayan people. **DETAILS ON P2**

Oman welcomes UN call for Gaza ceasefire

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Palestinian territories, and the need for the Gaza Strip to obtain all its needs of humanitarian materials and aid without obstacles.

The Foreign Ministry issued a statement on Monday reiterating its firm and supportive position for all UN resolutions aimed at establishing peace in the region.

The statement stressed the responsibility of the Security Council towards implementing its resolutions, protecting civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories, and recognising the Palestinian state in accordance with international law.

After more than five months of war, the UN Security Council for the first time on Monday demanded an immediate ceasefire in Gaza



after the United States, which vetoed previous drafts, abstained.

Drawing unusual applause in the normally staid Security Council, all 14 other members voted in favour of the resolution which “demands an immediate ceasefire” for the ongoing holy month of Ramadhan.

The resolution calls for the truce to lead to a “lasting, sustainable ceasefire” and demands that all the captives seized on October 7 be released. “The bloodbath has continued for far too long,” said Amar Bendjama, the representative of Algeria, the Arab bloc’s current member of the Security Council and a sponsor of the resolution alongside a diverse group that included Slovenia, Switzerland, Japan and South Korea.

“Finally, the Security Council is shouldering its responsibility,” he said. **SEE ALSO P7**

Royal Academy to focus on ‘Future Leaders’ programme



The Royal Academy of Management's Board met on Monday.

**MUSCAT:** The Royal Academy of Management's Board of Trustees reviewed the academy's accomplishments, strategic plans for 2024, and upcoming initiatives designed to enhance national leadership across all levels. The discussions underscored the academy's ongoing efforts to equip both the public and private sectors with empowered leaders and skilled professionals.

The board held its third meeting under the chairmanship of Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Academy of Management. This meeting marks a pivotal moment in the academy's annual agenda, setting the strategic direction for the year ahead.

Sayyid Khalid welcomed the board members and commended the academy on celebrating the first anniversary of the Royal visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. He also highlighted the launch of a commemorative postage stamp.

During the meeting, Sayyid Khalid emphasised that the strategic activities planned for the academy in 2024 are a direct embodiment of His Majesty the Sultan's vision for Oman. The initiatives are geared towards nurturing leadership in diverse sectors, thereby contributing to Oman's positioning among the developed nations.

“The academy's focus is aligned with His Majesty's supreme directives to cultivate a leadership community through structured programmes and dialogues,” Sayyid Khalid said.

The 2024 plan includes a new 'Future Leaders' programme highlighting the academy's comprehensive approach to embrace leadership communities and develop human capital across various fields. These initiatives aim to prepare Oman for future challenges and opportunities by fostering a deeper understanding of emerging trends and developments. **TURN TO P3**



# Bilateral ties reviewed with Algeria



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Monday Dr Mohammad Ali Boughazi, Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the existing bilateral relations were reviewed and means of enhancing them were explored. The two sides also discussed several matters of mutual interest. — ONA

# Chinese ambassador bids goodbye

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received in his office on Monday Li Lingbing, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Sultanate of Oman to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty. The minister expressed his appreciation to the ambassador for her efforts in developing fields of cooperation between the two countries, wishing her success in her success in her future duty. The ambassador expressed her thanks for the cooperation extended to her during her duty in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA



# Golden Jubilee Walkway to be completed this year

MUSCAT: The Muscat Municipality has completed the first phase of the Golden Jubilee Walkway and is preparing to float a tender for the construction of the second phase which is expected to be completed by the end of this year. The Golden Jubilee Walkway has an area of 84,400 square metres. It cuts through residential neighbourhoods, commercial establishments and prominent landmarks. The walkway connects the Al Mawaleh, Al Hail and Al Khoudh districts of the capital city. It stretches along Maizoon



Street to the north and the South Al Mawaleh quarter to the east and west and the Central Fruits and Vegetables Market and adjoining commercial area to the south. The Golden Jubilee Walkway includes a 1,972-metre-long bicycle path. It also contains three plazas for rest that include sheltered seating areas, cafes and other entertainment and picnicking facilities. Other facilities include green spaces extending over 38,250 square metres with various types of flowers and shade trees, two children's playgrounds and 140 car parks.

# His Majesty's greetings conveyed to President of Paraguay



ASUNCIÓN: Santiago Peña, President of the Republic of Paraguay, received Talal bin Sulaiman al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Federative Republic of Brazil who presented his credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Non-resident Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Paraguay. The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the president alongside his wishes of good health and long life to him and his wishes of further progress and prosperity for the friendly Paraguayan people. The ambassador expressed the Sultanate of Oman's keenness on fostering bilateral relations between the two countries and enhancing cooperation in various fields especially economy and investment to serve the joint interests of the two peoples. The Paraguayan president asked the ambassador to pass on his greetings to His Majesty along with his wishes of good health and long life. — ONA

# Peace in Yemen discussed with UN Special Envoy



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister on Monday received in Muscat, Hans Grundberg, UN Special Envoy for Yemen. The Foreign Minister stressed the keenness attached by the Sultanate of Oman to Yemen's stability, security, unity and its sovereignty. He also underscored Oman's support for all efforts that serve the interests and aspirations of the Yemeni people and contribute to strengthening pillars of security and peace in the region. — ONA

# PUBLIC PROSECUTION WARNS AGAINST BEGGING

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

The Public Prosecution has warned that begging at mosques, roads, stores, and public areas is a behavior frowned upon by society and an offence punishable by law. It added that using a minors with the intent to beg is a crime punishable by a fine of RO 100, and imprisonment of three years. The sentence is doubled if the offender is the minor's guardian, trustee, or a person entrusted to his or her care or supervision. It may be noted that some instances of begging have been

reported from parts of the country during Ramadhan and examples include individuals approaching vehicle owners in parking areas near mosques, supermarkets, and hypermarkets. "Individual generally approaches people asking for some small amounts like RO 1 or more saying they have been fasting and have no money to buy food for themselves and their families," said a citizen, who encountered such situations twice this Ramadhan, including near a mosque. Chapter 3, Article 297 of the Oman Penal Code states that whoever is found begging



The Public Prosecution has warned against begging at mosques, roads, stores and public areas

in public or private mosques, roads, places, or venues, shall be punished by imprisonment for a period no less than a month and not exceeding a year, and a fine no less than RO 50 and not exceeding RO 100, or one of those two punishments. The court may confiscate funds in his or her possession at the time of arrest. If the convict repeats the begging, he or she shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not less than six months and not exceeding two years. Whoever establishes that he or she begged out of necessity, or that is incapable of earning and has no other source of income, shall

be exempt from punishment. In all cases, it is permitted to adjudicate the deportation of the beggar if he is an expatriate. Article 298 states that whoever uses a juvenile or surrenders him to another, to beg, shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not less than three months and not exceeding three years, and a fine not less than RO 50 and not exceeding RO 100, or one of those two punishments. The punishment shall be doubled if the perpetrator is a guardian or custodian of the juvenile, or if he is responsible for his supervision or care.



## Financial Services Authority established

FROM P1

Article (4) instructs the Chairman of Board of Directors of the Financial Services Authority to issue the regulations and decisions necessary for the implementation of provisions of the System attached. It states that, till such time, the current laws, regulations and decisions shall continue to be applied without prejudice to the provisions of the System attached.

Article (5) states that the specialty of regulating the profession of accounting and auditing shall be transferred from the "Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion" to the "Financial Services Authority".

Article (6) states that the phrase "Financial Services Authority" shall replace the phrases "Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion" and "Section of Professions and

Crafts at the Department of Corporate Affairs at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion", "Director General of the Directorate General of Commerce" - wherever quoted in the Law Regulating the Profession of Accounting and Auditing issued pursuant to Royal Decree No 77/86.

Also, the phrase "Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion", wherever quoted in the aforementioned Law Regulating the Profession of Accounting and Auditing shall be replaced by the phrase "Chief Executive Officer of the Financial Services Authority".

The board of directors of the Financial Services Authority shall undertake to structure the committee referred to in Article (24) of the Law Regulating the Profession of Accounting and Auditing, provided that the committee shall have two or more

accountants as members.

Article (7) replaces the phrase "Capital Market Authority", wherever quoted in laws and Royal Decrees with the phrase "Financial Services Authority". Also, the phrases "Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Capital Market Authority" and "Chief Executive Officer of the Capital Market Authority" shall be replaced, wherever quoted in laws and Royal Decrees with the phrases "Chairman of Board of Directors of the Financial Services Authority" and "Chief Executive Officer of the Financial Services Authority".

Article (8) cancels all that contradicts this Decree or the System attached to this Decree or contravenes their provisions. Article (9) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the date of issue.

— ONA

## OMAN DATA PARK, ITHCA GROUP LAUNCH JABREEN SMART INFRASTRUCTURE SOLUTIONS



**MUSCAT:** Oman Data Park (ODP) and ITHCA Group on Monday launched Jabreen Smart Infrastructure Solutions, the largest cloud systems with a new identity in the Sultanate of Oman. The launching ceremony of Jabreen Smart Infrastructure Solutions, was held under the auspices of Shaikh Ghusan bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI). The new clouding system aims to provide the Omani markets with various integrated cloud packages as well as artificial intelligence cybersecurity solutions. — ONA

## Royal Academy to focus on 'Future Leaders' programme

FROM P1

Moreover, the meeting delved into the specifics of the 'Future of Government Work' programme, which targets directors in the GCC government sector, equipping them with essential skills and knowledge to effectively translate visions and strategies into reality.

"The academy is poised for the future with our 'Future Readiness Initiatives', aiming to empower leaders with profound understanding of trends that will shape the future landscape of nations," he added. The formation of the Royal Academy of Management's Board of Trustees, honoured by the

patronage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, represents a key milestone in Oman's educational and leadership development journey. The board, comprising esteemed members from various sectors, underscores the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to advancing leadership and administrative excellence.

# MSX Dialogue explores future of higher education

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

As many as 65 per cent of the jobs that our future generation will be working in the next decade do not exist today and the job scenario will take a mammoth leap from what it is today to what it is going to be in the future, according to Dr Bradley J Cook, President of the American University of Bahrain.

Speaking at the inaugural edition of the 'MSX Chairman's Dialogue' organised by Muscat Stock Exchange and hosted by Major General Mohammed bin Mahfoodh al Ardhi, Chairman, MSX at the MSX Investors Hall recently, Dr Bradley said that to help future generations cope with the changing trends, universities will forge stronger partnerships with industry to bridge the gap between academia and the workforce.

"Further, industry-sponsored projects, mentorship programmes, and work-integrated learning opportunities will prepare students for successful careers. AI will set education back 2,500



Dr Bradley J Cook speaking at the inaugural edition of the 'MSX Chairman's Dialogue' organised by Muscat Stock Exchange.



years and that is a good thing. Future universities may offer more interdisciplinary programmes that combine diverse fields of study to address complex real-world problems. Collaboration across disciplines will be emphasised to foster creativity and innovation," Dr Cook said at the event held in the presence of Dr Ali bin Saud al Bimani and Dr Hussein bin Sulaiman al Salmi and CEOs and other stakeholders.

According to Dr Bradley, the deeper purpose of higher education is human wellbeing

and health should be of foremost importance in whatever initiatives that we take a step forward.

"The very deeper purpose of higher education is human wellbeing and any higher education that doesn't aim at human wellbeing is of no use. The first and foremost element required towards achieving it is health. When I say health, it means both mental and physical health. We need to help our children to be resilient to changes, and prepare them for the future," Dr Bradley, who is the President of the AUB,

the first comprehensive American-model co-educational university in the Kingdom of Bahrain, said.

The 'Dialogue' titled 'The Future of Higher Education in the Middle East' aimed at endeavouring to build a bridge between global and Omani stalwarts from their respective fields, to shed light on the current state of higher education, the key to shaping the future of higher education, global dynamics, and shifting economies, evolving educational paradigms and vision for the future, Mohammed bin Mahfoodh

**65 per cent of jobs for future generation next decade not existing today, says Dr Bradley J Cook, scholar, President, American University of Bahrain who calls for adapting to future workforce demands**

al Ardhi, Chairman, MSX said that said higher education in the Middle East is influenced by several factors that include technological advancements, changing demographics and economic development.

"Higher education in the Middle East is influenced by several factors and technology would continue to play a key role in transforming higher education in the Middle East. E-learning platforms, online courses, and virtual classrooms will become more prevalent, offering greater flexibility and accessibility to students," Major General Al Ardhi

added.

Dr Cook, who is a noted educationist with nearly 30 years of executive administrative experience in higher education, said though the current state of higher education does not look great, he had firm belief in education.

Research continues to demonstrate the value of a university education due to better earning potential, increased household incomes and better health. Middle East countries would continue to invest heavily in research and development to foster innovation and knowledge-based economies. This will pave the way for a greater focus on research-oriented programmes and the establishment of research centres and technology parks.

Al Ardhi hoped that international collaborations and partnerships with leading universities and institutions worldwide would facilitate knowledge exchange, research collaborations, and faculty exchanges thereby enhancing the quality of education in the region.

## ESTABLISHMENT FINED FOR TAMPERING WITH EXPIRY DATES

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 25

The Consumer Protection Department in Al Batinah South Governorate in the Wilayat of Barka recently conducted a successful operation and seized a group of expatriate workers involved in fraudulent activities at a commercial establishment in Rumais, Barka. The workers were found to be manipulating the expiry dates of a food spice product and selling it with false expiration dates.

This is part of the efforts by the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) to address consumer complaints and seize prohibited goods that pose health and safety risks to the community.

During a raid on the store, the inspection and market control team discovered that the expatriate workers were placing false expiry dates on the spice products.



All the seized items were confiscated and will be destroyed

They were repackaging it in new bags and replacing the original expiration dates with new ones.

Acting on a tip, law enforcement officers swiftly moved to the establishment and apprehended the violators.

Initially, when questioned, the violators denied the offence and claimed that they were repackaging the products due to the wear and tear of the previous bags.

However, when presented

with evidence, they eventually confessed to the offence.

All the seized items were confiscated and will be destroyed.

Additionally, violators will face legal action besides a fine of RO 2,000. Such practices are explicitly prohibited under Article 7 of the Consumer Protection Law, which prohibits trading counterfeit, corrupt, counterfeit, or unauthorised goods, as well as advertising them.

## Wheat harvest begins in Dhank

**DHANK:** Wheat harvest was under way at the Saih Al Salam farms in the Wilayat of Dhank in Al Dhahirah Governorate, on Monday.

The Saih Al Salam farms were allotted to investing in food security in wheat cultivation. Eighty acres were cultivated in the first phase with the acreage expected to double in the

next season. This season, the production is expected to reach 48 tonnes of wheat.

An improved high-yielding wheat variety is grown in the project and its cultivation took 120 days from November to the end of March. The project utilises centre pivot irrigation.

