

P10

ALCARAZ TOPS
MEDVEDEV TO
REPEAT AS INDIAN
WELLS CHAMPION



P13

OMAN OIL
EXPORTS SOAR
TO REACH 26.2
MILLION BARRELS



P19

AL BURAIMI'S SHARFA
MOSQUE REMAINS THE
CENTRE OF SOCIETY
AFTER 300 YEARS



MUSCAT

HM CONGRATULATES
PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation on the occasion of winning the presidential elections for a new term. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments to President Putin, wishing him success in leading the people of Russia towards further progress. His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations further development and prosperity.

PUTIN WINS



Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses the crowd during a rally and a concert celebrating the 10th anniversary of Russia's annexation of Crimea at Red Square in Moscow. **DETAILS ON P7**

MOE, SQU REVIEW
JOINT COOPERATION

The joint committee between Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and the Ministry of Education held a meeting under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in the presence of Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education in the presence of committee members from both sides. The committee discussed the possibility of increasing academic seats in the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University in educational specialisations and in light of the current and future needs for educational jobs. **SEE P2**

Royal Decree
appoints
non-resident
ambassadors

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued Royal Decree No (17/2024) on appointing non-resident ambassadors.
Article (1) appoints Talal bin Sulaiman bin Habib al Rahbi, the Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to the Federative Republic of Brazil as extraordinary, plenipotentiary and non-resident Ambassador of Oman to the Oriental Republic of Uruguay and the Republic of Colombia.
Article (2) appoints Badr bin Mohammed bin Badr al Mantheri, the Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as extraordinary, plenipotentiary and non-resident Ambassador of Oman to the Republic of Iceland.
Article (3) appoints Ahmed bin Ali bin Said al Rashidi, the Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka as extraordinary, plenipotentiary and non-resident Ambassador of Oman to the Republic of Maldives.
Article (4) appoints Hamoud bin Salim bin Abdullah al Tuwaiyah, the Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to the Russian Federation as extraordinary, plenipotentiary and non-resident Ambassador of Oman to the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Serbia.
Article (5) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

TIME TO STOP HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE IN GAZA: SAYYID BADR

Israel should pay for loss of lives

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY

@shadam

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, called for the need to compensate the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip for the loss of innocent lives and those affected by the Israeli war and the need to make a collective and comprehensive effort to alleviate the suffering of the painful humanitarian crisis facing the brotherly Palestinian people.

In an interview with the CNN programme 'Connecting the World with Becky Anderson', Sayyid Badr, said: "What viewers really everywhere need to know that the people of Palestine are suffering a total humanitarian catastrophe. Over 30,000 have already been killed since last October. Tragic stories of newborn babies dying from starvation. The whole of the Gaza Strip is in famine and it is unspeakable. And this has not been caused by a natural disaster or a disease. This is the doing of the Israeli defence forces."

"All this is caused by the Israeli side denying the people of Gaza basic living necessities. This is the doing of the state of Israel in complete violation of international law and international humanitarian law. We cannot really but highlight such facts," he added.

Sayyid Badr said that the world must demand reparations for the loss of innocent lives and destruction inflicted. "US President Biden has called upon the Israelis not to move on to Rafah. The whole world is calling Israel not to move on to Rafah. I think enough is enough. And I will join US Vice President Harris' call for a ceasefire now. This will allow aid to flow by land, and it will also allow Israel's remaining hostages to be released peacefully



A woman and child walk along the coastal highway with other displaced Palestinians fleeing from the area in the vicinity of Gaza City's Al Shifa Hospital on Monday. — AFP

and not through war and then a process of peace and reconstruction of shattered lives can begin after a ceasefire," he said.

"In the 1990s, the then US Secretary of State James Baker convened an international conference that would eventually lead to historic agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. I think the United States has the capacity to do exactly the same now. These were supposed to lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state that would live side by side in peace with Israel in what we still call the two-state solution," he said.

Sayyid Badr stressed on the way to allow aid into Gaza. "The only way to really get the flow of aid as quickly as possible is through the establishment of a ceasefire. I think that is the only way, especially by land, because the people of Gaza need water, food, medicine, fuel, and this can only be supplied in sufficient quantities through land routes, through the various openings that are available, not just through Rafah, but through the various other openings everywhere."

On whether if Israel is weaponising aid and intentionally starving Gazans, Sayyid Badr said, "Yes, I think that is what is happening. That is what not only me saying, but the whole international community and UN agencies are really witnessing a deliberate policy of starvation and siege on the people of Gaza."

On the potential for a peace conference that Sayyid Badr is calling for, including having Hamas at the table, he said, "Well, I think if we can establish first an immediate ceasefire and move on swiftly, and this is why we called for a new international peace conference to complete the mission that wasn't completed back in the 1990s." **TURN TO P3**

'Hidaya Waqf' Foundation to promote scholarly communication

AHMED AL KAABI

MUSCAT, March 18

As part of ongoing efforts to enhance cultural and religious communication, the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday witnessed the inauguration of the 'Hidaya Waqf' Foundation, under the auspices of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

'Hidaya' will focus on highlighting the values of true Islam, address non-Muslims and provide support for cultural exchange programmes. It will underscore the civilisational role of Omani society and promote scholarly communication among nations, peoples and societies.

'Hidaya' signed five memoranda of understanding (MoU) that deal

with strategic partnerships with other institutions, government departments and private sector establishments. The MoUs will cover various aspects of cooperation, coordination and integration aimed at expanding the scope and impact of such cultural action.

'Hidaya' institution will also provide support for new Muslims and gain society's confidence.

Speaking on the occasion, Shaikh Abdulrahman bin Ahmed al Khalili, Chairman of the Foundation's Board of Directors, said that Hidaya Waqf Foundation is dedicated to supporting programmes and activities related to two significant aspects of utmost importance.

The first aspect is introducing the noble Islamic religion by highlighting its radiant truth and inherent essence to



Dignitaries at the launch of the foundation on Monday.

non-Muslim residents and visitors to this blessed land, as well as supporting new Muslims through various programmes, activities, and events such as the annual acquaintance event.

Shaikh Al Khalili further emphasised that the second aspect of the foundation

is introducing Omani civilisation and showcasing its landmarks to the world by bridging scientific and cognitive relations with educational institutions, intellectual and cultural centres. The distinctive characteristics of Omani civilisation have made it a subject of interest for a wide

range of researchers who continually seek to explore Oman and its intellectual and historical depth.

The historical and modern Omani political stances, characterised by standing for truth and supporting the oppressed, have greatly attracted the world's attention and efforts to understand them. Hence, it was imperative for every researcher about Oman to find what they seek, as Oman was never been closed from the world or isolated from its Islamic and Arab surroundings.

Shaikh Al Khalili stressed the importance of cooperation with educational and cultural institutions in this context, highlighting the pivotal role of the foundation in garnering global attention towards Omani civilisation. **TURN TO P2**

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Over 1,500 to benefit from Fak Kurba initiative



Donations are directed to cases in coordination with government institutions and civil society

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 18

More than 10 government and private institutions announced their support for the eleventh edition of the Fak Kurba initiative at an annual meeting organised by the Omani Lawyers Association. This season, the initiative aims to release 1,500 prisoners.

Dr Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Zadjali, Chairman of the Omani Lawyers Association, who supervises the initiative, said, “Since its launch, the initiative aims to relieve the distress of persons who are imprisoned by bringing joy and happiness to them and their families.”

It may be noted that persons eligible to benefit under the initiative include those not benefited from the initiative during its previous editions, the debt must be related to commercial, civil, labour or legal cases and not criminal.

“We received the initial lists of those

eligible to be included in the initiative this year, and the number of names on these lists was 965 of those imprisoned or against whom a detention order was issued,” he said.

“Since the launch of the initiative in its 11th edition on March 3, around 50 cases have been released, followed by a large batch of those released in the coming days,” he added.

The amount of the claim should not exceed RO 2,000, and the total number of claims shall not exceed RO 2,000 for one insolvent person if there is more than one claim against him.

Donations are directed to deserving cases in coordination with government institutions and civil society.

The priority in payment will be given to the lesser claim to the oldest than the youngest.

It is worth noting that the initiative has contributed to the release of more than 5,890 cases since 2012.

MoE, SQU review joint cooperation

MUSCAT: The joint committee between Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and the Ministry of Education held a meeting under the chairmanship of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in the presence of Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education in the presence of committee members from both sides.

The committee reviewed a number of topics including following up on the recommendations of the committee's first meeting as well as new topics proposed by both sides related to enhancing cooperation in the field of studies, scientific research and postgraduate studies. It also discussed the possibility of increasing academic seats in the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University in educational specialisations and in light of the current and future needs for educational jobs and strengthening teaching curricula to



The committee discussed ways of benefiting from the SQU in examinations for supervisory jobs and school administration positions

enhance the areas of special education and students with learning difficulties.

The committee discussed ways of benefiting from the SQU in examinations for supervisory jobs and school administration positions and reviewed areas of activating the role of the vocational guidance specialist at the Ministry of Education to introduce it

as a discipline at the university and to conduct joint courses and seminars to introduce school students to future areas of study at universities in accordance to their talents and tendencies.

Also discussed at the meeting was the utilisation of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, research and scientific experiments.

‘Hidaya Waqf’ to promote communication

FROM P1

He emphasised the foundation's commitment to achieving its noble goals through sustainable financial resources and partnership with the community and institutions.

The ceremony also featured a visual presentation introducing the foundation and a speech by Shaikh Dr Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharousi, Assistant Grand Mufti, on the importance of

supporting the foundation's programmes and activities.

Dr Al Kharousi stated that the purpose of this foundation, named after a Prophet's guidance, aims to showcase the bright aspects of the ancient and authentic civilisation of this country and the commendable religious commitment of its people. This cultural aspect that we aspire to showcase to people requires cooperation and partnership, especially concerning education,

awareness, and highlighting the country's distinctive aspects.

Dr Al Kharousi emphasised the importance of collective cooperation as an embodiment of the values of the true religion and the pursuit of spreading goodness, truth, and guidance among people. He affirmed that the foundation focuses on implementing community programmes and activities aimed at directing minds

and consciences towards knowledge and education through meaningful workshops and diverse educational courses.

He explained that these programmes target all those interested in learning about Islam in the Sultanate of Oman, understanding the history of Islam in the region, as well as familiarising themselves with the cultural aspects in which Omanis have contributed across various fields.



TENDER

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF WIND INDEPENDENT POWER PROJECTS (IPPs), SULTANATE OF OMAN

Nama Power and Water Procurement (PWP) is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water and for purchasing and selling the output in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the PWP license.

PWP is announcing the launch of the qualification process for interested developers through the issuance of the Request for Qualification (RFQ) document.

In line with Sultanate of Oman vision to diversify fuel sources and achieving net zero target by 2050 through the use of clean energy for power generation, PWP is planning to develop five Wind projects with a cumulative capacity of around 1000 MW at various location ("Wind IPPs" or "Projects") in partnership with the private sector, projects details below:

Project	Capacity	Location	SCOD
Sale of Dhofar I	50 MW	Harweel	Achieved COD in 2019
Dhofar II	114-132 MW	Harweel	Q2 2027
Jaalan Bani Bu Ali	91-105 MW	Jaalan Bani Bu Ali	Q1 2027
Duqm	234-270 MW	Ras Madrakah	Q4 2027
Sadah	81-99 MW	Sadah	Q4 2027
Mahoot I	342-400 MW	Mahoot	Q4 2027

PWP is announcing the launch of the qualification process for interested developers through the issuance of the Request for Qualification (RFQ) document.

Tender Number	Tender Title	Tender Purchase Price	Statement of Qualification Submission Deadline
OPWP/2024/08	Request For Qualification for the Development of Wind IPPs	RO 500 Last day of purchase is 08 April 2024	08 May 2024 Before 12.00 pm (Gulf Standard Time).

Disclaimer: This RFQ is for interested developers and is not applicable to interested or potential EPC contractors.

The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through PWP website: (https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx) after completion of the registration process via the e-tendering system.

The supplier user manual can be accessed on the official website of the Company. In case of any queries, please send an email to: (procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om).

Oman takes part in Unesco session

PARIS: The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 219th session of the Unesco Executive Board being held in Paris from March 13-27.

The Sultanate of Oman is represented by Dr Hamad bin Saif al Hamami, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to Unesco, alongside some experts.

In his first speech to the Unesco Executive Board since the Sultanate of Oman obtained its membership for the period 2023-2027, Al Hamami touched on the ongoing Palestinian crisis that is presently preoccupying the world, stressing that the Sultanate of Oman is among countries calling for the importance of taking urgent measures to end the war on the Gaza Strip and Palestine in general and the need for international law to deliver on its responsibilities to protect civilians, ensure their humanitarian needs and lift the illegal siege on Gaza and the rest of the Palestinian territories. He called on Unesco to play its role within the scope of its activities to help the Palestinian people.

In his speech, Al Hamami stressed that the Sultanate of Oman is committed to consolidating the principles of constructive dialogue and the values of tolerance in society, especially among the youth segment who are the basic element for building the nation. He added that the Omani youth receive care and attention in all scientific, cultural, and sports fields and that the Sultanate of Oman's international tolerance



and coexistence project is a good example in this regard.

The programmes adopted by Unesco directly affect the future of other countries and societies, especially those dedicated to addressing the environmental, social, and economic challenges associated with disasters especially that the world today is in dire need of cooperation and synergy to mitigate the effects of disasters, he said.

Al Hamami said that one of the fruits of cooperation with the Unesco is the inauguration by the Sultanate of Oman, in cooperation with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the latest national centre in the region for multi-hazard centre which monitors predicts disasters occur and deliver information to the relevant institutions to take necessary action to mitigate the impact of disasters.

Among the policies and initiatives

of the Sultanate of Oman to protect the environment at the global level is its declaration in 1989 of the Unesco Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Conservation with a deposit that has reached \$1 million so far, Al Hamami said pointing out that the prize is expected to be extended during this session for another 6 years based on the positive recommendations of the external evaluator.

The 219th session of the Unesco Executive Board discusses several topics most importantly reviewing the report on the implementation of the Unesco's programmes and budget in addition to some topics related to the areas of the Unesco's work in education, culture, science, and communication as well as items submitted by member states and administrative and financial topics.



Israel should pay for loss of lives

FROM P1

“And the purpose of the conference will be to translate the will of the international community for a two-state solution into action by agreeing the necessary arrangements and required guarantees to sustain it under an international peace agreement. Whether today or tomorrow, the whole world has said again and again there is no other way to have sustainable peace in the long term except the adoption of a two-state solution,” he added.

Asked whether he was in touch with the Ansar Allah group or spoken to Iran about their intentions, “I believe there is a very strong connection. In fact, it’s the only connection between what’s going on in the Red Sea and what’s going on in Gaza. If we stop the war in Gaza, we will de-escalate tension everywhere. And I believe the freedom of navigation, which is something we all call for, will be resumed if we simply recognise that connection between the developments in Palestine and Gaza and the disturbances we are witnessing in the Red Sea,”



Over 30,000 have already been killed since last October. Tragic stories of newborn babies dying from starvation. The whole of the Gaza Strip is in famine and it is unspeakable

SAYYID BADR AL BUSAIDY

Foreign Minister

Sayyid Badr said.

“As somebody who supports the people of Gaza and calls for a ceasefire, does that, by implications suggest that you



Palestinians flee the area after Israeli bombardment in central Gaza City on Monday amid the ongoing battles. – AFP

are supporting the Ansar Allah actions at present. I mean, they are deadly. We are not supporting the Israeli actions. We want those actions to be stopped. We want the atrocities stopped everywhere. We are a country of peace. We call for peace everywhere. And we cannot simply expect the continuation of these atrocities in Gaza and witness it without lifting a finger at Israel,” he added.

In conclusion, Sayyid Badr said Oman’s key role is part and

parcel of the regional role of promoting a climate of peace, of promoting dialogue, of trying to connect people. “And your programme is called Connect the World. And I hope you will join us in really connecting everybody for the sake of peace and for the sake of prosperity and the development of all of our region. We will continue to play that role. And I believe there are people of goodwill and clear vision on all sides who can do that,” he said.

41 artworks showcased at SQU’s 27th annual photography week

MUSCAT: The 27th edition of Photography Week entitled ‘Narrative’, began at Sultan Qaboos University from Monday. The activity is organised by the Photography Group of the Deanship of Student Affairs.

About 41 artworks, including portraits, nature, and photography of some ancient and modern architectural facilities, in addition to artistic photography and abstract trends are on display.

The exhibition included several interactive and creative corners, including the creative corner, video graphics, and the studio.

This years event highlights the role of the image in



The Photography Week entitled ‘Narrative’, began at SQU on Monday.

communicating moral and narrative concepts and a language of dialogue that carries all thematic patterns, through

artistic performances that simulate the effect of the image in building intellectual awareness and sensory communication.

Visitors to the exhibition will be able to participate in the process of selecting the winning images by voting for the image.

