

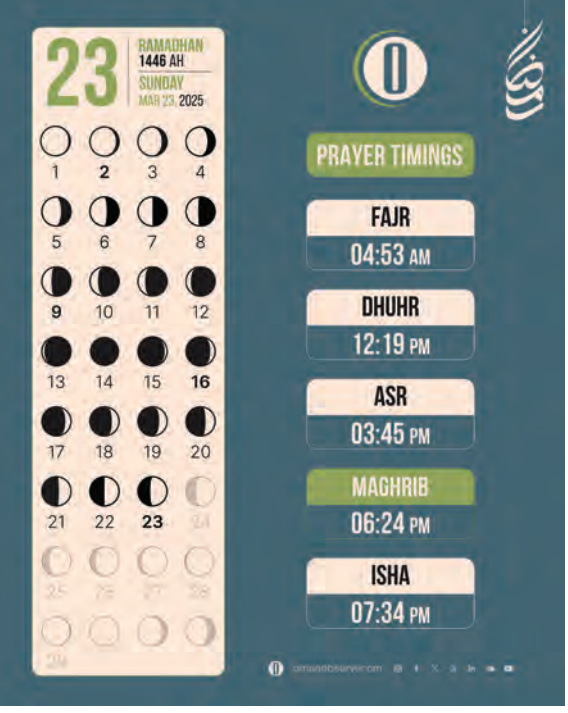
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23
RAMADHAN
1446 AH
SUNDAY
MARCH 23, 2025



PRAYER TIMINGS			
FAJR 04:53 AM			
DHUHR 12:19 PM			
ASR 03:45 PM			
MAGHRIB 06:24 PM			
ISHA 07:34 PM			

INBRIEF

HM GREET'S IRANIAN, PAKISTANI LEADERS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the Iranian New Year (Nowruz). His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to President Pezeshkian wishing him good health and happiness and the friendly Iranian people further progress and prosperity.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik also sent a cable of greetings to President Asif Ali Zardari of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the occasion of his country's National Day. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Zardari and the friendly Pakistani people. — ONA

OMAN CONTINUES ITS FIRM SUPPORT TO THE ARAB LEAGUE



ABDULLAH BIN NASSER AL RAHBI

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, along with the Arab countries, celebrates the 80th anniversary of the founding of the League of Arab States. Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League, affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman believes in the importance of the Arab League as a unifying framework for Arab countries and is keen to support its role and enhance its working mechanisms to be more capable of facing regional and international challenges. Al Rahbi noted that achieving food security, economic integration and other shared Arab goals requires clear political will from Arab countries as well as more effective implementation mechanisms within the Arab League. — ONA

OMAN JOINS THE WORLD IN MARKING EARTH HOUR



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman alongside other world countries is marking Earth Hour, which takes place on March 22nd each year. This year the celebration is held under the theme 'Together for the Biggest Hour for Earth'. The event is part of efforts aimed to increase environmental awareness, confront the challenges of global warming and climate change and encourage individuals, communities, and institutions to promote environmental sustainability and rationalise energy.

ISRAEL HITS HEZBOLLAH TARGETS

ISRAEL ON SATURDAY said it launched fresh attacks on Hezbollah, hours after intercepting three missiles fired from Lebanon, as a fragile ceasefire appeared on the brink of collapse.

The renewed shelling is the heaviest exchange of fire since a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah took effect in November.

"In response to the launching of rockets towards Israel this morning, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Israel Katz have instructed the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] to act with force against dozens of terrorist targets in Lebanon," said a statement from Netanyahu's office.

The IDF said it "struck dozens of Hezbollah rocket launchers and a command centre from which Hezbollah terrorists were operating in southern Lebanon."

The attacks came after the IDF said it intercepted three projectiles launched from Lebanon at the northern Israeli border town of Metula, with no injuries or damage reported.

Hezbollah has denied any involvement in the rocket fire directed towards Israel earlier on Saturday. "The Israeli enemy's claims are merely pretexts to justify its ongoing aggression against Lebanon, which has not stopped since the announcement of the ceasefire," it said in a statement released after Israel launched fresh attacks on Hezbollah targets in retaliation for three missiles fired from Lebanon.

Hezbollah said it remains committed to the ceasefire deal with Israel reached in November and "stands behind the Lebanese state" in addressing what the group described as a serious Israeli escalation against Lebanon.

Residents in the targeted areas reported hearing loud explosions due to the shelling. In a statement posted on X, the Israeli



Smoke rises from Taibeh, following Israeli strikes in response to cross-border rocket fire. — Reuters

military said Chief of the General Staff Eyal Zamir had conducted a "situational assessment" and that Israel would "respond severely to the morning's attack." "The State of Lebanon bears responsibility for

upholding the[ceasefire] agreement," it said. The fighting threatens to break the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, which has been in place for nearly four months. — DPA

World Happiness Report: Oman ranks 4th in the Arab World

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MARCH 22

The World Happiness Report for 2025 has been released and the Sultanate of Oman has been ranked 52nd with a score of 6.147 out of 10, placing it fourth in the Arab World. The report is based on a three-year average of each population's assessment of their quality of life.

The Sultanate of Oman's ranking surpasses several major economies, including Japan (55), Korea (58), Bahrain (59), Malaysia (64), Türkiye (94), India (118) and Egypt (135).

In the Arab world, GCC neighbours

UAE (21) holds the top spot, followed by Kuwait (30) in second place and Saudi Arabia (32) in third. Bahrain, Libya, Algeria and Iraq follow in the rankings.

The annual survey, compiled by Gallup, ranks 147 nations based on life satisfaction from 2022-2024. Finland retains its top spot for the eighth consecutive year, with an average score of 7.736.

Mexico and Costa Rica have entered the top 10, with the US ranking 24th. Experts from economics, psychology and sociology aim to explain the variations across countries and over



Family size plays a role in life satisfaction, with couples living with children or extended family members reporting higher levels of happiness.

time using factors such as GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom, generosity and perceptions of corruption. These factors help to explain the differences across nations, while the rankings themselves are solely based on individuals' responses when asked to rate their own lives.

The report highlights that people tend to underestimate the kindness in their communities, as the return rate of lost wallets is higher than expected. Benevolent acts have increased by 10% from 2017-19 to 2024, across all generations and most global regions, despite a return

towards pre-Covid levels.

There are significant differences in meal-sharing practices worldwide, with some countries having high rates of shared meals while others have meals alone. Sharing meals greatly impacts subjective well-being, similar to income and employment status. Those who share more meals report higher life satisfaction and positive emotions, regardless of age, gender, country, culture, or region.

Family size also plays a role in life satisfaction, with couples living with children or extended family members reporting higher levels of happiness.



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SHORT TAKES



Malallah bin Mahmoud al Balushi, Oman's Ambassador to Hungary, presenting his credentials to Maia Sandu, President of Moldova

CREDENTIALS PRESENTED TO MOLDOVAN PRESIDENT

CHISINAU: President Maia Sandu of the Republic of Moldova received Malallah bin Mahmoud al Balushi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Hungary, as he presented his credentials as the non-resident Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Moldova.

During the meeting in Chisinau, Ambassador Al Balushi conveyed the warm greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Sandu, expressing hopes for her continued health and happiness, as well as progress and prosperity for the Moldovan people.

In response, President Sandu extended her greetings and well wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the people of Oman, wishing them continued success and advancement under His Majesty's wise leadership.

President Sandu welcomed Ambassador Al Balushi and wished him success in his diplomatic mission, expressing optimism for the strengthening and growth of bilateral relations between Oman and Moldova. — ONA



Announcement
(1/2025)

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion announces the cessation of receiving paper applications for opening Sanad Services Center.

Applications will be submitted electronically once the announcement is made to reopen the application process.

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Sultanate of Oman
سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التجارة والصناعة وترويج الاستثمار
Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion



Oman enhances vet waste management with Beah

IN a strategic move to enhance environmental sustainability and ensure the safe management of hazardous waste, Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (Beah) has signed an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. The agreement focuses on the collection, transportation and treatment of healthcare waste generated by government veterinary clinics affiliated with the ministry.

The agreement was signed by Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture and Jassim bin Mohammed al Wahaibi, General Manager of Healthcare Waste Management at Beah. The collaboration aligns with national efforts to establish a more efficient and environmentally responsible waste management system, particularly for veterinary clinics handling biohazardous materials.

Under this agreement, Beah will implement advanced waste management



Beah signs agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

solutions to handle veterinary healthcare waste in compliance with the highest approved environmental and safety standards. The initiative is expected to reduce ecological risks and enhance public health by ensuring the proper disposal of hazardous materials.

Jassim al Wahaibi emphasised that this

agreement reinforces Beah's commitment to providing integrated waste management solutions. He noted that the company remains dedicated to adopting cutting-edge technologies and best practices to manage healthcare waste efficiently, in alignment with global environmental standards.

Dr Al Bakri highlighted the Ministry's commitment to implementing sustainable environmental practices within the veterinary sector. He stressed that this partnership would play a crucial role in protecting human and animal health while ensuring the highest levels of operational efficiency in veterinary services across the Sultanate of Oman.

This agreement represents a significant step forward in Oman's ongoing efforts to achieve environmental sustainability and aligns with the nation's Oman Vision 2040 goals. Through this collaboration, the country continues to prioritise responsible waste management strategies that benefit both the environment and public health.

— ONA

OMAN CELEBRATES WORLD WATER DAY THEMED 'PRESERVING GLACIERS'

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is celebrating the World Water Day, which falls on March 22 every year, under the theme: 'Preserving Glaciers.'

Zahir bin Khalid al Sulaimani, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Water Association, emphasised the importance of preserving global water resources, as this year's theme, 'Preserving Glaciers,' reflects the growing challenges facing the ecosystem due to climate change and melting ice.

He explains that glaciers are natural reservoirs of fresh water and play a key role in feeding rivers and lakes, directly impacting global water security. He noted that climate



Oman attaches great importance to environmental and water sustainability issues

change and rising temperatures are accelerating the melting of glaciers, posing a threat to water supplies and increasing the risk of natural disasters such as floods and sea level rise.

He stressed that Oman, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, attaches great importance to environmental and water sustainability issues and supports international efforts aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change and preserving water resources for future generations.

He pointed out that the Oman Water Association continues its efforts to raise awareness about the importance of water sustainability, promote scientific research in water management; and support national and international initiatives aimed at protecting natural resources.

— ONA

Nizwa hosts 'Taaruf' event to promote culture, Islamic values

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, MARCH 22

The Directorate of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Al Dakhiliyah, represented by the Department of Introduction to Islam and Cultural Exchange and the Women's Education and Guidance Centre, in partnership with Madayn Nizwa, hosted the third edition of 'Taaruf' event at the Intercity Hotel in Nizwa. This initiative aimed to introduce non-Muslim expatriates to Omani culture and the core values of Islam.

Held under the auspices of Dr Khalaf bin Salem al Ishaqi, a member of the State Council, the event included a variety of activities such as a lecture on 'Modesty in Omani Society' by Hamad bin Salem al Dhaheri, a volunteer at the Grand Mosque's Islamic Information Centre. The talk highlighted modesty as a fundamental Islamic value promoting respect, kindness and moral integrity.

One of the highlights of the event was the personal stories shared by new Muslims, recounting their journeys to Islam and the profound impact it had on their lives. 18 individuals — 17 women and one man — embraced Islam, citing the kindness and hospitality of Omanis as key influences.

The programme also featured an interactive session on the Quran's



The initiative aims to introduce non-Muslim expatriates to Omani culture and the core values of Islam

universality, a cultural quiz and a communal Iftar, giving participants a firsthand experience of the unity in Muslim prayer and fasting traditions.

Saad bin Suleiman al Kindi, Head of the Islamic Awareness and Cultural Exchange Department, emphasised that such events foster interfaith understanding and showcase Oman's longstanding tradition of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. He also highlighted Oman's historical role in spreading Islam through dialogue rather than conflict, positioning the country as an ideal venue for such initiatives.

Through 'Taaruf', Oman continues to promote cultural exchange, religious harmony and the values of Ramadhan, compassion, generosity and unity.

SHORTTAKES



The contest saw inspiring young minds engage with the Holy Quran

240 TAKE PART IN BURAIMI RAMADHAN QURAN CONTEST

AL BURAIMI: The 12th Ramadhan Holy Quran Competition concluded in the Wilayat of Al Buraimi, marking another successful year of inspiring young minds to engage with the Holy Quran. Organised under the supervision of the Awqaf and Religious Affairs Department in Al Buraimi Governorate, the competition witnessed the participation of 240 contestants, both male and female, who competed across four levels.

To honour their dedication and achievements, the top five winners from each level were recognised, reinforcing the importance of Quran memorisation and understanding. The competition was held at Al Awqaf School for girls and Al Qasimi Mosque for boys, ensuring a structured and supportive environment for participants. — ONA



FARM EMPOWERS STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

SHINAS: The Al Wafa Centre in the Wilayat of Shinas, Al Batinah North Governorate, has launched an innovative agricultural reserve managed by students with disabilities. This initiative empowers them with essential agricultural skills, fostering self-reliance and enhancing their practical knowledge. The project aligns with the Ministry of Social Development’s ongoing efforts to rehabilitate and integrate persons with disabilities into productive sectors.

Khalid bin Ismail al Balushi, the reserve’s supervisor, stated that the project trains students in various agricultural stages, from planting seeds to harvesting, using modern techniques such as drip irrigation and organic fertilisers.

The farm produces a diverse range of vegetables and fruits, tailored to seasonal cycles, ensuring high-quality yields. Beyond agriculture, it serves as an interactive learning space, helping students develop essential skills while promoting their active participation in society. — ONA

Campaign launched to combat food waste

KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

A major initiative to reduce food waste has been launched in Muscat Governorate, addressing the growing concerns over significant food waste, especially after Iftar and Suhoor gatherings during the holy month of Ramadhan.

Titled ‘Take What You Need,’ this multilingual awareness campaign aims to highlight the importance of preserving food and curbing excess waste. It encourages individuals to prepare or purchase only the amount of food they need, aiming to reduce the food discarded into landfills.

“The ‘Take What You Need’ campaign responds to the increasing food waste, particularly during Ramadhan. Large quantities of food, which are hard to quantify, often end up in trash or landfills,” said a spokesperson from Muscat Municipality.

The initiative points out the environmental and community impacts of food waste, including the foul odors that develop as food decomposes and the additional strain it places on sanitation workers. The core messages of the campaign are focused on fostering gratitude, sharing with the needy, reducing waste and promoting responsible consumption. It aims to encourage societal values that



The “Take What You Need’ campaign responds to the increasing food waste, particularly during Ramadhan. Large quantities of food, which are hard to quantify, often end up in trash or landfills

SPOKESPERSON
Muscat Municipality



promote appreciation of blessings and wise resource management.

KEY MESSAGES INCLUDE:

Gratitude to Allah: Wasting food shows a lack of appreciation for Allah’s blessings.

Helping the needy: Share surplus food with those in need instead of discarding it.

Exhaustion of cleaning efforts: Food waste puts additional strain on cleaning staff.

Barakah (Blessings) in sustenance: Respecting food brings blessings, while wastefulness can lead to loss of provision.

Economic wisdom: Avoiding food waste saves money and helps manage resources wisely.

SQU Hospital earns Canadian accreditation

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) has once again demonstrated its commitment to medical excellence by achieving Canadian Accreditation for Healthcare Institutions (CACHE) for the fourth consecutive time.

Maintaining its Platinum status, the hospital has reaffirmed its position as a leading provider of high-quality healthcare services by international standards.

First accredited in 2014, SQUH has consistently upheld the highest benchmarks in healthcare delivery, patient safety and operational efficiency. Over the years, the hospital has focused on continuous improvement and innovation, positioning itself as a model institution in the region.

This latest accreditation follows a rigorous evaluation process that assessed various aspects of medical care, administrative performance and patient safety protocols. The assessment reaffirmed SQUH’s adherence to best international practices and its ability to keep



The accreditation underscores its role in shaping the future of healthcare in Oman

pace with advancements in medical technology and healthcare management.

The hospital administration highlighted that this recognition is a testament to the dedication and hard work of its medical and administrative teams. It reflects their unwavering commitment to patient-centred care, clinical excellence and ongoing

professional development. The achievement also strengthens the hospital’s reputation as a key medical reference institution in Oman and beyond.

SQUH’s ability to maintain this prestigious accreditation underscores its role in shaping the future of healthcare in the Sultanate of Oman. By consistently meeting and exceeding global

healthcare standards, the hospital is contributing to the broader goals of Oman’s healthcare system, ensuring that patients receive world-class medical services.

Accreditation Canada for Healthcare Organisations is one of the most esteemed global assessment bodies in the healthcare sector. It grants certification only to institutions that demonstrate a sustained commitment to the highest levels of quality, clinical governance and patient safety. SQUH’s continued success in securing this accreditation highlights its exceptional standards and dedication to medical excellence.

