

10

RAMADHAN
1446 AH
MONDAY
MAR 10, 2025

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PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR
05:06 AM

DHUHR
12:22 PM

ASR
03:46 PM

MAGHRIB
06:19 PM

ISHA
07:29 PM


omanobserver.com

INBRIEF

REAL ESTATE
TRANSACTIONS
EXCEED RO 185M

The value of real estate transactions in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of January reached RO 185.5 million compared to RO 207.8 million during the corresponding period in 2024, comprising a drop by 10.8 per cent, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Fee collected for completed legal transactions amounted to RO 7 million, comprising a rise by 5.6 per cent. The value of sale contracts reached RO 79.9 per cent (down by 20.9 per cent) for 5,688 contracts (dropping 7.1 per cent). **SEE P15**

ARMED MAN SHOT
NEAR WHITE HOUSE



The US Secret Service shot an armed man outside the White House early on Sunday after a confrontation, and the man is now in an area hospital, it said in a statement.

President Donald Trump was not in the White House at the time, as he is spending the weekend at his Florida residence. Secret Service officials received a tip on Saturday from local authorities that a suicidal person may be travelling to Washington from Indiana and the person's car was found a block from the White House, it said in the statement. The man brandished a firearm as officers approached him and the Secret Service opened fire shortly after midnight local time.

Social protection spending rises to RO 577 million

MUSCAT: Overall spending on social protection has surged to RO 577 million signalling the great attention the Sultanate of Oman pays to achieving stability, a dignified life and improving the standard of living of citizens.

Dr Faisal bin Abdullah al Farsi, CEO of the Social Protection Fund (SPF), said that the fund's system includes a set of policies and programmes that deal with the life cycle of the individual from birth

to old age. There are two types of benefits: insurance programmes and social protection programmes.

The Social Protection Fund functions as an executive body to enforce the laws and legislation related to the social protection system, Dr Al Farsi said, stressing that governance is the basis for disbursing benefits and that governance aims to ensure that benefits only go to those who are actually entitled to them.

Dr Al Farsi said that the number of direct beneficiaries of social protection benefits crossed 1.5 million people. As for insurance programmes, there are 590,000 active insured persons in addition to 1 million foreign workers who were added to the social protection system for the first time. Hence, the Social Protection Fund benefits more than 2 million people monthly.

He noted that the system includes

three main levels namely: zero level which is the basic social protection such as the elderly benefit which amounts to RO 115 disbursed as part of social protection support on top of the retirement pension. Certainly, some benefits are paid automatically to all Omanis who meet the conditions, such as the elderly, while other benefits are subject to verification to ensure that they go to the persons who need them the most. **DETAILS ON P2**

Israel strikes Gaza ahead
of new talks on ceasefire

Hamas for permanent truce and reopening of borders

ISRAEL carried out an air strike in northern Gaza on Sunday, rattling an already fragile ceasefire as it prepared for fresh talks in Doha on the future of its truce with Hamas.

Despite the end of the truce's initial phase a week ago, both sides have refrained from returning to all-out war, though there have been sporadic episodes of violence. Sunday's air strike was the latest of daily strikes reported by Israel since last Thursday.

Hamas has repeatedly called for an immediate start to negotiations on the ceasefire's second phase, which was negotiated by the United States, Qatar and Egypt aiming to bring a permanent end to the war. Israel says it prefers an extension of phase one until mid-April, and cut off aid to Gaza over the impasse.

Hamas representatives met mediators in Cairo last week, emphasising the urgent need to resume humanitarian aid deliveries to the territory "without restrictions or conditions", a Hamas statement said.

"We call on mediators in Egypt and Qatar, as well as the guarantors in the US administration, to ensure that the occupation complies with the agreement... and proceeds with the second phase according to the agreed-upon terms," Hamas spokesman, Hazem Qassem, said.

Hamas's key demands for the second phase include a captive-prisoner exchange, a complete withdrawal of Israel from Gaza, a permanent ceasefire, reopening of border crossings and lifting of the Israeli blockade, he said.

Former United States president Joe Biden had also outlined a second phase involving the release of remaining living captives, the withdrawal of all Israeli forces left in Gaza,



A Palestinian boy stands next to a fence as he and others gather to receive bread from a bakery, in Khan Younis, in Gaza, on Sunday. — Reuters

and establishment of a permanent ceasefire.

Following talks with mediators, another Hamas spokesman, Abdel Latif al Qanoua, said indicators were so far "positive".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said it would send delegates to Doha on Monday, and Israeli media reported the security cabinet would discuss the matter later on Sunday.

The truce largely halted more than 15 months of fighting in Gaza, where virtually the entire population was displaced by

Israel's relentless military campaign in response to October 7, 2023, attack.

The six-week first phase led to the exchange of 25 living Israeli captives and eight bodies for the release of about 1,800 Palestinian prisoners held in Israel.

It also allowed much-needed food, shelter and medical assistance to re-enter Gaza.

Since Israel subsequently cut off the aid flow, United Nations rights experts accused the government of "weaponising starvation". — AFP

Plans for 12-day ‘Grand Tour of Oman’ project under way

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism plans to offer a 12-day Grand Tour of Oman experience to visitors.

The ministry has sought bids from consultancy firms that can design a project that involves designing the route for a comprehensive tourism experience across the country, including off-road adventure.

The experience should allow visitors to explore tourism products and engage in immersive and interactive experiences, ensuring

that tourists are not merely spectators but become an integral part of the experience itself.

The project includes developing a clear road map and detailed plans for enhancing all elements of the journey, including tourist routes, key attractions, supporting services, infrastructure, governance methodologies, and monitoring frameworks to ensure that the journey is executed under the highest standards.

The project leverages the details outlined in the Tourism



The project includes developing a clear road map and detailed plans.

Development Plans for the various governorates, as prepared by the ministry.

It should integrate tourism experience across different destinations, aligning with the top-brand signature experiences identified in the Oman Tourism Strategy.

The consulting services must be accompanied by appropriate technical studies of the sites and prepare, develop and design one of the Top Experience of Oman Tourism Strategy (OTS).

OMAN

RAMADHANCHECK



NO UNDUE PRICE HIKE OF ESSENTIALS

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Prices of essentials, fruits and vegetables in all public markets are under control, as observed by the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA). A number of price controlling mechanisms are currently in place to keep prices of essential goods, fruits and vegetables under control during the holy month of Ramadhan and no unvalidated hike in prices is so far visible, according to the CPA.

“Prices of various essentials, fruits and vegetables at the central market of Khazaen are well controlled and no undue hike whatsoever is visible,” said a representative from the Consumer Services and Market Watch department at the CPA.

There were complaints that the price of onions and other fruits and vegetables were on the rise over the past two weeks as the demand went high.

“There has been a slight shortage of supply of some fruits and vegetables in the beginning of the month as we import them from two or three countries and when the supply was affected as the production there went down, we sourced them from other countries and the demand has been met,” he added.

The CPA has earlier warned vendors against hiking prices of essentials without the permission of the Authority.

“We are closely monitoring the prices of essentials, including fruits and vegetables at both the wholesalers and retailers and we had discussions with major business entities in the market. Anyone found to be violating the rules will be dealt with accordingly,” he said.

Consumers can report on toll free numbers 800779009 or 80077997.

PACT SIGNED TO INTEGRATE TECHNOLOGY IN PUBLIC LIFE



SUHAR: Al Batinah North Governor’s Office on Sunday signed a cooperation agreement to integrate smart technology into public life in the governorate with Huawei Oman and MENA Invest Company. The agreement aims to integrate smart solutions and AI in various service and development sectors in the governorate in a manner that contributes to enhancing public services and boosting sustainable development, as well as augmenting the operational performance of government units. — **ONA**

Consuming unpasteurised milk poses health risks: Health experts

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

With the increasing demand for fresh foods during Ramadhan, some consumers choose to purchase unpasteurised milk from local markets and farms, thinking it is a healthier and more natural option. However, this practice presents significant health risks, as contaminated milk can harbour harmful bacteria that cause food poisoning, potentially leading to severe complications for fasting individuals.

The Food Safety and Quality Centre defines unpasteurised milk as raw milk that has not been subjected to the necessary

heating process to eradicate harmful microorganisms. While some believe that consuming raw milk offers additional nutritional benefits compared to pasteurised milk, scientific studies and health organisations strongly advise against its consumption due to the potential presence of dangerous pathogens that can cause serious illnesses.

In a tweet from its official Twitter account, the Food Safety and Quality Centre emphasised that unpasteurised milk is vulnerable to contamination from various sources, making it a health risk. These sources include animal waste that may contaminate milk during the milking process, as well as zoonotic diseases like bovine



While some believe that consuming raw milk offers additional nutritional benefits compared to pasteurised milk, scientific studies and health organisations strongly advise against its consumption.

tuberculosis that can be transmitted to humans through tainted milk. Furthermore, bacteria from

the animal’s skin may transfer to the milk during milking or due to improper handling. Environmental factors such as soil, dirt, and unclean surfaces can introduce harmful bacteria during production. Additionally, mastitis infections in cows can result in the release of bacteria into the milk, further heightening the risk of contamination. These risks underscore the importance of adhering to strict hygiene and safety standards during milk production and distribution.

Due to these health hazards, experts strongly recommend consuming only pasteurised milk as a preventive measure to safeguard public health.

Yousef al Abri, a farm owner, shared insights on consumer preferences during Ramadhan: “We have observed that some customers, particularly the elderly, request raw milk, believing it to be more beneficial. We always strive to educate them about its dangers and strongly urge them to opt for pasteurised milk to ensure their health and the safety of their families.”

Al Abri also noted that some individuals purchase raw milk and boil it at home, mistakenly thinking this process serves as proper pasteurisation. However, boiling only eliminates some bacteria and does not fully replicate pasteurisation.

1.5 million people receive social protection benefits

YOUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

OVERALL spending on social protection has surged to RO 577 million signaling the great attention the Sultanate of Oman pays to achieving stability, a dignified life and improving the standard of living of citizens.

Dr Faisal bin Abdullah al Farsi, CEO of the Social Protection Fund (SPF), explained that the fund’s system includes a set of policies and programmes that deal with the life cycle of the individual from birth to old age. There are two types of benefits: insurance programmes and social protection programmes.