It is worth noting that the Ministry of Agriculture,

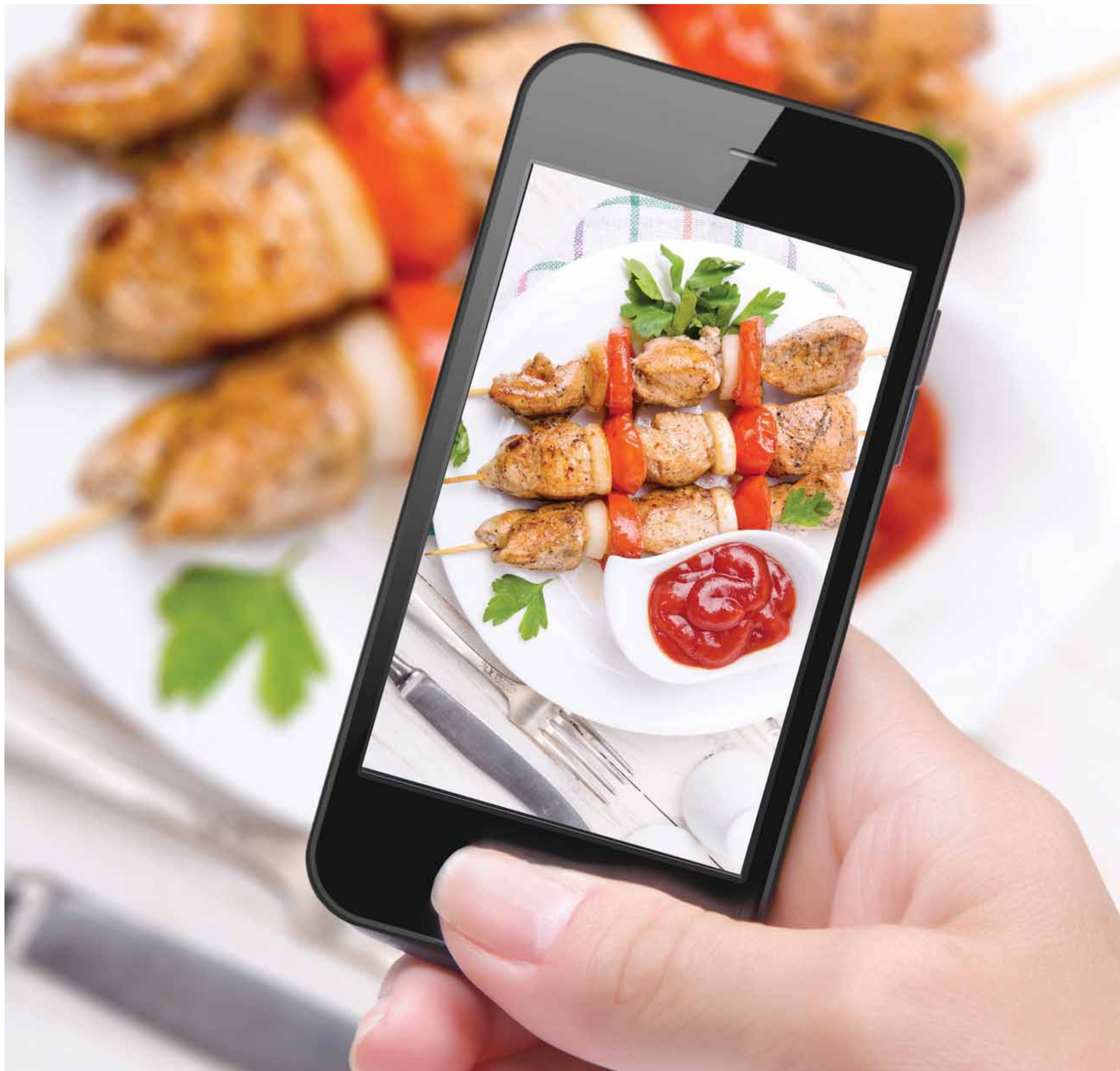
Fisheries and Water Resources endeavours to support and encourage farmers to grow wheat being a strategic commodity in food security. The ministry provides seeds of improved, high-yielding wheat varieties, harvesting machines well as technical support and direct supervision to boost wheat output. — ONA



An improved high-yielding wheat variety is grown in the project and its cultivation took 120 days from November to the end of March. — ONA



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# THINK BEFORE YOU SHARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
@lakshmioman

**B**EING considerate is one of the main attributes during the holy month of Ramadhan. However, there can be many ways one can be considerate namely through actions, words, and intentions.

However, there is one particular behaviour we all could have been partaking in knowingly or unknowingly, which we need to rethink.

Hatim bin Harith al Abdissalaam, Life Coach, and member of the Islamic Information Centre, explains that it also has to do with sharing various types of images on social media.

What we portray on social media, even if it is very innocent, can have an impact on

others. It might be the sharing of happiness and excitement, but it can be depressing for others who are struggling.

“We should be considerate to others, and should move away from the concept that everything revolves around us only. We should think of other people.”

“The reason why I am saying this is the fact that we are seeing it among ourselves. On the very first day of Ramadhan we saw the images and videos of people in Gaza not having anything to break their fast with, or very little to eat,” said Hatim.

He said just because we cannot do much to help them, we could still try to do at least a little bit. We must try to reduce the amount of exposure with the use of pictures and videos of the food and gatherings we are



**Let’s embody empathy and moderate, fostering gratitude, and sensitivity in our online presence**

**HATIM BIN HARITH AL ABDISSALAAM**

*Life Coach*

having. So that we can be considerate of the feelings of our brothers and sisters of Gaza, who are going through a very difficult time.

“You know every time we take a picture of the wonderful meal we are going to have, somewhere someone else in the world is deprived of the same. In addition, when he sees that it might create a feeling of envy or sadness in his heart. So you do not want to create an opportunity for others to have envy of what you have,” he added.

Hatim also points out that a way of appreciating and being thankful to Allah for what one has been blessed with is to preserve it and only consume what is needed.

“Let us not be extravagant, and fill the table with different types of food and then dump them in the garbage,” he urges.



# EXPRESSWAY EXPANSION TO BE ON SCHEDULE: MUNICIPALITY

VINOD NAIR  
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

The expansion of the Muscat Expressway was initiated based on the studies regarding the traffic growth in the city by various competent agencies, including the Muscat Municipality, Royal Oman Police (ROP), and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT).

With the work expected to start in the last quarter of this year, according to Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, measures will be taken to ensure that the selected contractor finishes the project within a time frame and that all safety measures will be guaranteed, including alternative roads, during the construction period as work will be carried on the existing network. It may be noted that the Qurum traffic intersection is one of the busiest in the city. The project is expected to take a minimum of three years to complete.

At the time of its opening in 2010, Muscat Expressway was a showpiece for the road infrastructure development in the country, which in the subsequent years led to the opening of mega projects such as the Wadi Udai-Al Amerat Road, Sur Coastal Highway, Al Batinah Expressway, Al Sharqiyah Expressway (with two tunnels), and Al Amerat-Bausher road.



Muscat Expressway

The road project was listed in the additional projects added to the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025) as per the Royal Directives and the expansion ((three lanes on each side) will occur between the Al Qurm and Halban Interchanges and then connect the Al Batinah Expressway.

The project is important to enhance the flow of traffic and reduce congestion, apart from improving the movement of goods transportation,

**The project is important to enhance the flow of traffic and reduce congestion, apart from improving the movement of goods transportation**

which will contribute to the national economy and strengthen the capital's

infrastructure in proportion to the pace of population growth. The project includes expanding the highway to six lanes in each direction, expansion of existing bridges, works related to intersections, water drainage channels, protection works for mountain slopes, floor paving, service transformation work, concrete barriers, and guardrails, and replacing the current lighting with environmentally friendly LED lightings.

## Expatriate arrested in money doubling scam



MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police's General Department of Criminal Investigation and Research on Monday apprehended an African national accused of defrauding a citizen by falsely promising to double their money.

The suspect allegedly convinced the victim to part with RO 22,000 under the guise of doubling the sum.

Upon investigation, authorities swiftly located and arrested the suspect, seizing the full amount in question.

## CBO allocates RO 64m in govt treasury bills

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has disclosed that the total value of government treasury bills for this week stands at RO 64 million/ The treasury bills, issued by the Ministry of Finance, serve as guaranteed short-term financial instruments, providing investment avenues for licensed commercial banks. Acting as the issuance manager, the CBO facilitates the issuance of these bills.

The breakdown of allocations includes RO 16 million for a maturity period of 28 days and

RO 48 million for a maturity period of 91 days.

The bills issued for 28 days recorded an average acceptable price of RO 99,620, while those for 91 days averaged at RO 98,722.

The discount rates and returns for the respective periods were also provided in the statement.

Moreover, the statement highlighted the interest rate on repurchase operations (repo) with the Central Bank of Oman, set at 6 per cent, and the discount rate on treasury bill facilities, set at 6.50 per cent.

Treasury bills offer liquidity through discounting with the CBO and conducting repo deals with the central bank.

Additionally, licenced commercial banks can engage in repo operations among themselves in the interbank market.

This financial instrument provides flexibility for the government to finance expenditures seamlessly while contributing to shaping short-term interest rates in the market.

— ONA

## Global art exhibition concludes



Artists who took part in the global art exhibition 'Ithaka'

MUSCAT: A captivating art exhibition named 'Ithaka,' presented by COG India Art Foundation concluded at the Art & Soul Gallery in Water Front Mall, on March 23.

The three-day exhibition began on March 21. About 33 talented artists from around the world have showcased 56 of their artworks.

Raul S Hernandez, Philippine Ambassador to the Sultanate

of Oman, opened the 'Ithaka' exhibition. Reena Jain, First Secretary (Culture), Embassy of India, Muscat, was the guest of honour.

The participating artists are Archan Mukherjee, Dr Tuhin Chattopadhyay, Vasundhara Prakash, Ranita Mandal, Aneasha B S, Sandeep Parkhi, Masuma Begum, Mausam Jha, Nilima Dongaonkar, Monica Singh, Pooja Muthuraj, Neha

Sharma, Ankita Biswas (Roy), Sampa Biswas, Prakriti Biswas, Bipasha Sinha, Shreeja Thakur, Kavitha Murali, Abhirami Nair, Megha Garodia, Sanjib Das, Dimitra Lobo, Shafaq Asad, Ana Algre Hernandez, Avash Chakraborty, Vanshika Kanodia, Raffat Nayyar, Ramya Mukundan, Preeti Tiwari, Shalini Kartik, Poornima Muthusami and Dr Shatabdi Som.

رؤية عمان 2040

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Moving Forward with Confidence

Ministry of Social Development

### Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender:-

| Tender No. | Tender Subject                                                                                                                                                 | Grade                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Last date for obtainment of Tender Document | Last date for Tender Submission | Tender Document Price (non-refundable) |                 |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------|
|            |                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                             |                                 | Small and Medium Companies             | Local Companies |
| 127/2024   | Supplying machinery, equipment and raw materials for the protected rehabilitation workshops of the Vocational Assessment and Rehabilitation Center at Al Khoud | Companies specialized in the field of supplying machinery, electrical, mechanical and industrial equipment and spare parts registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree | Sunday 14-4-2024 02:00 PM                   | Sunday 5-5-2024 10:00 AM        | 10 R.O                                 | 25 R.O          |
| 128/2024   | Purchase of (70) desktop computers and (80) laptops                                                                                                            | Companies specialized in the field of supplying communications equipment, information technology and accessories registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first or second degree                            | Sunday 14-4-2024 02:00 PM                   | Sunday 5-5-2024 10:00 AM        | 10 R.O                                 | 25 R.O          |
| 129/2024   | Implementation of the governance program of social responsibility and community development programs                                                           | Companies specialized in the field of quality management consulting a nd registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the first or second degree                                                                               | Sunday 14-4-2024 02:00 PM                   | Sunday 5-5-2024 10:00 AM        | 10 R.O                                 | 25 R.O          |
| 130/2024   | Purchase (46) iPad tablets                                                                                                                                     | Companies specialized in the field of supplying communications and information technology equipment and accessories registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second degree                           | Sunday 14-4-2024 02:00 PM                   | Sunday 5-5-2024 10:00 AM        | 10 R.O                                 | 25 R.O          |

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (**https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om**) . On **Tuesday 26/3/2024**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (**reg@tenderboard.gov.om**) tel. (**24402200**).

**" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"**

**www.mosd.gov.om**



# Four suspected Moscow attackers in custody

MOSCOW: Russia has ordered four men accused of killing at least 137 people in a massacre at a Moscow concert hall to be held in custody on “terror” charges with the death toll expected to climb as more than 100 people are hospitalised.

The men face life in prison, although Russian officials have clamoured for the lifting of a moratorium on the death penalty to deliver even harsher sentences.

In a series of late-night court hearings in Moscow that ran into the early hours of Monday, the four men — with bruises and cuts over their faces — were dragged into the court in front of dozens of reporters who had assembled at the capital’s Basmanny district court.

FSB security service officers wheeled one in to the hearing on a medical gurney, following reports and videos on Russian social media of bloody interrogations after the men were arrested on Saturday.

The Friday evening attack has been claimed by IS group, though Russian officials have not commented on their possible involvement.

In his only public remarks since, President Vladimir Putin pointed to a Ukrainian connection, saying the four suspects gunmen were arrested while trying to flee there.

Gunmen in camouflage stormed the Crocus City Hall concert venue on Friday night, shooting concert-goers before setting the building ablaze and fleeing the scene, Russian investigators say.



A man suspected of taking part in the attack of a concert hall is escorted by Russian law enforcement officers prior to his pre-trial detention hearing at the Basmanny District Court in Moscow. — AFP

**In a series of late-night court hearings in Moscow that ran into the early hours of Monday, the four men were dragged into the court in front of dozens of reporters**

More than 5,000 people were in the building, Russian state media cited a spokesperson from the venue owner as saying on Monday.

It was the deadliest attack in Russia in two decades and the most fatal in Europe to have been claimed by IS.

The Moscow court ordered the men to be held in pre-trial

detention until May 22 — a date that is likely to be extended until a full trial.

Russia said on Saturday it had arrested 11 people in connection with the attack. There has been no information on the other seven.

The four suspected shooters were all citizens of Tajikistan, Russian state media reported.

The president of Tajikistan told Putin in a phone call on Sunday: “Terrorists have no nationality.”

Moscow and Dushanbe agreed to “intensify” their counter-terrorism co-operation, the Kremlin said in a readout of the call.

Putin has vowed to punish those behind the “barbaric

terrorist attack”, and on Saturday said the four gunmen had been arrested while trying to flee to Ukraine.

Health officials said on Sunday evening the number of those injured stood at 182, with 101 people still in hospital, of whom 40 were in “critical” or “extremely critical” condition. — AFP

# Trump has hours to cover \$454 m

NEW YORK: Donald Trump faces a Monday deadline to post a bond to cover a \$454 million civil fraud judgment or face the risk of New York state seizing some of his marquee properties.

Trump, seeking to regain the presidency this year, must either pay the money out of his own pocket or post a bond while he appeals Justice Arthur Engoron’s Feb. 16 judgment against him for manipulating his net worth and his family real estate company’s property values to dupe lenders and insurers.