Sultan Qaboos University Hospital aims to further enhance its medical services, invest in state-of-the-art technologies and continue fostering a culture of innovation and excellence. This accreditation not only reinforces the hospital’s achievements but also catalyses future advancements in Oman’s healthcare sector. — ONA

Al Dakhiliyah sees 32.9 pc surge in heritage, tourism visitors

NIZWA: The number of visitors to heritage and tourist attractions in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate surged to 415,081 in 2024, marking a 32.94 per cent increase from 312,243 visitors in 2023, according to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. Al Hoota Cave alone welcomed 39,981 visitors last year.

This growth is attributed to the enhanced promotion of historical districts like Harat Al Aqr in Nizwa and Harat Al Ain in Izki, along with increased tourist activity in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Al Jabal Al Sharqi and Misfat Al Abriyeen in Al Hamra.

Al Dakhiliyah remains a prime tourism destination in Oman, renowned for its diverse geography

and rich heritage sites, including 63 castles and forts.

Among them, Nizwa Fort, Jabreen Castle, Bahla Fort, and Bait Al Radidah Fort have been developed for tourism, while Samayil Fort has recently been offered for private sector investment.

According to Ahlam bint Hamad al Qasabiyah, Director of the Heritage and Tourism Department in Al Dakhiliyah, the governorate boasts 158 hospitality establishments offering 2,636 rooms, ranging from hotels and camps to heritage inns.

She emphasised the Ministry’s focus on preserving cultural heritage while promoting tourism



Rose season in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is a key attraction in Al Dakhiliyah

investment, which creates jobs, empowers SMEs and supports artisans.

Adventure tourism, agricultural experiences like pomegranate and rose seasons in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and heritage crafts such as pottery and silverwork are the key attractions.

Future initiatives include the Rose Trail project in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and restoration of historic sites to enhance tourism appeal.

The private sector’s growing role in hospitality and tourism, coupled with government support, is driving sustainable development in the region. The department continues to facilitate tourism

licencing and organise year-round events, including the Al Dakhiliyah Winter Festival, to showcase the governorate’s rich cultural and natural assets.

The development of historic neighbourhoods with immersive cultural experiences, coupled with eco-friendly initiatives and digital tourism promotions, has further positioned Al Dakhiliyah as a top choice for both domestic and international travellers.

With its blend of adventure, heritage and sustainable tourism, the Al Dakhiliyah governorate continues to play a pivotal role in Oman’s vision for a thriving tourism industry. — ONA



RUSH HOUR AT BEAUTY SALONS

SIHAM AL SAIDI

AS THE holy month of Ramadhan comes to the end, beauty salons and wellness centres around Oman are witnessing a sudden increase in demand, particularly from women eager to revive their appearance preparing for Eid.

From body contouring treatments to skin rejuvenation procedures, many see Ramadhan as the perfect opportunity for self-care and preparation for the celebration and festive season.

With fasting hours limiting food intake and promoting detoxification, many women believe Ramadhan is the ideal time to enhance their beauty routines. “In Ramadhan, I naturally lose weight, and combining this with body sculpting treatments helps me achieve my desired shape before Eid,” says Wafa al Shedi , a mother of four children. Skin treatments are also in high demand this period. “Fasting helps clear my skin, so I take advantage of this time to make facials and laser treatments to achieve a fresh, shining look,” said 28-year-old Aisha Naser.

Dr Manar Al Sad, a specialist at a leading beauty clinic in Muscat, confirms the trend. “We see a significant increase in clients seeking non-surgical procedures such as laser skin treatments, fillers, and body contouring. Ramadhan provides an opportunity for clients to recover from minor procedures before Eid celebrations.”

Nutritionists also highlight the benefits of combining Ramadhan fasting with professional treatments. “Fasting helps reset the body, and when paired with proper nutrition and hydration, it enhances the effects of aesthetic procedures,” says nutrition specialist Jawa Ali. She advises clients to focus on a balanced diet rich in hydration and essential nutrients to maximise the benefits of their treatments.

While many women embrace beauty treatments during Ramadhan, others believe in a more natural approach. “I prefer to focus on inner well being through spiritual and physical health rather than cosmetic procedures,” shares Hayfa, a 42-year-old teacher.

Dr Jawaher, a dentist comments: “I saw women are competing to get the best look for Eid with different techniques. A quick treatment is demanded for beautiful smile and look.”

Despite differing opinions, beauty clinics continue to thrive during this period, offering special Ramadhan packages to cater to the rising demand. As Eid approaches, the blend of tradition and modern self-care practices reflects the evolving beauty culture among women in Oman.

With the growing trend of pre-Eid beauty preparations, one thing is clear, for many women. Ramadhan is not just a time of spiritual renewal but also an opportunity for self-enhancement and confidence as they step into the festive celebrations.

Q
Fasting helps reset the body, and when paired with proper nutrition and hydration, it enhances the effects of aesthetic procedures.

JAWA ALI
Nutrition specialist

SAF commemorates Battle of Badr

THE Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) commemorated the anniversary of the Battle of Badr with religious celebrations held at Umm Al Ghawarif Camp Mosque in the Wilayat of Salalah and Murtafa'a Camp Mosque in Muscat.

In Salalah, Brigadier General Pilot Malik bin Yahya al Numani, Commander of Salalah Air Base, presided over the event. Civilian officer Malik bin Mohammed al Saidi delivered a lecture on the significance of the battle in Islamic history, emphasising its religious and military values and their relevance in modern military life. He also highlighted the virtues of Ramadhan and the importance of instilling Islamic principles in youth.

Meanwhile, in Muscat, the event was organised by the Moral Guidance and Military Protocol Department at the SAF Chief of Staff and was attended by Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman. Shaikh Zaher bin Abdullah al Abri, in his lecture, reflected on the divine support that led to victory at Badr and stressed the need for preparedness, morale-building and strategic planning in military life. Both events saw the participation of senior officers, Ministry of Defence personnel, and members of other military and security agencies. — ONA



SAF commemorated the anniversary of the Battle of Badr in Salalah

Supreme Judicial Council meets

MUSCAT: The Supreme Judicial Council convened its fourth meeting of 2025, chaired by Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council.

The meeting addressed several key topics in line with the Council's mandate to oversee courts, judges and the Public Prosecution, as well as to develop laws and legislation relevant to its work.

Council members reviewed the progress of the new electronic portal for litigants, Qadaa. They expressed optimism that the Qadaa portal would enhance judicial efficiency.

Discussions also covered administrative, financial and functional matters concerning judges, public prosecutors and council employees. — ONA

Al Dhahirah steps up consumer protection

IBRI: As Eid Al Fitr approaches, markets and shops in Al Dhahirah Governorate are experiencing increased commercial activity, with residents purchasing essential Eid supplies. In response, a joint consumer protection campaign has been launched to ensure compliance with market regulations and safeguard public health.

The campaign, organised by the Consumer Protection Authority in collaboration with Al Dhahirah Municipality, the General-Directorate of Agricultural Wealth and Water Resources and the Directorate of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, aims to enhance coordination between government agencies in monitoring consumer markets.

Dr Sultan bin Hamid al Zaidi, Director of the Consumer Protection Authority in Al Dhahirah Governorate, emphasised that the expanded inspection and awareness initiative aligns with Oman's vision of strengthening inter-agency cooperation.

The campaign follows a structured action plan to oversee establishments that experience increased demand before the holidays.

Ahmed bin Hamid al Kalbani, a health inspector at the Food Safety and Quality



A joint consumer protection campaign was launched in Al Dhahirah Governorate to ensure compliance with market regulations

Department in Al Dhahirah Governorate, highlighted the department's role in conducting extensive field visits to assess the quality of food products.

The team is actively collecting samples from local markets and imported goods arriving through the Rub al Khali border crossing to test for pesticide residues and other harmful substances. — ONA



MUSCAT GOVERNORATE MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (7/2025)

Muscat Municipality invites Companies specialized in the field and registered with General Secretariat of **Tender Board**, to participate and obtain tender documents from the website via the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE/25/003	Site Preparation for Vendors in Al Bustan	08/04/2025	28/04/2025
PRE/25/018	Rehabilitation Work in Al Uthaiba Park	08/04/2025	28/04/2025
PRE/25/029	Proposed Traffics Lights in Almaalah Road at Quriyyat	08/04/2025	28/04/2025
PRE/25/048	Development of Public Park at Siaa in Al Amerat	08/04/2025	28/04/2025
PRE/25/052	Consultancy Service for Supervision of Remedial Bridges in Muscat Governance	08/04/2025	28/04/2025
PRE/25/054	Paving Works for Al-Ameen Mosque Parking in South Maabilah – Phase 3	08/04/2025	28/04/2025
PRS/25/006	Supply of Electrical Materials for Muscat Municipality	08/04/2025	28/04/2025
PRS/25/007	Supply of Plumbing Materials for Muscat Municipality	08/04/2025	28/04/2025
PRE/25/062	Supply of Road Safety Barriers	08/04/2025	28/04/2025
PRE/25/058	Supply of Lighting Materials	08/04/2025	28/04/2025
PRE/25/027	Construction of Internal Roads in Muscat Governorate – Package 1A (Muscat Hills)	08/04/2025	28/04/2025

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).



Ministry of Health

Announcement

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

Tender Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non Refundable)
977/2025	Renovation Works for Wadi Andam Health Center	Before 9 am on Sunday 06/April/2025	Before 9 am on Sunday 04/May/2025	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board have Fourth grade	R.O 25 Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Any Clarification, you may contact via

Telephone: 24402200

Email id: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om



Sultanate of Oman

The Supreme Judicial Council

Tenders Announcement

The Supreme Judicial Council announces its desire to submit the following tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
05/2025	Tender for building cleanliness of the Supreme Judicial Council at Governorate Dhofar for the year 2026	06/04/2025	26/05/2025	Excellent, First,	RO 25/-
06/2025	Tender for building cleanliness of the Supreme Judicial Council at Governorate Musandam for the year 2026	06/04/2025	26/05/2025	Excellent, First, Second, Third & Fourth	RO 25/-
07/2025	Inspection, maintenance and repair of alarm and fire fighting systems in the court complexes in (Muscat, Sohar, Al Buraimi, Ibri, Ibra, Nizwa, Rustaq, Salalah and Al Khuwair)	06/04/2025	28/04/2025	Excellent, First, Second, Third & Fourth	RO 25/-

Where you can buy the more detailed tender documents electronically via the link below website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

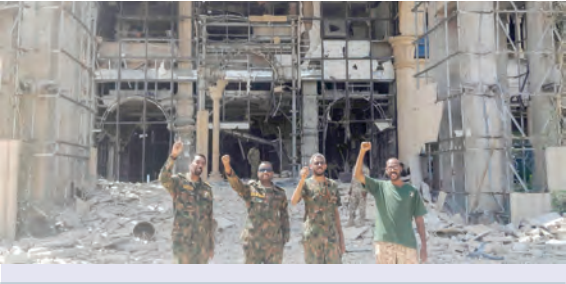
Bidders must submit a letter of commitment to the bid, addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tenders Committee of the Supreme Judicial Council, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tenders Council and the latest updates to the electronic bidding system. Based on Circular No. (1/2024) issued by the General Secretariat of the Tender Board.

1- **For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:**
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

2- **For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:**
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:
Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@gtsb.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Soldiers of the Sudanese army pose at the damaged presidential palace, in Khartoum. — AFP

SUDAN ARMY ADVANCES IN CENTRAL KHARTOUM

KHARTOUM: Sudan’s military said on Saturday it seized several key buildings in central Khartoum from paramilitary control after army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan promised “full liberation” following the recapture of the presidential palace. Army spokesman Nabil Abdallah said the military was “continuing to pressure” the Rapid Support Forces throughout the city centre, giving a list of buildings recaptured including the central bank, state intelligence headquarters and the Sudan National Museum.

Sudan’s national institutions in the city centre were all overrun and looted by paramilitaries in the first weeks after fighting erupted in April 2023. An RSF source confirmed that its fighters had “withdrawn from some locations in central Khartoum,” but added, “The battle has not been decided yet”. “Our forces are now waging a fierce battle” near the airport, he said on condition of anonymity.

On Friday, the army and allied armed groups retook the presidential palace from the RSF, which retaliated with a drone strike that killed three journalists and several army personnel. The paramilitaries had used the palace to house their elite forces and stockpile ammunition, according to military sources. — AFP

JAPAN, CHINA AND S KOREA AGREE TO PROMOTE PEACE



Officials hold a joint press conference after their meeting in Tokyo. — AFP

TOKYO: Japan, South Korea and China agreed on Saturday that peace on the Korean peninsula was a shared responsibility, Seoul’s foreign minister said, in a meeting of the three countries’ top diplomats in which they pledged to promote cooperation. The talks in Tokyo followed a rare summit in May in Seoul where the three neighbours agreed to deepen trade ties and restated their goal of a denuclearised Korean peninsula.

“We reaffirmed that maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula is a shared interest and responsibility of the three countries,” South Korea’s Cho Tae-yul said. Seoul and Tokyo typically take a stronger line against North Korea than China, which remains one of Pyongyang’s most important allies and economic benefactors.

Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya said he, Cho, and China’s Wang Yi “had a frank exchange of views on trilateral cooperation and regional international affairs... and confirmed that we will promote future-orientated cooperation”. “The international situation has become increasingly severe, and it is no exaggeration to say that we are at a turning point in history,” Iwaya said. — AFP

MORE THAN 340 HELD AFTER MASS PROTESTS IN TÜRKIYE

ISTANBUL: More than 340 people were arrested following Türkiye’s biggest street protests in over a decade sparked by the detention of Istanbul’s powerful opposition mayor, a minister said on Saturday. Hundreds of thousands of people hit the streets across the country late on Friday, sparking clashes with riot police in Turkey’s three largest cities: Istanbul, the capital Ankara and the western coastal city of Izmir.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said “343 suspects were caught

in the protests that took place in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana, Antalya, Canakkale, Eskisehir, Konya and Edirne,” warning that those who sought to sow “chaos and provocation.. will definitely not be tolerated!” It was the third straight night that protesters rallied in support of Imamoglu, whose arrest on Wednesday triggered a massive show of defiance that spread from Istanbul to more than 50 of Turkey’s 81 provinces.

During the evening, fierce clashes

broke out between protesters and riot police, who fired tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannon to disperse them in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. After spending his third night in custody, Imamoglu began speaking to police on Saturday morning in connection with the “terror” probe.

Already named in a growing list of legal probes, Imamoglu has been accused alongside six others of “aiding and abetting a terrorist organisation”. — AFP

Civilians among dead as Israel strikes Lebanon

ISRAEL conducted deadly strikes on Lebanon on Saturday in response to a rocket attack from across the border, as Lebanese militant group Hezbollah denied responsibility for the launch. Lebanon’s official National News Agency reported one girl among two killed in an Israeli strike on the southern town of Touline, amid the largest escalation of attacks since a November 27 ceasefire.

The Israeli army had said earlier on Saturday that three rockets, all of which were intercepted, were fired from Lebanon into northern Israel, setting off air raid sirens in the region for the first time since November.



This picture taken from the northern Israeli border with Lebanon shows smoke billowing after an Israeli strike on the Lebanese village of Kfar Kila. — AFP

“Hezbollah denies any involvement in the rocket fire from southern Lebanon into the occupied Palestinian territories (Israel),” the group said in a statement, calling Israel’s accusations “pretexts for its continued attacks on Lebanon”. The Lebanese group said that it stands “with the Lebanese state in addressing this dangerous Zionist escalation on Lebanon”. While Hezbollah has long held sway over areas of Lebanon bordering Israel, other Lebanese and Palestinian groups have also carried out cross-border attacks. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam warned the country risked being dragged into a “new war” after months of relative calm.

“We cannot allow fire from Lebanon on Galilee communities,” Defence Minister Israel Katz said, referring to towns and villages in

We strongly urge all parties to avoid jeopardising the progress made, especially when civilian lives and the fragile stability observed in recent months are at risk

UN PEACEKEEPING FORCE

the north, many of which were evacuated after Hezbollah began firing on Israel in support of Hamas in October 2023. “The Lebanese government is responsible for attacks from its territory. I have ordered the military to respond accordingly,” Katz said. Armed forces chief Eyal Zamir warned the military would “respond severely”. NNA said Israeli air strikes and shelling had targeted several areas of the south. One Israeli strike killed two people including a girl in Touline, NNA reported. It had earlier reported Israeli strikes wounded two people in the border village of Kfarkila.

The UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon said it was “alarmed by the possible escalation of violence” following the morning’s rocket fire. “We strongly urge all parties to avoid jeopardising the progress

made, especially when civilian lives and the fragile stability observed in recent months are at risk,” it said. The Lebanese prime minister meanwhile “warned against renewed military operations on the southern border, because of the risks they carry of dragging the country into a new war,” his office said.