The Social Protection Fund functions as an executive body to enforce the laws and legislation related to the social protection system, Al Farsi said stressing that governance is the basis for disbursing benefits and that governance aims to ensure that benefits only go to those who are actually entitled to them.

Al Farsi said that the number of direct beneficiaries of social protection benefits crossed 1.5 million people. As for insurance programmes, there are 590,000 active insured persons in addition to 1 million foreign workers who were added to the social protection system for the first time. Hence, the Social Protection Fund benefits more than 2 million people monthly. Al Farsi noted that the system includes three main levels namely: zero level which is the basic social protection such as the elderly benefit which amounts to RO 115 disbursed as part of social protection support on top of the retirement pension. Certainly, some benefits are paid automatically to all Omanis who meet the conditions, such as the elderly, while other benefits are subject to verification to ensure that they go to the



Some benefits are paid automatically to all Omanis who meet the conditions, such as the elderly.

persons who need them the most.

Regarding the classification of permanent diseases, Al Farsi said that measures are underway to classify the category of permanent diseases as part of the benefits of people with disabilities and the classification is expected to be approved soon.

Al Farsi said that the new social protection law was distinguished by making retirement pensions variable instead of being fixed due to inflation. Accordingly, pensions are calculated on the basis of 75 per cent of the official inflation rate while ensuring a minimum annual rise. This year, the percentage was raised to 1 per cent and will be reviewed annually according to the

inflation rate. As per the new system, the retirement pension is calculated according to the annual wage growth rate which amounted to 3 per cent last year. This means that individuals who did not receive a salary rise will be automatically compensated by this percentage upon calculating the retirement pension.

Also under the Social Protection System is the Job Security System which provides temporary support to those who lost their jobs for reasons beyond their control during crises. The system has seen an extension of the unemployment benefits for more than five years due to economic crises, Al Farsi concluded.

Sign language workshop to help communication

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

The Ministry of Social Development, represented by the General-Directorate for Persons with Disabilities, organised a specialised training workshop in sign language at the first level of the ‘Omani Sign Dictionary’. Fifteen participants from the Directorate’s employees took part in the workshop that is being held over five days.

It aims to spread Omani sign language to employees of the General Directorate for Persons with Disabilities. It also aims to facilitate communication and complete transactions for hearing-impaired clients, as well as provide employees with terminology related to job titles, tasks, and department and division names



Moza bint Salim al Ghafriyah

within the Directorate. Additionally, the workshop aims to qualify employees to interact with hearing-impaired individuals in various life situations and enable them to use sign language terms in sentences and dialogues to communicate effectively.

The workshop began with a historical overview of sign language on its first day, followed by practical applications in sign language for letters, family, business, and religion. In the upcoming days, practical applications will cover attributes, cases, colours, services, job titles and tasks, as well as the names of wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman, Arab countries, the environment, oceans and social relations.

Moza bint Salim al Ghafriyah, a sign language expert at the

Ministry of Social Development, emphasised the importance of the workshop, stating: “We aim to equip participants with communication skills for individuals with hearing disabilities, provide them with sign language communication services, and enable them to complete transactions independently without needing a sign language interpreter. Additionally, participants will gain familiarity with the culture and psychology of individuals with hearing disabilities.”

Participant Ahmed bin Suleiman al Awfi from the National Autism Centre highlighted the significance of learning sign language for communicating with colleagues who have hearing disabilities, assisting in translation and conveying information to those in need.



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SHORT TAKES



BAN ON ANIMAL IMPORTS FROM YEMEN LIFTED

MAI AL GHADANIYAH
MUSCAT, March 25

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources on Sunday issued a decision lifting the ban on importing live animals from the Republic of Yemen. However, the decision set strict conditions including that importers should apply for an import licence before the shipment leaves Yemen. In addition, animals should be entered through the approved entrance and the veterinary authority should be informed 48 hours prior to shipment arrival.

The decision also stipulates importers of animals from Yemen to submit a report on the animal mortality rate during the journey specifying that they did not come into contact with infected animals or pass through disease outbreak areas. Importers are also required to submit a veterinary licence and approved veterinary health certificates of the animals.

RAFO SIGNS PACT WITH OQEP



Represented by the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), the Ministry of Defence, on Sunday signed an agreement for emergency air support with OQ Exploration and Production Company (OQEP) for the offshore concession area of Bukha Platforms in Musandam Governorate. — ONA

STEADY LIVESTOCK SUPPLY FOR RAMADHAN, EID ENSURED

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has said that 289,089 heads of livestock were made available to consumers during January and February 2025, of those 267,213 are heads of sheep and goats and 21,876 cows.

Eng Khalfan bin Mattar al Sharji, Director-General of Livestock, said that the ministry is acting in coordination with livestock import companies to meet

local market needs for livestock and red meat over the forthcoming period. For this purpose, a total of 129 permits have so far been issued for the firms to make the imports, he added.

Al Sharji pointed out that the total number of livestock allowed to be imported stood at 359,150. He added that the number included 332,700 goats and sheep and 26,450 heads of cattle.

He explained that local market

need for red meat rises during the holy month of Ramadhan and Eid Al Fitr, prompting higher demand for livestock imports.

Al Sharji affirmed that, to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, epidemics or common livestock diseases in the Sultanate of Oman, the veterinary quarantine personnel are now set in full action round the clock, conducting necessary health checks on all livestock imports. — ONA

Muscat Municipality issues food safety norms

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

DURING Ramadhan around, families often prepare large quantities of food to ensure delicious and varied meals for Iftar and Suhoor. However, in the midst of the festive preparations, food safety and proper preservation can sometimes be overlooked, leading to food spoilage or even food poisoning.

Muscat Municipality has highlighted important guidelines on social media to help ensure safe food cooling and storage throughout the holy month, reducing health risks from poor preservation. These practices will keep meals fresh and safe for consumption during the month of fasting.

It's common to prepare large amounts of food in advance, but it's crucial to avoid leaving cooked food at room temperature for extended periods.

High temperatures, especially in some regions, can promote the growth of harmful bacteria. Health authorities recommend cooling hot food within two hours of cooking. Dividing the food into smaller portions can speed up the cooling process and help maintain food safety.

Dr Maryam Saeed, a Nutrition and Food Safety Consultant, notes, "Leaving food at room temperature for extended periods, particularly protein-rich foods like meat and poultry, encourages the growth of harmful bacteria such as Salmonella and E. coli. Rapid cooling and portioning food into smaller quantities significantly reduce these risks."



Temperature control plays a vital role in food preservation

Temperature control plays a vital role in food preservation. Muscat Municipality recommends keeping refrigerated foods at 5 degrees Celsius or lower to slow bacterial growth and maintain food quality. Freezing foods should be done at -18 degrees Celsius or lower to nearly eliminate bacteria and preserve the food for longer periods.

In addition to proper cooling and freezing, correct storage methods are essential for food safety.

Some of the useful tips are:

Use airtight containers for cooked and refrigerated foods to avoid contamination and preserve flavour. Minimise frequent opening of the refrigerator to maintain consistent temperature. Organise food in the refrigerator to ensure even cooling, preventing spoilage.

Fasting individuals can adopt simple practices to ensure healthy food consumption during Ramadhan:

These relate to reheating food thoroughly before consumption, especially if it's been stored in the refrigerator, to kill any lingering bacteria.

Avoid refreezing thawed foods, as this can impact their quality and pose health risks. Regularly check food for signs of spoilage and discard any that appear off in colour or smell.

Use quick cooling methods, like placing food in a cold water bath before refrigeration, to shorten cooling time.

Dr Emreem emphasises, "Food poisoning during Ramadhan often results from improper handling of stored food. For instance, reheating food at low temperatures or insufficiently can leave bacteria alive. Always heat food to at least 74 degrees Celsius to ensure safety."

Ramadhan presents an opportunity to adopt healthier habits, not just in food preparation, but also in how we store and preserve our meals. By following the correct storage guidelines, you can ensure meals remain flavourful and safe while protecting your family from foodborne illnesses.

Maslenitsa Festival unites Oman, Russia in cultural celebration

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The vibrant Maslenitsa Spring Festival, a spectacular celebration of Russian culture, concluded on a high note, captivating an audience of 20,000 at Al Mouj Muscat. The festival brought together Omanis and expatriates from diverse nationalities, offering a rich cultural exchange.

Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the festival highlighted sustainability, creativity, and local entrepreneurship. It provided a platform for Omani SMEs to showcase their innovative products to a global audience. A grand fair featured authentic handmade products and souvenirs from both Oman and Russia, further



The vibrant Maslenitsa Spring Festival of Russian culture captivated an audience of 20,000

enhancing cultural collaboration.

Organised by Russian House Oman and supported by the Ministries of Heritage and Tourism, Culture, Sports and Youth, as well as the Russian Ministry of Culture,

the Government of St Petersburg, and the Russian Embassy, this year's festival marked the 40th anniversary of Oman-Russia diplomatic relations. It served as a fusion of both cultures, offering interactive

activities for all ages.

Dignitaries such as Jamal bin Hassan al Mousawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum; Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat; and Ibrahim bin Saif Bani Oraba, Deputy General Manager for Arts at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, joined Russian Ambassador Oleg Levin and other officials, including Andrey Malyshev, Russia's Deputy Minister of Culture, and Nizami Mamyshev, Deputy Chair of the Committee of External Relations of St Petersburg, in celebrating this milestone event.

Nearly 100 artists from Russia performed at the festival.

Speaking to Observer, Igor Egorov, Head of the Russian Community in Oman, emphasised the festival's role in strengthening cultural ties

between the two nations.

"Maslenitsa was a festival for all residents of Oman, and we hope it deepened the cultural bond between our countries. The overwhelming response made this year's event truly special," he noted.

The festival presented a stunning mix of tradition and innovation, featuring performances by renowned Russian ensembles, including St Petersburg's 'Moroshka' Song and Musical Theatre and Dagestan's State Academic Dance Ensemble 'Lezginka.'

