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RAMADHAN  
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MONDAY  
MAR 3, 2025

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PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR

05:12 AM

DHUHR

12:24 PM

ASR

03:45 PM

MAGHRIB

06:16 PM

ISHA

07:26 PM

omanobserver.com

INBRIEF

HM GREETINGS TO BULGARIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Dr Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere wishes to President Dr Rumen Radev and the people of Bulgaria.

BOOST TO E-COMMERCE

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has launched a new policy and executive programme aimed at regulating the expanding postal sector in Oman. **DETAILS ON P13**

RAMADHAN

4

ESSENTIAL NUTRITION STRATEGIES FOR RAMADHAN

HADITH

QURAN

DUA

In first, private American spaceship lands upright on Moon

WASHINGTON: A US company successfully landed its spacecraft on the Moon on Sunday, marking only the second private mission to achieve the milestone — and the first to do so upright.

Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost Mission 1 touched down shortly after 3:34 am US Eastern Time (0834 GMT) near Mons Latreille, a volcanic formation in Mare Crisium on the Moon's northeastern near side.

"Y'all stuck the landing, we're on

the Moon," an engineer at mission control in Austin, Texas, called out as the team erupted in cheers. CEO Jason Kim confirmed that the spacecraft was "stable and upright" -- in contrast to the first private landing last February, which came down sideways.

"We're on the Moon!" Nicky Fox, associate administrator for Nasa's Science Mission Directorate, rejoiced. The first image from the lander revealed the rocky,



Blue Ghost carries 10 instruments, including a lunar soil analyser.

pockmarked terrain it had to autonomously navigate in order to select its touchdown spot, having slowed down from thousands of miles per hour to just two mph.

Nicknamed "Ghost Riders in the Sky," the mission is part of a Nasa-industry partnership aimed at reducing costs and supporting Artemis, the programme designed to return astronauts to the Moon.

The golden lander, about the size of a hippopotamus, launched on January

15 on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, capturing stunning footage of Earth and the Moon along its 2.8 million mile journey. It shared a ride with a Japanese company's lander set to attempt a landing in May.

Blue Ghost carries 10 instruments, including a lunar soil analyser, a radiation-tolerant computer and an experiment testing the feasibility of using the existing global satellite navigation system to navigate the Moon. — AFP

UN chief calls for aid to be restored ‘immediately’

ISRAEL SUSPENDS AID, STRIKES GAZA KILLING FOUR

UN chief Antonio Guterres called on Sunday for Israel to end its suspension of humanitarian aid to Gaza "immediately."

"The Secretary-General urges all parties to make every effort to prevent a return to hostilities in Gaza. He calls for humanitarian aid to flow back into Gaza immediately and for the release of all hostages," said a statement from the UN posted on X.

Earlier, Israel said it was suspending the entry of aid into Gaza, where both Israel and Palestinian sources reported Israeli military strikes as Hamas alleged a "coup" against a six-week-old truce.

The health ministry in Gaza reported at least four killed and six wounded in Israeli attacks.

As the 42-day first phase of the ceasefire drew to a close with negotiations inconclusive, Israel early on Sunday approved a truce extension it said US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff proposed.

The extension would cover the holy month of Ramadhan and the Jewish holiday of Passover.

Hamas has repeatedly rejected an extension, instead favouring a transition to the truce deal's second phase.

As outlined by former US president Joe Biden, the second phase would bring a permanent end to the war that began on October 7, 2023.



Palestinians gather to receive aid provided by UNRWA including food supplies outside a distribution centre at Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza Strip on Sunday. — Reuters

and supplies into the Gaza Strip will be suspended".

It said there would be "consequences" for Hamas if it did not accept the temporary truce extension.

On a sandy street in Gaza City, Mays Abu Amer, 21, expressed hope the ceasefire can continue "for a longer period of time and forever as well. Because we have so much destruction, we need a lot of time for reconstruction."

Hamas said the "decision to suspend

humanitarian aid is cheap blackmail, a war crime and a blatant coup against the (ceasefire) agreement".

Gaza's civil defence agency reported "artillery shelling and gunfire from Israeli tanks" east of Khan Yunis city in southern Gaza. The Israeli army said it was "unaware of any artillery shelling in this area".

The Palestine Red Crescent, however, reported one person killed in an Israeli drone strike in the area, and one more killed in another town nearby. — AFP



DHOFAR ENHANCES ADVENTURE TOURISM

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has taken a significant step to enhance adventure tourism in Dhofar Governorate by commissioning the development of three key mountain trails. Local companies specialising in adventure tourism have been entrusted with these projects, which are expected to improve visitor experiences and attract more nature enthusiasts to the governorate. As part of the initiative, the ministry has introduced a high-wire (Via Ferrata) track at Jabal Samhan, a thrilling adventure activity that allows climbers to navigate iron tracks set along steep mountain slopes. **DETAILS ON P3**



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SHORT TAKES



Al Dhahirah Nature Reserve is home to different species of wild animals

AL DHAHIRAH BOOSTS ARABIAN IBEX PROTECTION

**IBRI:** Al Dhahirah Governorate offers many habitats for wild animals, including the Arabian ibex. Al Dhahirah Nature Reserve, which extends over an area of more than 860 square kilometres, is home to different species of wild animals.

Field surveys show that the nature reserve houses good numbers of the Arabian ibex, in addition to the Arabian gazelle, the lynx, the mountain fox and wild cats.

The Arabian ibex, in particular, constitutes a salient feature of the natural heritage of the Sultanate of Oman. In Al Dhahirah Governorate, the Arabian ibex forms the most common view of animals living normally in the wild.

Al Dhahirah Nature Reserve stands apart for its unique location amid the rugged mountainous terrain, which provides a suitable environment for reproduction and growth of the Arabian ibex away from threats. — ONA



CDAА MARKS WORLD CIVIL DEFENCE DAY WITH MEMBER STATES

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAА), on Saturday marked the World Civil Defence Day, which falls on March 1 every year, alongside the member states of the International Civil Defence Organisation.

This year the event is celebrated under the theme, ‘Civil Defence, Guarantee of Security for the Population’ to emphasise the pivotal role played by civil defence agencies in protecting lives and property and enhancing public security and safety through high readiness to confront natural disasters and emergencies. The CDAА is keen on cooperating with all sectors and civil society to preserve public safety and protect individuals and properties. — ONA

OMAN SHOWCASES TOURISM POTENTIAL AT ITB BERLIN 2025

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, is set to participate in the International Tourism Exchange Berlin (ITB) 2025, one of the world’s most prestigious tourism exhibitions. Scheduled to be held in the German capital from March 4, this global event serves as a significant platform for networking, knowledge exchange and fostering international partnerships in the tourism industry.

Oman’s participation aligns with its strategic vision to strengthen its position as a global tourism destination, attract more international visitors and explore



opportunities for investment in its thriving tourism sector. The Sultanate of Oman will showcase its diverse tourism offerings, including unique landscapes, cultural heritage and world-class hospitality services, with a special focus on attracting visitors from European markets.

This year, Oman’s delegation includes 55 tourism and hospitality

establishments, alongside four key strategic partners: Oman Air, Oman Airports, Omran Group and Visit Oman. Their presence highlights Oman’s commitment to expanding its global tourism footprint and promoting investment opportunities in the sector.

Speaking about the importance at ITB, Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director-General of Tourism Promotion and Official Spokesperson at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, emphasised that Oman’s presence at ITB Berlin 2025 is a significant step towards reinforcing the country’s standing on the global tourism map.

— ONA

Unified govt portal to benefit citizens, residents

VINOD NAIR  
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

**THE** Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has launched the Unified Government Services Portal (gov.om), a comprehensive platform aimed at providing easy and seamless access to essential government services for both citizens and residents.

The portal is designed to simplify the process of obtaining information and services, eliminate the need for navigating through multiple platforms and streamline procedures between government entities.

Currently, the portal hosts 91 fully digital services from 10 government entities, following the successful launch of 23 services in the first phase.

The second phase, scheduled for launch between March and June, will bring 63 more services, expanding the portal’s capabilities and further improving access to government services.



The portal hosts 91 fully digital services from 10 government entities

The portal represents a significant step towards digitising government processes and improving accessibility for all

Among the key offerings of the portal that benefit expatriates are services related to business activities, including starting, practicing and completing business activities, along with obtaining necessary permits for events.

Expats can also apply for visas for various purposes, such as tourism, work and investment, all via the portal. Additionally, there are e-services dedicated to reporting corruption, abuse and begging, ensuring fair law application and the protection of citizens’ rights.

Other services for expatriates include obtaining medical fitness certificates for resident cards, renewing those cards, cancelling SIM card electronic authentication, and handling taxation services like income tax returns, VAT refunds for non-resident foreign individuals, and tax residency certificates.

The portal also includes services for rental properties, such as lease contracts, obtaining property mortgage releases, no-objection permits for demolitions and real estate development project licences. Further, there are services for managing labour-related tasks for both Omanis and non-Omanis in the private sector.

In the tourism sector, the portal contributes to the development of Oman’s tourism industry by offering services that attract international visitors.

With its comprehensive range of services, the Unified Government Services Portal represents a significant step towards digitising government processes and improving accessibility for all residents, including expatriates.

Dhofar enhances adventure tourism with new trails

**SALALAH:** The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has taken a significant step towards enhancing adventure tourism in Dhofar Governorate by commissioning the development of three key mountain trails. Local companies specialising in adventure tourism have been entrusted with these projects, which are expected to improve visitor experiences and attract more nature enthusiasts to the governorate.

As part of the initiative, the ministry has introduced a high-wire (Via Ferrata) track at Jabal Samhan, a thrilling adventure activity that allows climbers to navigate iron tracks set along steep mountain slopes.

This addition is set to elevate Dhofar’s reputation as a destination for extreme outdoor activities. Furthermore, key hiking trails in Ain Hasheer, the Tabaldi tree area and Ain



Dhofar has gained prominence as a sought-after destination for adventure seekers



Ghaydh have been upgraded with new directional signage to assist visitors, while international trail markers have been repainted for better navigation. Sections of these trails have also been paved to

enhance accessibility, ensuring a safer and more enjoyable experience for hikers exploring Dhofar’s rich natural beauty.

The governorate’s diverse topography makes it a prime location for adventure tourism,

with over 40 recognised mountain trails offering a mix of challenging and scenic routes. Dhofar has gained prominence as a sought-after destination for adventure seekers, particularly during the khareef season. The ongoing efforts to enhance trekking routes align with the broader vision of promoting eco-tourism and responsible travel in Oman. By improving infrastructure and safety measures on these trails, the ministry hopes to encourage both local and international visitors to explore Dhofar’s untapped adventure tourism potential.

As Dhofar continues to develop its tourism offerings, these enhancements signal a strong commitment to making the governorate an attractive destination for thrill-seekers and nature lovers alike.

— ONA



AHMED AL KAABI

DAILY lifestyles shift significantly during the holy month of Ramadhan as people seek activities that blend health benefits with spiritual ambiance. Among the sports gaining remarkable popularity is cycling, which has become a top choice for individuals and groups alike, whether for exercise or to enjoy the unique atmosphere of the month.

With this growing interest, markets have witnessed a significant rise in bicycle prices due to soaring demand from both individuals and sports groups. Retailers report that many popular models, especially those preferred for nighttime rides or fitness purposes, have completely sold out. This price surge is driven by high demand and limited supply. However, cycling enthusiasts continue to find alternatives by opting for second-hand bicycles or renting from stores offering such services.

Dr Reem al Zaabi highlights that cycling is a low-impact exercise, making it suitable for people of all ages. It enhances cardiovascular

“Cycling while fasting is perfectly safe if done before Iftar and for a limited duration. It enhances endurance and heart health without excessive fatigue

ZAKARIA AL ZADJALI  
Cycling enthusiast

health, strengthens muscles and improves endurance.

Discussing its impact during Ramadhan, Dr Al Zaabi explains that cycling is an ideal activity for fasting individuals when done at appropriate times, as it stimulates blood circulation without causing excessive fatigue. She recommends cycling an hour before Iftar or after Taraweeh prayers, as the body is more prepared for physical activity at these times.

She also stresses the importance of following health guidelines while cycling during fasting. Staying hydrated by drinking sufficient water between Iftar and Suhoor is essential to avoid dehydration and exhaustion.

Additionally, consuming balanced meals rich in carbohydrates and proteins helps sustain energy levels and replenish lost nutrients, ensuring better physical performance.

Zakaria al Zadjali, a dedicated cycling enthusiast, describes it as one of the most beneficial sports for overall health. He emphasises its role in improving heart health and lung capacity. He notes that cycling while fasting does not pose a risk if done before Iftar and limited to an

hour to prevent dehydration and exhaustion.

Al Zadjali also observes a noticeable increase in cycling activity during Ramadhan, with many children using bicycles for recreation. While he acknowledges its health benefits, he urges parents to monitor their children's cycling habits and ensure adherence to safety measures.

“Cycling while fasting is perfectly safe if done before Iftar and for a limited duration. It enhances endurance and heart health without excessive fatigue,” says Al Zadjali.

He highlights the necessity of wearing helmets and equipping bicycles with lights, particularly since many children prefer evening rides. Proper lighting improves visibility and reduces accident risks. He further calls for stricter monitoring by relevant authorities to promote awareness and prevent violations, ensuring a safer environment for cycling enthusiasts.

As cycling continues to gain momentum during Ramadhan, it remains more than just a fitness trend - it reflects a lifestyle choice that blends health, spirituality and community engagement.

SHORT TAKES



Dr Ali al Bimani and Tariq al Barwani formalised the strategic partnership

KO, NU partner to equip students with future-ready skills

MUSCAT: Knowledge Oman (KO), the leading community-driven knowledge-sharing platform, and the National University of Science and Technology (NU) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to equip students with essential future-ready skills, preparing them for the evolving job market.

In the presence of senior academic staff and the Knowledge Oman team, NU Vice-Chancellor Dr Ali al Bimani and Knowledge Oman founder Tariq al Barwani formalised the strategic partnership. The collaboration aims to bridge the gap between academia and industry by providing students with practical learning experiences, industry insights and opportunities for professional growth.

“We are committed to offering our students an education that goes beyond textbooks. Partnering with Knowledge Oman allows us to provide real-world insights and hands-on training, strengthening our students’ capabilities and enhancing their employability in an ever-changing job market,” said Prof Vallavaraj, Dean of the College of Advanced Technology.

As part of the agreement, Knowledge Oman will organise a series of seminars, community engagement initiatives and expert-led sessions to ensure students not only acquire theoretical knowledge, but also develop critical skills for success in a competitive workforce.

“At Knowledge Oman, our mission has always been to empower the next generation with knowledge and skills that drive innovation and success. Through this collaboration, we are excited to bring industry experts, practical sessions and community initiatives to students, ensuring they are well-prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future,” said Balqees al Hassani, President of Knowledge Oman.