Israel is supposed to withdraw its forces across the UN-demarcated Blue Line, the de facto border but has missed two deadlines to do so and continues to hold five positions it deems “strategic”. Israel has carried out repeated air strikes during the ceasefire that it said targeted Hezbollah military sites that violated the agreement. The Lebanese army said it had dismantled three makeshift rocket batteries in an area north of the Litani on Saturday. — AFP



PROTESTS INTENSIFY IN SEOUL

SEOUL: Hundreds of thousands of South Koreans took to the streets on Saturday as rallies for and against the impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol intensified over the upcoming Constitutional Court’s decision on whether to dismiss him. Main streets in central Seoul were filled with protesters for and against Yoon, carrying various political signs as well as South Korean national flags. But supporters of Yoon argue that justice will only be served if Yoon is reinstated.

Yoon faces a criminal trial on charges of insurrection for declaring martial law, making him the first sitting South Korean president to stand trial in a criminal case. — AFP

REPATRIATION AGREEMENT

Venezuela accepts US deportation flights



Venezuela announced it had reached an agreement with Washington to accept more deportation flights from the United States, one week after more than 200 Venezuelans were sent to El Salvador. “In order to ensure the return of our countrymen with the protection of their human rights, we have agreed with the US government to resume the repatriation of Venezuelan migrants with a first flight tomorrow,” top negotiator Jorge Rodriguez said. — AFP

GREETING AND BLESSING

Pope Francis plans to appear in public



Pope Francis plans to make his first appearance in more than five weeks on Sunday, offering a blessing from the window of his room at Rome’s Gemelli Hospital as he battles double pneumonia, the Vatican said. Francis wants to come to the hospital window around noon on Sunday to give a greeting and blessing. The Vatican said Francis was not expected to deliver the prayer but would come to the window for a greeting. — Reuters

FLIGHTS RESCHEDULED

Heathrow airport resumes operations



London’s Heathrow Airport resumed full operations, a day after a fire knocked out its power supply and shut Europe’s busiest airport. Operations were normal on Saturday morning, but airlines were still dealing with the aftermath. The vast majority of scheduled morning flights departed successfully, with a handful of delays and cancellations. British Airways said it expected around 85% of its schedule to proceed. — Reuters

The New York Times

In US crackdown, focus expands to legal immigrants



TYLER PAGER

The writer is a White House correspondent for The New York Times



ZOLAN KANNO-YOUNGS

The writer is a White House correspondent, covering President Trump



HAMED ALEAZIZ

The writer covers the Department of Homeland Security and immigration policy

US immigration agents wearing masks arrested a Georgetown University academic outside his home in Virginia. They detained two German tourists for weeks when they tried to enter the country legally through the southern border. They knocked on doors at Columbia University apartments, searching for pro-Palestinian protesters. The Trump administration has opened a new phase in its immigration agenda, one that goes well beyond the mass deportation of immigrants in the country illegally.

US border officials are using more aggressive tactics, which the administration calls “enhanced vetting,” at ports of entry to the United States, prompting US allies to update their travel advisories. At the same time, the administration is targeting legal immigrants who have expressed views that the government believes threaten national security and undermine foreign policy. The tactics have unnerved foreign tourists and sent a chill through immigrant communities in the United States, who say they are being targeted for speech — not for breaking any laws. “Whether it’s speech and criticism, green cards, they’re really taking it to a whole new level,” said Gil Kerlikowske, a former Customs and Border Protection commissioner and an ex-police chief of four cities. Recalling the anti-immigration agenda in Trump’s first term, Kerlikowske said that “it’s déjà vu all over again on steroids.”

The administration says the arrests and detentions are about protecting Americans. “The Trump administration is enforcing immigration laws — something the previous administration failed to do,” Tricia McLaughlin, the spokesperson for the Homeland Security Department, said when asked about the recent arrests. “Those who violate these laws will be processed, detained

and removed as required.” Trump’s hard line on immigration has been a centerpiece of his political identity for years.

Customs agents have wide latitude to search cellphones or computers of travellers crossing into the United States. According to Customs and Border Protection, however, such searches have typically been rare. In 2024, less than 0.01% of arriving international travellers had their electronic devices searched, the agency said. Homeland Security agents also have access to a large database called the National Targeting Center to detect risks among visitors to the United States. With the help of other nations sharing information about residents travelling to the United States, the database allows agents to flag visitors when they enter the nation’s ports.

It is not clear how much those tactics were used to pick up people in a string of recent cases in which visitors trying to enter the United States reported being turned back or detained. But two Homeland Security officials, who asked for anonymity to discuss the matter in detail, acknowledged that officers were acting more aggressively after Trump’s executive order.

Two German tourists said they were stopped separately at border crossings at San Diego and Tijuana and sent to a crowded detention centre, where they reported being denied a translator and being put in solitary confinement. A Canadian national said she was detained and put “in chains” when officers flagged her visa paperwork.

This month, a French scientist was prevented from entering the country. France’s minister for higher education said US Border Patrol agents found messages in which he expressed his “personal opinion” to colleagues and friends about Trump’s science

US border officials are using more aggressive tactics, which the administration calls “enhanced vetting,” at ports of entry to the United States, prompting US allies to update their travel advisories. The administration is targeting legal immigrants who have expressed views that the government believes threaten national security and undermine foreign policy.

policies. McLaughlin denied that and said the scientist had confidential information on his electronic device from Los Alamos National Laboratory, which he had taken without permission and tried to conceal. The scientist was working for France’s publicly funded National Center for Scientific Research. Representatives for the centre said he did not wish to speak to the media, but they did not immediately respond to the Homeland Security Department’s allegations against him.

In another case, the department stopped and detained Dr Rasha Alawieh, a kidney transplant specialist and professor at Brown University who was trying to return to the United States after visiting relatives in Lebanon. The administration deported Alawieh despite her having a valid visa and a court order blocking her removal. Federal authorities said in a court filing that they found “sympathetic photos and videos of prominent Hezbollah figures” in her phone and that she attended the funeral for the leader of Hezbollah in February.

When it comes to scrutinising people living in the United States, investigators for Immigration and Customs Enforcement who typically focus on long-term inquiries have been searching videos, online posts and news clippings of campus protests against the Israel-Hamas war. They have then compiled reports on their findings for the State Department.

To deport people living in the United States with green cards or valid visas, the Trump administration has invoked a rarely used provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act that gives the secretary of state sweeping power to expel foreigners who are seen as a threat to the country’s foreign policy interests.

MUTATED DNA RESTORED IN GENE THERAPY ADVANCE



GINA KOLATA

The author is a New York Times reporter focused on diseases and treatments

Researchers have corrected a disease-causing gene mutation with a single infusion carrying a treatment that precisely targeted the errant gene. This was the first time a mutated gene had been restored to normal. The small study of nine patients announced last week by Beam Therapeutics of Cambridge, Massachusetts, involved

fixing a spelling error involving the four base sequences — G, A, C and T — in DNA. The effect was to change an incorrect DNA letter to the right one. The result was a normal gene that functioned as it should, potentially halting liver and lung damage in patients with a rare disorder.

“This is the beginning of a new era of medicine,” said Dr Kiran Musunuru, a gene therapy researcher at the University of Pennsylvania’s Perelman School of Medicine. He added that the method offers the hope of treating other genetic diseases precisely by fixing mutations — an alternative to current gene therapies, which either add new genes to compensate for mutated ones or slice DNA to silence genes.

Dr Richard P. Lifton, president of Rockefeller University and head of its Laboratory of Human Genetics and Genomics, said the sort of gene editing Beam did, rewriting genes with an infusion, “is a holy grail” that “has the promise for being a one-and-done kind of therapy.” Despite the study’s small size, he said the results are “a very impressive advance and very promising.”

The study involved patients who have alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency, or AATD, a genetic disease that affects an estimated 100,000 Americans, mostly of European ancestry. That makes it as common as sickle cell in this country. It is progressive and incurable. The alpha-1 antitrypsin protein is made in the liver and normally goes to the lungs and protects them from inflammation from inhaled irritants like smoke or dust.

The gene editing was simple for patients. They sat in a chair for a couple of hours while lipid nanoparticles, like those used in Covid vaccines, were infused into their blood. The nanoparticles did not hold vaccines, though.

Energy sites burn as Kyiv, Moscow trade accusations

AS Ukraine and Russia prepare for talks that would put in place a temporary halt on strikes on energy infrastructure, each side has continued to accuse the other of fresh attacks on the power grid, underscoring the deep mistrust between them. Overnight into Friday, part of a major Russian natural-gas station near the Ukrainian border was set ablaze in an attack that each country accused the other of launching.

Videos shared by Russian military bloggers and verified by The New York Times showed a large fire at the station, which once pumped gas to Europe through Ukraine, with what appeared to be pipelines engulfed in flames. Also on Friday, Russian authorities in the southwestern Krasnodar region reported a secondary explosion at a fuel depot that had been burning for two days after a Ukrainian drone attack. Russian officials said the fire had spread to more than 100,000 square feet.

Ukraine and Russia agreed this week to a limited 30-day ceasefire on strikes against energy infrastructure — the first major step toward de-escalation in more than three years of war. The agreement followed calls between President Donald Trump and President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, and Trump and President Vladimir Putin of Russia, to broker the partial ceasefire. But the details of how and when this partial truce would take hold remain unresolved and are expected to be hammered out in US-mediated talks in Saudi Arabia on Monday. Zelensky said his country would draw up a list of infrastructure facilities that could be covered by the ceasefire to avoid misunderstandings.

Strikes on energy facilities have



Ukrainian soldiers work on moving a vehicle damaged in overnight Russian air strikes on the outskirts of Sloviansk, Ukraine.



CONSTANT MÉHEUT

The writer is a reporter for The New York Times, currently covering the war in Ukraine

been central to each side’s strategy to weaken the other throughout the war. Russia has pounded Ukraine’s power grid, aiming to make life unbearable for civilians and hinder the country’s war effort. Ukraine’s strikes on Russian facilities focus on crippling its vast oil industry, cutting off revenues that finance its military operations. On Wednesday, the Ukrainian national railway said its power system had been attacked. The same day, Russia said Ukrainian drones attacked the fuel depot in the Krasnodar region. Neither claim could be independently verified.

Both sides have an interest in blaming the other for violating the ceasefire before it even begins, seeking to portray their opponent as untrustworthy. Against that backdrop, Friday’s attack on the Russian gas station fits neatly into this propaganda war. The gas facility sits just across the border from Ukraine, near the town of Sudzha, in territory that Ukrainian

forces seized during their incursion into Russia’s western Kursk region last summer. But recent Russian advances have pushed back Ukrainian troops in the area from all but a sliver of land, and it was unclear whether they still controlled the station as of Friday.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Ukraine had “deliberately” blown up the Sudzha gas metering station as its military retreated from the area. It called the attack “a deliberate provocation” designed to “discredit the peace initiatives of the US president.”

The Ukrainian army, though, suggested the explosion was a Russian “false flag” operation designed to put the blame on Ukraine. It said Russia had “repeatedly shelled” the station in the past as it counterattacked Ukrainian troops in the area. “Russians continue to create numerous fakes and seek to mislead the international community.”

OPINION

Breaking the cycle of negative illness behaviour



DR HAMED AL SINAWI

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

MY son had recently undergone a major dental surgery which made him unable to chew food for weeks so he survived on soup and smoothie. The lack of carbohydrates in his food and being at home all the time for three weeks made him frustrated and irritable. He would frequently ruminate about his condition and how he should not have agreed to the operation. Despite reassurance from his doctors, he remained in a negative mood most of the time. I tried to take him for long walks so he could vent his feelings, but I guess one cannot be a therapist for his son.

This made me reflect on the concept of illness behaviour — a term used to describe how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to their health conditions. It includes how people recognise symptoms, seek medical help, adhere to treatment, and emotionally react to illness.

While some may approach illness with resilience and optimism, others may struggle with anxiety, frustration, or even denial, which can impact their overall recovery.

My son's reaction to his dental surgery was a clear example of how illness behaviour can influence one's experience of recovery. Despite receiving medical reassurance, he

remained emotionally distressed, focusing on his temporary discomfort rather than the healing process. This preoccupation with his symptoms and the regret over his decision to undergo surgery created a mental barrier that prolonged his distress and affected his mood.

Illness behaviour is shaped by several factors, including personality, past medical experiences, cultural beliefs and social support. Some individuals, often termed health seekers, take an active role in their recovery by following medical advice, maintaining a positive outlook, and engaging in self-care.

Others, sometimes referred to as illness affirmers, may dwell on their symptoms, fearing the worst, or even developing avoidance behaviours that delay healing.

The way a person interprets their illness also plays a crucial role. Cognitive biases, such as catastrophising (assuming the worst possible outcome) or selective attention (focusing solely on symptoms while ignoring signs of improvement), can significantly increase distress. In my son's case, his frustration with the temporary dietary restrictions and isolation led him to ruminate on his condition rather than recognise his gradual healing.

Research in health psychology suggests

Illness behaviour is shaped by several factors, including personality, past medical experiences, cultural beliefs and social support

that a proactive approach to illness can speed up recovery. Engaging in normal activities as much as possible, seeking social support, practising relaxation techniques, and maintaining realistic expectations about recovery can help mitigate negative illness behaviour. Conversely, persistent worry, self-pity, or withdrawal from routine activities can prolong the psychological and even physical burden of illness.

Family members and healthcare professionals play a crucial role in shaping illness behaviour. While reassurance from doctors is essential, emotional support from loved ones can be equally impactful.

Encouraging professional counselling or peer support groups may sometimes be necessary for individuals struggling with the emotional impact of illness.

Ultimately, illness behaviour is not just about physical symptoms; it is about mindset and coping strategies. Having a balanced perspective by acknowledging discomfort while focusing on progress enables patients to enhance their resilience and improve their overall recovery experience. Recognising and addressing negative illness behaviour early can transform a challenging healing journey into one marked by patience, acceptance and eventual relief.

UN WARNS OF ‘MASSIVE TRAUMA’ FOR GAZA’S KIDS

NINA LARSON

The UN warned that all of Gaza’s approximately one million children were facing ‘massive trauma’ as fighting in the war-ravaged territory resumed and amid dire aid shortages. Humanitarians described an alarming situation in Gaza, amid a growing civilian death toll since Israel resumed aerial bombardment and ground operations after a six-week ceasefire.

Sam Rose, the senior deputy field director in Gaza for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA, highlighted the psychological shock for already traumatised children to once again find themselves beneath the bombs.

This is a ‘massive, massive trauma for the one million children’ living in the Palestinian territory, he told reporters in Geneva, speaking from Gaza.

The breakdown of the ceasefire that took effect on January 19 comes as the population is already dramatically weakened from 15 months of brutal war. “It’s worse this time,” Rose warned, “because people are already exhausted, they’re already degraded, their immune systems, their mental health, (and) populations on the verge of famine.

“Children who had come back to school after 18 months out of school, now back in tents,... hearing the bombardment around them constantly. “It’s fear on top of fear, cruelty on top of cruelty, and tragedy on top of tragedy.”

James Elder, a spokesman for the UN children’s agency Unicef, said traumatised children usually only start to process their trauma when they begin returning to normalcy.

“Psychologists would say our absolute nightmare is that they return home and then it starts again,” he told reporters.

“That’s the terrain that we’ve now entered,” he said, warning that Gaza was the only “example in modern history in terms of an entire child population needing mental health support”.

It has also been a deadly period for humanitarians, with seven UNRWA staff killed just since the ceasefire broke down, bring the total number killed from that agency alone to 284 since the Gaza war began.

A Bulgarian worker with another UN agency was also killed this week, as was a local staff member of Doctors Without Borders, the medical charity said. Humanitarians warned the situation on the ground has been made worse by Israel’s decision earlier this month to cut off aid and electricity to Gaza over the deadlock in negotiations to prolong the ceasefire. — AFP

Stay alert as scammers target Ramadhan month

IN 2024 worldwide scammers cheated victims out of a staggering \$1.03 trillion. While scammers previously targeted mostly Western countries, they are now focusing on Muslim countries like Oman, especially during Ramadhan, because of the unique opportunities the holy month presents for fraudulent activities.

Scammers know that Ramadhan is a time of goodwill and generosity, which makes people more vulnerable. There are many reasons why scammers become increasingly active during this period.