Visitors immersed themselves in Russian traditions by learning folk dances, dressing in traditional attire, and participating in cooking workshops, where they mastered the art of Russian pancakes and sweets.

FASTING FOR
DETOX

FACT
OR FICTION?



KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR A
HEALTHY RAMADHAN



STAY HYDRATED – Drink plenty of water between Iftar and Suhoor to support the body’s natural detox processes.



EAT BALANCED MEALS – Choose whole foods rich in proteins, fibre and healthy fats instead of fried and sugary options.



ENGAGE IN LIGHT ACTIVITY – Walking after Iftar helps maintain circulation and energy levels.



Fasting is not a miracle detox solution, but when combined with mindful habits, it can be a gateway to a healthier body and mind.

Dr Jawaher al Hadhrami, a specialist in clinical nutrition, explains, “The body has its own natural detoxification system. The liver and kidneys continuously filter out toxins and eliminate waste. Fasting does not ‘cleanse’ the body as some imagine, but it can indirectly support detoxification by reducing exposure to unhealthy foods and encouraging better dietary habits.”

For some, fasting has led to noticeable health benefits. Suad al Sinani, a 35-year-old fitness enthusiast, shares, “I used to feel bloated and sluggish due to poor eating habits. But after fasting, my digestion and energy levels improved. Cutting out snacks and sugary meals made me feel lighter and more focused.”

Similarly, Reham al Khawaldi, a mother of two, sees Ramadhan as an opportunity to reset her body. “I use this month to drink more water, soups and fresh juices. It feels like a detox after months of unhealthy eating. Instead of focusing only on food, I feel more energised and refreshed.”

However, some argue that fasting alone does not detoxify the body – its effects depend on dietary habits outside fasting hours. Alia al Hashmi, a working mother, believes, “Fasting alone doesn’t cleanse the body. Some people eat heavier meals at Iftar, which can strain digestion. The key is maintaining a balanced diet, not just fasting.”

Dr Jawaher agrees, adding that while fasting may not directly cleanse the body in a medical sense, it offers indirect benefits. “Fasting gives the digestive system a break, which may improve metabolic efficiency. It also encourages people to be more mindful of their food choices. Many individuals consume more natural, unprocessed foods during Ramadhan, which can reduce inflammation and boost overall well-being.”

FASTING during Ramadhan is widely regarded as a time for both spiritual and physical renewal. Many believe it helps detoxify the body by eliminating harmful substances and promoting overall health. But how true is this claim? While medical science confirms that the liver and kidneys naturally detoxify the body, personal experiences suggest that fasting can serve as a reset for healthier habits and improved well-being.

“*Fasting alone doesn’t cleanse the body, but it can be a powerful reset – if paired with mindful eating and hydration***”**

DR JAWAHER AL HADHRAMI
Specialist in clinical nutrition

Escrow system boosts real estate investment

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

In an exclusive interview, Eng Khalid bin Nasser al Mahrouqi, Director-General of Real Estate Development at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, highlighted the pivotal role of the escrow account system in boosting real estate investment in Oman. This system improves transparency and protects buyers’ rights, making the market more appealing to both local and international investors.

Al Mahrouqi explained that the escrow account mandates developers to open a dedicated bank account for funds paid by buyers, ensuring that these funds are used exclusively for construction. This mechanism reduces project failure risks and boosts investor confidence in the sector. “This procedure guarantees proper use of buyers’ funds, mitigating the risk of failure and enhancing trust in the real estate market,” he stated.

Emphasising the government’s commitment to regulating the market, Al Mahrouqi noted that the escrow account system helps stimulate foreign investments



ENG KHALID BIN NASSER AL MAHROUQI
Director-General of Real Estate Development

Over 90 projects have been registered in the escrow account system till now, with expectations for this number to rise

by reassuring investors that projects will be completed as per the approved plans. He added that such regulations foster market demand, which in turn drives economic growth.

To date, over 90 projects have been registered in the escrow account system, with expectations for this number to rise. The ministry is actively educating developers and investors about the system, offering benefits like bank financing and enhanced project promotion for registered developers.

Al Mahrouqi clarified that the number of unregistered developers is far fewer than previously reported, with only 40 unlicensed projects. He stressed the ministry’s focus on awareness campaigns and strict enforcement of regulations, including penalties for non-compliance. The ministry also supports developers through platforms like “Tatweer”, offering market insights, technical advice and marketing support to help them succeed.

In terms of fund

disbursement, Al Mahrouqi explained that payments from the escrow account are made in stages based on approved documents, ensuring funds are spent on actual construction and not diverted. This system prevents financial manipulation and ensures that projects adhere to their timelines.

Lastly, Al Mahrouqi highlighted the importance of regulating real estate advertisements to protect buyers from fraudulent or unlicensed offers. The ministry’s ongoing efforts to refine real estate laws and provide support will continue to foster growth and stability in Oman’s real estate sector, benefiting both local and foreign investors and supporting national economic development.

With these regulations in place, Al Mahrouqi anticipates an increase in real estate investments, positioning Oman as a competitive and secure destination for both local and international investors, further enhancing the country’s economic stability.

MAJOR HEALTH INVESTMENTS BOOST KHAZAEN MEDICAL SECTOR

BARKA: Oman’s healthcare sector continues to expand, with nine major health projects now localised in the integrated ‘Medicine City’ within Khazaen Economic City, Al Batinah South Governorate. By the end of 2024, these projects had attracted investments totalling RO 156 million, reinforcing Oman’s strategy to enhance its pharmaceutical and medical industries.

Khazaen Economic City, a major economic and industrial hub, has successfully secured investments in specialised pharmaceutical projects, including the production of human vaccines, manufacturing

of medicines and medical supplies, and the development of storage and distribution facilities for pharmaceuticals and medical equipment.

Eng Salem bin Sulaiman al Dhahli, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, emphasised that the Medicine City serves as a key pillar in Oman’s vision to strengthen the healthcare sector by attracting local and international investors. He highlighted the role of foreign and domestic investments in improving national drug security and localising medical industries, reducing reliance on imports. — ONA

Cyber Security Week begins in Al Batinah

AL RUSTAQ: The Directorate-General of Education in Al Batinah South Governorate has launched Cyber Security Week, an initiative running until March 13, aimed at enhancing awareness of cyber threats, strengthening digital security practices and promoting safe online engagement.

Sultan bin Hamad al Hashemi, Director of the Information Technology Department at Al Batinah South Education Directorate, emphasised the significance of the event in educating students and the wider community about the growing risks associated with social media, electronic transactions and cybersecurity threats. He



The Cyber Security Week aims at enhancing awareness of cyber threats

highlighted that the initiative seeks to improve knowledge and response strategies for handling digital security challenges while promoting the safe and responsible use of artificial intelligence applications.

Al Hashemi further noted that Cyber Security Week plays a crucial role in instilling strong

cybersecurity principles and values among school students across the governorate. By fostering awareness, the event aims to equip students with the necessary skills to protect themselves from online risks, ensuring a safer digital learning environment.

The week-long programme includes various awareness activities, workshops and exhibitions across schools in the governorate. These sessions cover essential topics such as cybersecurity fundamentals, data protection, safeguarding personal information, preventing electronic hacking, artificial intelligence security, and best practices for safe social media use. — ONA

Savouring the essence of Omani halwa in Ramadhan

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

By sunset, Muscat glows with the spirit of Ramadhan, its streets illuminated with festive lights and an air of serenity.

Muttrah, in particular, transforms, with Ramadhan greetings displayed in Arabic and English, and its iconic mosque bustling with Taraweeh prayers.

As the night unfolds, a cherished tradition comes to life - the tasting of Omani halwa.

At Diwaniya Sweets, a renowned establishment with 45 branches and a legacy of 42 years, visitors indulge in flavours that define Omani heritage. “Our halwa made with saffron and honey is called Al Masiya, while the one with pistachio and sugarcane is Al Sultaniya



At Diwaniya Sweets, visitors continue tradition of tasting Omani halwa during Ramadhan

Red,” explains Aiman al Hooti. Frankincense-infused halwa and fig halwa add to

the unique offerings, while the classic Al Diwaniya Black, made with walnuts, remains a favourite.

Open from 9 am until midnight, the shop welcomes a diverse mix of customers, with expatriates visiting in the morning and Omanis joining in the evening. The ritual of tasting halwa unites people of all ages and backgrounds.

Eng Mehdi Saleh, a tourist from Baghdad, fondly recalls his first encounter with Omani halwa. “A friend brought it back from Oman, and now I want to take some home as souvenirs for my family and friends.”

For many, a taste of halwa is more than just a sweet treat - it’s a journey into Oman’s rich cultural tapestry, made even more special during the holy month.

ahliGlobal equityfund

Notice of the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of Ahli Global Equity Fund

We, the Management of **Ahli Global Equity Fund** (the “**Fund**” hereby invite the unit holders to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting to be held at 3:30 pm, on Tuesday, 25 March 2025, at Ahli Bank HQ. In the event that the quorum to convene the Annual Ordinary General Meeting is not complete, the second general meeting will be convened at 3:30 pm, on Wednesday, 26 March 2025, at Ahli Bank’s HQ to discuss and consider the following agenda:

- 1) To consider and approve the Fund Management Report for financial year ended on 31 December 2024.
- 2) To consider and approve the Auditors’ Report on the balance sheet and profit and loss account for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
- 3) To ratify the sitting fees for the Fund’s Management Meetings for the financial year ended on 31 December 2024 and determine the sitting fees for the financial year ending on 31 December 2025
- 4) To inform the general assembly of the related party transactions which took place during the financial year ended on 31 December 2024
- 5) To appoint an auditor for the financial year ending on 31 December 2025 and determine their fees.

According to the Articles of Association of the Fund, any unit holder shall have the right to authorize in writing any other person to attend the meeting and vote on the resolutions taken thereat on his/her behalf. The authorization must be on the proxy forms, which is enclosed with the invitation. Natural persons must enclose copies of their IDs. Minor unitholders and unitholders who do not have IDs shall enclose copies of their passports. Non-Omani unitholders shall enclose along with their completed proxy forms copies of their passports or their resident card. Proxy forms for corporate persons shall be signed by their authorized signatories. Copies of commercial registration documents as well as ID/passport copies of their authorized signatories’ must be enclosed with their completed and stamped proxy forms.

