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RAMADHAN
1446 AH
TUESDAY
MAR 18, 2025

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PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR
04:58 AM

DHUHR
12:20 PM

ASR
03:45 PM

MAGRIB
06:22 PM

ISHA
07:32 PM

IN BRIEF

IRAN COOPERATING WITH UN NUCLEAR WATCHDOG

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi said on Monday that his country was “committed” to cooperating with the UN’s nuclear agency after meeting with its chief, Rafael Grossi.

Gharibabadi said in a post on X that the talks in Vienna with the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had been “frank and constructive”. “While safeguarding its national security and interests, Iran remains committed to cooperating with the IAEA within the framework of its safeguards’ obligation,” he said, referring to agency protocols aimed at deterring the spread of nuclear weapons.

In a post of his own, Grossi said cooperation was “indispensable to provide credible guarantees of the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme”. Earlier on Monday, foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said the meeting was a “part of our ongoing engagement with the agency”.



CELEBRATING LAYLAT AL AQBA

Amid an atmosphere filled with spirituality and joy, the children of Bahla revived a cherished Ramadhan custom passed down through generations.

DETAILS ON P3

Royal Decrees on placements in Diplomatic Corps

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued two Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 33/2025 conducts placements in the Diplomatic Corps.

Article (1) states that HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki bin Mahmoud al Said, the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its Permanent Representative to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and its Permanent Representative to the Digital Cooperation Organisation in Riyadh, shall be transferred to

the General Diwan of the Foreign Ministry.

Article (2) transfers Talal bin Sulaiman bin Habib al Rahbi, the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the Federative Republic of Brazil, and appoints him as the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the United States of America.

It also transfers Abdulghafar bin Abdulkarim bin Issa al Balushi, the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, and appoints him as the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the Federative Republic of Brazil.

Article (3) appoints Sayyid Najib bin Hilal bin Saud al Busaidy as the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its Permanent Representative to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and its Permanent Representative to the Digital Cooperation Organisation in Riyadh.

Article (4) grants Thamir bin Fayez bin Khalfan al Alawi the title of ambassador and appoints him as the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the Kingdom of Spain.

Article (5) says that this Decree

shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 34/2025 appoints a Non-resident Ambassador.

Article (1) appoints Issa bin Saleh bin Abdullah al Shaibani, the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the Republic of India, as the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

45,000 job opportunities for Omanis this year

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

THE OPERATIONAL plan for 2025 targets to provide 45,000 job opportunities, including 11,000 for training and qualification, 10,000 in government establishments and 24,000 in the private sector. This was revealed by Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, at the ministry’s annual press conference held on Monday. He also noted that the ministry is focused on supporting work-related training and wage subsidies for small and medium enterprises.

The ministry reviewed its achievements for 2024 and its objectives for 2025, stressing that it is carrying on its efforts to upgrade the labour market and provide employment opportunities for Omanis.

The ministry also reviewed three projects that employ artificial intelligence to improve smart management and provide funding for the pilot phases of these projects. The conference addressed the National Employment Programme which seeks to integrate education outcomes with labour market needs with a focus on developing new technologies to improve the system such as the Tawteen (nationalisation) and Khuta (steps) platforms.

The ministry underscored the role of technology in expediting the provision of job opportunities through digital tools that enhance the effectiveness of programme implementation. The minister said that reinforced qualitative job nationalisation initiatives will be carried out by employing talented Omanis in senior and middle-



Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, at the ministry’s annual press conference held on Monday.

level positions and establishing specialised companies to support employment in vital sectors.

The minister said that the ministry is developing human capital in the state’s administrative apparatus as well as building national capabilities and enhancing talent management. In addition, the ministry is taking final steps in the digital transformation strategy through the implementation of the smart administration project in cooperation with the private sector. The ministry is also designing three pilot applications to test artificial intelligence solutions, creating a visual identity and knowledge base, launching a waiting list initiative promoting the best practices in the digital transformation of human resources.

The minister said that the National Employment Programme seeks to find sustainable solutions to provide jobs in the public and private sectors, and seeks to achieve integration and alignment between educational outcomes and the actual labour market requirements. The programme has focused on ensuring the availability of necessary enablers to achieve the desired goals of the main initiatives. Besides, a set of measures are in place to enhance support for all partners involved in the education, training, and employment systems.

Dark oxygen... a deep-sea discovery that has split scientists

BREST, FRANCE: Could lumpy metallic rocks in the deepest, darkest reaches of the ocean be making oxygen in the absence of sunlight?

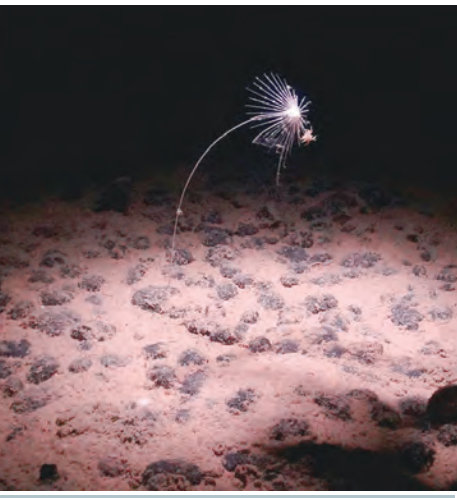
Some scientists think so, but others have challenged the claim that so-called “dark oxygen” is being produced in the lightless abyss of the seabed. The discovery — detailed last July in the journal Nature Geoscience — called into question long-held assumptions about the origins of life on Earth and sparked intense scientific debate.

The findings were also consequential for mining companies eager to extract the precious metals

contained within these polymetallic nodules. Researchers said that potato-sized nodules could be producing enough electrical current to split seawater into hydrogen and oxygen, a process known as electrolysis.

This cast doubt on the long-established view that life was made possible when organisms started producing oxygen via photosynthesis, which requires sunlight, about 2.7 billion years ago.

“Deep-sea discovery calls into question the origins of life,” the Scottish Association for Marine Science said in a press release to accompany the publication of



Greenpeace has long campaigned to stop deep-sea mining.

the research. Environmentalists said the presence of dark oxygen showed just how little is known about life at these extreme depths, and supported their case that deep-sea mining posed unacceptable ecological risks.

“Greenpeace has long campaigned to stop deep-sea mining from beginning in the Pacific due to the damage it could do to delicate, deep-sea ecosystems,” the environmental organisation said. “This incredible discovery underlines the urgency of that call”.

The discovery was made in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone, a vast underwater region of the Pacific

Ocean between Mexico and Hawaii of growing interest to mining companies. Scattered on the seafloor 4 km beneath the surface, polymetallic nodules contain manganese, nickel and cobalt, metals used in electric car batteries and other low-carbon technologies. The research that gave rise to the dark oxygen discovery was partly funded by a Canadian deep-sea mining business, The Metals Company, that wanted to assess the ecological impact of such exploration. It has sharply criticised the study by marine ecologist Andrew Sweetman and his team as plagued by “methodological flaws”. — AFP

OMAN



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SHORTTAKES



PHOTOGRAPHY WEEK KICKS OFF AT SQU

MUSCAT: The 28th edition of Photography Week at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) began on Monday. Organised by the university’s Photography Group, the event showcases a visual and intellectual philosophy that celebrates diversity and integration between contrasting elements.

The exhibition features 15 portraits, 5 nature photographs, 15 images depicting people’s lives, as well as works showcasing architecture, wildlife, and abstract images. The events will run until March 20, including art workshops, performances, and accompanying activities, solidifying “Photography Week” as a prominent cultural and artistic event at the university. — ONA

HIKER RESCUED IN JABAL SHAMS

MUSCAT: The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) has successfully rescued a woman who sustained injuries after falling while mountain hiking in Jabal Shams in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, Al Dhahirah Governorate.

In a statement, CDAA said ‘Rescue and ambulance teams from the Civil Defence e and Ambulance Department in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, in cooperation with the Police Aviation, responded to an accident in which a woman fell while practising mountain hiking in Jabal Shams in the Wilayat of Al Hamra.’

The teams were able to access the woman’s location on the mountain and safely transport her to the hospital. She was reported to be in a moderate health condition upon arrival. The coordinated effort between the ground rescue teams and the Police Aviation unit ensured a swift and effective response to the incident.

STATE COUNCIL COMMITTEE DEBATES TELECOM BILL

MUSCAT: The State Council’s Legal Committee on Monday discussed the report of the Technology and Innovation Committee on the Telecommunications and Information Technology Regulatory Bill referred by the Council of Ministers.

The Legal Committee held its fifteenth meeting of the second regular session of the eighth term under the chairmanship of Shaikh Sultan bin Matar al



It reviewed the observations and views of the members of the Technology and Innovation Committee.

Azizi, Chairman of the Legal Committee, in the presence of the members of the committee and a number of employees of the Secretariat-General. It reviewed the observations and views of the members of the Technology and Innovation Committee on the provisions of the draft law which aims to keep pace with local and global changes in the telecommunications and information technology sector.

Road accidents decline 6% this Ramadhan: ROP

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

THE number of accidents in the Sultanate of Oman during the holy month of Ramadhan has reduced by 4-6 per cent this Ramadhan as compared to last year’s Ramadhan, according to the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

Speaking to the Observer, Lieutenant Colonel Saif bin Ahmed al Ramadhani, Director, Executive Office, National Committee for Road Safety at the DG of Traffic, Royal Oman Police, said that the all-round efforts of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and other authorities have paid off and the rates of accidents are under control compared to some 10 years ago.

“There has been a decrease in traffic accidents by 15 per cent in March, compared to last year. There has been an overall reduction of around 24 per cent compared to last year, thanks to the increasing awareness campaigns and educational initiatives. The slight increase of accidents in March compared to other months is something around 2 to 3 per cent,” he said.

According to the studies conducted by the ROP, the major



LIEUTENANT COLONEL SAIF BIN AHMED AL RAMADHANI

The number of accidents and fatalities is high just before Iftar as people rush to reach their families. The number of accidents tends to increase during the month of Ramadhan and most of the accidents take place between 4 pm and 6 pm

reasons behind traffic accidents in Oman are three. “Speeding, usage of mobile phones and fatigue driving are the three main reasons for accidents in the country and the root cause of 87 per cent of the accidents is attributed to human error,” he said.

“Human behaviour, human errors and reckless driving are the main reasons followed by the vehicle factor where our departments pay careful attention to decide the safety measures of the vehicles from time to time and the road factor where the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Information Technology (MoTCIT) is building better roads and other infrastructure,” he added.

However, the number of accidents and fatalities is high just before Iftar as people rush to reach their families. The number of accidents tends to increase during the month of Ramadhan and most of the accidents take place between 4 pm and 6 pm, mostly during the pre-Iftar time, constituting 35 per cent.

EXTRA CAUTION

Al Ramadhani urged all motorists to pay more attention and be extra cautious on the road as traffic accidents usually show a spike during the holy month, during the

pre-Iftar hours in particular. “We can minimise and put a halt to such accidents by observing a number of factors. First of all, try to get enough rest before turning your engine on.

SPEEDING

Speeding is the real villain as it can result in fatal road traffic injuries and it is better safe than sorry. Get out of the habit of last-minute shopping in Ramadhan,” he said.

He said that using a mobile phone while driving is always a crime and during the holy month, phone plays the role of an even worse villain Last but certainly not least, fasten your seat belt while being in a moving car. “The ROP is making all efforts to reduce the number of accidents, road patrolling increased, more programmes to educate people not to rush, and the like the results of which are visible in the long run.”

BLACK SPOTS

Another issue is pedestrians using the wrong areas to cross the roads. “There are black spots where pedestrians cross dangerously and only strict rules can stop pedestrians crossing the main roads as traffic safety and people safety are one of the most important aspects of road safety in the country,” he said.

Dhofar’s winter charm draws tourists from across the globe

SALALAH: While Dhofar is world-renowned for its khareef season, winter unveils another spectacular facet of its tourism landscape. Drawing visitors from across the globe, particularly from Europe, this season showcases the governorate’s breathtaking natural beauty, rich heritage, and adventurous experiences.

Every year, Dhofar welcomes organised tourist groups from Germany, France, Italy, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Switzerland.

Travellers explore archaeological treasures like Al Baleed, Sumhuram, and Al Shisr, alongside the Museum of the Land of Frankincense and the historic forts of Taqah and Mirbat. The traditional Gold and Silver Souk, as well as the untouched wilderness of Jabal Samhan Reserve, further enhance the visitor experience.

For adventure seekers, Dhofar offers exhilarating activities, from free walking, mountain biking, and sandboarding to marine sports such as diving and kayaking.

Meanwhile, desert tourism captivates many foreign visitors, stretching from the frankincense-rich Wadi Dokah in the Wilayat of Thumrait to the golden dunes of Al Shisr. Activities such as camel riding, Bedouin cultural experiences, and sunset gazing over the vast sandscapes — spanning Al Hashman Sands to Ramlat Jadhila — offer an immersive taste of Arabia’s heritage.

Marwan bin Abdhakeem al Ghassani, Director of Promotion at the Directorate-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar, emphasised the ministry’s commitment to positioning Dhofar as a year-round destination. Efforts include intensified promotional campaigns, media familiarisation trips, and participation in international tourism exhibitions.

These initiatives are already yielding results, with new markets opening up, including direct charter flights from Uzbekistan and Belarus. Last year alone, over 70,000 tourists arrived via charter flights,



Dhofar Governorate’s breathtaking natural beauty draws visitors from across the globe, particularly Europe

with numbers expected to rise this season.

Saeed bin Ahmed Rir Omar, CEO of Al Fawaz Tourism Office, highlighted the consistent growth of inbound tourism, driven by strategic partnerships with global travel agencies. His company regularly organises trips for tourists from Austria, Germany, Sweden, Dubai,

and Central European nations, reinforcing Oman’s status as a premier winter retreat.

Tour guide Alawi bin Mohammed Ba’alawi noted that Oman’s reputation as a secure and culturally rich destination plays a key role in the sector’s steady expansion. Beyond its economic benefits, tourism provides employment

opportunities for local guides and transport providers, further strengthening community engagement.

European tourists are captivated by Dhofar’s diverse offerings. Petra Nawrocka, a tour guide at Slovakia’s Sator Travel, described her agency’s growing love for Oman since their first visit in 2019. “The country’s natural beauty, warm hospitality, and rich history make it a unique destination. The Rub al Khali desert, with its mesmerising dunes and golden sunsets, remains an all-time favourite,” she said.

She also highlighted the pristine beaches of Dhofar, particularly Al Fazayah, and the novelty of camel experiences for European visitors. “Omanis’ deep connection with their camels fascinates us. It’s an experience that leaves a lasting impression on our guests,” she added.

German tourist Valentin Brunner, now on his second visit to Oman, described his first trip to Salalah as “breathtaking.” — ONA

SHORT TAKES



Afaq will admit international students and Omanis who did not get a chance through acceptance via the Unified Admission Centre

SQU TO ACCEPT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

MUSCAT: As part of its plans to enhance its international rating and, in line with Oman Vision 2040, the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has announced a new Bachelor’s programme codenamed “Afaq” for the conditional admission of international students and Omanis who did not get a chance through acceptance via the Unified Admission Centre.

The programme, scheduled to be implemented with effect from the forthcoming academic year, sets specific terms and fees for the admission of international and Omani students who do not have access to their desired specialisations due to the Centre’s sorting process.

The admission of this segment will not affect the number of seats allocated for Omani students who compete through the Unified Admissions Centre every year. — ONA

MOCIIP WARNS OF MISUSE OF CRS FOR FAKE E-STORES



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has said there is an increase in online fraud cases involving individuals misusing registered commercial records to operate deceptive e-commerce stores.

In a statement, the ministry urged consumers to make purchases exclusively through e-commerce platforms licensed by the ministry and verified on the Maroof Oman platform to ensure a secure shopping experience.

The ministry also advised the public to verify that contact details provided by licensed online stores align with those listed in their commercial registration. Additionally, consumers are cautioned against transferring payments to personal accounts when making online purchases to mitigate the risk of fraud and financial loss. The warning comes as part of the ministry’s ongoing efforts to protect consumers and maintain a safe shopping experience.

Children of Bahla celebrate Laylat Al Aqba with joy and fun

AMAL AL RIYAMI
BAHLA, MARCH 17

Amid an atmosphere filled with spirituality and joy, the children of Bahla revived a cherished Ramadhan custom passed down through generations. Laylat Al Aqba, which falls in the middle of the holy month Ramadhan, is a celebration of children who have successfully fasted for 15 days, marking their achievement with a religious gathering full of supplications and praises.

Despite the differences in names and traditions, the common thread is the overwhelming joy that fills the hearts of children and their families, along with the spiritual ambiance that defines



Laylat Al Aqba, which falls in the middle of the holy month of Ramadhan, is a celebration of children who have successfully fasted for 15 days, marking their achievement with a religious gathering full of supplications and praises.