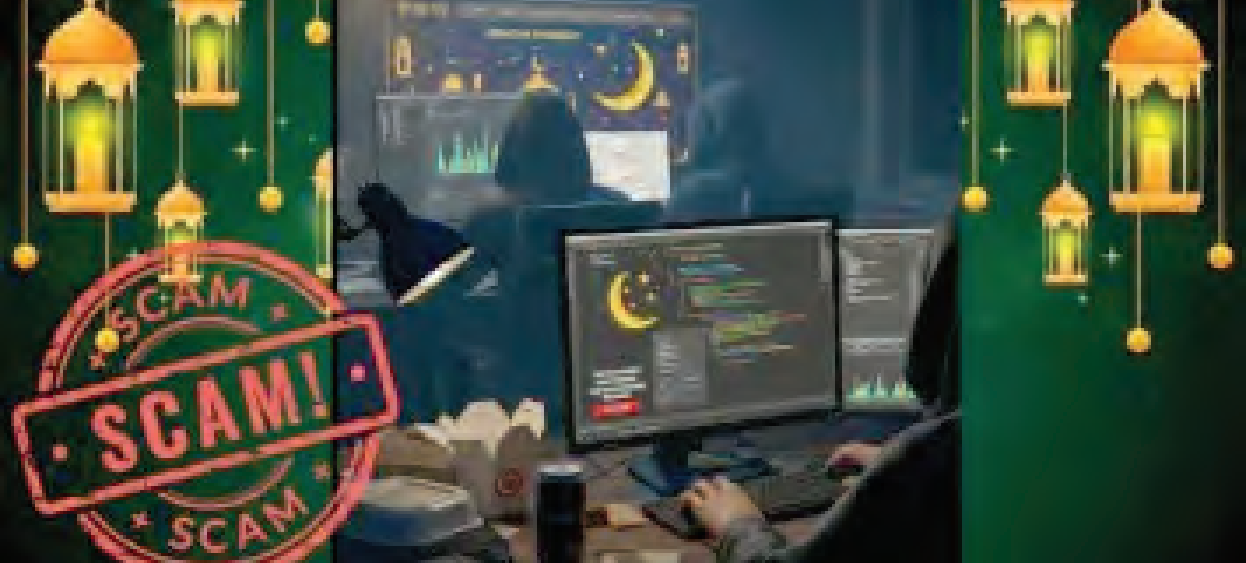
The Holy Month is a time when Muslims are encouraged to donate Zakat and give generously. While such religious precepts are important, if we are giving to good causes, we need to ensure that our donations reach those in need rather than ending up with crooks.

Staying alert and verifying information can help prevent falling victim to fraudulent schemes.

Scammers exploit generosity by creating fake charity appeals or impersonating well-known charities, tricking people into donating to fraudulent causes.

During Ramadhan as Muslims, we are more spiritually engaged and may be more trusting, believing we are doing good deeds. Scammers often use emotional manipulation, such as pretending to be orphans, refugees or people in crisis to gain sympathy and extract money.

During Ramadhan sales and Eid preparations, online shopping activity increases. Fraudsters take advantage of this by setting up fake online stores, selling counterfeit products or engaging in phishing scams. Many companies offer special Ramadhan promotions and financial deals, making people more receptive to investment opportunities. Scammers pose



KARIM EASTERBROOK

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as banks, investment firms or cryptocurrency platforms, promising high returns and then disappearing with victims’ money.

It’s not just Omanis who are at risk. Oman has a large expatriate population that often sends money back home during Ramadhan. Fraudsters impersonate money transfer services, tricking people into paying fake transaction fees.

Pilgrimage scammers are also particularly active during Ramadhan. Fraudsters advertise cheap Umrah packages for those wanting to visit Mecca. Victims pay upfront, only to later find out the trips don't exist, losing their money.

Whether during Ramadhan or throughout the year, you can protect yourself from scammers by following these precautions: verify charities before donating by checking their official websites, be cautious with online shopping and use only trusted platforms, check the legitimacy of travel agencies before booking Umrah packages, verify financial deals and investment opportunities through official sources - if an investment opportunity looks too good to be true, it probably is, and avoid

clicking on suspicious links in messages or emails.

Some of the more common scams include calls pretending to be from your bank, claiming suspicious activity has been detected on your account. They ask you to confirm your account or credit card details. Don’t! Banks never call to request this information. They impersonate local authorities or government officials, pressuring victims into giving personal information or making payments.

You may receive a message saying a parcel cannot be delivered due to an outstanding fee. The scammer asks for just one or two Omani Rials, but once you make this small payment they steal thousands from your account.

Like most people, I have been targeted by scammers or received cold calls or messages from unwanted advertisers.

Scammers are always adapting their methods, preying on people’s trust, generosity and financial transactions. Staying vigilant, verifying sources and questioning anything suspicious can help protect you from becoming their next victim.

Omanis’ dutifulness to parents



DR MUSALLAM
AL MAANI

The writer is Dean
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for Women

OMANIS are very unique when it comes to kindness to parents. Their acts towards their parents proceed from a sense of self-binding duty and obligations. The action of obligating themselves to this noble distinguishing quality is in fact an inherited characteristic passed from one generation to another.

This particular Omani trait is nurtured by two factors. The first factor is due to the fact that the Omani society has inherited and long-held established and customary traditions and patterns of behaviour, while the other is fostered by the noble and righteous Islamic religion.

Despite all the development Oman has witnessed over the last fifty years or so, the Omanis have been able to maintain a unique cultural continuity in social attitudes and customs. Unaffected much by nowadays influences, Omanis still hold dear their parents and may do anything but not to be ungrateful, disrespectful, or neglectful towards them.

A visitor to Oman would not be surprised

nor would they be stricken with wonder or amazement to see Omanis travelling more than 400 kilometres every weekend for no other reason but to visit his old mother or father or both and spend the weekend with them. If you want to know an Omani, just look at the company they keep with their parents.

Omanis, no matter how old they are, must obey their parents in all matters unless it involves refusal or neglect to obey Allah. This stems from a genuine Islamic teaching which is succinctly expressed in Surah Luqman (31:14) “And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents.” Even in cases where Allah commanded people not to obey their parents if they urge them earnestly and pressingly towards associating partners with Allah or anything contrary to faith, they still have to treat them kindly in worldly matters as Allah says in Surah Luqman (31:15), “But if they endeavour to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness”.

Islam exhorts Muslims to honour parents with strong affection and care, considering

A visitor to Oman would not be surprised nor would they be stricken with wonder or amazement to see Omanis travelling more than 400 kilometres every weekend for no other reason but to visit his old mother or father or both and spend the weekend with them

them worthy of high regard. Through adherence to such Islamic values, the way Omanis treat their parents is marked by an appearance of thoughtful and sympathetic regard, refinement and grace along with a lack of roughness or uncultivated vulgarity.

When treating their parents, Omanis truly have a keen sense of what to do or say to them. Through this, they maintain good relations with parents by being gentle to them while avoiding any act that offends them. Refraining from disrespect or contempt, Omanis speak politely to parents, as mentioned in Surah Al Isra (17:24): “And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, ‘My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up when I was small.’” That is why Omanis never show anger to their parents, nor do they raise their voice or speak harshly to them. As the holy month of Ramadhan is about to depart, may Allah bless us to display the highest standards of humility in our treatment of parents and grant us the ability to follow and adhere to our noble Islamic teachings, asserting our firm belief in Allah by upholding morals and interactions in all our acts and behaviours.

SCIENTISTS HOPE TO SAVE BIGGEST GLACIER IN THE ALPS

CECILE MANTOVANI & DENIS BALIBOUSE

The biggest glacier in the Alps could yet be partially saved if global warming is capped below two degrees Celsius, Swiss scientists said on Friday, although significant ice loss is now inevitable.

Glaciers around the globe are disappearing faster than ever, with the last three-year period seeing the largest glacial mass loss on record, according to a UN report on Friday.

The Great Aletsch Glacier in the Bernese Alps, which is 20 kilometres long and weighs 10 billion tonnes, attracts over a million people a year who can view its immensity from the Jungfrauoch viewing platform at 3,454 metres above sea level.

“It’s very likely that almost all glaciers are going to be lost and I sincerely hope that the Aletsch Glacier at this high elevation, we may be able to preserve some of the ice,” Matthias Huss, Director of Glacier Monitoring Switzerland (GLAMOS), said at the top of the Jungfrauoch railway station.

In a scenario without any climate mitigation, its three distinct tributaries that merge into a vast river of ice would vanish, leaving behind a deep, grey valley, a depiction from the Swiss Academy of Sciences showed.

But if global warming holds below two degrees, it would survive, albeit much shorter and thinner and “considerably reduce the menacing rise in the sea level”, the document said.

“In particular, glaciers at over 3,000 metres above sea level could be preserved in the long term,” said the Swiss Academy of Sciences of the second scenario.

The research, released to coincide with the first World Day for Glaciers, did not say which was the more likely scenario, but Swiss glaciologist Andreas Linsbauer said it was “probably something in between”.

More than half of the glaciers in the Alps are in Switzerland where temperatures are rising by around twice the global average due to climate change.

Already, their volume has fallen by almost 40 per cent since 2000. Meanwhile, all 19 of the world’s glacier regions experienced a net loss of mass in 2024 for the third consecutive year, the United Nations said, warning that saving the planet’s glaciers was now a matter of ‘survival’.

Five of the last six years have seen the most rapid glacier retreat on record, the UN’s World Meteorological Organization said on the inaugural World Day for Glaciers.

“Preservation of glaciers is a not just an environmental, economic and societal necessity: it’s a matter of survival,” said WMO chief Celeste Saulo. Beyond the continental ice sheets of Greenland and Antarctica, more than 275,000 glaciers worldwide cover approximately 700,000 square kilometres, the WMO said. But they are rapidly shrinking due to climate change.

“The 2024 hydrological year marked the third year in a row in which all 19 glacier regions experienced a net mass loss,” the WMO said.

Together, they lost 450 billion tonnes of mass, the agency said, citing new data from the Swiss-based World glacier Monitoring Service (WGMS). It was the fourth-worst year on record, with the worst being in 2023. — AFP

Exams: Building blocks for character, resilience

WHETHER parents are justified in their recent criticisms of the

content, format and results of the General Education Diploma, or not, Oman’s educational authorities would do well to heed their concerns. It may well be correct that, as the Ministry of Education has said, there is a statistical anomaly at present due to the actual result being dependent upon the results achieved across the entire academic year. However, 10,000 failures must not be ignored.

Exams are not just an indication of what a student knows, but what they have been taught and what they have retained from their learning. Assessments, as many exams are referred to today, also reflect the students’ ability to express what they know, how to put what they know into words and that is often a greater issue than subject and topic knowledge. To this end, exams are not an ‘official test of knowledge,’ or are not only that, but they will determine the ‘ability of learners to express their depth of knowledge, their understanding, their skills and intelligence.’ In measuring so much of an individual, it’s therefore imperative that the structure, content, purpose and difficulty of exams takes on a complexity far beyond simply writing a series of questions. Today, they are tools for learning, as finding oneself in any examination tests so much more than knowledge, their resilience, ability to perform under pressure, to manage their time effectively, are all challenged.

As a teacher, lecturer, exams officer and having produced hundreds of test and exam papers across thirty years of school, college and university, I can categorically state that in terms of complexity, setting exams can be a devilishly difficult task, especially without a depth of guidance and support that is needed to meet their objectives. We also need to be very clear who is being examined, on which subjects and specialities and with which resources. We must be confident that their teachers have taught all the different learning styles in a way that ensures all learners have the same ‘learnability.’ For example, students usually function in one of three primary styles, as visual, they see things; aural, they hear things;



Exams are not an ‘official test of knowledge,’ or are not only that, but they will determine the ‘ability of learners to express their depth of knowledge, their understanding, their skills and intelligence.’

or kinaesthetic, they do things. That’s why teachers vary the way they present information, so all learners benefit.

All exams, to be effective, must encourage the learners in their introductory stages, with simple question types, such as true/false questions, multiple choice questions, gap fill and matching formats, with appropriate imagery and activity requirements to meet all learning styles. The very best exam papers also offer very clear guidance as to how students should answer the questions and it stands to reason that we must be confident that the students have had their learning checked, not once, not twice, but several times, in several different ways, because ‘telling’ students something is not teaching it! After all, how many times and in how many ways, do you parents need to tell kids to keep their room’s tidy? Exams therefore should evolve towards a more demanding phase of open-ended, leading and funnelling questions, rhetorical, recall, evaluation, inference, comparison, hypothetical, interview, survey and process questions, which become progressively more demanding and

seamlessly evolve into a final essay type question. Most of the time, the student has evolved during the exam and is, again progressively, more able to respond and give of their best. Yet, conscientious teaching and committed learning, will count for nought if the exams are presented to them in a way they have never seen before, if their expectations are shattered upon opening the paper and seeing a ‘foreign’ set of tasks.

To be honest, seeing the media and social media comments about the GED, I believe that is exactly what has happened here. Someone has found a new level of exam setting but failed to ensure that it fairly assesses student learning and the question styles and formats have not been made available to teachers and through them, to the students. Today’s assessment processes are proven, foolproof and the students will be well-prepared if they have had opportunities to practice all the formats and know the how’s and what’s. I am confident, that if future exams meet expectations, are not complex and are no mystery... the next set of results will be far less controversial.



RAY
PETERSEN

The writer is a
media consultant

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



**SAY NO TO DRUGS
SAY YES TO FOOTBALL**

BECOME A MEMBER

**20 March 2025
10-12pm**

**Zaytoona football club turf
Gobra**

United Cargo

PROGRAMME AGAINST DRUG ABUSE CONDUCTED

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAR 22

A football tournament against the growing menace of drug abuse and consumption of psychotropic substances across the world was conducted by some football lovers at the Ghobra Football Ground. Organised with the slogan ‘Say no to Drugs, Say yes to Football’, football enthusiasts, players and their families from various walks of life in Oman came together to raise awareness through a sports event against the increasing drug abuse in the world.

The tournament was inaugurated by Niaz Abdul Khader, MD of United Cargo and at the official opening ceremony of the tournament, players and officials took the anti-drug pledge. Niyaz said that staying away from serious sports and activities; and being self-absorbed is what leads children to bad habits like drug addiction and that drugs that are used for fun first and then lead to the tragedy of addiction.

LEWIS HAMILTON NOTCHES FIRST VICTORY FOR FERRARI



Ferrari’s British driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates after winning the sprint race of the Formula One.

Lewis Hamilton has his first Formula 1 victory under his belt with Ferrari. Hamilton, in only his second weekend driving for Ferrari, qualified on the pole and won the 19-lap sprint race on Saturday morning ahead of qualifying for Sunday’s Chinese Grand Prix.

“From Lap 1 here this weekend, I’ve been feeling on it,” said Hamilton. “The engineers have

done a great job, the mechanics have done a great job to really fine-tune the car — it felt great today, I got a good start, there’s so much grip on this new tarmac it’s hard to look after these new tires and I think everyone was struggling out there the same.”

Hamilton gained eight points for the sprint race victory, providing new hope for Ferrari’s championship aspirations following some opening-round struggles in Australia. “The first race was difficult and obviously, I think I really do feel a lot of people underestimated the steep climb it is to get into a new team, to become acclimatised within the team and understanding communication and all sorts of things,” he said.

Oscar Piastri finished in second place, just 6.889 seconds behind Hamilton and ahead of Max Verstappen. — AFP

Oman U-17 suffer two defeats against Russia

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 22

OMAN U-17 national football team suffered two defeats against Russia in friendly matches as part of the underway domestic camp for the team in Al Musannah and it will run until March 29. The first preparatory match at Al Rustaq Sports Complex ended for Russia at 4-1 on Wednesday while the following warm up fixture finished for Russia again at 5-1. Both matches shaped the team's readiness for the forthcoming challenge at AFC U-17 Asian Cup which will be scheduled in Saudi Arabia during April 3-20, 2025.

Despite the losses, Oman head coach Anwar al Habsi concluded from both matches with several outcomes. The coaching staff ensured all players had the chance to feature against a strong Russian side, helping finalise tactical approaches and determine the core squad for the continental competition. In both matches, Oman's strikers including Al Waleed al Baradi and Al Yazen al Balushi netted one goal in each match.

With the final squad selection approaching, the coaching staff will soon submit the official 23-player list to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). This roster will represent Oman in the highly anticipated tournament, where they will compete in Group D alongside Iran, Tajikistan and North Korea.

Before heading to Saudi Arabia after Ramadhan, Oman will play two crucial friendlies against Vietnam on March 25 and 28. These matches will serve as the final assessment of the squad, allowing the coaching staff to fine-tune player fitness, technical execution and tactical discipline ahead of their Asian challenge.

The AFC U-17 Asian Cup will feature 16 teams, divided into four groups. The top two teams from each group will advance to the quarterfinals, with the Championship also acting as a qualifier for the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025.

For the first time, eight Asian teams will secure spots in the expanded 48-team global event. Oman's young talents will aim to make their mark on the continental stage with hopes of progressing beyond the group phase and securing a spot in the prestigious Fifa U-17 World Cup.