The MoU marks the beginning of a series of initiatives designed to foster collaboration between students, industry professionals and academic leaders. Through interactive sessions, networking opportunities and knowledge-sharing platforms, this partnership will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of Oman’s young professionals.

This agreement underscores both organisations’ commitment to enhancing Oman’s knowledge economy and nurturing the next generation of innovators, entrepreneurs and industry leaders.

Masirah: Unlocking its untapped tourist potential

VINOD NAIR  
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

JUST as Dhofar attracts visitors during the khareef season, Masirah Island has the potential to become a premier year-round tourism destination in Oman.

Speaking to Observer, Abdulhamid bin Ali al Abri, Deputy Wali of Masirah, highlighted the island’s unique summer winds, which create a climate similar to, if not better than, Dhofar’s during the monsoon months. While temperatures from January to March remain pleasant, the absence of wind makes the climate comparable to Muscat.

The island’s strong winds during summer make it an ideal hub for kiteboarding, kitesurfing competitions and jet skiing, attracting adventure enthusiasts not just from Oman but across the region. To capitalise on this,



ABDULHAMID BIN ALI AL ABRI  
Deputy Wali of Masirah

the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South is planning to host major tourism events through a dedicated company, aiming to offer an escape from bustling city life.

A key boost to Masirah’s accessibility is the proposed civilian airport project, which will enhance connectivity not only within Oman but also to regional destinations like Kuwait and Qatar.

According to Mansoor al Majaly of Masirah Beach Camp, the island offers rich tourism potential while preserving local traditions, culture and privacy. His camp, located away from the city centre, has been attracting both domestic and international tourists throughout the year. Currently, Masirah hosts eight to ten hotel apartments, along with chalets and camps spread across the island. Other natural attractions include pristine springs and a black turtle sanctuary, home to a species



distinct from the green turtles of Ras Al Jinz.

With its diverse offerings, adventure sports opportunities and upcoming infrastructure developments, Masirah is poised to emerge as a sought-after year-round destination for travellers seeking both thrill and tranquillity.

UTAS Nizwa concludes second debate championship

NIZWA: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Nizwa successfully concluded its second debate championship, which featured competitive intellectual exchanges among teams from various university branches.

The Suhar branch team secured first place, followed by the Ibri branch team in second place, after a closely contested final round that demonstrated exceptional public speaking and critical thinking skills.

The championship, held over three days, included preliminary rounds, a panel discussion in Al Aqar neighbourhood on bilingual debates and critical thinking, and exhibition debates in English.

Dr Hafez bin Ahmed Ambusaidi, Deputy Assistant President for Electronic Systems and Student Services at Nizwa

Branch, emphasised that the competition has enhanced students’ analytical skills and fostered a culture of meaningful dialogue within the academic community.

The event concluded with an awards ceremony, where top speakers in Arabic and English were recognised:

Best Arabic Speaker: Horiya bint Rashid al Saqriyah (Al Musannah branch), Second Place Arabic Speaker: Al Baraa bin Hilal al Maqrashi (Nizwa branch), Best English Speaker: Nasaem bint Qasim al Wahaibiyah (Ibra branch), Second Place English Speaker: Mustafa Naaman Sheikh (Salalah branch).

The championship is part of the university’s broader mission to cultivate intellectual engagement and prepare students for active participation in academic and professional discourse. — ONA

Dividend Declaration 2024



Notice to Unit Holders

The Fund Management Body of Vision Al Khair GCC Fund in their meeting held on 26 February’ 2025, approved to pay cash dividend of 6% i.e. (60 baiza per unit) for the financial year ended 31st December 2024, to the unit holders as of record date of 25th March 2025.

The unit holder has the right to obtain units instead of cash dividend as on the due date and by making a request for the same to the Fund’s Administrative Manager.

In case of any queries, Please contact **Ms. Oula AL Rahbi** at **+968-24760052** or Email: **fundoperations@visioncapital.om**

Dividend Declaration 2024



Notice to Unit Holders

The Fund Management Body of Vision Real Economy GCC Fund in their meeting held on 26th February’ 2025, approved to pay cash dividend of 5% i.e. (50 baiza per unit) for the financial year ended 31st December 2024, to the unit holders as of record date of 25th March 2025.

The unit holder has the right to obtain units instead of cash dividend as on the due date and by making a request for the same to the Fund’s Administrative Manager.

In case of any queries, Please contact **Mrs. Oula AL Rahbi** at **+968-24760052** or Email: **fundoperations@visioncapital.om**

Dividend Declaration 2024



Notice to Unit Holders

The Fund Management Body of Vision Focused Fund in their meeting held on 26 February’ 2025, approved to pay cash dividend of 5% i.e. (50 baiza per unit) for the financial year ended 31st December 2024, to the unit holders as of record date of 25th March 2025.

The unit holder has the right to obtain units instead of cash dividend as on the due date and by making a request for the same to the Fund’s Administrative Manager.

In case of any queries, Please contact **Ms. Oula AL Rahbi** at **+968-24760052** or Email: **fundoperations@visioncapital.om**

جمعية البيئة العمانية  
Environment Society of Oman



Notice of the Annual General Assembly & Extraordinary Assembly

The Board of the Environment Society of Oman invites all members to attend the Annual General Assembly and Extraordinary Assembly, which will be held on **Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> March at 9.00 pm, at the Cultural Club in Qurum.**

**Agenda of the Extraordinary General Assembly:**

1. Voting on the amendment of the internal regulations and the adjustment of corporate membership fees to OMR 2,000.

**Agenda of the Annual General Assembly:**

1. Discussing the Financial Report for the year 2024
2. Discussing the Progress Report for the year 2024

In accordance with ESO Constitution only renewed members can attend the meeting. Members may authorize another member to attend on their behalf by submitting a written proxy authorization. Kindly fill out the proxy form and send it via email to: **Membership@eso.org.om**

For further information please call ESO office on phone No **24790945 / 24790954 / 24790935 / 24790926** or Fax **24790986.**

**www.eso.org.om / admin@eso.org.om**

Al Buraimi hosts forum to support productive families



AL BURAIMI: The Directorate-General of Agricultural Wealth and Water Resources in Al Buraimi, through its Rural Development Department, organised a marketing and promotional forum to support productive families and enhance rural product visibility.

Sheikha al Kindi, Head of the Rural Development Department, highlighted that the initiative aims to boost rural industries, enhance market access, and empower families by strengthening their production and marketing skills. The event plays a crucial role in localising rural agricultural industries and supporting the broader economy. The forum saw a significant participation from local entrepreneurs showcasing natural, high-quality and chemical-free products, catering to consumers seeking healthier alternatives. — ONA

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Finnish Border Guard’s ship Turva escorts Cook Islands-registered oil tanker Eagle S out to sea on the Baltic, near Porvoo, Finland. — Reuters

FINLAND PLANS TO RELEASE SUSPECTED OIL TANKER

OSLO: Finland will release an oil tanker which investigators believe broke a Baltic Sea power cable and four Internet lines late last year, and will escort the vessel to international waters even as the criminal probe continues, police said on Sunday. The Cook Islands-registered Eagle S was boarded by Finland’s coast guard on December 26 and has been held in custody while authorities probed the case.

Three crew members remain subject to a travel ban and are not allowed to leave Finland, police said in a statement. “The criminal investigation continues with further interviews of the crew and the examination of the material gathered,” police said.

Investigators believe the cables broke when the Eagle S dragged its anchor along the seabed, and a lost anchor believed to belong to the vessel was later recovered from the ocean. A lawyer representing the ship’s owner has said the alleged damage happened outside of Finland’s territorial waters and that the country thus lacked jurisdiction to intervene. — Reuters

UK, France working to end fighting, says Starmer

BRITAIN and France are working with Ukraine on plans to end the fighting with Russia, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Sunday, as European leaders gathered for crisis talks after a blowout between Kyiv and Washington. Speaking ahead of a summit in London with more than a dozen European leaders seeking a way forward on the three-year-old conflict, Starmer urged world leaders to “work together”, saying “nobody wants to see” scenes like Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and US counterpart Donald Trump’s clash in the Oval Office on Friday. “We have to find a way that we can all work together. Because, in the end, we’ve had three years of bloody conflict. Now we need to get to that lasting peace.” Starmer told the BBC. “The United Kingdom, along with France and possibly one or two others, will work with Ukraine on a plan to stop the fighting, and then we’ll discuss that plan with the United States.”

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni echoed the sentiment, saying as she met Starmer in his Downing Street home that “It is very, very important that we avoid the risk that the West divides.” Ukraine’s allies have been underscoring their steadfast commitment to counter growing concerns that Trump is about to sell Kyiv short in negotiations with Russia.

Starmer warmly welcomed Zelensky to the British capital on Saturday, the day after the Ukrainian leader was kicked out of the White House, extending a loan to strengthen Ukraine’s depleted defences.

The London meeting brings together leaders from around continental Europe,



Britain’s Prime Minister Keir Starmer (R) greets France’s President Emmanuel Macron (L) as he arrives to attend a summit held at Lancaster House in central London. — AFP

including France, Germany, Denmark and Italy as well as Türkiye, Nato and the European Union. With fears growing over whether the United States will continue to support Nato, the meeting will also address the need for Europe to increase defence cooperation. In addition to attending the security summit, Zelensky is also due to meet King Charles III during his visit. Speaking ahead of the summit, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Warsaw could use its friendly ties with Washington to “transcend this dilemma” and persuade it to be more supportive of Ukraine.

As Zelensky’s convoy swept into London on Saturday, a crowd of supporters cheered. “You’re very, very welcome here in Downing Street,” Starmer told Zelensky before their 75-minute closed-door talks. Zelensky

effusively thanked Britain and its people “for their tremendous support from the very beginning of this war”. The pair discussed Ukraine’s position and how to end the war “with a lasting and just peace that will not allow Russia to use the ceasefire to rearm and attack again”, according to a statement released by Zelensky’s office.

They also unveiled a £2.26-billion (\$2.84 billion) loan agreement to support Ukraine’s defence capabilities, to be paid back with the profits of immobilised sovereign Russian assets. Just hours earlier, Zelensky had been shouted down at the White House. As cameras rolled in the Oval Office, Trump and US Vice-President JD Vance angrily accused Zelensky of not being “thankful” and refusing to accept their proposed truce terms. — AFP

Ailing pope hails faithful’s ‘support’ and ‘affection’

ROME: Pope Francis, hospitalised for more than two weeks with double pneumonia, on Sunday thanked believers around the world for their “support” and “affection” as he missed delivering a third straight Angelus prayer in person. The 88-year-old pontiff, who has been treated at the Gemelli hospital in Rome since February 14, missed the traditional weekly prayer, which instead was published in the form of a letter the Vatican released at noon. “I would like to thank you for the prayers, which rise up to the Lord from the hearts of so many faithful from many parts of the world. I feel all your affection and closeness and, at this particular time, I feel as if I am ‘carried’ and supported by all God’s people. Thank you all,” wrote the Argentine pontiff.

He concluded by calling for peace in addressing conflicts around the globe. “I pray above all for peace. From here, war appears even more absurd. Let us pray for tormented Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Myanmar, Sudan and Kivu,” the pope wrote. According to the Vatican, the pope spent “a calm night”. “The pope is still resting,” the Holy See said earlier in its latest health update on the head of the Catholic Church. On Saturday evening, it had said the pope’s condition was “stable”, adding that he was still receiving oxygen, had no fever, had been eating, was alert and praying.



Tourists and pilgrims visit St Peter’s square in The Vatican as Pope Francis is still hospitalised. — AFP

Francis, leader of the world’s almost 1.4 billion Catholics, was admitted to Rome’s Gemelli hospital on February 14 with bronchitis that soon developed into pneumonia in both lungs. Last weekend, the Vatican reported he was in a “critical” condition, suffering a major respiratory attack and requiring blood transfusions, prompting widespread concern. After a series of incremental improvements, there was more alarming news on Friday when the Vatican said Francis “presented an isolated crisis of bronchospasm which led to an episode of vomiting with inhalation and a sudden worsening of the respiratory picture”. “It will take doctors 24 to 48 hours to evaluate the impact” of Friday’s breathing crisis, a Vatican source said.

Andrea Ungar, professor of geriatrics at the University of Florence, said on Saturday that it appeared vomit had entered the pope’s lungs, which “aggravated the pneumonia”. Such an issue normally required a strengthening of antibiotics, ventilation and respiratory exercises, he said. He added the pontiff would likely stay in hospital for some time -- “at least 10 days” in the most optimistic scenario.