To prevent delay in starting the meeting, unitholders are requested to arrive about half an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

In case of any enquiries, please contact **Mrs. Duaa Al Zaabi** Phone No 24577922.

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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Germany’s Chancellor-in-waiting Friedrich Merz leaves after giving a statement, Berlin. — Reuters

MERZ WANTS EU WEAPONS TO BOOST US SHIELD

BERLIN: German Chancellor-in-waiting Friedrich Merz on Sunday said he would like talks with France and Britain about sharing their nuclear weapons. “Sharing nuclear weapons is an issue that we need to talk about... we have to become stronger together in nuclear deterrence,” he said in an interview on Deutschlandfunk radio, a day after agreeing cornerstones of a coalition deal between his conservative party and the Social Democratic SPD party. “We should talk with both countries (France and Britain), always also from the perspective of supplementing the American nuclear shield, which we of course want to see maintained.”

At a summit in Brussels, EU leaders backed plans to spend more on defence amid fears that Russia, emboldened by its war in Ukraine, may attack an EU country next and that Europe can no longer rely on the US to come to its aid. Merz’s tougher stance on security and migration reflects a changing political landscape, where the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has surged to become the country’s second-largest party.

— Reuters

COLOMBIAN GUERILLAS RELEASE HOSTAGE FORCES



Soldiers leave after local communities force them out of the military base El Plateado. — AFP

EL PLATEADO: Twenty-eight police officers and one soldier held hostage in southwest Colombia were released, with fresh tensions erupting in the coca-producing region after they had left. Residents of the community of La Hacienda in the department of Cauca told the detainees that they were free to go. The men, held since Thursday, collected their riot gear and left along a dirt road, escorted by local residents. The three-hour journey to El Plateado, where the men were released, was tense, with an unidentified drone flying over the convoy and fierce arguments between the villagers and officials of the Ombudsman’s Office.

President Gustavo Petro confirmed that the men were free. The 29 men were detained after a day of clashes between residents and security forces, part of a government military operation aimed at ending drug-related violence in a region with one of the highest concentrations of coca crops in Colombia. The government said the officers were being held by a dissident FARC guerrilla group, the Estado Mayor Central (EMC), for whom the Canon del Micay region is a stronghold.

— AFP

BRUTAL STRIKES

Shelling kills 7 in Sudan strategic city



Paramilitary shelling on Sunday on a city in Sudan’s south, where the army broke a prolonged siege last month, killed seven civilians and wounded nearly two dozen others. Witnesses reported intense bombardment by the RSF on Sunday, with one shell striking a public transport bus carrying passengers, on the third consecutive day of attacks from the north and east. The shelling killed seven people and wounded 23 others, all civilians.

— AFP

US ENDS WAIVER FOR IRAQ TO BUY IRANIAN ELECTRICITY

BAGHDAD: Washington has declined to renew a sanctions waiver that allowed Iraq to buy electricity from neighbouring Iran, a spokesperson for the American Embassy in Baghdad said on Sunday. The Baghdad government, which hopes to achieve energy self-sufficiency by 2028, said it had prepared “for all scenarios” regarding the waiver.

“On March 8, the US Department of State did not renew the waiver for Iraq to purchase Iranian electricity,”

the US Embassy spokesperson said. The decision “ensures we do not allow Iran any degree of economic or financial relief”, the spokesperson added. The statement did not mention Iranian gas imports.

The waiver was introduced in 2018, when Washington reimposed sanctions on Tehran after US President Donald Trump abandoned a nuclear deal with Iran during his first term in office. Since returning to the White House in January, Trump has reinstated

his policy of exerting “maximum pressure” against Iran.

“The President’s maximum pressure campaign is designed to end Iran’s nuclear threat, curtail its ballistic missile programme, and stop it from supporting fighting groups,” the embassy spokesperson said on Sunday. Calling Iran “an unreliable energy supplier”, the spokesperson urged Baghdad “to eliminate its dependence on Iranian sources of energy as soon as possible”.

— AFP

Syria leader issues plea for national unity, peace

SYRIAN

President Ahmed al Sharaa called for national unity and peace on Sunday, after hundreds were reportedly killed along the country’s Mediterranean coast in the worst violence since the overthrow of Bashar al Assad. Clashes between the new security forces and loyalists of the former government erupted on Thursday in the areas to which Assad belongs, and have since escalated into reported mass killings. “We must preserve national unity (and) civil peace as much as possible and, Allah willing, we will be able to live together in this country,” Sharaa said from a mosque in Damascus.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor has reported that 745 people were killed in the coastal Latakia and Tartus provinces. The Britain-based Observatory said they were killed in “executions” carried out by fighters and were followed by looting. The fighting has also killed 125 members of the security forces and 148 pro-Assad fighters, according to the Observatory, taking the overall death toll to 1,018.

The interior ministry said on Sunday that government forces were conducting “sweeping operations in Qadmous and the surrounding villages” in Tartus province to “pursue the remnants of the toppled regime”. State news agency SANA quoted a defence ministry source as saying there were violent clashes ongoing in Tanita, another Tartus village. A photographer in the city of Latakia reported a military convoy



Members of Syria’s new authorities security forces gather in Sanamayn, in the southern province of Daraa. — AFP



We must preserve national unity (and) civil peace as much as possible and, Allah willing, we will be able to live together in this country

AHMED AL SHARAA

entering the Bisnada neighbourhood to search homes. Defence ministry spokesman Hassan Abdul Ghani said on Saturday the security forces had “reimposed control” over areas that had seen attacks by Assad loyalists.

Education Minister Nazir al Qadri announced that schools would remain shut on Sunday and Monday in both Latakia and Tartus, while SANA reported a power outage throughout Latakia province due to attacks on the grid by Assad loyalists. The killings followed clashes sparked by the arrest of a wanted suspect, the Observatory reported. The monitor said there had been a “relative return to calm” in the region on Saturday.

A defence ministry source said that troops had blocked roads leading to the coast to prevent “violations”, without specifying who was committing them. Latakia

province security director Mustafa Kneifati told the news agency: “We will not allow for sedition or the targeting of any component of the Syrian people.”

The Syrian areas have been gripped by fear of reprisals for the Assad family’s brutal rule, which included widespread torture and disappearances. Social media users have shared posts documenting the killing of friends and relatives. The Observatory, which relies on a network of sources in Syria, has reported multiple “massacres” in recent days, with women and children among the dead.

The Observatory and activists released footage showing dozens of bodies in civilian clothing piled outside a house, with blood stains nearby and women wailing. Other videos appeared to show men in military garb shooting people at close range.

— AFP



ISRAEL ATTACKS SOUTHERN LEBANON

The Israeli military said it targeted a Hezbollah site with an air strike in southern Lebanon, as Lebanese media reported one killed and another wounded in an Israeli drone strike on a car. Lebanon’s official National News Agency reported one killed and one wounded in an “Israeli drone strike” on a car in the southern village of Kherbet Selm, citing the health ministry.

A November 27 truce largely halted more than a year of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel, including two months of full-blown war in which Israel sent in ground troops. Israel has continued to carry out periodic strikes on Lebanese territory since the agreement took effect.

— AFP

CONTAINED RISK

Japan’s wildfire brought under control



Japan’s worst wildfire in more than half a century has been brought under control, the mayor of the northern city of Ofunato said on Sunday. “Following an aerial survey, we assessed that the fire no longer posed the risk of further spread. I declare that the fire is now under control,” Ofunato Mayor Kiyoshi Fuchigami told a news conference. The fire engulfed about 2,900 hectares, making it Japan’s largest in more than 50 years.

— AFP

VIOLENCE SURGE

UN reports rise in attacks in eastern DRC



Escalating attacks have struck hospitals and other civilian infrastructure in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo during the ongoing anti-government assault by the armed group M23, the UN’s humanitarian agency said. “Between March 1 and 3, several hospitals were targeted by armed actors in an escalation of violence against medical centres and health personnel” there, the UN Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA) said.

— AFP

Russian special forces attack Ukrainian Kursk

RUSSIAN special forces crept miles through a major gas pipeline near the town of Sudzha in an attempt to surprise Ukrainian forces as part of a major offensive to eject Ukrainian soldiers from the western Russian region of Kursk, pro-Russian war bloggers said. Thousands of Ukrainian soldiers seized about 1,300 square km of Russia's Kursk region in August last year in what Kyiv said was an attempt to gain a bargaining chip in future negotiations and to force Russia to shift forces from eastern Ukraine.

Russia has been pressing the attack with some success in recent days, with open source maps on Friday showing Kyiv's contingent in Kursk nearly surrounded after rapid Russian advances. Russian advances in 2024 and US President Donald Trump's upending of U.S. policy on Ukraine and Russia have caused



Servicemen prepare to fire towards Russian troops at a frontline, in Zaporizhzhia region, Ukraine. — Reuters

fears among European leaders that Ukraine will lose the war and that Trump is turning his back on Europe. The United States paused military aid and the sharing of intelligence with Ukraine this month after a meeting between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on February 28 descended

into acrimony in front of the world's media.

In its daily update on the situation in Kursk, Russia's Defence Ministry said its forces had retaken the village of Lebedevka, as well as seizing Novenke, a hamlet across the border in Ukraine's neighbouring Sumy region. Yuri Podolyaka, a Ukrainian-born, pro-Russian military blogger, said Russian special forces had walked miles along the inside of the major gas pipeline and some had spent several days in the pipe before surprising Ukrainian forces from the rear near Sudzha. Sudzha is the home of major gas transfer and measuring stations on a pipeline that used to carry Russian natural gas into the Ukrainian gas transmission system for onward transportation to Europe. Pro-Russian war blogger Two Majors said a major battle was under way for Sudzha and that Russian forces had surprised Ukrainian soldiers by entering the area via a major gas pipeline. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



People pray at the statue of John Paul II outside the Gemelli Hospital, in Rome. — AFP

POPE THANKS DOCTORS AS CONDITION IMPROVES

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis, who is responding well to treatment for pneumonia, thanked his doctors and healthcare workers on Sunday as he missed delivering a fourth straight Angelus prayer in person. The 88-year-old, in Rome's Gemelli hospital since February 14, issued a written Angelus in which he thanked those who volunteer to help others in need, praising their "closeness and tenderness".