PHOTO BY SAMI AL HINAI

PROPOSED MUSANDAM AIRPORT TO ENTER BIDDING STAGE

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

The final design of the proposed Musandam Airport has been completed and a strategy is being prepared to start the tendering process. It was revealed by Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, during the recently held dialogue on the development of the governorates, which included Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Dakhiliyah and Musandam.

It may be noted that Governors are accorded more powers following the issuance of the Governorates System in 2022. It was also revealed



The runway will be expanded to 3,300 metres in the second phase

that the Dibba Lima-Khasab road is 40 per cent complete and is progressing well as per the timeline. Work is underway on the dual

carriageway between Farq and Izki while streetlight work will be completed on the Al Batinah Expressway before the end of the year. A study is underway to divert trucks on the road linking Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South governorates, without affecting economic activity.

As per earlier reports, Musandam Airport is expected to be ready in the second half of 2028. The project assumes significance due to operational challenges facing the current Khasab Airport, especially the possibility of operating services for 24 hours.

The project will be divided into phases. The first stage will

include a 45-metre-wide runway. A passenger building (to handle 250,000 passengers annually) will be constructed in addition to an air traffic control tower, runway (2,520 metres long and 45 metres wide), taxiways, a fire station, equipment repair shops, a marine rescue station and parking lots for aircraft.

There will be a new road of 7-km leading to the airport. In the second phase, the runway will be expanded to 3,300 metres capable of Airbus 330s, 350s and Boeing 787s and 777s, in addition to increasing the number of taxiways and parking lots for aircraft, an aircraft isolation yard and the terminal building (if required).

Islamic art exhibition of Sharjah Musesum opens

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

THE National Museum, in partnership with the Sharjah Museums Authority, launched the ‘Masterpieces of Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation’ exhibition. Held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism and Chairman of the the National Museum, and in the presence of Shaikh Sultan bin Ahmed al Qasimi, Deputy Ruler of Sharjah, the exhibition offers visitors a rare opportunity to explore 82 masterpieces of Islamic art, some displayed outside the UAE for the first time.

Among the unique pieces featured are the first Quran printed with lithographic technology and a silver cup bearing the tughra of Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II, highlighting the lasting influence of Islamic art across the ages.

Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, noted that this exhibition marks an extension of the ongoing cultural collaboration between Oman and the UAE.

“This exhibition represents a new chapter following the success of the ‘Omani Civilisation: Origins and Development’ exhibition in Sharjah in 2023,” Al Moosawi said. He added, “It showcases the scientific and artistic achievements of Islamic civilisation, which continues to inspire creativity and innovation today.”

The exhibition is divided into three distinct sections, each offering a deep dive into the arts and innovations that flourished during Islamic civilisation:

Arts of Calligraphy: Featuring rare Islamic manuscripts, Quranic pages and historic items such as curtains from the Prophet’s Mosque and Kiswa (Kaaba covering), this section highlights the development of Arabic calligraphy and its role in religious and artistic expression.

Additionally, it includes Islamic coins from the Umayyad and Abbasid periods,



Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi and Shaikh Sultan bin Ahmed al Qasimi watch the rare artefacts.

showcasing the art of calligraphic engraving on currency.

Science and Innovation: This section honours the groundbreaking contributions of Muslim scholars in fields such as astronomy, medicine and engineering, displaying artefacts like astrolabes, celestial globes and medical manuscripts. Visitors can also view tools used by Muslim physicians in the Middle Ages, reflecting the contributions of Islamic science to global knowledge.

Harmony and Diversity: Focusing on the aesthetic diversity of Islamic art, this section highlights geometric, floral and pictorial motifs that emerged between the 2nd and 14th centuries AH/28th century AD. These artworks reflect the cultural exchanges and trade influences that shaped Islamic civilisation over centuries.

Aisha Rashid Ali Bin Deemas, Director-General of the Sharjah Museums Authority, expressed pride in this collaboration,

emphasising the importance of cultural diplomacy in strengthening ties between Oman and the UAE. “This exhibition is a testament to the shared Islamic heritage that unites our peoples and fosters greater understanding through art,” she said.

The exhibition also offers an interactive experience for visitors, with digital demonstrations and interpretive panels that provide insight into the historical and cultural context of each piece. Additionally, guided programmes and workshops will help visitors engage more deeply with the rich history of Islamic art.

Running until May 3, the ‘Masterpieces of Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation’ exhibition is a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the artistic and scientific achievements of Islamic civilisation, highlighting the importance of cultural cooperation between museums in preserving this invaluable heritage for future generations.

RAMADHAN

AVOID
THE RUSH,
CELEBRATE
WISELY

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

AS EID APPROACHES, markets and malls transform into bustling hubs of activity, drawing families eager to complete their holiday preparations. The excitement of shopping for clothes, sweets, gifts and hospitality supplies is an integral part of the festive spirit.

However, the chaos and lack of planning often lead to unnecessary spending, with many families purchasing more than they need or splurging on non-essential items.

Economic consultant Walid al Rawahi highlights that one of the most common mistakes is postponing shopping until the final days of Ramadhan. This often results in hasty purchasing decisions, such as buying excessive quantities or unsuitable items that cannot be returned due to store policies or logistical constraints.

He explains, "Sufficient time is available to everyone, but it requires prior planning. Some families choose to shop at the last minute, leading to poor purchasing decisions under pressure and crowding. While Eid is about celebration, it doesn't necessitate extravagant spending."

As Ramadhan draws to a close, stores flood the market with promotions, attracting eager shoppers. While some see these offers as an opportunity to save, others view them as marketing tactics designed to encourage unnecessary spending.

Entrepreneur Noura al Muqimi points out, "Offers aren't always deceptive, but consumers must approach them wisely. Regular shoppers can distinguish between real and inflated discounts. The issue arises when families impulsively purchase items they didn't initially

plan for, often in excessive quantities." She adds, "Eid shopping habits vary across families - some prioritise children's needs, others spend lavishly, while some strike a balance. The difference lies in financial circumstances and consumer awareness."

A key factor contributing to pre-Eid congestion is that many families wait for their salaries before beginning their shopping, leading to overcrowding in markets in the final days of Ramadhan.

Al Muqimi explains, "Most citizens prefer to shop once their salaries are credited, putting immense pressure on markets. Families with financial flexibility tend to shop earlier, avoiding the last-minute rush and confusion."

Traditional Omani clothing remains a cornerstone of Eid preparations, though its high cost presents a financial challenge for some families.

Abdullah al Hosni from Muscat notes, "The custom of buying new clothes for Eid, especially traditional attire, is deeply rooted in our culture. However, this shouldn't lead to excessive spending. Moderation is key to maintaining financial stability while upholding traditions."

He further adds, "The crowding in markets isn't just about discounts; it's a reflection of cultural habits. While some indulge in extravagant purchases, the majority focus on essential items."

Muhannad al Rashidi from Nizwa observes that some families perceive Eid as a time for limitless spending, often leading to financial strain. He remarks, "Overbuying creates unnecessary financial pressure. The crowded markets also contribute to traffic congestion, stress for

consumers and added burden on retailers. Discounts significantly influence buying behaviour, especially with rising costs and taxes, but many shoppers end up purchasing items they never planned to buy."

Ismail al Kalbani emphasises that consumer culture plays a crucial role in shaping spending habits. He explains, "If individuals grow up in a consumer-driven environment, they are likely to adopt the same mindset. Some families start Eid shopping months in advance, helping them avoid last-minute price hikes and crowds." He warns, "Many people shop out of habit rather than necessity. After Eid, they realise they've spent large sums on unused items."

To avoid the pitfalls of wasteful spending and last-minute chaos, experts recommend the following strategies:

Plan ahead: Create a shopping list early to prioritise essential purchases and avoid impulse buying.

Spread out shopping: Start shopping weeks before Eid to access better deals and avoid crowded markets.

Compare prices: Research and verify discounts before purchasing to ensure they are genuine.

Set a budget: Determine a spending limit to keep expenses in check and prevent financial strain.

Eid shopping should be a joyful experience, reflecting the spirit of celebration rather than becoming a financial burden.

By planning ahead, making informed purchases and distinguishing between needs and wants, families can enjoy a stress-free shopping experience that enhances the festive atmosphere without unnecessary extravagance.



Sufficient time is available to everyone, but it requires prior planning. Eid is about celebration, it doesn't necessitate extravagant spending.

WALID AL
RAWAHI
Economic consultant

SHORT TAKES



The initiative seeks to address the growing challenges faced by diabetic patients

MoH launches AI screening for diabetic retinopathy

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) has launched a national project to screen diabetic retinopathy using artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, aiming to enhance early detection and improve eye care for diabetic patients across Oman.

The initiative seeks to address the growing challenges faced by diabetic patients in Oman, as diabetic retinopathy remains one of the most serious complications of diabetes, potentially leading to vision

loss if left undiagnosed. The primary objective of the project is to establish a national framework for the early detection and management of diabetic retinopathy. It also aims to reduce cases of vision impairment and preventable blindness while ensuring high-quality eye care services for patients.

According to the ministry, the project operates through 25 healthcare institutions equipped with advanced retinal imaging devices across all governorates of Oman. The screening programme targets all individuals diagnosed with diabetes, both Type 1 and Type 2.

Meanwhile, the ministry plans to expand the project by introducing additional screening programmes, including tests for glaucoma and moderate myopia. There are also plans to establish observation clinics for ongoing patient monitoring. The initiative further aims to enhance telemedicine projects by connecting diagnostic devices to reduce the burden on specialised medical facilities and to develop a locally trained AI model based on the data.

OMAN CONCLUDES TURIN SPECIAL OLYMPICS WINTER GAMES

TURIN: The Sultanate of Oman concluded its participation in the Special Olympics World Winter Games, ‘Turin 2025’, in the Republic of Italy. During the tournament, Oman won seven different medals — 1 gold medal, 2 silver medals and 4 bronze medals. The gold medal was won by Hossam bin Nasser al Amri, in the 300-metre speed skating event. One of the two silver medals was won by Hossam bin Nasser



al Amri — in the 200-metre speed skating event — and the other — Hossam bin Nasser al Amri bagged the gold in the speed skating event

was won by Al Baraa bin Malik al Battashi, in the 100-metre cross-country event. Out of the four bronze medals, Retaj al Salmi won 2 bronze medals in the 200-metre and 100-metre speed skating events, while 1 bronze was won by Al Baraa bin Malik al Battashi in the cross-country skating event and 1 bronze was won by Amira al Raissi in the 100-metre snow running event. — ONA

Dhofar invests RO 849,000 in social development

THE Directorate-General of Social Development in Dhofar Governorate continues to drive social progress through a series of key initiatives and infrastructure projects aimed at supporting persons with disabilities, family welfare and community partnerships.

Mohammed bin Hamid al Kalbani, Director-General, highlighted the ongoing construction projects set for completion in 2025.

These include a new Social Development Department building, an Omani Women’s Association facility, and the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands, with an estimated cost of RO 558,000 and a 90-per cent completion rate.

A hydrotherapy unit at the Al Wafa Centre in Taqah, costing RO 159,000, has also reached 90 per cent completion, while comprehensive maintenance projects in Mirbat and Thamrait are in the bidding and awarding phase.

The directorate has outlined a strategic plan to enhance rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities in response to rising demand across various



The directorate has launched 16 initiatives focusing on family development, institutional support

The directorate has outlined a strategic plan to enhance rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities

willayats. In 2024 alone, RO 849,000 in social assistance was provided to 6,557 Omani families. The number of individuals enrolled in Al Wafa Centres in Salalah, Taqah and Mirbat reached 398, while private rehabilitation centres registered 408 enrollees. Additionally, 149 individuals benefited from early intervention services in government centres, with 234 receiving such services in private institutions. The provision of prosthetic devices and support services benefited 234 persons with disabilities.

Community engagement remains a priority, with social development committees managing 10 charitable teams that collectively received RO 643,000 in aid last year. For 2025, the directorate has already launched 16 initiatives focusing on family development, institutional support and disability rights. Meanwhile, 45 awareness programmes have been approved under the development awareness plan.

In 2024, the directorate conducted 324 awareness and guidance programmes across various sectors, benefiting over 20,893 individuals at a total cost of RO 57,000. The past year also saw major infrastructure upgrades, including the opening of the Social Development Department building in Al Mazyouna and the Omani Women’s Association, valued at RO 807,000.

Comprehensive maintenance projects were undertaken for facilities in Rakhyout (RO 65,000), Taqah (RO 85,000), and the directorate’s customer service hall. Aligning with Oman Vision 2040, the Directorate-General of Social Development in Dhofar is committed to expanding social welfare programmes, enhancing rehabilitation services and strengthening governance in social initiatives. — ONA

UTAS Sur students launch campaign on cyber safety

SUR: Students of public relations major at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Sur (UTAS) launched a public awareness campaign on cyber safety titled, ‘Jabil Ammrk’.

Dr Sana al Hadabi, Deputy of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, unveiled the name and logo of the campaign marking the official beginning of campaign activities.

Dr Raya al Hajri, Deputy Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Electronic Systems and Student Services, Hana al Sulaimi, Head of Mass Communication Department, directors of various centres, faculty members and students attended the event.

The campaign focuses on educating the community about the growing risks of cyber threats and the importance of protecting personal information online. The ‘Jabil Ammrk’ campaign aims to provide students, professionals and the community with comprehensive knowledge and skills to develop safer digital habits.

Revealing the logo, Dr Al Hadabi said: “The logo reflects the theme of the



UTAS students launched ‘Jabil Ammrk’, a public awareness campaign on cyber safety

campaign, reminding individuals to be aware and protect themselves online. This initiative is an excellent example of how students can use public relations to address real-world challenges.”

During the launch event, public relations students explained the importance of the theme of cyber safety and offered details of the meaning of the campaign logo. The logo design represents vigilance, awareness and digital responsibility, encouraging individuals to be mindful of their actions in the digital space. The campaign highlights key topics such as

password security, phishing, scams and privacy protection to help people navigate the online world safely.

Hawraa al Jahwari, Public Relations student, expressed pride in the campaign, saying, “Jabil Ammrk reflects the importance of being cautious and responsible in the digital world. It serves as a reminder to think before we click, share, or engage online. The logo visually represents this idea, with its structured design symbolising protection and awareness. This campaign encourages everyone to be mindful of their online actions and prioritise cyber safety.”



Tender Announcement

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Fee (Non-refundable) OMR	Tender Purchase Deadline	Clarification Deadline	Tender Submission Date
TENDER/ 2025/03/ ENG/011	CONSTRUCTION OF COMMERCIAL BUILDING AT AWQAD IN DHOFAR GOVERNORATE	50	24.03.2025	27.03.2025	09.04.2025
TENDER/ 2025/03/ ENG/012	CONSTRUCTION OF NEW FILLING STATION AT SUWAIQ HARBOUR IN AL BATINAH SOUTH GOVERNORATE	50			

Bank Name & Account Number
Bank. Muscat (0423005687760617)

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments registered under grade 3 and above (in C.R) with minimum of 3 years' experience in the same field. Bidders can collect the tender documents from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to procurement@almaha.com.om The tender may be collected on any working day between 08:00 AM – 03:00 PM.
- Bank Guarantee:** The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.
- Offer Submission:** Tender bid should be submitted a sealed envelope and addressed to the Chairman of Tender Committee, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelope containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.
- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 01:00 PM on the submission date.
- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without giving any reasons.
- For any enquiry email us at (procurement@almaha.com.om) or by calling **24610289/24610287/24610355**

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co. (SAOG)
PO Box No: 57, PC: 116, Mina Al Fahal, Sultanate of Oman

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Representatives attend the Brussels IX Conference “Standing with Syria”, at the Europa Building in Brussels. — AFP

EU PLEDGES 2.5 BILLION EUROS FOR SYRIA AID

BRUSSELS: The EU on Monday vowed around 2.5 billion euros (\$2.7 billion) in aid for Syria as the bloc seeks to help the country’s recovery after the ouster of Bashar al Assad. “Syrians need greater support, whether they are still abroad, or they decide to go home. And this is why today the European Union is increasing its pledge for Syrians in the country and in the region to almost 2.5 billion euros for 2025 and 2026,” European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen told a donor conference in Brussels.