On Monday morning, Trump wrote on social media that the number Engoron set was “fraudulent.” “It should be zero, I did nothing wrong!”, he said.

The Trump campaign on Friday called for donations from “one million pro-Trump patriots,” saying that the “iconic Trump Tower” was among his properties



A flag depicting former US President Donald Trump is placed at Trump Tower in New York City, US – Reuters file photo

at risk of seizure.

The case cuts to the core of his public image as a prosperous businessman. Trump rose to fame as a developer of flashy properties like Manhattan’s Trump Tower and often boasts of his financial success - even though his companies have at times struggled.

But Trump, the Republican candidate challenging Democratic President Joe Biden in the Nov. 5 US election, now faces a web of financial worries including campaign fundraising lagging behind his rival.

The judgment in the case was entered in Manhattan, where Trump properties such as Trump

Tower or 40 Wall Street may be in the sights of New York Attorney General Letitia James, a Democrat who brought the civil case in 2022.

James also has notified Westchester County, just north of New York City, of the judgment, a step toward potentially seizing assets there such as a Trump golf course and a 60-room mansion and estate called Seven Springs.

Taking control of Trump’s properties would pose a host of legal and logistical challenges for the attorney general’s office. Placing liens on them to ensure they are not sold or transferred and going after Trump’s liquid assets would be more straightforward.

Trump has denied wrongdoing and called the case politically motivated. The first former US president ever to face criminal charges, Trump has been indicted in four separate cases, pleading not guilty in each. — Reuters

## UK targets Vietnamese to deter Channel

LONDON: The UK on Monday launched a new global social media campaign, aimed at Vietnam in particular, to deter migrants from trying to cross the Channel from northern France on small boats.

It comes as statistics showed the number of arrivals using the hazardous and highly contentious route up by 15 per cent so far this year compared to the same period in 2023.

An increasing proportion of “small boat” arrivals hail from Vietnam, with the southeast Asian nation among the top 10 nationalities for migrants crossing

the Channel, according to the UK interior ministry.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has made “stopping the boats” one of his top priorities, and claimed to be succeeding when they fell by around a third last year.

A reversal on that could prove politically perilous for the Conservative leader ahead of a general election expected later this year.

The new online adverts, which feature real testimonies from those who have made the dangerous journeys, are being posted on Facebook and YouTube to target Vietnamese migrants. — AFP



Migrants rescued from the English Channel walk after arriving on a Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) boat at Dungeness. – Reuters file photo

## SHORT TAKES

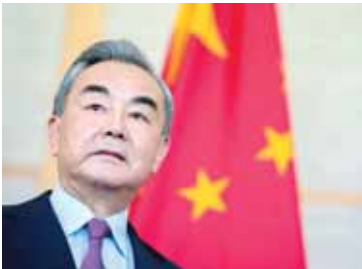
### SEOUL

#### Senior North Korean official meets China’s Wang

A senior North Korean official leading a delegation to China met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and called for a strengthening of ties, state media KCNA said on Monday.

Kim Song Nam, director of the international department at North Korea’s ruling Workers’ Party of Korea, had a “friendly talk” with Wang at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing.

Kim called on the sectors in charge of foreign affairs of the two countries to contribute to



further strengthening bilateral relations, KCNA said, while Wang expressed his belief that the bilateral relations would “unshakably advance” under the countries leaders. — Reuters

### TOKYO

#### Japan, US discuss boosting military cooperation

Japan and the United States are discussing ways to boost military cooperation, Tokyo’s top government spokesman said on Monday. Japanese media said a review of the allies’ security pact will be announced at a US-Japan summit next month in Washington.

“Japan and the United States have been discussing ways to strengthen cooperation in command and control in order to enhance interoperability and readiness,” government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi told



reporters. “My understanding is that nothing has been decided regarding the American side’s structure, including strengthening the functions of US Forces Japan,” he said. — AFP

### PORT MORESBY

#### 5 dead, 1,000 homes destroyed in PNG earthquake

At least five people were killed and an estimated 1,000 homes destroyed when a magnitude 6.9 earthquake rocked Papua New Guinea, officials said on Monday as disaster crews poured into the region.

Dozens of villages nestled on the banks of the country’s famed Sepik River were already battling soaking floods when the quake struck early on Sunday morning.

“So far, around 1,000 homes have been lost,” said East Sepik Governor Allan Bird, “still as-



sessing the impact” from a tremor that “damaged most parts of the province”. Police commander Tamari said that authorities had recorded five deaths in the wake of the disaster. — AFP



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gaza

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7

# UN CHIEF URGES MASSIVE GAZA AID FLOW



Palestinians walk past destroyed houses, amid the ongoing Israeli strikes, in Jabalia refugee camp. — Reuters

**AMMAN:** UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday called for a massive supply of aid to Gaza to fight starvation, saying there was a growing international consensus to tell Israel a ceasefire is needed in its war on Gaza.

Speaking on a visit to Jordan, Guterres said he also saw a growing consensus for telling Israel that any ground invasion of Rafah, Gaza's southernmost town on the Egyptian border, could mean a humanitarian disaster.

Rafah has become the last refuge for half of Gaza's uprooted population, swollen by displaced Palestinians escaping fighting elsewhere in Gaza after more than

**It is absolutely essential to have a massive supply of humanitarian aid now. This means opening more entry points, this means a concentration of efforts of all entities**

**ANTONIO GUTERRES**

*UN Secretary-General*

five months of war.

Israel should lift all obstacles to aid into Gaza and allow convoys of the UN Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA into northern Gaza where starvation is looming,

Guterres said.

"It is absolutely essential to have a massive supply of humanitarian aid now. This means opening more entry points, this means a concentration of efforts of all

entities and without obstacles and limitations from the Israeli side," Guterres said.

During a tour of a centre in Jordan's Wihdat camp where UNRWA provides health and education services, the top UN official said that the agency was a lifeline of hope and dignity for millions of refugees across the region.

"The decision not to allow UNRWA'S convoys to go to northern Gaza where we have a dramatic starvation situation is totally unacceptable and those that took that decision must assume the responsibility facing history of the consequences of the

decision," Guterres added.

Israel stopped all imports of food, medicine, power and fuel into Gaza at the start of the war. Although it later let in aid deliveries, aid organisations say security checks and the difficulty of moving through a war zone have greatly hindered their operations.

Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, accompanying Guterres, appealed to UN Security Council members to vote on Monday in favour of a resolution calling for a ceasefire and pressing Israel to allow unimpeded aid, saying it would send a "message that what's

happening is unacceptable and what's happening has to stop."

"Nothing justifies continuing with killing innocent people ... committing so many massacres. Nothing justifies denying men, women and children their right to food and medicine," Safadi added.

UNRWA has been in crisis since Israel accused a dozen of its staff of involvement in the October 7 attacks against Israel. The allegations prompted several big donors to UNRWA to pause funding, putting the agency's future in doubt. However, some other countries have since restored funding. — Reuters

## Israel strikes rage around major hospitals

**GAZA:** Israeli forces fought Palestinians in besieged Gaza on Monday including around at least two major hospitals, raising fears for the patients, medics and displaced people trapped inside.

Troops and tanks have encircled Gaza City's Al Shifa Hospital, the territory's biggest, for a week and more recently moved on the Al Amal Hospital in the main southern city of Khan Younis.

While Israel has labelled its operations "precise" and said it has taken care to avoid harm to civilians, aid agencies have voiced alarm about civilians caught up in the fighting.

As combat raged on, technical talks have continued in Qatar towards a truce and captives release deal, and the UN Security Council was set to convene later in the day for a vote on a new ceasefire demand.

Almost six months into the war sparked by the October 7 attack, global concern has mounted over the threat of famine in Gaza, and on Israeli plans to invade the crowded far-southern city of Rafah.

As Israel's top ally the United States has voiced rising concern,



Palestinians mourn their relatives, killed in Israeli bombardment, at Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al Balah. — AFP

the Israeli Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, was headed to Washington for talks with Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin.

Gallant said his focus in the United States — which provides Israel with billions of dollars in military aid a year — would include "our ability to obtain platforms and munitions".

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who leads a coalition including ultra-nationalist parties, has vowed to go ahead with a Rafah invasion even without Washington's

support.

US Vice President Kamala Harris stressed that a Rafah invasion would be "a huge mistake" and, when asked whether she would rule out "consequences" for Israel.

The health ministry in the Gaza Strip put the total Palestinian death toll at 32,333, most of them women and children.

Bombardment and fighting in Gaza killed another 72 people overnight, according to the ministry.

More than 50 airstrikes rained

**Troops and tanks have encircled Gaza City's Al Shifa Hospital, and recently moved on the Al Amal Hospital in the main southern city of Khan Younis**

down on the Gaza Strip, said the government press office.

Israel's armed forces gave a similar number and said its fighter jets and helicopters had struck about 50 targets and eliminated approximately 10 of them.

Food and water shortages have deepened the suffering, especially in northern Gaza where residents, mostly women and children, were waiting in line to fill up jerrycans and buckets in Jabalia.

Palestinians living near Al Shifa have reported hellish conditions, including corpses in the streets, constant bombardment and the rounding up of men, who are stripped to their underwear and questioned.

At Al Amal Hospital, the Palestinian Red Crescent said Israeli forces had surrounded all entrances and prohibited hospital staff from leaving. — AFP

## UN agency says barred from N.Gaza aid

**GAZA:** The United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees has said that Israel had definitively barred it from making aid deliveries in northern Gaza, where the threat of famine is highest.

"Despite the tragedy unfolding under our watch, the Israeli Authorities informed the UN that they will no longer approve any UNRWA food convoys to the north," Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the agency, said on X. "This is outrageous & makes it intentional to obstruct lifesaving assistance during a man made famine."

Israel fired back, saying on Monday that UNRWA "has long forsaken its role in facilitating aid to northern Gaza. While we've been working with aid orgs and other UN agencies to facilitate large amounts of aid to the north."

COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body responsible for Palestinian civilian affairs, said Israel "goes to great lengths to facilitate aid to northern Gaza, including by opening a new crossing in northern Gaza".

UNRWA director of communications Juliette Touma said that the decision not to approve deliveries to the north had been relayed in a meeting with Israeli military officials on Sunday.

It followed two denials in writing for convoy deliveries to the north last week. No reason for the decision was given, Touma said.

Gaza faces dire humanitarian conditions as a result of Israel's war against Palestinians that began nearly six months ago.

Last week a UN-backed food security assessment warned that famine was projected to hit the north of Gaza by May unless there was urgent intervention.

"The latest decision is another nail in the coffin" for efforts to get desperately needed aid to Gazans reeling from war, Touma said.

Martin Griffiths, head of the UN humanitarian coordination office, said on X on Sunday that UNRWA "is the beating heart of the humanitarian response in Gaza".

— AFP



Humanitarian aid is dropped on the Gaza Strip, west of Gaza City. — AFP

# Revitalising the art of storytelling



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

Two important occasions were celebrated last week in Oman namely Mother’s Day as well as the International Day of Storytelling.

It may seem that they are unconnected, but in a way, there is nothing more related than the role of storytelling as it is remembered by us through our mothers and grandmothers. This also reminds us of the power of storytelling.

It is well known that storytelling brings families together, but there is also data on this: research has shown that children who listen to stories of their families’ ancestry and history become more resilient and adaptable. They are able to anticipate the struggles and challenges that come up in life and are better prepared to deal with them.

As a headline in Forbes declares, ‘Mothers Are Leaders. So Mothers Must Tell Stories!’ When women in a family tell stories, whether imagined or not, they anticipate children’s reactions and how to cope with them.

Storytelling is an ancient tradition that goes back to ancient times with oral stories spreading

across different parts of the world. They inculcate values and morals in children but also enlarge their imagination and creativity.

The most memorable stories are the ones which contain a colourful combination of magic, improbable action and a final moral to remember it by.

As an art, storytelling is indispensable to the modern world. It develops the skills of listening and enriches vocabulary while firing the imagination. This is much better than listening to stories on a computer.

For one, physical contact means that the experience of listening is an interactive one where questions can be asked and issues discussed. It also means that children are making, and keeping, valuable relationships with members of their family.

While we may think that storytelling as an art is disappearing and blame it on our hectic schedules as well as that of the child, stealing moments for stories is never impossible.

This can happen over meal times, sleep time, or weekend breakfast times which are shared with the family.

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Ignoring a child when they come with a book is not recommended because it sends all the wrong signals: there is no time for the child, reading itself is a waste, or the parent would rather be doing something else – none of this sends a strong, bonding message.

Storytelling should be more than just a family activity. Schools, the community and society at large can participate in this process to develop children’s cognitive skills and impart a sense of belonging to them.

Setting aside some time in a week in school, encouraging community libraries to have storytelling sessions, and even encouraging competitions via book fairs and exhibitions are all effective ways to encourage the habit of storytelling and adding value to this age old activity.

Stories are important ways of understanding our complex world.

Outsourcing this art to technology can only limit its reach and potential. Storytelling within families and communities remains one of the most successful ways through which children can learn and cope with the challenges of life.

## Pandemic accord talks at loggerheads as time ticks away

ROBIN MILLARD

The final round of talks on a landmark pandemic accord faces a frantic last push this week, with countries still pulling in different directions on how to handle future global health crises.

The last week of negotiations runs until Thursday with nations trying to hammer out an agreement to make sure the world is better prepared to deal with the next pandemic — or better still, stamp it out before it even happens.

Shaken by Covid-19, which shredded economies, overturned societies, crippled health systems and killed millions, countries decided in December 2021 to build a framework of binding commitments to stop such trauma from ever happening again.

But as two years of talks come to the crunch, major sticking points remain over how far countries are prepared to go.

The ninth and final negotiations round opened on March 18, with daily talks ploughing on late into the evening.

Sealing a deal will involve some serious horse-trading — but the breakthrough moment remains elusive. Diplomats insist they remain keen to conclude an agreement, but the various alliances still seem far apart.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has repeatedly warned nations that “everyone will have to give something, or no one will get anything.”

European countries — who led calls for a pandemic treaty — want more money invested in pandemic prevention, while African nations want the knowledge and financing to make that work, plus proper access to pandemic “counter-measures” like vaccines and treatments.

The United States wants to ensure all countries share data and samples from emerging outbreaks quickly and transparently, while developing countries are holding out firm for guaranteed equity to stop them getting left behind.

According to the road map, a finalised accord on pandemic preparedness, prevention and response would be adopted at the May 27 to June 1 World Health Assembly of the WHO’s 194 member states. But there is a sense in diplomatic circles that developing nations are growing weary of Western obduracy and extra negotiations in April may be needed to cross the line.

“We all know there remain critical areas where you are yet to reach consensus,” Tedros told the final negotiations round.

“You agree on what you are trying to achieve... now you need to agree on how to achieve these objectives. — AFP

## Challenges of awareness of digital events



Dr Muamar bin Ali Al Tobi

The writer is an academic and researcher

I closely follow the local AI movement and its developments. As we entered 2024, I have noticed an increase in AI-related symposiums and conferences organised in Oman by both governmental and private entities.