Durant scores 42 as Suns eclipse Cavs

LOS ANGELES, UNITED STATES: Kevin Durant scored 42 points as the Phoenix Suns reignited their playoff hopes with a 123-112 upset of the Eastern Conference-leading Cleveland Cavaliers on Friday.

A superb performance from Durant secured a third straight victory for Phoenix as they aim to muscle their way into the postseason picture in the Western Conference.

Durant erupted for 19 points in a third-quarter burst of scoring that took the game beyond Cleveland's grasp, with the Suns opening up a 98-79 lead heading into the fourth quarter which they never looked like letting slip.

10TH PLACE
The win lifted Phoenix into 10th place in the Western Conference and into the play-in tournament reckoning. The top six teams in each NBA conference qualify automatically for the playoffs, while teams placed from 7th to 10th play in a mini tournament to determine the final two



Phoenix Suns guard Devin Booker saves the ball from a back court violation against the Cleveland Cavaliers.

playoff berths. “This is the best team in the league,” Durant said of Cleveland following the Suns win. “We’ve been struggling and we know we’ve got the

toughest schedule for the last 10 games,” he added. “So we just wanted to dial in and make sure we kept building on the work we’ve done over the last week.” Cleveland’s fourth consecutive loss leaves the second-placed Boston Celtics just five wins behind the Cavs at the top of the East.

The Celtics improved to 51-19 after thrashing the Utah Jazz 121-99 on the back of 27 points from Kristaps Porzingis and 26 points from Jayson Tatum.

The Detroit Pistons’ progress towards the playoffs suffered a jolt in a surprising 123-117 defeat on the road to the struggling Dallas Mavericks.

The Mavs — whose season has been blown off course by the trade of Luka Doncic to the Lakers and a season-ending injury to Kyrie Irving — powered to a precious victory thanks to 31 points from Spencer Dinwiddie and 27 from P J Washington.

SENSE OF PURPOSE
The result leaves Dallas

perched on the edge of playoff contention in 11th place with a 34-37 record in the Western Conference. Detroit occupy the sixth and last automatic playoff berth in the East.

Despite the loss the Pistons will fancy their chances of locking down a postseason ticket given a vastly superior record — 39-32 — to seventh-placed Atlanta (33-36).

In the Western Conference, the Oklahoma City Thunder celebrated their successful clinching of the No 1 seeding on Thursday with a ruthless 141-106 beatdown of the Charlotte Hornets.

The Thunder were assured of top spot in the West despite not playing on Thursday after the Los Angeles Lakers’ defeat to Milwaukee.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander finished with 30 points as no fewer than eight OKC players finished in double figures in a wire-to-win which leaves the Thunder with a 58-12 record at the top of the West.

— AFP

SHORTTAKES



CLUB LEON OUT OF CLUB WORLD CUP

PARIS: Mexican Club Leon were removed from the upcoming Club World Cup in the United States after Fifa ruled on Friday they were violating rules on multi-ownership.

Leon expressed their “anger and indignation” on social media, saying the decision “goes against the spirit of fair competition” and aims to appeal.

A Fifa appeals committee, responding to a complaint by Costa Rican club Alajuelense, ruled that Leon and another club from Mexico, Pachuca, failed to meet tournament regulations on multi-club ownership. Both sides are owned by Grupo Pachuca.

However it was Leon, the winners of the 2023 regional CONCACAF Champions Cup, who were thrown out of the tournament while Pachuca, CONCACAF champions in 2024, were allowed to remain.

“Club Leon will be removed from the competition, with the club to be admitted as a replacement to be announced in due course,” Fifa said in a statement.

The decision is a costly one for Leon, who along with other clubs from the CONCACAF region were due to receive a \$9 million fee from Fifa for participation in the group stage, a source said.

Teams which advance from the group stage are eligible for further prize money on top of that participation fee.

From the CONCACAF region, USA teams Seattle Sounders and Inter Miami are also taking part in the June-July tournament along with another Mexican club Monterrey.

Article 10.1 of the tournament regulations states that no participating club can directly or indirectly hold or deal in the securities or shares of any other club in the competition.

“We are an independent, autonomous and sovereign team. Let there be no doubt,” Leon protested on social media, adding that they “won the 2023 CONCACAF Champions League title with fairness and professionalism.”

The club condemned “a measure that is cruel, unfair, which we do not endorse and we do not know who it benefits, but who it harms: our fans.”

Leon had been drawn to face English giants Chelsea on June 16 in Atlanta before playing Brazil’s Flamengo and Esperance of Tunisia.

The 32-team event, in the first edition of its expanded format, takes place from June 14 to July 13 in the United States. — AFP

Boxing legend George Foreman dies aged 76

FORMER heavyweight champion George Foreman, who lost to Muhammad Ali in boxing’s iconic 1974 “Rumble in the Jungle” before reclaiming the title two decades later, died on Friday aged 76, his family said.

Fondly known as Big George, Foreman dropped out of school and went on to become an Olympic gold medallist, two-time world champion and legend of boxing.

He fought 81 times as a professional, winning 76, 68 of those by knockout.

As well as boxing he put his name to the “George Foreman Lean Mean Fat-Reducing Grilling Machine,” appearing smiling and friendly in the TV ads, becoming a celebrity outside the sport.

“With profound sorrow we announce the passing of our beloved George Edward Foreman Sr, who peacefully departed on March 21, 2025, surrounded by loved ones,” Foreman’s family said in a statement on Instagram.

“We are grateful for the outpouring of love and prayers, and kindly ask for privacy as we honour the extraordinary life of a man we were blessed to call our own.”

Boxing paid tribute to one of its greats.

“His contribution to boxing and beyond will never be forgotten,” fellow former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson posted on X.

Legendary boxing promoter Bob Arum saluted Foreman as “one of the biggest punchers and personalities the sport has ever seen.”

US President Donald Trump paid tribute to a “GREAT FIGHTER” whom he “knew well.”

“He was something really Special, but above all, he was a Great Person,” Trump posted on his platform Truth Social.

Pride to pity

Born in Texas on January 10, 1949, Foreman grew up in Houston.

At the Mexico Games in 1968, the 19-year-old Foreman bludgeoned his way to the super-heavyweight gold.

At 6-foot-4 (1.93m), “Big George” was larger and stronger than the other leading heavyweights of the time.

He was light on his feet, but slugged his way through the professional ranks to earn a heavyweight title shot against champion Joe Frazier, demolishing the champion in two rounds.

By the time he fought his third title defence over 15 rounds against Ali in October 1974 in Kinshasa, Foreman was



(FILES) US boxing heavyweight champions, Muhammad Ali (L) and George Foreman (R) fight in Kinshasa on October 30, 1974. — AFP



George Foreman (1949 – 2025)

unbeaten in 40 professional bouts.

He had won all but three inside the distance and had not needed to develop stamina.

Ali’s “rope-a-dope” tactics exhausted the big man, who lost in eight rounds.

The defeat punctured Foreman’s intimidating aura, not least in his own mind.

“I just couldn’t believe I’d lost the world title,” he said later. “It was the most embarrassing moment of my life. It went from pride to pity. That’s devastating.”

His campaign for another title shot ended when he lost on points to another contender,

Jimmy Young, in March 1977 on a hot night in Puerto Rico.

When he announced his comeback 10 years later, bald where he had once sported an Afro and flabby instead of chiselled, it seemed like a boxing gimmick.

KNOCKOUT

Over the next three years he fought 21 times, mostly against mediocre opponents, winning every bout, 20 of them inside the distance.

A big name in a weakened and fragmented division, he earned a title shot against Evander Holyfield in 1991 and then against Tommy Morrison two years later, losing both on points.

In November 1994 he faced Michael Moorer, who had dethroned Holyfield. In the same shorts he had worn 20 years and six days earlier against Ali, Foreman was trailing badly when he caught Moorer on the chin in the 10th for a knockout.

At 45 years and 299 days old he was the oldest heavyweight world champion.

He was stripped of first his WBA title and then his IBF crown for refusing to fight nominated opponents but won three more fights and was still “lineal” world champion when he lost on points to Shannon Briggs in 1997, aged 48, and retired again. — AFP

Goffin stuns Alcaraz, Djokovic makes strong start

CARLOS ALCARAZ fell 5-7 6-4 6-3 to Belgian David Goffin in the Miami Open second round on Friday while Novak Djokovic tied Rafa Nadal for most ATP Masters 1000 match wins and Russia’s Mirra Andreeva took another step toward a ‘Sunshine Double’.

Goffin led the second seed by a break in each of the three sets and secured the victory on his second match point when a sliding Alcaraz was unable to retrieve a forehand the Belgian ripped into the corner.

Up next for Goffin is Brandon Nakashima, a 6-4 4-6 6-3 winner over Roberto Carballes Baena.

Six-times champion Djokovic made his long-awaited Miami Open return and defeated Australian Rinky Hijikata 6-0 7-6(1) to reach the third round.

It marked Djokovic’s first Miami appearance since 2019 and the Serbian fourth seed’s victory was his 410th ATP Masters 1000 match win, tying him with Rafa Nadal atop the all-time list.

“I wanted to make a statement to myself and to others, as well, that I’m still able to play on a high level,” Djokovic told reporters.

It was all one-way traffic in the opening set as Djokovic showcased his superior shotmaking from the baseline along with a lethal service game to make a perfect start and needed just 27 minutes to wrap up the opening set.



I wanted to make a statement to myself and to others, as well, that I’m still able to play on a high level

NOVAK DJOKOVIC



David Goffin reaches for a backhand against Carlos Alcaraz on day four of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — Reuters

But Hijikata refused to back down and his confidence grew during a tightly-contested second set where neither player could manage a break but Djokovic took over in the tiebreak where he won the final six points.

Russian seventh seed Daniil Medvedev, the 2023 Miami champion who arrived this year fresh off a run to the Indian Wells semifinals, crashed out at the first hurdle as he fell 6-2 6-3



Novak Djokovic reaches for a forehand against Rinky Hijikata on day four of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — Reuters

to Spaniard Jaume Munar.

On the women’s side, Andreeva, making her Miami Open debut fresh off winning the first leg of the Sunshine Double at Indian Wells, was a 6-0 6-2 winner over Veronika Kudermetova and will next face Doha champion Amanda Anisimova.

Polish second seed Iga Swiatek beat Caroline Garcia for the second time in as many tournaments with a 6-2



Mirra Andreeva reaches for a forehand against Veronika Kudermetova on day four of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — Reuters

7-5 victory that sets up a third-round clash with Belgian Elise Mertens, a 6-4 6-1 winner over American Peyton Stearns.

Australian Open champion Madison Keys advanced with a 6-3 6-3 win over Armenia’s Elina Avanesyan to set up a third round clash with Filipino wildcard Alexandra Eala, who beat Latvian 25th seed Jelena Ostapenko 7-6(2) 7-5. — Reuters

2026 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

SHORTTAKES



Robert Lewandowski (L) and Lithuania's midfielder Domantas Antanavicius vie for the ball. — AFP

ENGLAND BEAT ALBANIA, POLAND EDGE LITHUANIA IN WC QUALIFYING

PARIS: Thomas Tuchel made a winning start to life as England coach with a 2-0 victory against Albania in 2026 World Cup qualifying on Friday, while Robert Lewandowski handed Poland a narrow win over Lithuania.

Goals in either half from debutant Myles Lewis-Skelly and captain Harry Kane were enough to get England over the line as they began their qualification campaign for the next World Cup, which will take place in the USA, Canada and Mexico.

Since taking over the reins from Gareth Southgate in January, Tuchel promised a more vibrant England side but there were only a few fleeting examples of that in an uninspiring yet efficient win at Wembley.

“We can do better, we have to do better. We started well, we had seven-eight minutes with 100 per cent ball possession with a lot of passes and high energy,” said a critical Tuchel.

“Second half, I felt we were too slow and in general not enough runs off the ball to get behind the line.”

The 51-year-old German described managing England at Wembley for the first time as a “very new experience”, adding: “Myles Lewis-Skelly debuts with me on the pitch, so I am not all alone.”

Lewis-Skelly, aged 18 years and 176 days, became the youngest player to score on his England debut when he slid a composed finish through the legs of goalkeeper Thomas Strakosha on 20 minutes, following a sublime through-ball by Jude Bellingham.

“I’m lost for words really. I’m just so grateful to the manager for putting trust in me,” said the Arsenal teenager. The other moment of inspiration in the match came with 13 minutes remaining as Kane magnificently plucked a deep Declan Rice cross out of the air at the back post and slotted the ball into the far corner.

OTHER RESULTS

Elsewhere on the opening matchday of European qualifying, Poland edged a 1-0 win against Lithuania in Warsaw.

Barcelona striker Lewandowski fired home from the edge of the box in the 81st minute to give Michal Probiez’s side a winning start in Group G.

Finland overcame Malta by the same scoreline thanks to a first-half goal by Oliver Antman, with the hosts finishing a player down after Maltese defender Kurt Shaw was dismissed.

Cyprus topped Group H thanks to a 2-0 home victory over San Marino, while Bosnia and Hercegovina won 1-0 in Romania.

In England’s Group K, Latvia also got underway with a win, beating Andorra 1-0. — AFP



Mohamed Salah in action. — Reuters

Salah shines as Egypt edge Ethiopia in WC qualifiers

CAPTAIN

Mohamed Salah scored for Egypt as they eased to a 2-0 victory over Ethiopia in their 2026 World Cup qualifier on Friday, but 2022 semifinalists Morocco needed a late winner from Bilal El Khannouss to defeat unfancied Niger. Zizo bagged Egypt’s second goal as they opened up a commanding five point lead in Group A at the halfway point of the qualification campaign. Burkina Faso earlier defeated Djibouti 4-1 to move into second in the pool.

The top team in each of the nine groups earns a place at the finals in the United States, Mexico and Canada, while the four best runners-up enter an arduous inter-continental playoff campaign for one further berth.

OTHER RESULTS

Morocco had the luxury of playing their ‘away’ clash with Niger at home in Oujda with their opponents having no suitable stadiums to host international matches.

But they needed an equaliser on the hour-

mark from Ismael Saibari, and then a winner two minutes into stoppage time from El Khannouss to claim victory and lead Group E by six points from second-placed Niger.

Relebohile Mofokeng and Jayden Adams both scored their first international goals as South Africa were made to toil for a 2-0 home win over neighbours Lesotho as they went top of Group C.

South Africa travel to neutral Abidjan to play second-placed Benin on Tuesday where coach Hugo Broos’ side could potentially open up a sizeable lead in the pool.

Nigeria claimed a first win of the qualification campaign at the fifth attempt with a 2-0 success over Rwanda in Kigali. Victor Osimhen scored a brace to take Nigeria to six points, four behind South Africa.

Ghana, who failed to qualify for the Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco later this year, moved top of their qualification pool with a 5-0 hammering of Chad in Accra.

Antoine Semenyo, Inaki Williams, Jordan Ayew, Mohammed Salisu and Ernest Nuamah all scored for the home side, who

lead Madagascar in Group I by two points.

Ivory Coast took over at the top of their pool as they claimed a narrow 1-0 win over Burundi in a game played in Morocco.

Evann Guessand scored his first goal for the Ivorians to settle the contest.

Mohamed Amoura netted a brace as Algeria won 3-1 in Botswana to move top of Group G on goal difference from Mozambique. Amine Gouiri scored the opener for the visitors.

Guinea were held to a goalless draw by minnows Somalia in neutral Abidjan in a blow to their chances.

The Democratic Republic of Congo edged South Sudan thanks to Theo Bongonda’s first half winner as they moved into second in Group B behind leaders Sudan, who play Senegal on Saturday.

Emilio Nsue scored on his return to the Equatorial Guinea side in their 2-0 win over minnows Sao Tome and Principe.

Nsue served a six-month ban imposed by Fifa after previously being ruled ineligible to represent the central African nation, despite being their all-time leading scorer. — Reuters

Argentina on brink after Almada strike sinks Uruguay

MONTEVIDEO: Argentina edged to the brink of qualification for the 2026 World Cup on Friday after a superb strike from Thiago Almada earned them a 1-0 victory over Uruguay in Montevideo.

The reigning world champions looked to be headed for a draw after a tense tussle against a Uruguay side who defeated the Argentinians 2-0 in Buenos Aires earlier in qualifying.

But Argentina grabbed all three points with a moment of magic that stunned Montevideo’s Estadio Centenario.

Gathering the ball on the edge of the area, the 23-year-old attacking midfielder took a touch and uncorked a ferocious strike that flew into the top corner beyond the dive of Uruguay goalkeeper Sergio

Rochet.

The only blemish for Argentina on an otherwise solid night’s work came deep into stoppage time when Nicolas Gonzalez was dismissed after catching Uruguay defender Nahitan Nandez with a high boot in a rash challenge.

Nevertheless that late red card could not take the gloss off the evening for Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni, who praised his team’s response to losing Messi to injury.