Catholics and other well-wishers around the world have been praying for the liberal reformer who has led the Church for almost 12 years. Pilgrims have flocked to the Gemelli hospital, many leaving handwritten messages, including posters illustrated by children, and balloons bearing his image. — AFP

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| <div><div></div><div>صندوق ابكيور الرؤية<br/>Epicure Vision Fund</div></div>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |           |
| Chairman’s Report - December 2024<br>Epicure Vision GCC Growth Fund (EVGF)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |           |
| <p>The Epicure Vision GCC Growth Fund (EVGF) was up 0.3% from inception (29-Aug-2024). The NAV of the fund closed at RO 1.002 as of 31 December 2024. For the fourth quarter, the Fund was up 0.8%.</p> <p>MSCI World index gained 2.1% during the same period. The gains were primarily due to optimism from the election of Donald Trump as US President and China’s economic stimulus. Brent crude oil slumped during the period, declining by 6.6%, to USD 74.6/barrel. Demand concerns and rising crude supplies outweighed the optimism around the latest Chinese stimulus measures.</p> <p>S&amp;P GCC Index gain 2.6% during the same period, mainly due to Dubai (up 19.0%), Qatar (up 3.6%), Kuwait (up 2.5%) Abu Dhabi (up 2.0%) and Bahrain (up 1.5%). The GCC markets were fueled by global market sentiment and rate cuts mirrored by GCC central banks in line with the U.S. Federal Reserve.</p> <p>GCC countries have been making strong headway in diversifying government revenues with a focus to boost non-oil GDP. Various reforms have been initiated which accelerated economic transformation and diversification. The continuous government investment to diversify away from dependence on hydrocarbons and favorable demographics, further aids to its appeal. As per latest IMF’s report, GCC’s real GDP is expected to grow by 1.8% (2024) and 4.2% (2025).</p> <p>In 2024, we have seen the region hit record contract awards of USD 264 bn primarily led by Saudi Arabia. Countries like Oman and Kuwait too saw contract awards hit their highest levels since 2017. We continue to see strong momentum in these awards. IPO activity continued to be strong with 2024 seeing a total of around 53 IPOs and is expected to continue. Tourism activity continued its strong growth with the region witnessing record visitor numbers.</p> <p>On behalf of the Board of Directors, we extend our sincere appreciation to our esteemed unit holders for their ongoing support and participation. We also wish to regard His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his exemplary leadership and visionary guidance, which ensures Oman’s continued journey towards prosperity and development.</p> |           |
| STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION<br>AS AT DECEMBER 31, 2024                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |           |
| EXHIBIT – A<br>Period ended<br>December 31,<br>2024<br>RO.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |           |
| ASSETS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |           |
| Investments at fair value through profit or loss                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 8,045,081 |
| Due from broker                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 66,103    |
| Cash and cash equivalents                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 20,926    |
| Total Assets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 8,132,110 |
| LIABILITIES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |           |
| Current Liability                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |           |
| Accruals and other payables                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 16,130    |
| Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders – Exhibit- C                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 8,115,980 |
| Net asset value per unit                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 1.002     |
| STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS<br>AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME<br>FOR THE PERIOD FROM JUNE 04, 2024<br>TO DECEMBER 31, 2024                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |           |
| EXHIBIT – B<br>Period from<br>June 04, 2024 to<br>December 31,<br>2024<br>RO.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |           |
| INCOME                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |           |
| Dividend income                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 11,747    |
| Interest income                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 1,763     |
| Net realized gain on Investment through FVPL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | (3,907)   |
| Fair value changes in investments at FVPL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 68,099    |
| Total income (net)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 77,702    |
| EXPENSES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |           |
| Management fees                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 10,191    |
| General and administration                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 12,553    |
| Brokerage expenses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 15,345    |
| Custodian service fees                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 2,894     |
| Foreign exchange loss (net)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 32,955    |
| Total expenses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 73,938    |
| Net profit and total comprehensive income for the period                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 3,764     |
| Net profit per unit                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 0.0008    |

SHORT TAKES



Newly graduated Sudanese army soldiers stand in attention during a ceremony in Merowe. — AFP

EGYPT REJECTS TO FORM PARALLEL SUDANESE GOVT

CAIRO: Egypt rejected on Sunday attempts aimed at establishing a rival government in Sudan, warning that such moves jeopardised the “unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity” of the war-torn country. A week ago, the RSF and its allies signed a charter in Kenya declaring the formation of a “government of peace and unity” in areas under their control. “Egypt expresses its rejection of any attempts that threaten the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of brotherly Sudan, including the pursuit of forming a parallel Sudanese government,” a statement from Cairo’s foreign ministry said on Sunday. It added that such actions “complicate the situation in Sudan, hinder ongoing efforts to unify political visions and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis”.

Egypt also called on “all Sudanese forces to prioritise the country’s supreme national interest and to engage positively in launching a comprehensive political (peace) process without exclusion or external interference”. Last week, Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty voiced the same stance in a press conference alongside his Sudanese counterpart Ali Youssef. — AFP

UGANDAN ARMY DEPLOYS TO NORTHEAST DRC



An M23 officer inspects the convoy repatriating soldiers at the main border crossing between DR Congo and Rwanda in Goma. — AFP

KAMPALA: The Ugandan army confirmed on Sunday it has sent troops to another town in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo to fight local armed groups, amid fears a raging conflict could spiral into a wider war.

“Our troops have entered Mahagi town and we are in control,” Uganda’s defence and military affairs spokesman Felix Kulayigye said. The deployment was requested by the Congolese army following alleged massacres of civilians carried out by a group known as the Cooperative for the Development of Congo (Codeco), he said, without providing further details.

Mahagi is in Ituri province, which borders Uganda, where at least 51 people were killed on February 10 by armed men affiliated with Codeco, according to humanitarian and local sources. Codeco claims it defends the interests of the Lendu community, mainly composed of farmers, against the Hema community, mainly herders. Uganda already has thousands of troops in other parts of Ituri under an agreement with the Congolese government. Last month, Uganda announced its troops had “taken control” of the provincial capital, Bunia. — AFP

GOVERNMENT MEASURES

Iran’s parliament ousts economy minister



Iran’s parliament voted on Sunday to remove the country’s Economy Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati from office over mismanagement of the economy and a plunging national currency, state media reported. The parliament has ousted Hemmati in a no-confidence vote. Parliamentarians opposing Hemmati argued that he had failed to prevent price increases in basic goods such as medicine, and food while being unable to control the foreign exchange market. — Reuters

NATIONS FAIL TO BREAK DEADLOCK ON UN CLIMATE REPORT TIMING

BANGKOK: Nations failed to break a deadlock over the timing of the UN’s next blockbuster assessment of climate change science after a marathon meeting in China that US envoys skipped. At issue was whether the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which informs policymakers, will deliver its next three-part assessment before a 2028 United Nations’ “stocktake” of the global response to rising temperatures. Many wealthy countries and

developing nations exposed to climate impacts wanted an accelerated timetable, arguing the reports would allow countries to be guided by the most up-to-date science. But they faced objections from some oil producers and major polluters with rising emissions. The talks in Hangzhou ran over by more than a day, wrapping up late Saturday night with an agreement to allow work to proceed without a definitive deadline for delivery. The outcome was a “bitter

disappointment”, said Zhe Yao, global policy advisor at Greenpeace East Asia. The deadlock “only serves those who wish to hold back climate action, but climate vulnerable countries cannot wait”, Yao said. “It’s a bitter disappointment every time when division leads to a decision being postponed or kicked down the road.” The meeting was overshadowed by a US decision to stay away, as President Donald Trump unpicks his predecessor’s climate actions. — AFP

Israel blocks Gaza aid as ceasefire standoff escalates

ISRAEL

blocked the entry of aid trucks into Gaza on Sunday as a standoff over the truce that has halted fighting for the past six weeks escalated, with Hamas calling on Egyptian and Qatari mediators to intervene. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said earlier that it had adopted a proposal by US President Donald Trump’s envoy, Steve Witkoff, for a temporary ceasefire in Gaza for the Ramadan and Passover periods, hours after the first phase of the previously agreed ceasefire expired. If agreed, the truce would halt fighting until the end of the Ramadan fasting period around March 31 and the Jewish Passover holiday around April 20.

The truce would be conditional on Hamas releasing half of the living and dead hostages on the first day, with the remainder released at the conclusion, if an agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire.

Hamas says it is committed to the originally agreed ceasefire that had been scheduled to move into a second phase, with negotiations aimed at a permanent end to the war, and it has rejected the idea of a temporary extension to the 42-day truce.

Reflecting the fragility of the ceasefire deal, local health officials said Israeli gunfire had killed four Palestinians in separate attacks in the northern and southern Gaza Strip. The Israeli military said that “suspects” were identified close to its troops in northern Gaza and that they had planted a bomb. It added that an airstrike was carried out to



Palestinians gather to receive aid provided by UNRWA outside a distribution centre, at Jabalia camp. — Reuters

Egyptian sources said that the Israeli delegation in Cairo had sought to extend the first phase by 42 days, while Hamas wanted to move to the second phase of the ceasefire deal. Spokesman Hazem Qassem said on Saturday that the group rejected Israel’s “formulation” of extending the first phase. In the first phase of the ceasefire, Hamas handed over 33 Israeli hostages as well as five Thais returned in an unscheduled release, in exchange for around 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees from Israeli jails and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from some of their positions in Gaza. Under the original agreement, the second phase was intended to see the start of negotiations over the release of the remaining 59 hostages, the full withdrawal of

“eliminate the threat.”

Egyptian sources said that the Israeli delegation in Cairo had sought to extend the first phase by 42 days, while Hamas wanted to move to the second phase of the ceasefire deal. Spokesman Hazem Qassem said on Saturday that the group rejected Israel’s “formulation” of extending the first phase. In the first phase of the ceasefire, Hamas handed over 33 Israeli hostages as well as five Thais returned in an unscheduled release, in exchange for around 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees from Israeli jails and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from some of their positions in Gaza.

Under the original agreement, the second phase was intended to see the start of negotiations over the release of the remaining 59 hostages, the full withdrawal of

Israeli troops from Gaza, and a final end to the war.

However the talks never began and Israel says all its hostages must be returned for fighting to stop. “Israel will not allow a ceasefire without the release of our hostages,” Netanyahu’s office said, announcing that the entry of all goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip would be halted. “If Hamas persists in its refusal, there will be additional consequences.” Hamas has denounced Israel’s move as “blackmail” and a “blatant coup against the agreement”.

“We call on mediators to pressure the occupation to fulfill its obligations under the agreement, in all its phases,” it said, adding that the only way to get the hostages back would be to adhere to the agreement and start talks for the second phase. — Reuters

DEATH TOLL RISES IN LA REUNION

LA REUNION: At least four people have died in the Indian Ocean island of La Reunion during the passage of a devastating cyclone that sowed destruction across the overseas French territory, officials said. Cyclone Garance struck the territory of 900,000 people, uprooting trees, tearing off roofs and flooding homes. Entire streets were inundated and cars washed away.

A red alert, ordering the population to stay indoors, was lifted on Saturday morning after Garance was downgraded to a severe tropical storm. Around 160,000 people were still without electricity, while more than 950 were staying in temporary accommodation centres. — AFP



SEARCH OPERATION

8 dead in India avalanche as rescue ends



Rescuers recovered the eighth and final body from the site of an avalanche in a remote area of northern India, the army said on Sunday, marking the end of a marathon operation in sub-zero temperatures. Authorities had revised down the number of workers on site at the time of the avalanche from 55 to 54 after one worker, previously believed to be buried, was found to have safely made his way home before the avalanche hit. — AFP

STRATEGIC CRUISE

US aircraft carrier enters South Korea



The US aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson arrived at the southern city of Busan in South Korea as a show of force. The visit was part of the “ironclad” commitment of the United States to extended deterrence and to show readiness by the military alliance between Seoul and Washington against North Korea. The nuclear-powered vessel was joined by the guided-missile cruiser USS Princeton and the USS Sterett guided-missile destroyer. — Reuters

OPINION

Ramadhan in art: A mosaic of devotion and heritage



**SANDHYA  
RAO MEHTA**

*The writer is  
Associate Professor,  
Sultan Qaboos  
University*

**RAMADHAN** is a time of devotion, charity and spiritual introspection. It is observed in diverse ways in different parts of the world. Still, the literary and artistic manifestations across time reflect how this diversity is a comment on the unity of faith.

In an article entitled ‘Ramadhan as subject’, writer Ibtisam Ahmed explores many artistic manifestations of Ramadhan across time and space.

For example, she shows the origin of the fanoos, the lantern, in Cairo around 969 CE when the then-ruler was welcomed in the night with lights to show the way. The ruler liked the atmosphere so much that he ordered these lanterns to be used regularly.

Eventually, of course, the lantern became an integral part of Ramadhan festivities, with various versions being used to decorate Iftar gatherings and even greeting cards.

Lamps are also important in the way that they were used to remind people of the morning Suhoor and prayer.

An early poetic work, the Maqamat, is a

collection of 50 stories by Al Hariri Al Basri, related Quranic stories and riddles. Its illustration in 1236 CE contains a beautiful etching of a Ramadhan procession.

In the Ottoman court, there is evidence of a variety of discussions of the various aspects of Ramadhan, including the importance of fasting, prayer and charity. These discussions are said to be reflected in ‘Ramazaniye’, an 18th century CE collection of Ramadhan reflections.

In Persia, copies of Hafez’s ‘Divan’ include a miniature of the sighting of the moon before Eid Al Fitr.

There are also many miniatures depicting Ramadhan and Eid observances in the rich collection of the Mughal Empire. These include miniatures in the official commissioned biographies Babarnama and Shahnama, in addition to many other beautifully illustrated books.

Interestingly, early literary works seem to be just texts, with visuals in the form of etchings, paintings, miniatures and calligraphy being added to later editions as these works travelled to different regions.

When literary traditions turned to prose,

*Ramadhan’s art  
and literature over  
time reflect faith,  
tradition and  
cultural diversity in  
meaningful ways*

many writers began to espouse the virtues of devotion and charity during Ramadhan in ways that were more accessible to various people.

Ahmed Rasim, for example, portrayed Ramadhan in the Ottoman period in great detail through stories and memoirs.

There is often regret that the joy of togetherness as shared by communities before seems to have gone away. Yet, writers and artists still celebrate the social unison that Ramadhan makes possible.

Amy Hackney Blackwell, for example, brought together a series of superb photographs in her book ‘Ramadhan’ that depicts the holy month and its observances across the world.

As writer Ali Tügekci says, “after you finish the book, the common aspects of Ramadhan and the spirit of unity in the Muslims all around the world are bound to stay with you”.

The true spirit of Ramadhan lies in the devotion it inspires and the sense of community it invokes. Art forms through time have illustrated the various manifestations of this holy month while retaining its central spiritual function.

SUDAN SCHOOL  
OFFERS A SECOND  
CHANCE AT EDUCATION

MUTWAKEL ISSA

*In a worn-down classroom in eastern Sudan, men and women watch attentively from a wood bench as a teacher scribbles Arabic letters on a faded blackboard.*

*Nodding approvingly in the corner is the school’s 63-year-old founder Amna Mohamed Ahmed, known to most as ‘Amna Oor’, which partly means lion in the Beja language of eastern Sudan.*

*She has spent the last three decades helping hundreds return to their education in Port Sudan, now the country’s de facto capital.*

*The educator, who wears an orange headscarf wrapped neatly around her head, said she started the project in 1995 because of widespread illiteracy in her community.*

*“That’s what pushed me to act. People wanted to learn – if they didn’t, they wouldn’t have kept coming,” she said.*

*Amna’s classes offer a second chance to those who missed out on formal education, particularly women who were denied schooling due to cultural or financial barriers.*

*For 39-year-old Nisreen Babiker, going back to school has been a long-held dream.*

*She left school in 2001 after marrying and taking on the responsibility of raising her younger siblings following her father’s death.*

*“My siblings grew up and studied, and my children too,” she said.*

*“I felt the urge to return to school. Even after all these years, it feels like I’m starting fresh,” she said.*

*Amna’s school has also become a haven for those displaced by Sudan’s ongoing conflict, which erupted in April 2023 between army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who leads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).*

*The war has killed tens of thousands, uprooted over 12 million, and driven swathes of the country into hunger and famine.*

*Maria Adam is among those who fled their homes after war broke out. She arrived in Port Sudan seeking safety and a better future.*

*“When I arrived in Port Sudan, I heard about this place and joined,” said the 28-year-old, noting that she dropped out of school when she was 11.*

*“I want to finish my education so I can help my children,” Adam said.*

*Sudan’s education system has been shattered by the conflict, with the United Nations estimating that over 90 per cent of the country’s 19 million school-age children now have no access to formal learning. Across the nation, most classrooms have been converted into shelters for displaced families.*

— AFP

Tartuffe: A master of  
deception, manipulation

**TARTUFFE** is the main character in Molière’s 1664 French play, is a cunning hypocrite who pretends to be pious while secretly scheming for wealth and power. He deceives Orgon, the head of the household, by feigning virtue and humility, gaining his trust while attempting to usurp his fortune. Eventually, his manipulative nature is exposed, revealing him as a fraud and a symbol of religious hypocrisy.