These gatherings vary in their digital focus, with many emphasising AI applications through educational initiatives targeting different societal groups, from school students to university students, and extending to the general and industrial communities.

These events highlight local expertise in digital transformation, featuring researchers and specialists, and benefit from international experiences shared in these digital forums.

Many symposiums have resulted in recommendations clarifying the path for implementing digital transformation plans, including AI projects.

They also underline Oman’s strong digital presence in AI and the high readiness of the involved institutions, demonstrated through various means, such as exhibitions showcasing digital projects that reflect both student creativity and the innovation of small and medium enterprises led by ambitious Omani youth.

I do not wish to reiterate the details of these digital gatherings that have been widely covered by local media and social media platforms.

Anyone interested can easily follow their news and participate actively.

As soon as one symposium ends, another begins, a fact I am reminded of through personal invitations to participate.

My aim in this article is to explore ways to enhance these events and broaden their impact through proposals.

One suggestion is to bridge the gap in communicating these events to all societal segments, especially those interested in the digital field.

I am sometimes surprised by the lack of awareness among specialists about some of these events, and more so when announcements or showcases are made post-event. This limits the reach and participation, missing out on the potential contributions of other



A BROADER PROMOTIONAL  
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PERSPECTIVES

Omani specialists.

To address this, a comprehensive database of Omani digital specialists should be created in cooperation with relevant entities, which would facilitate the direct and swift delivery of invitations to these events, maximising their benefits and impact.

In addition to this targeted approach to engage specialists, a broader promotional effort is necessary to publicise these events well in advance, allowing for wider participation from both academic and investment perspectives.

My second proposal focuses on the earnest activation of follow-up and implementation committees.

This should not be limited to government conferences but should extend to all such events to ensure the longevity and implementation of knowledge and recommendations post-conference. I have previously chaired such a committee for a

national conference on digital transformation, and while some recommendations were implemented, the fate of others remains unknown.

It’s crucial for these events to be linked to a follow-up mechanism that ensures monitoring and implementation, contributing to the scientific and economic development of the nation.

This alignment with ‘Oman Vision 2040’ is essential for amplifying national efforts in the digital and economic sectors, achievable only through collaborative efforts and opening doors for all organising entities to engage in mutual interaction towards common national goals. This article is not a critique but an interactive proposition to push forward the digital movement and its related activities, including the organisation of events that have seen increased activity since the beginning of this year.

This reflects a significant interest and ambition from both governmental and private institutions in contributing to the scientific and economic upliftment.

We all rely on societal awareness of the digital sector and its key components like AI, which will propel progress and accelerate its pace.

Such scientific events and their interactions will play a crucial role in building this desired awareness.

# Your presence is the best gift...

Have you ever wondered what would be the best gift one could give? Was reading recently that one of the most important gifts you can give someone is your presence.

And this presence then of course would have to be minus distractions that is with no mobile and social media interruptions.

The busiest of people can be lonely and wealth is no remedy to this problem. Thankfully Ramadhan brings people together.

A friend said that she loves cooking when she has guests. And that is what makes iftar an enchanting experience as people come together to break the fast.

Mother Teresa once described loneliness, “The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved.”

Sometimes loneliness is caused by circumstances and at other times it is due to personalities. The difference is that some might enjoy their solitude, while others might long for someone to have a conversation.

A simple presence would not do because the person also wants to be heard. And for that we need to be good listeners.

Listening is an art and a skill at the same time. Students need to have this skill to take down notes in class. In life too, being a keen listener makes a difference. We know more, and we can understand better just because we are good listeners.

The key element is to stay focused and the best assurance for it is to face the speaker and maintain eye contact. Listening to a person does not just mean hearing the voice and the words but watching the body language. If you must really make the conversation a special experience then we must listen without judging.



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

THE BUSIEST OF PEOPLE CAN BE LONELY AND WEALTH IS NO REMEDY TO THIS PROBLEM. THANKFULLY RAMADHAN BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER

We are quick to judge and come to our own conclusions not knowing how much we lose out never knowing the real story and the person.

When a person tells us about his/her problems we quickly want to provide suggestions and solutions. This is even before they complete their story. The fact remains that solutions will always come from within. But for the person to reach that stage of revelation that person would have to attain trust. There is no worse thing than letting down a person’s trust by revealing their personal details to others.

Everyone goes through being vulnerable at some point in life as it is part of life’s journey.

It is the month of Ramadhan, and we are at yet another gathering for iftar. Many nationalities have come together and every one breaks the fast together.

No matter from where you come, everyone requires water and dates to break the fast, and the rest is personal preference. We can also experience the energy levels go up slowly when the fast was broken.

It makes us feel gratitude to nature, farmers and the people who prepare the food, reminding us how interdependent we are.

Everyone prays together no matter where you are in your journey of life.

At one of the biggest community iftars in the Sultanate of Oman, hundreds of women sat together and when more people turned up than expected, they decided to share their food.

The mother with two daughters on either sides told her children to share their food and gave her food to the newcomers. And the best moment came when the call for prayer filled the air and everyone drank water and ate dates.

Then two hands from either side stretched out to the mother with food for her. Where there is love for parents, humanity stays intact.

## CELEBRATING QARANQASHO



Children pose for a picture as they celebrate the Qaranqasho, a traditional Gulf-region children’s party celebrated after breaking fast on the 14th night of the holy month of Ramadhan marking the middle of the month, in Doha on Sunday. – AFP

# India’s rise as a global superpower

As a policy analyst, and a former secretary and academic officer of the Historical Association of Oman, I have noticed the remarkable strength and endurance of the relationship between Oman and India. The exchange of goods, people, colours, ways of living, and beliefs has been shaped by various factors such as geopolitical realities and commercial interests, and has persisted for thousands of years despite changes in technology, and culture.

However, given the constantly developing landscape of global affairs characterised by uncertainty, India’s trajectory as a burgeoning superpower beckons a nuanced examination to navigate the future of the Oman-India relationship and partnership. Geopolitical uncertainties and shifting alliances further compound the situation, highlighting the need to continuously re-evaluate strategic partnerships and power dynamics for India and its partners.

India is a key player in the global geopolitical landscape, boasting the world’s fifth-largest economy by GDP, according to the IMF ranking in February 2024, and the third-largest by purchasing power parity. It is also recognised as one of the fastest-growing major economies, with an annual growth rate of 6.3 per cent of its real GDP, which is projected by the IMF to reach 6.5 per cent in 2024.

India’s economic trajectory towards superpower status is evident through its growing influence in international trade and investment. The country’s economic reforms, liberalisation policies, and



Ahmed Al Mukhaini

The writer is a Muscat-based policy analyst and international interlocutor

INDIA’S TRAJECTORY AS A BURGEONING SUPERPOWER BECKONS A NUANCED EXAMINATION TO NAVIGATE THE FUTURE OF THE OMAN-INDIA RELATIONSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP

investments in infrastructure have positioned it as a crucial player in global supply chains. India’s large consumer market, skilled workforce, and burgeoning technology sector have attracted significant foreign investment, particularly in sectors like IT, pharmaceuticals, and renewable energy.

As India continues its economic ascent, it is expected to further solidify its position as a major economic powerhouse, potentially overtaking the likes of the United States and China in GDP rankings in the coming decades. However, challenges such as income inequality, bureaucratic red tape, and infrastructure bottlenecks remain hurdles that need to be addressed to sustain long-term growth. In terms of military capabilities, India possesses one of the largest standing armed forces in the world. The country has invested heavily in modernising its military equipment and has been focusing on enhancing its defence capabilities, particularly in the domains of air and naval power. India’s military doctrine has evolved to include a mix of conventional and nuclear capabilities, aimed at deterring regional threats and safeguarding its national interests. A case in point is last week’s rescue of 17 crew members during an anti-piracy operation by the Indian Navy, with no casualties reported. The captured Somali pirates were taken to be prosecuted in Mumbai, aboard the warship INS Kolkata,

just days after they were captured by Indian forces.

Looking ahead, India’s military expansion is likely to continue, with an emphasis on developing indigenous defence technologies, expanding its naval presence in the Indian Ocean region, and enhancing its strategic partnerships with key countries such as the United States, Japan, and Australia through initiatives like the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue).

Considering India’s rise on the global stage, and its stable relationship with Oman at multiple levels, Oman can benefit from forging closer ties with India to tap into its economic prowess and strategic influence. Equally, Oman being a key player in the Gulf region, both countries stand to gain from collaborating on various fronts, including trade, energy cooperation, counter-terrorism efforts, and maritime

security, serving their joint mid- to long-term strategic and national interests.

Oman should look to leverage its strategic location as a gateway between the Middle East, Africa, and Asia to enhance economic partnerships with India. This can involve joint infrastructure projects, such as the development of ports, logistics hubs, and industrial zones that facilitate trade between the two countries and beyond. In addition, Oman can help bridge the growing gap between India and Muslim communities around the globe, extending its credibility to India.

Moreover, Oman is well poised in formulating and catalysing a Trilateral Strategic Alliance involving Oman, India and Iran. The potential for cooperation between India and Iran presents a unique opportunity for Oman to play a facilitating role in enhancing regional connectivity and stability.

India has historical ties with both Iran and Oman and has been actively involved in projects like the Chabahar port development in Iran, aimed at improving trade links with Central Asia and Afghanistan. Oman can leverage its diplomatic relations with India and Iran to facilitate dialogue and cooperation on a range of issues, including energy security, maritime trade, and regional stability. By acting as a bridge between India and Iran, Oman can help unlock synergies that benefit all three countries, fostering a conducive environment for economic growth and strategic collaboration in the region. In addition, both Oman and India, endowed with a common legacy of non-alignment movement can present a new axis of peace and stability backed by Oman’s global reputation as a trusted facilitator, and India’s ascending economic and military might.

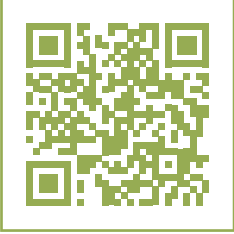
In conclusion, the fluid nature of global affairs underscores the importance of continuous strategic reassessment for India. In an era where alliances can shift and traditional power structures are challenged, India must adeptly navigate these uncertainties. Embracing a dynamic approach to diplomacy, economic cooperation, and military strategy will be essential in ensuring India’s sustained rise as a global superpower. In this journey, India will need Oman, who has been a trusted partner, a good neighbour, and a reliable friend.



India’s annual growth is projected to reach 6.5 per cent in 2024. – Reuters file photo

# sport

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## SEEB GRAB MINISTRY’S SHIELD

Seeb win third OVA title after beating Al Salam in final

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

Seeb defeated Al Salam 3-1 in the final of the Ministry’s Shield volleyball at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Sunday.

The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Eng Omar bin Mahmoud al Mahrazi, CEO of the Sohar Free Zone and Deputy CEO of Sohar Port.

The match was a repeat of the First Division League final, where Seeb won the title against Al Salam 3-1. This is Seeb’s third title this

season after winning the Super Cup and the League.

The match started with a serve by Al Salam’s Murad Khan, who scored the first point of the match.

Seeb equalised with a point from a mistake by Murad. Al Salam then scored the lead point, but Seeb responded through Saud al Maamari to tie the score at 2-2. Al Salam then scored two points to take the lead, but Seeb reduced the deficit to 4-3 with a mistake from an Al Salam player. Al Salam then doubled the score with three points, but Seeb came back to take advantage of Al Salam’s mistakes

to take an 8-7 lead. The two teams continued to exchange points throughout the first set, which ended with a 26-24 win for Al Salam.

The second set started with a serve by Seeb, and Al Salam’s Khalid responded with the first point. Al Salam’s Amjad al Saadi then scored the second point, but Seeb equalised with two mistakes from Al Salam to make it 2-2. Murad scored the lead point for Al Salam, but Seeb responded with four points to make it 6-3. Al Salam then continued to lose points through several mistakes that Seeb players took advantage

of to make it 12-7. Seeb continued to double the score, ending the set with a 25-16 win.

Al Salam started the third set with a serve and scored the first point. Seeb took advantage of a weak serve by Al Salam to equalise the score. Seeb players then scored the lead point, and Al Salam responded with a point to make it 2-2.

The two teams continued to exchange points until Seeb took a 6-5 lead. Seeb then doubled the score by scoring 7 points while Al Salam players scored 5 points to make it 13-10 for Seeb. Seeb players

continued to raise points while Al Salam tried to come back in the last minutes of the set, but Seeb managed to end the set in their favour with a score of 25-21.

Seeb managed to open the scoring in the fourth set, and then doubled the score with two additional points while Al Salam scored one point to make it 3-1 for Seeb.

Seeb responded with three points while Al Salam scored two points to make it 6-3. Seeb scored two points and Al Salam responded after a tactical change by the coach and scored a number of points to

take a 10-8 lead.

Seeb managed to take a 5-point lead at 17-12. Seeb then came back with a strong performance to take a 21-19 lead, and then Seeb managed to snatch the fourth set 25-22. Thus, Seeb was crowned with the championship shield for the sixth time in a row.

At the end of the match, the clubs that won the top three spots were honoured. Champions Seeb received gold medals and the Ministry’s Shield. Al Salam won second place and the silver medals, while Oman Club came in third and won the bronze medals.

## Red Warriors aim for away victory against Malaysia

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

Oman will target to stay at the top of the group and get inch closer to the progression when they take on hosts Malaysia in Group D of the Preliminary Joint Qualification – Round 2 for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 on Tuesday. The match will kick off at 6:00 pm (Oman time) at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur.

Red Warriors lead the standings currently by six points with goal difference than Kyrgyzstan and Malaysia after a crucial victory in the previous round against Malaysia by 2-0 in Muscat.

Oman will enter the match knowing that the rivals potential are to register a victory especially they are playing in their own ground at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium



Oman head coach Jaroslav Silhavy with player Ali al Busaidy.

with fans support.

Today’s triumph will raise the hopes of the national team to secure the direct ticket to AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 and move to the next stage of the Fifa World Cup 2026.

Therefore, Coach Jaroslav Silhavy’s men will work hard to accomplish their target. On the other side, it will be a challenging assignment for Red Warriors as Malaysia will be looking for the compensation after their defeat few days ago. The Malaysian side will aim on registering a strong bounce back and will rely on that by the home ground advantage.

**WINNING POINTS**

Czech coach Jaroslav Silhavy, Oman’s national team football coach, affirmed that the team prepared very well for the game. “We hope to return back to home with

the same winning result last week in Muscat. The opponent is a good team, well disciplined on the pitch and we are showing our respect to them. I am confident on my team players as we prepared very well for the tight encounter and we are fully aware of the Malaysian team’s technical style,” he said during the press conference on Monday.

The 62-year-old added in his remarks that Malaysia team is one of the organised teams in Asia and delivered a top game in Muscat. “We will work hard to stop their attacks. Although, we are missing the efforts of our key striker Issam al Subhi who is an essential player inside the green field but we have the suitable substitutions,” he added.