There is a jury allocated to choose the winning images in the week’s competition and includes a group of university graduates. The exhibition also includes a competition for filming the best short video with internal artistic workshops. The Photography Week will conclude its activities on Thursday and the closing event will be held on March 20, Wednesday, under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Dr Faris bin Turki al Said, and the winning photos will be announced during the same event.

Role of scientific research in pharma security and national economy

MUSCAT: During the Covid pandemic, pharmaceutical security emerged as an existential element of human life, and attention was directed towards pharmaceutical companies that rely on research and development to save humanity from epidemics and deadly diseases as many struggled to secure the vaccines due to various factors.

One of the biggest lessons learned from the pandemic is the importance of pharmaceutical security in general, and especially in Oman.

With this in mind, we raise the issue of pharmaceutical security in Oman and answer a series of questions on what role does scientific research play in achieving pharma security and supporting the national economy?

How to improve the pharmaceutical industry in the Sultanate of Oman? What are the enablers for achieving pharmaceutical security? All these questions, among others, are answered in the latest issue of Scientific Insights magazine published by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The importance of pharmaceutical security Prof Dr Haider bin Ahmed al Lawati, Prof at the College of Science, Sultan Qaboos University, is of the view that pharmaceutical security is one of the main objectives that countries aim to achieve. Pharmaceutical security is not only about the provision of sufficient quantities of medicines but also about local production of pharmaceuticals and non-reliance on foreign imports. This can be achieved by supporting the local pharmaceutical industry so that local products can compete with imported products.

Role of scientific research in achieving pharma security

R&D are essential in the pharmaceutical industry and key to achieving pharmaceutical security.

Scientific research plays a critical role in drug discovery and development and has a direct impact on national pharmaceutical security

Dr Mohammed bin Hamdan al Rubaee, Director-General, Pharmaceutical Affairs and Drug Control, Ministry of Health, says, Scientific research plays a critical role in drug discovery and development and has a direct impact on national pharmaceutical security. It supports the national economy by promoting innovation, creating employment opportunities, and driving economic growth through the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. In addition, investment in scientific research is not only a matter of public health but also a vital strategic and economic necessity.

Prof Dr Haider al Lawati adds that scientific research in the field of pharmaceutical manufacturing is considered one of the most challenging research fields, as it is both time-consuming and highly expensive. Thus, it is almost exclusively limited to highly ranked global universities and international companies.

Arab and Gulf countries suffer from a lack of serious research in this field. Most pharmaceutical companies in the Arab world are generic drug manufacturers that do not rely on scientific research in pharmaceutical production. Pharmaceutical companies can be divided into two main categories: innovator drug companies and generic drug companies. Generic drugs are not new drugs, but rather drugs manufactured after obtaining a permit from the research company to produce them, or they are no longer protected by production rights.



Prof Dr Haider bin Ahmed al Lawati



Dr Mohammed al Rubaee

MAXIMISING THE BENEFITS OF SUHOOR

AFRAH AL BALUSHIA

@Afrahalbalushia

During the sacred month of Ramadhan, suhoor meal holds a profound significance in preparing the body and mind for the day’s fasting ahead. Suhoor should be treated like an early morning breakfast. In this meal, we should choose light foods that can keep us feeling full for a long time.

Nutrition experts suggest drinking at least two glasses of water during suhoor. But the most important thing is to drink two litres of water during the period between iftar and suhoor, provided that the water is taken slowly to ensure that we get the appropriate amount we need daily.

One should eat a balanced suhoor meal instead of eating fatty main dishes such as meat, rice, and pasta. Do not give you a feeling of fullness, but rather make you feel hungry and thirsty throughout the next day.

Long hours of fasting leads to changes in our lifestyles, and changes in the quantity and quality of food intake. To obtain a healthy and balanced lifestyle during



One should eat a balanced suhoor meal instead of eating fatty main dishes such as meat, rice and pasta.

Ramadhan, it is necessary to become familiar with some basic eating habits.

Do not keep vegetables away from the suhoor meal, as watercress, cucumber, garden cress, cabbage, lettuce, carrots, parsley, and all other vegetables are foods that moisturise the body and freshen the breath.

Salads can be made for suhoor by adding many types of delicious and beneficial vegetables.

Eat more foods rich in fibre, such as oranges, lettuce and cucumber. Make sure to eat protein, which is one of the important nutritional tricks during the suhoor meal, so you can eat eggs, beans, or yogurt, as these foods reduce the feeling of

thirst during the fasting hours.

It is recommended to eat fruit to enhance energy in the body and obtain sugars from natural sources such as apples, bananas, guava, and pears.

Eating a lot of high-salt foods, such as pickles, causes a feeling of thirst during fasting for the next day. You should avoid eating them,

especially during the suhoor meal.

Avoid sleeping immediately after suhoor meal, because this causes you to be exposed to many health problems, including weight gain and stomach disorders. Try to eat suhoor meal early and well before bed.

Reduce your intake of caffeine-rich drinks as much as possible because they expose you to stress, fatigue and increase your feeling of thirst during fasting the next day.

The benefits of Suhoor lie in stimulating the digestive system and maintaining the blood sugar level. Suhoor prevents feelings of fatigue and laziness, and gives the body the energy needed to work, study, worship, and perform daily tasks during the day. It also maintains the general balance of the body, especially during long hours of fasting. Eating a healthy and complete suhoor meal protects people from any problems resulting from lack of water or food, such as headache, dizziness, constipation and other problems.

Doctors confirm the importance of the suhoor meal during Ramadhan. It supplies the body with energy and activity

during fasting hours, especially for young people, who suffer from fatigue and loss of concentration while studying during daytime hours.

In addition, we must not forget that children who have reached ten years of age are keen to share the fast with their parents, so the focus must be on giving them a healthy suhoor meal, as it is more difficult to endure fasting than it is for adults, so it must be an ideal meal.

Nutrition experts advise that children’s meal must include eggs or cheese, with bread, dates, a spoonful of white honey and milk, given that these foods contain the important ‘Vitamin B’, protein, calcium, and starches. These recommended foods work to stimulate the child’s digestion process and provides him with energy for a long time during the next day.

Doctors also advise to have suhoor meal shortly before the dawn call for prayer, in order to enable the body the benefit from all the nutrients for the largest possible period of the daylight hours, as it provides energy and reduce the hours of need for water.



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RAMADHAN REFLECTIONS

STUDENTS ABROAD SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

KHALID AL BALUSHI

THE EXPERIENCE

of students studying abroad during Ramadhan is a blend of emotions, as they find themselves distant from the familiar comfort of family gatherings and the companionship of friends and loved ones. However, amidst this separation, there lies an invaluable opportunity for them to delve into diverse cultures and cultivate new experiences. In interviews with Oman Daily Observer, several students shared their unique perspectives and encounters during this sacred month.

Amira al Balushi, a doctoral student at Universiti Sains Malaysia says, “We strive to maintain the blessed atmosphere of Ramadhan through prayers, reading, and contemplating Quranic verses. Ramadhan is the same in every Islamic country, but the only difference lies in rituals, customs, and the gathering of families around the iftar and suhoor tables; that’s the only distinction.”

Al Balushi added, “The atmosphere during Ramadhan in Malaysia is embodied through cooperation and solidarity among Muslims, and the organisation of various religious and social activities in mosques and Islamic centres, alongside communal Ramadhan meals within the university campus, where Muslim communities of academics, students, and staff gather daily from iftar until the Maghrib and Taraweeh prayers.” She advised, “Omani expatriates should enjoy the Ramadhan atmosphere abroad by seeking out local Muslim communities that organise Ramadhan events and participating in communal prayers and iftars. They can also use technology to connect with their families and share the joy and atmosphere.”

Amira al Balushi in her message to her family, says, “Despite the distance, the spirit of family unity and solidarity remains strong in my heart. May peace and happiness prevail throughout our beloved country, Oman.”

Abdullah al Araiimi, a student at Arizona State University, US, said, “Studying abroad during Ramadhan is different and it is hard to accept the fact that you will be spending the holy month away from your family, but as students we have to cope with it. We cannot ignore the fact that Ramadhan here in the US is different, especially considering our study, chores, and cooking for ourselves but try to make it easier on ourselves by gathering whenever possible to get rid of the homesickness.”

He further adds that they adapt to the situation and try their best by connecting more with the Muslim community and doing Salat al Taraweeh so we at least feel the spirit of Ramadhan.

Shifa al Dhafri, a student at one of the UK universities says, “In the UK there is not a certain source we can know that Ramadhan is due, we rely on announcements from the major mosques in London, which we share on our Omani society group chats.

Ramadhan differs from the way we used to in Oman. Yet still some people start fasting the day after or the day before because there is no certain source to get the news from.”

Al Dhafri says “The Muslim community in UK makes Ramadhan more like you are living in an Arab or Muslim country. Arab grocery stores and restaurants decorate their shops and broadcast Ramadhan songs. The efforts of Omani society in bringing us together, sharing Omani dishes, and wearing our traditional clothes make Ramadhan even better!”

Al Dhafri further adds that inviting friends for iftar, going to the mosques in the town where people break their fasting and pray Al Tarawih, and listening to lectures in mosques, make one appreciate the simple joys, that we might have taken for granted back home.”

Shaheen al Balushi elaborates on his experiences in India and Britain, stating, “During Ramadhan, the sense of estrangement varies depending on the country of residence, influenced by factors like the local Muslim population, mosque accessibility, and neighbourhood diversity.”

Reflecting on India, Shaheen noted, “I reside among a diverse group of youths from different faiths, all of them respect one another’s beliefs. We strive to foster an ambiance through gatherings, meetings, prayers, and shared iftar and suhoor meals with Muslim friends, emphasising mutual respect and understanding.” Despite encountering challenges,

Shaheen recounted that in Britain, mosque proximity posed a barrier, impacting his worship practices but still persists in upholding the spirit of the holy month through fasting, recitation, and community engagement.



ABDULLAH AL ARAIMI

Studying abroad during Ramadhan is different and it is hard to accept the fact that you will be spending the holy month away from your family, but as students we have to cope with it



SHAHEEN AL BALUSHI

I reside among a diverse group of youths from different faiths, all of them respect one another’s beliefs. We strive to foster an ambiance through gatherings, meetings, prayers, and shared iftar and suhoor meals



AMIRA AL BALUSHI

The atmosphere during Ramadhan in Malaysia is embodied through cooperation and solidarity among Muslims, and the organisation of various religious and social activities in mosques and Islamic centres, alongside communal Ramadhan meals within the university campus



SHIFA AL DHAFRI

The Muslim community in UK makes Ramadhan more like you are living in an Arab or Muslim country. Arab grocery stores and restaurants decorate their shops and broadcast Ramadhan songs





Govt treasury bills worth RO 70m issued

MUSCAT: The total issuance of Government Treasury Bills amounted to RO 70 million. The value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 5 million, for a maturity period of 28 days.

The average accepted price reached RO 99.615 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 99.615 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.01875 per cent and 5.03815 per cent, respectively.

Whereas, the value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 28.6 million, for a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price reached RO 98.734 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 98.705 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.07643 per cent and 5.14151 per cent, respectively.

While, the value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 36.4 million, for a maturity period of 182 days.

The average accepted price reached RO 97.446 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 97.430 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.12217 per cent and 5.25643 per cent, respectively.

Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 6.00 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 6.50 per cent. — **ONA**



Asaad bin Saeed al Hinai and Ahmed bin Mohammed al Habsi, members of the student project team

SQU STUDENTS USE AI FOR DATE SORTING

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 18

A group of students from the College of Engineering at Sultan Qaboos University have succeeded in integrating an artificial intelligence technique using computer vision with robotics systems, with the aim of automatically identifying the quality of dates and introducing artificial intelligence (AI) technology into the food industries.

The project aims to increase food quality by using artificial intelligence to automate food inspection and sorting, increase factory production capacity, reduce the time required to inspect and sort dates, and contribute effectively to food security.

One of the members of the student project team, Asaad bin Saeed al Hinai, said: The date industry is one of the important industries in the Sultanate of Oman, as it is one of the sources of income and trade. However, date producers face challenges in the sorting process, especially in identifying dates that are spoiled or unsuitable for human consumption. Artificial

Artificial Intelligence plays an important role in improving the date sorting process in factories, and is helpful in date sorting projects using computer vision algorithms and robotics

Intelligence plays an important role in improving the date sorting process in factories, as we carried out a date sorting project using computer vision algorithms and robotics.

He added that the system works to operate artificial intelligence in sorting dates automatically, as the system automates the process of sorting edible dates from spoiled ones, distinguishes the quality of dates automatically, identifies the condition of dates that pass through a production line using artificial intelligence, then transfers them to the appropriate path, and counts the number of dates. Which are sorted and the percentage of spoiled dates from good ones.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al

Habsi, a member of the student project team, explained that the process of introducing artificial intelligence is in food sorting, which is very important, as it begins with introducing dates into the production line via the conveyor belt. After that, the dates are photographed from the top of the production line using a high-resolution camera, through which they are identified. Computer vision distinguishes good dates from bad ones, then the dates are sorted through special gates in a production line.

Saleh bin Yahya al Ghanami, a member of the student project team, pointed out that there are many challenges facing factories, such as manually sorting spoiled or unusable products. This method is economically expensive, and relying on the human factor may reduce the quality of dates.

Al Ghanami stated that the system's performance is measured in terms of sorting speed - the amount of dates that are sorted within an hour — and the rate of examination and sorting error, stressing that the system increases the efficiency of the date sorting process compared to traditional methods.

Youth Centre launches diverse Ramadhan Programmes

MUSCAT: The Youth Centre in Muscat has introduced an extensive array of programmes tailored for the holy month of Ramadhan. Designed to foster the skills of young individuals and optimise their time during this sacred period, these initiatives encompass a wide spectrum of activities.

Among the offerings are sessions delving into Quranic recitation, a digital drawing camp, a contemporary agriculture programme, a financial literacy workshop including basics of investing in financial markets, and the engaging Al Badel youth challenges. Additionally, the Virtual Youth Academy programme, hosted on LinkedIn, offers specialised training opportunities.

Mohammed bin Nasser al Lamki, the Director of Programmes at the Youth Centre, highlighted the significance of these Ramadhan programmes

in nurturing the talents and aspirations of young people.

He emphasised the intent behind each programme, such as fostering creativity through digital drawing, educating on modern agricultural techniques, enhancing financial decision-making skills, and promoting teamwork and sportsmanship through youth challenges.

The 'Glimpses in Tajweed Quran' programme aims to refine Quranic recitation skills, while the Virtual Youth Academy on LinkedIn provides targeted training for over 350 beneficiaries, both male and female.

With a commitment to youth development, the Youth Centre continues to expand its programme offerings across various domains. By the end of 2023, it had delivered over 190 programmes, benefiting a significant number of 37,544 young men and women.



The Youth Centre in Muscat initiatives encompass a wide spectrum of activities.

Electronic link initiative towards consumer safety by ROP, CPA

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

The Consumer Protection Authority, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police, have begun to use electronic link to the vehicle recall sector through the summons system on the authority's website.

The electronic link is a joint system in the vehicle sector between the Authority, the police and vehicle agencies in the Sultanate of Oman.

The e-link lies in reducing traffic accidents resulting from manufacturing defects in vehicles, increasing the response rate to published recalls, facilitating communication with owners of recalled vehicles to inform them of the existence of a recall for their vehicles, saving public money by not having the owner repair his vehicle at his own expense, providing a real and accurate database, and ensure that the summons reaches the concerned parties.

According to the effects of the electronic



Implementation of e-link for vehicle recall notifications by an Integrated approach.

link to the quality of consumer services, Hilal bin Saud al Ismaili, Director of the Recalls and Warnings Department at the Consumer Protection Authority, said, "There are preliminary results, according to reports and indicators of car dealerships, in an increase in the response rate from consumers as a result of communicating with the last owner of the vehicle and knowing the status of the recalled vehicles,

their locations, and the means of accessing them and detects whether it was in the Sultanate of Oman, exported, or cancelled from service."

The electronic link provides correct data about the vehicle and its owner, such as the name of the vehicle owner, the vehicle number, and the condition of the vehicle, in order to communicate with the vehicle owner and notify him of the recall of his vehicle, and for the agency to provide spare parts from the supplying factory.

The linking mechanism is carried out by receiving agencies' requests on the linking system to obtain the correct data about the vehicle and its owner. The Authority then sends and receives the request from the Royal Oman Police and then sends the data to the requesting agency. The steps for electronic linking to the system take place after the agent inserts the chassis numbers into the summons system and approves by choosing (yes) to request obtaining the data of the last owner of the vehicle.

nhi المعهد الوطني للضيافة
national hospitality institute

PO Box 854, PC 131, Al Hamriya, Sultanate of Oman Tel: 24816313, Fax: 24817125

AGENDA FOR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ("AGM") AND EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING ("EGM")

The Board of Directors of National Hospitality Institute SAOC (the "Company") invites the shareholders to attend the AGM and EGM of the Company to be held on **Sunday 31st March 2024, at 1:00 P.M. and 1:30 P.M.** respectively at Meeting Room in National Hospitality Building in Wadi Al Kabir, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman to discuss the following agenda:

Firstly: AGM Agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' report for the financial year ended 31st December 2023 (Attachment - 1).
- To consider and approve the Auditors Report, the Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account for the financial year ended 31st December 2023 (Attachment - 2).
- To approve the sitting fees being availed by the members of the Board of Directors and the members of the Board's sub-committees for the financial year ended 31st December 2023 and to specify the sitting fees for the next financial year (Attachment - 3).
- To bring to the attention of the shareholders the transactions entered into with Related Parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2023. (Attachment - 4).
- To approve the appointment of the Auditors for the financial year ending 31st December 2024 and fix their remuneration.