Earlier on Monday, Germany kicked off a new pledging round of aid for Syria, as the EU hosted a donor drive for the war-torn country after the ouster of Bashar al Assad. “There can only be a peaceful future for Syria if there is an inclusive political process,” German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said. She announced Berlin would provide an additional 300 million euros (\$327 million) for the United Nations and other organisations providing assistance for Syrians in the country and around the region. — AFP

EU SANCTIONS RWANDANS AHEAD CONGO PEACE TALKS



Congoese and Belgian citizens take part in a protest, in Brussels. — Reuters

BRUSSELS: The European Union sanctioned nine people and a gold refinery on Monday in connection with a Rwanda-backed rebellion in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, a day before peace talks scheduled in Angola between M23 rebels and the Congoese government. The sanctions targeted M23 political leader Bertrand Bisimwa and Rwandan army commanders. They were also applied to the chief executive of Rwanda Mines, Petroleum and Gas Board and Gasabo Gold Refinery in Kigali, which the EU accused of illicitly exporting natural resources from Congo.

Amid a flurry of diplomatic activity, a rebel alliance that includes M23 confirmed it would send a five-member delegation to Tuesday’s talks in Luanda, which could mark M23’s first direct negotiations with the Congoese government. Congo President Felix Tshisekedi’s office said on Sunday that Kinshasa would send representatives to Luanda, reversing the government’s long-standing vow not to negotiate with the group, which it has dismissed as a mere front for the Rwandan government. Pressure has been growing on Tshisekedi to negotiate with M23 after a series of battlefield setbacks since January. — Reuters

FUND SHORTAGE

WHO says Kabul operations risk shutdown



The World Health Organization said on Monday 80 per cent of services that it supports in Afghanistan could shut down by June due to a funding shortage. The UN health agency said the cash shortfall is tied to a shift in “development aid priorities”. The agency said that 167 such operations have already closed due to a lack of financial support. Afghanistan relies largely on NGOs, UN agencies and aid donors to keep the health system afloat. — AFP

S KOREA OPPOSITION URGES SWIFT RULING ON PRESIDENT’S FATE

SEOUL: South Korea’s opposition party on Monday urged the country’s Constitutional Court to rule swiftly on suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol’s impeachment, saying delays were “irresponsible” and causing social unrest. Despite experts predicting a verdict by mid-March, the Constitutional Court has yet to rule — making Yoon’s case the longest deliberation in its history. Some 100,000 people took to Seoul’s streets over the weekend, police said on Monday, with protests

demanding Yoon’s immediate removal from office, alongside large gatherings in support of him. “The nation and its people have reached their limits. Tension and patience have already been pushed beyond their bounds,” opposition MP Kim Min-seok said on Monday. “We await a responsible decision from the Constitutional Court. Any further delay would be abnormal and irresponsible.” South Korean authorities had last week requested a drone ban

in the area around the court, prompting speculation in local media that the ruling would come imminently. But the drone ban will be extended at weekly intervals until the end of March, police said, adding that it was intended to block potential threats, around the time of the Constitutional Court’s impeachment ruling. All predictions on when the verdict will come are “purely speculative” at this stage, a political commentator, said. — AFP

Ansar Allah claims attack on US aircraft carrier

YEMEN’S Ansar Allah said they attacked an American aircraft carrier group twice within 24 hours as they prepared for huge rallies on Monday after US strikes left dozens dead. The response from the Ansar Allah follows attacks on Saturday ordered by President Donald Trump that hammered the capital, Sanaa, and several other areas, killing 53 people, according to the group.

The United States struck the Ansar Allah over their repeated attacks on Red Sea shipping sparked by the Gaza war, which have put a major strain on the vital trade route. The group said it had hit back by firing 18 missiles and a drone at the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier group on Sunday, before launching a second strike hours later. There was no immediate comment from the United States about the claimed attacks. In a statement posted to the continued American aggression against our country”. Washington has vowed to keep striking Yemen until the Ansar Allah stop attacking Red Sea shipping, with Trump warning he would use “overwhelming lethal force”. Sanaa’s Al Sabeen Square, the scene of regular major protests during the Israel-Hamas war, looked set to be packed once again for Monday’s rally. Late on Saturday, the Ansar Allah-controlled capital was hit by heavy strikes. The Yemeni health ministry said women and children were among the 53 people



People inspect the rubble of a house hit by a US strike in Yemen's northern Saada province. — AFP

The group said it had hit back by firing 18 missiles and a drone at the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier group on Sunday, before launching a second strike hours later. A group’s spokesperson said the attacks were “in retaliation to the continued American aggression against our country”

killed and 98 wounded. “The house shook, the windows shattered, and my family and I were terrified,” father of two Ahmed, who declined to give his full name, said. The strikes were the first since Trump came to office in January, and came despite a pause in the attacks during a ceasefire in the Gaza war. On Sunday, US officials vowed further strikes until the rebels ended their campaign against Red Sea shipping. Yemenis media reported more explosions late on Sunday night, accusing the Americans of targeting a cotton facility in the Hodeida region and the Galaxy Leader, a cargo ship hijacked in November 2023. In response to the latest escalation along the maritime trade route, the United Nations urged both sides to “cease all military activity”, while

China reiterated calls for diplomacy. “The reasons behind the situation in the Red Sea and the Yemen issue are complex and should be properly resolved through dialogue and negotiation,” said foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning. The Ansar Allah have attacked Israel and shipping vessels throughout the Gaza war, saying they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians. Before this weekend’s targeting of the US carrier group, the Ansar Allah had not claimed attacks in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden since January 19, when the ceasefire in Gaza began. However, they had threatened to resume its attacks over Israel’s blocking of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian territory. It said it would “move to additional escalatory options” if the “American aggression” continued.— AFP



ISRAELI AIR STRIKE KILLS THREE IN GAZA

GAZA: An Israeli air strike killed three Palestinian men in the Gaza Strip, medics said on Monday, and there was no sign of progress at renewed ceasefire talks. Medics said the three men were killed near Bureij camp in the centre of the devastated Palestinian enclave by a missile fired from a drone. Israel’s military did not immediately comment. In Rafah medics said three people were wounded in another air strike. Rafah residents have reported frequent fire by Israeli forces deployed in areas adjacent to the border inside the city boundaries. The bloodshed underscores the fragility of a three-stage ceasefire agreement. — AFP

INTENSIFIED FIGHTING

Paramilitary shelling kills six in Sudan



Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces shelled Omdurman killing six civilians, including two children. Sunday’s attack, blamed on the RSF, also wounded 36 civilians, half of them children. It struck residential areas in northern Omdurman, hitting civilians inside their homes and children playing on a football field. From Khartoum alone, at least 3.5 million people have been forced from their homes due to the violence. — AFP

GOODWILL VISIT

Yunus to visit China this month



Bangladeshi leader Muhammad Yunus will travel to Beijing on a diplomatic goodwill visit this month as frosty relations with India spur his caretaker administration to court new friends. “Bangladesh aims to elevate this bilateral relationship to new heights,” Yunus’s media secretary said. “They will discuss a wide range of issues concerning both countries.” Yunus is slated to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping during the March 26-29 visit. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks during a press briefing in Dhaka. — AFP

UN CHIEF TO HOLD TALKS WITH RIVAL CYPRUS LEADERS

GENEVA: UN chief Antonio Guterres was to meet the rival Cypriot leaders to kick off two days of informal talks aimed at finding a “way forward” on the divided island. Guterres was to convene President Nikos Christodoulides of the Greek-speaking, internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus and Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar at the United Nations offices in Geneva. The guarantor powers of Britain, Greece and Turkiye were also set to participate.

“This meeting is being held in the context of the secretary-general’s good offices’ efforts on the Cyprus issue,” a UN spokeswoman said. “The informal meeting will provide an opportunity for a meaningful discussion on the way forward.”

The rival Cypriot leaders also met in January to discuss opening more crossing points across the divided island, as part of trust-building efforts to revive stalled peace talks. They met in the buffer zone that has split the Mediterranean island for decades. There are currently nine crossings along the UN-patrolled Green Line that separates the two sides. Thousands cross daily for work, education, or medical care. — AFP

CANADA 'S CARNEY INVITES ZELENSKY



Canada’s Prime Minister Mark Carney has invited Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to the G7 summit in June in the western province of Alberta, a government official said on Monday. The invitation comes amid an uncertain approach among the Group of Seven powerful democracies toward the Russia-Ukraine war since US President Donald Trump returned to office. Carney, who is visiting Paris and London this week, posted on social media on Sunday that in their call Zelensky gave an update “on Ukraine’s defence and global efforts to advance peace.” — AFP

GEORGIA’S EX-LEADER SAAKASHVILI TO SPEND 12.5 YEARS IN PRISON

TBILISH: A Georgian court on Monday sentenced ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili to four and a half years behind bars for illegally crossing the border, bringing the pro-Western politician’s total sentence to 12.5 years. Saakashvili, 57, was sentenced in absentia in 2018 to six years in prison for abuse of office and, last week, he received a nine-year sentence for mispending public funds from the Caucasus country.

On Monday, Saakashvili was

sentenced to “four years and six months in prison for illegally crossing Georgia’s border” when he covertly returned from exile in Ukraine, lawyer Dito Sadzaglishvili said. “Taking into account the combination of sentences, Mikheil Saakashvili’s overall prison term is set at 12 years and six months,” said Judge Mikheil Jinjolia. Saakashvili and rights groups have denounced his prosecution as politically motivated. He is being held in a civilian hospital, where he was

transferred in 2022 after staging a 50-day hunger strike to protest over his detention.

The European Parliament has called for his immediate release, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has demanded that Saakashvili, a Ukrainian national since 2019, be transferred to Kyiv. Zelensky — who appointed Saakashvili as his top adviser to oversee reforms — accused Russia of “killing” Saakashvili “at the hands of the Georgian authorities”. — AFP

Ukraine launches drone attacks on Russia refinery

UKRAINIAN

forces launched a drone attack on southern Russia overnight, sparking a blaze at an oil refinery, local authorities said on Monday, as Moscow launched a barrage of nearly 200 drones against Ukraine. The Ukrainian attack on the oil refinery in Russia’s southern Astrakhan region was the latest in a series of aerial strikes by both sides targeting energy facilities. Regional Governor Igor Babushkin said staff of a “fuel and energy” complex were evacuated before the attack, which sparked a large blaze. “One person was wounded during the attack. The victim has now been taken to the hospital,” Babushkin wrote on social media.

The latest bombardment comes as Ukraine criticised Russia for refusing to accept a US-proposed 30-day ceasefire without any preconditions. Moscow launched its own barrage of some 174 drones on Ukraine, where air defence units shot down 90 drones, including the Iranian-designed Shahed type drone, the air force said. Around 500 people in the southern region of Odesa lost power because of the attacks and one person was wounded there, Governor Oleg Kiper said, adding several buildings were damaged, including a preschool.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and US counterpart Donald Trump will speak by phone on Tuesday, as one US official expressed hope the two could agree on a Ukraine ceasefire within weeks.

Trump said earlier that “a lot of work” had been done between the United States and Russia on settling the three-year Ukraine conflict, and that there was a “very good chance” hostilities would end.

Putin said last week he agreed with the idea of a ceasefire but warned he had “serious questions” about how it would be implemented that he wanted to discuss with Trump. Kyiv has agreed to the ceasefire, while its European allies have criticised Putin for not committing to an unconditional and immediate halt in fighting, with the UK accusing the Russian leader of “dragging his feet”. “There is such a conversation being



A Ukrainian tank drives on a road in a village in the Dnipropetrovsk region. — AFP

prepared for Tuesday,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters ahead of the Trump-Putin call, without commenting on what the two leaders would

Prime Minister Keir Starmer and President Emmanuel Macron teaming up to lead Europe’s backing of Ukraine during Donald Trump’s tumultuous second presidency highlights a warming British-Franco relationship, insiders and analysts say. Relations between the cross-Channel neighbours nosedived during acrimonious negotiations over Britain’s departure from the European Union following a shock 2016 referendum result.

Starmer came into office in July vowing his Labour party would “reset” Britain’s relationship with European allies, an approach he has doubled down on since Donald Trump’s White House return and subsequent upending of US foreign policy. “From before coming into government, Keir Starmer has prioritised building a strong relationship with President Macron,” said a Downing Street source, speaking on condition of anonymity. “It’s clear that they have a warm personal relationship and complementary skills. There is huge respect on both sides, which was built before

the current epochal challenge and is now invaluable.”

The pair have gathered European leaders and other allies to respective summits in Paris and London as they attempt to assemble a “coalition of the willing” — countries prepared to protect any ceasefire. Starmer and Macron say they are prepared to deploy troops to Ukraine, backed by US support, to deter Putin from violating any truce. They are trying to convince other nations to do the same or help through different types of support, such as logistics and surveillance.

Starmer convened the latest meeting of interested countries on Saturday in a virtual gathering of around 25 leaders. The meeting came after Macron told military chiefs from across Europe and beyond to move “from concept to plan” and “define credible security guarantees” for Kyiv. “The teams are working hand in glove,” the Downing Street source said. Britain and France are acting as key intermediaries between Ukraine and Trump’s administration. Both countries’ national security advisers, along with Germany’s, met a top aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in the Polish capital this week. — AFP

North Macedonia mourns dozens killed in club blaze

SKOPJE: North Macedonia lowered flags to half staff and people flocked to memorials on Monday as the nation mourned a horrific club blaze that killed 59 people at the weekend. The blaze at the hip-hop concert in the eastern town of Kocani, which also injured around 155 people, triggered an outpouring of grief in the small Balkan country where authorities vowed an investigation.

The fire started as a crowd of young fans packed into Club Pulse to attend the performance by a popular hip-hop duo called DNK, with the blaze apparently ignited by fireworks onstage. One of DNK’s singers, Andrej Gjorgjieski, was killed and the other, Vladimir Blazeov, was injured, while a guitarist, a drummer and a back-up singer also died. In the capital Skopje, hundreds massed at a university amid frigid rain for a student-led memorial ceremony, where people paused for several minutes of silence and

laid flowers and lit candles at a makeshift shrine.

Emotions ran high for some. “I think that this is not an accident but literary direct murder due to all the breaches that are being done in the state. We cannot be silent all the time no matter how afraid are we,” said Angela Zumbakova, a 19-year-old student of psychology.

In Kocani, dozens waited in line to sign a book of condolences. More than 20 people were under investigation over the incident, 15 of whom were already in police custody, while others were in hospital, according to the interior minister.

The list of suspects includes the owner of the club, the organiser of the event, and people responsible for security. A former director of the rescue services and a state secretary at the economy ministry were also among those detained. The interior ministry also said that around 500



A student lights a candle at the University of Skopje during a memorial ceremony, in Skopje. — AFP

people were packed inside the venue, even though just 250 tickets had been sold.

On Sunday, the head of the Kocani hospital, Kristina Serafimovska, said that many of the dead “suffered

injuries from the stampede that occurred in the panic while trying to exit”. The government has announced a seven-day mourning period. “Let us unite our forces, let us not allow anyone else to sacrifice

standards for profit, nothing is more valuable than the lives of young people,” North Macedonia’s President Gordana Siljanovska said late on Sunday.

Videos posted on social networks and shot before the fire showed there were “stage fountains” set up — a type of indoor fireworks used during performances. Other videos showed huge flames emerging from the building, a white two-storey structure in Kocani, a town of around 30,000 residents.

The prosecutor’s office later said the club had breached several fire regulations, including having insufficient extinguishers and emergency exits. The club did not have a licence to use fireworks and did not have required safety vehicles parked outside. Support from countries across Europe also flooded in, with several patients in critical condition transferred to hospitals abroad. — AFP

OPINION

Is bombing Yemen an effective solution?



EDITORIAL

THE recent air strikes ordered by President Donald Trump against certain targets in Yemen have sparked significant debate regarding their effectiveness and potential consequences. However, to determine whether bombing Yemen is a viable solution, considering several factors is crucial, including historical context, military effectiveness and humanitarian impact.

Oman has voiced deep concern over such escalation in Yemen and its resulting humanitarian repercussions and civilian casualties. It expressed its regret over the military operations which worsens the suffering of the Yemeni people and increases instability. Oman reiterated its firm stance calling for peaceful solutions through dialogue and negotiation, warning of the repercussions of military action while calling for addressing the root causes of the crises through sustainable political solutions that ensure stability and development for the peoples of the region.

Trump's recent air strikes in Yemen were described as an attempt to deter attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea. However, experts have pointed out that previous military campaigns against the Ansar Allah have not effectively diminished their capabilities.

The Ansar Allah have demonstrated

adaptability in their operations. Therefore, while air strikes may disrupt the Ansar Allah's operations temporarily, they are unlikely to provide a long-term solution to the conflict.

Yemen is already suffering from a severe humanitarian crisis exacerbated by ongoing conflict. The recent air strikes reportedly resulted in civilian casualties, with estimates indicating that at least 31 people were killed. Such actions can further alienate local populations and increase resentment toward foreign intervention.