"I too experience the thoughtfulness of service and the tenderness of care, in particular from the doctors and healthcare workers, whom I thank from the bottom of my heart," he said. "We need this, the 'miracle of tenderness' which accompanies those who are in adversity, bringing a little light into the night of pain," he said in the text published by the Vatican.

This hospitalisation has been more serious, however, with Francis suffering several respiratory crises, prompting fears the road to recovery would be long, or might force the elderly pontiff to resign. On Saturday, the Vatican said the pope appeared finally to be responding well to treatment and had seen "a gradual, slight improvement", marking several days without crises. Though the pope does not have a fever, his doctors want to see more positive results "in the coming days" before giving a prognosis, an evening medical bulletin said.

On Sunday morning he received Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state, and Edgar Pena Parra, a Venezuelan archbishop who is also a senior Vatican official. People who gathered in St Peter's Square on Sunday, where Francis would usually stand at a Vatican window to read the Angelus to crowds below, said his presence was sorely missed.

"He is a wonderful person who has given so much and I hope that he can return as soon as possible", said Diana Desiderio, who volunteers with the civil protection agency in Pescara. She and fellow volunteers are praying that Francis will "return to the window again and bring peace and serenity to everyone because we need it", she added. — AFP

صُحْرَا لِلسَّاقَاة

SOHAR POWER

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Audtied Financial Statement for the year ended 31 December 2024

BOARD OF DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Sohar Power Company SAOG ("Sohar Power" or the "Company"), I am pleased to present you with the Twentieth Annual Report of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2024.

On 25th March 2024, Sohar Power Company shareholders held their Annual Ordinary General Meeting ("AOGM") to approve the 2023 Financial Statements and other related issues. On the same day, the shareholders held Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to approve the amendment of article 6 of association to reduce the number of board members from 7 to 5 members.

On 8th April 2024 the Company received a Request for Offer (RFO) letter from Nama PWP to submit an offer for its available power capacity for a 9-year term. Following several discussions and submissions, the Company received a letter of award from Nama PWP on 23rd July for a 9-year contract, commencing on 1st April 2025. A critical requirement for the PPA was for the Company to be solvent at the start of operations. This was partially achieved by writing off the accumulated losses through a combination of capital reduction (by Shareholders), sale of the water plant (to assist in repayment of Senior debt) and restatement of assets based on projected returns from the PPA.

To bring the company into full solvency position, the company is working towards the completion of Conditions Precedent (CPs) to the executed Amended and Restated Agreement (A&RA) on 12 December 2024 with lenders, is expected by Q1 2025

The Company held an Ordinary General Meeting (OGM) on 3rd October 2024 to approve the new Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), related party transaction and appointment of external auditor for 2024. On 6th October 2024, the Company held an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to approve the withdrawal of bankruptcy, debt restructuring, equity capital reduction and MSF sale.

Following the decisions at the OGM and EGM, the Company executed the Amended & Restated Finance Agreement, the MSF Sale Agreement, the Power Purchase Agreement and other related project agreements. Further, the Company also submitted the withdrawal of its bankruptcy application which had been pending decision at the Primary Court. The Court provided its acceptance of such withdrawal on 2nd December 2024.

The capital reduction approved at the Extraordinary Shareholders Meeting held on 6th October 2024 from OMR 22,101,000 to OMR 2,000,000 was completed in November 2024.

Health & Safety

The year 2024 has seen excellent Health and Safety performance for Sohar Power.

Towards the last quarter, the Company commenced the following activities at site:

(a) Dismantling of the MSF Units which is being undertaken by the MSF Buyer. Until end December 2024, safe manhours of 6,374 were clocked while undertaking this activity.

(b) Re-commissioning activities for the power plant, which is being undertaken by the O&M Operator (Sohar Operation and Maintenance Company LLC).

There were no Lost Time Accidents (LTA), accumulating to 4,354 days without LTA at the end of the year.

Health and safety of the people working for the above activities has been accorded the highest priority. The Company is committed to maintain its record to ensure that highest standards of safety are maintained and that they are completed without any LTIs. This shall be ensured as the Company gets into the operation phase, post Commercial Operation Date (COD).

The Health and Safety of our employees, contractors and visitors remains the utmost priority for the Company.

Operations

Since the end of the PWPA term on 15th May 2022, the

plant has been mothballed (preserved) by the O&M Operator SOMC under a Preservation Contract.

Following the signing of the PPA, the Company commenced the following major activities at site:

(a) Dismantling of the MSF Units which is being undertaken by the MSF Buyer. This is expected to be completed by Q3, 2025.

(b) Re-commissioning activities for the power plant, which is being undertaken by the O&M Operator (Sohar Operation and Maintenance Company LLC). While the Scheduled Commercial Operation Date (SCOD) is 1 April 2025, the Company along with its O&M Operator is aiming to achieve an earlier COD.

Financial Performance

The Board of Directors would like to announce that the Company has ended the year with a net profit of RO 22 million compared to a net loss of RO 5.1 million in 2023. The net profit in 2024 is mainly due to impairment reversal, gain on MSF sale impact in 2024 compared to 2023.

The revenues for the period amount to NIL against OMR NIL million for the same period last year. This is mainly due to the expiry of PPA.

The direct and indirect costs have increased from OMR 2.6 million in 2023 to OMR 3.0 million in 2024 which is due to costs related to recommissioning the plant for the new PPA. Due to the pendency of bankruptcy proceedings, trading in the company's shares was suspended on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) since July 2023. The Company is expected to re-commence trading activities post submission of the Company's audited results and after receiving a corresponding directive from the Financial Services Authority (FSA).

Corporate Governance

In line with efforts deployed in previous years, the Company ensured that its organization, systems, policies, and procedures follow the highest standards of governance to always comply with the Code of Corporate Governance promulgated by the FSA, including the new Code requirements effective since July 2016.

After the resignation of the internal auditor of the Company, the Audit Committee and the Board has appointed, after obtaining FSA approval, an external firm to perform the IA activities of the Company until the end of 2023.

Corporate Social Responsibility

In 2024, the Company was unable to contribute to local projects intended for the local communities and the people of the Sultanate of Oman due to the bankruptcy application submitted to the court. The Company will resume contributing to local project in 2025.

Outlook for 2025

The process of returning the company into full solvency position is ongoing and pending few Conditions Precedent (CPs) to be satisfied with the lenders which is expected during Q1 2025. Following the entry into a long term PPA, the Company looks forward to serving the Sultanate by providing reliable power to the grid. The Company will look to improving its operations by addressing energy leakages, by closely monitoring operational efficiency and addressing issues related to component obsolescence.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to thank our valued stakeholders, including our shareholders, lenders, the APSR, Nama PWP, FSA and partners for their continued support, trust, and confidence, especially during the difficult times that the Company faced over the past two years. I would also like to thank all the personnel associated with the preservation of the plant in Sohar and the staff of the Company for their loyalty, dedication and commitment.

I would also like to express our gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Government for their continued guidance, support and encouragement to the private sector.

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2024

	31 Dec 2024	31 Dec 2023	31 Dec 2024	31 Dec 2023
	RO'000	RO'000	USD'000	USD'000
		Restated (Note 33)		Restated (Note 33)
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	20,720	-	53,818	-
Right-of-use asset	1,273	-	3,305	-
Total non-current assets	21,993	-	57,123	-
Current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	-	7,012	-	18,213
Right-of-use asset	-	4	-	10
Income tax refundable	10	-	26	-
Other receivables	6,177	665	16,040	1,728
Cash and bank balances	841	1,110	2,184	2,883
Total current assets	7,028	8,791	18,250	22,834
Total assets	29,021	8,791	75,373	22,834
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	2,000	22,101	5,195	57,405
Legal reserve	667	4,373	1,732	11,358
Accumulated losses	(16,220)	(62,010)	(42,141)	(161,074)
Total capital and reserves	(13,553)	(35,536)	(35,214)	(92,311)
Non-current liabilities				
Lease liabilities	1,152	-	2,993	-
Provision for decommissioning costs	2,276	-	5,913	-
Deferred tax liability	705	-	1,831	-
Employee benefit liabilities	23	-	61	-
Total non-current liabilities	4,156	-	10,798	-
Current liabilities				
Term loans	32,016	34,353	83,159	89,230
Lease Liabilities	199	-	516	-
Provision for decommissioning costs	-	2,141	-	5,562
Employee benefit liabilities	-	20	-	53
Accruals and other payables	6,174	2,868	16,039	7,456
Amounts due to related parties	29	4,945	75	12,844
Total current liabilities	38,418	44,327	99,789	115,145
Total liabilities	42,574	44,327	110,587	115,145
Total equity and liabilities	29,021	8,791	75,373	22,834
Net deficit per share	(0.678)	(0.161)	(1.761)	(0.418)

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2024

	Year ended 31 Dec 2024	Year ended 31 Dec 2023	Year ended 31 Dec 2024	Year ended 31 Dec 2023
	RO'000	RO'000	USD'000	USD'000
		Restated (Note 33)		Restated (Note 33)
Direct costs	(2,369)	(1,971)	(6,155)	(5,121)
Gross loss	(2,369)	(1,971)	(6,155)	(5,121)
Other income	606	991	1,574	2,576
General and administrative expenses	(592)	(629)	(1,537)	(1,633)
Amortisation of right-of-use assets	(83)	(62)	(216)	(161)
	(69)	300	(179)	782
Operating loss for the year	(2,438)	(1,671)	(6,334)	(4,339)
Impairment reversal on property, plant and equipment	17,777	-	46,175	-
Gain on sale of property, plant and equipment	4,929	-	12,801	-
Related party loan written-back	4,915	-	12,766	-
Finance costs	(2,505)	(3,721)	(6,506)	(9,667)
	22,678	(5,392)	58,902	(14,006)
Income tax	(695)	287	(1,805)	745
Net profit/(loss) after tax and total comprehensive income/(loss) for the year	21,983	(5,105)	57,097	(13,261)
Earnings/(loss) per share - basic and diluted	1.10	(0.023)	2.855	(0.060)

Note: The complete accounts either in English or Arabic will be sent to any shareholder by mail within 7 days of receipt.