A COMPLETE MATCH

“How can I not be satisfied?” Scaloni said following the win. “Not just for the result — but for how they gave it their all. The satisfaction comes from the fact that the team played a complete match.



Thiago Almada celebrates after scoring during the 2026 Fifa World Cup South American qualifiers. — AFP

“When one player is missing, another comes in (...) we have enough to go out onto the field calmly, but the team is there.”

The win means Argentina can become the first South American team to book their place at next year’s World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico with a victory over arch-rivals Brazil in Buenos Aires on Tuesday. The world champions now lead the 10-team South American qualifying competition with 28 points from 13 games, leaving them six points ahead of Ecuador in second, with Brazil third on 21 points.

Uruguay are fourth in the standings with 20 points from 13 games, just ahead of fifth-placed Paraguay on goal difference.

Friday’s victory ensures that Argentina can finish no worse than seventh place, meaning they are assured of at least a spot in an inter-confederation playoff. The top six teams in the standings qualify automatically for the World Cup.

In Friday’s other South American qualifier, Ecuador boosted their chances of reaching the finals with a 2-1 win over Venezuela.

Two goals from veteran striker Enner Valencia sealed the points for Ecuador, who are bidding to qualify for the World Cup for the fifth time in the nation’s history.

Ecuador coach Sebastian Beccacece saluted his team’s performance but cautioned against complacency as they close in on a World Cup berth. — AFP

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NEWSYSTEM



Several companies in the exploration, drilling and development sector have already expressed interest in securing these concessions.

OMAN OPENS NEW OIL AND GAS CONCESSIONS TO BOOST INVESTMENT

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Energy and Minerals has introduced a new concession system to attract investment in oil and gas exploration, offering key blocks with significant potential in the Sultanate of Oman. This initiative is part of the ministry's broader strategy to enhance production, preserve reserves, and ensure a stable energy supply for local and international markets.

Dr Salah bin Hafiz al Dhahab, Director-General of Investment at the ministry, stated that the new system differs from previous concession models. In the last quarter of 2024 and early 2025, the ministry introduced exploration opportunities through Scotiabank and OQ, aiming to draw investors to these strategic areas.

The available blocks include Block 18 in the Sea of Oman and Blocks 36, 43 and 66 onshore. Several companies in the exploration, drilling and development sector have already expressed interest in securing these concessions. The application period will remain open until June 2025, after which negotiations will begin with the selected companies.

Dr Al Dhahab emphasised that the ministry's focus is on expanding production capacity, accelerating field development and facilitating investment, both in newly explored areas and in existing fields that face operational challenges.

Some of the concession areas present geographic and geological difficulties, prompting the ministry to introduce key incentives to encourage investor participation. — ONA

Oman ports drive trade growth and expansion

OMANI seaports reinforced their status as key drivers of the national economy, handling trade worth approximately RO 16.5 billion in 2024 — 77% of the country's total trade volume, including both imports and exports.

Muhanna bin Musa bin Baqir, Director-General of Ports at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), highlighted the pivotal role of Omani ports in facilitating global trade and advancing economic diversification.

He emphasised that Oman's ports have kept pace with regional and global trade shifts due to their strategic position on international shipping routes.

In an interview, he revealed that total cargo volumes handled by Omani ports surged to 137 million tonnes in 2024, a 15% increase from 119 million tonnes in 2023.

Sohar Port witnessed an impressive 72% rise in bulk cargo volumes, while Salalah and Suwaiq ports saw 10% growth each. Duqm Port recorded an exceptional 152% increase in cargo handling, reflecting enhanced operations and rising demand for integrated port services.

Oman's ports also saw an increase in vessel traffic, with over 12,000 ships docking in 2024 — up 1.5% from the previous year. Container throughput at Salalah and Sohar ports reached 4.2 million TEUs, with Salalah handling 3.3 million TEUs and Sohar processing 942,000 TEUs.



Oman's ports also saw an increase in vessel traffic, with over 12,000 ships docking in 2024.

BOOST IN CRUISE TOURISM AND LIVESTOCK TRADE

Oman's maritime sector also made strides in cruise tourism, with 114 cruise ships bringing in over 416,000 tourists to the ports of Sultan Qaboos, Khasab and Salalah. Additionally, Omani ports handled more than 4 million heads of livestock in 2024.

PORT EXPANSIONS AND STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

To support future growth, MoTCIT has prioritised infrastructure expansion and modernisation. In 2023, the ministry signed a concession agreement with Asyad Ports to develop, manage, and operate Suwaiq Port, enabling it to accommodate larger vessels and handle diverse cargo types.

At Salalah Port, the completion of a major container terminal expansion has boosted capacity to

6.5 million TEUs.

The upgrades, including quay enhancements and yard expansion, allow the port to handle larger ships exceeding 366 metres in length and process over 14,500 containers, improving efficiency and clearance times. Meanwhile, at Sultan Qaboos Port, a framework agreement was signed to expand commercial activities, including ship supply services and crew change operations.

These initiatives, carried out in collaboration with Asyad and Omran, are expected to transform the port into a regional hub for both commercial and tourist vessels.

With continuous upgrades and strategic investments, Oman's ports are solidifying their role as economic enablers, reinforcing the country's position as a global logistics powerhouse. — ONA



MUHANNA
BIN MUSA BIN
BAQIR

Director-General of
Ports at the Ministry
of Transport,
Communications
and Information
Technology.

IGC launches digital portal to streamline natural gas access in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 22

THE INTEGRATED Gas Company (IGC), Oman's sole aggregator and supplier of natural gas, has launched its new Gas Applications Portal, a digital platform designed to simplify how industries apply for and manage their natural gas requirements.

IGC CEO Abdul Rahman bin Humaid al Yahyaei hailed the initiative as a game-changer for the sector, enhancing efficiency, transparency and accessibility for both existing and prospective consumers.

"This portal marks a major milestone in Oman's energy sector digitalisation. By moving applications online, streamlining approvals and increasing transparency, we are making it easier than ever for businesses to access the energy they need to grow and thrive," Al Yahyaei told the *Observer*.

The portal introduces several

enhancements, allowing users to submit multiple applications under a single account, track their application status in real time, engage directly with IGC representatives for support and manage multiple projects from a centralised dashboard.

The platform is also mobile-friendly, ensuring seamless access from anywhere. By digitising and centralising these processes, IGC ensures a more efficient experience for consumers while reinforcing its role in optimising natural gas allocation and supply in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

Beyond facilitating standard applications, the portal also supports spot sales and short-term gas supply auctions, allowing for faster processing of industrial-scale requests.

"With this platform, we are not only improving customer experience, but also enhancing efficiency in how gas is allocated and utilised. This is a key step



ABDUL
RAHMAN BIN
HUMAIID AL
YAHYAEI

CEO, Integrated Gas
Company

the new portal is now the primary access point for all large, medium and small industrial and non-industrial gas consumers, whether for long-term allocations or short-term supply.

New investors — both local and international — can register and submit gas allocation requests digitally, eliminating the need for phone or e-mail inquiries. This development also reflects a broader shift in Oman's gas

towards maximising the value of Oman's natural gas resources while fostering a more competitive and transparent market," Al Yahyaei added. Significantly,

governance.

Previously, gas allocation requests were reviewed solely by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, but with IGC's formal establishment in December 2022, this responsibility has now been transferred to the company.

Existing consumers can also use the portal to apply for additional gas allocations for expansion projects or subsidiaries without the need to create new accounts.

However, all requests will be assessed against criteria that prioritise strategic contributions to Oman's economy, including job creation, GDP contribution, decarbonisation, ICV, SME growth and potential for further investment.

To ensure a fair and transparent process, IGC has developed new guidelines for evaluating applications, setting supply tariffs, and determining allocation sizes and durations in line with national economic priorities.

Importantly, the portal also

facilitates applications for spot gas sales - a growing segment of Oman's gas market. IGC has already executed one such transaction in the past year and plans to leverage the platform's versatility for future opportunities, aligning with market evolution and revenue optimisation objectives.

Additionally, the portal is designed to complement broader government efforts to position Oman as an investment hub. Investors requiring natural gas can submit applications even while their projects are still in the permitting stage, with detailed information on standard gas sales agreements readily available on the platform.

Operating the portal is a dedicated team from IGC's commercial and contracts department, equipped to guide applicants through the process and address inquiries. The portal is now live and accessible at <https://gasapplications.igcoman.om>.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The campaign aimed to reward loyal cardholders.

NBO CELEBRATES MOTHER’S DAY WITH AN IFTAR AND REWARDS

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) celebrated Mother’s Day by hosting an exclusive Iftar event at W Muscat for its highest-spending cardholders and their beloved mothers. The event recognised 12 winners, selected based on their spending using NBO Debit, Credit and Badeel Prepaid Cards; where they were presented with valuable gifts.

Commenting on the celebration, Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager and Head of Product, said: “At NBO, we believe in celebrating the moments that matter most to our customers. Mother’s Day is a special time to honour the love and sacrifices of mothers, and this campaign was our way of showing appreciation to those who trust us with their banking needs.

“Through initiatives like this, we reinforce our commitment to rewarding our customers and ensuring that every interaction with NBO is a rewarding experience.”

The Mother’s Day campaign aimed to reward loyal cardholders while encouraging seamless and secure digital transactions. Through this initiative, NBO reaffirms its commitment to providing exclusive benefits and personalised experiences that bring families together.

NBO remains committed to introducing innovative campaigns that enhance customer engagement and satisfaction.

SHARAKAH PARTICIPATES IN ‘RAMADHAN EVENING’ ENTREPRENEURSHIP DISCUSSION

MUSCAT: Sharakah, Oman’s leading SME development company, played a key role in a thought-provoking ‘Ramadhan Evening’ discussion panel titled “Future Entrepreneurship: Today’s Challenges and Tomorrow’s Opportunities.”

The event, held under the auspices of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, brought together key figures from government and business to explore the evolving landscape of entrepreneurship in the Sultanate of Oman.

Organised by the SME Committee of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch at Al Batinah North, the session saw the participation of Eng Said bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the branch, alongside council members, government and private sector representatives and a diverse group of business owners, including women entrepreneurs.

Own the Ford Explorer with Ramadhan benefits

THE Ford Explorer is now available with exclusive Ramadhan benefits. The benefits include 5 years/100,000 km of free service, a 5-year/100,000 km manufacturer’s warranty, 5 years/100,000 km of roadside assistance, free Insurance and 1-year free registration.

Customers can also get a chance to win 1 out of 8 iPhone 16 Pro Max in the raffle draw (Conditions apply. Please visit the Ford showroom for details.). The offer ends on April 17, 2025.

The Ford Explorer redefines the SUV experience, seamlessly blending bold design, cutting-edge technology, advanced safety features and exceptional power for an unmatched driving experience.

Whether conquering rugged terrain or navigating city streets, the Explorer’s intelligent systems ensure supreme comfort, control and confidence, making it the ultimate companion for families and adventure seekers alike.

The Ford Explorer is powered by a formidable 2.3-litre turbocharged EcoBoost engine, delivering an impressive 300 horsepower and 420Nm of torque. Paired with an all-new 10-speed automatic transmission, the Explorer offers smooth, responsive shifts for an effortlessly dynamic drive.

Its Intelligent All-Wheel-Drive (AWD) system, combined with a Terrain Management System featuring seven selectable drive modes, including standard Sand Mode, ensures that the Explorer



The Ford Explorer redefines the SUV experience.

is built to tackle any road or off-road challenge with ease.

The Ford Explorer is engineered to elevate every journey with its suite of state-of-the-art technology. A centrally mounted 8-inch digital touchscreen with the intuitive SYNC 3 infotainment system provides seamless access to navigation, entertainment and connectivity features.

With available Apple CarPlay integration, drivers can stay connected without distraction. A wireless charging pad and multiple USB ports, including new type-C outlets, offer ultimate convenience, while the available 980-watt, 12-speaker B&O premium audio system immerses passengers in a superior listening experience.

Safety is at the heart of the Ford Explorer, equipped with Ford Co-Pilot360, an advanced suite of driver-assist technologies designed to enhance protection on the road.

Standard features include Pre-Collision Assist with Automatic Emergency Braking, Pedestrian Detection, Forward Collision Warning, Dynamic Brake Support and Blind Spot Information System with Cross-Traffic Alert. The Lane-Keeping System and Auto High-Beam Headlamps add extra layers of reassurance for drivers and passengers alike.

For added security, available Ford Co-Pilot360 Assist+ offers advanced technologies such as Evasive Steering Assist, which provides steering support to help avoid potential collisions, and Post-Impact Braking, which helps reduce the severity of secondary crash events.

Ford’s Intelligent Adaptive Cruise Control automatically adjusts speed based on traffic conditions, ensuring a safer and more relaxed driving experience.

With a power liftgate for effortless cargo access and an intelligently designed interior, the Ford Explorer ensures every journey is as comfortable as it is exhilarating. The 8-inch touchscreen navigation system offers split-screen functionality, providing a seamless interface for both maps and audio controls.

BANK MUSCAT CROWNED FOR INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INITIATIVES

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has been honoured with the Innovative Community-Driven Initiatives award for 2025 at the Oman Forum.

This prestigious recognition, presented by Alam al-Iktisaad Wal A’mal (AIWA) magazine under the auspices of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura, celebrates the Bank’s pioneering efforts in implementing quality initiatives that have fostered a positive and sustainable impact.

Zuwaina al Sharji, Assistant General Manager of Central Operations and Change Management at Bank Muscat, received the award on behalf of the Bank.

The Forum, titled “Promoting Local Content: Towards a Sustainable and Diversified Economy”, addressed critical topics such as the implementation of national policies for local content as a strategic tool for economic diversification, strengthening Omani industries, encouraging local projects, reducing import dependence, maximising local resources and supporting innovation and



This recognition celebrates the Bank’s pioneering efforts in implementing quality initiatives.

entrepreneurship.

Al Sharji expressed her pride in receiving the award, highlighting that it reflects Bank Muscat’s success in developing innovative community initiatives that merge social impact with sustainability. She emphasised the Bank’s commitment to empowering various groups and supporting projects that make a tangible difference in people’s lives, thereby setting a benchmark for responsible

community work.

Al Sharji reiterated the Bank’s dedication to continuing this approach, which plays a significant role in bolstering the national economy and promoting sustainable development. Bank Muscat’s approach to community-driven initiatives goes beyond mere support, focusing on sustainable solutions with long-term positive impacts.

This aligns with the Bank’s policy of adopting a renewed vision for community service, contributing to individual development, enhancing social well-being, and creating genuine opportunities for growth and development.

The Bank’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes are fully aligned with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to achieve sustainable development and enhance the well-being of Omani society through public-private partnerships. The programmes focus on supporting education, health, the environment and youth, contributing to the national goals set by the country’s wise leadership to build a strong and balanced society.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds to open 12 new showrooms in March

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the world’s 6th largest jewellery retailer, is set to launch 12 new showrooms by March 2025 to further strengthen its presence across India.

The latest expansion drive will take the total international showroom count to 391 showrooms across 13 countries, with presence in 19 states across India.

The new showrooms will be located at Panvel in Mumbai, Sinhagad Road in Pune, Brahmapur and Soubhagya Nagar in Odisha; Dhanbad in Jharkhand, Hospet, Nagarbhavi and Chitradurga in Karnataka; Nandyal, Amalapuram, Machilipatanam in Andhra Pradesh and Varanasi in UP. Malabar Group has invested over \$69 million for this expansion phase and has hired 406



employees in various roles this financial year.

Additionally, the brand has plans to launch 60 new showrooms in the year 2025, further expanding its global presence. In April 2025, the Group is set to inaugurate 5 new showrooms

across the GCC, the UK and Canada, marking its expansion plans in the international market.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds has launched a consumer awareness campaign with prolific actor and brand ambassador NTR Jr. The campaign highlights the brand as a responsible jeweller, emphasising its commitment to sustainable practices, authentic hallmarked jewellery and certified natural diamonds.

Commenting on the expansion, MP Ahammad, Chairman, Malabar Group, said, “Our expansion plan is aligned with our broader vision of extending our global footprint and offering quality-focused, transparent retail practices coupled with a world-class shopping experience to more people across the world.

We are deeply committed to ethical business

practices and responsible sourcing, which are at the core of our values. As we continue to grow and enter new markets, each showroom opening represents a step closer to realising our vision of becoming the world’s number one jewellery and luxury brand.

This global market penetration not only broadens our reach, but also strengthens our position as a trusted brand that offers excellence, integrity and unparalleled luxury to our customers worldwide.”

The new showrooms of the brand will offer a diverse range of traditional and contemporary jewellery collections, coupled with a personalised shopping experience, demonstrating Malabar Gold & Diamonds’ dedication to customer service excellence.

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The one-day symposium discussed opportunities and challenges in enhancing the bilateral economic ties between the two countries.