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen has been one of the most severe global emergencies in recent years. It has resulted from a complex interplay of factors, including ongoing conflict, economic collapse and foreign intervention.

The bombing campaign also carries significant geopolitical risks. By escalating military action against the Ansar Allah, Trump may provoke further retaliation and this could lead to broader regional instability. Additionally, without a comprehensive diplomatic strategy accompanying military action, there is little chance for achieving lasting peace or stability in Yemen.

Oman has consistently advocated for peace in Yemen through a multifaceted diplomatic approach that emphasises dialogue, mediation and humanitarian support. Oman has played a crucial role in facilitating

While the bombing may provide short-term tactical advantages against the Ansar Allah forces, it fails to address underlying political grievances or humanitarian needs

dialogue between conflicting parties. It has hosted numerous talks involving Yemeni officials and foreign diplomats aimed at finding a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

Oman has also provided humanitarian assistance to alleviate suffering caused by the ongoing conflict. This includes offering medical care to injured Yemenis and allowing refugees to seek safety within its borders. The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is dire, with millions facing food insecurity and lack of basic services; thus, Oman's support is vital for many affected individuals.

Oman's call for peace in Yemen is rooted in its long-standing principles of neutrality and diplomacy. By facilitating dialogue among conflicting parties and providing humanitarian assistance, Oman aims to foster a sustainable resolution to one of the region's most pressing crises. Its unique position allows it to act as a bridge between various factions while advocating for an inclusive political solution that prioritises stability and security for both Yemen and Oman itself.

While the bombing may provide short-term tactical advantages against the Ansar Allah forces, it fails to address underlying political grievances or humanitarian needs. A more comprehensive approach that includes diplomatic engagement alongside any military action would be necessary for achieving sustainable peace in Yemen.

HEAT LINKED TO HEART DISEASE IN AUSTRALIA

CHIARA PALAZZO

Researchers in Australia have drawn a link between cardiovascular disease and hot weather, forecasting that the heart disease burden could double by the 2050s if current climate trends continue, according to a paper published on Monday.

Researchers have found that an average of 49,483 years of healthy life were lost yearly to cardiovascular disease caused by hot weather in Australia from 2003 to 2018.

The authors of the study, published in the European Heart Journal, used data from the Australian Burden of Disease Database on illness or death caused by heart disease during that span.

They then calculated that about 7.3 per cent of the total burden due cardiovascular disease or death can be attributed to extreme weather conditions.

Their modelling suggests that that figure could double or even triple by 2050, depending on different greenhouse gas emissions scenarios outlined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The lower emissions scenario would correspond to a lower burden - 139,828 on average of years of healthy life lost annually by 2050 - while the higher emissions scenario would correspond to a higher burden - 161,095 on average of years of healthy life lost annually by 2050.

“When the weather is hot, our hearts must work harder to help us cool down. This added pressure can be dangerous, especially for people with cardiovascular disease,” said Prof Peng Bi from the University of Adelaide.

“Although our study is focused on Australia, the fundamental link between higher temperatures and increased cardiovascular risk has been documented globally.”

“This study combines several key factors - climate change, population shifts, and adaptation scenarios - to give a full picture of the disease burden across Australia,” said lead author Dr Jingwen Liu from the University of Adelaide.

“This makes our study one of the first of its kind globally.”

“Our models rely on assumptions that may not capture every real-life detail; however, despite these uncertainties, our comprehensive approach makes the study valuable for planning future climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies,” Liu said. — dpa

Cities in a changing world

A report from the World Government Summit 2025, titled ‘The Liveability of Cities in the Age of Digital Citizenship’, predicts that by 2050, nearly 70 per cent of the global population will reside in urban areas. As millions continue to migrate from rural regions to cities in pursuit of better job opportunities, education and quality of life, urban centres remain hubs for culture, innovation and economic growth.

Despite the challenges of urbanisation, cities strive to expand infrastructure and services while ensuring public health, safety and well-being. Governments worldwide prioritise the development of sustainable, resilient cities that balance modern lifestyles with economic competitiveness and social vitality.

Urban planning today is not just about infrastructure; it focuses on enhancing liveability, economic prosperity and social well-being. Cities that adapt to changing needs and expectations remain dynamic and attractive, incorporating green spaces, cycling paths and pedestrian-friendly environments that foster both physical and mental well-being.

Oman has made significant strides in modern urban planning, aligning with Oman Vision 2040. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning strategy aims to create cities that integrate economic and social aspirations while fostering private sector partnerships. This approach promotes regional development, optimising land and natural resources, ensuring balanced growth and supporting environmental sustainability.Oman's urban vision is entering a transformative phase, particularly with its emphasis on sustainable cities. The priority given to regional development has led to improvements in infrastructure, service quality and decentralised governance, enhancing economic competitiveness and social well-being. This shift underscores a



While Sultan Haitham City represents the future, Omani cities have long been distinguished by their architectural heritage and sustainable practices. Their urban identity is shaped by social and cultural traditions

commitment to creating cities that are not only functional but also adaptable to evolving societal needs.

A prime example of this vision is Sultan Haitham City, designed to be a model for sustainable. The city is envisioned as an investment-friendly, high-quality living destination, integrating renewable energy, water conservation and eco-friendly infrastructure.

Historically, Omani cities have preserved their architectural integrity while evolving to meet modern demands. The rapid pace of urban transformation has introduced new planning priorities, particularly in Muscat and other major urban centres. These cities are expanding infrastructure and services to accommodate internal migration and investment growth, aiming to balance development with environmental preservation.

Oman's shift towards decentralised governance further supports the creation of sustainable cities. Each governorate possesses distinct resources and strengths, and the goal is to enhance their appeal to both residents and investors. Strengthening urban

resilience ensures that cities can withstand social and economic fluctuations while maintaining their attractiveness and functionality.

As the Arab world marked Arab City Day on March 15, Oman's commitment to flexible and sustainable urban development is worth celebrating. The country's urban vision is not just about modernising architecture but fostering a balance between growth, transparency and community engagement.

Omani cities, rich in history and cultural identity, now face the challenge of expanding services and prioritising human-centred development. Ensuring liveability and economic viability will enhance their competitiveness and adaptability in a rapidly evolving world. Forward-thinking planning, aligned with citizen needs and aspirations, will be key to shaping cities that are not only functional but also thriving hubs of innovation and opportunity.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari
The original version of this article was published in Oman Arabic newspaper on March 16



AISHA AL DARMAKI
The writer is a member of the State Council and a researcher specialising in semiotics

Changes in behavioural patterns...



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

HUMAN behaviour changes according to circumstances, and we can see that during the holy month of Ramadhan. This is one of the important lessons we can learn from the holy month that sees millions of people fast from dawn to dusk.

Food and water, factors that are essential, are often taken for granted on normal days. Then comes Ramadhan when people refrain from water and food until it is time to break the fast. This is an opportunity to understand the value of water to quench thirst. We begin to value food as a source; we appreciate the farmers and the people who cook it. Most importantly, we are able to practice empathy.

We understand the significance of food in providing us with the required energy to function. Our brain, our mind, and our body need it. So imagine the plight of people who are deprived of it. That is deprived of proper food not just for a month, but as a regular reality.

The time of Iftar is when the fast is broken, and it becomes a special moment, especially when everyone gathers together. Breaking the fast together, praying together, and have food together creates a unique bond in a world of individualism. The beauty of mass Iftars held in Oman is the fact that most of the people may not even know each other. Expatriates from different countries and different cultural backgrounds sit together and have the same food. Another feature is sitting on the ground. Many mosques

in Oman become important venues for people to gather for Iftars. Some people find the occasion a wonderful opportunity to contribute to the welfare of society by providing cooked food and fresh fruits.

Rusayil roundabout has a story to convey during this year of fasting. The round has been seeing traffic jams for longer periods during this Ramadhan.

Lt Col Saif bin Ahmed al Ramadhani, Director of the Executive Office of the National Committee for Road Safety, explained that this year more and more people are choosing to go to their hometowns on a daily basis during the holy month.

The reason?

He explained that people are eager to spend the Iftar moments with their family members. Before, the trend was to spend the weekdays in Muscat and then go home for weekends.

Eating together, whether with family, friends, or colleagues, has numerous benefits that extend beyond simply sharing a meal. Some of the key advantages are enhanced social bonds, a sense of belonging, improved communication skills, listening skills, better mental health, stress reduction, mindful eating, passing down traditions, exploring culinary practices, and most importantly, mindfulness and gratitude.

Attending community Iftars brings in strengthened relationships because shared meals foster connection. Eating together allows individuals to engage in conversation, share stories, and build stronger emotional

Many mosques in Oman become important venues for people to gather for iftars. Some people find the occasion a wonderful opportunity to contribute to the welfare of society by providing cooked food and fresh fruits

ties. Regular communal meals create a feeling of community and belonging, which is essential for emotional well-being.

The gatherings are perfect places to practice conversations leading to improved interpersonal interactions. Discussions during meals encourage active listening and attention to others, which are vital social skills. These are great opportunities for the youth. The gatherings are great to reduce loneliness because communal eating can combat feelings of isolation and loneliness, enhancing overall mental health. Another wonderful initiative to indulge in is to be a volunteer.

There is more to sharing a meal because it can provide a sense of comfort and relaxation, reducing stress levels and allowing for a break from daily pressures.

Another advantage to eating together is that it encourages more mindful eating practices, promoting awareness of food choices and portion sizes.

Communal gatherings could encourage balanced food intake, as families and groups often prepare balanced meals, leading to healthier diets compared to solo eating, which may lean towards foods of convenience.

Shared meals offer an opportunity to pass down cultural and family traditions related to food, fostering a sense of identity and continuity at the same time as a platform to try different dishes together and enjoy diverse dishes and promote cultural understanding.

NEW CANADA PM SEEKS ‘RELIABLE’ EUROPE ALLIES

FRANCESCO FONTEMAGGI

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said on Monday that his country was seeking to reinforce ties with “reliable” European allies, as he embarked on a transatlantic trip after his country’s economy and even sovereignty came under unprecedented threat from its southern neighbour the United States.

Carney, the former Bank of England governor who succeeded Justin Trudeau last week, conspicuously chose key Europe powers France and the United Kingdom, rather than the United States, for his first foreign visits after President Donald Trump ramped up the rhetoric against Canada. Describing Canada as the “most European of non-European countries”, Carney said his nation needed to boost ties with European allies like France while trying to retain positive relations with the United States.

“It is more important than ever for Canada to reinforce its ties with reliable allies like France,” Carney said during a press conference with President Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee Palace on his first trip abroad since becoming prime minister on Friday.

“I want to ensure that France and the whole of Europe work enthusiastically with Canada, the most European of non-European countries, determined like you to maintain the most positive possible relations with the United States,” Carney said.

Carney faces threats on three fronts: a trade war with the Washington, Trump’s threats to annex his country, and looming domestic elections.

Trump’s imposition of an escalating raft of import tariffs on Canadian goods has threatened to trigger a recession, and his scorn for Canadian sovereignty sent jitters through the former ally.

Opinion polls show a large majority of Canadian voters reject Trump’s argument that their country would be better off as the “51st state of the United States”.

But the trade war is a threat to the economy of the vast country of 41 million people, which has long enjoyed a close US partnership.

Canada, France and Britain are among the Nato members that have maintained strong support for Ukraine’s beleaguered government and military since Russia’s all-out war in February 2022, even as Trump’s US administration has bullied Kyiv to make concessions to Moscow.

London and Paris are putting together plans for a coalition security force in Ukraine and looking for allies.

Canada and France want a “solid and lasting peace, accompanied by robust guarantees that will protect Ukraine against any further Russian war and ensure the security of the whole of Europe,” Macron said alongside Carney. — AFP

For a North American Economic Union!

TRADE and political tensions between the United States and its immediate neighbours, Canada and Mexico, are at historic highs, raising fears of a full-scale trade war and a collapse of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which itself was a renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The way President Donald Trump tells it, both countries could be doing more to rein in the flow of migrants and fentanyl. Moreover, since each runs a large trade surplus vis-à-vis the US, he accuses them of unfair trade practices, and of serving as a foothold for Chinese exporters seeking to circumvent US tariffs.

But Trump is not only pressing these concerns. He is also insulting both countries, by arguing that Canada should give up its sovereignty and become America’s 51st state, renaming the Gulf of Mexico, and threatening US military operations against drug cartels inside Mexico.

While the most likely outcome is an eventual renegotiation of the USMCA that leads to some modest tariff increases but mostly maintains the free-trade area, this would be a sub-optimal scenario. To resolve the fundamental sources of tensions, avoid future conflicts, and increase growth and welfare for North America, all three countries should start drafting plans for a North American Economic Union: a single market with full free trade not just in goods – as in the current free trade area – but also in services, capital, labour, technology, data, and information.

Obviously, this would not happen overnight. The first steps following economic union would be to harmonise regulatory policies, with Mexico and Canada largely adopting the standards in place in the US (by far the largest of the three economies), align industrial policies to reshore and friend-shore production to a larger North American single market and agree



The three countries should start drafting plans for a North American Economic Union.



NOURIEL ROUBINI

The writer is a senior adviser at Hudson Bay Capital Management LP and Professor Emeritus of Economics at New York University’s Stern School of Business, is a Co-Founder of Atlas Capital Team

on common trade, technology, and financial policies to de-risk relations with China. This could then be followed in due course by a fixed exchange-rate regime – like the early European exchange-rate mechanism – and a full monetary union (like the eurozone) that allows seamless payments across the area. North America is an optimal currency area – even more so than the eurozone – and a common currency would end the trade tensions that arise from regular destabilising exchange-rate fluctuations that exacerbate trade imbalances.

Next would come a full banking union, a capital markets union, and various other forms of risk sharing, pointing ultimately to the possibility of a fiscal union. Eventually, elements of a common foreign and defence policy would probably also be needed to manage issues such as immigration, law enforcement, and drug-related matters. Finally, a few decades down the line, these arrangements could allow for a consensual form of political union – “USA” would become a federated United States of the Americas – if all sides agree to it. Sovereignty could be maintained, like in the

European Union, but greater political coordination of a range of policies could be achieved over the long term. For now, though, a full economic union makes eminent sense, given how deeply integrated the North American economy has already become. Moreover, each party brings unique advantages (and needs) to the table.

Canada has an abundance of land and natural resources relative to the size of its population; but its macro and structural policies have led to sluggish growth and a smaller domestic market compared to the US. At the same time, the US has a large skilled labour force, massive stocks of physical and financial capital, and the world’s leading technology industry; but with highly populated swaths of its territory vulnerable to climate change, it will need to move people northward. Finally, Mexico has a large supply of low-cost skilled labour and some important natural resources; but weak governance and a lack of structural reforms have hampered growth and led to festering social dysfunctions – not least drug-related corruption, violence, and criminality.

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SPORTS

AWAYGAME



RED WARRIORS GEAR UP TO BATTLE SOUTH KOREA IN WC QUALIFIERS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

Red Warriors are underway in their daily training sessions in Goyang City in South Korea under the watchful eyes of experienced national head coach Rasheed Jaber. The team will conduct their third straight training session at the Goyang Stadium on Tuesday ahead of their crucial AFC Asian of the World Qualifiers — Road to 26 against the hosts South Korea on Thursday.

The Oman team delegation arrived in Seoul city on Friday and six days in advance for the encounter in order to ensure the team's adaptation to the climate and time change of five hours compared to Oman.

During the last two training sessions, coach Rasheed and his assisting team worked hard to finalise the starting line-up of the team including the suitable player who will cover the absence of experienced midfielder Harib al Saadi, who will not be available for Thursday's clash due to yellow cards. Oman's two professional league players including Mohsin al Ghassani of Bangkok United SC and Issam al Subhi (Iraqi Air Force Team or Al Quwa Al Jawiya) joined the team's training sessions. Rasheed will study several proposals for covering the centre of the middle line after Harib's absence by adding Abdullah Fawaz and Arshad al Alawi.

Despite the difficulty of South Korea assignment, the runner-up of last edition of the Gulf Cup in Kuwait are in perfect shape to impress in Goyang City. Oman's striking line-up features top stars including Mohsin al Ghassani, who impressed in the Thailand league besides Issam al Subhi, who shined in the recent Gulf Cup. Seeb star Abdulrahman al Mushaifri delivered top show in the last few matches with his team at AFC Challenge Cup and with the national team too. Al Munthir al Alawi and Salah al Yahyaei are back to the national team squad with top records after an absence for a while and this will give a good motivation for the team to bounce back strongly in the qualifiers.

The Red Warriors target is to secure positive results in the upcoming two matches against South Korea and Kuwait on Thursday and Tuesday respectively to boost their chances of securing direct or indirect slots for the World Cup qualification. The first two teams in each group of the Asian qualifiers will secure direct spots while third and fourth place will enter additional qualifying stages.