Secondly: EGM Agenda:

- To discuss share capital erosion due to accumulated losses.

For further information please contact Mrs. Saada Al Harthy, on phone No (24813141) GSM Number 92381488 or email address: Saada@nhioman.com

Chairwoman

Battle rages around Gaza’s largest hospital

GAZA: Israeli forces launched an operation early on Monday in and around Gaza’s largest hospital, Al-Shifa, with witnesses reporting air strikes and tanks near the complex crowded with patients and displaced people.

The pre-dawn raid came at a time of growing concern over a looming Israeli ground invasion of Gaza’s crowded far-southern city of Rafah, and as international mediators and envoys readied to meet in Qatar on Monday to revive stalled truce talks.

The Israeli military told Gazans to immediately evacuate from Al-Shifa in Gaza City after it launched the raid based on what the army termed intelligence “indicating the use of the hospital by senior fighters”.

Witnesses said that the Israeli forces had dropped Arabic-language leaflets with the same evacuation instructions and a warning that “You are in a dangerous combat zone!”

The health ministry of the Gaza Strip said residents near the hospital in the largely devastated city had reported dozens of casualties who could not be

Residents near the hospital in the largely devastated city had reported dozens of casualties who could not be helped due to the intensity of gunfire and artillery shelling

helped “due to the intensity of gunfire and artillery shelling”.

The Gaza government media office condemned as a “war crime” the “storming of the Al-Shifa medical complex with tanks, drones and weapons, and shooting inside”, where thousands of displaced Palestinians were sheltering.

The army had previously raided Al-Shifa in mid-November, sparking an international outcry, in an operation in which it said its troops had found weapons and other military equipment in rooms in and below the hospital.

Israel has carried out a relentless bombing campaign and ground offensive that Gaza’s health ministry says has killed at

least 31,726 people, most of them women and children.

An Israeli siege that cut off water, electricity, fuel and basic supplies has brought large-scale shortages in the territory of 2.4 million people that the UN warns is on the brink of famine.

Overland access for aid convoys from Egypt has been limited amid the bombing, ground combat and growing insecurity in Gaza where some vehicles have been looted by desperate crowds.

The United States, Jordan and other western and Arab countries have airdropped food into Gaza, while a first aid vessel sailing from the Mediterranean island-nation of Cyprus has opened a new maritime corridor for humanitarian relief goods.

Halting efforts toward a truce and captives release deal, which have involved US, Qatari and Egyptian mediators, were expected to resume in Qatar.

However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has again vowed, in the face of growing global concern, that the army will finish its operation, before or after any truce. — **AFP**



Famine imminent in north Gaza, ‘unprecedented’ crisis: UN

ROME: Half of Gazans are experiencing “catastrophic” hunger, with famine projected to hit the north of the territory by May without urgent intervention, a United Nations-backed food security assessment warned on Monday.

“People in Gaza are starving to death right now. The speed at which this man-made hunger and malnutrition crisis has ripped through Gaza is terrifying,” the head of the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) Cindy McCain said.

“To have 50 per cent of an entire population in catastrophic, near-famine levels, is unprecedented,” Beth Bechdol said, the deputy director general of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).



A man carries food aid packages provided by the non-profit non-governmental organisation World Central Kitchen, in Rafah. – AFP

People in Gaza are starving to death right now. The speed at which this man-made hunger and malnutrition crisis has ripped through Gaza is terrifying

CINDY MCCAIN
Head of the UN’s WFP

This amounts to around 1.1 million people “struggling with catastrophic hunger and starvation”, according to the WFP. It added: “This is the highest number of people ever recorded as facing

catastrophic hunger” under the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) partnership, which published its latest report on Monday. The situation is particularly dire in the north of the besieged Palestinian territory, where there are about 300,000 people, the UN says — and where aid agencies have reported huge difficulty distributing food and other aid.

Aid charity Oxfam on Monday accused Israel of continuing to “systematically and deliberately block and undermine” the delivery of aid into Gaza, in violation of international humanitarian law.

The IPC system, conducted by the UN and aid agencies, is used by the UN or governments in deciding whether or not to officially declare a famine. “Famine is imminent

in the northern governorates and projected to occur anytime between mid-March and May 2024,” the IPC report said of Gaza.

“All evidence points towards a major acceleration of deaths and malnutrition. Waiting for a retrospective famine classification before acting is indefensible,” it said.

A famine is declared when 20 per cent of households face an extreme food shortage — which is the case in Gaza, the UN says — one in three children are acutely malnourished, and at least two in every 10,000 people die every day of starvation or malnutrition.

Children in Gaza face “extremely critical health conditions... exposing them to high-risk nutritional deterioration”, the IPC report said. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

BRUSSELS

World’s biggest ‘open-air graveyard’: EU’s Borrell

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Monday that Israel’s military campaign in Gaza had turned the territory into the world’s biggest “open-air graveyard”.

“Gaza was before the war the greatest open-air prison. Today it’s the greatest open-air graveyard,” Borrell said at a meeting of EU ministers in Brussels.

“It’s a graveyard for tens of thousands of people and also a graveyard for many of the most important principles of humanitarian law.”

Borrell also reiterated his accusation that Israel was using famine as a “weapon of war” by not allowing aid trucks into Gaza.

“Israel is provoking famine,” he told a humanitarian conference.

Israel’s Foreign Minister Israel Katz hit back at Borrell and told him “to stop attacking Israel and recognise our right to self-defence.”

“Israel allows extensive humanitarian aid into Gaza by land,

CAIRO

Israel blocks UNRWA chief from entering Gaza

Israeli authorities denied permission for the head of the UN Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) to enter the Gaza Strip on Monday, UNRWA and the Egyptian foreign minister said, calling it an unprecedented move.

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini, speaking alongside Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry at a Cairo news conference, said he had intended to go to Rafah on Monday “but I have been informed an hour ago that my entry into Rafah is declined”.

Shoukry told Lazzarini: “You were declined by the Israeli government, refused the entry which is an unprecedented move for (a) representative at this high position”.

UNRWA, founded in 1949, provides aid and essential services to Palestinian refugees and is the largest such provider in Gaza.

The move to deny Lazzarini permission to enter the territory comes as Palestinians in Gaza face a deepening humanitarian

DOHA

Israel spy chief to discuss truce with Qatar PM

Israel’s intelligence chief, Qatar’s premier and Egyptian officials are expected to hold talks in Doha on Monday on a potential Gaza truce and captives exchange deal, a source with knowledge of the talks said.

The meeting between Mossad chief David Barnea, Qatar PM Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani and Egyptian envoys “is expected to take place soon”, the source said on condition of anonymity given the sensitivity of the talks.

The talks in the Qatari capital are the first after weeks of intense negotiations involving Qatari, US and Egyptian mediators failed to secure a truce between Israel and Palestinians for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began last week.

Hamas official Osama Hamdan told Al-Manar television channel in Lebanon that there was “a real opportunity to end the aggression and achieve a permanent ceasefire”.

He said Hamas, which previously demanded a complete Is-

raeli withdrawal, would accept a partial Israeli retreat before the exchange of any prisoners.

Under this scenario, he told the channel, “after 14 days, there will be a withdrawal to the east... which means reopening the road for displaced people so that they can return”.

Barnea was involved in previous rounds of talks in Doha that led to a one-week break in fighting in late November and the release of scores of Israeli and foreign captives, as well as aid entering the besieged Palestinian territory.

Israel confirmed on Sunday its plans to attend talks following a cabinet meeting meant to decide the delegation’s mandate, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said. — **AFP**



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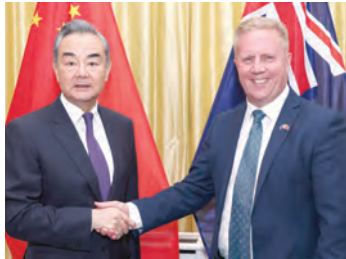
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In brief

■ WELLINGTON



CHINA'S FM WANG BEGINS DIPLOMATIC VISIT IN NEW ZEALAND

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi made a rare visit to New Zealand on Monday, stressing the need to work with “friends” in the face of the “tumultuous international situation”.

Speaking in the capital Wellington before a meeting with his New Zealand counterpart, Wang said the trip was also a chance to shore up diplomatic ties that have come under strain.

“In the face of the current tumultuous international situation, we are willing to strengthen strategic communication with our friends in New Zealand on international and regional issues of common concern,” Wang said. — AFP

■ WARSAW



POLISH FARMERS LAUNCH NEW BLOCKADE ON GERMANY BORDER

Polish farmers blocked two major border crossings with Germany on Monday in a protest against farm imports from outside the European Union and the bloc's environmental red tape.

Farmers have been blocking checkpoints with Ukraine, complaining that imports from the neighbouring war-torn country undercut their profits, and now expanded the protest to the country's western border.

The two blockades at the Swiecko and Gubinek crossings “will continue until Wednesday evening”, a spokesman for the local police said. Farmers last month blocked the border with Germany in Slubice. — AFP

■ BOGOTA



COLOMBIA COPS SEIZE 7.3 MILLION GALLONS OF CRUDE IN RAIDS

Colombian police have seized more than seven million gallons of crude oil in raids on illegal refineries, in an operation targeting production of bootleg fuel in Norte de Santander province, the police said.

“The national police are committed to safeguarding nature, understanding it's an invaluable resource for society, and the fight against organised crime,” Colonel William Castano said.

Police took control of 13 pools used for storing hydrocarbons; seized five makeshift refineries, 17 pieces of equipment and 4,250 gallons of hydrocarbons. — Reuters

Kremlin hails Putin exceptional vote win

MOSCOW: The Kremlin hailed President Vladimir Putin's election win as “exceptional” on Monday, after the ex-spy won over 87 per cent of the vote in a three-day ballot blasted as illegitimate by Western powers.

Moscow has presented the weekend presidential election as proof that Russians have rallied around Putin more than two years into the Ukraine offensive.

In power since the last day of 1999, he is now on course to become the longest-serving Russian leader in more than two centuries.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the result showed Russians were consolidating “around his (Putin's) path.”

Authorities had called on Russians to take part in the vote out of patriotic duty.

Kremlin-friendly electoral chief Ella Pamfilova said Putin had won a “record” result and got “almost 76 million” votes.

The West slammed the election as unfair but Pamfilova, speaking on state television, dismissed the statements as made by “a dying branch of humanity.”

She said international OSCE observers were not invited because they were “in the hands of the Anglo-Saxons.”

Her commission said the vote



Preliminary voting results in the Russian presidential election are displayed on a screen at the Central Election Commission in Moscow. — AFP

ran smoothly and fairly.

The Kremlin said Putin held phone calls with his ex-Soviet allies in Central Asia, Belarus and Azerbaijan after the vote.

He also received congratulations from other authoritarian countries such as China, North Korea, Venezuela and Myanmar, Russian state

media said.

Putin reaffirmed growing ties with Beijing in his victory speech.

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday congratulated Vladimir Putin on his election victory, hailing the Russian president as a force for progress as Moscow's ties with Beijing deepen.

In a congratulatory message

reported by Beijing's state broadcaster CCTV, Xi told Putin his re-election “fully reflects the support of the Russian people for you”.

“I believe that under your leadership, Russia will be able to achieve greater achievements in national development and construction,” Xi said.

Kremlin-friendly electoral chief Ella Pamfilova said Putin had won a “record” result and got “almost 76 million” votes

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday in a congratulatory message to re-elected Russian President Vladimir Putin he looked forward to boosting ties to develop their “special” relationship.

“Look forward to working together to further strengthen the time-tested Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between India and Russia in the years to come,” Modi wrote on social media platform X.

Whereas the previous four presidential elections Putin won since 2000 saw Western leaders pour in their congratulations, his victory this time was met with scathing statements.

Kyiv stepped up attacks on Russian soil in the run-up and during the election. Russia said on Monday that another two people were killed in the Belgorod border region. — AFP

Seoul hosted summit warns of AI risks to democracy



Summit leaders pose for a family photo during the Third Summit for Democracy in Seoul. — AFP

SEOUL: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on Monday called fake news and disinformation based on AI and digital technology threats to democracy, as some officials attending a global summit.

Speaking at the opening of the Summit for Democracy being held in Seoul, Yoon said countries had a duty to share experiences and wisdom so that artificial intelligence and technology could be employed to promote democracy.

“Fake news and disinformation based on artificial intelligence and digital technology not only violates individual freedom and human rights but also threatens democratic systems,” Yoon said.

South Korea is hosting the third Summit for Democracy conference, an initiative of US President Joe Biden aimed at discussing ways to stop democratic backsliding and erosion of rights and freedoms.

Digital threats to democracy, and how technology can promote democracy and universal human rights, are expected to be the main agenda of the three-day meetings, attended by representatives from more than 30 countries, ranging from Costa Rica to the United

Fake news and disinformation based on AI and digital technology not only violates individual freedom and human rights but also threatens democratic systems

YOON SUK YEOL
South Korean President

States and Ghana.

“As authoritarian and repressive regimes deploy technologies to undermine democracy and human rights, we need to ensure that technology sustains and supports democratic values and norms,” US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the summit.

Blinken later said 2024 was an “extraordinary election year” to highlight risks of disinformation and falsehoods in cyberspace. He also repeated Washington's accusations that Russia and China are behind global

campaigns aimed at manipulating information.

Some European officials also accused Russia of conducting disinformation campaigns using AI.

The Kremlin has repeatedly denied accusations of spreading false or misleading information.

Hours before the summit started, North Korea fired several short-range ballistic missiles into the sea for the first time in two months in its latest show of force.

The democracy summit is also being attended by British Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden, who said democracy faced threats on multiple fronts, including cyberattackers disrupting campaigns, populists embracing falsehoods, and “autocrats holding sham elections.”

Blinken said Washington was releasing the first guidance of its kind for tech companies to help prevent attacks on human rights defenders online.

In addition, he said at the summit that a half-dozen more countries, including South Korea and Japan, were joining a US-led crackdown on the misuse of commercial spyware to surveil journalists or human rights defenders. — Reuters

Nine arrested for attack on French police station

PARIS: Nine people have been arrested over a firework attack on a police station near major venues for this summer's Paris Olympics, the French capital's top police official said on Monday.

The Sunday evening attack in the northern suburb of La Courneuve came days after a teenager riding a moped was killed in a car chase with police, echoing a June killing that triggered days-long riots.

“Around 50 people attacked the police station in La Courneuve, mostly with mortar fireworks,” Paris police chief Laurent Nunez told broadcaster TF1.

Videos posted on social media showed groups of people firing a barrage of fireworks at the building's facade. Police said the attackers also threw stones and Molotov cocktails.

Police responded with sting-ball grenades and flash-ball projectiles, used by riot police as an alternative to firearms. The standoff lasted for about 30 minutes, Nunez said.

La Courneuve is located in Paris' northern suburbs, in the Seine-Saint-Denis department that hosts Olympic venues including the flagship Stade de France stadium.

“We can tie this attack to the death” of the 18-year-old killed on Wednesday, named only as Wanys R., Nunez said.

“The young people clearly came

from the neighbourhood” where Wanys lived, he added.

Nunez said the arrested suspects included seven adults aged 18-21 and two minors. Two police officers were “slightly hurt”, he added.

Nunez said police reinforcements would be deployed in the area around midday on Monday.

Wanys R. was being chased by police on Wednesday after refusing to stop for a check.

A video widely shared online showed how his scooter was struck by a police car, killing him and injuring his passenger.

The lawyer representing Wanys' family on Friday accused the police of hitting him on purpose, while the officers' own representative insisted it was an accident.

Residents said that they condemned the attack on the police station.

“The Olympics aren't our concern but this gives us a bad reputation and that's not good for business,” said a local grocery shop owner.

In June, a video of a police officer shooting dead 17-year-old Nahel M. triggered nights of riots in gritty Paris suburbs and other deprived areas.