Oman’s player Ali al Busaidy said that the purpose of this match is to duplicate the victory and gain a significant three points. “We are confident to repeat the win again.

As players, we will implement all the instructions of the head coach. Malaysia team have many top players and we respect them. Our head coach is aware of the technical level of the opponent and he will address the right tactic to stop them on the field. As national team players, we are in good shape to adapt with any circumstances that could be faced by the team,” he concluded.

Oman players are in good shape to face the Malaysian team challenge with an eye on registering the second successive triumph. Silhavy may use the similar starting line up of the last game except Issam al Subhi who received two yellow cards.

The replacement of Al Subhi may be from Mohammed al Ghafri, Hatim al Roushdi, Jameel al Yahmadi and Abdulrahman al Mushefiri.

# Gujarat edge Mumbai in thriller to spoil Pandya's homecoming

SANJU SHINES AS RAJASTHAN BEAT LUCKNOW BY 20 RUNS



Gujarat Titans players celebrate a wicket of Mumbai Indians at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. - IPL

**AHMEDABAD, India:** Gujarat Titans edged out Mumbai Indians by six runs in an IPL thriller on Sunday as Hardik Pandya suffered a defeat as Mumbai captain after he controversially replaced Rohit Sharma.

Rohit (43) and Dewald Brevis (46) shone in Mumbai's chase of their 169 target with a third-wicket stand of 77 but Gujarat's bowlers hit back to keep the opposition down 162-9 in Ahmedabad.

Millions of Mumbai fans had slammed the franchise for the captaincy switch as Pandya made his IPL debut for Mumbai under Rohit and later led Gujarat to a title in their debut season in 2022 at the same venue.

But it was celebration at the world's biggest cricket stadium, named after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for new home team captain Shubman Gill who spoiled Pandya's homecoming.

Commentators said close to 90,000 fans turned up at the 132,000 capacity arena.

Five-time champions Mumbai needed 48 from 36 balls with seven wickets in hand before going down to an opening loss.

"We backed ourselves to chase those 42 runs but it was one of those days where we lost the momentum," said Pandya.

"It feels good to be back because this is one stadium you can enjoy, feel the atmosphere quite lively and obviously the crowd was full and they got a good game as well."



Rajasthan Royals captain Sanju Samson plays a shot.

Mohit Sharma took down Brevis, who came in as impact substitute, and then Tim David in successive overs before fellow quick Spencer Johnson struck twice in the 19th over to dent the chase further.

Rohit's wicket in the 13th over off Sai Kishore also proved to be key for Gujarat.

Pandya attempted to go for the 19 runs needed in the last over with a six and a four off Umesh Yadav before being caught out on the third. "I think the way the boys held their nerve, and the way we bowled in the death overs, especially with the dew coming in, I thought it was special," said Gill.

## SAMSON BLITZ

Pandya, who has returned to

competitive cricket after an ankle injury, bowled with the new ball and sent down three overs for 30 runs.

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah came in first change to bowled Wriddhiman Saha with a trademark toe-crushing yorker and finished with figures of 3-14 in four overs to keep down Gujarat to 168-6.

His other two wickets included Sai Sudarshan, who top-scored with 45, and David Miller, who made 12.

Bumrah was ably supported by IPL debutant and South African quick Gerald Coetzee, who took two wickets after joining the franchise for \$602,000 in the auction last year.

In the first match of the day,

Sanju Samson led from the front as Rajasthan Royals defeated Lucknow Super Giants by 20 runs in Jaipur.

Captain Samson hammered an unbeaten 82 off 52 balls to steer inaugural IPL champions Rajasthan to 193-4 after they elected to bat first.

New Zealand quick Trent Boult then struck two early blows to rattle the Lucknow batting, which finished on 173-6 despite an unbeaten 64 by West Indies' Nicholas Pooran.

Lucknow, who made the play-offs in the last two seasons since their debut alongside Gujarat Titans in 2022, lost regular wickets but skipper KL Rahul attempted to keep the chase on track in his 44-ball 58 despite his slow start.

The left-handed Pooran then took charge and along with Rahul put on 85 runs for the fifth wicket but the asking rate kept climbing.

Rahul fell to Sandeep Sharma after his fifty and Marcus Stoinis's departure left Pooran with a lot to do in the final few overs.

Samson took on the opposition attack and built key partnerships including a 93-run third-wicket stand with Riyan Parag, who made 43.

The Rajasthan innings witnessed a nearly 10-minute halt in the first over when a cable of the spidercam broke and technicians scurried to untangle the wires on the field. —AFP

## Rajitha takes five wickets as Sri Lanka crush Bangladesh in first Test

**SYLHET, Bangladesh:** Kasun Rajitha claimed his second five-wicket haul in Test cricket as Sri Lanka crushed Bangladesh by 328 runs on Monday in Sylhet to go 1-0 up in the two-match series.

The visitors bowled out Bangladesh for 182 in their second innings after lunch on the fourth day, with Rajitha returning with 5-56.

Overnight batsman Mominul Haque scored 87 not out for Bangladesh to delay the inevitable, before Lahiru Kumara (2-39) took the final wicket.

Fast bowler Rajitha claimed the wicket of Tajul Islam in the third over of the morning, trapping the left-hander in front for six.

Mominul, who hit 12 fours and a six, put on a dogged 66-run partnership with Mehidy Hasan Miraz for the seventh wicket before Rajitha struck again.

Mehidy, on 33, edged Rajitha to Dhananjaya de Silva at second slip.

Rajitha took the wickets of Shoriful Islam (12) and Khaled Ahmed (zero) off consecutive deliveries after the break to complete his five-wicket haul.

Vishwa Fernando was the other pivotal bowler for Sri Lanka with 3-36 as pacemen took all 20 wickets for the visitors in the game.

"The wicket had something for the fast bowlers," said Sri Lanka captain and player of the match De Silva.

"We were talking about playing late, and what shots to play on this wicket. It paid off at the end of the day."

Tajul and Mominul resumed Bangladesh's innings at 47-5 after the top order collapsed in little over an hour before the close of play on Sunday.

"The wicket was good, there was movement early on," said Bangladesh captain

Najmul Hossain Shanto.

"We have to improve our new-ball batting. A lot of work has to be done before the next Test, and we are going to have a plan to come back strongly."

Sri Lanka, who have never lost a Test series in Bangladesh, made 280 in their first innings and Bangladesh replied with 188.

The visitors then made 418 with first-innings century-makers de Silva and Kamindu Mendis both reaching three figures for the second time in the match.

They were only the third pair from the same country to score centuries in each innings of a Test after Australia's Chappell brothers, Greg and Ian, and Pakistan's Misbah-ul-Haq and Azhar Ali.

The second and final match of the series will be played in Chittagong from March 30. —AFP

## SCOREBOARD

**Sri Lanka 1st innings 280**  
**Bangladesh 1st innings 188**  
**Sri Lanka 2nd innings 418**  
**Bangladesh 2nd innings**  
M Hasan lbw Fernando 0  
Z Hasan c Mendis b Kumara 19  
N Shanto c Karunaratne b Rajitha 6  
M Haque not out 87  
S Hossain c Mendis b Fernando 0  
L Das c Mathews b Fernando 0  
T Islam lbw Rajitha 6  
M Miraz c de Silva b Rajitha 33  
S Islam c & b Rajitha 12  
K Ahmed c Mendis b Rajitha 0  
N Rana c de Silva b Kumar 0  
**Extras (b11, lb3, nb3, w2) 19**  
**Total (all out; 49.2 overs) 182**  
**Fall of wickets:** 1-0, 2-9, 3-36, 4-37, 5-37, 6-51, 7-117, 8-164, 9-164  
**Bowling:** Fernando 15-5-36-3, Rajitha 14-1-56-5, Kumara 11-2-1-39-2, Prabath Jayasuriya 9-1-37-0  
**Result:** Sri Lanka win by 328 runs  
**Series:** Sri Lanka lead 1-0



Sri Lanka's Kasun Rajitha (L) celebrates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Khaled Ahmed during the fourth day of the first Test at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. - AFP

# Chennai to host IPL final on May 26, says BCCI

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian Premier League final will be played on May 26 in Chennai, the Indian cricket board said on Monday, releasing the full schedule of the hugely lucrative T20 tournament.

The IPL, which began on March 22 in Chennai, will end five days ahead of the T20 World Cup in the West Indies and United States, starting June 1.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) had initially released only the first two weeks of the IPL schedule,

because it clashes with India's six-week-long general election.

Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi stadium will host Qualifier 1 and the Eliminator on May 21 and May 22, followed by Qualifier 2 on May 24.

The final on May 26 will be held in the southern Indian city of Chennai.

Voting in India's marathon elections begin on April 19, with results expected on June 4.

Defending champions Chennai Super Kings began their campaign with a win at



MA Chidambaram Stadium, Chennai, will host the final.

their home MA Chidambaram Stadium against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the opener.

Owing to the tournament clashing with elections, a few teams will have their home bases shifted to different venues.

Punjab Kings, who started their season at the new stadium in Mullanpur, will culminate their home campaign in the Himalayan hill town of Dharamsala, according to BCCI.

Rajasthan Royals opted for a second venue in Guwahati, and

will play their final two home matches in the northeastern state of Assam.

Delhi Capitals will play all their remaining five home matches in front of their home crowd at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi, after opting to play their first two home matches in Visakhapatnam.

The tournament has grown into the world's richest cricket league since its inaugural season in 2008 and has added billions to the Indian economy and the BCCI. — AFP

ROYAL CAVALRY’S ‘MANARAH’ WINS IN FRANCE



The Royal Cavalry mare ‘Manarah’, led by jockey Michael Forrest and supervised by trainer Elizabeth Bernard, was crowned first in the horse racing competitions that were held at French Pau track and were dedicated to purebred Arabian horses for a distance of 2,000 metres.

PSM announces cash prizes for tourney

MUSCAT: The management of Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) Board of Governors has announced cash prizes for the winners and runners-up of the PSM Ramadhan softball cricket tournament on Sunday.

The winners of the tournament will take home RO 300 and the champions trophy while the runners-up will get cash award of RO 200 and a trophy.

Special prizes will also be given to man of the match, player of the tournament etc.

Meanwhile, Charwa X1 Asfandyar X1, Hola Cosmos, Gully Boys advanced to the next stage after posting wins.

Nazimabad X1 crushed Al Haseena Jewellers by big a margin. Once again a superb knock of 85 not out by Awais Muneer in the 145 runs total



secured the victory.

Akhmat Hayat Raza, former chairman of PSC, was the chief guest for the award ceremony.

USA blank Mexico 2-0 for Concacaf Nations League title

Dallas: Gio Reyna and Tyler Adams scored as the United States beat Mexico 2-0 in Sunday’s Concacaf Nations League final, giving the Americans all three titles in the event’s history.

Adams scored a long-distance screamer in the 45th minute and Reyna fired home a loose ball from the edge of the box in the 63rd for the USA, who also won Nations League crowns in 2021 and 2023.

“It never gets old winning titles for your country. I’ll never take any of them for granted,” Reyna said.

“The group of guys and the energy we have, I always love coming to camp. I’m at a loss for words right now.”

Reyna hoped the “Three-peat” would provide inspiration for competing in Copa America on home soil this summer against South America’s top teams.

“It’s big for momentum,” he said. “We’ve been together with our core group now. We know what it takes to win big matches.

“We can hopefully keep the momentum going into Copa America and maybe lift a trophy there.”

The Mexicans appeared to have a lifeline into the match in the 73rd minute when a penalty was awarded after US defender Antonee Robinson was ruled to have fouled Santiago Gimenez



USA players celebrate with the trophy. – USA Today Sports

in the penalty area. But a video review overturned the decision and instead Gimenez was issued a yellow card for simulation, blunting the emotions for a Mexican fightback.

Play was halted in the 86th minute and twice more in stoppage time after Mexican fans yelled discriminatory language, a homophobic insult when the opposing goalkeeper kicked the ball.

When the final whistle finally came, the Americans had captured the crown at Arlington,

Texas, on the home field of the NFL’s Dallas Cowboys.

“Our goal this whole tournament was to advance and then get a chance to play in the final and win the final and we achieved it,” US coach Gregg Berhalter said.

The Americans won both prior Concacaf Nations League crowns, beating Mexico 3-2 in extra time in the 2021 inaugural championship match and Canada 2-0 in last year’s final after dispatching Mexico 3-0 in last year’s semifinals. — AFP

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SEZAD begins providing services in designated areas



**MUSCAT:** The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) administration has completed the procedures to implement the Council of Ministers’ decision to develop, execute and supervise municipal services and public facilities in the old Sayy commercial district, among other areas where their public utility status has been lifted and incorporated into the zone’s general scheme.

The administration started providing municipal licensing services, technical affairs services, as well as training staff to provide these services in conjunction with the completion until fully outfitting a specific office to handle municipal services in the Sayy commercial district.

Tatweer, acting on behalf of the SEZAD administration, has started preparing roads, opening corridors, cleaning certain sites, and putting up directional signs in addition to working to assess the current state of services in schemes whose public utility status was lifted.

The total area of the schemes whose public utility status was lifted within SEZAD scheme is 33 square kilometres, distributed over 9 different schemes, including the old Sayy commercial district scheme. A number of industrial, commercial, commercial/ residential, and residential uses are covered under the scheme.

Numerous infrastructure projects that match the goals of residents and investors are being implemented in SEZAD. A variety of investment areas in the fields of real estate development, renewable energy, logistics, tourism, and industry are included in the zone.

AI key to securing technologically advanced future for Oman: Expert

JOMAR MENDOZA  
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to play a pivotal role in addressing national challenges and empowering every citizen in the Sultanate of Oman, particularly in light of the government’s strong focus on sustainability and innovation, says a leading Omani expert on digital transformation.