The word Tartuffe has since entered the English language to describe a confidence trickster — someone who masks dishonesty with false morality.

I recently had the misfortune of knowing a Tartuffe. He was exceptionally skilled in deception — too good, in fact.

At first he appeared kind, generous and understanding, exuding charm and attentiveness. He made me feel special, boosting my confidence and offering unwavering support.

I trusted him, relied on him. Before I realised it, he had become an indispensable part of my life. But beneath this crafted persona was something sinister. He was not my friend — he was a fraudster, a manipulator, a predator who thrived on control. His goal was never to help but to exploit, targeting those who were generous, kind-hearted or emotionally vulnerable.

A skilled con artist does not rush. He embeds himself into your life, studying your vulnerabilities — your insecurities, struggles or need for support. He offers solutions, making himself appear irreplaceable. At first his generosity seems boundless. He helps with errands, provides small favours and listens when needed. He never asks for anything in return for the small favours — until he does. In addition, when he finally does, it seems only fair to repay his kindness. Generously.

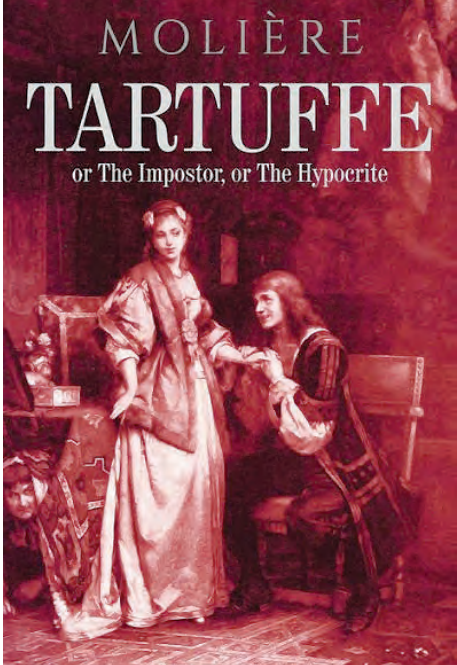
One of a trickster’s most



KARIM  
EASTERBROOK

*The writer is a  
former Cambridge  
School Principal  
and an interview  
skills advisor*

*A tartuffe is a  
master of deception  
who constructs  
false narratives to  
manipulate your  
emotions*



*The term Tartuffe, derived from the main character in Molière’s 1664 French play*

dangerous tactics is isolation. He subtly undermines your relationships, planting seeds of doubt — “You know you can’t trust him, right? But don’t worry, you have me.” He convinces you that anyone who questions him is lying. He publicly performs small acts of kindness, reinforcing his carefully constructed image.

Slowly, your circle of support shrinks. You withdraw from genuine friends, believing only he has your best interests at heart. By the time you recognise what’s happening, you may feel entirely dependent on him. A tartuffe is a master of deception. He constructs false narratives to manipulate your emotions. He may claim financial hardship, making you believe that only you can help him.

It starts small — the mention of an unexpected expense, a minor favour. But they grow. You find yourself giving more and more, feeling guilty if you hesitate. He places you in situations where saying no feels impossible. After all, he has been so helpful — how could you refuse?

What you don’t realise is that you are being conditioned. Each act of generosity strengthens his grip. You justify it by reminding yourself of all he’s done for you. The cycle continues, deepening his deception.

Most confidence tricksters exhibit sociopathic tendencies. They lack conscience, empathy or genuine emotional attachment. To them, people are tools — stepping stones to financial gain and control. They feel no remorse when they manipulate or ruin their victims.

Their ability to mimic genuine emotions makes them especially dangerous. They can appear sad on cue, feign affection and display concern when necessary. They claim people have lied about them, insist they have done nothing wrong and always offer a well-rehearsed smile. Their lies come effortlessly. But it’s all an act. Once they have extracted everything they can from you — or more likely when they sense you’re beginning to see through them — they discard you without hesitation, moving on to their next unsuspecting victim.

For those caught in a confidence trickster’s web, the realisation is devastating. Victims feel guilt, shame, anger and betrayal. Many struggle to accept that someone they trusted so completely was deceiving them all along. Escaping a fraudster requires strength and, often, outside help. If you suspect manipulation:

- Cut ties completely. Do not engage, argue, or give them the chance to manipulate you further.
- Stop providing money or assistance, no matter how persuasive their excuses.
- Reach out to those who genuinely care about you.

Most importantly, remember — you are not to blame. These con artists are experts in deception, and anyone can fall victim. The best defence is awareness: recognising the signs before they take hold and ensuring that your kindness is never exploited.

# Ramadhan... a journey of collective renewal



ABDULAZIZ  
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author,  
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**RAMADHAN** is a month of immense blessings; a time for reflection, fasting and spiritual growth. It serves as a reminder to be grateful for the many blessings we often take for granted. This sacred month encourages fasting, prayer, reflection and community, and acts as a yearly reset button, allowing us to refocus our lives and renew our intentions. Ramadhan holds great significance for millions of Muslims around the world. It is the ninth month of the lunar Islamic calendar, and its observance is one of the Five Pillars of Islam - the foundational acts of worship and practice for Muslims. Fasting, as the fourth pillar of Islam, is a means of attaining piety. One of the Quranic verses mentions the word “Taqwa”, which refers to doing what Allah has commanded and avoiding what He has forbidden. This is why fasting during Ramadhan is one of the greatest means of fulfilling the commands of Islam. Fasting teaches restraint, helping individuals control worldly desires and dedicate time to prayer and meditation. Quranic verses about Ramadhan clearly outline the requirements and characteristics of this noble month, emphasising the disciplined nature of fasting and guiding Muslims to become more conscious of Allah. One such verse states, “You may eat and

drink until you see the light of dawn breaking the darkness of night, then complete the fast until nightfall. Do not be intimate with your spouses while you are meditating in the mosques. These are the limits set by Allah, so do not exceed them. This is how Allah makes His revelations clear to people, so they may become mindful of Him.” Another verse provides guidance for Muslims who miss fasting or are unable to fast due to valid reasons during Ramadhan. Therefore, they are encouraged to make up the missed days after Ramadhan, or if they cannot fast at all, they should compensate by feeding a poor person. The verse states, “Whoever of you is ill or on a journey, then let them fast an equal number of days after Ramadhan.” The blessings of Ramadhan are indeed abundant. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “There has come to you Ramadhan, a blessed month which Allah has enjoined you to fast. During this month, the gates of Heaven are opened, the gates of Hell are closed, and the rebellious devils are chained up. In it, there is a night which is better than a thousand months, and whoever is deprived of its goodness is indeed deprived.” The Prophet (PBUH) also stated, “Whoever fasts Ramadhan out of faith and in hope of reward, his previous sins will be forgiven.” Therefore, Ramadhan marks a gift from the Almighty Allah, providing Muslims an

Ramadhan is not only a time for fasting, but a season of unparalleled blessings and countless rewards. All extend beyond just the individual, embracing the entire Muslim community and beyond

opportunity to earn His blessings and seek forgiveness. Muslims are strongly encouraged to make the most of this sacred month. Overall, this holy month of fasting serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of faith, self-discipline and compassion. As Muslims around the world observe Ramadhan, they not only fulfil a religious obligation, but also embark on a transformative journey - one that cleanses their souls and deepens their connection to Allah and to one another as a community. For Muslims, Ramadhan is a time of increased worship, religious reflection, charity and good deeds. Socially, it brings families and friends together for festive gatherings to break their fast. Ramadhan's religious rituals and spiritual essence unite diverse Muslim communities around the world, with practices encompassing fasting, prayer, community engagement and personal reflection. Ramadhan is not only a time for fasting, but a season of unparalleled blessings and countless rewards. All extend beyond just the individual, embracing the entire Muslim community and beyond. It is an opportunity for spiritual renewal, self-discipline and acts of kindness. Through fasting, prayer, charity and reflection, Muslims embark on a journey that brings them to a world united in faith and compassion.

## AIR SAFETY REPORTING UNDER SCRUTINY

LISA BARRINGTON AND TIM HEPHER

This month marked three years since a China Eastern jet plunged into a hillside killing 132 people, with relatives still waiting to learn what caused China's deadliest air disaster in three decades. It is one of dozens of accidents worldwide in which investigators have yet to issue a final report designed to help prevent new accidents, despite a target of one year. While recent deadly crashes in Kazakhstan, South Korea and the United States and the non-fatal flip of a crash-landed jet in Canada have thrust safety into the spotlight, the industry is worried that too many past accidents remain unresolved. According to airlines, almost half of 268 accidents involving fatalities or major damage between 2018 and the end of 2023 lacked a final report. “That’s a really big concern,” said Mark Searle, head of safety at the International Air Transport Association (IATA). “The lessons that we learn from accident reports are absolutely critical to avoid future events.” Aviation safety has improved markedly over decades based on open sharing of information, with investigations intended to draw lessons rather than assign blame. The “brace position” for emergency landings, for example, was refined over years thanks to such investigations. By pure chance, the least injured person in a fatal 1976 crash in New Jersey had his head between his knees due to air sickness. Technology to avoid collisions, the importance of not inflating life jackets inside planes and improved seat design are all lessons learned from past crashes. Coordinated by the UN’s International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), global guidelines call for an initial report in 30 days and a final one ideally within a year. Failing that, investigators should issue statements on each anniversary. But in a recent paper, IATA and six other aviation bodies raised the alarm over delayed or non-existent final reports. “I think a number are being held up at the political government level because they are narratives that perhaps they are not too keen to hit the public eye,” Searle said. Others blame judicial interference or a shortage of resources for independent investigations in many countries. The warning comes as social media has transformed how the public interact with air disasters. Fuelled by statements from US President Donald Trump that January’s mid-air collision in Washington stemmed from diversity policies and a helicopter flying too high, a flurry of rumours circulated online about pilot identities and accident causes. It is often only when publicity fades that forensic work can unlock the multiple factors in an accident, experts say. — Reuters

# How to achieve universal access to digital IDs

**WE** often take the ability to prove our identity for granted, but a government-issued ID is key to accessing essential services like healthcare, banking and registering property ownership. And not everyone has one. That is why United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.9, which aims to “provide legal identity for all” by 2030, is so important. Digital IDs are even more valuable. Unlike physical documents, well-governed digital IDs can be harder to lose, steal, or destroy. Digital IDs have been especially important in war-torn Ukraine and flood-ravaged Brazil, where they enabled citizens whose physical documents were lost or destroyed to receive critical support – both in person and online. Despite these advantages, an estimated 850 million people around the world lack legal identification. But growing demand and emerging technological solutions suggest that the goal of achieving universal access to digital IDs by 2030 is within reach. On the demand side, digital IDs promote financial inclusion, increase economic participation and help curb benefit fraud. According to McKinsey, digital ID programmes could boost a country’s GDP by 3-13 per cent in 2030. On the supply side, the past decade has provided valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges associated with digital ID systems. Notably, low-cost tools like the Modular Open Source Identity Platform have shown that such programmes can be implemented cheaply and efficiently. But significant challenges remain. For starters, nearly one billion people without digital IDs are spread across dozens of countries with different governance arrangements, demographic structures and technological capacities. A one-size-fits-all approach is neither practical nor desirable, as ID systems must be tailored to each country’s unique needs and cultural norms. Governments, which typically issue and regulate digital IDs, also



Unlike physical documents, well-governed digital IDs can be harder to lose, steal, or destroy.



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pose a risk of misuse or abuse. In the absence of legal frameworks for a standardised global approach, policymakers must establish robust safeguards to ensure ID systems are used responsibly. To this end, we recently convened senior policymakers, civil-society leaders and experts on digital infrastructure under the auspices of the 17 Rooms initiative to develop strategies for improving and expanding digital ID systems. Participants sought to identify “good patterns” for digital IDs that – if reinforced by international organisations and funders – could help governments deploy and manage these systems. National statistics agencies offer a useful model. In many countries, these agencies are relatively insulated from political pressures, enabling them to protect data privacy, maintain credibility and build public trust. Similarly, setting transparent, independently defined standards for the design, implementation and maintenance of digital ID systems can facilitate responsible and scalable development. We propose five approaches to designing reliable digital ID systems. First, both digital and physical IDs are more trusted

when they are testable, tailored to individual preferences and designed to minimise data collection. Taiwan, for example, collects only the necessary data for each transaction, enabling users to disclose personal information selectively – a practice known as meronymity – through secure verification methods. Second, governments must work closely with civil-society partners to mitigate risks and develop compelling use cases. One possible approach is to create public-facing mechanisms that allow civil-society organisations to test ID systems and identify potential issues early on. Jamaica’s experience with digital IDs serves as a cautionary tale. A lack of engagement with non-government stakeholders has led to widespread distrust, slowing adoption and reducing the system’s effectiveness. By contrast, the Media Foundation for West Africa has bolstered state accountability by training journalists to use digital public infrastructure (DPI), including digital IDs, to monitor and report on government actions. Other initiatives, such as SlashRoots in the Caribbean and Taiwan’s gov movement, underscore the importance of engaging with civil society and media professionals. ©Project Syndicate, 2025

# SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Argentine forward #10 Lionel Messi. — AFP

## MESSI RESTED BY MIAMI FOR MLS GAME AT HOUSTON

**MIAMI:** Lionel Messi will sit out Inter Miami’s Major League Soccer game at the Houston Dynamo on Sunday as the club looks to manage his minutes.

A club spokesman confirmed to AFP that Messi didn’t travel to Houston on Saturday but wasn’t injured and was being rested.

Sunday’s game was selected by the league for the new, stand alone “Sunday Night Soccer: broadcast on Apple TV, which MLS is hoping will grow fan interest in the league.

Inter Miami have had a busy start to the season with their MLS opener last week coming in between the two legs of the first round of the CONCACAF Champions Cup.

Messi started all those games, but the club have opted to sit the 37-year-old for what would have been the fourth game in 12 days.

Miami are in CONCACAF action again on Thursday when they host Jamaican club Cavalier in the first-leg of their two legged tie with Messi expected to start in that game.

Inter’s busy schedule continues into March with their first eight games of the season coming in the span of 26 days.

Messi had trained on Friday with the rest of his team-mates including 38-year-old Uruguayan striker Luis Suarez, who has made the trip to Houston. — AFP

## Red Warriors gear up for final group at WC Qualifiers

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

**THE** Oman national football team were supposed to play an international friendly match against Niger on Monday at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex as part of the team’s preparations for the AFC Asian Qualifiers – Road to 26 but the match postponed until further notice as the guest team did not arrive to Muscat.