The policeman who fired the fatal shot has been charged with voluntary homicide. — AFP



French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin talks to police drone pilots ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, in Beynes near Paris. — Reuters

Spiritual cleansing for more inner peace



Hyesha Barrett
coach.hyesha@gmail.com

The writer is a life coach and NLP practitioner

In light of the holy month of Ramadhan and living in this heightened digital age of constant noise and distractions, it's vital to seek solace, calm and clarity to purify our mind, body and environment. One great way is through the practice of spiritual cleansing. Whether through rituals, ceremonies or personal practices, the cleansing is to rid ourselves of negative energy, emotional baggage and spiritual impurities in order to achieve inner peace and happiness. Common methods involve the use of sacred elements such as fire, water, smoke and herbs. Immersing yourself in a body of water such as spring water, a bath filled with epsom salts or simply visualising cleansing waters washing away negativity, these acts can be deeply rejuvenating and transformative. Just as we cleanse our physical bodies to maintain hygiene and health, we must also attend to our spiritual and emotional selves. Fire, with its purifying energy has been revered in many cultures as a symbol of transformation and renewal. Burning herbs or resin such as sage, palo santo or

frankincense is a practice called smudging, which is believed to clear stagnant energy and create a sacred space. In addition to external rituals - meditation, prayer, self-reflection and introspection are powerful tools for clearing mental clutter and fostering inner peace. By quieting the mind and turning inward, we can confront and release negative thoughts, emotions and attachments that hinder our growth. As you delve deeper into your inner world, you will automatically gain profounder insights into your beliefs, behaviours, patterns and conditioning. In today's fast-paced world, where stress, anxiety and negativity abound, the importance of spiritual cleansing cannot be overstated. By taking the time to cleanse and purify our inner world, we will undoubtedly cultivate resilience, clarity and a deeper sense of connection to the outer world around us. Embarking on a spiritual cleanse can offer a plethora of benefits that will positively impact various aspects of your life. Spiritual cleansing helps release pent-up emotions, traumas and

SPIRITUAL
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negative energies which might be holding you back. Removing energetic blockages and stagnant energy revitalises the body and mind as it restores balance and harmony to your whole being. Releasing negative energy can also positively impact your relationships with others. As you cleanse your own energy, you will become more attuned to the needs and feelings of those around you, fostering deeper connections and more meaningful interactions. Spiritual cleansing also opens the channels of intuition and inner guidance. By quieting the mind and tuning into your inner wisdom, you become more attuned to subtle cues and insights of others, empowering you to make aligned choices while navigating life's journey with greater clarity. Spiritual cleansing practices promote balance, harmony and alignment in your being, which will lead to a greater sense of connection and fulfilment. Here's to cultivating greater clarity, peace and harmony within yourself and your surroundings, empowering you to live more authentically while being aligned with your truest essence. Ramadhan Mubarak to you and your loved ones!

Drones no match for Ukrainian artillery: Experts

MATHIEU RABECHAULT

Ukraine is relying on the massive use of drones to compensate for an artillery shell shortage and undermine Russian military capabilities, but experts warned they cannot tip the balance. Both drones used for strikes hundreds of kilometres away and commercial drones are starting to dominate the battlefield. In particular, so-called First Person View (FPV) drones allow their pilots to see live images of the ground as if they were on board and can locate enemy units and, if armed with explosives, attack them from within a few kilometres. “At the moment in Ukraine, we are seeing the use of drones on an unimaginable scale, we are really talking about tens and hundreds of thousands of drones on the battlefield,” Ulrike Franke, a researcher at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), said. In its 2024 budget Kyiv earmarked €1.15 billion (\$1.25 billion) for drones, and President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that the country will produce “one million drones” this year, after setting up a specific drone branch in February. Kyiv’s direction comes as its supporters are trying to bolster Ukrainian stocks — London is set to deliver more than 10,000 drones, of which one thousand are FPV drones, and Paris is preparing to order 2,000 kamikaze drones, some of which will be used in Ukraine. Ukrainian officials estimate between 100,000 and 120,000 drones are needed monthly. Whereas it needs 200,000 to 250,000 artillery shells per month for a major offensive or 75,000 to 90,000 to sustain the war defensively, according to an Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) review. Western backers largely depend on US stocks to sustain defence, but Kyiv does not have enough ammunition to launch a major offensive next year, it added. So “Ukraine can reduce its requirements for artillery ammunition by significantly increasing production of strike drones” continued Michael Kofman and Franz-Stefan Gady in the IISS review. Drones are “capable of reproducing many of the functions of artillery and missiles at a fraction of the cost”, agreed Mykola Bielieskov of the Atlantic Council. Ukrainian FPV drones are currently responsible for between 65 and 85 per cent of the destruction of Russian positions, according to a French military source. But Ulrike Franke warned: “They use drones because they can produce or buy them, but it is not ideal.” — AFP

Fasting during Ramadhan helps you attune to the rhythms of nature



Mohammed Anwar Al Balushi
Academic Lecturer and Advisor, Oman College of Management and Technology

What does fasting signify to you, and what emotions do you experience during fasting? It's worth pondering whether fasting has ever been recognised as a means to humble the ego and dissolve pride within oneself. If indeed it holds such transformative power, then it stands as one of the noblest practices. Fasting cultivates inner strength and wisdom, facilitating a deeper understanding of oneself. It offers an opportunity for introspection, allowing individuals to reconnect with their inner selves and evaluate their actions, particularly those involving deceit, dishonesty, and betrayal. In this month of fasting, it is a chance for genuine self-assessment, acknowledging any wrongdoings committed against others. Indeed, none are exempt from the burdens of sin in this world. Allah has ordained fasting during Ramadhan, as mentioned explicitly in the Quran: “O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become Al Muttaqun (the pious).” Such divine commands must be adhered to and honoured. At its core, fasting during Ramadhan is one of the fundamental pillars of Islam. Beyond the physical act of abstaining from food and drink from dawn to dusk, it holds profound spiritual significance. Fasting entails suppressing worldly desires and enduring hardship to deepen one's connection with nature and the Almighty. The practice of fasting predates Islam, originating in other religions. There exists profound meaning and wisdom behind this ancient tradition, yet its true essence often eludes many. One aspect I have come to appreciate about fasting is its ability to instil empathy by allowing individuals to experience a fraction of the suffering endured by millions facing hunger and deprivation daily. Ramadhan is a time for virtuous behaviour, increased Quranic



THE PROFOUND WISDOM OF FASTING LIES IN NURTURING HUMANITY AND FOSTERING A COLLECTIVE SENSE OF COMPASSION AND EMPATHY

recitation, self-restraint, and spiritual rejuvenation. It fosters a sense of community and empathy, urging individuals to reflect on their actions and treat others with kindness and compassion. There are invaluable lessons to be gleaned from Ramadhan, and the challenge lies in incorporating these teachings into our lives beyond the holy month. Ultimately, the profound wisdom of fasting lies in nurturing humanity and fostering a collective sense of compassion and empathy. Fasting during Ramadhan was instituted in 624 CE, during the early years of Islam, following the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) migration from Mecca to Medina. This marked the inception of the Islamic calendar. Fasting is practiced in various forms across different religions, even before Islam as mentioned in the Holy Quran. For instance, Buddhist monks and

nuns adhere to a disciplined regimen that includes fasting after their noon meal to aid in meditation and promote good health. In the Catholic Church, Lent involves fasting and abstaining from meat and dairy products for 40 days, with exceptions granted by popes in certain circumstances. Hindus observe fasting on specific days of the month, such as Ekadasi, Pradosha, or Purnima, as part of their religious practices. For Jews, fasting entails complete abstinence from food and drink, including water, on certain designated days, except on Shabbat, which takes precedence over fast days. Regardless of religious tradition, the essence of fasting lies in cultivating compassion, well-being, and goodwill towards all beings. As stated in the Guru Granth SahibJi, “Let your mind be content and be kind to all beings. In this way, your fast will be successful.” Exploring fasting across various religions reveals a common wisdom: fasting is not about suffering, but rather about safeguarding against gluttony and impure thoughts, actions, and speech. Fasting must always be accompanied by increased prayer and alms giving (donating to a local charity, or directly to the poor, depending on circumstances). Partaking in fasting without these essential components is viewed as futile or potentially damaging to one's spiritual well-being.

When hunger becomes suffering

The holy month to observe fasting is also a month full of lessons. It is a month also to recognise the feeling of hunger. Thousands across the globe fast to control weight, but there are millions who may be struggling to meet their daily nourishment. Quite often most people may not have realised the situation faced by the economically challenged people.

Not far away, as the globe has shrunk into a digital world, we have seen the struggle for food. People in Gaza are fasting even knowing they may not have enough food for iftar to break the fast.

Writing this while waiting for the call of the prayer to break the fast with so many others, the atmosphere changes and it becomes quieter and the air fills with serene voice saying, “God is Great.”

And everyone starts their first meal after sunrise to sunset, with dates, buttermilk and water and whatever is their personal preference. The energy may be low but the joy is tremendous as people sit with their loved ones, friends and colleagues.

Had the pleasure to be part of a team where corporate houses have been distributing iftar kits at labour camps. The gratitude the people had on their faces receiving the kits was not just for the food but for the very fact that they were remembered. They are far away from their family members but life goes on and wherever life has taken them, they observe fasting.

It is a restaurant with variety of food items, and the restaurant owner said, “There are 30 different juices.”

The thought went to people in Palestine - did they have enough clean water to drink?

The struggle we are seeing of a whole community running out of food, of starvation which is completely man-made and cannot be blamed on famine or natural disaster.

But what is on spotlight is the will of the people - to celebrate the spirit of Ramadhan even if there are



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WE ARE TALKING ABOUT NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF OUR FOOD INTAKE DURING IFTAR, AND THEY ARE LOOKING FOR ANYTHING TO SUPPRESS THEIR HUNGER

minimum amenities and are stranded in refugee camps. Lack of decorations and furniture, most importantly food, does not stop them from praying and expressing gratitude. However, that should not stop the world from thinking of a solution to their problems. World history if full of struggles of power and dominance but resolutions and solutions do come. Just like mathematics, people find solutions.

For now, though, the vision of struggle for food is so strong that when we hold a bread in our hand, the thought that comes is of the parents in Gaza looking for food, kids stretching out their hands and vessels to collect food for their families. The innocence in their eyes has been replaced with the expression of a person whose mind is preoccupied or lost in thoughts.

We are talking about nutritional value of our food intake during iftar, and they are looking for anything to suppress their hunger. The malnutrition level has taken a leap. And one wonders whether diseases like metabolic syndrome exist in a situation like this. But where can one take a walk when it is not safe to walk to collect food. And how can one erase the visual impact of seeing the flour sacks with blood stains? Men, so many of them, left their families telling them that they will collect flour for them and come back only to realise they would never be able to return. And for the ones left behind, how are they even going to express hunger after this?

But people are making a difference, like the Omani teams which reached the people in Gaza and could distribute food. The medical doctor from Oman who took the decision to be with the people who desperately need medical attention.

The will is what we learn about during this month. The will to complete the fast even when the body signals thirst and hunger.

This is a lesson that teaches us what we can achieve when we set our mind such as attaining peace within ourselves and with each other.

READY FOR LAUNCH!



The Soyuz 2.1a booster rocket with the Soyuz MS-25 spacecraft is installed on the launch pad at the Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, on Monday. Nasa astronaut Tracy Dyson, Roscosmos cosmonaut Oleg Novitskiy and spaceflight participant Marina Vasilevskaya of Belarus are scheduled to launch to the International Space Station on March 21. – Reuters

The consumerism dilemma...

As a political economy and policy analyst with a passion for sustainability, it is evident that the rampant consumerism prevalent in today's society poses a significant threat to the long-term health of our planet. The incessant demand for goods and services driven by consumer culture has led to resource depletion, environmental degradation, and social inequality, making it imperative for policymakers to take decisive action to counteract these negative impacts.

Consumerism, characterised by the excessive consumption of goods and services beyond one's basic needs, has become deeply ingrained in our societies, fuelling economic growth but exacting a heavy toll on the environment. The production and consumption of goods contribute significantly to carbon emissions, habitat destruction, and pollution, all of which are exacerbating the global climate crisis and threatening the sustainability of our ecosystems. Furthermore, consumerism often fosters a culture of disposability, leading to the generation of vast amounts of waste that overwhelms our landfills and incinerators, perpetuating a linear “take-make-waste” economic model that is incompatible with long-term sustainability.

In the context of Oman, a country known for its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, the impact of consumerism on sustainability is particularly stark. The rapid economic development and rising standards of living in Oman have led to a surge in consumer demand for goods and services, exerting pressure on the country's natural resources and



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IN OMAN, A COUNTRY KNOWN FOR ITS RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE AND NATURAL BEAUTY, THE IMPACT OF CONSUMERISM ON SUSTAINABILITY IS PARTICULARLY STARK

ecosystems. The oil-dependent economy of Oman has historically fuelled consumption patterns that prioritise material wealth and conspicuous consumption, further exacerbating the strain on the environment and perpetuating unsustainable practices. Our traditional ways of living where we used to balance between needs and wants have been withered under growing consumerism compounded by cheap and low-quality environmentally unsustainable products.

To address the detrimental impact of consumerism on sustainability in Oman, policymakers must adopt a holistic and multi-pronged approach that combines regulatory measures, incentives, public awareness campaigns, and stakeholder engagement.

From consumers' perspectives, the aforementioned approach should make financial and economic sense. One quick win for promoting sustainability while offering financial benefits to consumers in Oman could be the implementation of a ‘Green Incentive Scheme’ for households and businesses. Under this scheme, the government could offer financial incentives, such as subsidies, to individuals and organisations that invest in renewable energy sources like solar panels or energy-efficient appliances. By reducing their reliance on traditional energy sources and lowering their

utility bills, consumers would see immediate financial benefits while also contributing to the nation's sustainability goals. A pilot project started a few years ago by the Authority for Public Services Regulations. It needs to be expanded and further promoted.

Another example would be the promotion of sustainable transportation options, such as electric vehicles (EVs), through a combination of incentives and infrastructure development. Policymakers in Oman could introduce tax incentives for the purchase of EVs, along with subsidies for installing charging stations in public areas and residential complexes, instead of just making it a requirement. Not only would this initiative help reduce carbon emissions and air pollution, but it would also lead to better uptake of this form of transport and long-term cost savings for consumers through lower maintenance and fuel costs compared to traditional fuel-powered vehicles.

Furthermore, implementing a “Waste Reduction and Recycling Incentive Scheme” could incentivise individuals and businesses to adopt practices that minimise waste generation and promote recycling. By offering rebates or discounts for using eco-friendly packaging, reducing single-use plastics, and participating in recycling schemes and initiatives, consumers would not only contribute to environmental preservation

but also potentially save money through reduced waste disposal fees and resource conservation. Once again, a few years ago Oman embarked on limiting single-use plastic bags. As a result people started changing their behaviour, alas this scheme seems to have ended or morphed into a more tolerant scheme. Countries that introduced such an initiative sought to sustain it by creating community-based or SME-led paper packaging (including bags) factories that provided cheaper locally made alternatives to plastic and created some economic interdependence between sustainable and environmentally friendly practices and the economic benefits.

These examples demonstrate how policy interventions focused on sustainability can yield tangible financial benefits for consumers in Oman, encouraging them to make eco-conscious choices that align with their economic interests. Addressing the other side of the equation, producers, the policymakers in Oman can consider the following recommendations to promote sustainable consumption and production practices: Implement Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies: By holding producers, or distributors where products are manufactured outside Oman, responsible for the entire lifecycle of their products, including recycling and disposal, Oman can incentivise the adoption of

sustainable production practices and reduce the environmental impact of consumer goods.

Introduce eco-labelling and certification schemes: Establishing clear and standardised labels that indicate the environmental footprint of products can empower consumers to make informed choices and drive demand for sustainable goods.

Invest in green infrastructure and renewable energy: Transitioning towards a low-carbon economy by investing in renewable energy sources and energy-efficient technologies can reduce Oman's carbon footprint and mitigate the environmental impacts of consumerism. Educate and empower consumers: Launch public awareness campaigns, educational campaign, and workshops to educate consumers about the environmental impacts of their consumption choices and empower them to make sustainable decisions.

By leveraging the above-mentioned policy recommendations and quick wins, policymakers in Oman can pave the way for a more sustainable future that balances economic prosperity with environmental protection. It is only through a concerted effort to combat consumerism and promote sustainable consumption practices that we can safeguard the well-being of current and future generations and preserve the precious natural resources.

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Alcaraz tops Medvedev to repeat as Indian Wells champion

INDIAN WELLS, United States: World number two Carlos Alcaraz cruised home in a 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 victory over Daniil Medvedev on Sunday to win a second straight Indian Wells ATP title, both coming at the Russian's expense.

Alcaraz captured his first title since Wimbledon last July and became the first repeat winner at Indian Wells since Novak Djokovic won three straight titles from 2014-16.

For the 20-year-old Spaniard, 12 days in the California desert proved just what he needed after a stuttering start to the season, which included a quarterfinal exit at the Australian Open and an ankle injury that forced him out of his opening match at Rio de Janeiro in February.

"A lot of doubts for me," he said of his mindset coming in amidst his longest title drought since he burst through for his first Grand Slam title at the 2022 US Open.

For Alcaraz, however, it wasn't just about ending the drought, it was about rediscovering his joy in the game.