Miklos Almasy

Chairman of the Board

OPINION

Shaping new reading trends in finance, mental health



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Assoc Prof, Dept of English Language and Translation, SQU

AS International Women’s Day was celebrated last week, the focus has largely been on noting the successes of women in leadership roles, entrepreneurship, and other traditionally male dominated areas like the sciences.

Another interesting trend that has not got enough attention is the way that women are defining market trends in reading. This is particularly relevant in two important areas: financial literacy and mental health.

Data had earlier shown that even women who have successful careers tend to leave financial investments decisions to their male relatives, usually husbands. This is no longer true, at least in urban settings. Increasingly, women are taking charge of their own money and learning to use it strategically.

Books giving financial advice to women has seen a rising trend in recent years. According to Forbes, it now constitutes 4.5 per cent of all non-fiction books published annually.

This is an important shift from traditional reading. Books like ‘Wealth Secrets’ by

Deborah Owens and ‘On my own two feet’ by Manisha Thokor share tips on how to safely navigate the financial world as a woman.

Much of the financial advice is also being shared by ‘finfluencers’, finance influencers on social media. Many of them even share these books on their sites, reviewing the books for their topical value and accuracy of information. Younger women tend to inhabit the social media spaces, so such reviews lead to increased sales of traditional books on finance as well.

Another important category of books targeted at women are those relating to mental health. According to the World Economic Forum, the balancing of careers and personal lives takes a heavy toll on women who are also traditionally less accustomed to take external help for emotional problems.

Again, books on self-help and ensuring mental health has seen an upward slide in the last decade. Books like ‘Mind over mood’ by Christine Padesky and ‘Anxiety: How to overcome it’ by Sonali Gupta combine memoir and clinical explanations to

Women are redefining reading trends as they tend to inhabit social media spaces, which lead to increased sales of traditional books on finance as well

normalise mental health conditions and offer constructive advice to overcome fears.

Of course, social media is a major cause of mental stress, especially among younger women, but it can also be a supportive space for women struggling with mental peace. Studies have shown that, with all its challenges, social media also offers a community and sense of purpose for those looking for support.

Women speaking about their own challenges in established media platforms like Ted talks or in their own channels help others to see beyond themselves and learn to cope with the world without the fear of being judged.

Books are always being re-invented in order to keep up with rising trends and needs. While reading itself is seen to be on a downward spiral, this is not always the case, particularly in certain genres where there are gaps which still need to be filled.

Keeping women at the centre of their focus, the publishing industry can do well to offer a variety of books that will cater to their rising demands and needs.

UN BODY SAYS SOUTH SUDAN SITUATION WORSENING

GEORGE OBULUTSA

Increased violence and political friction in South Sudan threaten its fragile peace process, a United Nations rights body said on Saturday, days after the arrests of several officials allied to the country’s vice-president.

Earlier this month, security forces loyal to President Salva Kiir arrested two ministers and several senior military officials allied with Riek Machar.

The arrests have raised fears for the future of a 2018 peace deal which ended a five-year civil war between forces loyal to Kiir and Machar that cost nearly 400,000 lives.

“We are witnessing an alarming regression that could erase years of hard-won progress. Rather than fuelling division and conflict, leaders must urgently refocus on the peace process, uphold the human rights of South Sudanese citizens and ensure a smooth transition to democracy,” Yasmin Sooka, chairperson of the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, said in a statement.

The arrests followed heavy clashes in recent weeks in the strategic northern town of Nasir between national forces and the White Army militia, a loosely-organised group mostly from the Nuer, Machar’s ethnic group.

Government spokesperson Michael Makuei said the arrests were made because the Machar-allied officials are in “conflict with the law”. He has accused forces loyal to Machar of collaborating with the White Army and attacking a military garrison near Nasir town on March 4.

Machar’s party has denied the accusations.

On Saturday, the National Security Services intelligence agency said it had arrested and detained several people “believed to have verified links to the military confrontation” in Nasir and another nearby town. It did not give the total number of arrests or their identities.

Makuei did not immediately respond when sought for comment on the rights commission’s statement.

On Friday, a South Sudanese general and dozens of soldiers were killed when a UN helicopter trying to evacuate them from Nasir came under attack, the government said.

South Sudan is in “alarming regression” as clashes in recent weeks in the northeast threaten to undo years of progress towards peace, the UN commission on human rights in the country warned.

A fragile power-sharing agreement between President Salva Kiir and First Vice-President Riek Machar has been put in peril by the clashes between their allied forces in the country’s Upper Nile State. — AFP

With USAid cuts, Africa faces crippling losses

THE United States is cutting almost all its spending on aid. The biggest loser will be Africa.

For years, sub-Saharan Africa has received more US aid money than any other region — except for 2022 and 2023, when the United States came to Ukraine’s aid after the Russian war.

In 2024, \$12.7 billion of \$41 billion in American foreign assistance went straight to sub-Saharan Africa, and billions more went to global programmes — including health and climate initiatives — for which Africa was the main beneficiary.

Practically all of that aid is set to disappear in the wake of President Donald Trump’s decision to dismantle the US Agency for International Development. The cuts are expected to undo decades of efforts to save lives, pull people out of poverty, combat terrorism and promote human rights in Africa, the world’s youngest, fastest-growing continent.

Trump officials have accused the agency of waste and fraud. In his speech to Congress, Trump railed against aid to Africa, saying the United States was spending millions to promote issues “in the African nation of Lesotho, which nobody has ever heard of.”

The Supreme Court ruled that USAid and the State Department must pay contractors as much as \$2 billion for work already completed, but the ruling will have little effect on the wider consequences of eliminating most US foreign assistance.

A New York Times examination of government spending data found that most aid has been spent on humanitarian, health and disaster assistance. In many African countries, it will be harder to accurately track the consequences of these tragedies, since a major programme focused on collecting global health data has also been axed.

Surveys show that Americans



A large camp for displaced people in the Democratic Republic of Congo. - The New York Times



RUTH MACLEAN

The writer is the West Africa bureau chief at The New York Times



SAIKOU JAMMEH

The writer is a reporter at The New York Times

are divided on whether foreign aid is valuable or effective. But W Gyude Moore, a scholar and former Liberian minister, said the way it is being dismantled is “almost gratuitous in its cruelty.”

Seven of the eight countries most vulnerable to the USAid cuts are in Africa (the other is Afghanistan). Here is a breakdown of what Africa stands to lose as the United States draws down its aid contributions across the world.

Africa is struggling with several humanitarian crises marked by extreme hunger and violence, from warring factions in Sudan to armed groups ravaging eastern Congo and a wave of extremist violence destabilising the Sahel.

Last year, the United States spent \$4.9 billion helping people flee such conflicts or survive natural disasters like floods and hurricanes.

The biggest American humanitarian programme in the world in 2024 was in Congo, where the United States spent \$910 million on food, water, sanitation and shelter for more than 7 million displaced people, according to Bruno Lemarquis, the United

Nations’ humanitarian coordinator in the country.

As a donor, the US was “ultra dominant” in Congo, Lemarquis said, paying 70 per cent of the humanitarian costs last year. Now 7.8 million people stand to lose food aid, and 2.3 million children risk facing deadly malnutrition, he said.

Last week, the UN said Congo needs \$2.54 billion to provide lifesaving assistance to 11 million people in 2025.

The United States was also the biggest donor last year to Sudan, where it funded over 1,000 communal kitchens to feed starving people fleeing a brutal civil war. Those kitchens have now shuttered, and Sudan is facing “mass deaths from famine,” according to the United Nations human rights chief, Volker Turk.

For decades, the United States led efforts to combat famine worldwide, but now famines will likely multiply and become deadlier, according to the International Crisis Group, an independent, non-government organisation that seeks to prevent and resolve conflict.

— The New York Times

Charity is a hallmark of Ramadhan



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and a communications professional

THE social significance of Ramadhan goes beyond the individual act of fasting as a religious obligation. It acts as a powerful catalyst for community building, charitable acts, and the strengthening of both family and social connections. During Ramadhan, Muslims engage in various acts of kindness and solidarity, fulfilling their religious obligations while also contributing to the creation of a more compassionate and just society.

The communal and familial aspects of Ramadhan foster a sense of unity and belonging, while the focus on charity and social responsibility encourages individuals to actively participate in their communities. Ultimately, Ramadhan serves as an influential reminder of the importance of empathy, generosity and social justice, both within the Muslim community and in society as a whole.

Throughout the month, Muslims are encouraged to give generously, whether through the mandatory alms giving known as zakat or through voluntary acts of charity, known as sadaqah. Many charitable organisations and individuals take this time to support those in need by providing food, clothing and financial assistance to the poor and needy families.

Zakat, which is the third pillar of Islam, is a mandatory form of charity required from Muslims who have the financial means. It is calculated as 2.5 per cent of one’s wealth,

provided that the wealth has been in one’s possession for a full lunar year. However, if the wealth falls below a certain threshold, called the nisab, no zakat is due. If the wealth exceeds the nisab, zakat becomes obligatory.

This charitable donation is directed to the poor, travellers in need (such as refugees) and other designated groups, as outlined in the Holy Quran: “Indeed, ‘prescribed charitable offerings’ are only to be given to the poor and the indigent, and to those who work on administering it, and to those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to free those in bondage, and to the debt-ridden, and for the cause of Allah, and to the wayfarer. This is an obligation from Allah. And Allah is all-knowing, all-wise.”

Sadaqah, on the other hand, is a voluntary charity that can be given at any time, though it is especially encouraged during Ramadhan due to the belief that rewards for charitable acts are multiplied during this holy month. One of the most common expressions of charity during Ramadhan is the community Iftar, where Muslims gather to break their fast together. These shared meals not only nourish the body, but also strengthen social bonds, creating an atmosphere of warmth, solidarity and mutual support.

The emphasis on both obligatory and voluntary charity promotes a culture of generosity and empathy, encouraging individuals to contribute to the welfare of their communities.