Oman are currently placed fourth in Group B, with six points from two wins and four defeats. South Korea are topping the group with 14 points while Iraq are second with 11 points. Jordan are in third place with nine points.

100 horses take part in Elite Showjumping

THE ELITE RAMADHAN Showjumping Competition, organised by Elite Show at the Olympic Arena of Al Rahba Farm in the Wilayat of Barka under the supervision of the Oman Equestrian and Racing Association, concluded with participation of more than 100 horses from various government cavalry units and private stables across five categories. The competition saw intense competition in a Ramadhan atmosphere filled with enthusiasm and excitement. The event was sponsored and supported by Nama Water Services, Liva Insurance, and several private sector institutions. It was attended by Sayyid Munthir bin Saif al Busaidy, Chairman of Oman Equestrian and Racing Association, along with several board members and representatives from participating units and stables.

In Category C of 120 cm jump height category, 12 horses competed and Barbara Marta on Caster from Al Said Stables took first place. In the Category D at 110 cm jump height, a total of 16 horses participated and Sultan bin Saif al Foori on Bassam from Royal Cavalry claimed the top place. At Category E for 100 cm jump height featured 21 horses and Rashid bin Amer al Mashaykhi on Raad from Royal Oman Police won the first place. At Category F of 90 cm jump height, a total of 34 horses competed and Wafaa bint Rashid al Housniyah on Jatha from Royal Oman Police clinched the top place. At Beginner



Category of 70 cm jump height, a total of 30 horses vied for the top places with 10 riders successfully completing the round with no errors. At the end of each round, the top riders

were honoured, with a victory lap on horseback to celebrate their achievements. The final awards were presented by Sayyid Munthir bin Saif al Busaidy, Chairman of Oman Equestrian and Racing Association.

600 runners take part in community running event

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

THE COMMUNITY running event, organised by the Oman Automobile Association in collaboration with the Oman Athletics Association (OAA), witnessed a large turnout from various groups, with approximately 600 runners of all ages participating. Supported by several private companies, the event was one of the most prominent community sports gatherings in Oman. It aimed to promote a culture of sports, facilitate knowledge exchange and create an environment that encourages continued athletic achievements.

The event featured three main races. In the men's 5-kilometre race, Nader Ismail secured first place, followed by Hassan Hisham in second, and Salim al Rashdi in third. In the women's category, Arlene claimed first place, with Gina al Hibal in second and Hanan al Jahmani in third. Meanwhile, in the family race, Al Jabri's team took first place, followed by Al Rawahi's team in second and Suhail's team in third.

The event also included an interactive panel discussion featuring a distinguished line-up of Omani athletes. Participants included runner Saleh al Saidi, coach Haitham al Salhi, runner Barakat al Harthy, runner Yaqoub al Nadabi, mountaineer Nadhira al Harthy, and runner Fahd al Abri. The discussion was moderated by Riyadh al Hinai.

The athletes shared their experiences in the world of sports, discussing the physical and mental



The event was one of the most prominent community sports gatherings in Oman.



The primary goal was to create an inclusive sporting environment that encourages everyone to adopt an active lifestyle.

challenges they faced, such as injuries, pressure and periods of limited support, and how they overcame these obstacles with determination and perseverance. They also highlighted the importance of continuous self-improvement and the role of sports in shaping character, instilling discipline, and fostering commitment. The panellists encouraged young athletes to pursue their ambitions and strive for success.

ALL-ROUND PARTICIPATION
OAA Chairman Said al Hajri expressed his delight at the success of the community

event. He noted the widespread participation, which included professional and amateur runners as well as families who saw the event as an opportunity to strengthen family bonds through sports. He explained that the event featured a 1.5-km family relay race in addition to the 5-km race, which was open to all running enthusiasts. The primary goal was to create an inclusive sporting environment that encourages everyone to adopt an active lifestyle.

Al Hajri added: "Registration was open for only four days, yet we reached 600

participants, reflecting the strong passion for sports in our community. This widespread participation underscores the importance of physical activity across all age groups and reinforces the concept of sports as a way of life, especially among the younger generations."

He emphasised that the event was not just a race but a step towards building a generation of athletes capable of representing Oman on international platforms. He stated that the OAA follows a long-term strategy to develop athletics and elevate it to a global level. In this context, the idea of holding the event during Ramadhan was developed in collaboration with the Oman Automobile Association, and it was presented in an innovative way that contributed to its success and attracted a large number of participants.

Al Hajri also revealed future plans, announcing that a new edition of the event will be held in November, maintaining the same successful format but in a different location to attract even more participants. He stressed that the association provides opportunities for all age groups — whether professionals, amateurs, or families — to participate and engage with others, fostering a spirit of competition and sportsmanship.

He concluded by saying, "We believe that such events will play a crucial role in advancing sports in Oman, not only by promoting a running culture but also by discovering and refining athletic talents capable of representing Oman in the future."

LALIGA



BARCA COMPLETE COMEBACK AT ATLETICO TO GO TOP

MADRID: Barcelona battled back from two goals down to beat Atletico Madrid 4-2 and land an important blow in the Spanish title race on Sunday. Lamine Yamal struck in the 92nd minute and Ferran Torres in the 98th to help take the Catalans back top of the table after Real Madrid beat Villarreal on Saturday to briefly claim pole position. Barcelona have a game in hand on the champions with both sides level on 60 points, while Atletico trail the top two by four after they crumbled at home against Hansi Flick's side to end a disastrous week following their Champions League elimination.

Having twice been caught out late by Atletico this season, this time it was Barcelona's turn to provide the sting in the tail, extending their unbeaten streak to 18 matches across all competitions. Julian Alvarez and Alexander Sorloth put Atletico ahead before Robert Lewandowski and Torres hit back for Barca, who went on to win in stoppage time.

Atletico remain third on 56 points from 28 games. The teams will meet again in the Copa del Rey semifinals after the first leg ended in a thrilling 4-4 draw, with the return taking place at the Metropolitano on April 2. —AFP



ALI SHAH, MTB XI, MIB FIGHTERS WIN

MUSCAT: The exiting matches at Pakistan School Muscat Ramadhan cricket tournament continued to entertain good crowds as three more matches were played on Monday.

In the first match, Ali Shah XI defeated Lahore United by 10 runs. Asked to bat first, Ali Shah scored a massive 116 runs without losing a wicket. Yasir scored a whirlwind 54 runs from 17 balls while Taha scored 52 from 28 balls.

In reply, Lahore United played well but ended up at 106 runs. Taha was the man of the match for his fifty and a wicket. In the second match, Taskers XI were defeated by MTB XI by 7 wickets. Batting first, Tuskers scored 80 runs for 6 wickets.

Bilal of MTB was the man of the match for his 56 off 12 balls. The third and last match was played between MIB Fighters and ABP Avengers. MIB scored 132 for 6 in 8 overs. Arshman scored 41 runs from 18 balls. Avengers scored 81 runs in 8 overs. MIB's Arshman got 3 wickets for 19 runs as MIB won the match by 50 runs.



McIlroy claims second Players title in play-off

NORTHERN Ireland's Rory McIlroy cruised to a St Patrick's Day victory at the Players Championship on Monday, defeating JJ Spaun in a play-off at TPC Sawgrass in Florida.

The four-time major champion completed the three-hole shoot-out in one over par, while Spaun's challenge wilted after a disastrous triple-bogey on the second play-off hole.

"This is the third time I've won on St Patrick's Day, so it's been a good luck charm for me," McIlroy said after sealing the second Players Championship of his career and 28th PGA Tour title overall.

"I was lucky enough to do enough to get it done, but unbelievably proud and happy to win my second Players... It's really nice," McIlroy added.

"I went home last night thinking 'I should have had this.' But I went home and reset, didn't have a great night's sleep, but was lucky enough to get it done."

McIlroy had finished tied at the top of the leaderboard with Spaun following Sunday's storm-hit final round after failing to hold on to a three-shot lead with five holes to play.

But after returning to the course on Monday in bright, breezy conditions, there

was no sign of a repeat of the late stumble by McIlroy on Sunday that had allowed Spaun to force his way into the first play-off of his career. McIlroy struck first on the opening play-off hole, the par-five 16th, crushing a 336-yard drive straight down the fairway before reaching the green in two.

Spaun meanwhile looked out of sorts from the get-go, finding the fairway rough off the tee before landing his second shot into the greenside bunker.

McIlroy failed to make his 33-foot eagle putt but calmly rolled in an awkward five-footer for birdie.

'MORE COMPLETE PLAYER'

Spaun, whose recovery out of the bunker left him with a long, unsuccessful birdie putt, could only par.

After that early wobble, things got worse for Spaun at the par-three 17th island hole, with the American plunging his tee-shot into the water behind the green.

Spaun then missed a long 10-foot putt for double bogey and eventually finished with a triple-bogey six.

While McIlroy missed his birdie chance and a 10-footer to save par, his bogey four still left him three shots clear heading to the 18th.

McIlroy's tee-shot on the last went well

wide of the right fairway, but Spaun was unable to exert pressure, also going wide of the fairway.

Both players reached the green in three and missed their par putts. McIlroy coolly tapped in for bogey to seal victory.

McIlroy's win marked the second title of the season for the Northern Irishman as he build towards the Masters in Augusta next month — the only major missing from his collection.

McIlroy said his early season form was a reward for the hard work he has put in over the years.

"I've worked really hard — I feel like I'm a way more complete player than I was a few years ago," McIlroy told NBC. "I feel like I can play in all conditions and anything that comes my way. Really happy that I was able to get it done today."

Spaun meanwhile was left reflecting on a disappointing outcome.

"It's hard not to feel discouraged a little bit, but nothing but positives," Spaun said. "Putting myself in contention and giving myself a chance to win in a play-off — if someone had told me that would happen at the start of the week I would totally have taken it."

"Hopefully I can just learn from this and get it done next time." — AFP

Howe hails victory as Newcastle beat Liverpool to lift League Cup

LONDON: Eddie Howe hailed Newcastle's "incredible" League Cup final victory against Liverpool as proof his side are ready for a period of sustained success after finally ending their 56-year trophy drought.

Newcastle produced a superb display to beat Premier League leaders Liverpool 2-1 at Wembley on Sunday, securing the Magpies' first major prize since the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup.

After celebrating with 32,000 jubilant Newcastle fans packed into one half of Wembley, Howe and his players kept the party going in the dressing room.

"There has to be a celebration. I will certainly be encouraging it. That's not usual for me.

"I urge everyone to enjoy it. We've

had some people who have worked for this club for a long time and it's great to see them so happy.

"That is what is all about, you have so many difficult days in football and this club has had its share."

Aside from a brief period when Kevin Keegan's self-styled "entertainers" challenged for the title in the 1990s, Newcastle have suffered decades of self-inflicted wounds that rendered them a laughing stock.

All that changed in 2021 when a Saudi-backed consortium completed a takeover from unpopular owner Mike Ashley and quickly hired Howe as their manager.

Thanks to Howe's leadership and the Saudi financial backing,



Newcastle United's Callum Wilson and Alexander Isak with the trophy after winning the Carabao Cup. — Reuters

Newcastle have been transformed from relegation candidates to silverware winners.

'IT PROVES WE CAN DO IT'

Amanda Staveley, who was the face of the ownership consortium until

leaving last year, had boldly claimed Newcastle would one day win the Premier League.

While that target remains unfulfilled, Staveley's belief that trophies would soon arrive has come to fruition, with Newcastle chairman Yasir Al Rumayyan, governor of the Saudi Public Investment Fund, at Wembley to witness the triumph.

Now Howe, whose deft touch has been so influential in Newcastle's renaissance, wants his team to use the victory as a springboard for more success.

"I think it's really important, hopefully with one there can be more. It's not easy but it proves we can do it," said Howe, who led Newcastle in the Champions League last season and is chasing a return to

the competition next term.

"You don't get many shots at this. It proves we can mix it with the very best and lift our game. Now we have to do it again. We've got some iconic players who will go down as legends in the future. They have to cement their legacy."

Howe became visibly emotional as he contemplated Newcastle's road to redemption and his own path to the greatest moment of his career.

"Naturally you end up thinking of the players, the staff, but also the people who aren't with you, like for me, my mum, family members," he said. "You go to them and just think of all the sacrifices, hard work that they gave you as a child to give you the opportunity to have a good life," he added. — AFP

SPORTS

INDIANWELLS



Russia’s Mirra Andreeva poses with the trophy after defeating Belarus’ Aryna Sabalenka during the women’s singles final. — AFP

ANDREEVA FIGHTS
BACK TO BEAT
SABALENKA IN FINAL

MIAMI: Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva fought back to overcome world number one Aryna Sabalenka 2-6, 6-4, 6-3 in the Indian Wells final on Sunday, winning a second WTA 1000-level event in a row to keep her charmed year on track.

The 17-year-old Andreeva, the youngest women’s champion at the tournament since Serena Williams in 1999, found her form midway through the match and crumpled to the ground in celebration after closing it out with a forehand winner.

Top seed Sabalenka pulled herself out of a slump to bring some of her best tennis to the California desert this year and got off to a hot start on Sunday but her form unravelled as the match wore on and she was left to rue missed opportunities.

“I would like to thank myself for fighting until the end and for always believing in me and for never quitting,” Andreeva said at the trophy ceremony.

“I was running like a rabbit today because Aryna, she’s been sending bullets and it was really hard to just keep up.”

Andreeva had lost to Sabalenka twice this year and it looked as though the pattern would continue as the top-seeded Belarusian mixed some nifty drop shots with her usual forehand power to save four break points in the third game.

Sabalenka sent a backhand winner down the line to break in the fourth game and four games later a visibly frustrated Andreeva whacked a ball into the stands after sending a shot into the net as the Russian was broken again.

The teenager got a confidence boost in the second set, however, when she broke Sabalenka with a forehand winner in the third game and fended off two break points in the sixth.

After trading breaks to open the third set, Sabalenka’s errors began to pile up and she fired into the net on break point in the third game to give the ninth seed the advantage.

MORE AGGRESSIVE

“After the first set, I just realised, that, ‘oh, well, what I do now, it doesn’t work, so I have to change something,’” Andreeva told reporters.

“In the second set, I tried to play a little bit more aggressive. I didn’t try to over hit her, because I don’t think anyone can over hit Aryna, because she’s super-powerful player.

“I tried to really, I don’t know, create something to make her uncomfortable, and, you know, point-by-point, game-by-game, I managed to do that.”

Gracious in defeat, 2023 runner-up Sabalenka brought her trademark sense of humour to the trophy ceremony, while holding onto the petite consolation prize.

“I kind of have a love-hate relationship with this place. I’ll just put this trophy on top of another one and pretend it’s the trophy for the winning,” said Sabalenka.

“It’s going to be a quite similar size, you know?”

The win on Sunday sees Andreeva continue her meteoric rise, after she partnered with coach Conchita Martinez a year ago, as she recorded her fifth straight win over a top-10 player.

Former world number two Martinez guided Andreeva into the French Open semifinals last year and helped steer her into the world’s top 10 with her triumph in Dubai last month.

Andreeva, who downed twice champion Iga Swiatek in the semifinals, heaped praise on her team in her victory speech and later told reporters they were “super protective” of her.

“(Martinez) gives me advice, you know, how to play and also how to maybe not to spend too much time on-site or how not to waste your energy,” she said. “Because I have such a good team around me, they help to protect me.” — Reuters



Jack Draper with the trophy after winning the final against Denmark’s Holger Rune during the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. — AFP

Draper powers past Rune
to win Indian Wells title

BRITAIN’S

JACK DRAPER roared past Denmark’s Holger Rune 6-2, 6-2 on Sunday to win his first ATP Masters 1000 title at Indian Wells. The 14th-ranked Briton, who toppled two-time defending champion Carlos Alcaraz in the semifinals, didn’t face a break point as he subdued the 13th ranked Dane in just 69 minutes.

He’ll make his top 10 debut on Monday at seventh in the world.

“It’s incredible,” said Draper, a US Open semifinalist last year whose preparations for 2025 were hindered by a flare-up of hip tendinitis.

“I’m just so grateful and happy to be out here, to be able to play, my body feeling healthy, to feel great in my mind.

“All the work I’ve done over the last few years, it feels like it’s all coming together on the big stage and I can’t put that into words,” added the 23-year-old, who also missed significant time with shoulder and abdominal injuries in 2023.

Draper said his energy was “sapped” after his big victory over Alcaraz, but his few nerves before the final quick dissipated.

“When I got out on the court, I felt amazing,” said Draper, who was rock-solid in his first Masters 1000 final as he raced to a 4-0 lead.

“I felt like I was in control. I knew what I needed to do. I just went for it and played to win,” he said.