"It means a lot to me, lifting this trophy, winning this tournament, because I overcome a lot of problems in my head, a lot of problems physically," he said.

"Not that I didn't win a tournament since Wimbledon. For me, it doesn't matter, It's

about the feelings ... It's about enjoying playing tennis, once I step on the court, putting my game. It's what only matters.

"That's why I'm really, really happy to lift this trophy, because I found myself at this tournament," the Spaniard said.

As he did last year, Alcaraz denied Medvedev's bid to capture the only one of the ATP's six hardcourt Masters 1000 titles he has yet to win.

More importantly, after a week in which he ended Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner's 19-match winning streak, Alcaraz was looking forward with renewed confidence to next week's hardcourt tournament in Miami and beyond.

"Obviously winning tournaments helps a lot coming to the next ones," said Alcaraz, whose tournament included not only a semifinal victory over red-hot Sinner but also a brush with a swarm of bees in his quarterfinal win over Alexander Zverev — the man who ousted him in Melbourne.

"Obviously winning a Masters 1000 again — it is a really difficult tournament to win — gives you extra motivation to keep going, extra, extra confidence for Miami right now and for what's next," said Alcaraz, who joined compatriot Rafael Nadal as the only players to win five Masters 1000 titles before turning 21.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz with the championship trophy after defeating Daniil Medvedev of Russia in the final of the BNP Paribas open at Indian Wells. – USA Today Sports

EXTRA MOTIVATION

World number four Medvedev, who was hindered by an ankle injury in their 2023 title clash, got off to a hot start in this one, parlaying a service break into a 3-0 first-set lead. But Alcaraz produced a blazing forehand passing shot to break Medvedev in the fifth game and from there they duelled to the tie-breaker

with entertaining rallies spiced by drop shots, volleys and lobs.

Alcaraz had fans out of their seats in one rally, when he started to let a lob go by but, seeing it was heading in, managed to reach it and salvage the point.

"I'm trying to do that kind of points," Alcaraz said. "It gives me extra motivation."

Trailing 5-2 in the tie-breaker,

Australian Open runner-up Medvedev battled back to 5-5, but Alcaraz claimed the set when the Russian sent a forehand wide and from there he was in complete control.

"He managed in the first set at one moment to raise his level," Medvedev said. "I kind of managed to be there and to try to catch his level, but I was just a

little bit down.

"In the end, this down was going down, down, down, and he was going up, up, up.

"So the result is a fair result for the match that it was. But I'm happy," Medvedev added. "Last time I managed to (reach the final in Indian Wells) I won Miami — so that's what I'm going to try to do." — AFP

Oman to host T20I series against Namibia from April 1

COACH DULEEP MENDIS EYES THE SERIES AS AN IDEAL PREPARATION FOR ACC MEN'S T20 PREMIER CUP AND ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP 2024

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket is all set to host Namibia for a five-match bilateral T20 international series at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat from April 1-7.

Both the teams have qualified for ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024, to be jointly hosted by West Indies and the USA, and the five-match series will serve as a good preparation for the World Cup-bound squads.

Confirming the tour, Oman Cricket Chief Development Officer Duleep Mendis said: "The bilateral series involving five matches series presents an invaluable opportunity

for the teams to fine-tune their strategies and compositions before the World Cup commences in June."

The matches will be played from April 1-7 with April 3 and April 6 rest days. The matches will start from 2.30 pm.

Oman and Namibia are clubbed in the same Group B at the T20 World Cup. The group also consists of the last two winners of the Men's T20 World Cup in England and Australia, and Scotland. Coincidentally, Oman and Namibia will inaugurate their World Cup campaign by facing each other on June 2, 2024, in Barbados, West Indies.

Oman had recently hosted Papua New Guinea, another team bound for T20 World Cup, for an unofficial one-day international series and a T20I series with the hosts drawing level the one-day two-match series



and winning the T20I series 2-1.

Head coach of Oman, Mendis, is looking forward to the series against Namibia and hopes that his players will keep the winning momentum as they prepare themselves for the World Cup.

CHANGE OF PLANS

Oman were initially scheduled to

travel to a four-nation tournament in Uganda in April with the hosts along with the Netherlands and Namibia the other teams. However, following the cancellation of the tournament, Oman Cricket got in touch with the Namibian Cricket counterparts and agreed for the five-match series in Oman.

With teams preparing for the

World Cup in June, the upcoming five-match series is an "ideal way" to proceed, according to Mendis.

Oman head coach said: "Following the cancellation of the Uganda tour due to unforeseen reasons, we were fortunate to get Namibia agree to a tour to Oman, despite that fact that both the teams are in the same pool at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

"This will be a good preparation for us ahead of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Men's T20 Premier Cup, Asia Cup Qualifier, which we will be hosting from April 12-21. A total of ten teams will be competing in the Premier Cup, which will also boost our preparations ahead of the June ICC Men's T20 World Cup."

Mendis said: "The tour against Namibia serves as optimal preparation for the two major events in April and June. Oman Cricket extends its gratitude to the

Namibia Cricket Association for their cooperation and agreement to the tour."

At the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in West Indies and the USA from June 1-29, Oman is one of the 20 teams competing. The event is split up into four groups consisting of five teams, with the top two sides from each group then progressing to the Super Eight phase of the tournament ahead of the knockout semifinals and final.

Joining co-hosts USA in Group A are arch-rivals India and Pakistan, as well as Canada in their first appearance at the event as well as the European side Ireland.

The West Indies are placed into Group C alongside New Zealand, Afghanistan, Uganda and Papua New Guinea, while Group D sees South Africa, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Netherlands and Nepal pooled against each other.

Tanzid, Rishad power Bangladesh to series win against Sri Lanka



Bangladesh's Tanzid Hasan plays a shot during the third and last one-day international (ODI) match against Sri Lanka in Chittagong. – AFP

CHITTAGONG, Bangladesh: Rishad Hossain played an attacking innings of 48 after substitute Tanzid Hasan Tamim hit 84 off 81 balls on Monday, steering Bangladesh to a four-wicket win and a 2-1 ODI series victory over Sri Lanka.

Set a modest target after Janith Liyanage's unbeaten 101 guided Sri Lanka to 235 all out in 50 overs, Bangladesh raced to 237-6 in 40.2 overs.

Rishad remained unbeaten on 48 off just 18 balls.

The hosts were in danger when Wanindu Hasaranga forced Mehdi Hasan Miraz, the last recognised batsman, to give a catch to Pramod Madushan for 25, with Bangladesh still 58 runs away from victory.

But Rishad dispatched the first ball he faced over midwicket for six and did not look back.

He hit four sixes and five fours in his whirlwind innings before

Mushfiqur Rahim, 37 not out, finished the game with a boundary off Maheesh Theekshana.

Tanzid led the initial charge, replacing Soumya Sarkar in the second innings as a concussion sub, despite Lahiru Kumara wreaking havoc with 4-48.

LOT OF CHARACTER

"Tanzid batted really well at the start. The way Mushi (Mushfiqur) batted, I think it helped Rishad's innings," Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said.

"On a wicket like this, the bowlers showed a lot of character."

Liyanage earlier staged a lone battle en route to his maiden century after Bangladesh made regular strikes, with Taskin Ahmed leading the way for the home side with 3-42.

Skipper Kusal Mendis (29) and Charith Asalanka (37) made a good start but lost their wickets before

they could build bigger innings.

"I think we were 40-50 runs short but we bowled well in few overs," Mendis said.

"Janith (Liyanage) batted really well, a couple of wickets fell in the middle overs, and he then batted very well."

Sri Lanka won the toss and elected to bat first, only to lose both openers inside four overs.

Taskin struck early, trapping in-form opener Pathum Nissanka leg-before for one, then dismissing the other opener Avishka Fernando for four in his next over.

Mustafizur Rahman, playing his first match in the series, removed Sadeera Samarawickrama off his first ball for 14 to leave Sri Lanka reeling at 41-3.

Leg-spinner Rishad made Mendis his first ODI wicket, also off his first ball of the game.

Mustafizur ended Asalanka's

counter-attacking innings before Mehidy claimed two back-to-back wickets to expose the tail.

But Liyanage held one end firm to ensure Sri Lanka batted out 50 overs, hitting Taskin over the cover for a four in the final over to reach his century off 101 balls.

Mustafizur and Mehidy claimed 2-39 and 2-38, respectively.

Bangladesh won the opener by six wickets, with Sri Lanka taking the second by three wickets on Friday. The two teams will now play a two-match Test series, beginning on Friday in Sylhet. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

Sri Lanka 235 all out in 50 overs (J Liyanage 101 not out, C Asalanka 37; Taskin Ahmed 3-42, Mustafizur Rahman 2-39) vs Bangladesh 237-6 in 40.2 overs (Tanzid Hasan Tamim 84, Rishad Hossain 48 not out; L Kumara 4-48, Wanindu Hasaranga 2-64)

Result: Bangladesh win by four wickets

Series: Bangladesh win series 2-1

Dynamos FC, Playphone Team emerge winners

MUSCAT: Soccer Fans FC, a group of expat football enthusiasts, organised the third edition of Brown Safety Fest 2k24 at Jabir Bin Sayed Stadium recently. Matches were played across three categories - Master Cup, Soccer Cup, and Junior Cup.

While Smashers FC clinched victory in the Master Cup category, Dynamos FC emerged victorious in the Soccer Cup category. In the final phase, two teams reached a goalless draw, advancing to penalties. It was tie in the penalty shoot-out. Finally, through a toss, Dynamos FC secured victory.

Individual awards were bestowed upon Dynamos FC's Musahir as the best player, Al Ansari TNT's Akash as the best defender, Niswah Safwan as the best goalkeeper and Dynamos FC's Nadim as the top scorer.

Amidst the fervor of football fans, the tournaments brought excitement. Especially, young talents under 14, integrated into the Junior

Cup, showcased a promising display, hinting at a bright future for the sport.

During the finale, Team Playphone emerged as winners in Junior Cup Season 3. Ishaan from Team Notes was chosen as the best player, Kevin from Team Notes as the best goalkeeper and Ikbal from Team Playphone and Lisaan from Team Notes were chosen as top scorers.

During the culmination of the tournament, Soccer Fans FC aimed to acknowledge promising talents and encourage competitive spirit by awarding notable performers. A special mention goes to Muhammad Mazin, an eighth-grade student, for his exceptional contribution as a coordinator, enhancing team dynamics.

His leadership and coordination skills significantly influenced the victory of the Playphone Team in the final match. His achievement as the best coordinator of the Junior Cup resonated with the essence of sportsmanship.



The tournament winners pose with the trophy.

Asfandiyar XI, Shaheer XI move to second round

MUSCAT: Asfandiyar XI and Shaheer XI moved into the second round of Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) Ramadhan tape ball cricket tournament after their wins in Sunday night's matches.

Sagheer struck 29 not out off 12 balls to power Asfandiyar XI against Moosa XI while Tipu's unbeaten 30 enabled Shaheer XI's win against Oriental XI in front of a cheering crowd.

In the first match, Asfandiyar XI posted 118 for 5 wickets after being sent in to bat first with Sagheer being

the top scorer. Usama bowled well and got three wickets in 2 overs for Moosa XI.

Chasing 119 for a win, Moosa XI lost the match by 25 runs after reaching 93 runs in the stipulated 8 overs.

In the second match, Oriental XI won the toss and elected to bat. They posted 77 runs on board with Bilal Malik hitting 33 runs while Ali took 2 wickets for 17 runs for Shaheer XI.

Shaheer XI reached the target with 5 wickets in hand with Tipu winning the man of the match award.



Faraz, Country Manager of Air Sial, hands over the man of the match award.

Bangalore clinch WPL final win

NEW DELHI: Aggressive knocks from Ellyse Perry and Sophie Devine buoyed Royal Challengers Bangalore at the right moment to seal an eight-wicket Women's Premier League final win on Sunday after a Delhi Capitals batting collapse.

Bangalore triumphed 115-2 with three balls to spare in their chase of 113 all out, with Delhi surrendering the fight at their home ground after their 64-run opening partnership was broken.

Australia's Perry top-scored for Bangalore with 35 not out surpassing New Zealander Devine, whose 32 included five fours and a six in the 27 balls she faced.

Four of those boundaries came in the seventh over off Radha Yadav, closing a 36-run gap from the same point in Delhi's innings.

"We did the job," Devine said. "We had all the parts last season as well, it was just about putting them together."

Devine departed in the ninth after an unsuccessful review of her lbw trapping by Shikha Pandey, with captain and fellow opener



Smriti Mandhana anchoring the innings before she was sent back after a catch off Minnu Mani for 31.

Delhi skipper Meg Lanning and Shafali Verma made a barnstorming start after opting to bat with eight boundaries between them in seven overs.

But slow bowler Sophie Molineux brought the home side's innings to a screeching halt with three dismissals off four balls in the eighth over.

The Australian forced Verma to misjudge a sweep and drive a catch to mid-wicket then bowled

both Jemimah Rodrigues and Alice Capsey off consecutive deliveries. A deflated Delhi conceded their remaining seven wickets for just 49.

"It all happened relatively quickly, as it tends to do," Lanning said of the collapse. "Crazy things happen, and every game has been pretty close," she added. "They deserved the win."

UNEXPECTED FINALISTS

Bangalore were unexpected finalists for the WPL's second edition after a narrow five-run win in Friday's eliminator over

Mumbai Indians, who beat Delhi in the inaugural season's final.

The franchise has long had a reputation as an also-ran competitor.

Bangalore was one of the founding teams of the Indian Premier League but has never won that tournament despite three finals appearances and a roster featuring star batsman Virat Kohli and former South Africa captain Faf du Plessis.

The WPL was first staged last year as a curtain-raiser for the IPL and has already proved a tidy earner for the country's cash-rich cricket board.

Franchise rights were auctioned off last January for \$572.5 million, while media rights for the first five seasons were sold to Viacom18 for \$116.7 million.

The two deals made the WPL the world's second-most valuable women's sports league after WNBA women's basketball in the United States.

Match crowds have grown steadily for the second edition with a near-capacity crowd in Delhi for the final. — AFP



Manchester United's Antony celebrates scoring their second goal with Amad Diallo, Marcus Rashford, Alejandro Garnacho and Diogo Dalot during the FA Cup quarterfinal against Liverpool at Old Trafford, Manchester, Britain. – Reuters

MAN UTD FIGHTBACK ENDS LIVERPOOL'S QUADRUPLER QUEST

MANCHESTER United Kingdom: Manchester United ended Liverpool's quest for a quadruple of trophies in Jurgen Klopp's final season after Amad Diallo's winner edged a thrilling FA Cup quarterfinal 4-3 after extra-time.

The Ivorian winger was sent off for a second booking after taking his shirt off in celebration at the end of a chaotic 120 minutes that kept United's chances of ending the season with silverware alive.

Erik ten Hag's men will be confident of reaching the final for a second consecutive season after being paired with Championship side Coventry in the last four.

Two goals in three minutes from Alexis Mac Allister and Mohamed Salah towards the end of the first half had swung the

game in Liverpool's favour after Scott McTominay opened the scoring.

Antony's first goal at Old Trafford for more than a year kept United alive to send the game into extra-time.

Liverpool edged in front once again when Harvey Elliott's deflected shot found the bottom corner. But Marcus Rashford, who had missed a glorious chance to win the tie deep into injury time, made amends by drilling home to make it 3-3.

Diallo then scored just his second ever United goal in added time of extra-time at the end of a breakneck counter-attack from a Liverpool corner, led by the impressive Alejandro Garnacho.

"When it's Manchester United against Liverpool, it's one of the

world's best football matches. It is historical," said Ten Hag. "The team showed resilience and determination to win this game.

"We've had so many set backs. We are very strong mentally. We energised the fans, they got behind us and we won."

United trail Liverpool by 17 points in the Premier League and having made an early exit from both the Champions League and League Cup, the pressure was on Ten Hag if he is to remain in charge for a third season.

The home team started like a side who knew their season depended on victory as they flew out of the traps and got their reward.

Garnacho's effort was saved by Caoimhin Kelleher but only looped up for McTominay to blast

home his ninth goal of the season. Liverpool 'struggling' physically.

Liverpool have had a far more intense schedule in recent weeks than United as they remain in three competitions, having already lifted the League Cup last month.

"That was the first time I saw my team really struggling. That's how it is, we played a lot of football recently," said Klopp.

"Congratulations to United, they fought extremely hard as well."

Klopp's men took half an hour to awake from their slumber, but once they did were far more effective in the final third.

The visitors turned the tie around in the dying embers of the first half as Mac Allister's deflected strike had too much power for Andre Onana.

Three minutes later, Liverpool led as Salah struck once more against his favoured opponents.

United pleaded in vain for a foul on Bruno Fernandes by Joe Gomez and Salah was left with a simple task to knock in his 13th goal in 14 games against United after Onana parried Darwin Nunez's initial effort.

Liverpool enjoyed far more control of the game after the break but they were also guilty of not taking their chances to kill the game off.

United were blunt and lacking ideas going forward as they chased the game until Antony became an unlikely hero.