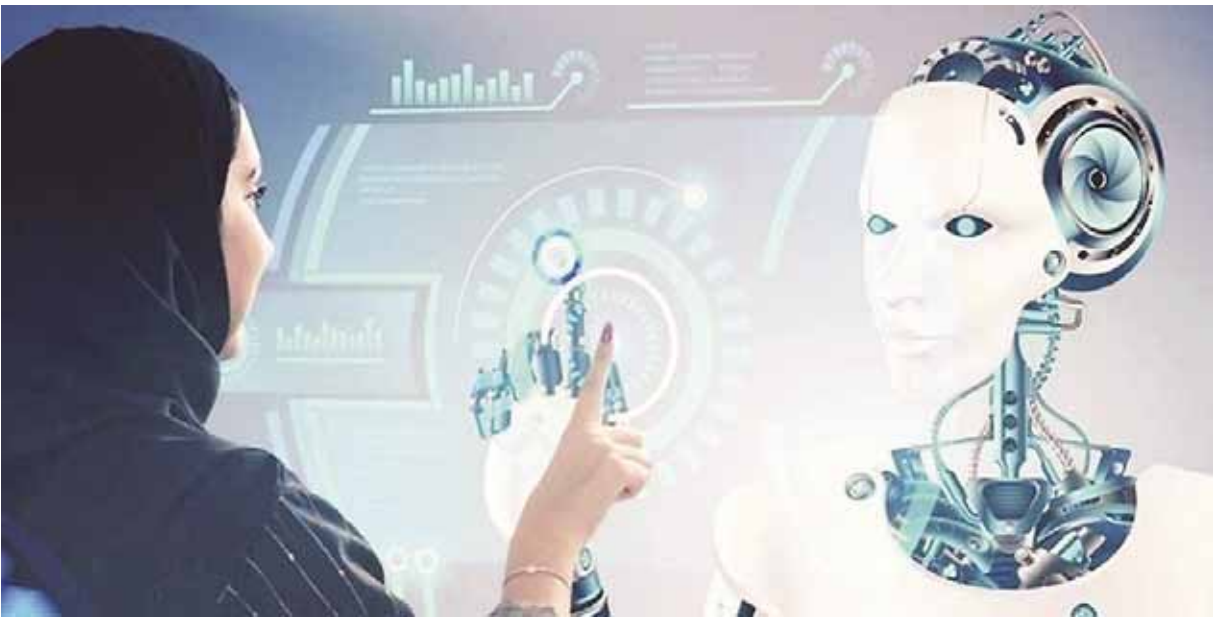
In a recent exclusive interview with *Oman Daily Observer*, Laila al Hadhrami, the Smart Cities Development Manager at the National Energy Centre, stressed the need to drive AI adoption to help secure a technologically advanced future for Oman.

Sharing her vision for Oman’s path towards AI-driven progress, the well-known tech futurist emphasised the importance of fostering collaboration in research, innovation, and digital inclusivity.

By leveraging AI responsibly, Oman aims to unlock economic growth, optimise resource utilisation, and steer the nation towards a prosperous future.

The recent emphasis on the national strategy for the Digital Economy and AI, highlighted in His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s address, provides a significant boost to Oman’s aspirations in responsible AI development and implementation, she said.

In her capacity as Executive Director, Laila al Hadhrami aims to position the Oman IT Society (OITS) as a key player in promoting technological



excellence and inclusive growth across Oman, particularly focusing on AI awareness and education.

Through initiatives like the OITS Ambassadors programme, volunteers are actively engaged in raising awareness about AI through free monthly lectures and workshops on AI and emerging technologies across Oman.

This initiative is aimed at bridging the knowledge gap and dispelling misconceptions surrounding AI, ensuring that every Omani citizen is equipped with the necessary understanding to navigate the evolving technological landscape.

However, Oman faces pressing issues in raising awareness about artificial intelligence, including educational disparities, misconceptions, and language barriers, according to the expert.

Comprehensive educational initiatives, workshops, and transparent communication



By leveraging AI responsibly, Oman aims to unlock economic growth, optimise resource utilisation, and steer the nation towards a prosperous future

LAILA AL HADHRAMI  
Smart Cities Development Manager at the National Energy Centre

are essential to overcome these challenges. The OITS Ambassadors programme, with its focus on promoting AI literacy and engaging stakeholders from government, academia, industry, and civil society, plays a crucial role in addressing these awareness challenges and fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation in the AI domain, she stresses.

Collaboration across government, academia, industry, and civil society organisations is deemed critical in fostering responsible AI development initiatives and policies in Oman.

Establishing platforms for dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration can build understanding and garner support for sustainable and ethical AI practices, ultimately empowering Omani citizens and driving progress towards a future where AI serves as a transformative tool for prosperity and development.

Bayanat portal in shortlist for WSIS Prize 2024



**MUSCAT:** The Electronic Disclosure Portal, Bayanat, has been shortlisted as a contender for the prestigious World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) Prize.

Bayanat is a disclosure portal for financial and non-financial information of public joint stock companies and investment funds and other entities regulated by the Capital Market Authority and considered one of the key electronic projects of the CMA within its endeavours to achieve the objects of its strategic plan to upgrade the securities market in line with the national priorities of Oman Vision 2040 in digital transformation.

Citizens and residents are urged to cast their votes in favour of Bayanat via the website <https://2u.pw/29re3gRn>. The portal participates in the competition under the category (All C7. E-business). Voting ends on March 31, 2024.

CMA participation in the competition underscores the importance accorded to e-projects that aim to facilitate access to information and attract domestic and international investors, as well as boost Oman’s overall profile.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Oman among top 5 MENA states with sizable CO2 capture potential

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, MARCH 25

A new report by the International Energy Forum (IEF) — the world’s largest grouping of energy ministers — has named the Sultanate of Oman among the Top 5 economies of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region with ambitious programmes for Carbon Capture, Utilisation & Storage (CCUS) as part of their Net Zero strategies.

The Riyadh-based IEF, which counts 73 energy ministers of producing and consuming countries in its ranks, also listed the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar in the region’s Top 5 destinations for CCUS-based investments.

CCUS encompasses a suite of technologies that support the capture of planet-warming CO2,



CCUS deployment is a key component of Oman’s Net Zero strategy.

generally from large point sources like power generation or industrial facilities that use either fossil fuels or biomass as fuel.

The captured CO2 is compressed and transported to be used in a range of applications,

or injected into deep geological formations such as depleted oil and gas reservoirs or saline aquifers.

“The role of CCUS is particularly important in regions such as MENA where oil and gas industries’ technological

pro prowess is a significant enabler in the deployment of clean tech solutions, such as CCUS to reduce GHG emissions. Several countries in the MENA region have already begun to invest in CCUS technology due to its effectiveness in removing emissions from the oil and gas industry and related production processes,” said the IEF in the report.

In Oman, CCUS related projects announced to date comprise two small-scale ventures and one project with an unspecified capacity, according to the IEF report. It noted however the importance of parts of northern Oman as potential sites for CO2 storage.

Most promising is the Oman Ophiolite, which has a storage capacity of an estimated 8.2 gigatonnes of CO2, although the storage efficiency of the Ophiolite

needs to be further assessed, it said.

Importantly, the report envisions a promising future for CCUS in the MENA region. Being already a leading energy exporting region, CCUS could allow MENA to boost its exports with decarbonised energy, delivering a double benefit of supporting the economy while supporting climate targets.

Current projections estimate that new market opportunities in hydrogen export and CO2 storage services could add between \$15.5 bn and \$44 bn in gross value added (GVA) to the GCC in 2050.

Job opportunities would also be significant with estimated 87,000 to 245,000 direct and indirect new jobs created by 2050, it added.

According to Oman’s Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the country is expected to abate 16.3

million tonnes of CO2 annually via CCUS by 2050.

In support of this goal, the ministry signed last November a Terms of Reference (TOR) agreement with multiple oil and gas industry stakeholders to establish a regulatory framework for blue hydrogen and CCUS policies in Oman.

Other private-led initiatives are also under way in support of CCUS deployment. Notable is the case of energy major Occidental of Oman (Oxy) signed a MoU with OQ Gas Networks SAOC (OQGN) last November to jointly study the potential for CCUS projects in Oman.

The two companies pledged to explore the development and deployment of CCUS in conjunction with enhanced oil recovery (EOR) projects at Oxy’s production assets in Oman.



## Ooredoo organises Qaranqasho event for children in Oman

MUSCAT: Marking the 14th night of the holy month of Ramadhan, Ooredoo recently organised a fun-filled, family-friendly and free Qaranqasho event for kids.

The event held at the Mall of Muscat proved hugely popular with families in Oman. With lots of entertainment, activities, gifts, and sweets, it drew a huge crowd to share in this special celebration during Ramadhan.

“As the Omani people observe the holy month of Ramadhan, Ooredoo embraces the spirit of fasting, prayer, generosity, and community engagement.

Our annual Qaranqasho event is one of our many programmes and events across Oman; and one which we know embraces the spirit of the Holy month and brings families together,” said Feras al Shaikh, Director of Branding and Communications at Ooredoo.

Celebrating two decades of giving back to local communities, Ooredoo has always put the community at the heart of everything it does and aims to give back in a meaningful way, reflecting two of its core values; ‘Caring and Connecting’.

For more information on Ooredoo’s events, products and services, visit [www.ooredoo.om](http://www.ooredoo.om) and head to their social media channels to stay connected on a daily basis.

# OPES 2024 to focus on affordable, sustainable and clean energy solutions

MUSCAT: The dates and agenda for the eagerly awaited Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES) 2024 were announced at an exclusive press conference. Organised under the esteemed patronage of the Ministry of Energy & Minerals, the event will take place from April 22 to 24, 2024, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

This event marks a pivotal gathering for the oil, gas and energy sector within the country. Furthermore, OPES will also feature a conference organised by the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE).

Organised by CONNECT (Oman Exhibitions Organising Company LLC), OPES proudly partners with the host organisation, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

The event will convene an esteemed gathering of numerous experts in the petroleum and energy industry from around the world, along with decision makers and other stakeholders.

It sets a promising path for enhancing and advancing efforts in transforming the energy industry to reduce carbon emissions, aiming to achieve carbon neutrality goals.

The exhibition, commencing



The event marks a pivotal gathering for the oil, gas and energy sector within the country.

on April 22, is expected to feature a distinguished array of local and international exhibitors.

Throughout all three days, the exhibition will welcome visitors from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm, offering ample opportunities for exploration, networking and establishing strategic partnerships.

OQ and bp stand as Principal Sponsors of OPES, with Oxy serving as the Exclusive Sustainability Host.

Additionally, Oman Shell assumes the role of Diamond Sponsor, with Gulf Energy as the Platinum Sponsor.

Noteworthy Gold Sponsors include Oman LNG, CC Energy Development, SLB, and Bapco Energies, all playing crucial roles in ensuring the success of the event.

Commenting on the forthcoming event, Dr Saleh al Anboori — Conference

Chairperson & Director General of Exploration and Production of Oil and Gas, said, “The Oman Petroleum and Energy Show 2024 provides a unique opportunity to learn about the most prominent developments in the energy sector, locally and internationally.

It brings together a select group of pioneers in the oil and gas, and energy industry, and has become a significant platform

that sheds light on the most important developments in the energy scene globally.

Furthermore, it catalyses the exchange of knowledge and expertise, pushing the boundaries of innovation in the energy sector to support sustainable development efforts, aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Additionally, it reinforces the Sultanate of Oman’s concerted efforts to curb carbon emissions and enhance energy efficiency. OPES 2024 also provides a platform for robust discourse and knowledge exchange that promises to ensure sustainability.”

Serving as a vital nexus for professionals from diverse sectors, including industry leaders, policymakers, and experts, OPES offers an unparalleled opportunity to network, delve into market dynamics, explore cutting-edge innovations through live demos and product demonstrations, and foster strategic partnerships.

This year’s event is poised to welcome over 300 exhibiting companies from 24+ countries, drawing over 15,000 visitors.

With more than 200 expert speakers and 900 conference delegates, attendees can expect engaging discussions and valuable insights throughout the event.

## Bank Muscat to host Souq Al Wathbah on Thursday



MUSCAT: The Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority and Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, have joined hands to organise the annual Ramadhan Souq Al Wathbah at Bank Muscat’s Head Office, Airport Heights, from March 28 to March 30, 2024 (Thursday to Saturday).

This annual initiative comes as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of Bank Muscat, aiming at promoting small enterprises and providing them a space to introduce attractive Omani products and services to visitors. This year,

more than 150 entrepreneurs and SMEs will participate in the 2024 edition of Souq Al Wathbah. The exhibition will showcase a number of Omani products encompassing fashion, beauty, health and food. The three-day Souq will be open from 8 pm to 12 midnight.

Souq Al Wathbah represents a broad space for home-based projects and businesses to network with entrepreneurs and exchange experiences. It comes within the strategies of both the SMEs Development Authority and Bank Muscat to support Omani entrepreneurs, SMEs and startups, and educates the community about the importance of supporting

SMEs being the backbone of the country’s economy.

Since its first inception, the Ramadhan Souq achieved successful results and this year’s edition is expected to also witness excellent participation from the public and the media, especially as it is one of the well-known souqs held during the month of Ramadhan.

Bank Muscat is committed to implementing its strategic plans to support SMEs.

For this particular purpose, it has launched many other initiatives including Al Wathbah Academy, Al Wathbah Businesswomen’s Forum etc.

## NBO Muzn Islamic Banking unveils Ramadan deposit offer



MUSCAT: In a bid to encourage the spirit of generosity and communal sharing throughout the Holy Month of Ramadhan, National Bank of Oman (NBO) Muzn Islamic Banking has introduced its exclusive Ramadhan deposit offer.

Under the ‘Earn More to Give More’ campaign, the Ramadhan deposit offer features a diverse array of Sharia-compliant deposit products designed to empower individuals to strengthen their financial standing while fulfilling their religious obligations.

This initiative reflects Muzn Islamic Banking’s unwavering commitment to providing impactful and ethical financial solutions during the holy month.

Salima al Marzouqi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO Muzn Islamic Banking, said: “Inspiring prosperity with a purpose, our Ramadhan deposit offer at NBO Muzn Islamic Banking not only elevates financial well-being but also resonates with the spirit of giving.

Beyond financial gains, these exclusive deposit products offer a unique opportunity for our clients to create a positive social impact, reinforcing a sense of community and generosity. By choosing our ‘Earn More to Give More’ campaign, customers not only enhance their own financial standing but also play an integral role in supporting noble causes, embodying the true essence of Ramadhan.”

# Kia Oman announces winners of mega rewards Ramadhan campaign

MUSCAT: Reliable International Automotive, the distributors for Kia in Oman recently announced two winners of the mega rewards Ramadhan campaign. They won the Kia Pegas.

Kia Oman’s latest Ramadhan campaign offers customers buying a new Kia an opportunity to embark on winning journeys and enjoy mega rewards. Customers get 9 chances to win a car in raffle.

Apart from that they can avail service from 50,000 km up to 100,000 km, insurance and more. The campaign is valid from February 29, 2024 up to April 28, 2024 (Conditions apply).

For details please visit any Kia showroom.)

Sharing his thoughts on winning the raffle, one of the winners said, “Thank you Kia for



this unique Ramadhan campaign. I have always felt that Kia is one of the few automotive brands that is always giving customers experiences that they will love.

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

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

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

The next raffle draws are on March 25, April 1 & 8 where customers have a chance to win Kia Pegas, and Grand Raffle is on

May 6 where one lucky customer can win a Seltos.

So hurry and book today to get mega rewards from Kia this Ramadhan.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers.

Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way.

No wonder then that Reliable International Automotive has been ranked amongst the top Kia distributors worldwide and has been honoured with prestigious accolades including the ‘Good Partnership award’, ‘Family Like Care’ Service award’, and ‘Kia ‘Distributor of Distinction’ award.

## AI key to securing technologically advanced future for Oman: Expert



One prominent example of community engagement and sustainable practices leading to positive urban development outcomes is found in the city of Nizwa.

### FROM PAGE 13

In the pursuit of sustainable cities, community empowerment emerges as a key strategy in driving sustainability and environmental stewardship.