On the other side, the team players raised their warm up sessions at the underway domestic camp which started on February 22. The local camp was an opportunity for the coaching staff to monitor the players physical and technical level ahead of the scheduled matches against South Korea and Kuwait on 20 and 25 March respectively as part of Group B games in the AFC Asian Qualifiers – Road to 26.

Coach Rasheed Jaber and his assistant Yaqoob al Sabahi implemented various technical tactics to boost attacking side of the team and enhancing the defending area. The current Red Warriors gathering featured attendance of some new faces including three players from first division league like: Issa al Nabi and Mundher al Wahiabi (Muscat club) beside Ridhwan al Syiabi from Samayel club beside Al Khabourah player Al Faraj al Kiyuomi. The new players performed top shows and confirmed their eligibility to be part of the national team. Three different venues where Oman team players executed their technical practices during this camp including Royal Court Affairs stadium in Al Khoudh, Seeb Stadium and Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Oman, now with six points in the group, and they will aim to bounce back strongly in the qualifiers after their defeat against



Coach Rasheed Jaber and his assistant Yaqoob al Sabahi implemented various technical tactics to boost attacking side of the team and enhancing the defending area.



Iraq by 1-0 last November. Red Warriors focus will be to vie for the third and fourth places as this will lead to another phase of competitions ahead of the World Cup in Mexico, USA and Canada

next summer. Iraq has bolstered their chances of claiming one of the top two spots in Group B beside Jordan while South Korea almost confirmed their spot in the World Cup. Oman will face a challenging away fixture against group leaders South Korea in Seoul on March 20 and five days later they will meet Kuwait in Kuwait city.

**OMAN SQUAD:**  
Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Ibrahim al Rajhi, Abdulmalik al Badri, Khalid al Buraiki, Ghanim al Habshi, Thani al Rushedi, Majid Salim, Khalid al Ghtrefi, Musab al Shaqsi, Harib al Saadi, Abdullah Fawaz, Ahed al Mashakeyhi, Al Faraj al Kiumi, Ridhwan al Siyabi, Mulham al Sunaidi, Issa al Nabi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Yousef al Malki, Husain al Shahri, Mohammed al Ghafri, Abdul Salam al Shukaili, Nasser al Rawahi, Mundher al Wahaibi, Nasser al Naimi, Mohammed al Subiai and Hatim al Roushdi.

## Renaissance Interschool Regatta showcases Oman’s talent

**MUSCAT:** The Renaissance Interschool Regatta (RIR) 2025 produced excellent sailing, tense racing and offered a glimpse at Oman’s future sailing stars as 45 schoolchildren took to the waters of Al Mouj Muscat in their Optimist dinghies. Brought together from 15 government schools in Muscat, Sur and Al Mussanah, and part of the Oman Sail Community Sailing Program, sponsored by Renaissance Services, the sailors all showed how impressive their progress has and how bright their futures could be.

Mohammed al Balushi (Musab bin Al-Zubair Basic Education School, Al Mussanah) won the boy’s event after a close battle with Ibrahim al Maskari (Durat Al-Ajyal Basic Education School, Muscat) who had to settle for second place.

Timur al Amri (Durat Al-Ajyal Basic Education School, Muscat) finished third. In the girl’s competition, Mariam al Hadhrami (Al-Safa Basic Education School, Mussanah) won the gold medal ahead of Mariam al Hashar (Sur Basic Education School, Sur) who finished second, with Jameela al Jalboobi (Sur Basic Education School, Sur) finishing third.



Top three winners of School Category.

Sur Basic Education School ended the regatta as the best performing school. Sailors from the school edged Durat Al-Ajyal Basic Education School, Muscat, into second and the Al-Rawae Basic Education School, Muscat, took the bronze.

Stephen R Thomas, CEO, Renaissance Services, said, “The Renaissance Interschool Regatta is a great opportunity to showcase the benefits of the Community Sailing Program. We are pleased to support these young sailors

through this programme, which not only teaches them how to sail but also imparts valuable lessons that go beyond the sport. It is encouraging to see so many young people taking an interest in sailing and contributing to Oman’s rich maritime traditions.”

Abdulaziz al Shidi, Oman Sail’s Acting Director Sailing, added, “The Interschool Regatta, sponsored by Renaissance Services, is one of the leading youth sports events in Oman, combining competition with a



The Renaissance Interschool Regatta

focus on enriching the community. Through sport, the sailors learn valuable lessons to take with them on and off the water, and starting with the Community Sailing Program, Oman Sail and Renaissance Services are delighted to create a platform to develop the abilities of young Omanis.”

The Oman Sail Community Sailing Program, sponsored by Renaissance Services, has already introduced 301 boys and girls to the sport this year as part of an annual commitment to teach a

total of 900 students aged 8-10 from government schools in Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah South and Muscat governorates each year.

Each student takes part in a five-week sailing course with one weekly session on the water using the Optimist boat and participates in a beach clean-up to help keep the environment clean for Oman’s native wildlife and marine species – as well as ensuring sailors of all ages and levels can enjoy clean seas.

SHORTTAKE



SIXERS SHOCK WARRIORS TO SNAP NINE-GAME LOSING STREAK

LOS ANGELES: Quentin Grimes scored a career-high 44 points as the Philadelphia 76ers shocked the Golden State Warriors 126-119 to snap their nine-game NBA skid on Saturday -- a day after confirming superstar centre Joel Embiid would miss the rest of the season.

The Sixers brought Stephen Curry and the Warriors back to earth with a thud two days after Curry drilled a dozen three-pointers on the way to 56 points in a win at Orlando.

Curry finished with 29 points and a season-high 13 assists but the Warriors missed the offensive spark of Jimmy Butler.

Philadelphia seized control with a 37-point second quarter that propelled them to a 67-55 halftime lead.

Golden State pulled level at 116-116 with 2:01 remaining, but Grimes drove for a layup and Guerschon Yabusele drilled a three-pointer and the 76ers held on for the win.

Despite the loss of Embiid to a lingering knee injury — the most notable of a string of injury setbacks for the Sixers — Grimes was bullish on their chances of making the post-season.

“We’ve still got a lot of games and a chance to make the play-in,” he said.

Milwaukee star Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 29 points with nine rebounds and nine assists and Damian Lillard added 28 points for the Bucks in a 132-117 victory over the Mavericks in Dallas.

Milwaukee closed the first half on a 15-4 scoring run to take a 71-63 lead at halftime and Kyrie Irving, who led Dallas with 31 points, was limited to four points in the third quarter as the Bucks pulled away in the second half.

One day after Detroit’s eight-game winning streak — their longest in 17 years — ended with a loss to Denver the Pistons bounced back with a 115-94 victory over the Brooklyn Nets.

Tobias Harris, Jalen Duren and Malik Beasley scored 18 points apiece to lead six Pistons players to score in double figures -- Beasley making six of his 10 shot attempts before he was ejected midway through the fourth quarter after receiving his second technical foul.

Duren added 11 rebounds and six of the Pistons’ 15 blocked shots.

Cade Cunningham scored nine of his 15 points in the fourth quarter and handed out nine assists for the Pistons, whose sloppy third quarter had seen their 23-point halftime lead sliced to six going into the final period. — AFP



Oman’s U-14 Tennis Team secures three victories

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

OMAN’S U-14 national tennis team concluded its participation in the preliminary qualifiers for the International Junior Championship held in Bahrain amid an atmosphere of intense competition. The team secured three victories, contributing to the players’ international ranking points.

The team began its campaign with a valuable win against the UAE but suffered a setback in the second match against Kyrgyzstan, the fifth-seeded team, with a 3-0 defeat. Despite a strong performance, Azzan al Busaidy lost a two-hour match against Kazakhbayev, ending 7-5, 6-4 in favour of the latter. Moataz al Mazrouei also fell to player Bekay, 6-1, 6-3. In the doubles competition, the Omani pair couldn’t secure a win, losing 6-2, 6-2, ultimately missing the chance to qualify for the quarterfinals.

In the placement matches, Oman faced Turkmenistan, suffering a 3-0 loss. Azzan al Busaidy was defeated by Ali 6-2, 6-2, while Moataz al Mazrouei lost to Suleiman by the same score. The doubles match ended 4-2, 4-2 in favour of Turkmenistan.

However, the Omani team bounced back with a crucial 2-1 victory over Yemen. Azzan Al Busaidy lost his match against Yousef Omar 6-2, 3-6, (9-11), but Moataz al Mazrouei secured a win over Ahmed Said 6-3, 6-3. In their final match, Oman delivered an impressive performance against Jordan, winning 2-0. Azzan al Busaidy defeated Rayan Kowar 6-2, 6-1, while Moataz al



Mazrouei showcased a strong display, winning against Omar Istanbul 6-1, 6-1. At the tournament’s conclusion, Hong Kong claimed the championship title after defeating Indonesia 2-0, securing both teams a place in the final qualifiers for the Junior World Cup.

Ahmed al Balushi, the team’s delegation manager, emphasised the significance of such tournaments in enhancing players’ technical skills and boosting their international rankings. He noted that the competition, which featured 21 teams, was highly competitive and included opponents with strong international and Asian rankings, providing Omani players with valuable experience and confidence. He added that the Oman Tennis Association is committed to participating in tournaments under the International and Asian Tennis Federations, as well as regional championships, to further refine the players’ skills and competitiveness.

National team coach Sofiane highlighted that the tournament was an important



and beneficial experience for the players, allowing them to compete against opponents of various levels, which helps in their development.

“Despite some challenges, such as the injury of Abdulrahman al Rahbi, the players delivered strong performances and demonstrated a high level of competitiveness,” Sofiane said. “We secured three victories, and we could have achieved even better results if not for minor mistakes, which we will work on correcting in the future. What pleased me the most was the fighting spirit displayed by the players, especially in difficult matches.” Regarding the importance of the tournament, the coach explained that competing in such events provides players with a great opportunity to face internationally and regionally ranked opponents, which enhances their confidence and playing style. Sofiane concluded, “We will evaluate our performance, correct our mistakes, and aim for better results and deeper progress in upcoming tournaments.”

Varun stars as India set up Champions Trophy clash with Australia

DUBAI: Spinner Varun Chakravarthy returned figures of 5-42 as India beat New Zealand by 44 runs on Sunday to set up a semi-final clash with Australia in the Champions Trophy.

India won all three of their group matches to top Group A and will play the first semi-final of the 50-over tournament in Dubai on Tuesday.

New Zealand will take on Group B winners South Africa in Lahore on Wednesday.

India are playing all their matches at the Dubai International Stadium after they refused to tour hosts Pakistan due to security reasons.

Australia and South Africa had to travel to Dubai from Pakistan despite not knowing if they would be playing there, as India were

told ahead of the tournament they would play the first semi-final if they qualified no matter where they finished in the group. South Africa will now have to fly back to Pakistan ahead of their meeting with New Zealand.

Shreyas Iyer’s 79 and a late 45 by Hardik Pandya steered India to 249-9 after being invited to bat first.

New Zealand pace bowler Matt Henry stood out with figures of 5-42 from his eight overs.

Chakravarthy took his first ODI five-wicket haul in just his second match as India bowled out New Zealand for 205 in 45.3 overs despite a valiant 81 by Kane Williamson.

Williamson survived two dropped catches on 17 and 68 in his 120-ball knock before he finally fell, stumped off Axar Patel.



Chakravarthy (R) celebrates with Pandya.

New Zealand lost Rachin Ravindra early as Patel took a superb catch to dismiss the opener for six.

Chakravarthy cut short Will Young’s innings on 22 when he bowled him with a googly.

Williamson stood firm but could not find a long-term partner as Daryl Mitchell and Tom Latham were dismissed for 17 and 14 respectively.

India’s spinners dominated in helpful conditions, as Kuldeep Yadav sent back Mitchell and Ravindra Jadeja trapped Latham lbw.

In between the two wickets, Williamson hit Jadeja for a boundary to raise his 47th ODI half-century but India kept taking wickets.

Earlier, India were in trouble at 30-3 when Virat Kohli, playing in his 300th one-day international, fell victim to a stunning one-handed

catch from Glenn Phillips.

An airborne Phillips clung on to a fast-travelling ball at backward point to dismiss Kohli for 11 off Henry.

Kohli was left standing in disbelief before trudging off the ground to stunned silence.

Iyer and Patel, who made 42, put on 98 for the fourth wicket to rebuild the innings against a disciplined New Zealand attack.

Another stunning catch, this time by Williamson, who flung himself to his left at backward point to make a one-handed grab close to the ground, dismissed Jadeja for 16 off Henry.

Pandya struck four fours and two sixes in his run-a-ball innings to give India a total which proved to be enough. — AFP

SPORTS

MARC MARQUEZ BEATS BROTHER ALEX TO WIN THAILAND GP



Marc celebrates on podium after winning. — AFP

**SIX-TIMES** MotoGP champion Marc Marquez continued his perfect start with factory Ducati as he completed a weekend double at the season-opening Thailand Grand Prix on Sunday, finishing ahead of his younger brother Alex.

Pole-sitter and sprint winner Marc Marquez made an electric start in hot and humid conditions at the Buriram International Circuit but Alex, who had qualified second on the grid, took the lead on the seventh of the 26 laps.

Marc snatched back the lead with three laps remaining, however, to win the opening race of the MotoGP season for the first time since 2014.

Twice MotoGP champion Francesco Bagnaia, Marquez's new team-mate, came in third to complete an all-Ducati podium.

"Yesterday, I was happy. Today, I'm super happy," Marquez told reporters. "I mean, this is a dream! It's a dream start my new journey with Ducati like this in Thailand where I won my last four championships, to be here with my brother - incredible."

Marquez had looked dominant all weekend and it seemed only a matter of time that he would overtake Alex, who is four years his junior, as he finished 1.732 seconds ahead.

The 32-year-old Spaniard extended his lead at the top of the MotoGP world championship with 37 points, eight more than second-placed Alex and 14 ahead of Italian Bagnaia.

Marquez now has 112 MotoGP podiums, equalling compatriot Dani Pedrosa.

"I thought he (Marquez) was trying not to use a lot of rear tyre. I was using everything, I was using all the energy because when you don't have it, literally, you need to push a bit more, and you cannot really save tyre," Alex said.

"But in the end second was our maximum target today. So, to keep Pecco (Bagnaia) behind it's not easy, he's a world champion, and you have another experience."

Bagnaia, who lost last year's championship to the now injured Jorge Martin by 10 points, battled with Alex for second place.

"I gave my all and I could not be too close to Alex to try and attend. Marc was playing with us all the way. So, my maximum ambition was to finish in P2 but we finished in P3," Bagnaia said.