The Brazilian had scored just once in his previous 38 games but showed no sign of a lack of confidence as he spun and fired

into the far corner three minutes from time.

Rashford should have completed the comeback as, after taking a brilliant first touch to cushion the ball into his path, he slotted wide with just Kelleher to beat. A frenetic encounter continued to rage from end-to-end in extra-time as Elliott's deflected effort looked set to again put Liverpool into the last four.

But United did not lie down as Rashford was more deadly when handed a second chance after Nunez gave the ball away deep inside his own half.

And as Liverpool sensed the chance to win it from a corner at the death, Garnacho broke clear and timed his pass to Diallo to perfection before he fired in off the far post. — AFP

Pochettino ignores boos to seal semis

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, MARCH 18

A thrilling game with late goals saw Chelsea clinch a semifinal place in the FA Cup with a 4-2 defeat of Leicester. Chelsea fans had turned against their manager, Mauricio Pochettino, booing him and shouting "you don't know what you are doing" after his substitutions and with Leicester having fought back into the game.

Pochettino said: "They need to trust me to manage in the way I think is best for the club. We need to respect their opinion as much as they need to respect mine. I am not here to do what people want. I am not stupid. I saw Mudryk (whom he substituted) and we analysed it and he was tired. He was doing some stretching and we thought he would not finish the

game. We decided to go first for Mudryk, then for Stirling. We are professionals."

Leicester were put under pressure early with Chelsea dominating the first half. They took the lead in the 13th minute. Nicolas Jackson beat Jannik Vestergaard on the right to cross for Marc Cucurella to tap in for his first goal for the club.

Raheem Sterling then won a penalty in the 25th minute when he was brought down by Abdul Fatawu and he decided to take the spot kick instead of Cole Palmer who has scored five out of five penalties that he has taken for the club. His poor shot was saved by the goalkeeper and then in the 41st minute he missed a chance when he shot wide with only the goalkeeper to beat.

Chelsea went two up in added

time of the first half when Stirling somewhat made up for his earlier errors with providing an excellent pass to Palmer to score easily. Then from the relative comfort of two goals lead Chelsea let the opposition come back into the game.

Just six minutes after the break Axel Disasi was put under pressure by Patson Daka in a tussle for the ball and Disasi decided to ease the situation with a back pass to the goalkeeper. But from 35 yards his shot went into the Chelsea goal with Robert Sanchez well out of the goal and watching helplessly.

Leicester then achieved parity in the 62nd minute when Malo Gusto failed to stop Stepny Mavididi and he was able to curl a shot inside the far post for Leicester's spirits to be lifted with that equaliser. But in the 71st

minute a penalty was awarded to Chelsea and a yellow card shown to Callum Doyle for his foul on Jackson.

However, VAR showed the foul was inches outside the box and the decision was changed to a free-kick and a red card.

The game became livelier with Leicester's fight-back but Chelsea grabbed the lead again in the second of the eight minutes of added time when substitute Carney Chukwuemeka scored from a neat back-heeled flick by Palmer and finally with virtually the last kick substitute Noni Madueke found the right top corner of the net.

Leicester manager, Enzo Maresca said: "We don't like to lose but the effort and display was very good. The red card changed the dynamic of the game."



Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino celebrates with Noni Madueke after the match against Leicester City. – Reuters



Intellectual property applications increase by 12.59 per cent



Applications submitted in 2023 represented the registration of 13,196,000 applications for national and international trademarks.

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) stated that the number of applications for national and international trademarks, national and international patents, and copyright and designs in 2023 reached to 14,234 registering a growth of 12.59 per cent compared to 12,642 applications registered in 2022.

Statistics issued by the National Intellectual Property Office at MoCIIP showed that the applications submitted in 2023 represented the registration of 13,196,000 applications for national and international trademarks, compared to 11,744,000 applications in 2022.

There are also registration of 874 applications for national patents and international, compared to 737 applications registered in 2022, and 143 applications registered for copyright, compared to 144 applications in 2022, and 21 applications registered for industrial designs, compared to 17 applications registered in 2022.

Nidaa bint Yaqoub al Tamimiyyah, Head of the Patents and Industrial Designs Department at the National Intellectual Property Office, explained the importance of intellectual property comes in many areas, especially in the economy and investment sector, noting it encourages fair competition and that

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ENABLES BUSINESS OWNERS, WHETHER LARGE COMPANIES, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED COMPANIES, OR INDIVIDUALS, TO ENSURE GUARANTEED COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES, GENERATE SOURCES OF INCOME, AND AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE COMPANY TO GROW

many of these investments contain one or more forms of intellectual property rights as an effective business enabler.

She said that intellectual property enables business owners, whether large companies, small and medium-sized companies, or individuals, to ensure guaranteed competitive advantages, generate sources of income, and an opportunity for the company to grow.

It also helps them maintain their market position, reduce tax liability, form a source of competitive intelligence, and facilitate access to financing.

MoCIIP represented by the National Intellectual Property Office, invites innovators to submit their applications for registration with the ministry's Intellectual Property Department and to participate in national and international exhibitions, which is considered a mini market in which the inventor can market his innovation and get to know the companies that will support those innovations. — ONA

Oman's new wind power projects to target \$1.2 bn in investments

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 18

Plans for the near simultaneous development of five wind-based Independent Power Projects (IPPs) at key locations around the Sultanate of Oman, represent the biggest push by the Omani government to shore up the contribution of renewables to electricity generation in the country.

Total investment in the five wind farm projects, targeting an aggregate generation capacity of over 1 gigawatts (GW), is estimated at around RO 450 million (equivalent to about \$1.2 billion).

Earlier this week, Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP) — the sole procurer of power capacity — said it was gearing up to launch the procurement process covering the five Wind IPPs as part of an international competitive tender.

All five projects are slated to be brought into operation over the course of 2027.

Significantly, the newly unveiled portfolio of Wind IPPs differs somewhat from previously announced strategies for wind-based capacity, either in terms of the proposed location of these projects or in their envisioned



Five new wind farms will bolster Oman's renewable capacity by around 1 GW.

capacities.

Wind-swept Mahout in Al Wusta Governorate, for example, is set to host the biggest of the five IPPs with a generation capacity estimated at 342 – 400 MW and an investment cost of around RO 187 million.

Notably, Mahout did not figure in previous lists of sites identified as possible locations for wind farms. Likewise, Duqm — previously

tipped to host a Wind IPP of 200 MW — will now feature a scaled up project of capacity ranging from 234 – 270 MW.

On the other hand, Ras Madrakah — located not far from Duqm — and previously identified as a site for a 100 MW wind farm — does not figure in the current wave of Wind IPPs.

The capacities of Wind IPPs planned at Sadah (Dhofar

Governorate) and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali (Al Sharqiyah South Governorate) remain roughly unchanged at 81 – 98 MW for Sadah and 91 – 105 for Jaalan Bani Bu Ali. Finally, Dhofar Wind II IPP, which will come up adjacent to Dhofar Wind I IPP — the nation's first wind farm — is sized at 114 – 132 MW, which is modestly larger than the previously envisioned capacity of 100 MW.

Madayn launches 'Explore' platform to showcase investment opportunities

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 18

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has launched its geographic information system (Explore), marking a significant step in its ongoing efforts to provide an attractive investment environment and promote project localisation across diverse sectors.

The system, which was launched under the auspices of Eng. Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of Madayn, aims to assist investors in pinpointing the available investment opportunities in the industrial cities.

Eng Aliaa al Nassri (pictured), Planning and Geographical System Director at the Directorate General of Facilities and Infrastructures in Madayn, stated that 'Explore' platform comes as part of Madayn's Digital Transformation Plan (2021-2025), which is aligned with the



objectives of Madayn Vision 2040.

"The platform aims to create sustainable digital solutions conducive to industrial growth and investment appeal, ensuring a robust and competitive industrial sector," Al Nassri pointed out.

She added, "Through Explore, investors can access comprehensive information about each industrial city, including area size, leasing policy, investment data, and types of activities. Additionally, they can explore the profiles of companies and investors operating within the industrial cities, gaining insights

into their business activities and contact details.

The platform also offers dynamic 2D and 3D views of the Knowledge Oasis Muscat, and allows users to search for investment opportunities tailored to their specific needs by identifying relevant industrial and commercial activities and specifying required land areas."

Al Nassri further elaborated that 'Explore' platform provides an array of services catering to both current and prospective investors in Madayn through (www.explore.madayn.om).

"The platform features a user-friendly interface, seamlessly integrated with Masar Service Centre. Once a request is made through the 'Explore' platform, it smoothly transfers to Masar for further processing.

Moreover, the platform presents a variety of up-to-date investment opportunities, allowing investors to explore a range of options across

all industrial cities based on their respective business and industrial activities," she added.

Madayn stands out as one of the pioneering government bodies to implement an electronic system for showcasing lands, locations, products, services, and various industrial activities through an integrated mapping platform.

Initially introduced in 2009, the geographic information system has undergone a comprehensive restructuring as part of Madayn's Digital Transformation Plan (2021-2025) to incorporate a diverse range of services.

This system joins an extensive suite of services offered by Madayn to foster an attractive investment environment in its industrial hubs, including Masar electronic platform, which enables investors to access a variety of 43 services, covering investment, contracts, permits, as well as general operational and inspection services.

Oman oil exports soar to reach 26.2m barrels

MUSCAT: The total amount of the Sultanate of Oman's oil exports until the end of January 2024 soared to about 26,201,300 barrels, calculating the average price of a barrel at \$83.2, as oil exports constituted 83.9 per cent of the total oil production amounting to 31,236,200 barrels.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicated that total oil exports recorded an increase of 0.6 per cent compared to the end of January 2023, as total exports at that time reached 26,046,300 barrels, in parallel with a decrease in production by 5.4 per cent, as it recorded at that time 33,023,800



barrels.

The total production of crude oil decreased by 7.9 per cent by the end of January 2024 to reach 23,930,900 barrels, while the total production of oil condensates increased by 3.7 per cent, recording 7,305,200 barrels, while the average daily production of oil reached 1,007,600 barrels until end of January 2024.

China topped the countries importing oil from the Sultanate of Oman, with total exports amounting to 25,200,600 barrels, an increase of 16.5 per cent from the end of January 2023, followed by Japan with 1,600,000 barrels, a decrease of 21.1 per cent. — ONA

Oman oil price reaches \$85.69 per barrel



MUSCAT: On Monday, the official price of Omani oil for next May delivery reached \$85.69 per barrel. The price of Oman oil witnessed an increase of 92 cents compared to last Friday's price of \$84.77.

The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for delivery this March amounted to \$78.75 per barrel, an increase of \$1.54 per barrel compared to the price for delivery last February.

Meethaq Islamic Banking unveils Ramadhan offer on auto financing and salary transfer



MUSCAT: In alignment with its commitment to providing unparalleled customer value proposition, Meethaq Islamic banking from Bank Muscat proudly unveils exclusive offers to commemorate the Holy month of Ramadhan.

Customers will be thrilled by the opportunity to receive guaranteed cashback for transferring their salary.

Those who transfer their salary to Meethaq Islamic Banking will be eligible for a cash back up to RO 500 on the first salary credit, capped at 10 per cent of total salary.

Individuals must maintain a minimum monthly salary of RO 250.

Furthermore, customers who receive the cash bonus need to maintain an active salary account, ensuring regular salary credits for a minimum of 12 months from the initial salary transfer date.

The cashback benefit extends specifically to savings accounts, providing added value to our customers' banking experience.

Revving up the excitement even further, both existing and new customers can benefit from a competitive profit rate of 4.85 per cent (excluding life takaful) on Auto Finance for both new and used cars, valid until May 2, 2024.

Eligible customers can avail financing of up to 80 per cent of the vehicle's value, with reduced payments and extended financing tenure of up to 10 years.

Meethaq customer can enjoy the convenience of accessing

and managing their finances seamlessly through Meethaq's expansive network of branches across Oman.

Applicants can benefit from swift processing and minimal documentation requirements for both of these offers.

The launch of these highly attractive offers follows a detailed study of the needs of different customer segments in the country.

This initiative aims to further enhance the services and facilities offered.

On this occasion, Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager – Meethaq Personal Banking, expressed his enthusiasm, stating: "We are delighted to introduce our special Ramadhan offers, which empower customers to make substantial savings on our auto financing product and enjoy a cashback on salary transfer offer.

Each year, these offerings attract significant interest, enabling customers to benefit from a competitive profit rate and a wide range of facilities.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to our valued customers for their trust in Meethaq's financing solutions and our comprehensive suite of products and services."

Continuing its dedication to delivering a world-class Islamic banking experience to its customers nationwide, Meethaq has solidified its position with the largest Islamic banking network in Oman consisting of 28 branches strategically situated across Oman.

MHD ACERE wins best customer satisfaction award in GCC

MUSCAT: MHD ACERE, the exclusive distributor of MG Motor in Oman, has been honoured with the prestigious Best Customer Satisfaction Award for its exceptional customer service in the previous year. This accolade was bestowed upon the distributor at the MG 5 Star Distributor Award 2023, held by SAIC Motor Middle East.

The Best Customer Satisfaction Award recognises distributors that consistently meet or surpass overall customer expectations.

MHD ACERE stood out for its unparalleled after-sales services and remarkable network expansion, earning the admiration of both customers and industry peers.

Expressing his delight, Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, remarked, "We are thrilled to receive recognition as the best distributor in customer satisfaction in the GCC region. This achievement



is a testament to the dedication of our team, the unwavering support of SAIC Motor ME, and, most importantly, the trust and loyalty of our valued customers.

At MHD ACERE, we take

pride in representing the MG Motor brand, which embodies the spirit of passion and excellence. We remain committed to serving our customers with the same fervour, contributing to

the growth and expansion of MG Motor in Oman."

MG Motor Oman has witnessed significant growth, with its network of showrooms expanding to 14 state-of-the-art facilities across various regions including Sinaw, Ibri, Sinaw, Nizwa, and Salalah.

This extensive network enables MG Oman to deliver superior service and cater to the diverse needs of its customers effectively.

In addition to the Best Customer Satisfaction Award, MG Motor Oman also secured the MG Best Technical & Training Operations Award for its outstanding technical report quality and excellence in training planning and implementation.

MHD ACERE and MG Motor Oman remain committed to upholding the highest standards of customer service and satisfaction, further solidifying their position as leaders in the automotive industry in Oman and the wider GCC region.

NBO launches Shahr Al Atta Ramadhan campaign

MUSCAT: As a testament to its commitment to supporting the less privileged and fostering the spirit of giving, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has launched its annual Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) campaign Shahr Al Atta.

This programme encompasses a series of initiatives designed to make a positive impact on the community and contribute to the nation's growth.

Shahr Al Atta kicked off with an internal staff event — a delightful Bake Sale held on February 29. This sets the stage for a season of generosity and community engagement, resonating with the spirit of compassion as the Holy Month of Ramadhan approaches.

The Bake Sale, the first event of the Shahr Al Atta initiative, unleashed the culinary talents of employees, showcasing a delectable array of mouth-watering baked goods.

The proceeds from this event will be contributed to NBO's CSR drive, reinforcing the bank's commitment to social responsibility.

In its second phase, Shahr Al Atta will distribute food



hampers to low-income families across the country.

This initiative, which has been a cornerstone of NBO's CSR efforts for several years, aims to provide essential sustenance and support to those in need during the Holy Month of Ramadhan.

As part of the Shahr Al Atta programme, NBO will also collaborate with a charitable organisation to celebrate Qarraqasho, a joyous occasion dedicated to bringing happiness to less fortunate children.

Through various activities and partnerships, NBO strives to create memorable moments for these children and spread the joy of the season. The concluding activity of Shahr Al Atta will involve partnership with a charitable establishment to celebrate Eid, fostering a sense of community and togetherness during the festive occasion.

Through this series of impactful initiatives, Shahr Al Atta aims to embody the spirit of giving, compassion, and unity

during this sacred time.

NBO continues to go beyond banking transactions and serve the community through positive actions.

NBO invites everyone to join in the spirit of Shahr Al Atta to create together a season of goodwill and solidarity.

Comprehensive details on NBO's accounts, products, and exclusive offers are accessible at www.nbo.om, directly through the NBO Call Centre, or via the user-friendly NBO.

Chery Tiggo 4 Pro sets the trend for the young generation

MUSCAT: Cars represent the culmination of modern industrial technology and are widely recognised as important indicators of a country's manufacturing strength. The latest data shows that in 2023, China's automobile production and sales both exceeded 30 million units for the first time, with exports increasing by over 50 per cent year-on-year.

Chery Automobile, as a leader in Chinese brand exports, has maintained its position as the champion of passenger car exports for 21 consecutive years. In 2023, Chery Automobile exported

923,900 vehicles, showcasing the power of "intelligent manufacturing in China."

Within Chery Automobile's product line-up, the Tiggo 4 Pro, positioned as an entry-level model, maintains strong sales momentum in global markets, with monthly sales exceeding tens of thousands of units.