This reflects the teachings of the Holy

Zakat, which is the third pillar of Islam, is a mandatory form of charity required from Muslims who have the financial means. It is calculated as 2.5 per cent of one’s wealth, provided that the wealth has been in one’s possession for a full lunar year

Quran: “Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish prayer and give zakah will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.”

The spirit of giving during Ramadhan not only alleviates poverty, but also fosters a sense of community and solidarity among Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

By sharing and caring for others, individuals reinforce the Islamic values of compassion and social justice. This month serves to amplify the spirit of generosity and empathy, bringing people closer together.

Ultimately, Ramadhan marks a time to focus on spiritual growth, community harmony and compassion for others. Fasting during Ramadhan encourages empathy for the less fortunate, reminding Muslims of the daily struggles faced by those who experience hunger and thirst.

The shared experience of fasting and praying together strengthens bonds within families and communities, providing spiritual and emotional support throughout the month. In this way, Ramadhan stands as a celebration of community, compassion and collective well-being.

In fact, Ramadhan is a deeply social occasion that transcends individual practice. Its rituals and customs weave through many layers of community, charity, family, identity and solidarity, making it a highly significant period in the Islamic calendar, both spiritually and socially.

TRUMP’S ‘GOLD CARD’ NOT ON THE CARDS SOON, SAY EXPERTS

EMILIE BERAUD

Donald Trump has boasted of selling US residency to wealthy foreigners through an around \$5 million “Gold Card” from as early as March, but immigration experts say the planned visa cannot be created without Congress.

“We have it all worked out from a legal standpoint,” the US president declared last month, assuring the new card would be on the market two weeks later. It “goes on sale very, very soon”, he then told Congress last Tuesday.

While his administration has “significant authority” to manage existing visa programmes, creating a new visa category “would require an act of Congress”, Migration Policy Institute communications director Michelle Mittelstadt said.

A similar programme to the “Gold Card” already exists in the United States. Created in 1990 to stimulate the economy, the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Programme offered a permanent residency card -- better known as the Green Card -- provided they invest enough capital in an American business.

Other conditions include creating or preserving at least 10 permanent jobs reserved for American employees.

In the United States, permanent residents can usually apply for naturalisation after five years. Some 8,000 people were issued a EB-5 visa in 2022, according to Mittelstadt.

“We’re going to replace it with the Trump gold card,” Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said. The EB-5, he said, “was full of nonsense, make-believe and fraud, and it was a way to get a green card that was low price”.

However, “an existing programme established by Congress and set in the law cannot be unilaterally changed this drastically simply by the executive branch. It would not be legal,” said Sharvari Dalal-Dheini, Director of Government Relations for the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

The US Constitution explicitly grants Congress the power to legislate on immigration under Section 8 of Article 1.

Trump claims that the United States could “sell maybe a million of these cards” to reduce the country’s debt.

But “current law only authorises up to 10,000 EB-5 visas annually”, Dalal-Dheini said. To change the quota, the backing of Congress would be essential. “It is highly unlikely that the programme could begin this month,” Mittelstadt said.

Even with a Republican majority in both chambers of Congress, “it is likely that this type of legislation would require more than a simple majority to pass it,” Dalal-Dheini said.

— AFP

Canada must learn from the green backlash

AS Canadians prepare to elect a new government, the rapid deterioration in relations with the United States will be front of mind. But the slow pace of decarbonisation of our planet, and Canada’s role in turning this around, must be right alongside it.

The chance of limiting global warming to 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels, as set out in the 2015 Paris climate agreement, is now vanishingly small. Despite many countries’ efforts, global greenhouse-gas emissions have not even started to fall, and would have to decline by a staggering 7.5 per cent per year to stay within the carbon budget envisaged by the Paris agreement. If this does not change soon, the planet will start to cross climate tipping points, from the collapses of the Greenland Ice Sheet and the Labrador Sea Current to the abrupt thawing of the permafrost.

Addressing this existential crisis requires implementing policies that will accelerate the pace of decarbonisation by leveraging the improvements in green-energy generation and infrastructure. The desire is seemingly there – global surveys show that voters want more, not less, climate action. But politicians rightly sense that they will be penalised in the next election for taking aggressive action, leading to an overly cautious approach. We are thus winning the war too slowly, which, as climate activist Bill McKibben has pointed out, is the same as losing.

The political backlash against climate action is growing worldwide. Green parties are in retreat across Europe, and the European Commission is rethinking its Green Deal legislation in light of the continent’s declining competitiveness, stoking fears that the bloc may scale back its targets. From Australia to Germany, incumbent governments have faced public pressure to abandon green policies. In the US,



The political backlash against climate action is growing worldwide.



JONATHAN
D OSTRY

The writer is formerly a senior official at the IMF, is Professor of Economics, Global Affairs, and Public Policy at the University of Toronto and a non-resident fellow at the Brussels-based think tank Bruegel

President Donald Trump ran for re-election on a platform to reverse Joe Biden’s signature climate policy. Similarly, in Canada, the Conservatives have embraced the rallying cry “axe the tax” – referring to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s carbon tax.

Policy backsliding is to be expected on occasion, and global progress must be resilient to such lapses, as it was during the first Trump administration. But the populist revolt against green policies offers some important lessons for the next Canadian prime minister.

To be politically sustainable, such policies must internalise these costs in the initial design phase. For example, economists have rightly championed carbon taxation as the most efficient way to curb emissions. But sometimes efficiency must be sacrificed – in this case, by resorting to alternative instruments or complementary measures to soften the blow of the green transition on segments of society that are less able to bear the cost.

To be clear, that does not mean invoking the compensation principle, which claims that the

most efficient policy maximises the resources available to provide compensation for those negatively affected, but fails to recognise that such compensation rarely takes place.

Nor is it enough to say that if carbon taxation is revenue-neutral, as it is designed to be in Canada, this will somehow ensure that compensation will reach those who need it. Voters are smart, and unless policy credibly convinces potential losers that they will be made whole, the mere risk that they will lose can provoke a backlash.

Climate policies must be compatible with social and political realities, and not based solely on economic efficiency. This is a lesson for all countries – including Canada – experiencing broad pushback against green measures.

The world cannot afford populist politicians denigrating decarbonisation as a harmful obsession of the elite. Buy-in from the households and firms that will disproportionately bear the costs is necessary if we are to have any chance of avoiding catastrophic global warming.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Saham and Al Khabourah at Al Rustaq Sports Complex

SAHAM STUN AL KHABOURAH IN LAST 16 OF OL

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

Saham secured an exciting 3-2 victory over Al Khabourah on Saturday at Al Rustaq Sports Complex as part of the 16th round of the Oman Football League.

The game started cautiously from both teams, the first chance was in the 6th minute for Saham's Ali al Hashmi, but he failed to capitalise. Al Khabourah responded with attacking pressure, as Bashar al Balushi fired a powerful shot in the 13th minute, brilliantly saved by Saham's goalkeeper. Yusuf Bouabid nearly opened the scoring for Saham in the 15th minute, but his shot narrowly missed the right post.

Saham's goalkeeper made a crucial save against a dangerous shot from Joen Karl, while Omar Prince wasted a golden opportunity for Saham with a weak attempt in the 19th minute. The attacking pressure was tie to end first half in a goalless draw.

The second half kicked off with a higher tempo, as Al Khabourah took the lead in the 53rd minute through Ahmed al Riyami, who capitalised on defensive confusion inside the box. However, Saham responded quickly, earning a penalty that was successfully converted by Algerian Rashid Ait in the 57th minute, bringing the game back to level terms.

Saham continued pressing and managed to take the lead in the 62nd minute through Adeniji. Al Khabourah intensified their attacks, attempting to break through the wings and central areas, but Saham's goalkeeper, Hassan al Buraiki, showcased brilliant saves, especially in the final minutes.

As stoppage time began, Adeniji struck again in the 93rd minute, finishing off a swift counterattack to extend Saham's lead. Al Khabourah's Mohamed Lamine managed to reduce the deficit in the 95th minute, but it was too late to change the outcome, as Saham secured a valuable 3-2 win.

With this victory, Saham climbed to 20 points, advancing to sixth place on goal difference ahead of Al Nasr, who sits in fifth. Meanwhile, Al Khabourah remained at 21 points, holding onto fourth place without change.

Oman coach selects squad for Red Warriors camp



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

OMAN head coach, Rasheed Jaber, has selected 24 players for the national team domestic camp which began on Sunday night and will run until March 13. The five-day camp is designed to provide an opportunity for local club players to train under the national team coaching staff during a break in the top-tier league. This camp is a crucial part of Oman's preparations for the AFC Asian Qualifiers – Road to 2026.

Seeb players will join the camp after the team match against Al Arabi of Kuwait in the second leg of quarterfinals of AFC Challenge Cup which is scheduled on Wednesday at Seeb Stadium.

The opted players in the squad were: Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Abdulmalik al Badri, Khalid al Buraiki, Ghanim al Habsi, Thani al Rushedi, Majid al Saadi, Khalid al Ghatrefi, Musab al Shaqsi, Harib al Saadi, Abdullah Fawaz, Ahed al Mashaikhi, Al Faraj al Kiyumi, Redwan al Siyabi, Mulham al Sunaidi, Issa al Naabi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Yousef al Malki, Hussain al Shahri, Mohammed al Ghafri, Salah al Yahyaei, Nasser al Rawahi, Mundher al Wahaibi, Mohammed Abdulhakeem and Hatim al Roushdi.

Based to the confirmation of Oman team manager, Khalid al Rawas, the national



team will play a friendly match against Sudan on Thursday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, after the cancellation of the previous match against Niger.

The warm-up game against Sudan serves as the only match ahead of AFC Asian Qualifiers encounters against South Korea and Kuwait on March 20 in Korea.

In the beginning week of March, Red Warriors concluded their first short warm-up gathering which lasted for few days. During the last camp, the team went under several training sessions and the camp was an opportunity for the coaching staff to monitor the players' physical and technical level.

Oman will vie for spot from group B as they are now with six points in the group. Red Warriors will shift their focus to bounce back strongly in the qualifiers after their defeat against Iraq by 1-0 in last November.