Al Hadhrami's vision is centred on empowering communities to actively participate in the planning and implementation of initiatives that promote environmental stewardship and social equity.

By fostering a culture of sustainable awareness within communities, individuals can play a crucial role in shaping their cities and contributing to shared environmental and social goals.

One prominent example of community engagement and sustainable practices leading to positive urban development outcomes is found in the city of Nizwa in Oman.

Nizwa, known for its rich historical heritage, transformed abandoned clay houses into heritage inns, revitalising the

economy, generating employment opportunities, and preserving the city's unique character.

Al Hadhrami's involvement in establishing Al Dakhiliyah Global Development & Investment reflects a commitment to translating Oman Vision 2040 into actionable initiatives, empowering governorates to lead sustainable projects, attract investments, and enhance the quality of life for citizens across Oman.

As Oman continues its journey towards a sustainable and technologically advanced future, collaboration, community empowerment, and innovation will remain the cornerstones of progress, shaping a nation that is resilient, prosperous, and inclusive. By embracing the principles of Oman Vision 2040 and harnessing the power of AI and sustainable practices, Oman is poised to realise its vision of a brighter and more sustainable future for all its citizens.

## China to treat foreign firms equally amid industrial upgrade push

BEIJING: China pledged on Monday to treat foreign companies the same way as domestic peers in a bid to attract more foreign investment, cooperation and expertise, as Asia's largest economy moves to upgrade and strengthen its industrial chains.

"China will fully guarantee national treatment for foreign companies, so that more foreign companies can invest in China with confidence and peace of mind," Vice Commerce Minister Guo Tingting said at the China Development Forum in Beijing.

Guo did not give details about how China would guarantee "national treatment", or the equal treatment of locals and foreigners as per World Trade Organization (WTO) principles. For years, Western firms have complained of unequal access in China, a vast consumer market and also global supplier of raw materials and components.

Western governments have expressed concern about "economic coercion", and companies have considered "de-risking" supply chains and operations away from China.

China's introduction of a broader anti-espionage law, exit bans and raids on consultancies and due diligence firms have further chilled foreign fund inflows. Inbound foreign direct investment contracted 8 per cent last year.

"A significant percentage of Chamber members have reported to us that they are treated unequally compared to their domestic counterparts," said Jens Eskelund, president of the European Chamber of Commerce in China, giving market access, government



People stand outside an Apple Store in Shanghai, China. — Reuters

procurement, access to subsidies and communication with the government as examples.

"The clearest indication of equal treatment will be when our members tell us they no longer experience these and other related challenges," he added. Geopolitical tension, most prominently with the United States on a range of issues including US concern that US chips and AI technology could be used to boost Chinese military capabilities, has also weighed on investor sentiment.

In response, China has stepped up efforts to address concerns of foreign investors, pledging to protect the rights of foreign companies and promising to further enlarge entry

into its markets.

China will continue to open up high-level areas of industry and finance and create more market opportunities, and will firmly safeguard a multilateral trading system with the WTO at its core, Guo said.

Premier Li Qiang on Sunday said China will continue efforts to build a first-class business environment and to welcome enterprises from all over the world to invest in the country.

Stephen von Schuckmann, a board member and executive at ZF Group who oversees the auto supplier's battery-drive operations, has said the company was committed to China, which leads

the world in electric vehicle sales and production. "Any wording and hype about an exodus in the supply chain is not what we follow," he said in remarks published by CGTN.

"We're invested. We're here to stay." Over 100 overseas executives and investors have attended the annual China Development Forum since the weekend, including companies with deep supply chains in China such as Apple and Siemens.

China will fully lift restrictions on foreign investment access to its manufacturing sector and deepen in-depth cooperation with firms from all countries, Minister of Industry and Information Technology Jin Zhuanglong said at the forum on Monday. — Reuters

## Oil benchmark Brent nears \$86 on heightened supply concerns



A state controlled oil refinery Lotos is pictured in Gdansk, Poland. — Reuters

LONDON: Oil benchmark Brent hovered close to \$86 a barrel on Monday as hostilities intensified between Russia and Ukraine and in the Middle East.

Brent crude futures climbed 40 cents to \$85.32 a barrel by 1124 GMT while US crude futures also gained 40 cents to \$81.12. Both benchmarks have risen steadily this year, with Brent up nearly 11 per cent and WTI about 12.5 per cent by Friday's close.

The upward trajectory is linked to belief that a sticky recession is being fought off, with interest rates in major economies expected to fall by the summer, while the Opec+ group of oil producers has extended supply curbs into the second quarter.

Concerns over global oil supply are being heightened, meanwhile, by attacks on Russian energy facilities and Ukrainian energy infrastructure as well as fading hopes of a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict, said Hiroyuki Kikukawa, president of NS Trading.

Another Russian oil refinery had half of its capacity knocked out in a drone attack over the weekend. — Reuters

## EU probes US giants Apple, Google and Meta under new digital law

BRUSSELS: The EU on Monday hit Apple, Google parent Alphabet and Meta with the first ever probes under a mammoth digital law, which could lead to big fines against the US giants.

The European Commission, the EU's antitrust regulator, announced that it "suspects that the measures put in place by these gatekeepers fall short of effective compliance of their obligations under the DMA" — the bloc's Digital Markets Act.

Since March 7, six of the world's biggest tech companies — Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, TikTok owner ByteDance, Meta and Microsoft — have had to comply with the EU's landmark DMA after being named so-called "gatekeepers".

The DMA has lofty goals of creating a fairer digital space by curbing how the biggest companies act online, including ensuring they give users more choice. Senior officials have acknowledged that changes are already taking place, but suggested that they did not go far enough.

"We are not convinced that the solutions by Alphabet, Apple and Meta respect their obligations for a fairer and more open digital space for European citizens and



European Commissioner for Internal Market Thierry Breton holds a press conference in Brussels, Belgium. — Reuters

businesses," said the EU's internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton.

Under the new rules, the commission can impose fines of up to 10 per cent of a company's total global turnover. This can rise to up to 20 per cent for repeat offenders.

In extreme circumstances, the EU has the power to break up companies.

Unlike the EU's traditional rules that saw probes last for years, the DMA demands regulators act fast and complete any investigation within 12

months of its start.

Monday's probes are focused on whether Alphabet's Google Play and Apple's App Store are allowing app developers to show consumers offers, free of charge, outside of those app marketplaces.

"The commission is concerned that Alphabet's and Apple's measures may not be fully compliant as they impose various restrictions and limitations," it said in a statement.

Alphabet is also under suspicion over whether Google search results favour its own

services — Google Shopping, Google Flights and Google Hotels — over rivals.

The EU slapped a whopping 2.4-billion-euro (\$2.6 billion) fine on Google in 2017 over similar claims of self-preferencing.

Apple is also under the spotlight over whether it allows users to easily uninstall apps on its iOS operating system and the design of the web browser choice screen.

Under the DMA, the gatekeepers must offer choice screens for web browsers and search engines in a bid to level the playing field and give users more options.

Meta faces more problems over its ad-free subscriptions model, which has already been targeted by three complaints since it launched in November.

The commission fears the "binary choice" for EU users "may not provide a real alternative in case users do not consent, thereby not achieving the objective of preventing the accumulation of personal data by gatekeepers".

Meta has faced an avalanche of legal problems in the EU over its data processing, including a 1.2 billion-euro fine last year for data privacy breaches. — AFP

## Bayanat portal in shortlist for WSIS Prize 2024

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The portal was created to enhance transparency and efficiency in the financial markets which reflect on enhancing the confidence of market participants inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman beside enhancing the legislative and technological infrastructure related to disclosure processes of the issuers of securities and insurance companies and brokers to cope with the objects of Oman Vision 2040 with regard to digital transformation.

XBRL is a digital portal for disclosure of both financial and non-financial information and data of issuers of securities which would reflect positively on the standards of transparency and fairness required in the stock markets and consequently enhancing the confidence of participants.

XBRL portal provides safe and fast technology for disclosure reports as it standardises the concepts of financial information and disclosure elements for easy access by all the parties to furnish accurate, reliable and timely financial information providing the ability to conduct the required comparison, studies and analysis in an efficient electronic way.

# Importance of forming strategic partnerships



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is Knowledge Oman Founder knowledgeoman.com

Becoming innovative, expanding into different and bigger markets, increasing market and share value while remaining agile is not something that a traditional business model can simply do today, no thanks to the complexity and rapid technological advancement that continues to change, evolve and revolve.

In order for organisations to grow, succeed and/or remain even relevant in this dynamically driven world today, the need to embark into strategic partnership with the like-minded individuals and organisations is paramount. My article today will shed light

and focus on the importance of forming strategic partnership for organisation's necessary growth, success and sustainability.

What does strategic partnership really mean anyways, and what does it entail?

Think of it as two or more, individuals and/or organisations, that form an agreement to help each other reach a desired goal that has tangible value to their selves and intended target (customer per se).

Help in the sense of sharing resources, risks, decisions and ultimate rewards emanating from the partnership. Goal in terms of market expansion, increase and retain of customer base, more revenue and the likes.

Growing, succeeding and sustaining is what most organisations strive for, and of course, strategic partnership plays a vital role in achieving this desired goal.

There are a number of organisations that have entered into fruitful strategic partnership over the years that demonstrate how industries collaborate to achieve shared goal, enhance offerings, and ultimately create value for their customers, be it



Strategic partnership plays a vital role in achieving desired goal.

in same or newer markets and industry all together.

International examples include Apple and Nike, Walmart and FedEx, and McDonald's and Coca-Cola to name a few.

Local examples that I can share include full-fledge telecom operators e.g. Omantel forming partnership with Huawei, so as Ooredoo forming partnership with SAP, and the recent announcement of community initiatives forming strategic partnership with like-minded industries, for the sake of community engagements.

Let me start with details of some of the international strategic

partnerships.

Apple, being a multinational technology company, and Nike, an athletic footwear and apparel company, collaborated to create Nike+ platform which integrated Nike's fitness tracking technology with Apple's iOS devices, resulting in products that allow users to track their workouts, set fitness goals and share progress with friends and family.

Walmart, another multinational retail company that operates a chain of hypermarkets discount department and grocery stores, and FedEx, a multinational company focused

on transportation business, have also collaborated to offer convenient package pickup and drop-off services, that resulted in providing Walmart customers with ultimately enhanced shopping experience, thanks to the shipping and receiving packages via FedEx's transportation services.

Lastly, McDonald's, the multinational fast food chain, and Coca Cola, another multinational company that produces carbonated soft drinks, continue to have strategic partnership where you as a customer can get Coca Cola products while you have McDonald's meals.

As for details on some of the local strategic partnerships, Omantel recently launched national cloud in cooperation with Huawei, providing its customers with global practices in the field of ensuring data security (via Huawei's experience), while ensuring data is stored in the country.

Likewise, Ooredoo has partner with SAP (one of the largest provider of enterprise application software), to enable complete digital business transformation and consolidation of Enterprise

Resource Planning (ERP) solutions.

Last week, as Knowledge Oman signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Techno Plastic Industry SAOC, specialising in the manufacturing of plastic piping solutions, to collaborate on community engagement and social responsibility, as part of its commitment to further strengthen the community engagement through strategic partnerships.

The value of strategic partnership cannot be underestimated today — especially for organisations that seek to increase top-line revenue (sales) for their survival, and also secure their bottom-line (profits) for their supportive shareholders.

Working solo and expecting to compete in a hungry and evolving markets, where consumers are also not just aware but are also demanding quality services, is not something that can be taken lightly (as far as growth, success and sustainability is concerned).

Organisations need to keep an eye open and continuously seek for better ways to operate and collaborate if they wish to survive.

Until we catch up again next week, stay positive.

## China and foreign CEOs dance ever trickier tango



CHAN KA SING

The author is China columnist for Reuters Breakingviews.

Beijing is awash with dance partners this week as CEOs of 100 or so multinational giants such as Apple and AMD gathered for the two-day China Development Forum. It's being held, though, as both sides try out different moves: foreign firms are looking to de-risk from China, whereas the government is pressing ahead with phasing out some overseas technology.

That makes the increasingly uneasy relationship between the two sides primed for missteps.

Created in 2000 just before the People's Republic became a member of the WTO, the Forum is committed to “engaging with the world for common prosperity”. That ought to be music to a global audience's ears.

And in his opening speech this year Chinese Premier Li Qiang hummed the right notes, reiterating his administration's efforts to attract foreign investors and welcome companies from all countries to deepen their foothold in China's \$18 trillion economy.

A shaky economic recovery and escalating geopolitical tensions are taking a toll,

though. Foreign direct investment fell by a fifth in the first two months of the year, worse than the 8% decline in the whole of 2023.

That's not to say global giants are ready to turn their back on the world's second-largest economy. Apple CEO Tim Cook said last week that no supply chain is as critical to the \$2.7 trillion company as China's.

Sure, the iPhone maker is shifting some of its manufacturing contracts elsewhere, but more than 75% of its 200 major suppliers still maintain production in the country.

Chinese leaders, meanwhile, seem keen to engage directly with the West's business elite. *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Cook, HSBC's Noel Quinn and others are due to dine with Xi Jinping this week, months after China's leader broke bread with corporate titans on a visit to San Francisco.

More hazards are appearing on the dance floor, though. Washington has for several years been spearheading a campaign to exclude Chinese technology firms like Huawei and SMIC from global networks, and to prevent the country getting hold of the most advanced semiconductors.

Beijing wants to delete US products from its turf, too; for instance, that AMD and Intel microprocessors are now being phased out from government computers and servers.

It may only take two to tango. But the more noise and distractions there are, the greater the chance that the dancers trip up. — **Reuters**



MARIEJO RAMOS

The author is an inclusive economies correspondent based in Manila, Philippines.

As the Philippines works to ramp up mining to meet global demand for metals crucial to the green energy transition, environmental groups are demanding strict limits to protect nature and Indigenous lands.

The Philippines has the world's fourth-largest copper reserves, fifth-biggest nickel deposits and is also rich in cobalt - all of which have important uses in clean energy technologies, from lithium-ion batteries for electric vehicles (EVs) to solar panels.

Mineral requirements for renewable energy technologies must be quadrupled by 2040 to reach the goals of the Paris Agreement, and the World Bank estimates a 500% increase in the demand for transition minerals.

That is encouraging mineral-rich countries like the Philippines, where mining is relatively undeveloped and only accounts for 1% of gross domestic product (GDP), to boost their production of so-called critical minerals.

But with nearly two-thirds of the Philippines' mineral reserves lying on Indigenous lands, environmental and rights campaigners are demanding new legislation to limit mining activity to the minimum needed for the green energy switch.

“Mining is a necessary evil in our civilisation and daily life. But



An open-pit gold-copper mining area is pictured in Barangay Didipio, Kasibu in Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines. – AFP

we believe in mining anchored on just minerals transition, or mining what is absolutely necessary and sourcing them responsibly,” said Maya Quirino, advocacy coordinator at the Legal Rights and Natural Resources Centre (LRC), a local nonprofit that works for Indigenous and environmental rights.