Draper dropped just four points on serve in the first set as Rune, who burst on the scene with a precocious Paris Masters triumph in 2022, had 10 of his 19 unforced errors in the opening frame.

The Dane had managed to hold serve twice before Draper pocketed the set, giving himself set point with an ace before Rune thumped a backhand into the net. Draper broke Rune to open the second set, and even though the Dane got a few more looks at Draper’s second serve he couldn’t take advantage.

“I think today was very clear that I didn’t play well enough,” said Rune, who had ousted Daniil Medvedev, runner-up the past two years, in the semifinals.

“He was serving amazing, for sure. But I think I could have done my part better.

“Jack was playing extremely well, but the few chances I had to make it difficult for him, I didn’t quite take them, because I wasn’t really trusting every shot of my game today.”

‘I DESERVE IT’

Draper seized a second break for a 5-2 lead and after sending a forehand long on his first match point he had the win when Rune went long with a backhand.

Draper’s run to a third career title included victories not only over Alcaraz but also over 2022 Indian Wells winner Taylor Fritz and big-hitting home hope Ben Shelton.

“Last year I lost here and I felt so uncomfortable playing here,” Draper said. “My serve was really struggling. I didn’t feel like I was in control of the ball, and I lost my way mentally last year.

“So I knew coming here this year is a challenge, but not only for me but for a lot of the players. I think Taylor and Carlos play in a way where they are very aggressive with their forehand, they serve great.

“As the matches went on, I felt more and more confident in these conditions.”

Draper, who claimed his two prior ATP titles in 2024, said his biggest title to date was a testament to his perseverance.

“I feel like I deserve it, in all honesty,” the British player said.

“It’s an emotional feeling to know how much you’ve gone through and put in and to be here now to say that I’m going to be number seven in the world tomorrow, I can’t tell you how much that means to me.” — AFP

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OMAN ALLOCATES RO 53.05 MILLION IN TREASURY BILLS

MUSCAT: The total value of government treasury bills issued this week reached RO 53.05 million, offering short-term investment opportunities for commercial banks while supporting liquidity in the financial market.

The 28-day treasury bills were issued at a total value of RO 150,000, with an average accepted price of RO 99.700 per RO 100, reflecting a discount rate of 3.91% and a yield of 3.92%.

For the 91-day treasury bills, the allocated amount stood at RO 36.4 million, with an average accepted price of RO 98.975 per RO 100, an average discount rate of 4.11% and a yield of 4.16%.

Meanwhile, 182-day treasury bills were issued at RO 16.5 million, with an average accepted price of RO 97.845 per RO 100, a discount rate of 4.32% and a yield of 4.42%.

Treasury bills, issued by the Ministry of Finance and managed by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), serve as a secure investment option for licensed commercial banks. They also act as a key monetary tool, influencing short-term interest rates and enhancing market liquidity.

The interest rate on repurchase (repo) operations with the CBO for these bills stands at 5.00%, while the discount rate on treasury bills is 5.50%.

Treasury bills offer quick liquidity through discounting at the CBO and repo transactions between banks in the inter-bank market.

In addition to providing an investment channel, treasury bills help the government manage short-term funding needs efficiently while contributing to financial market stability.

— ONA

17 km2 earmarked for Green Hydrogen Zone

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

KEY public sector stakeholders tasked with fostering the growth of a green hydrogen industry in Oman participated in a recent strategic workshop on the master-planning of a dedicated Green Hydrogen Zone in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) in the southeast of the country.

Spanning an area of 17 sq kilometres, the zone will cater to investors and developers operating in the green hydrogen space at the SEZ.

The zone will also strengthen SEZAD's role in Oman's clean energy strategy, as well as the achievement of the country's Net-Zero targets, said Ahmed al Rajhi, Renewable Energy Projects Lead at SEZAD.

According to Al Rajhi, the strategic workshop was attended by representatives of Hydrom (the master-planner and orchestrator of Oman's green hydrogen industry), as well as Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), Nama Water Services and Nama Distribution — all National Champions with distinct roles to play in the rollout of common infrastructure necessary to sustain a planned pipeline of green hydrogen projects.

Also in attendance were representatives of lead consultant Khatib & Alami. The overall goal of the



Duqm will host an elaborate array of projects at the downstream end of Oman's green hydrogen ecosystem (© Hydrom)

workshop was to ensure that all the stakeholders worked in alignment on the development of the Duqm Green Hydrogen Zone, he noted.

“Covering 17 square kilometres, the plan includes dedicated service corridors connecting upstream and downstream areas, export terminals and consumption zones — laying the groundwork for an integrated infrastructure that accelerates green hydrogen investments and ensures seamless delivery across the value chain,” said Al Rajhi in a post.

“SEZAD is committed to enabling sustainable, future-ready projects, reinforcing its position as a leading green

energy hub in the region,” he added. The Duqm Green Hydrogen Zone is expected to host the downstream components and adjacent industries of five of the eight green hydrogen mega schemes confirmed for implementation in Oman to date.

The schemes in question are promoted by the following consortiums: (1) Amnah (with Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners — CIP, Blue Power Partners and Al Khadra (2) HyDuqm (with ENGIE, POSCO Holdings, Samsung Engineering, PTTEP, Korea East-West Power and KOSPO (3) GEO (with Shell, OQ, InterContinental Energy and EnerTech Holding (4) BP and

(5) HyPort Duqm (with BP, OQ and DEME).

The upstream components, comprising mainly vast arrays of solar and wind farms, will be laid out across the hinterland of Duqm, spilling into the wider Al Wusta Governorate as well.

Envisaged for development within the Duqm Green Hydrogen Zone, planned in the close proximity of the Port of Duqm, are the green hydrogen producing electrolyzers of the five mega projects in question, as well as plants producing green ammonia, green methanol and other green commodities derived from hydrogen. Storage infrastructure is envisioned as well.

Oman strengthens banking laws to drive financial innovation

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has taken a significant step in modernising its financial sector with the issuance of Royal Decree No (2/2025) on the Banking Law and Royal Decree No (3/2025) on the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) System.

These legislative changes coincide with the appointment of a new CBO Governor and Board of Directors, reinforcing efforts to enhance the legal and regulatory framework governing the financial system. The reforms aim to ensure the sector remains resilient, adaptable and aligned with international banking developments.

Over the past two decades, Oman's banking industry has undergone substantial growth, making it necessary to update its legislative structure to keep pace with digital transformation and emerging financial services.

The new Banking Law, comprising 241 articles, is designed to improve regulatory clarity,



Over the past two decades, Oman's banking industry has undergone substantial growth.

enhance transparency and foster financial inclusion. It introduces measures to strengthen the governance of the Central Bank of Oman, outlining its responsibilities in implementing monetary policy, managing liquidity and maintaining financial stability.

The law also affirms the CBO's exclusive authority over currency issuance, ensuring that national currency regulations align with

global financial advancements.

One of the major updates in the Banking Law is its focus on attracting foreign investment and expanding banking operations.

The revised regulations simplify procedures for foreign banks entering the Omani market while granting financial institutions greater flexibility in investment and credit activities.

This includes enhanced support

for small and medium-sized enterprises, facilitating access to financing for local businesses and large-scale projects. The law also dedicates a chapter to Islamic banking, introducing provisions that eliminate multiple taxes and fees on real estate and movable assets, making Sharia-compliant finance more attractive.

Recognising the rapid evolution of digital finance, the new law paves the way for digital banks, financial technology (fintech) solutions, crowdfunding platforms and open banking applications. By easing regulatory requirements, Oman aims to encourage innovation in banking services while promoting financial inclusion.

Additionally, the law reinforces consumer protection, emphasising transparency in service pricing, fairness in banking transactions and stricter safeguards for customer data privacy.

The governance framework for the Central Bank of Oman has also

been restructured under Royal Decree No (3/2025), which outlines the bank's core objectives through a set of 21 articles.

These objectives include ensuring monetary stability, overseeing banking and non-banking financial institutions, enforcing financial regulations and maintaining the overall safety of the financial system.

The new framework enhances the CBO's role in supporting Oman's long-term economic development, in line with the nation's broader financial and investment goals.

These reforms build on Royal Decree No 47/2024, which introduced the Bank Deposit Protection Law to safeguard depositor funds and bolster confidence in the financial sector.

These legislative measures establish a robust, transparent and investor-friendly banking environment, positioning Oman as a stable financial hub in the region while ensuring sustainable economic growth.

— ONA

ADVERTORIALS

BANKDEDICATION



This strategic alliance underscores the bank’s dedication to innovation and customer-centricity.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL & OOREDOO BUSINESS JOIN FORCES TO EMPOWER SMES

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman’s best bank, recently partnered with Ooredoo Business to introduce innovative solutions for local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This strategic alliance underscores the bank’s dedication to innovation and customer-centricity, reinforcing its role as a key enabler of financial empowerment for businesses.

Through this collaboration, Sohar International is set to provide an exclusive suite of offerings — including complimentary fixed services, flexible device financing, a compelling mobile offer, customizable Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions, an attractive Riyada card benefit and enhanced communication tools — all aimed at streamlining operations, reducing costs and fostering sustainable growth.

Commenting on the initiative, Abdul Qadir al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer at Sohar International, stated, “Partnering with industry leaders like Ooredoo reinforces our commitment to delivering world-class services while fostering an ecosystem that drives innovation and operational excellence.

This initiative reflects a strategic, forward-thinking approach to financial services, where every element is designed for the customer’s success. With this comprehensive package, we provide SME clients with essential tools to enhance efficiency and accelerate digital transformation.”

Said al Lawati, Director of Business Marketing and ICT Solutions at Ooredoo, said, “Ooredoo recognises the evolving needs of SMEs and the challenges of staying competitive in a digital-first world. By simplifying connectivity and financial access, we enable smarter operations, seamless growth and long-term success for businesses in Oman.”

Beyond traditional banking, Sohar International forges strategic alliances to enhance customer value. A key highlight of this exclusive package that can be offered to Sohar International customers is the Complimentary Fixed Services, providing two months of free fixed-line rental to ease costs.

Additionally, Flexible Device Financing allows businesses, after a three-month qualifying period, to acquire up to five state-of-the-art devices through competitive installment plans — ensuring they stay ahead of technological advancements without heavy upfront costs.

Riyada Card Holders receive a 50 per cent discount on Fixed Business Internet and Shahry Business Digital Plans, along with 1,000 free bulk SMS messages to expand business reach and engagement.

MAZDA OMAN ANNOUNCES FIRST WINNER OF ITS RAMADHAN RAFFLE

MUSCAT: Mazda Oman proudly announces Ruqaiya Ahmed as the first winner of its Ramadhan raffle, driving home a brand-new Mazda 6.

This exclusive campaign brings added excitement to the holy month, offering customers the opportunity to own a Mazda while also standing a chance to win another.

With three more raffle draws remaining, anticipation continues to grow as more customers look



forward to experiencing the joy of winning. Beyond the thrill of the raffle,

Mazda Oman is committed to enhancing the ownership experience, providing an exclusive 4-year unlimited linjaz service package and 3-year AAA roadside assistance for added peace of mind. As the campaign unfolds, now is the perfect time to explore Mazda’s exceptional lineup and take advantage of this limited-time opportunity. Visit your nearest Mazda showroom or contact 92888005 to learn more and secure your chance to win.

Lincoln Nautilus now with exclusive benefits

OWN the luxury Lincoln Nautilus and get exclusive Ramadhan benefits, including 5 years / 100,000 km service, 5 years / 100,000 km warranty, free insurance and 1 year registration, all designed to enhance your ownership experience. (Conditions apply. Visit the Lincoln showroom in Wattayah for details.) The offer ends on April 17, 2025.

The Lincoln Nautilus commands attention with a bold and refined presence. Its striking design is defined by the signature Lincoln grille, a reimagined rear fascia, an elegant light bar and refreshed tail lamps.

The redesigned spoiler enhances its aerodynamic appeal, reinforcing the Nautilus’ modern, confident stance. Elevating its visual allure, the Reserve trim debuts striking 20” bright machined aluminium wheels with premium-painted pockets, adding a dynamic yet polished touch.

Step inside and the Nautilus transforms every drive into an indulgent escape. Subtle ambient lighting inside and out creates a warm, inviting atmosphere, while acoustic side glass minimises exterior



The Lincoln Nautilus commands attention with a bold and refined presence.

noise, ensuring a peaceful cabin environment. Thoughtfully engineered to eliminate road vibrations, the interior delivers a remarkably smooth and quiet ride. The seating experience is equally luxurious, plush, soft-to-the-touch materials are complemented by ventilated, massaging and highly adjustable seats, tailored for ultimate relaxation.

Designed with driver comfort in mind, the steering wheel features a refined, sporty grip with an increased rim circumference. Wrapped in supple Wollsdorf

leather and finished with sophisticated European-style stitching, it embodies pure craftsmanship. Positioned ahead of the driver, a 12.3-inch fully configurable digital instrument cluster offers crisp, real-time information at a glance. Lincoln’s innovative approach to design extends to the centre console, which forgoes a traditional shifter in favour of a vertically-oriented Push-Button Shifter seamlessly integrated into the instrument panel. Each button is carefully shaped and textured for effortless use, making gear selection

intuitive. For those seeking the pinnacle of comfort, the available Ultra Comfort front seats, designed with input from orthopaedic specialists, offer up to 22-way adjustability, complete with lumbar massage. Whether navigating city streets or embarking on long highway journeys, these seats help reduce fatigue and enhance overall well-being. Heated and cooled seating options further elevate the experience in the Lincoln Reserve model. Under the hood, the Nautilus delivers exhilarating performance through its refined powertrain options. The available 2.7-liter twin-turbo V6 engine generates an impressive 335 horsepower and 515 Nm of torque. Coupled with an advanced all-wheel-drive system, adaptive suspension and AWD disconnect technology, the Nautilus adapts seamlessly to varying road conditions, delivering both confidence and precision. Additional performance-enhancing features include Auto Start-Stop technology and an advanced 8-speed automatic transmission with SelectShift, ensuring a smooth, responsive drive.

TYREPLUS HIGHLIGHTS ROAD SAFETY AND TYRE CARE MEASURES

MUSCAT: This Ramadhan, TyrePlus, a division of MHD ACERE, urges drivers to adopt safe driving habits and prioritise vehicle maintenance to ensure a smooth and secure journey.

With changes in sleep schedules, fasting-related fatigue and increased road congestion during Iftar hours, TyrePlus emphasises the importance of both driver awareness and vehicle preparedness — particularly tyre safety.

ROAD SAFETY TIPS FOR RAMADHAN Ramadhan brings about a shift in daily routines, which can impact concentration and reaction times while driving. To help motorists stay safe, TyrePlus shares essential driving safety tips for the month: Avoid driving during iftar: Stop at least 10 minutes before Iftar to break your fast safely and prevent distractions. Follow road rules: Continue to follow all road rules and regulations just like you do during other



times. As loss of sleep and poor focus is common during Ramadhan, you must ensure to take extra caution while driving on road. Practice defensive driving: Be mindful of other motorists who may be fasting and maintain a safe distance. Plan your journey wisely: Start early to avoid peak-hour traffic and reduce stress. Ensure your vehicle is well-maintained: Regular servicing, including tyre checks, is crucial to

prevent unexpected breakdowns. THE ROLE OF TYRE SAFETY IN RAMADHAN ROAD SAFETY With rising temperatures in Oman during Ramadhan, tyre safety becomes even more critical. Heat can cause tyre pressure fluctuations, increasing the risk of blowouts. TyrePlus, a leading car care brand with nine branches across Oman, encourages drivers to have their tyres checked regularly to ensure optimal performance. “As families travel across Oman to celebrate Ramadhan, road safety should be a top priority. Proper vehicle maintenance, particularly tyre safety, is essential in preventing accidents caused by fatigue and poor road conditions. At TyrePlus, we remain committed to ensuring every driver is equipped with high-quality tyres and reliable car care services,” said Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE.

NBO expands Shahr Al Atta campaign to strengthen community support

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has launched its annual Shahr Al Atta campaign for Ramadhan, reflecting its commitment to supporting the less privileged and fostering the spirit of giving while contributing to corporate social responsibility. The campaign encompasses a series of initiatives designed to serve those in need and make a positive impact on the nation’s growth. It began with an in-house bake sale, where proceeds were donated to charity, reaffirming NBO’s dedication to giving back. As part of the initiative, food hampers



The campaign encompasses a series of initiatives designed to serve those in need.

were distributed to low-income families across the country in collaboration with Zakat Committees and charitable organisations. This initiative, a cornerstone of NBO’s CSR efforts for several years, aims to provide essential sustenance and support to those in need during the Holy Month of Ramadhan. Building on this, the campaign extends its reach through various activities that provide essential support and bring joy to different segments of society. In collaboration with the Cultural Citizenship Salon, NBO is organising a

special event for children from the Child Care Centre to celebrate Islamic Orphans Day, offering engaging activities that promote happiness and inclusion. Additionally, in partnership with the Oman National Autism Centre, NBO is hosting a Qaranqasho celebration for children on the autism spectrum, fostering inclusivity and awareness. Furthering its outreach, NBO has partnered with the Seeb Zakat Committee to support Kaswat Al Eid, providing children from low-income families with new clothes, enabling them to celebrate Eid with joy.