"I tried my best, but I was slower and I was losing more time in some part of the track."

Franco Morbidelli made up two places to finish fourth, while Trackhouse's Japanese rookie Ai Ogura continued his remarkable start to MotoGP as he came fifth. — Reuters

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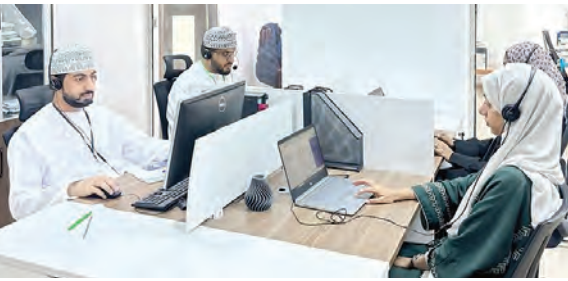
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INCREASING SHARE



The survey is designed to provide accurate economic data to aid decision-makers in shaping Oman's digital transformation strategy.

OMAN SURVEYS DIGITAL ECONOMY'S GDP CONTRIBUTION

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is conducting a nationwide survey to measure the contribution of the digital economy to Oman's GDP in 2023.

The initiative supports the National Digital Economy Programme, which aims to increase the sector's share to 10 per cent of GDP by 2040.

The survey is designed to provide accurate economic data to aid decision-makers in shaping Oman's digital transformation strategy. It will also support economic research, facilitate international comparisons and track progress towards national digital goals.

Focusing on private sector establishments in ICT, digital financial services and online insurance, the survey covers 1,300 businesses of all sizes across Oman's governorates.

Key indicators include the digital economy's GDP share, employment levels, wage expenditures, investment in digital infrastructure and operating costs.

Hamad bin Nasser al Shukaili, Director of the Survey Project, emphasised the importance of industry cooperation, noting that strong participation enhances the accuracy of insights and helps shape policies for a sustainable digital economy. He highlighted that Oman's digital sector is pivotal to future economic growth, with data-driven decision-making essential for fostering innovation and investment. — ONA

New postal policy to boost e-commerce, logistics

HIBBA AL KINDI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has launched a new policy and executive programme aimed at regulating the expanding postal sector in Oman.

The Postal Sector Policy and Executive Programme (2025-2029) seeks to modernise the postal sector and improve service quality while supporting parallel sectors including e-commerce, transport and logistics. In his foreword, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, highlighted the significance of the postal sector in Oman,

“The postal sector in the Sultanate of Oman serves as a pivotal pillar in achieving economic and social integration, acting as a bridge for communication and a service provider for communities and businesses.

With the rapid advancements in telecommunications and information technology, the development of this sector has become an urgent necessity to keep pace with global changes, enhance its role in supporting e-commerce and logistics services, and achieve operational efficiency and innovation in service delivery.”

He added: “It is with great pleasure that the Ministry launches the Postal Sector Policy and Executive Programme (2025-2029) as a strategic step aimed at laying a solid foundation for the development of the sector, enhancing its efficiency and improving the quality of services provided to citizens and residents.

Additionally, this initiative supports e-commerce and integrates with the logistics and transport system in the



The new policy and executive programme aims to grow the postal sector.

Sultanate of Oman. This document is the result of concerted efforts among various stakeholders in the postal sector.”

This policy and its executive programme, Al Maawali noted, are based on a clear vision, key pillars and executive programmes and initiatives designed to achieve national objectives in alignment with Oman Vision 2040, the National Program for Economic Diversification (Tanfeedh), and the Universal Postal Union (UPU) strategy.

“Through the implementation of this executive programme, we aspire to bring about a qualitative transformation in the sector by adopting international best practices, strengthening partnerships between the public and private sectors and ensuring the sustainability of postal services to serve the interests of society while keeping up with future challenges,” he further noted.

The document identifies multiple initiatives under the programme's four main pillars: expansion and quality, integration and innovation, sector growth, and legislation and international relations.

Some key initiatives include the liberalisation of exclusive postal services in Oman, the establishment of a national addressing system, e-commerce delivery guidelines and the development of a universal postal service agreement.

According to the document, the initiatives will be overseen by the Ministry in addition to sector stakeholders including the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, Licensed Postal Service Providers, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Royal Oman Police (Customs Authority), the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, and the Small and Medium Enterprises Authority.

Smart parking and EV charging to transform urban mobility in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA  
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

IN a move set to redefine urban mobility in Oman, EV Technology has entered into a strategic partnership with Naviparking to integrate smart parking solutions with electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure. The collaboration aims to alleviate parking congestion while promoting sustainable transportation across the country.

With Oman's urban centres experiencing rapid growth, parking scarcity and traffic congestion have become pressing challenges. The increasing number of vehicles, particularly in metropolitan areas, has led to inefficiencies in parking space utilisation.

By combining Naviparking's digital parking management system with EV Technology's expertise in electric vehicle infrastructure, the partnership seeks to streamline the parking experience while supporting the country's transition to cleaner mobility solutions.

Under the agreement, smart



Smart parking systems will be deployed at key locations across Oman, enabling drivers to locate and reserve parking spaces seamlessly via digital platforms. Image for illustration only.

parking systems will be deployed at key locations across Oman, enabling drivers to locate and reserve parking spaces seamlessly via digital platforms.

Additionally, designated spots will feature integrated EV charging stations, allowing electric vehicle owners to charge their cars while parked.

In an interview with the *Observer*, Adeel Irshad, Chief Operating

Officer of EV Technology, said, “Through our partnership with Naviparking, we are taking another step forward in our mission to create a more sustainable, efficient and future-proof transportation system in Oman.” “At the same time, integrating EV charging with Naviparking's digital parking solutions will streamline the entire parking and charging process, allowing EV drivers to enjoy a

hassle-free experience while contributing to a greener future for Oman,” he added.

The initiative aligns with Oman's broader vision for sustainability and smart city development, which includes leveraging digital technology to enhance urban living standards. The introduction of smart parking is expected to reduce the time spent searching for parking spaces, lower fuel consumption and ease overall traffic congestion.

Naviparking, which has been operating for a decade in Poland, the UAE and Bahrain, brings its expertise in intelligent parking solutions to the partnership. The company's digital ecosystem enables real-time parking space monitoring and reservation, a feature that could significantly improve urban traffic flow.

“We are thrilled to partner with EV Technology to offer an integrated solution that not only improves the parking experience but also contributes to the sustainable future of urban mobility,” said Marek Stawinski, Founder and CEO of Naviparking.

“Together, we are creating smarter, greener cities where people and technology work in harmony to drive positive change.” Beyond benefiting individual drivers, the partnership presents opportunities for investors seeking to engage in Oman's evolving smart city landscape.

As digital transformation accelerates across the region, the demand for intelligent parking and EV infrastructure is expected to rise, making this sector an attractive investment prospect.

Both companies are encouraging private sector stakeholders and government entities to collaborate in scaling these initiatives. By enhancing accessibility to EV charging and optimising parking space management, the partnership is set to play a crucial role in Oman's urban development strategy.

As the country continues to push forward with sustainability and digital integration, this collaboration marks a significant milestone in the modernisation of Oman's transportation infrastructure.

ADVERTORIALS

VALUE-ADDED FEATURES



This account stands out as an innovative financial solution in today's market.

EARN MORE WITH BANKDHOFAR'S HIGH-YIELD SAVINGS ACCOUNT

**MUSCAT:** BankDhofar's High Yield Savings Account redefines banking convenience by offering not only competitive interest rates of up to 4.25 per cent but also a suite of value-added features designed to enhance the financial experience of account holders.

Designed for customers seeking to maximise their savings potential while maintaining seamless access to their funds, this account stands out as an innovative financial solution in today's market.

Unlike conventional savings accounts, the High Yield Savings Account allows customers to optimise their interest earnings on the funds maintained in their account. With a peak interest rate of 4.25 per cent, returns are calculated daily based on the closing balance and credited at the end of the month.

This ensures that account holders can make the most of their savings by earning interest in a way that compounds effectively over time. By allowing interest to accumulate daily, the account provides customers with a steady and predictable way to grow their wealth while ensuring their funds remain easily accessible whenever needed.

Beyond its attractive interest structure, the High Yield Savings Account serves as a gateway to a comprehensive range of essential banking services. Customers can seamlessly link their savings account to their debit and credit cards, giving them immediate access to funds and enabling smooth, everyday transactions.

This account can be used to receive your salary where you can earn interest on your salary. Additionally, the account is integrated with term deposits, providing customers with the flexibility to manage their financial portfolio efficiently. Insurance options are also available, allowing customers to safeguard their financial well-being while continuing to earn interest on their balances.

BankDhofar has made banking easier than ever by ensuring that account holders can access their funds at any time. Whether through the user-friendly mobile banking app or the secure online banking platform, customers can manage their accounts around the clock, transfer funds, set up direct debits and complete transactions with ease.

The bank's extensive ATM network enables convenient withdrawals and deposits, while features such as cardless cash withdrawal add an extra layer of accessibility and security.

The High Yield Savings Account also provides access to a range of financing solutions tailored to the needs of customers and offers insurance solutions, including personal accident insurance, motor insurance and travel insurance, ensuring that customers have peace of mind in all aspects of their financial journey.

LIVA INSURANCE WINS 'MOST TRUSTED INSURER' AWARD

**MUSCAT:** In a significant recognition of its commitment to excellence, Liva Insurance has been crowned 'Most Trusted Insurer' at the Top Brands in Oman Awards 2025, an esteemed event held under the banner of Alam Al-Iktisaad magazine, one of Oman's leading Arabic business publications.

This prestigious accolade follows a detailed nationwide survey conducted by Alam Al-Iktisaad magazine, in collaboration with the Arabian Research Bureau, to identify the brands that resonate most strongly with the Omani public, based on



trust, brand recall, and consumer loyalty.

The Top Brands in Oman Awards celebrate brands across all sectors that have consistently earned the

confidence of consumers and made a lasting impact on their respective industries.

Liva Insurance's triumph as the 'Most Trusted Insurer' is a testament to the brand's dedication to providing innovative, customer-focused solutions in an ever-evolving insurance landscape.

This recognition further reinforces its position as a leader in Oman's insurance sector, trusted by individuals, families, and businesses alike to safeguard their most valuable assets.

Ignite the spirit of Ramadhan with BYD's offer

**BYD** is thrilled to continue its journey in Oman by bringing innovative vehicles and futuristic experiences to its customers.

This Ramadhan, fuel your journey with BYD Oman's exclusive offers introducing unbeatable prices and incredible benefits on its all-electric and hybrid vehicles.

Experience the best of BYD's innovations and invest in an all-electric vehicle with stress free service perks up to 5 years/100,000 km on all-electric vehicles and 5 years/50,000 km on a plug-in hybrid vehicle (PHEV).

Get additional perks like free EV and PHEV chargers, first-year free insurance and unlock unbeatable value for money before the offer ends on April 24, 2025.

Find your perfect BYD vehicle and get the best value for money! Get unbeatable prices and drive home the plug-in hybrid QIN Plus Classic starting at RO 6,790 or Atto3 EV classic and Song Plus Comfort PHEV, now priced at RO 9,990. Plus, get an exciting chance



Experience the best of BYD's innovations and invest in an all-electric vehicle with stress free service perks.

to enter the Raffle Draw to win the BYD Qin Plus Classic.

The BYD Qin Plus DM-i is a cutting-edge plug-in hybrid vehicle (PHEV) powered by a 1.5-litre gasoline engine and an electric motor.

Thanks to BYD's innovative DM-i Super Hybrid Technology, it offers a 100 km electric range and ultra-low fuel consumption. With a combined range of up to 1,000 kilometres, it's setting new standards in efficiency and performance.

The BYD ATTO 3, is the perfect choice for those seeking an electric SUV with impressive performance and fuel-efficiency. Powered by BYD's revolutionary Blade Battery, it delivers exceptional safety, high performance output in premium comfort setting. The gym-themed cockpit is designed to deliver an immersive driving experience with a 5-inch LCD dashboard, the exemplary 12.8-inch rotatable screen, rhythmic interactive ambient lighting and ergonomic

seats.

Additionally, the BYD Song Plus Comfort is a plug-in hybrid SUV featuring BYD's Super DM technology, that delivers impressive ultra-low fuel consumption and remarkable response handling.

With a combined range of up to 900 kilometres (NEDC), the AWD offers a luxurious driving experience with features like ambient lighting, a 360° camera, a panoramic sunroof, a Dirac audio system, and compatibility with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay.

Further enhancing the experience with BYD's revolutionary 15.6" rotating multimedia screen, multi-color ambient lighting — all while blending outstanding performance with state-of-the-art technology and comfort.

Customers can experience BYD's electric and hybrid range at the BYD showrooms at Al Wattayah, Al Mouj and Mall of Oman.

Don't miss out on these incredible offers this Ramadhan and take the first step towards the future with BYD!

KR-NIKON, YOUTH CENTRE CONCLUDE VISUAL STORYTELLING CONTEST

**MUSCAT:** The Khimji Ramdas (KR) Group and Nikon, in partnership with the Youth Centre, have successfully concluded this year's 'Manzarah Omaniya' short-film contest, with a spectacular closing ceremony at Cinepolis in Oman Avenues Mall. The initiative aims to empower Omani youth talents in visual storytelling, celebrating their creative abilities.

A brainchild of the KR Group, this year's competition saw eight finalists shortlisted across two categories — four in the Professional category and four in the Amateur category.

The films were primarily shot in the Wilayat of Sur, aligning



with Oman's 2025 tourism focus on the coastal city.

To further immerse participants in Sur's rich cultural and historical heritage, the finalists engaged in an exclusive video-walk, capturing the city's iconic landmarks and scenic

attractions.

During the closing ceremony, all winning films were showcased, highlighting the exceptional creativity and technical expertise of the participants. The winners were honoured with Nikon cameras,

reinforcing the competition's commitment to equipping emerging filmmakers with industry-leading tools to advance their craft.

Varun Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas stated: "An initiative by Khimji Ramdas, 'Manzarah Omaniya' is designed to nurture and celebrate Omani talent in visual storytelling.

More than just a competition, it reflects our commitment to empowering local creators by providing them with a platform to express their perspectives, capture the essence of our heritage and elevate Oman's presence in the regional and global creative landscape."

Al Wathbah Ramadhan Souq set to open on March 6

**MUSCAT:** The SMEs Development Authority and Bank Muscat are pleased to announce the inauguration of Al Wathbah Ramadhan souq, taking place from Thursday, March 6 to Saturday, March 8, 2025, at the Bank's headquarters in Airport Heights.

Marking the 11th edition this year, the souq will feature the participation of approximately 150 entrepreneurs and home business owners. This initiative reflects the Bank ongoing commitment to enhancing social responsibility and supporting the development of the business sector.