“For example, gold is not essential to the energy transition,” she told Context.

Quirino's organisation is leading calls for a new mining law that would only permit the “indispensable extraction” of critical minerals.

It also seeks to prohibit destructive open-pit mining, or mining in sensitive ecosystems, and hike taxes on the companies to give great benefits to local communities.

A draft bill filed by lawmakers and supported by the LRC in 2021 is still pending in Congress, but its backers are working to gain more support this year from legislators.

**JUST TRANSITION?**

Globally, the area covered by mines has doubled over the past three years, driven by demand for critical minerals, according to a 2023 study by LRC. In the

Philippines, the group says, that has exacerbated mining's negative impacts on people and the environment — whether by depleting water supplies or forcing Indigenous peoples to move elsewhere.

Mining projects in the Southeast Asian country have often prompted protests by Indigenous people and disputes over their land rights, and the impact of mines on the environment, including water supplies.

Recent examples include the Tampakan and Didipio gold and copper mines in South Cotabato and Nueva Vizcaya provinces, where local communities have protested over pollution and water shortages they blame on the mines. “Since 2017, we could no longer farm on my father's land because it dried up.

Many farmlands here no longer function due to irrigation issues,” said Myrna Duyan, a member of the Tuwali indigenous group who lives near the Australian-owned open-pit Didipio mine.

Duyan said some Indigenous people had been displaced by the mining, while others said it had split the community between those opposed to the mine and

those who saw it as a welcome economic boost.

Despite the perceived economic benefits, “most of the taxes from mining goes to the national government and not to the local communities”, said Quirino, whose group says the royalties paid by mining companies should be hiked.

Under current laws, miners pay 4% in excise tax to the state and 1% in royalties to Indigenous communities.

While Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has vowed to overhaul the industry's tax regime, the proposed minerals management bill is not among his priority measures and he has not commented publicly on campaigners' wider demands.

The bill, which seeks to raise the current excise tax and royalties to 10% each, also seeks heavier fines on individuals and corporations for human rights and environmental harms.

“If we don't have a framework anticipating the huge demand for minerals, we will only open the country to mining that only promises money but without a nuanced approach to our resources,” said Quirino.

— **Reuters**

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Observer

# HADITH

GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Allah's Messenger said, "When the month of Ramadhan starts, the gates of the heaven are opened and the gates of Hell are closed and the devils are chained."

# FATWA



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

Does blood donation  
nullify someone's fasting?

No, it does not.

# QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

And donate from what  
We have provided for  
you before death comes  
to one of you, and you  
cry, "My Lord! If only You  
delayed me for a short  
while, I would give in  
charity and be one of the  
righteous."



Surah Al-Munafiqun

# Ramadhan

TUESDAY | MARCH 26, 2024 | RAMADHAN 15, 1445 AH

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## PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION CHRONICLES OMAN'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE AGES

RUQAYA AL KINDI

If you have the opportunity to visit the Omani Society of Arts in Ghala, do not miss the classic cameras exhibition. The expo takes you on a journey about the development of the camera industry and the art of photography through the ages. The exhibition takes you back many years, where you will learn about the unique and rare collection of classic cameras with their various technologies since 1933.

"The exhibition includes a variety of old cameras and historical photos, allowing visitors to see the designs and performance of cameras in an era where history, art, and technology combine to tell you a distinctive story through the lenses of the beautiful time," says Abdulrahman al Adawi, head of

the association's member affairs department and supervisor of the exhibition.

The 'Photography Heritage' exhibition focuses on displaying the possessions of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, where many old and rare cameras as well as several rare photographs of the late Sultan are displayed. These collectibles and photographs are considered unique treasures that express His Majesty's interest in history, culture, arts, and photography. In the exhibition halls, Abdullah introduces you to many classic cameras including two cameras that belong to photographer Taghlib al Barwani who has immortalised the images of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, in the seventies era.

Taghlib's captures tell many stories that express the late



Sultan's close relationship with his loving and devoted people.

The exhibition also displays three cameras that belong to the late Sultan, which are distinguished by high technology in that period. "The late Sultan was a lover of photography. He owned many cameras from different categories and techniques and practiced photography in some of his spare time. Photographer Taghlib al Barwani witnessed many moments in which the late Sultan directed photographers

to use specific photography equipment, and this guidance demonstrated his understanding of this art," Al Adawi noted.

As Abdullah pointed out, the Royal Decree established the Omani Society of Photography on July 9, 2012. It was previously known as the Photography Club and its affiliation transferred to the Diwan of Royal Court, out of His Majesty's keenness to make photography a significant art.

In the section on Taghlib al Barwani, the visitor learns



more about the first Omani photographer specialised in covering royal tours, national events, and official visits. "Al Barwani was born in 1942 AD and holds a diploma in photography and cinematography from the United Kingdom. He also went through many practical experiences in Gulf countries such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait," Al Adawi noted. Visitors will have a lot of fun in the photography studio, where they will have the opportunity to experience the

process of photography using old cameras to explore the challenges and techniques used in the past.

Sayyid Said al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, led the opening ceremony of the exhibition. Al Busaidy expressed his great interest in the exhibition as it carries a long artistic and photographic legacy and encourages everybody to visit the exhibition. The exhibition is on until the end of Ramadhan.

## HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF MUSLIM FAITH

### 630 Non-violent conquest of Mecca

The 630 Non-violent conquest of Mecca refers to Prophet Muhammad's peaceful return to Mecca after years of exile. This event marked the triumph of Islam's message of peace and forgiveness over violence. It holds great significance for Muslims as it symbolises mercy, reconciliation and the establishment of Islamic principles without bloodshed.

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

### SHOW COMPASSION AND GENEROSITY

Ramadhan emphasises acts of charity and kindness. Giving to those in need, whether through Zakat (obligatory charity) or Sadaqah (voluntary charity), is highly encouraged during this month. Offering food to the less fortunate, donating to charitable organisations, or simply helping someone in need fosters a sense of community and empathy.

## RAMADHAN AROUND THE WORLD

### ALGERIA



Islam was introduced to Algeria in the 7th century through Arab invasions. Over time, it became the dominant religion, blending with local Berber cultures. Algeria experienced periods of Islamic rule, including the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, followed by the Fatimid and Almohad dynasties.

The Ottoman Empire later ruled Algeria until French colonisation in the 19th century. After a protracted independence struggle, Algeria gained independence in 1962.

Today, Islam remains the predominant religion, with over 99 per cent of Algerians identifying as Muslims. The country's population is around 45 million.

During Ramadhan's Iftar, one of the most interesting dishes served in Algeria is "Chorba Frik," a hearty soup made with cracked wheat, meat, vegetables and aromatic spices, symbolising communal gatherings and sharing during the holy month.

## RAMADHAN TRIVIA HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE HOLY MONTH

WHICH DUA' IS ENCOURAGED TO BE SAID ON LAYLATU'LQADR?



# Ramadhan Football Leagues Bring Together Youth Across Oman



AHMED AL KAABI  
PHOTO BY ABDUL WAHID AL HAMDANI

The month of Ramadhan is an opportunity to enjoy sports, most notably football, as most of the Sultanate of Oman's governorates organise mini-leagues that witness great turnout from both practitioners and followers.

These matches, which are usually held after the Taraweeh prayer, are characterised by a wonderful youth atmosphere that is dominated by the spirit of tolerance, brotherhood and high sportsmanship. They are also interspersed with creative artistic football touches that are appreciated by the followers and the public who follow these matches.

As soon as Ramadhan comes, football lovers rush to prepare the fields that will host the competitions and the supplies needed to play football.

These leagues reflect the values embodied in this month of brotherhood, love, and tolerance, and they are not without friendly skirmishes and a desire to win.

The simplicity of the rules of these leagues allows young people and children who are football enthusiasts to showcase their skills and compete



with teams from other neighbourhoods, and why not attract the attention of those looking for football talents.

Organising sports competitions in Ramadhan, despite their competitive nature, is aimed at creating an atmosphere of communication and acquaintance that is not limited to young people from one area, but extends to different areas. As for Ahmed, the retired football fanatic, he saw that these leagues, which are now held in modern neighbourhood courts, open the door for all children and youth to practice their hobbies, which saves them from a set of practices that may negatively affect their



academic career or lead them to deviance. Yousef al Abri said teams from different regions come together during this month in an atmosphere of competition and acquaintance through playing football. He emphasises that many players who have become stars of Omani football have emerged in the Ramadhan tournaments. He pointed out that currently, the tournaments are an opportunity for new talents to express themselves. He added that a festive atmosphere often accompanies these competitions from the audience who come to enjoy and watch their friends play football. Al Abri confirms

that he has loved playing in Ramadhan tournaments since childhood because they used to bring him together with childhood friends and the most prominent players in the neighbourhood, and he also acquired his talent from playing football in these tournaments, which were the reason for his great stardom.

These mini-leagues have become a prominent place and form a special tradition during each Ramadhan, which young people seize to enjoy the hours of fasting throughout this great month and to maintain physical fitness.

FOOD

# How a Nutrition Expert Really Eats



**Maya Vadiveloo** spends most weekdays studying food. As a dietitian and associate professor of nutrition at the University of Rhode Island, she pores over large data sets to help people make healthier decisions at the grocery store.

But at night, when she gets home from work, perfect nutrition is not top of mind.

"I obviously spend quite a bit of time thinking about food," she said, but as a single parent of an 8-year-old daughter, she tries to model balance and pleasure rather than perfection and rigidity.

Here are seven tips she shared for maintaining that balance, and for eating well when you don't have a lot of time.

Make veggies your 'lazy' snack.

Vadiveloo always keeps carrots, cucumber slices or celery sticks on hand for a quick snack. That helps her meet her goal of eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day, and it means the easiest choice is a healthy one.

"It's amazing how satisfied I can be by just having a bag of baby carrots at my desk," she said.

Focus on the perimeter of the grocery store.

Most supermarkets place fresh, whole foods such as fruits and vegetables, dairy products, meat and fish on the outside edges, with processed and packaged foods in the centre aisles.

Vadiveloo spends the most time in the produce section, comparing prices and selecting in-season fruits and vegetables to have on hand for smoothies, lunches, snacks and dinner sides. She rounds that out with a stop at the freezer case, where she picks up a few versatile and budget-friendly favourites such as frozen broccoli, green beans, edamame, corn and berries.

Read the nutrition labels on packaged foods.



Vadiveloo tends to buy the same kinds of yogurt, tofu and whole-wheat bread each week. But when she's picking up an unfamiliar brand, she scans the nutrition labels.

With breads and breakfast cereals, for example, she looks for those that list a whole grain as the first ingredient and have at least 3 grammes of fibre and less than 5 grammes of sugar per serving. She tries to stay below the same sugar level when buying flavoured yogurt for her daughter — and she often chooses unsweetened yogurt and adds her own honey and vanilla at home.

For canned soups and jarred sauces, which can be quite high in salt, she chooses those that are lower in sodium.

Get creative with smoothies.

Smoothies aren't just for breakfast, and they're not just about fruit. They can be a satisfying meal with protein, healthy fats, vitamins and minerals. And unlike juices, they include all the fibre found in the fruits and vegetables that you toss into the blender.

One of Vadiveloo's favourite lunches is a smoothie made

with frozen banana and mango, fresh spinach or kale, kefir, almond or peanut butter, chia seeds, rolled oats, and milk or almond milk. It's quick, delicious and incorporates all of the food groups.

Explore your food cravings.

When she finds herself wanting a treat, Vadiveloo takes a moment to ask herself what exactly she's hankering for in that moment. Is she genuinely hungry? If the answer is yes, she starts with a nourishing snack such as trail mix, yogurt, a piece of fruit or baby carrots.

If she's still craving something more, she asks herself: Do I want something sweet, salty or cold? She has found that identifying the specific craving and fulfilling it is more effective than trying to stave it off or substituting something else that isn't quite what she wanted.

Meal prep on the weekend.

The weekend is when she

has time to slowly simmer large batches of her favourite comfort foods: chicken stock from leftover bones, tomato sauce, chili, vegetable soup.

Cooking stock from scratch means it'll have less sodium and more flavor than packaged broth or bouillon cubes. And Vadiveloo freezes her stock, sauces and soups into smaller portions that can be used in the weeks or months ahead.

A big pot of beans, seasoned just the way she likes them, can also be a quick and nutritious foundation for meals in the coming week: tacos one day, a burrito bowl the next.

Don't deprive yourself of foods you love.

Vadiveloo is a self-described "connoisseur" of soft pretzels — studded with salt and dipped in gooey melted cheese — which she'll sometimes order as a main dish when she's out. "It's not a balanced meal," she said, but it's something she enjoys occasionally without a smidgen of guilt.

Depriving yourself of favourite foods can backfire, research suggests, because it can make you crave them more, leading to overeating.

"Sometimes by merely allowing something, it makes it easier to adhere to a healthier pattern," she said. — **NYT**



## Archaeologists Recover Aztec Codices of San Andrés Tetepilco



**ARCHAEOLOGISTS FROM THE** National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) have announced the recovery of the Codices of San Andrés Tetepilco.

The three codices date from the late 16th to early 17th century and are believed to be a continuation of the Boturini Codex.

The codices depicts a transition from pre-Hispanic Mexico to the arrival of the Spanish, the latter represented with the image of Hernán Cortés who appears dressed like a Roman centurion. Another scene corresponds to the reign of Izcóatl, the fourth king of Tenochtitlan, and the founder of the Aztec Empire.

According to a press statement, the collection was in private ownership and has been acquired for the National Library of Anthropology and History (BNAH).

Following confirmation of authenticity by experts, INAH, in collaboration with various companies and philanthropists raised 9.5 million pesos (237,115.00 Pound sterling) for the purchase.

A closer examination has revealed that the codices were made on amate, a type of bark paper, with an applied layer of gesso and cochineal extract. Inks used to paint the various scenes come from plants, charcoal, indigo, and different shades of ochre. — **ONA**

## Lung Disease Raises Heart Risk: Study



**A RECENT STUDY** conducted by researchers at the University of Birmingham has found that having a lung disease may increase the likelihood of developing heart conditions, irrespective of other risk factors like smoking or age.

The study, which involved over 220 patients with Alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency (AATD), a rare genetic condition causing lung disease akin to Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), was published in the Orphanet Journal of Rare Diseases.

AATD causes the body to make low levels of a protein that protects the lungs. The affected individuals may develop symptoms including chronic cough, shortness of breath, and wheezing.

Despite lower conventional risk factors, AATD patients showed higher vascular stiffness, with 45 per cent exhibiting conflicting risk scores.

Surprisingly, 12.7 per cent developed cardiovascular disease within four years. Conversely, COPD and control group participants had similar risk scores.

Blood tests revealed a link between elevated levels of the enzyme Proteinase 3, associated with lung damage, and increased vascular stiffness, suggesting a direct pathway to heart disease.

Researchers propose Proteinase 3 inhibitors as a potential therapy to prevent cardiovascular issues, emphasizing its dual impact on lung and heart diseases.— **ONA**