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The committee also evaluated cooperation agreements signed with various government and private sector entities.

OCCI SME COMMITTEE OUTLINES KEY INITIATIVES FOR 2025

MUSCAT: The Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Committee of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) convened its first meeting of 2025 at the Chamber’s headquarters, chaired by Shaikh Ahmed bin Amer al Musalhi. The session brought together committee members to review strategic initiatives aimed at strengthening the SME sector.

Among the key programmes discussed were the “My Institution’s Sustainability Platform,” the “My Share for Social Investment” initiative, and the “Labour Market Regulation for Recruitment Offices” initiative.

Other notable projects included the Food Security Initiative, the Persons with Disabilities Institutions Initiative; and the Engineering and Design Work Platform Initiative — all designed to enhance SME growth and integration into the national economy.

The committee also evaluated cooperation agreements signed with various government and private sector entities, ensuring their alignment with set objectives. Additionally, members reviewed recent visits to OCCI branches across Oman, reinforcing regional collaboration and SME support.

Looking ahead, the committee finalised its 2025 annual action plan and established a dedicated team to oversee the implementation of initiatives, ensuring measurable progress and impact.

Al Musalhi emphasised the SME sector’s pivotal role in Oman’s economic development, stating, “Our focus remains on fostering an environment that empowers entrepreneurs and strengthens their capabilities. Collaboration with government and private stakeholders is essential to sustaining this sector’s growth.”

He further noted that the committee is committed to enhancing SME sustainability and innovation through its 2025 agenda, paving the way for a more dynamic and resilient business ecosystem. — ONA

BOE TO KEEP RATES ON HOLD AS GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY MOUNTS

LONDON: The Bank of England (BoE) is likely to keep interest rates on hold on Thursday and stick to its mantra of only gradual moves ahead as it grapples with the fallout from US President Donald Trump’s trade war and mixed news on Britain’s economy.

All 61 economists polled last week expected the BoE to leave its benchmark interest rate on hold at 4.5 per cent, with the next cut likely in May, followed by further reductions in August and November. While there has been limited news on Britain’s economy since the BoE’s last rate cut on February 6, Trump’s stop-start announcements of tariffs on US allies have thrown financial markets into a tailspin and raised questions about the outlook for inflation around the world.

Share prices have fallen dramatically over the past two weeks, especially in the United States, wiping out more than \$5 trillion in value in US markets over concerns that Trump’s policies could lead to a US recession.

By contrast, the announcement of a 500-billion-euro infrastructure and defence investment plan by Germany’s leading political parties boosted the value of many manufacturers.

“Global developments around tariffs and defence spending have mixed implications. We suspect the BoE won’t want to rush to judgement on what it all means for the UK economy, with no concrete news yet,” Elizabeth Martins, senior UK economist at HSBC, said. — Reuters

OIL RISES ON US ATTACK ON ANSAR ALLAH, CHINA ECONOMIC HOPES

LONDON: Oil traded higher on Monday after the United States vowed to keep attacking Yemen’s Ansar Allah until the group ends its assaults on shipping and Chinese economic data fuelled hopes for higher demand.

US President Donald Trump launched military strikes against the Ansar Allah on Saturday over the group’s attacks against Red Sea shipping. One US official said the campaign might continue for weeks.

Brent futures rose 72 cents, or 1 per cent, to \$71.30 a barrel by 09:20 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude futures gained 59 cents, or 0.9 per cent, to \$67.77.

Chinese economic data also supported prices. Retail sales growth quickened in January-February in a welcome sign for policymakers’ efforts to boost domestic consumption even as joblessness rose and factory output eased.

“Oil prices are benefiting from better-than-expected Chinese

economic data, potential more stimulus measures in China and renewed tensions in the Middle East, although so far there are still no supply disruptions,” said Giovanni Staunovo of UBS.

The oil market has a “comparatively healthy physical backdrop,” said Tamas Varga of broker PVM, citing the premium at which nearby oil contracts are trading to those for later delivery, a structure known as backwarrant. — Reuters

Infrastructure deals signed for Palm Hills in Khasab

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 17

AGREEMENTS

have been signed to implement key infrastructure services for Palm Hills, a major real estate development in Khasab that is poised to redefine modern living in the region.

As part of the Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods Initiative by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the project aims to set new benchmarks for sustainable community development in Oman.

Musandam Global Investment Company SAOC is spearheading this transformative project by finalising critical infrastructure agreements. With an investment estimated at RO 70 million, Palm Hills will span 635,000 square metres and offer a comprehensive mix of facilities.

The development plans include 650 residential units integrated with commercial spaces, a hotel and essential public amenities such as a mosque, a public majlis, sports fields, a medical centre and a nursery — all surrounded by ample green areas.

In addition to these, the project will host a branch of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Musandam, reinforcing the region’s commitment to enhancing educational opportunities alongside urban growth.



Musandam Global Investment Co is spearheading this transformative project by finalising critical infrastructure agreements.



The infrastructure framework for Palm Hills is designed to ensure that the community is well-equipped with modern utilities.

The infrastructure framework for Palm Hills is designed to ensure that the community is well-equipped with modern utilities. Agreements have been inked for

the construction of water and sewage networks in collaboration with Nama Water Services Company, while partnerships with Nama Electricity Distribution Company will see the establishment of robust electricity distribution systems.

Furthermore, a fibre optic network is set to be installed through cooperation with Oman Broadband Company, ensuring that the development is connected with state-of-the-art digital infrastructure. This integrated approach not only secures reliable utility services but also bolsters the overall sustainability of the project.

A distinctive feature of Palm Hills is its appeal to both local and international investors. Twenty-five per cent of the residential

units are earmarked for sale to Gulf nationals and foreign buyers, a strategic move expected to enhance the investment allure and drive real estate growth in Musandam.

First introduced to the market during the 3rd Oman Real Estate Expo (OREX) and Oman Design & Build Week last year, the project embodies the broader vision of the Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods Initiative to deliver affordable, high-quality housing solutions that cater to diverse needs.

As construction moves forward, Palm Hills is set to generate significant economic momentum in Khasab by creating job opportunities across construction, real estate, hospitality and retail sectors.

US-EU tariff clash imperils \$9.5 trillion of business, AmCham warns

BRUSSELS: The US-European tariff conflict is jeopardising transatlantic business worth \$9.5 trillion annually, the American Chamber of Commerce to the EU warned on Monday.

AmCham EU, whose more than 160 members include Apple, ExxonMobil and Visa, showed in its annual Transatlantic Economy report a deepening relationship hitting records in 2024, such as goods and services trade of \$2 trillion. It talks of 2025 as a year of promise and peril for the world’s largest commercial relationship.

In the past week, Washington has imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium, the EU has set out plans for retaliation and President Donald Trump has threatened 200 per cent tariffs on EU wine and spirits.

Trump has railed against the US goods trade deficit with the EU, although in services there is a US surplus and urged



A 3D-printed miniature model of US President Donald Trump and the European Union’s flag are seen in this illustration. — Reuters

manufacturers to produce in America. AmCham said trade is only part of transatlantic commercial activity and that the real benchmark was investment.

“Contrary to conventional wisdom, most US and European investments flow to each

other, rather than to lower-cost emerging markets,” it said.

US foreign affiliate sales in Europe are four times US exports to Europe and European affiliate sales in the United States are three times higher than European exports.

AmCham warned ripple effects from the trade conflict could damage these close ties. The report’s lead author Daniel Hamilton said intra-firm trade making up about 90 per cent of Ireland’s and 60 per cent of Germany’s trade could be hit.

There was also a risk of spillover into services trade, data flows or energy, with Europe reliant on US LNG imports.

“Ripple effects of conflict in the trade space will not be confined to trade. They ripple through all of those other channels and the interactions are quite significant,” he said.

US and EU companies had interlinking value chains to be globally competitive, such as for BMW cars exported from the US. “I’m not sure you’re going to have isolated investments,” Hamilton said.

“That’s just going to make things very inefficient,” he added. — Reuters

OPINION

Steps to protect your phone conversations



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman

LAST week’s article on whether someone is listening to our mobile phone conversation received a lot of attention. Almost everyone I meet confesses their experience on the same concern. Briefly, people experience personalised advertisements and promotions displayed on their smartphone after private and personal conversations. Questions were raised whether these mobile phones were listening to conversations (both while in or off calls). Heavyweight tech giants, Apple and Google, both denied secretly listening and/or recording their users’ conversations. Nevertheless, they all admitted that the Artificial Intelligence Powered apps (e.g., Siri for Apple, Google Assistant for Androids) do have access to smart device microphones (proof in the pudding). Furthermore, users often do not check on the kind of privacy policies/options they grant when installing apps onto their devices. This is scary, annoying, and indeed a concern for everyone. My article today will focus on steps one can follow to protect oneself from a mobile phone listening in on their conversation. Before I share the steps, let me list some of the things that our smart devices can expose. Your voice (via microphone), video (via camera), pictures (via app gallery), locations

(via GPS receiver), and your movement/senses (via sensors). What you see, talk, share, and tomorrow even feel or smell can be exposed, no thanks to smart technologies and the embedded sensors around the devices we use. You discuss a vacation with your wife; you get an ad displayed on your smartphone about the various options and offers in the market. You take snaps of your pet at home, and you get an ad about accessories you can buy for your pets. Places you visit or go to, and suddenly get promotions of places close by. You smell a particular food tomorrow; you get an ad about restaurants, their locations, and discounts offered too. You get the idea; there is practically no privacy in what you do, go, or say. So how can you protect yourself? First, seeing is believing, and I trust, knowing is believing too. By realizing that your smart device may be monitored, you would look and take the necessary steps to find out ways to protect yourself (such as reading this article per se). Do you get targeted and personalized ads? Does your mobile phone or tablet battery get drained fast? Do apps you use crash out of the blue? All these are signs that your smart devices may be infected. What to do? Check app permissions to see what kind of things you allow them to access, i.e., microphone, camera, locations,

So how can you protect yourself? First, seeing is believing and I trust, knowing is believing too. By realising that your smart device may be monitored, you would look and take the necessary steps to find out ways to protect yourself (such as reading this article per se).

gallery, etc. Disable any app that you feel doesn’t require those access (disabling can be done via the settings - app permissions of the designated mobile operating system). Next, install a trusted security app (e.g., Malwarebytes, McAfee, or Norton Mobile Security) to scan and detect spyware and unauthorized access of apps on your phones. What more? Ensure you update the operating system of your phone regularly (whenever you get a notification). This will ensure bugs and vulnerabilities are fixed. Lastly, back up your data regularly, be it on the cloud via a respected and trusted service provider or on your local drive (something I recommend for total privacy). To conclude my article this week, I would like to note that protecting your personal data in today’s AI-driven and hyper-connected world is becoming difficult. Safeguarding requires vigilance. I can tell you with confidence that this concern will continue to grow and may probably become a norm in our lives. I once said at one of the presentations I delivered for a cybersecurity conference that “privacy will no longer be a word in a dictionary.” This is becoming a reality as we progress every day. I hope the steps I shared in this article today will help protect and keep you safe meanwhile. Until we catch up again next week, keep your eyes open and stay safe.

CK HUTCHISON IS STUCK AS A GEOPOLITICAL PAWN

BY KA SING CHAN

HONG KONG: CK Hutchison’s shareholders must be hoping the conglomerate boasts some great chess players in its top ranks. Just two weeks ago the Li clan, which controls the sprawling Hong Kong-based company, hoped it had both escaped President Donald Trump’s ire over the Panama Canal and given a boost to its stock by agreeing to sell much of its ports business to a BlackRock-led consortium for almost \$23 billion. Now Beijing is making its displeasure over the deal known. That means CK Hutchison is, for now, stuck as a geopolitical pawn. The in-principle agreement to offload its 80% stake in 43 ports across 23 countries came after weeks of Trump alleging, without evidence, that China “is operating” the Panamanian shipping route; he also threatened that the US “is taking it back”. Beijing was initially silent on the deal, even though it was unveiled on the same day China kicked off its annual legislative session in the country’s capital – with CK Hutch Chair Victor Li attending as a key adviser. That changed in the past few days with the People’s Republic authorities reposting commentaries condemning the sale to “ill-intentioned US forces” as a betrayal of all Chinese people. Beijing’s anger is easy to understand: the ports and shipping industry is a key front in China’s trade war with the US, so Washington having more sway would not be welcome. Yet its reaction is likely to feed the Trump administration’s claims that the Panama Canal is subject to undue Chinese influence. Granted, the government run by President Xi Jinping may have no regulatory authority to veto the deal, which excludes all of CK Hutchison’s ports in Hong Kong and China. But it could make it harder for the company to renew contracts to run both the ports and electricity infrastructure in Hong Kong. And it could pile political pressure on the Li family, much as it did to Alibaba founder Jack Ma. If that proves enough to scupper the sale to BlackRock, the company would be back in Washington’s crosshairs. Victor Li and founder Li Ka-shing would probably be hard-pressed to resolve that dilemma alone. Instead, the ports business’s fate could be added to the growing list of strategic issues for any summit between Trump and Xi – along with, for example, tariffs and TikTok. CK Hutchison’s immediate future is slipping from its executives’ grasp. — Reuters

Building prosperity through strategic economic corridors

IN an increasingly interconnected world, economic trade corridors have emerged as vital instruments for fostering economic growth, promoting regional integration and facilitating international trade. These corridors, far more than just transportation routes, are comprehensive development strategies that link centres of production with centres of demand, integrating infrastructure with trade, investment and economic activities across specific geographical areas. Economic trade corridors are integrated networks of infrastructure designed to stimulate economic development within a specific geographical area. They connect economic agents, such as manufacturers, businesses and consumers; and link production centres with demand centres, whether within a country or between countries. These corridors are not merely about transportation; they are about creating an environment conducive to economic growth and development. As global trade patterns shift amid persistent supply chain disruptions, Oman is leveraging a strategy that dates back to its ancient maritime history – connecting economies through strategic corridors. This time, however, the Sultanate of Oman isn’t just offering its ports but crafting comprehensive networks that promise to reshape its economic landscape and secure its place in tomorrow’s global economy. For centuries, Omani ports served merchants traversing oceans between East and West. Today, this legacy is being reimagined through modern economic corridors – sophisticated networks that go far beyond transportation routes to include industrial zones, digital infrastructure and policy frameworks designed to stimulate economic activity across entire regions. Economic corridors represent integrated systems of infrastructure, policies and economic activities facilitating trade and investment between countries. Far more than mere transportation routes, they are comprehensive development strategies that integrate infrastructure with trade, investment and economic activities across specific



For centuries, Omani ports served merchants traversing oceans between East and West.



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The writer is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board adviser & business transformation mentor.

geographical areas, creating a dynamic ecosystem that stimulates broader economic development. Oman Vision 2040 has placed these corridors at the heart of its economic diversification strategy. With oil revenues no longer offering guaranteed prosperity, the sultanate of Oman is leveraging its strategic location at the crossroads of Asia, Europe and Africa to position itself as an indispensable link in global trade. The Oman-UAE corridor represents perhaps the most advanced of these initiatives. The centrepiece is the ambitious Hafeet Rail project — a 303-kilometre railway connecting SOHAR Port and Freezone to Abu Dhabi. With \$1.5 billion already secured of the \$2.5 billion required, this project is set to revolutionise cross-border trade. When operational, it will slash transportation times, reduce logistics costs and create thousands of jobs in transportation and associated services. Equally promising is the evolving Oman-Saudi corridor, anchored by the Economic Zone at Al Dhahirah (EZAD). This 388-square-kilometre development, backed by 1.2 billion Saudi Riyals in funding, represents a bold attempt to transform Oman’s historically remote border regions into thriving economic hubs. It targets manufacturing, mining, logistics and renewable energy sectors, leveraging proximity to Saudi Arabia to reduce production and export costs while creating substantial

employment opportunities. The Oman-India corridor, though not defined by physical infrastructure like railways, represents one of the sultanate of Oman’s most vital economic relationships. Bilateral trade reached \$8.947 billion in 2023-24, with more than 6,000 joint ventures representing \$7.5 billion in investments. Negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) continue, with both nations eyeing significant trade expansion. This corridor’s development potential includes expanding dedicated shipping lines with preferential port handling, developing joint ventures in renewable energy and green hydrogen, and establishing technology transfer programmes for digital economy sectors. Duqm Special Economic Zone serves as the focal point, attracting Indian investments in petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals and food processing. Another emerging pathway is the Oman-East Africa Maritime Corridor, currently in early development. Using Salalah Port as a gateway to East African markets, this corridor currently has limited shipping connections to Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia, with initial investments in logistics and warehousing. Its development potential includes establishing dedicated shipping lines and air cargo routes, developing food security-focused agricultural investments and creating specialised finance and insurance products for Africa-bound trade. Oman’s economic corridors generate a cascade of benefits. Initially, they boost trade efficiency by accelerating the movement of goods and lowering costs, thus enhancing the global competitiveness of Omani products. This, in turn, attracts greater foreign investment into transportation networks, industrial zones and logistics infrastructure. Ultimately, these developments spur job creation, not only in construction but also in diverse, sustainable roles across manufacturing, services and technology. This strategic development is particularly timely, as recent global disruptions have highlighted the fragility of extended supply chains.