Al Wathbah Ramadhan souq provides a platform for



Al Wathbah Ramadhan souq provides a platform for entrepreneurs and home businesses to showcase their diverse range of products to the public.

entrepreneurs and home businesses to showcase their diverse range of products to the public, thereby opening new marketing avenues and fostering collaboration and experience-sharing among participants.

Attendees can expect to find a variety of local products, including fashion items, health and beauty products, home décor, accessories, culinary delights, heritage tools, perfumes and a wide array of supplies in preparation for Eid Al Fitr. The souq will be open to the general public from 8 PM to midnight.

This annual event underscores the dedication of the SME

Development Authority and Bank Muscat to nurturing and developing this vital sector, which serves as the backbone of the national economy.

Al Wathbah souq has garnered significant attention from both the community and the media, encouraging visitors to support local initiatives and fostering awareness of the importance of small and emerging enterprises.

Following the success of previous years, the event is anticipated to witness a particularly vibrant atmosphere this year, especially that it is happening during Ramadhan, a time of heightened commercial activity and Eid preparations.

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The Khazzan Project for SMEs Development programme aims to strengthen Oman’s SMEs through focused development support.

SHARAKAH, BP OMAN DEVELOPED 12 SMES AS PART OF KHAZZAN PROJECT

MUSCAT: Sharakah, in partnership with bp Oman held a graduation ceremony for the 12 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as part of the Khazzan Project for SME Development programme, showcasing their shared commitment to fostering innovation and sustainability in Oman’s SME sector. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth.

The Khazzan Project for SMEs Development programme aims to strengthen Oman’s SMEs through focused development support, including financial support, structured mentorship and guidance.

It showcased diversity with the 12 SMEs spanning seven key sectors, including tourism, food and beverages, education and rehabilitation, with 66.7 per cent of the SMEs operated as service-based businesses, while 33.3 per cent focused on products, highlighting the dynamic blend of services and goods shaping Oman’s economy.

This holistic approach enabled businesses to achieve significant milestones, including enhanced operational efficiency, market expansion, stronger market position, new product development and geographical expansion with businesses reporting a 22 per cent increase in revenue at the end of the programme.

Three businesses also improved their market presence by rebranding and another three businesses successfully launched new products, underscoring their commitment to innovation and growth. All participants developed comprehensive business plans aligned with sustainable growth strategies for 2025, ensuring a clear and focused path forward

Ali Muqaibal, CEO of Sharakah, remarked, “The Khazzan Project for SME Development is more than just funding. It is a pathway for SMEs to thrive and contribute meaningfully to Oman’s economy. These 12 businesses are a testament to the power of perseverance and innovation.”

Ibrahim al Hinai, Social investment manager at bp Oman, Kuwait and Qatar, added, “Our partnership with Sharakah over the years has empowered over 120 SMEs, demonstrating how strategic support can drive progress and align with Oman Vision 2040’s goals for economic diversification and job creation.

The programme participants’ regional background this year included four governorates supporting entrepreneurs from varied backgrounds, with 16.6 per cent of the businesses overall being female-led and more than 18 new jobs were created as well as geographical expansion and enhanced risk management practices.”

OMAN TO SHOWCASE TOURISM POTENTIAL AT ITB 2025

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, will participate in the International Tourism Berlin (ITB) 2025 on March 4. The event, one of the world’s largest tourism exhibitions, provides a platform for industry leaders to share insights and explore developments in global tourism.

Oman’s presence at the exhibition reinforces its commitment to expanding its tourism sector and attracting European visitors. The delegation will showcase Oman’s diverse attractions, investment opportunities and unique tourism experiences. The goal is to strengthen partnerships and position Oman as a prime travel destination.

This year, 55 tourism and hospitality establishments will represent Oman, alongside four strategic partners: Oman Air, Oman Airports, Omran Group and the national travel operator “Visit Oman”.— ONA

SMEDA LAUNCHES BUSINESS INCUBATOR IN NIZWA

VINOD NAIR  
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

THE National Aviation Strategy 2040 of the Sultanate of Oman is helping to reshape the air mobility sector with a road map to modernise aviation, promote innovation and advance sustainability while integrating emerging technologies.

Kuljit Ghata-Aura, president of Boeing Middle East, Türkiye, Africa and Central Asia, said, “Air transport has long been a catalyst for economic growth and cultural exchange. Due to the efforts of Oman Air, SalamAir, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the aviation sector in Oman is driving connectivity and opportunity.”

He added, “Oman is actively exploring advanced air mobility (AAM) with steps to establish a regulatory framework.

Last year, a significant partnership emerged between Oman’s public transport operator, Mwasalat, the Civil Aviation Authority and an AAM startup developing uncrewed hybrid-electric vertical-takeoff-and-landing (eVTOL) cargo aircraft.

This collaboration is mapping out target routes and services, with plans to launch pilot programmes in unpopulated areas in 2025.

Additionally, AeroVecto,

NASRULAH AL AJMI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 2

IN a strategic move to foster entrepreneurship and support small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the SMEs Development Authority (SMEDA) has launched a business incubator in the historic Wilayat of Nizwa.

This initiative aims to provide a nurturing environment for startups, innovators and independent business owners, enabling them to develop their ideas into successful ventures. The incubator aligns with Oman Vision 2040 of creating a entrepreneurial ecosystem and

driving sustainable economic growth.

Designed to be more than just a workspace, the incubator offers a comprehensive support system for entrepreneurs. It provides private offices, shared workspaces, meeting rooms and relaxation areas, catering to a wide range of professionals.

The facility also features mentorship programmes, consultancy services and specialised training workshops, ensuring that startups receive the guidance needed to scale their businesses effectively.

Additionally, the incubator serves as a gateway for entrepreneurs to connect with investors and industry experts, increasing their chances of

securing funding and expanding their networks.

The programme is open to various business categories, including technology-driven startups, SMEs looking to expand, innovators seeking to commercialise their ideas and freelancers in need of a structured work environment.

By offering a structured incubation period of one year, the initiative provides businesses with the necessary resources and time to establish a strong foundation. Located in Harat Al Aqr, Nizwa, the incubator is also an affordable option for budding entrepreneurs, with a rental rate of just RO 3 per square metre.

Oman developing AAM with its skilled workforce



Wisk, is working to certify Gen6, an autonomous, all-electric, four-passenger eVTOL aircraft designed for self-flying air taxi services.

an Omani startup developing eVTOL aircraft for mass transit, proves that Oman is not just adopting AAM technologies but actively shaping their future.”

Unlocking Oman’s potential in advanced air mobility extends beyond mere infrastructure investments, including prioritising the development of a skilled workforce and is fostering innovation through strong public-private partnerships.

“Educational institutions play a pivotal role in nurturing a talent pipeline essential for this emerging industry. Omani universities are working to align their curricula with AAM-specific needs, offering specialised

certifications and forging partnerships with international aviation academies to ensure students receive world-class training and exposure.

Encouraging early interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects at schools is also crucial for cultivating future advanced air mobility engineers and operators,” Ghata-Aura said.

“Industry collaboration with academia can help establish training centers, fund scholarships, and create research and development (R&D) hubs that will invigorate this new sector”, he added.

Boeing has initiated collaboration with the Modern

**KULJIT GHATA-AURA**  
President of Boeing Middle East, Türkiye, Africa and Central Asia.

MUSCAT: In celebration of the holy month of Ramadhan, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) announced the launch of a marketing campaign under the theme “Investment Journey” across various social media platforms.

This aims to shed light on the range of investment opportunities within the special economic zones, free zones and industrial estates under OPAZ’s supervision.

The primary objective of the “Investment Journey” campaign is to raise awareness about these strategic

areas by sharing compelling content that narrates the experiences of entrepreneurs and investors. From the initial registration of companies to their expansion into global markets, the campaign will emphasise the array of facilities and incentives available to support investors.

GCC workforce reaches 31.8 million

MUSCAT: The total labour force in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has reached 31.8 million workers, accounting for 54.2% of the region’s total population, according to data from the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-Stat).

Men dominate the workforce, making up 78.7%, while women account for 17.6%. The number of employed GCC nationals stands at 5.6 million, representing 23.4% of the total workforce, with men comprising 60% and women 40%.

Since 2011, the number of



Men dominate the workforce, making up 78.7%.

working women in the GCC has increased by 600,000.

The public sector remains the largest employer of GCC nationals, with 83.5% of them

working in government jobs, compared to just 14.2% in the private sector. Most citizens are employed in the services sector, particularly in public

administration.

To address workforce imbalances, GCC nations have introduced policies such as the GCC Common Market and the Comprehensive Development Strategy, aiming to increase the participation of national workers in industry and other key sectors.

The region’s population strategy also focuses on enhancing women’s role in development and boosting youth employment.

Additionally, economic diversification efforts are driving the creation of green and sustainable jobs to align with global labour market trends.

OPINION

Agri-Fund’s contributions to Oman’s plant and livestock sectors



**HANAN AL SULAIMI**

*The writer is Executive Director - Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund*

**THE** Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund (AFDF) has worked to strike a balance between the projects it finances, aiming to enhance food security in the Sultanate of Oman while prioritising key initiatives for the sustainable development of the agricultural, livestock and fisheries sectors.

Agricultural, livestock and fisheries processing projects represent a crucial component of economic activity, adding value to primary and secondary products while creating employment opportunities for a broad segment of the national workforce.

Value-added services and post-production projects — such as sorting, packaging, preservation and processing — are particularly vital, especially during peak production seasons. These initiatives help ensure year-round food availability and contribute to price stability, benefiting both producers and consumers alike.

**AGRICULTURAL SECTOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Projects financed in the agricultural production sector have been classified into eight specialised areas, including the development of production systems. This area aligns with national efforts to enhance productivity per unit area and increase yields through advanced and efficient production techniques compared to traditional methods.

The fund has also supported projects focused on the conservation, maintenance

and sustainable use of genetic resources, with total funding exceeding one million Omani rials.

Additionally, it has invested in integrated pest management through biological control, addressing key sector needs by mitigating the spread of agricultural pests that have historically impacted crop productivity.

Among the notable funded agricultural projects is the Grape Cultivation and Production Development Project, which has benefitted 25 farmers. Another significant initiative is the Coconut Production Improvement Project in Dhofar Governorate, which aims to combat pests that reduce yield, directly benefiting 745 farmers.

The AFDF has also supported the propagation of economically valuable fruit crops, including citrus fruits, mangoes and bananas, by providing 314,000 saplings. Moreover, a dedicated project has been launched to expand the cultivation and improve the quality of Omani wheat varieties, benefiting more than 4,000 farmers.

As a result of these agricultural initiatives, Oman has achieved 97 per cent self-sufficiency in date production, a key indicator guiding national projects towards closing food supply gaps for strategically important commodities within the country’s food security framework.

**LIVESTOCK SECTOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Since its establishment, the AFDF has

*Agricultural, livestock and fisheries processing projects represent a crucial component of economic activity, adding value to primary and secondary products while creating employment opportunities for a broad segment of the national workforce.*

funded 55 projects in the livestock sector, as of the end of 2023.

Key focus areas include improving the efficiency of red meat production from cattle and goats, supporting projects that enhance growth rates, optimise animal care and management, prevent disease outbreaks and introduce modern production methods.

The fund has also financed genetic improvement projects for indigenous Omani breeds, particularly the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar goat, recognising the importance of preserving local genetic resources.

By selecting and propagating animals with promising production traits, these initiatives aim to enhance breed performance and distribute improved livestock to farmers.

In support of food security within the livestock sector, the AFDF has facilitated the introduction of modern dairy production technologies, benefiting 100 livestock farmers in Dhofar Governorate alone.

Additionally, the fund has overseen a poultry disease and animal feed quality survey and a specialised project analysing antibiotic and hormone residues in poultry meat.

The latter successfully examined 1,050 poultry meat samples, providing precise food safety reports that help ensure the quality of locally consumed meat.

Through its targeted funding strategies, the AFDF continues to drive sustainable development across Oman’s agricultural and livestock sectors, reinforcing food security and economic stability for producers and consumers alike.

UKRAINE MAY YET GET BETTER OF TRUMP ON MINING DEAL

BY PIERRE BRIANCON

THE minerals deal that US President Donald Trump could soon sign with Ukraine may not be the colonial-style asset grab it appears to be. President Volodymyr Zelenskiy can still turn it to his country’s long-term advantage.

Giving Washington a piece of Ukraine’s critical minerals and other resources was an idea Zelenskiy took to then-candidate Trump back in September, hoping it would align the two countries’ commercial interests.

The Ukrainian leader got more than he’d bargained for after the November election, when Trump started talking about some \$500 billion he expected as “money back” for the financial and military support the US has channelled to the country since Russia attacked three years ago.

The two countries have been discussing an agreement that would require Ukraine to pay half the revenue it will extract from the future monetisation of natural resources to a special fund controlled by the US, the New York Times reported. The fund would be tasked with reinvesting part of the proceeds in Ukraine, as a catalyst for attracting overseas capital.

The US appears to have dropped the \$500 billion demand, which never made much sense. American civil and military support to Kyiv over the last three years amounted to 114 billion euros, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy. Over the same period, EU countries sent 132 billion euros.

One big unknown is the scale of Ukraine’s assets. Local authorities have a poor picture of their country’s underground resources, which include uranium, lithium, oil and gas. The last mapping of so-called rare-earth metals was completed decades ago, and the deposits may not be viable. Besides, some of the coveted elements are in territory occupied by Russia.

Furthermore, any revenue is years away. Ukraine will first have to build or rebuild mines and repair the country’s damaged energy grid. The promise of future returns could spur US investment, thereby beginning the rebuilding of Ukraine, a task the World Bank estimates will cost \$524 billion.

Zelenskiy wanted any deal to be conditional on American involvement in policing a truce with Russia. That condition appears to have run up against the Trump administration’s opposition to military involvement in Europe.

But the Ukrainian leader has also stated that giving the US an interest in the country’s economic future would achieve the same outcome. Indeed, Russia doesn’t like the mooted deal — and President Vladimir Putin has offered the US a mineral agreement of his own. — Reuters

A strategic perspective on global conflict, commerce

THE international armed conflicts across Europe and the Middle East have had devastating impacts on all the countries at war and repercussions of the domino effect on countries both far and near.

Human suffering is incomprehensible, with extensive casualties and displacement. But the pen can bring the naked truth to the forefront and paint the narrative of reconstruction and the long-term implications of war for business and the world.

To date, 500,000 Ukrainians and Russian military personnel have been killed and wounded, with over 40,000 civilian casualties.

February 24, 2022, marked the start of Russia’s full-scale war of Ukraine, triggering a seismic shift in the global business landscape. From disrupted supply chains to volatile energy markets, these conflicts present challenges and opportunities for businesses across sectors, demanding strategic adaptation and innovative solutions.