OMAN AND BAHRAIN
EXPLORE BETTER
ECONOMIC TIES

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MARCH 22

THE ONE-DAY symposium on economic and financial integration between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain held under the auspices of Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, discussed opportunities and challenges in enhancing the bilateral economic ties between the two countries and better vistas for better economic ties.

Organised by the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Society in cooperation with the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Sultanate of Oman and the Omani Economic Association, the symposium, titled ‘Economic and Financial Integration between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain’, is part of the symposiums of the 25th Economic Council of the Omani Economic Association.

Adnan Ahmed Yousef, Chairman of the Bahrain Banks Association, joined the symposium from the Kingdom of Bahrain along with Saud bin Ahmed al Nahari, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman-Bahrain Investment Company; and Eng Hamad bin Mohammed al Wahaibi.

Al Wahaibi is Vice-President of the Omani Economic Association, and the dialogue was moderated by Dr Ahmed bin Said Kashoub, Head of the Investment Sector for Financial Markets and Head of the Index Office for Financial and Economic Consultations.

The symposium further delved into five themes, ‘The Current Reality of Economic and Financial Relations between the Two Brotherly Countries’, ‘Available Opportunities for Enhancing Economic and Financial Integration’, ‘The Role of the Private Sector in Promoting Economic Integration between the Two Brotherly Countries’ (The Oman-Bahrain Investment Company as a Model), ‘The Future Vision for Enhancing Economic and Financial Integration between the Two Brotherly Countries’, and finally, ‘Practical Solutions and Proposals’.

This symposium was held in light of the fraternal, close and historical relations between the two brotherly countries and peoples, which reflect the sincere desire and keenness of the wise leaderships of both countries, and their lofty directives to develop and nurture relations in all fields, to achieve the highest levels of coordination, cooperation and rapprochement, and to achieve integration between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain.

This symposium also aimed to maximise the volume of trade exchange between the two brotherly countries, review investment opportunities in both countries, and discuss challenges and develop solutions, to advance sustainable development and establish partnerships between the two sides in various economic fields.

OMAN’S
NATURAL GAS
PRODUCTION
AND IMPORTS
SURGE 9.5% IN
JANUARY

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman recorded a total domestic natural gas production and imports of 4.6 billion cubic metres by the end of January 2025, marking a 9.5% increase from the 4.2 billion cubic metres reported in the same period last year, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NC SI).

Industrial projects remained the largest consumer, accounting for 52.6% of total natural gas usage, with consumption reaching 2.42 billion cubic metres.



Industrial projects account for 52.6% of total natural gas usage.

Natural gas consumption in oil fields amounted to 1.15 billion cubic metres, while power plants used 1.01 billion cubic metres. Industrial

zones recorded a relatively smaller share, consuming 20 million cubic metres during the same period. The data also showed that non-associated natural gas production, including imports, totalled 3.51 billion cubic metres, while associated gas production reached 1.09 billion cubic metres. The steady rise in gas production and imports underscores Oman’s growing energy demands, particularly from industrial and power sectors, reflecting ongoing economic expansion. — ONA

MSX-listed companies’
net profits surge 52.6%

PUBLIC joint-stock companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) recorded a remarkable 52.6% increase in net profits in 2024, reaching RO 1.339 billion compared to RO 877.3 million in 2023.

This surge was driven by strong performances across multiple sectors, particularly banking, industry, investment, services and telecommunications.

The listing of OQ Exploration and Production and OQ Base Industries in 2024 also contributed to the overall profit growth, while several energy companies successfully turned losses into profits.

According to preliminary financial results from around 90 publicly listed firms, 69 companies reported profits in 2024, up from 68 in the previous year. At the same time, total losses among public joint-stock firms dropped to RO 38.1 million, down from RO 50.6 million in 2023, despite the number of loss-making companies rising from 20 to 21.

OQ Exploration and



The listing of OQ Exploration and Production and OQ Base Industries in 2024 also contributed to the overall profit growth.

Production topped the list of the most profitable companies, recording net earnings of RO 326.5 million, followed by Bank Muscat with RO 225.5 million and Bank Sohar International with RO 100.2 million.

Omantel ranked fourth with domestic net profits of RO 69.4 million, while National Bank of Oman secured the fifth position with RO 63.1 million.

Other top performers included OQ Gas Networks with RO 47.8 million, Bank Dhofar with RO 43.6 million, ahlibank with RO 41.6 million, Ominvest with RO 35.9 million, and Oman Arab Bank, which rounded out the top ten with RO 30.4 million in net profits.

Several companies experienced significant financial turnarounds, shifting from losses

in 2023 to profits in 2024. Among them, SMN Power Holding made the most notable recovery, reporting RO 4.5 million in net profits compared to losses of RO 26.4 million the previous year.

Similarly, Sohar Power Company rebounded strongly, recording RO 22 million in net profits after incurring losses of RO 5.1 million in 2023.

Conversely, six companies saw their financial performance decline, moving from profits in 2023 to losses in 2024. Liva Group posted a RO 5 million loss after earning RO 6.3 million in 2023, while Oman Refreshments also fell into the red, recording losses of RO 1.5 million.

Galfar Engineering and Contracting suffered a RO 3.9 million loss, a significant drop from its RO 574,000 profit in 2023.

The overall financial performance of MSX-listed companies in 2024 highlights growing market confidence, sector-wide resilience, and the positive impact of strategic expansions and new listings.

While some companies faced setbacks, the strong profit growth across key industries reflects a solid year for Oman’s capital markets. — ONA

AHLI ISLAMIC MONEY MARKET FUND SURPASSES RO 50 MILLION IN ASSETS

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to achieving significant milestones in the Islamic banking sector, the ahli islamic Money Market Fund has announced that its managed assets have surpassed the RO 50 million mark, just one year after its launch.

The fund also achieved an annualised return of +5.1% during the first 12 months of operations, generating a net profit of RO 861,417 for 2024. These results reflect the confidence investors have placed in the Fund and the appeal of its Sharia-compliant investment strategy.

Hanaa al Kharusi, Senior General Manager - Wholesale Banking, stated: “At ahlibank,



The fund also achieved an annualised return of +5.1% during the first 12 months of operations.

we take pride in the success of the ahli islamic Money Market Fund, which has exceeded RO 50 million in assets in its first year.

“The fund has maintained stability with low volatility, contributing to steady returns, in addition to its commitment

to ethical financial practices. Furthermore, we are proud that our investor base is well-diversified, comprising both institutional and individual investors, which highlights the fund’s broad appeal and reliability.

“This achievement reflects the excellence and innovation embraced by the bank and underscores its ability to provide secure, advanced investment solutions that meet the needs of our customers, balancing strong returns with limited risks, further reinforcing our position as a leading financial institution in the region.”

Echoing the same, Noora Sabah Jawad Sultan,

Chairperson - ahli islamic Money Market Fund, said: “At ahli islamic, we take pride in the performance of this exceptional fund, which stands out due to its unique structure.

“This fund provides an attractive alternative to demand deposit accounts, offering investors high liquidity and a flexible solution for managing their financial allocations in bank deposits.

“Moreover, the fund focuses on investing in high-credit-rated market instruments, ensuring that investors’ funds are exposed to securities of investment-grade quality, thereby enhancing the achievement of optimal risk-adjusted returns, in line with the highest banking standards.”

OFFSETTING US

Canada aims for free internal trade



Prime Minister Mark Carney on Friday said Canada could offset the effects of any US tariffs by removing internal trade barriers and that he aimed for free trade within the country by July 1, after meeting provincial and territorial leaders. “We are committing to table legislation by the 1st of July for goods to travel across the country... free of federal barriers,” Carney told reporters. — Reuters

FLIGHT TURMOIL

Heathrow flights resume after closure



Flights at Britain’s Heathrow resumed on Friday after a fire knocked out its power supply and shut Europe’s busiest airport for the day, stranding tens of thousands of passengers and causing travel turmoil worldwide. Heathrow said its teams worked to reopen airport after it was forced to close entirely after a huge fire engulfed a nearby substation on Thursday night. — Reuters

FUND FACILITY

IMF to consider \$20 billion Argentina deal



The International Monetary Fund (IMF) will discuss a new \$20 billion loan for Argentina during an informal meeting next week, Bloomberg News reported on Friday. The IMF will discuss a four-year extended fund facility of about 15 billion, the report said. Argentina’s lower house on Wednesday passed a decree issued earlier in the month supporting a new IMF programme. — Reuters

OPINION

Economic importance of local content in Oman



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

A specialist in local content/In-country value, the writer is the Acting Director-General of Local Content, previously assigned to the General Secretariat of the Tender Board

THE Sultanate of Oman is positioned strategically on the Arabian Peninsula and has made fantastic progress over the last few decades in diversifying its economy. Oman is slowly moving away from being an oil economy and with this shift comes the new term – local content.

Local content is defined as the inclusion of domestic goods and services, labour and industries that ensure maximum value and social development to be achieved out of a country’s resources.

As Oman moves forward, local content is much more than a policy tool, it is crucial for a sustainable economy, employment opportunities and citizen development.

In conjunction with Oman Vision 2040, the government’s focus on local industry and capability development aims to strengthen economic sustainability and reduce dependence on external resources.

This article covers a wide range of economic importance of local content in Oman such as employment opportunities, industrial diversification, technology transfer, capacity building and the economy as a whole.

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL CONTENT IN OMAN

In an Omani context, local content corresponds to the degree of domestic sourcing of goods, services and labour.

This includes: recruiting Omani citizens; utilising Omani services and goods; establishing Omani businesses and supporting local training and skills development.

Policies for local content are directed towards ensuring that the economic output from key sectors such as oil and gas is not exported, but rather, is retained and reinvested in the country’s economy.

Traditionally, the oil sector has been the mainstay of Oman’s economy.

However, due to the volatility of oil prices along with other competing economic factors, the government has put into place policies geared towards economic expansion.

One major part was the In-Country Value (ICV), initially focusing on the oil industry, but is now being embraced in different sectors.

LOCAL CONTENT IN ECONOMICAL STRUCTURE DIVERSIFICATION

Mitigating Overdependence on Oil Revenues: Oman Vision 2040 describes a strategy to lessen the reliance on hydrocarbons. Local content comes in fulfilling this strategy. Oman aims to start including:

- Domestic industries such as manufacturing, tourism, logistics
- Renewable energy
- Agriculture and fisheries

All these have the potential to be developed by Oman, which can reduce the economy’s susceptibility to external oil shocks.

STRENGTHENING SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

SMEs are the dominant players in Oman’s internal localisation strategies. Oman under the Small and Medium Enterprises

Local content is defined as the inclusion of domestic goods and services, labour and industries that ensure maximum value and social development to be achieved out of a country’s resources.

Development Authority (Riyada) and other parastatals has put in place policies aimed at the growth of SMEs by: Guaranteeing tender contracts to local SMEs; Granting non-repayable financial aids and credits; and Establishing different Entrepreneur training and mentoring schemes.

The increased competition from the active SMEs should lead to more innovations and a stronger domestic market.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND NATIONAL WORKFORCE EMPLOYMENT

Omani Workforce Employment Policy: Local employment policies have as their focus the integration of Omanis into the workforce.

The Omanisation strategy requires that locals be hired into a set percentage of positions in different sectors.

This is economically advantageous in several aspects:

- Help in lowering unemployment levels, augmenting household earnings and improvement of social harmony.
- Upward Mobility of Employees: Investment in education and training is also an objective of local content policies.

Firms are motivated to: Set up their own training facilities, collaborate with other educational organisations and award grants along with employment and student candidate positions.

As a result, there is the formation of a skilled and globally competitive workforce able to respond to the challenges of a diverse economy.

EVERY DROP COUNTS: BUILDING A WATER-SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



NAJAH AL
RIYAMI

The writer is a Media and Communication Master’s graduate.

MUSCAT: Imagine a world where water is never wasted, where every drop is cherished, and where droughts and shortages are things of the past. Sounds like a dream, right?

But with a few smart changes, this vision of a water-sustainable world isn’t just possible; it’s within reach.

It all starts with cutting out the waste.

A single dripping faucet can waste over 11,000

litres (3,000 gallons) per year - enough to fill a small swimming pool. Fixing leaks and using water-efficient fixtures might not seem revolutionary, but when millions of people do it, the impact is massive.

Managing water better is the next step. Right now, only 4% of wastewater is reused globally, yet studies show that recycled wastewater could meet nearly 50% of the world’s water needs by 2040. Cities like Singapore already recycle up to 40% of their water supply and aim to reach 55% by 2060 with advanced treatment and desalination.

Agriculture, one of the biggest water users, has a chance to lead the way - while 70% of global freshwater use goes towards farming, up to 60% of that water is wasted due to inefficient irrigation.

Switching to drip systems that deliver water directly to plant roots could reduce waste dramatically. Some farmers even use treated wastewater for irrigation; conserving fresh water for drinking and other critical uses. Cities can also be smarter about water. From rooftops covered in gardens that soak up rain, to sidewalks that let water filter through instead of flooding streets, and buildings that capture and reuse water on-site.

Changing habits is just as important. Turning off the tap while brushing your teeth can save over 7,000 litres (1,850 gallons) per year per person. Now imagine if millions of people did the same — just that small action could save enough water to supply entire cities. Small changes like this, multiplied by millions, make a huge difference.

Governments play a role too.

Strong regulations keep industries accountable while incentives push businesses and homeowners towards smarter choices. International cooperation is also key, because water doesn’t follow borders. Technology is stepping up.

Desalination plants are turning seawater into drinking water with 80% less energy than older plants, and AI-driven irrigation systems are helping farmers use every drop wisely. Right now, the world produces over 150 million tonnes of desalinated water daily, and as efficiency improves, it will play a bigger role in securing freshwater supplies.

Opportunities & challenges in PV sustainability

OMAN is steadily advancing towards its Vision 2040 goals, with renewable energy playing a crucial role in its economic diversification strategy. With an abundance of sunlight, the country has invested heavily in solar energy projects, including the Ibri II and Manah 1 & 2 solar plants.

However, as Oman accelerates its solar adoption, it must also prepare for the challenge of managing solar photovoltaic (PV) waste. Without a structured approach to recycling and circularity, the country risks facing a growing environmental burden and lost economic opportunities.

A recent report, titled “Circular Solar: Opportunities and Challenges in Solar PV” by the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), IfM Engage, and E.ON Group Innovation GmbH, highlights the importance of integrating circular economy principles into the solar sector.

This essay examines how Oman can benefit from solar circularity, leveraging international best practices to strengthen its renewable energy sustainability, create economic opportunities and establish itself as a leader in the Gulf’s green transition.

CIRCULARITY IN SOLAR ENERGY

Solar PV technology has experienced rapid global growth, driven by declining costs and technological advancements. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) predicts that by 2050, global solar installations will exceed 4.6 terawatts (TW), but this will also result in over 200 million metric tonnes of solar panel waste.

Without a proper recycling framework, most of this waste will end up in landfills, leading to resource loss and environmental hazards.

Oman’s increasing reliance on solar power makes it essential to address this challenge early. By incorporating circular economy strategies, the country can reduce environmental damage, lower costs for new solar projects and extend the lifespan of solar investments.

The question remains: How can Oman effectively integrate solar circularity



Oman accelerates its solar adoption, it must also prepare for the challenge of managing solar photovoltaic (PV) waste.

into its renewable energy policy framework?

OMAN IN THE CIRCULAR SOLAR ECONOMY

One of the most effective approaches for Oman is adopting the “4R” framework outlined in the report: Reuse, Refurbishment, Remanufacturing and Recycling.

Reuse involves extending the life of solar panels through repairs and repurposing, while refurbishment upgrades panels for secondary applications.

Remanufacturing disassembles panels to rebuild new ones using recovered components, and recycling extracts valuable materials like silver, silicon, aluminium and copper for reuse in new solar panels.

Oman can also learn from the European Union’s (EU) circular solar policies. The Waste from Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive mandates that 85% of solar panels must be collected and recycled by manufacturers. By implementing similar regulations, Oman can prevent improper disposal, promote responsible recycling and attract investments in solar waste management.

The circular solar economy also presents a strong economic opportunity.

According to SolarPower Europe, the EU solar recycling sector could create over 16,000 jobs by 2028. In



QASIM AL
MAASHANI

The writer is the head of Oman Observer’s Business section

Oman, solar panel refurbishment and recycling facilities could lead to new employment opportunities in green industries, fostering public-private partnerships and attracting foreign investments in sustainable technologies.

Moreover, Oman has the potential to position itself as a regional hub for solar PV sustainability. As Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other GCC nations expand their solar industries, Oman can lead by establishing solar PV recycling and refurbishment facilities, serving both domestic and regional markets.