It ranks first in overseas sales among Chinese A0-class SUVs, offering over 500,000 global users an advanced SUV with a blend of fashion, youthfulness, and intelligent technology.

The Tiggo 4 Pro is grounded in



a "global" concept, with its exterior crafted by an international design team, injecting more avant-garde

and youthful elements of fashion.

The dynamic and stylish front face is composed of a starry

diamond front grille and sleek lens automatic headlights, while the muscular body side design echoes the 18-inch five-spoke mirror dynamic wheel hubs.

The rear features a three-dimensional hollow light band with smoked black tail lights, complemented by horizontal chrome trim strips and chrome dual exhaust styling, enhancing the overall stylish temperament of the vehicle.

In terms of interior design, the Tiggo 4 Pro adopts a wide-body wrap-around layout, coupled with an integrated minimalist central

control area featuring a 10.25-inch ultra-clear floating LCD screen and a 7-inch full LCD instrument display screen, enabling multimedia, communication, and driving warning functions.

The main driver's 6-way electrically adjustable seat, finely crafted leather-wrapped 4-way adjustable multi-function steering wheel, dual-mode EPS steering system, electronic power steering, automatic air conditioning system, and 34 storage spaces, among other configurations and designs, combine to offer users a perfect blend of comfort and technology.

Most European banks able to handle current headwinds, experts say



Construction sites are photographed in Frankfurt, Germany. — Reuters

FRANKFURT: The majority of banks in Germany and Europe will be able to cope with the crisis in the office and real estate markets, coupled with a weakening economy, senior banking officials said at a conference in Frankfurt on Monday.

“We as supervisors do not need to be nervous. We have our instruments and have engaged with these risks at a very early stage. But we are very watchful,” Claudia Buch, head of banking supervision at the European Central Bank (ECB), told the conference organised by the Handelsblatt business daily in Frankfurt.

Raimund Röseler, head of banking supervision at Germany’s Federal Financial Supervisory Authority (BaFin), added that there was concern on financing for commercial property.

“But German banks are largely very well capitalised and will for that reason be able to survive strong headwinds, provided that risk management and governance are in order,” he added.

Due to the trend of working from home reducing the need for office space, the market for these properties is under pressure in many countries.

The collapse of Austrian property company Signa Holding in November has hit the German and Austrian commercial property market, with some banks increasing reserves to cope with any losses.

Both supervisors highlighted problems in the US commercial property market. But Röseler noted that few German banks were engaged in that market. “I do not have concerns overall,” he said.

— Reuters

Roll-out of Omani Nat-Cat Insurance Pool likely this year

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

A long-awaited Natural Catastrophe (Nat-Cat) Insurance Pool, designed to provide insurance coverage to individuals and businesses exposed to disaster-related risks, is likely to be rolled out this year, according to Oman Reinsurance Company (Oman Re), the nation’s first and only reinsurer.

The publicly traded reinsurer said in its 2023 Annual Report that multi-year efforts to secure broad agreement on the contours of a first-ever Nat-Cat Insurance Pool for the Sultanate of Oman have reached a key phase.

Those efforts, spearheaded by Oman Re, have involved Oman Insurance Association (OIA), the Capital Market Authority (as the insurance sector regulator), and other stakeholders.

“The deployment of the Omani Nat-Cat Pool is expected during 2024 and this a decision to be taken by the CMA,” said Dr Juma bin Ali al Juma, Chairman – Oman Re, in the Directors’ Report for the financial year ended December 31, 2023.

According to the Chairman, the rising frequency of natural catastrophes witnessed in Oman since 2018 had spurred the company to initiate a “national dialogue” with the regulator and Oman Insurance Association on the need for a framework to mitigate and manage the impacts for individuals and businesses.

An initial meeting to discuss



Cyclone Shaheen caused significant damage in northern parts of Oman in 2021.

the initiative was held in November 2021 in the wake of the devastation unleashed by Cyclone Shaheen.

In attendance were members of Oman Insurance Association and all decision-makers representing local insurance companies.

There was broad consensus on the need to establish a Nat-Cat Insurance Pool for the Omani market.

A Steering Committee helmed by Oman Re has since been working on the technical aspects of the reinsurance pool formation. While a proposal on the Motor section of the Nat-Cat Pool has been submitted to the regulator for its consideration and approval, the Non-Marine Section is currently being finalised, the

Chairman stated, adding that the Nat-Cat Pool is expected to be a reality this year.

Underscoring the need for contingency funding to help the nation bounce back from natural disasters, a National Fund for Emergencies (NFE) was instituted by Royal Decree earlier this year.

Set up under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance, its primary aim is to address “emergencies and natural disasters, like climatic conditions, floods, earthquakes and other risks that might impact the country or cause damage to public utilities and public infrastructure”.

The prestigious General Arab Insurance Federation (GAIF) has also called upon insurers and reinsurers of the MENA region

to create a regional Nat-Cat insurance pool to help strengthen underwriting capacities at the regional level.

Arab countries, it warned, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate risks including floods, earthquakes, tropical storms, droughts and forest fires.

According to the latest annual Natural Catastrophe and Climate Report by Gallagher Re, one of the world’s biggest reinsurance brokers, global insured losses from natural catastrophes reached an estimated \$123 billion in 2023, marking the fourth consecutive year where such losses exceeded \$100 billion.

The report estimates the global economic cost of all natural perils at \$357 billion in 2023.

Russia to hold rates at 16% with first cut expected in June

MOSCOW: Russia will hold interest rates at 16 per cent on Friday, with many economists expecting the bank to start easing monetary policy in June as inflation is stubbornly high. Inflation has eroded Russians’ living standards over the last decade.

President Vladimir Putin, fresh from securing a new six-year term in office, has recycled old promises with new deadlines and pledged more than 11.5 trillion roubles (\$125 billion) of public spending.

Widespread labour shortages,

rouble weakness, hefty government spending to fund what Moscow calls its “special military operation” in Ukraine, have all driven prices higher.

All 24 analysts and economists polled on Monday predicted that the Bank of Russia would keep its key rate at 16 per cent at Friday’s meeting.

We expect no changes in terms of rate or rhetoric, said Expert RA Chief Economist Anton Tabakh, with the central bank waiting for its previous monetary tightening to have an effect in the second half of



Illustration shows Russian Rouble coins are seen in front of stock graph. — Reuters

this year.

Sovcombank chief analyst Mikhail Vasilyev, predicting a hold, said there was a 30 per cent chance of a rate hike to 17 per cent, as inflation continued to pose risks. Inflation, the bank’s main area of concern, stood at 7.4 per cent in 2023, following on from an 11.9 per cent reading in 2022.

Economists expect it to remain well above the central bank’s 4 per cent target this year.

“We believe that the annual inflation will start to slow down significantly only from the

summer,” said Natalya Milchakova, lead analyst at Freedom Finance Global. “A key rate cut is still a long way off”.

In late February, 2022 Russia ramped up its benchmark rate to 20 per cent in an emergency move after Moscow dispatched tens of thousands of troops to Ukraine, which led the West to impose increasingly wide-ranging sanctions on Russia. The key rate was gradually cut to 7.5 per cent, before the bank started hiking again in July 2023. It held rates at 16 per cent in February. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

KARACHI

Pakistan central bank keeps interest rate on hold

Pakistan’s central bank on Monday held its key interest rate at 22 per cent as expected for a sixth straight policy meeting as inflation risks continued to loom.

The decision was in line with the expectations of a majority of analysts, although most are also expecting rate cuts from the second quarter of this year.

The bank said that although the inflation rate had eased in February, it remained high and subject to risks.

“This warrants a cautious approach and requires continuity of the current monetary stance to bring inflation down to the target range of 5-7 per cent by



September 2025,” the State Bank of Pakistan’s (SBP) monetary policy committee said in a statement.

Monday’s policy decision is the last ahead of the April expiry of a \$3 billion standby arrangement with the International Monetary Fund. Pakistan’s key rate was last raised in June to fight inflationary pressures. — Reuters

BRUSSELS

Austria inflation unrevised at 26-month low

Austria’s consumer price inflation eased to the lowest level in more than two years, as initially estimated in February, the latest data from Statistics Austria showed on Monday.

The consumer price index climbed 4.3 per cent year-over-year in February, slower than the revised 4.6 per cent increase in January.

That was in line with the flash data published on March 1.

Further, this was the lowest level of inflation since December 2021, but still twice as high as the European Central Bank’s stability target of 2.0 per cent.

The slowdown in inflation

was mainly due to the fact that the pressure on food prices eased significantly, and prices in restaurants no longer rose quite as sharply as recently, Tobias Thomas, director general at Statistics Austria, said.

Costs for food and non-alcoholic beverages grew at a slower rate of 3.7 per cent annually in February versus a 5.4 per cent rise a month ago.

Expenses for restaurants and hotels were 8.3 per cent more expensive, compared to 9.1 per cent in January. On a monthly basis, consumer prices climbed 0.7 per cent in February, as estimated. — dpa

BEIJING

China retail sales show shaky economic recovery

The performance of China’s economy in the first two months of 2024 was mixed, official figures showed on Monday, with sluggish household consumption alongside increased industrial production reflecting an uneven recovery.

The highly anticipated comeback after Beijing lifted stringent Covid control measures in late 2022 was less robust than expected, and the world’s second-largest economy now grapples with turbulence in the property sector, high youth unemployment and flagging consumption.

In January and February



combined, retail sales — the main indicator of household consumption — increased 5.5 per cent year on year, China’s National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said.

But the figure was down from December, which saw an increase of 7.4 per cent, and was slightly below the result anticipated by Bloomberg. — AFP

Blockchain in MENA region: Its present and future



GRACY CHEN

The author is Managing Director, Bitget, and a crypto enthusiast

As I return from the Web Summit in Qatar, I ponder the perspectives of crypto development in the Middle East. How quickly the landscape has changed: ten years ago, not so many people would name MENA among the most technologically innovative regions.

Yet, the title of one of my panel discussions during the Summit sums it up perfectly — “Building unicorns outside the Valley.” Silicon Valley, a thin strip of land, is, indeed, no longer an undisputed leader in startup launching and broad technology adoption. Tech goes global, especially blockchain, and MENA has become one of its catalytic centres.

WEB3 MENA IN NUMBERS
In 2020-2022, Web3 in the

Middle East went through a major transformation from a small industry to a headliner of a new economic revolution.

The UAE, for instance, saw a fourfold increase in the number of registered crypto businesses and secured as much as 10 per cent of global crypto transactions.

The regional share of the total mining hash rate exceeds 8 per cent and is only expected to grow as miners migrate from countries with regulatory instability toward the low-cost and reliable surplus of energy.

UAE empowers blockchain, crypto literacy is taught in schools — Web3 is simply omnipresent if you know where to look.

Other Gulf countries follow suit. While Saudi Arabia and UAE were battling over who had more favourable regulations and free economic zones, Oman entered the scene with a grand-scale hard

infrastructure project.

With over \$1.1 billion invested in crypto mining, Oman drives the Middle East’s expected share in Bitcoin mining to over 15 per cent. This decisive move has attracted foreign crypto ventures, which are now carefully eyeing the country.

Like its neighbours, Oman is in pursuit of diversification from hydrocarbon income. So far, its “Vision 2040” strategy of creating knowledge-intensive jobs seems to be focused on blockchain — a great sign for the regional industry. All these measures result in extreme optimism from investors.

With Bitcoin’s spot ETF approval in the US and an incoming halving in April, its price is hitting new heights — and, as expected by the regional users, will continue to do so.

Our study at Bitget shows

that over 80 per cent of investors in MENA expect the halving of Bitcoin to have a significant impact on its value, with 88 per cent thinking that the next Bull Run will propel BTC to a new all-time high price, which we recently saw came true.

This confidence and optimism are hard to earn, and this sentiment is notably stronger than that of participants from other regions.

Only 4 per cent of investors in MENA plan to decrease their crypto holdings in 2024, while 82 per cent are eager to increase their position in crypto.

Towards the global role of MENA

All the necessary ingredients are there: rapidly developing infrastructure, favourable policymaking, and welcoming users’ sentiment.

Blockchain and crypto have

found strong support in the Middle East and have been accepted widely.

MENA’s global role in Web3, both as the home to blockchain businesses and provider of raw mining power, will increase, opening up more opportunities for crypto. At Bitget, we’re determined to provide easier access to this emerging technology for everyone globally.

We plan to scale our Middle East team and hire professionals across the region to fill a range of back- and mid-office roles.

This is not just acknowledging the importance of MENA; it is about the core values of facilitating a more profound crypto adoption across the globe.

After attending the Web Summit in Qatar, I reflected on the future of crypto development in the Middle East, which appears to be very promising.

Only an oil slump can stop Vladimir Putin

HUGO DIXON

Vladimir Putin is winning the war of attrition against Ukraine. Although the Russian people are also suffering, the pain is not enough to force the newly re-elected president to change course.

He might reconsider if the West could squeeze Russia’s oil revenue. But that will be hard to engineer. Even if receipts from hydrocarbons stay at the same level, the Russian government is going to have to squeeze its citizens.

The economy is overheating as Putin, who has just secured a new six-year term to extend his 24-year rule, pumps more money into the war effort. Defence spending, which is budgeted at 10.8 trillion roubles (\$118 billion) this year, has trebled since the war began. Inflation is 7.7% and there are severe labour shortages.

The central bank has jacked up interest rates to 16% and said official borrowing costs will need to stay high for a “long period” to get inflation down to its 4% target. The government has imposed capital controls to prop up the rouble.

The government will also need to take fiscal measures to bring domestic consumption in line with production. Top of the list are likely to be tax increases focussed on richer individuals and companies. Putin has already signalled as much.

While such decisions will be unpopular with some, he will face no opposition ramming them through. Putin boasts that Russia grew 3.6% last year, more than any of the Group of Seven rich democracies which are backing Ukraine.

It will grow 2.6% this year and 1.1% next year, the International Monetary Fund predicts. But the underlying picture is not as healthy as these headline figures suggest.

For a start, a war economy by its nature does not produce goods that ordinary people can consume. As the government directs a bigger slice of national

income into churning out tanks and shells, there will be less money for consumer goods and services, says Tim Ash, a strategist at RBC BlueBay Asset Management.

The government has shielded the population from the economic cost of the war by raiding its national wealth fund to finance the budget deficit, which was 3.7% of GDP last year.

But this is not sustainable as the fund’s liquid assets have fallen by more than half since the Putin attacked Ukraine two years ago, and are now just 2.7% of national income. One way or another, the war economy will crowd out non-war spending.

This will happen through a mixture of tax hikes, inflation, high interest rates and spending cuts. What’s more, the war is hurting Russia’s mid-term prospects. Western sanctions are denying it advanced technology.

Labour productivity, which Putin dreams of boosting, fell 3.6% in the first year of the war. Investment dropped to 19.7% of GDP in 2022, from 21.4% in 2017.

About 315,000 Russian troops have died or been injured, according to the US government, while Re: Russia, an independent publication, estimates over 800,000 people had fled the country by last July.

This brain drain of young and educated people is a further drag on the economy. Although the economy seems likely to stagnate, the president does not face any domestic financial constraint to prolonging the war. Nor is he yet under any external restrictions. Putin has been able to sustain the attack because Russia is still earning a lot from hydrocarbons.

Despite Ukraine’s allies embargoing its oil and Europe finding alternatives to its gas, Russia enjoyed a current account surplus of \$51 billion in 2023.

Though that was down from a bumper \$238 billion the previous year, Moscow is still in the black. Things might change if Ukraine’s allies could drive Russia’s export revenues down so far that it goes into deficit, says Jacob Nell, a senior research fellow at the Kyiv School of Economics. — Reuters

The mystery of US interest rates



J. BRADFORD DELONG

The author is a former deputy assistant US Treasury secretary, is Professor of Economics at the University of California, Berkeley, a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research, and the author of *Slouching Towards Utopia: An Economic History of the Twentieth Century* (Basic Books, 2022).



The US Federal Reserve building is seen past caution tape in Washington, DC. — AFP

In the United States, the long-term real safe interest rate – the inflation-adjusted return on low-risk investments such as Treasuries is, in addition to “financial conditions,” the key mechanism influencing both the incentive to build and the balance of net exports (owing to its effect on the exchange rate).

From early March to mid-May 2022, this metric jumped by more than one percentage point as the bond market realised that the US Federal Reserve would soon curtail its efforts to promote a speedy recovery in employment following the pandemic.

Then, from late August to early October 2022, it jumped again, this time by an annualised 1.5 percentage points, as bond traders speculated that the Fed might have to tighten monetary policy to avert persistent inflation in an economy that had returned to full employment.

It was these two spikes that created the current interest-rate configuration. Rates today are far higher – around two percentage points – than the level anyone five years ago (before the pandemic) would have estimated the “neutral” rate to be.

The neutral rate, John Maynard Keynes explains in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, is the level necessary to “bring about an adjustment between the propensity to consume and the inducement to invest.”