Both the Russo-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine wars are having far-reaching consequences for the rest of the world. Alterations in trade flows, economic structures and established international trade systems have occurred because of the ongoing conflicts in Europe and the Middle East.

The reverberations of the conflict between Palestine and Israel are felt in the tourism, trade, investment and financial sectors of Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. Disruptions due to the global supply chain are experienced when vessels in the Red Sea are attacked.

Many countries have also altered their trade policies towards self-sufficiency and regionalism and are slowly shifting towards de-globalisation to protect themselves from external shocks.

Alternative transportation modes have gained preference, such as rail freight between Asia and Europe, which benefit companies like Deutsche Bahn and Russian Railways



Global trade volumes in goods and services have declined by 3.4 per cent. — Reuters



**DR MYTHILI KOLLURU**

*The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat.*

but also impact business transit costs and timelines.

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has also significantly impacted trade and investment. It has affected the automotive and hospitality industry in the European region.

According to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), global trade volumes in goods and services have declined by 3.4 per cent. Energy prices have increased by 100 per cent and commodities by 8 per cent. One-third of the international wheat exports and half of the sunflower oil exports were disrupted due to the war.

The exports of materials like palladium and nickel, essential for automotive manufacturing, have also been disrupted, affecting European manufacturers.

Sanctions imposed on these countries by other countries have caused damage to transport links, further straining supply chains and resulting in essential inputs being affected worldwide.

Russia has reoriented its trade in response to sanctions and economic pressures. It has shifted from advanced countries to emerging

countries like India, China and Türkiye.

Russia is more dependent on trade with non-sanction countries and redirecting energy exports to new markets at a discounted price compared to global benchmarks.

European countries that were earlier dependent on Russian supplies have also altered trade routes, though they come with increased cost and supply challenges. Middle Eastern countries, such as Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait; and North African Countries, like Algeria, have increased their energy exports to the European Union.

The situation in Europe and the Middle East suggests tension and instability. The humanitarian situation is critical, with millions in need of assistance.

The escalating tensions between these countries complicate the geopolitical implications for international trade. Wars are having a ripple effect on global economic confidence and investment. The situation threatens to exacerbate global inflationary pressures.

The disruptions in food production and exports have contributed to the worldwide food crisis.

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# Ramadhan

4

BASIC  
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## FATWA

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### Is Friday Prayer (Juma prayer) mandatory if Eid coincides with Friday?

Friday Prayer is Fardh (Obligatory) while Eid Prayer is Sunnah (recommended acts of worship). Therefore, Friday prayer must be performed even if Eid falls on Friday.



## HADITH GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Huraira and Abu Said (Allah be pleased with both of them) reported Allah's Messenger (as saying):

Allah, the Exalted and Majestic, said: Fast (is exclusively) meant for Me and I would give its reward. There are two (occasions) of joy for the observer of fast. He feels joy when he breaks the fast and he is happy when he meets Allah. By Allah in Whose Hand is the life of Muhammad, the breath of the observer of fast is sweeter to Allah than the fragrance of musk.

## QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY



Say, "I take refuge with the Lord of Daybreak. From the evil of what He created. And from the evil of the darkness as it gathers. And from the evil of those who practice sorcery. And from the evil of an envious when he envies.

(al Falaq)



## DUA SUPPLICATION TO ALLAH

O Allah, on this day, take me closer towards Your pleasure, keep me away from Your anger and punishment, grant me the opportunity to recite Your verses (of the Quran), by Your mercy, O the most Merciful.



# ESSENTIAL NUTRITION STRATEGIES FOR RAMADHAN

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI  
Instagram: @ruqaya.alkindi

**THROUGHOUT** the year, Muslims embrace voluntary fasting, culminating in the compulsory fast during the sacred month of Ramadhan. This spiritual practice serves as a pathway to draw closer to God and aspire for the blessings of Paradise.

Research has highlighted the myriad benefits of fasting for both physical and mental well-being. However, it's not uncommon for some individuals to experience fatigue, lethargy and reduced productivity during this time. As a compassionate response, many organisations adjust working hours and lessen the demands placed on employees observing the fast.

To maintain energy and focus while fasting, selecting the right ingredients for Iftar (the evening meal) and Suhoor (the pre-dawn meal) is essential. Dr Eman Sayed Ali, Consultant in Family Medicine, advises a balanced approach: "To enjoy a healthy Iftar without the unpleasant effects of overeating — such as bloating, heartburn, or sudden drowsiness — choose to eat gradually, rather than indulging in a large feast all

at once."

Nutritionist Taif Ahmed recommends a thoughtful start: "As the call to prayer echoes, break your fast with dates, followed by healthy fats like nuts or sesame tahini and perhaps some yoghurt or a protein-rich soup, such as one with chicken. This strategy helps moderate blood sugar levels, preventing an immediate drop at the end of your meal."

Taif further emphasises the importance of timing, suggesting that the main meal should commence after the Maghrib prayer, ideally featuring a salad or vegetables first. "Fibre acts like a sponge in the intestines, prolonging the sensation of fullness," she explains. Following this, focus on protein sources — including chicken, meat, fish, eggs, or shrimp — and healthy fats like olive oil drizzled over salads, olives, or avocados. This balanced distribution can help manage blood sugar levels effectively.

To further regulate blood sugar, Taif suggests having a preliminary light snack — perhaps some nuts paired with a piece of fruit — or even a modest serving of sweets following a handful of nuts.

Dr Eman underscores the significance of eating slowly and chewing thoroughly, noting, "It takes about 20 minutes for the brain to register full-

ness. By pacing yourself, you allow your brain the necessary time to signal satiety, thus curbing excessive consumption."

Suhoor, being the last meal consumed before dawn, is vital for sustaining energy throughout the day and reducing thirst. Dr Eman advises, "Aim for a balanced meal rich in protein — think eggs, legumes, yoghurt, cheese, fish and chicken — alongside wholesome starches. Opting for fibrous whole grains like oats and sweet potatoes, along with ample fruits, vegetables and healthy fats such as nuts and olive oil, will make all the difference."

Including potassium and magnesium-rich foods like lentils, bananas, yoghurt, cucumbers, chia seeds and a variety of vegetables will help mitigate dehydration and stave off thirst during fasting, as Dr Eman confirms.

Additionally, steering clear of certain foods can enhance the fasting experience. Dr Eman cautions against fried foods, those laden with salt and sodium — such as pickles, processed meats and fast foods — as well as spicy dishes overflowing with sugar or fats, like sweets and pre-packaged juices.

By making mindful choices and embracing a balanced diet during Ramadhan, one can truly enrich their fasting journey and nourish both body and spirit.



# The Holy Month Is a Timely Gift of Healing

BY KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabiyousef

## THE HOLY MONTH

of Ramadhan is a special gift from the Almighty, a time of mercy and blessings. The Religious Teachings Department at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque reminds us that this month serves as a period of healing — arriving precisely when we need it most. When our souls and hearts feel shattered and our physical and spiritual health is compromised, some of us may find ourselves on the brink of giving up. At such times, Ramadhan comes as a divine cure, offering healing and renewed hope to those who are broken and suffering.

How is Ramadhan a Source of Healing?

Ramadhan provides healing in various ways, but let us specifically consider it as the month of the Holy Quran.

Ramadhan is not merely a month of fasting; it is also the month in which the Quran was revealed, as Allah states:

“شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ”

Translation: “Ramadhan is the month in which the Quran was revealed” (Quran 2:185).

This connection to the Quran makes Ramadhan an even more precious gift from Allah. Our relationship with the Quran is profound; nothing surpasses the words of Allah in their power to heal the soul. The Quran cures and mends whatever resides in our hearts, as Allah describes it:

“وَنَزَّلْنَا مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ”

Translation: “We send down the Quran as a healing and mercy for the believers” (Quran 17:82).

What better remedy could we find than the words of Allah? When we are physically unwell, we seek the best doctors and follow their prescribed treatments. In the same vein, when our hearts and souls are afflicted, who better to heal us than Allah Himself? And what could serve as a more perfect remedy than the Quran?

While physical ailments may be treated with worldly medications, the sickness of hearts and souls demands divine intervention. The Quran is the ultimate medicine, providing complete healing for our spiritual and physical well-being.

Did Allah not say that it is in His remembrance that hearts find tranquillity?

“الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ”

Translation: “Those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God. Surely, it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find comfort” (Quran 13:28).

Reading the Quran is akin to Allah speaking directly to us. Whenever you feel isolated, overwhelmed by negativity, or yearn for peace, the Quran is the answer. Indeed, it is through the remembrance of Allah that our hearts find serenity.

Ramadhan is truly the month

of the Quran, making it the ideal opportunity for us to connect deeply with this sacred text. Let us utilise this blessed month to allow our souls to heal and begin anew, insha'Allah.

Have you ever noticed why we feel happier during Ramadhan, with our hearts and souls more at ease? It is because, during this month, we tend to fulfil our true purpose in this life — to worship Him:

“وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ”

Translation: “I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me” (51:56).

When we stray from our true purpose, our hearts and souls begin to suffer. That is when we find ourselves in need of divine intervention, and Allah sends us the blessed month of the Quran, filled with hopes, mercy, blessings and healing, alhamdulillah.

Let us begin our healing journey now, even before Ramadhan arrives. By incorporating the Quran into our daily lives, we can experience healing and grow stronger, both spiritually and physically. The burdens that weigh us down will be lifted, guiding our hearts towards peace.

There is no better time than Ramadhan to let the words of the Quran resonate within us and bring solace to our souls, for it was in this month that the Quran was revealed.

O Allah, let us witness the month of Ramadhan and guide us to make the most of it. O Turner of hearts, keep our hearts steadfast in Your faith.

Let us initiate this healing process now.

## RAMADHAN TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

### RAMADHAN LIGHTS AND CULINARY DELIGHTS IN TÜRKIYE

During Ramadhan, Türkiye comes alive with the enchanting glow of Mahya lights that adorn mosques, featuring uplifting Quran verses strung between their towering minarets. While Muslims around the globe break their fast with dates for a quick energy boost, in Türkiye, this is often followed by the delightful Ramadhan Pidesi. This special flatbread, known for its unique woven design and sesame seed topping, is ideal for complementing dishes like hearty soups and succulent meats.

The spirit of generosity is evident through the tradition of Askida Ekmek, or ‘bread on a hanger’, where patrons purchase an extra loaf of bread to support those in need. Iftar meals are a celebration of abundance, showcasing a variety of delicious dishes, coupled with desserts like Güllaç — a delectable combination of pastry, milk, rose water and pomegranate. As night falls, the sound of drumming fills the streets, gently awakening everyone to gather for suhoor, making the experience all the more festive.

## DAILY HEALTH TIPS TO REMEMBER



### BREAK YOUR FAST WISELY

Breaking your fast is a significant moment during Ramadhan and should be approached thoughtfully. Traditionally, Muslims break their fast with dates and water, a practice rooted in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Dates are not only delicious but also provide an immediate source of energy, containing natural sugars, fibre and various nutrients. After consuming dates, allow some time for your body to adjust before diving into a full meal, as this helps prevent digestive discomfort from sudden changes in food intake. Start with small portions to gauge your hunger level after a day of fasting. Next, choose light, digestible foods such as soups or salads before progressing to more substantial dishes. Gradually reintroducing food allows your digestive system to acclimatise back to normal eating patterns. Incorporating proteins and healthy fats in your first meal can help sustain energy levels, enhancing your Ramadhan experience.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF MIDDLE EAST TO THE WORLD



### MEDICINE: THE CANON OF MEDICINE

Avicenna (Ibn Sina), a Persian scholar, wrote Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb (The Canon of Medicine), an encyclopedia of medicine that synthesised and expanded upon previous medical knowledge, including Greco-Roman and traditional Islamic practices. This work became a standard text in many universities around the world until the 17th century, influencing both Eastern and Western medical education.

FEATURES



# How artist Hassan Meer helps shape the landscape of contemporary Omani art

BY NAJAH AL RIYAMI

**ART PLAYS** a crucial role in shaping a nation's identity, reflecting history, preserving traditions and connecting the past with the present. As Oman undergoes rapid modernisation, art anchors cultural heritage while embracing the future. Hassan Meer's work embodies this dialogue, using contemporary forms to capture a nation in transition.

A pioneering Omani contemporary artist and curator, Meer has significantly influenced the Gulf's modern art scene. His work explores memory, spirituality and cultural identity, ranging from childhood recollections to the echoes of Oman's fading traditions. His video installations, such as *The Dream* (2001), *Reflections from Memories* (2013) and *Ambiguity* (2019), examine the tension between tradition and modernity. Through shifting shadows and fleeting images, he creates spaces where the past lingers, shaping the present in hauntingly beautiful ways.

Meer's practice is deeply personal yet universal, capturing how places remember and rituals fade. As a key figure in contemporary Omani art, he has carved out space for conceptual and experimental work at a time when painting and calligraphy dominated, redefining Omani art while preserving cultural memory in new forms.

His studies in Austria and at the Savannah College of Art and Design in the US introduced him to installation art, photography and video, expanding his creative approach. No longer confined to paint and canvas, his work inhabits space, moves through time and layers meaning.

Upon returning to Oman in the late 1990s, he found an art scene with little infrastructure for conceptual work. Instead of conforming, he created his own platform. In 2000, he launched *The Circle Show*, Oman's first exhibition dedicated to contemporary and conceptual art. This was a turning point, bringing together artists willing to push boundaries and redefining what Omani art could be.

Meer's works are quiet and meditative, imbued with longing — reflecting histories that remain beneath the surface, fading rituals and traces of past lives. His video installations depict blurred figures in



abandoned spaces, while his photography captures the textures of ageing buildings, highlighting a world in transition.

As Artistic Director of Stal Gallery & Studio, Meer has nurtured emerging Omani artists, providing platforms to experiment and engage in contemporary artistic discourse. Through initiatives like the Stal Young Emerging Art Prize and *The Circle of Experimenting Art*, he has helped establish a space where conceptual art is not just accepted but encouraged.

Internationally, Meer has brought Omani contemporary art to major venues such as the Venice Biennale and Mori Art Museum, introducing Oman's evolving artistic identity to global audiences. In recent years, he has expanded into large-scale installations and public art. His piece *'The Birth of the Prince'*, originally an abstract painting, evolved into a monumental sculpture, reflecting his ongoing interest in form, memory and identity.

Meer's legacy lies not only in his work but

also in the movement he has helped shape. At a time when contemporary art had little visibility in Oman, he laid the foundation for its growth, challenging identity, memory and change. Through experimentation, mentorship, and storytelling, he redefined Omani art — not by providing answers but by creating spaces for reflection. His work captures moments of transition, ensuring that the dialogue between the past and present continues to inspire future generations.