CHALLENGES

Despite the benefits, Oman faces several challenges in developing a circular solar economy. One of the biggest obstacles is weak market formation for solar PV recycling. Due to the availability of cheap new solar panels, there is low demand for second-life panels.

Additionally, many businesses and consumers are unaware of solar circularity, and there is a lack of certification for refurbished panels, making their resale difficult.

Another major challenge is the absence of large-scale solar recycling infrastructure. Oman currently does not have dedicated facilities for solar panel recycling, which means that decommissioned panels either end up in landfills or are exported without proper oversight.

To address this, the government must incentivise private sector investment in recycling facilities and establish a national network for collecting and processing solar waste.

Policy gaps also hinder progress. While Oman has made strides in solar energy expansion, there is no dedicated regulation for solar panel recycling or circular economy mandates. Implementing policies such as extended producer responsibility (EPR) — which makes manufacturers responsible for collecting and recycling old panels — could ensure sustainable end-of-life management.

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Ramadhan

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A man owns a number of horses. Is there Zakat on them?

There is no Zakat on horses. This ruling is based on an authentic Hadith in which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, “There is no Zakat either on a horse or a slave belonging to a Muslim.”



HADITH
GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Huraira reported Allah’s Messenger as saying: Allah, the Majestic and the Exalted, said: Every act of the son of Adam is for him except fasting. It is done for My sake, and I will give a reward for it. By Allah in Whose Hand is the life of Muhammad, the breath of the observer of fast is sweeter to Allah than the fragrance of musk.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY



“And We have certainly created you, [O Mankind], and given you [human] form. Then We said to the angels, “Prostrate to Adam”; so they prostrated, except for Iblees. He was not of those who prostrated.”

(Surat Al Araaf-11)



DUA
SUPPLICATION TO ALLAH

O Allah, on this day, show me the way to win Your pleasure, do not let Shaytan have a means over me, make Paradise an abode and a resting place for me, O the One who fulfils the requests of the needy.



This annual observance, significant to millions of Muslims, has sparked interest for various reasons, often rooted in the desire to understand different cultures and spiritual practices.

FASTING AMONG NON-MUSLIMS ENCOURAGES STEPPING BEYOND COMFORT ZONES

BY BUTHINA AL RIYAMIYA

IN RECENT years, there has been a growing curiosity among non-Muslims about the practice of fasting during the holy month of Ramadhan. This annual observance, significant to millions of Muslims, has sparked interest for various reasons, often rooted in the desire to understand different cultures and spiritual practices. Articles and discussions in newspapers and blogs highlight that many individuals, regardless of their religious background, engage in fasting during this sacred time to explore shared human experiences, promote empathy, and foster a sense of community.

Fasting during Ramadhan, known as Sawm, involves abstaining from food and drink from dawn until sunset. It is more than merely refraining from physical nourishment; it encompasses a holistic approach, urging participants to engage in self-reflection, practice self-discipline, and avoid sinful behaviours. This commitment to spiritual growth cultivates empathy towards those less fortunate, illuminating the profound notion of solidarity and tolerance that transcends religious boundaries. Non-Muslims participating in fasting often uncover a deeper layer of understanding about fellow humans,

as the act of refraining from food becomes a collective journey of restraint, reflection, and bonding.

Among those who have ventured into this experience is Holly Parker, a UK resident whose initial thoughts about fasting were casual, stemming from a conversation with her sister. Two years ago, however, a discussion with a schoolmate about Ramadhan ignited her curiosity further. “Not as a religious duty but out of a desire I could not fully understand,” Parker recalled her motivation to fast. With guidance from her friend, the process became more manageable, marking the beginning of her exploration into this custom.

Parker recounts the unique challenges of fasting in a non-Muslim environment. “The smell of food was everywhere, and saying no was really hard,” she admitted, describing how, unlike in predominantly Muslim countries, where the act of fasting is communal, she found herself surrounded by colleagues who were eating throughout the day. Despite the difficulties, Parker noted a remarkable increase in her productivity, attributing it to her attempts to channel her focus away from hunger.

As Ramadhan drew to a close and the days progressed, Parker and her friend often reflected on their fasting experiences. They recognised that for many individuals around the globe, food scar-

city is a daily reality, and the sensation of hunger is not simply a temporary experience but a constant struggle. This shared reflection epitomised the beauty of cross-cultural exchange, emphasising the bonds of friendship that bridge cultural and religious divides.

Fasting is also embraced by many for health and wellness reasons, with a growing body of research supporting its benefits. Intermittent fasting, for instance, has gained popularity as a practice that not only promotes weight loss but also enhances metabolic health. Numerous studies suggest that fasting can improve insulin sensitivity, aid in heart health, and even promote longevity. The principle of fasting encourages us to listen to our bodies, creating a mindful approach to eating that many find revitalising.

In essence, whether motivated by spiritual beliefs or health considerations, the practice of fasting offers a multitude of benefits. Holly Parker’s journey into Ramadhan fasting exemplifies the power of sharing experiences across cultures, inviting others to become part of a broader dialogue that celebrates diversity and mutual understanding. Whether driven by faith, friendship, or pure curiosity, the act of fasting during the holy month of Ramadhan can resonate deeply, fostering connections that transcend the divides of our varied backgrounds.



How Ramadhan highlights the smooth merging of Islamic and Chinese culture

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

IN CHINA, Islamic culture has thrived and woven itself into the rich tapestry of Chinese society for over 1,300 years since its introduction.

Today, more than 20 million Muslims from various ethnic groups reside in regions like the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and beyond. For Muslims, Ramadhan stands as the most sacred, auspicious, and joyous month of the year.

Chinese Muslims, mirroring their counterparts around the world, engage in the purification of body and soul, observe fasting and prayers, perform acts of kindness, and embrace the traditions of solidarity, cooperation, friendship, and mutual support.

At the culmination of 30 days of fasting, Eid al-Fitr is celebrated with great enthusiasm by various Muslim ethnic groups, including the Uygurs, Hui, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Tatars, Kyrgyz, Sala, Dongxiang, and Bonan. This festive occasion sees friends and families coming together in joyous celebration.

Nestled along the historic Silk Road, Xinjiang serves as a meeting point for Eastern and Western civilisations, playing a pivotal role in the introduction of Islam to China. This vibrant region has long been home to diverse ethnic communities, fostering a rich interplay of cultures and the coexistence of various religions. The Yanghang Mosque in Urumqi often sees Chinese Muslims congregating in worship, while the square in front of the Id Kah Mosque serves as a lively gathering place, embodying the essence of harmony in Xinjiang.

Omani tourists, as well as local residents, have frequently visited Xinjiang to partake in Ramadhan celebrations with the local Muslim community, immersing themselves in the distinctive customs of Chinese Ramadhan.



The age-old tradition that marks the beginning of Ramadhan is the search for the crescent moon on the first evening after sunset, signalling the start of the monthly fast. In Xinjiang, Ningxia, and other areas with sizable ethnic populations, Eid al-Fitr is recognised as a public holiday.

As the month of fasting concludes, the Fajr prayer on Eid al-Fitr becomes the largest gathering of its kind throughout the year. Families prepare an array of traditional dishes that showcase their unique ethnic flavours, including fried Sanzi, fried Youxiang (both flour-based), and boiled jam. The celebration often includes the slaughter of sheep and chickens, the crafting of Liangfen (a traditional Chinese dish made of starch jelly), and hearty vegetable stews. Homes overflow with festive delicacies, generously shared with relatives, friends, and neighbours, as the air fills with music, laughter, and joyous dancing.

In China, fasting among Muslims is a commonplace religious observance, grounded in personal choice, legislatively protected and widely respected within society. During Ramadhan, the Chinese government takes measures to ensure food hygiene and alleviate traffic congestion, fostering a smooth observance of the month while promoting national unity and social harmony.

Both Chinese and Islamic civilisations embrace the values of moderation, peace, and kindness. As a unique convergence of these two significant cultural traditions, Xinjiang's history, culture, and local customs invite exploration and appreciation. It is hoped that more friends from Oman will visit Xinjiang to admire its breathtaking snow-capped mountains and desert landscapes, savour the delights of its unique culinary offerings, and experience the warmth of its friendly, harmonious inhabitants.

RAMADHAN TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

“Nasi Lemak” (coconut rice), Islamic arts and community prayers in Brunei

In Brunei, Ramadhan is observed with a profound sense of reverence and national pride. As the month unfolds, families come together to prepare “Nasi Lemak”, a beloved dish of fragrant coconut rice, often served with various accompaniments, creating a delightful iftar experience. The nation transforms, with mosques beautifully adorned and prayer gatherings abundant, as communities unite for nightly prayers. Public celebrations and cultural events showcase Islamic arts and heritage, reflecting the rich tapestry of Bruneian culture. The spirit of giving is evident, with many individuals and organisations launching initiatives to provide meals and support for those in need. Throughout Ramadhan, the emphasis on faith, community and hospitality creates an atmosphere of joy and reflection. For Bruneians, this sacred month serves as a celebration not only of religious devotion but also of cultural identity and national unity.

DAILY HEALTH TIPS TO REMEMBER



Focus on Whole Foods

Emphasising whole, unprocessed foods during Ramadhan can significantly enhance your health and well-being. Whole foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and lean proteins, are rich in essential nutrients, vitamins and minerals that effectively nourish your body. Unlike heavily processed foods, which often contain added sugars, unhealthy fats and preservatives, whole foods provide greater satiation and health benefits without empty calories. For Suhoor, opt for meals that include whole grains like quinoa or brown rice, alongside colourful vegetables and a source of protein like eggs or yogurt. During Iftar, include fresh salads, lean meats, grilled fish and legumes like chickpeas or lentils to sustain your energy and support digestion throughout the day, contributing to a healthier Ramadhan.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS IN ISLAM



1187 CE: The Battle of Hattin

The Battle of Hattin was a decisive confrontation between Saladin's forces and the Crusaders, resulting in a major Muslim victory. This battle allowed Saladin to recapture Jerusalem, emphasising Muslim resilience and unity in the face of Crusader incursions. Saladin's leadership and diplomacy not only strengthened Muslim morale, but also showcased a commitment to reclaiming sacred sites.

FEATURES

Saturn gains 128 new moons, bringing its total to 274



ASTRONOMERS say they have discovered more than 100 new moons around Saturn, possibly the result of cosmic smashups that left debris in the planet’s orbit as recently as 100 million years ago.

The gas giant planets of our solar system have many moons, which are defined as objects that orbit around planets or other bodies that are not stars. Jupiter has 95 moons, Uranus has 28 and Neptune has 16. The 128 in the latest haul around Saturn bring its total to 274.

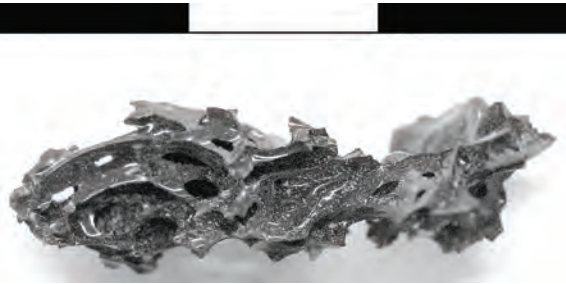
“It’s the largest batch of new moons,” said Mike Alexandersen at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, an author of a paper announcing the discovery that will be published in Research Notes of the American Astronomical Society.

Many of these moons are rocks only a few miles across — small compared with our moon, which is 2,159 miles across. But as long as the rocks have trackable orbits around their parent body, the scientists who catalog objects in the solar system consider them to be moons. That is the responsibility of the International Astronomical Union, which ratified the 128 new moons of Saturn.

The forthcoming paper’s lead author, Edward Ashton of the Academia Sinica Institute of Astronomy and Astrophysics in Taiwan, will have naming rights for the objects. The moons were discovered in 2023 using the Canada France Hawaii Telescope at Mauna Kea in Hawaii.

— JONATHAN O’CALLAGHAN / NYT

Vesuvius turned one victim’s brain to glass



FIVE YEARS ago, Italian researchers published a study on the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in the year 79 that detailed how one victim of the blast, a male presumed to be in his mid-20s, had been found nearby in the seaside settlement of Herculaneum. He was lying face down and buried by ash on a wooden bed in the College of the Augustales, a public building dedicated to the worship of Emperor Augustus.

In 2018, a researcher discovered black, glossy shards embedded inside the man’s skull. A 2020 paper speculated that the heat of the explosion was so immense that it had fused the victim’s brain tissue into glass. Forensic analysis revealed proteins common in brain tissue and fatty acids found in human hair, while a chunk of charred wood unearthed near the skeleton indicated a thermal reading as high as 968 degrees Fahrenheit. It was the only known instance of soft tissue — much less any organic material — being naturally preserved as glass.

Now, a paper published in Nature has verified that the fragments are indeed glassified brain. Using techniques such as electron microscopy, energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy and differential scanning calorimetry, scientists examined the physical properties of samples taken from the glassy fragments and demonstrated how they were formed and preserved.

— FRANZ LIDZ / NYT



Rarely seen cave art holds prehistoric secrets in France

DEEP inside a labyrinthine cave in southwestern France, ancient humans who lived around 30,000 years ago carved horses, mammoths and rhinoceros into the walls, a fabulous prehistoric menagerie that has rarely been seen -- until now.

Discovered in 2000 by an amateur cave explorer, the Grotte de Cussac in the Dordogne department holds ancient human remains, traces of long-extinct bears and stunning, fragile artworks its custodians go to great lengths to preserve.

Typically, the French authorities restrict access to the cave to researchers, who are only allowed to enter it four weeks per year.

But a team of AFP journalists was recently allowed to visit the cave for the first time, accompanied by scientists working to unravel its mysteries.

After unlocking the metal grate that blocks the entrance, the group put on white protective overclothes, head coverings and gloves, then disinfected the soles of their boots.

Authorities are anxious to avoid a repeat of the damage done to France’s famed Lascaux caves by microorganisms brought in by visitors.

The Lascaux caves -- which are also located in Dordogne, though their artworks are estimated to be thousands of years younger than the Cussac carvings -- were closed to the public in 1963 to save their precious frescoes.

The Cussac cave is accessed by a narrow passage through boulders that have closed off its inner chambers for thousands of years.

Lighting the way with headlamps, visitors cross vast chambers of stalactites and stalagmites, following the same narrow path as Marc Delluc, the late amateur speleologist who discovered the cave in September 2000.

Delluc, who died in 2017, noticed a draft blowing from within the rocks, picked his way through the limestone and uncovered a path of around 100 metres (yards) leading to the engravings.

He described the “rush of adrenaline” he felt when he saw the curved figures and silhouettes carved into the rock overhead.

“I realised the privilege I’d been granted, to enter a place that had been consecrated since the dawn of time,” he said.

‘SANCTUARY’

The 1.6-kilometre (mile-long) cave has more than 1,000 carved figures, both animals and stylised feminine forms.



Scientists have dated them to between 26,000 and 35,000 years ago, the time of the ancient Gravettian culture in Europe.

“The Grotte de Cussac is exceptional for its well-preserved state. It was probably closed off very soon after it was occupied, which protected the soil and vestiges inside,” said Emeline Deneuve, chief heritage conservationist for the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region’s cultural affairs department.

Claw marks and signs of burrowing show it was also used by cave bears, prehistoric relatives of the brown bear.

Inside their hibernation chambers, researchers have found the remains of six human bodies, dating to the same period as the engravings.

It is the only known example of a cave used by prehistoric humans for both burials and artworks, said the site’s lead archaeologist, Jacques Jaubert. The site was a “sanctuary”, not a dwelling, he said. “The group lived outside, in the open or in shelters under the rocks.”

‘FRAGMENTS OF MYTHOLOGY’

Jaubert thinks the cave may have been used for initiation ceremonies, “a rite of passage for adolescents to join the adult world” -- a practice often observed in primitive hunter-gatherer groups.

It would also have been seen “as a place of passage between the world of the living and

the world of the dead”, he said.

The carvings, which he calls “fragments of mythology”, were made with flint, wood and bone. They depict bison, ibex, geese and other animals, as well as women, often with giant heads and tiny feet.

“After testing the wall of the cave, leaving traces with his fingers, the artist carved the first animal figures, which were followed by others superimposed over them,” said researcher Valerie Feruglio, who uses 3D imaging to study the artworks, seeking to decipher their stories.

SAFEGUARDING HISTORY

The cave has still not been fully explored.

But authorities are extremely cautious in protecting the site, which was named a historic monument in 2002.

“We are the guardians responsible for preserving and documenting the site,” said Deneuve, the conservation chief.

“We support the research carried out there, as long as it is in line with conservation and heritage requirements. Documenting the cave and digitising it in 3D is also part of our goal to bring it to the public.”

In October, the Dordogne department opened a free exhibit on the cave in the town of Buisson-de-Cadouin, with reproductions of its artworks.

But authorities say there are no plans to open the cave to the public. — AFP