An interest rate that everyone considers to be above the neutral level therefore reflects markets’ confidence that a recession – or at least a substantial slowdown – is only a matter of time.

When that time comes, all will depend on whether the Fed recognises the approaching weakness in time to cut rates and achieve a “soft landing.”

This interest-rate configuration has now held for seven months.

The situation has not been fully static, of course. There was another one-point surge between June and October 2023. But that wave soon receded as speculation shifted to questions of when and how fast the Fed would start cutting rates.

The 30-year Treasury rate thus is back to where it was in October 2022. The landing has indeed been smooth. But the pilot has not dared to shift from reverse into neutral.

Apparently, the Fed is concerned that nonfarm payrolls keep rising. On a seasonally adjusted basis, there were 275,000 more jobs in February than in January, which is only slightly higher than the average of 250,000 over the past six months.

I suspect that the Fed is profoundly uncomfortable with interest rates substantially above what it confidently believes the neutral rate to be, especially now that inflation is very close to its 2 per cent target.

But it will not dare to shift

out of reverse until it sees signs of slower job growth.

Three explanations could clarify the current situation. The conclusion that interest rates are in excess of the neutral rate could be based on an erroneous analysis.

Or there could be an error in how we measure the state of the economy. Or, third, the Fed may have committed the Wile E. Coyote error.

Taking these explanations in reverse order, if economic weakness is indeed coming, the Fed will soon wish that it had started cutting rates in January 2024.

Remember, private-sector decisions to cut back on building, and to re-source purchases to overseas suppliers, were paused in 2022 and delayed until 2023 as people waited to see how much the Fed would tighten.

If firms then followed through on those postponed decisions between May and October 2023 – as the ten-year Treasury yield ran up temporarily from 3.53% to 4.93% – the impact on employment patterns should start to hit the economy right about now.

In pursuit of the roadrunner, Wile E. Coyote (a classic Looney Tunes character) always runs off the edge of the cliff but does not begin to fall until he looks down and realises he’s running in air. I was fairly confident that this was where the Fed stood six months ago. But as time passes without

anything happening, I become more torn.

What if the measurements are wrong? The consensus has long been that the US payroll survey is superior to the household survey. But in the past couple of years, a gap has emerged between these two surveys. While the payroll survey records 2.7 million more jobs than a year ago, the household survey records only 700,000 more people working in those jobs than a year ago.

If the labour market is as weak as the household survey suggests, that weakness should have already shown up in consumer spending. It has not.

That leaves the possibility of a faulty analysis. The near-consensus since the start of the pandemic has been that there are powerful fundamental factors keeping the neutral interest rate very low, and that there have been no major changes to those fundamentals.

The neutral rate therefore should still be very low, implying that the high policy rate is inappropriate to an economy at full employment with inflation near its target.

But if there is one lesson that I have learned in more than 40 years of trying to understand the business cycle, it is that there is no empirical regularity in the macroeconomy that can be trusted not to crumble beneath our feet in a remarkably short time.

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HADITH

GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger as saying:

If anyone forgets that he is fasting and eats or drinks he should complete his fast, for it is only Allah Who has fed him and given him drink.

FATWA



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

A traveller gets sick while on his way, the doctor advised him to stop his Ramadhan fasting as it may affect his health? What is he supposed to do?

Better to break. However, he should make up for the missed days.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

We have warned you of a near punishment — the Day when a person will observe what his hands have produced, and the faithless will say, "O, I wish I were dust".

(Al Naba')



TUESDAY | MARCH 19, 2024 | RAMADHAN 8, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om

NEW TV AND RADIO PROGRAMMES TO WATCH OUT FOR THIS RAMADHAN

BY STAFF REPORTER

Since the beginning of Ramadhan, several television and radio productions have been launched to reflect a range of issues that meet viewers' aspirations for art and entertainment. This comes within the framework of the vigorous efforts made by the Ministry of Information to enhance Omani media content, in addition to attracting Omani talents as writers, actors, cinematographers, producers, directors, and technicians, building their capacities, and developing their skills to contribute to the development of the artistic movement in the Sultanate of Oman.

TELEVISION DRAMA

Two local television dramas have been presented, 'Gharaq Falah' consisting of 15 separate episodes, written by Hood al Hooti and directed by Mohammed Kadhimi.

Each episode presents a specific issue whose events unfold to eventually offer a solution or guidance towards a solution, leaving the audience convinced to live with the pains and dilemmas of that issue or choose the right decision to avoid it. The series features a lineup of Omani drama stars, including Saleh Zaal, Fakhriya Khamis, and Amina Abdul Rasoul, along with actors Saud al Khanjari, Zuha Qadir, Khamis al Rawahi, and others.

Following this, another 15 episodes of the series titled "Ya Qalbi Ebtasem" which means "Oh my heart, smile," by the same director and written by author Naima al Hattali, revolve around several characters, including Hammam, the main character, who is fired from the job, married with two children, and living with his mother and mother-in-law under one roof. He tries to navigate his life appropriately given life's circumstances, working as a taxi driver, and through his work, he encounters various situations. The story's events begin to escalate, intersecting with the characters, and causing a crisis, for Hammam, his family, and his friends, who join him in searching to solve the mystery. Later, they discover that his friend Hussein orchestrated everything to create media content for fame, and publicity." The cast includes artists Saleh Zaal, Amina Abdul Rasoul, Mohammed Noor, Khamis al Rawahi, Manal al Alawi,

Amina Jameel, Mohammed al Siyabi, and Khalid al Hadidi, along with a large ensemble of young Omani faces.

RADIO DRAMA

On the front of Ramadhan dramas, the Sultanate of Oman Radio has been keen on presenting a new radio experience during the holy month. They produced six dramatic series this year, featuring a selection of writers, actors, and directors. The themes of these dramas varied between social, historical, and cultural.

"Wakan Sheghafn" unfolds the life story of a renowned social media personality. Starting as a mere hobby, her passion quickly attracts attention and adoration, turning her into a magnet for fans. However, her life takes a dramatic turn, plunging her into a world of shocks, betrayals, and shattered trust. She finds herself entangled in the dark realm of drugs, embroiled in events that tarnish her reputation and that of her children. Rasha al Balushi pens this gripping drama, directed by Hamad al Wardi.

"Kibar Al Sheim" transports audiences to two Omani communities between 1908 and 1920. It illuminates the society of interior Oman, where traditional Omani arts like Razha flourish, alongside a community in Zanzibar witnessing the dawn of Omani journalism. The series revolves around a character who, journeying with her husband to Zanzibar, leaves her children behind in Oman. Her attempts to reunite with her children are thwarted by her relationship with her journalist husband. Based on the novel "Those Hundred Years: Papers of Love, Pride, and Breaking" by Shaikhah al Fajri, this drama underscores the role of Razha and journalism in shaping social dynamics. Directed by Salim al Owaisi.

"Ibrahim Gobi" draws inspiration from the eponymous novel by Omani writer Khalil Khamis, shedding light on Omanis' struggles in seeking livelihoods over the past century. The series vividly portrays the resilience and determination of Omani individuals in nation-building, family care, and societal growth during the twentieth century. This drama, prepared by Nour Al Deen al Hashemi and directed by Hamad al Wardi, promises to captivate audiences.

"Swalif Nasna Al Tayyibeen" is a social series offering insight into

various life events and situations, with social messages reflecting the Omani persona and societal landscape, interspersed with comedic elements. Written by Talib al Balushi and directed by Salah Al Raeesi.

"Min Ma'athir Al Adab Al Arabi"

dives into the rich heritage of Arab and Muslim tales, serving as a medium to explore and document literary and cultural legacies through engaging anecdotes, paradoxes, and historical events. This drama, prepared by Ahmed al Hamdani and

directed by Mahmoud Obeid, offers valuable lessons applicable to contemporary life.

"Returning to Allah" presents a blend of historical and contemporary drama, highlighting renowned personalities who embraced Islam

wholeheartedly, showcasing the reasons behind their conversion, and emphasising the religion's message of tolerance and truth. Dramatically prepared by Ahmed al Izki and directed by Muna al Musalami.



HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF MUSLIM FAITH

627

Battle of the Trench: Quraysh troops attempt to siege Medina

The Battle of the Trench, occurring in 627 CE, saw the Muslim community of Medina defending against a siege by the Quraysh tribe from Mecca. Despite being outnumbered, the Muslims successfully thwarted the Quraysh by digging a defensive trench around the city. This victory showcased the strategic prowess and unity of the early Muslim community, solidifying their position in Arabia.

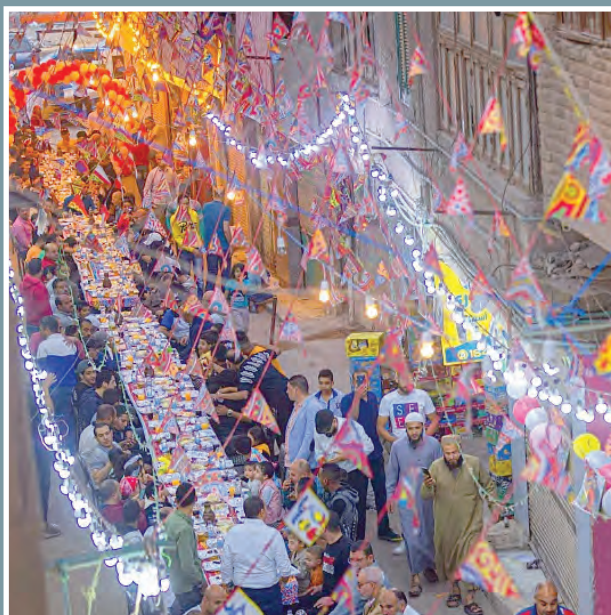
DOS & DONTs: ETIQUETTE GUIDE DURING THE HOLY MONTH

DON'T LISTEN TO LOUD MUSIC/SONGS.

Respect the sentiments of those who are fasting or praying during this holy period. Music, especially in some cultures, is associated with entertainment and worldly distractions, which might detract from the solemnity and spiritual focus that Ramadhan encourages. Listening to songs on a loud volume can cause hindrance and is not acceptable during Ramadhan.

RAMADHAN AROUND THE WORLD

EGYPT



Islam's history in Egypt spans over fourteen centuries, beginning with the Muslim conquest in the 7th century. Under various dynasties like the Fatimids, Ayyubids, and Mamluks, Egypt flourished culturally and architecturally, while Islam became deeply ingrained in society. Ottoman rule from the 16th to 19th centuries further solidified Islam's influence. In the modern era, Egypt gained independence in 1952, yet Islam remained integral to its identity. Today, the Muslim population in Egypt comprised nearly 90 per cent of the country totalling to around 100 million. During Ramadhan, Egyptians observe fasting from dawn to sunset, punctuated by prayers, community meals (Iftar), and acts of charity. Ramadhan fosters spiritual reflection, Quranic recitation, and strengthens communal bonds. These traditions exemplify the enduring significance of Islam in Egyptian culture and society.

RAMADAN TRIVIA HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE HOLY MONTH

WHAT IS THE CHARITY THAT MUST BE GIVEN DURING RAMADAN?

Answer to yesterday's trivia: I'tikaf



AL BURAIMI'S SHARFA MOSQUE REMAINS THE CENTRE OF SOCIETY AFTER 300 YEARS

BY AHMED AL KAABI

Over the centuries, the historic mosques of Oman have stood as a testament to the country's rich cultural and historical heritage. The construction and architectural styles of these mosques showcase the remarkable influence of Islamic art, which spread alongside the religion in the region.

Since the advent of Islam in Oman, the art of Islamic architecture has been magnificently embodied in the construction of mosques and prayer houses. These mosques are characterised by a unique architectural style that reflects the country's cultural heritage and blends seamlessly with its environment, encompassing both spiritual and material aspects of life.

Omanis have left their artistic mark on these historic mosques, skillfully incorporating Islamic architectural styles while adapting them to the unique characteristics of their environment and local culture. These mosques serve as a testament to the Sultanate's rich heritage and deep-rooted culture, making them invaluable elements of Oman's architectural legacy.

According to Suleiman al Azzani, the Sharfa neighbourhood in Al Buraimi has been inhabited since ancient times. Located in the heart of the city, it boasts numerous traditional houses that retain their distinctive heritage character to this day.

Al Azzani points out that the Sharfa Mosque dates back over 300 years. It was built by our ancestors to provide a place for worship and to strengthen the values of solidarity and community participation. Due to the difficulty of travel and long distances, it was built by our ancestors to serve as a place of worship for the local residents, following the inherited principle that no house should be built before a place of worship.

This historic building possesses unique design features. Al Azzani explains that the mosque has two mihrabs (prayer niches): one in the front, where prayers were held in winter, and the other in the back, where prayers were held in summer. The front section was designed to help warm the space, while the back section was designed to provide venti-



lation for the worshippers during the hot summer months.

The mosque has undergone several renovations over the years to keep up with the demands of modern times. It has been updated with modern tools and materials that are compatible with climate change and resistant to weather fac-

tors, without compromising its original heritage character.

The mosque served not only as a place of prayer but also as a centre for local gatherings. It hosted important meetings that addressed the affairs of the neighbourhood and the wilayat (province). It was also a place where children of the

neighbourhood gathered to learn the basics of prayer, Quran recitation, and all matters related to their religion.

Despite its long history, the mosque has not lost its important role in society. It continues to welcome visitors, preserve its heritage, and embrace modern developments.



THE MICHELIN GUIDE unveils its annual list of the best French restaurants on Monday, with its boss praising the “cultural dynamism” of a new generation of chefs.

After a long period of resting on the laurels of its gastronomic reputation, France has seen a flourishing of new establishments in the last decade or so, absorbing international ideas and with a greater focus on sustainability.

“It’s no longer just about heritage,” Gwendal Poullennec, head of the Michelin Guide, said ahead of the ceremony to launch its new edition.

“French gastronomy is no longer stuck in the past,” he said,

agricultural fabric,” said Poullennec.

Michelin announced a few demotions two weeks ago — done in advance to avoid any bitter taste at the annual ceremony, which this year is being held in the Loire Valley city of Tours.

Michelin has turned the guide’s launch into a touring affair around France since the pandemic, having hosted the last two in Strasbourg and Cognac.

That reflects the spread of France’s best restaurants beyond Paris, with regional eateries accounting for most of the new stars in recent years.

Some 40 small municipalities and villages will find themselves with a Michelin-starred restaurant in the new edition.



with the 2024 crop marking “the emergence of a whole generation that we could feel coming up”.

A total of 62 restaurants will receive a star — most for the first time and including 23 that have been open for less than a year.

The details will be made public at 5pm (1600 GMT), including the names of restaurants that have achieved the pinnacle of three stars.

Many put a focus on sustainable, locally-sourced cuisine.

“There is a very clear emphasis on the ‘terroirs’ — the local

very tangible impacts on the fragile bottom lines of restaurants.

A total of 28 lost a star this year, including one three-star establishment.

Tyre-manufacturing brothers Andre and Edouard Michelin launched their first guide in 1900 to encourage motorists to discover restaurants around France.

It has since expanded to 45 destinations around the world, and will this year launch a similar guide for hotels.

— AFP



Sand boarding makes a post-Covid comeback in Namibia desert town

SET AGAINST MILES of mesmerising sand dunes, Namibia’s seaside resort town of Swakopmund is seeing a boom in sandboarding, buoyed by a near-doubling of the numbers of cruise liners docking at nearby Walvis Bay last year.

Lying between the 80,000 square km (31,000 square mile) Namib desert and the sea, Swakopmund is drawing tourists back, three years after lockdown brought Namibia’s visitor numbers - previously around a million a year - to a standstill.

Many of them are tempted by the thrill of this extreme sport,



which involves sliding down sand dunes standing up or lying down on a board at speeds of up to 80 km (50 miles) an hour.

“It is one of the best things to do around here,” said Aylin Yazan, a media professional from London on her first trip to Namibia.

Namibia is located in southern Africa, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, Angola and Zambia to the north, Botswana to the east, and South Africa to the south and south-east. Its capital and largest city is Windhoek.

Namibia is renowned for its stunning landscapes, including the Namib Desert, which is one of the oldest deserts in the world, and the famous red sand dunes of Sossusvlei. The country is also home to diverse wildlife, with iconic species such as desert-adapted elephants, lions, rhinos, and giraffes. Additionally, Namibia boasts a rich cultural heritage, with indigenous communities like the Himba and San people preserving traditional ways of life. Economically, Namibia is known for its mining industry, particularly diamonds, uranium, and other minerals.

Walvis Bay is also seeing a boom in traffic from shippers diverting their cargoes away from the insecurity on the Red Sea and chronic congestion at ports in neighbouring South Africa.

For sandboarding guide Devon Waters, 28, a longtime resident of Swakopmund, which lies 360 km (223 miles) northwest of Windhoek, the sport offered an escape from a life on the streets, where drugs and crime were a constant temptation.

“(Sandboarding) changed me a lot. It keeps me off the streets because we work here every day,” Waters, who has been a guide for eight years, said.

“It puts bread on the table.”

—Reuters