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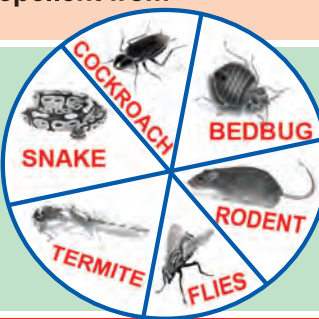
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An elderly sick, who is very poor, couldn't fast in the past two years and he is not able to feed others to compensate his lost fasting days during Ramadhan. What should he do?

If he cannot feed people because of certain inability, Allah will forgive him. "Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear".



HADITH GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Anas and Abu Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with both of them, reported that the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, said: "None of you will attain perfect faith until I am more beloved to him than his child, his parent, and all people".

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY



When there comes God's victory and conquest. And you see the people entering God's religion in multitudes. Then celebrate the praise of your Lord, and seek His forgiveness. He is the Acceptor of Repentance.

(Al Nasr)



DUA SUPPLICATION TO ALLAH

O Allah, on this day, guide me towards righteous actions, fulfil my needs and hopes, O One who does not need explanations nor questions, O One who knows what is in the chests of the (people of the) world. Bless Muhammad and his family, the Pure.



WALKING AFTER TARAWEEH PRAYERS EVOLVED INTO A CHERISHED SOCIAL RITUAL

BY BALQEES AL ORAIMI

IN RECENT years, walking in Oman has emerged as a popular trend, especially following the Taraweeh prayers during the holy month of Ramadhan. Each evening, the streets, parks and even malls are alive with the sound of footsteps as people from all walks of life and ages come together to embrace the simple yet profound gift of this physical activity. Families, friends and neighbours are frequently seen strolling together, creating a delightful tapestry of community spirit and connection under the stars.

During the luminous nights of Ramadhan, after concluding their Taraweeh prayers, the community comes to life. Parents accompany their children, friends catch up on the latest news and families gather in small groups. As feet trudge quietly along the pathways, conversations flow freely, memories are cherished and a warm sense of belonging develops.

Walking after Taraweeh prayers has evolved beyond merely a physical exercise or a means of maintaining health; it has transformed into a cherished social ritual that fosters warmth and intimacy among family members. It serves as an escape from the fast-paced nature of modern life, providing a welcome outlet for meaningful dialogue, far removed from the distractions of screens and daily chores.

Many devotees of this evening stroll acknowledge that it transcends the realm of physical activity; it offers a distinct chance for reflection, mental clarity and the strengthening of social bonds. Psychologist Dr Abdullah Muhammad highlights that this practice offers benefits far beyond enhancing physical fitness.

He remarks, "Walking after Taraweeh prayers aids digestion following iftar, boosts blood circulation and alleviates stress levels. However, it's equally an excellent opportunity for forging connections with family and friends. Walking together cultivates a relaxed environment for conversation, allowing children to communicate openly with their parents and couples to address their concerns away from the day's chaos."

Fatima al Hatroushi, a dedicated social worker, asserts that walking during Ramadhan creates a space for families to unite, far removed from dining tables and electronic devices.

She states, "In today's world, each family member often finds themselves engrossed in their own lives. Even under the same roof, a father might struggle to find time to engage with his children, while a mother may be knee-deep in daily responsibilities. Yet when the family steps out for a walk, the dynamic shifts. You witness a father discussing his son's aspirations, a mother confiding in her daughter, and siblings fondly recalling their childhood adventures."

Fatima continues, "What's remarkable about these spontaneous conversations is that they often run deeper and feel more genuine than those held indoors. The relaxed ambiance free from technological distractions allows for authentic connections."

Mohammed al Hashemi, a father of three, reflects on how he came to appreciate this tradition when he noticed his children eagerly anticipating their walks after Taraweeh prayers.

He shares, "Initially, I walked alone, but gradually my children began to request that I take them along. I've found it an exquisite chance to converse, listen to their thoughts and share tales from my own youth. Now, it has

become an essential part of our routine and it's my children who remind me of our evening walks."

He adds, "It's not merely a form of exercise; it's a special time for us to laugh, converse and relish the spirit of Ramadhan together. These moments create lasting memories more than anything else."

Interestingly, the practice of walking after Taraweeh is often a habit that flourishes during Ramadhan, yet it can easily extend well beyond the month, evolving into a healthy and sociable lifestyle.

Dr Abdullah Muhammad emphasises that "people often associate walking with the spiritual ambience of Ramadhan, but this activity can be seamlessly integrated into daily life after the month concludes. Walking requires no special equipment or gym memberships; it's simply the decision to step outside and embrace movement."

Many social workers believe that "walking as a family is not just a Ramadhan tradition; it can transform into a regular weekly or even daily activity. It not only fosters health but also strengthens familial ties while providing a space for dialogue and interactions between generations."

Perhaps it is the simplest habits that create the most beautiful memories. On Ramadhan nights, as footsteps echo quietly beneath the streetlights and laughter dances with the evening breeze, something profound occurs. Walking after Taraweeh prayers transcends physical activity; it becomes a precious moment filled with human connection that warms our hearts and restores the essential yet often overlooked feeling of togetherness. With every step, we build bridges towards one another, celebrating the ties that bind us.



Wherever they are in the world, Ramadhan is always a cherished time for Pakistanis

BY KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabiyousef](#)

RAMADHAN is a month that teaches us the importance of self-discipline, as Muslims fast from dawn until sunset, abstaining from food and drink. More than just a physical fast, this sacred month serves as a profound training ground for the soul. It invites us to cleanse our minds by steering clear of negativity and harmful actions while fostering a deeper spiritual connection to God.

Across the globe, each country celebrates Ramadhan with its own unique rituals and traditions, handed down through the generations. In Pakistan, the holy month is marked with tremendous enthusiasm and devotion, focusing on charity, family gatherings and the joyous celebration of Eid Al Fitr. Ramadhan inspires a strong sense of community, as individuals come together to break their fasts and engage in prayers. The streets buzz with the activity of vendors offering delectable Ramadhan delicacies and the air is rich with enticing aromas from dishes prepared for iftar.

During this sacred month, the spirit of giving is especially prominent in Pakistan. People embark on charitable endeavours, generously sharing food, money, clothing and grains with those in need. Mosques and various organisations set up stations where they distribute meals to the underprivileged, embodying the essence of compassion that Ramadhan inspires.

For many Pakistanis, Ramadhan is a cherished time when fasting, prayer and the recitation of the holy Quran take centre stage. It is also a period that emphasises charity, self-restraint and self-discipline.

Delightful traditional foods are essential to the Ramadhan experience, with staples such as parathas, dahi bhallay, pakoray, chana chaat, chicken kebabs, cutlets, samosas, fruit chaat and refreshing lassi or tea capturing the taste buds of many.

Recently, at Ravi Restaurant in Oman, a vibrant Iftar gathering took place, organised by the Sindhi community to showcase the true spirit of Ramadhan. Friends from various backgrounds came together to enjoy a sumptuous spread of iftar and suhoor



offerings. Under the gracious auspices of His Highness Sayyid Mohammed bin Salem al Said, alongside the esteemed Sayed Naveed Safdar Bokhari, Ambassador of Pakistan to Oman and Shaikh Syed Fayyaz Ali Shah, this event brought together a diverse array of guests, including Yasir al Zadjali, Arshad Ali Khan, Mian Mohd Munir, Zahid Shakoor, Usman Lakhan, Dr Ahmed Nawaz Hakro and many prominent figures from the community. “This holy month of Ramadhan teaches us the values of compassion and tolerance,” remarked Usman Lakhan, the chief organiser. “Today, we’ve invited friends from all walks

of life to join us in this beautiful initiative, successfully arranged by Imran Toor at the Ravi Restaurant, renowned for its traditional delights.” An essential aspect of Ramadhan in Pakistan includes assisting those in need, ensuring they can experience the month without financial worry. As Ramadhan draws to a close, initiatives are undertaken to provide new clothes for the less fortunate, enabling them to celebrate Eid Al Fitr alongside their fellow countrymen. This year, the Ravi Restaurant will host a celebration where hundreds of workers and economically challenged individuals will receive their new Eid attire, making the festive occasion even more special.

RAMADHAN TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

“Jollof rice,” village gatherings and storytelling sessions in Mali

In Mali, Ramadhan is celebrated with deep cultural significance, blending spirituality and community togetherness. As the holy month begins, families prepare traditional meals, with “Jollof rice,” a flavorful dish of rice cooked in a rich tomato sauce, often served during iftar. Villages come alive as people gather for communal prayers, sharing not just faith, but stories and folklore that enrich their cultural heritage. Evening gatherings often facilitate storytelling sessions, where elders pass down wisdom and traditions to the younger generation, reinforcing communal bonds. Charity plays an essential role during this time, as Malian Muslims dedicate themselves to helping the less fortunate, embodying the true spirit of Ramadhan. The month fosters a sense of unity and gratitude, reminding communities of their resilience and the power of collective faith. In Mali, Ramadhan is not just a time for fasting but a rich experience of heritage and shared humanity.

DAILY HEALTH TIPS TO REMEMBER



Consult a Doctor

For individuals with pre-existing health conditions or concerns about how fasting may impact their health, it is advisable to consult a healthcare professional before Ramadhan begins. A doctor can offer tailored advice based on your dietary needs and health status. If you have diabetes, hypertension, or other medical issues, understanding how to manage your condition while fasting is essential. Healthcare providers may recommend specific strategies for monitoring blood sugar or adjusting medication timings. Don't hesitate to seek advice on healthy eating practices to maintain your energy levels and overall well-being throughout the month. Remember, Ramadhan is a time for spiritual reflection, but your health should always be a priority.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS IN ISLAM



909 CE: The Establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate

The founding of the Fatimid Caliphate in North Africa by Abdullah al Mahdi Billah marked a significant phase in Islamic history as it established an alternative caliphate claiming descent from Fatimah, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Their capital, Cairo, became a vibrant centre of culture and trade, showcasing architectural achievements and intellectual pursuits.

FEATURES

Ancient sculptures were scented, Danish study shows



SCIENCE HAS already proven that sculptures from ancient Greece and Rome were often painted in warm colours and now a Danish study has revealed that some were also perfumed.

“A white marble statue was not intended to be perceived as a statue in stone. It was supposed to resemble a real god or goddess,” the author of the study, Cecilie Brons, said to the Danish scientific website Videnskab on Friday.

The archaeologist and curator at the Copenhagen museum Glyptotek made the discovery after immersing herself in the works of Roman writers such as Cicero and inscriptions on ancient Greek temples.

“Perfume and perfumed oils are often mentioned as part of the ‘decoration’ that was applied to religious cult statues in antiquity,” she said.

Cicero for example spoke of a ritual treatment of a statue of Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, the forest and animals in Greek mythology, in the Sicilian city of Segesta which was anointed with ointment and fragrant oils.

In Delos, in Greece, inscriptions in temples reveal that some statues were maintained by rubbing them with rose-scented perfume.

Admiring a statue during antiquity was “not just a visual experience, but also an olfactory one,” Brons concluded in her study, published in the *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*.

Previous research has found traces of pigments from long-faded paint on ancient Greek and Roman statues, showing that works long assumed to be white were in fact highly colourful.

The Greeks created numerous statues that reflect their cultural identity, religious beliefs and artistic achievements. These sculptures often depicted gods, heroes and significant historical figures, serving both as religious offerings and civic symbols. Public spaces like agoras featured these statues, enhancing community engagement and pride. Notable examples include grand figures in temples, such as Athena Parthenos in the Parthenon, which showcased advancements in artistic techniques and the idealisation of beauty. Additionally, statues commemorated victories and important individuals, connecting the past with the present and underscoring the significance of art in ancient Greek society. — AFP



Orchid explosions in ‘Mexican Modernism’ at NY Botanical Garden

THE GLOWING orange wall dripping with pink and crimson blossoms that greeted me in the Enid A Haupt Conservatory at the New York Botanical Garden on a recent Friday was hardly what I expected. Of course, it is time for the 22nd Annual Orchid Show and that show’s mission, Joanna L Groarke, the garden’s vice president for exhibitions and programming, said is to deliver a “shot of colour when people really need it.”

But with “The Orchid Show: Mexican Modernism,” they’ve surpassed that simple base line by miles. The show this year was conceived as a tribute to the great midcentury Mexican architect Luis Barragán (1902-88). The problem, as Marc Hachadourian, the director of glasshouse horticulture and senior curator of orchids, explained it, was to find a way of reconciling Barragán’s reputation for clean, modernist lines and minimal surfaces with the extreme, showy splendor of one of the world’s most cultivated plants.

Part of their solution, exhibited in three extravagant set pieces that anchor the beginning, middle and end of a steamy stroll through the garden’s hothouses, lies in the particular colours on offer this year. Leaning heavily towards whites and pinks that complement Barragán’s signature palette of creamy rose, orange and purple, they help the pieces strike your eye as unities well before you can take in any detail.

In the Palm Dome, where I started, a rich, rusty orange wall, a smaller white wall and a protruding, square-bottomed water trough evoke the architect’s 1960s Fuente de los Amantes (Lover’s Fountain) in Mexico City. Emerging from cavities built into each of these walls are hundreds of pink and white Phalaenopsis, dense bursts of colour and life almost too rich to number.

The Phalaenopsis, known as the grocery store orchid, is originally from Southeast Asia, but because it has been the most extensively hybridised, it comes in the greatest variety of colours. Species native to Mexico are also displayed throughout, like the fragrant but petite Lily-of-the-valley orchids, or Vanilla planifolia, which provides the minuscule black specks in your vanilla Häagen-Dazs and



was first cultivated by the Aztecs.

At the end of the show you discover an even lushier installation modeled on a garden that Barragán famously built around an existing jacaranda tree: Instead of jacarandas, this fabricated steel tree supports an abundance of purple orchids.

The other element serving to marry Barragán’s aesthetic with the orchid’s is the flowers’ placement in the walls. Always well within the edges, they’re framed not only by sharp corners, but by at least a foot or two of flat, brightly painted faux stucco. This works most magically in a hallway broken into sections by three stark walls with cutout doors, one purple, one orange, one fuchsia. As you enter the hall — accompanied by a playlist of Mexican boleros and guitar music — you see a line of plain, if brightly coloured, arches. Once you pass through, though and turn to look back, you see that these walls, too, are teeming with flowers.

Of course, giving winter- and world-weary visitors a shot of colour isn’t really the whole agenda. (It’s not that hard, either, since there are now more than 150,000 distinct varieties of orchid, coming in shades from rich, buttery orange to eye-melting violet to astringent greenish-white.) The real aim of capturing people’s interest with a show like this is to get



them into one of the world’s great botanical collections and put them face to face with the mind-boggling diversity of life on earth.

So while the Barragán-inspired installations themselves stick to a relatively narrow range of floral styles, the orchids that have been carefully scattered around the rest of the permanently installed vines, palms and cactuses are so various that if, like me, you come to take notes, you’ll walk out lightheaded and bleary.

“Mexican Modernism” does an admirable job of balancing simplicity of conception with opulence of execution. Coloured windows in one section turn cactuses orange and purple as the sun moves across the sky; potted orchids in the aquatic plants and vines gallery fill the room with fragrance even as they draw your attention to water lilies and water poppies; an adjoining show of stylish photographs by Martirene Alcántara, in the garden’s nearby Ross Gallery, takes you directly into Barragán’s sharp but explosively colourful walls and corners. But I’d recommend making some quick choices before the abundance goes to your head. Take a deep breath, pick a single flower — like a Phalaenopsis Taida Day, whose white sepals are marked with elegant purple veins — and look closely. — NYT