Red Warriors concentration will be on the third and fourth places as this will lead to another phase of competitions ahead of the World Cup in Mexico, USA and Canada next summer. Iraq has bolstered their chances of claiming one of the top two spots in Group B beside Jordan while South Korea almost confirmed their spot to the World Cup. Oman will face a challenging away fixture against group leaders South Korea in Seoul on March 20 and five days later they will meet Kuwait in Kuwait City.

Majees triumph, Al Bashayer stun Al Salam in Volleyball League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

Majees Club secured a well-deserved victory over Masirah with a clean sweep of three sets to none at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Majees' standout performers included Hilal al Muqbali, professional player Kristian Arthur, and Waleed al Badi, who played a crucial role in dominating the match. On the other hand, Masirah's duo, Ibrahim al Farsi and Hisham al Nasri, put in a strong performance, contributing to their team's attempts to stay in contention.

Majees entered the match with high confidence, setting a fast-paced rhythm from the outset. They claimed the first set 25-17, giving them a strong momentum to maintain their dominance.

In the second set, Majees continued their aggressive attacking play, capitalising on their well-organised formation to secure another 25-17 victory, extending their lead to two sets to none.

The third set was highly competitive. Majees gradually clawed back, reducing the gap to a single point. The set remained intense until the final moments when Majees turned the tables, closing it out 26-24 to seal the match with a 3-0 win.

With this victory, Majees raised their tally to 8 points, securing second place, while Masirah remained in fifth place with no points. Al Bashayer clinched a hard-fought 3-2 victory over Al Salam after a five-set battle at Al Amal Club's.

Al Salam started the match strongly, asserting dominance in



Picture by: Faisal al Balushi

the first set with powerful serves and precise attacks to claim it 25-16. However, Al Bashayer

regained their composure in the second set, putting on a highly competitive performance. The

teams exchanged the lead multiple times until the score reached 27-27. Eventually, Al Bashayer edged out a 29-27 win to level the match.

Building on their momentum, Al Bashayer controlled the third set and secured a 25-20 victory, moving one step closer to sealing the match. But Al Salam responded fiercely in the fourth set, delivering an impressive display to snatch a 26-24 win, forcing a decisive fifth set.

In the final set, Al Bashayer maintained their focus and dictated the pace from the start. They managed to take an early lead and maintain the gap, ultimately sealing the set 15-11 to claim a hard-fought but valuable victory. With this win, Al Bashayer now hold 4 points, placing them in fourth position, while Al Salam dropped to third place with 6 points.

SHORT TAKES



Oman is participating in “Turin 2025”, the 12th Special Olympics World Winter Games in Italy.

OMAN AT TURIN
SPECIAL OLYMPICS
WINTER GAMES

TURIN: The 12th Special Olympics World Winter Games, held in Italy, “Turin 2025”, kicked off on Sunday with the official opening ceremony at the Turin Olympic Stadium, with the participation of the Sultanate of Oman.

The opening ceremony included many sports, light and singing shows, a march by 106 athletes from the participating teams from around the world, and the entry of the torch, which ended its journey by lighting the cauldron, marking the official start of the Winter World Games.

The Oman Special Olympics delegation is participating in 3 different winter sports, 6 male and female players with intellectual disabilities, 6 coaches and 4 administrators. The list of players includes Salem al Ghafri and Ameera al Raisi in snow running, Al Baraa al Battashi and Nabaa al

Harthy in cross-country skiing, and Hussam al Amri and Retaj al Salmi in speed skating.

Dr Amal al Qatiti, member of the Board of Directors of the Special Olympics Oman and head of the mission, said: This is a suitable opportunity for different players by integrating them into the world, which is one of the main goals of gaining experience through interaction. She added that the Special Olympics movement focuses on

purely humanitarian work, using sports to serve people with intellectual disabilities and contribute to rehabilitation.

The current edition of the World Winter Games includes 8 winter sports, till March 16, with the participation of 1,500 male and female players with intellectual disabilities from 102 countries.

Earlier, the Omani athletes were trained at Majid Al Futtaim (MAF) Snow Centres across Oman and the UAE, joining teams from the UAE and Egypt in their preparations. A significant boost to the programme came with the launch of the Special Olympics UAE Snow Sport Team Development Strategy in October 2023, which outlined a four-stage roadmap (Outsourcing, Recognition, Team Formation and Continuity) to ensure long-term sustainability.

This initiative led to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Majid Al Futtaim and Special Olympics UAE in January 2024 during the FIS World Snow Day celebrations. — ONA



DR AMAL
AL QATITI

Member, Board of
Directors, Special
Olympics Oman



Carlos Alcaraz (ESP) hits a ball against Quentin Halys (FRA) at Indian Well Tennis Garden. — Reuters

Djokovic falls at Indian
Wells as Alcaraz triumphs

NOVAK

DJOKOVIC was shocked by Botic van de Zandschulp 6-2 3-6 6-1 in the second round

of Indian Wells on Saturday as the Serbian suffered an early exit at the hands of a tournament lucky loser for a second consecutive year.

Djokovic fell to lucky loser Luca Nardi of Italy in the California desert last year and history repeated itself on Stadium One court a day after top seed Alexander Zverev also went out.

The twenty-four time Grand Slam champion got off to a horrid start, hitting 14 unforced errors and being broken twice in the opening set.

He regrouped to race out to a 3-0 lead in the second, levelling the contest with a mighty forehand winner and pumping his fist in front of the packed, sun-soaked crowd.

But giant killer van de Zandschulp ran away with the decider, breaking Djokovic for a fourth time with a perfectly executed lob for a 3-1 lead and sealing the stunning upset when Djokovic's shot went wide on match point. “I started really well and then of course Novak came back,” said van de Zandschulp, who secured a berth to the tournament upon the withdrawal of 47th ranked Facundo Diaz Acosta.



Novak Djokovic (SRB) hits a shot during the second round of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Well Tennis Garden. — Reuters

■ Djokovic falls to Botic van de Zandschulp

■ Serb joins Zverev and Rublev with early exit

■ Keys and Sabalenka win in straight sets

Djokovic's loss led a day of upsets that included seventh seed Andrey Rublev losing 6-4 7-5 to Italy's Matteo Arnaldi and 17th seed Felix Auger Aliassime falling to American Jensen Brooksby 6-4 6-2.

KEYS AND ALCARAZ CRUISE
Earlier, Australian Open champion Madison Keys crushed Anastasia Potapova 6-3 6-0 in her first match as a Grand Slam champion, while Carlos Alcaraz began his bid for an Indian Wells three-peat with a 6-4 6-2 win over Quentin Halys.

Alcaraz is looking to join tennis greats Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer as the only players to have triumphed three successive times in “Tennis Paradise”.

“I couldn't wait to start the tournament, to get here again,” the Spaniard said after dispatching his French opponent.

Twelve months ago, a swarm of bees on Stadium One court stung Alcaraz and suspended play for nearly two hours during his quarterfinal.

Lance Davis of Killer Bee Live Removal played the hero that day, removing the bees from a moving camera over the court without harming them, and Alcaraz and Davis met at the net before Saturday's match where they shook hands and shared a laugh.

SABALENKA POWERS THROUGH
Top seed Aryna Sabalenka was tested but ultimately prevailed over young American McCartney Kessler 6-7(4) 6-3 under the lights.

The Belarusian was in full command of her formidable serve and never faced a break point while crushing six aces and winning 90% of her first serve points.

She sealed the win with a pair of deft backhand volleys on match point to set up a meeting with Italian Lucia Bronzetti. — Reuters

Duleep eyes strong finish for Oman cricket team in WCL2

MUSCAT: Oman's head coach, Duleep Mendis, emphasised the importance of strategic planning, team rebuilding and exposure to tough international conditions as the national cricket team gears up for the remaining 20 matches in the ongoing ICC World Cup League 2 (WCL 2), a crucial pathway to the 2027 ICC ODI World Cup.

In a recent interview after the conclusion of the WCL 2 tri-series at home in February that witnessed Oman compete with USA and Namibia, Mendis reflected on his team's recent performances, highlighting the challenges made.

Oman currently hold the second position in the WCL 2 standings, having accumulated 18 points from 16 matches, with a net run rate

(NRR) of +0.013.

The United States lead with 22 points from 16 matches and an NRR of +0.602, while Canada trail closely with 17 points but has played 13 games. The Netherlands are fourth with 17 points from 14 games, while Scotland [14 points, 11 games], Namibia [12pts, 17 games], Nepal [6pts, 12 games] and the UAE [4pts, 11 games] complete the standings as on March 5.

Mendis admitted that the team faced significant challenges during their start of the WCL 2 campaign last year that featured tours of Scotland and Canada, particularly in dealing with unfamiliar playing conditions.

“The hybrid pitches in Scotland, July 2024, were extremely green,



making it difficult to differentiate the wicket from the surrounding area,” he recollected.

“We didn't perform well there, but we played without complaints. Similarly, in Canada, September 2024, morning matches had to be rescheduled due to wet conditions. Those challenges were all part of the learning process for our boys.”

Despite setbacks in the early rounds of the campaigns, Mendis remains optimistic as his boys have regrouped and found form in tri-series at home last year.

The home run saw Oman register a four-match winning streak in November and post two wins out of four in the tri-series that concluded on February 18.

Mendis said: “We had to quickly

rebuild a complete new team after losing a large group of players late last October. Within just two days, we assembled a new squad and put them to the test during the Emerging Teams Asia Cup.”

Oman's resurgence has been driven by experienced players stepping up in crucial moments. The former Sri Lanka cricket great praised the impact of skipper Jatinder Singh, whose consistency has been vital to Oman's victories in the WCL campaign.

He said, “Jatinder has carried his domestic form into the international stage, and that has been a huge boost for us. His contributions, along with other seniors like Aamir Kaleem, have given the team lot of confidence.”

SPORTS

INDIA BEAT NZ BY 4 WICKETS TO WIN CHAMPIONS TROPHY

ROHIT, SPIN ATTACK POWER INDIA TO GLORY



Indian players celebrate with the trophy after winning the ICC Champions Trophy one-day international (ODI) final cricket match between India and New Zealand at the Dubai International Stadium in Dubai. — AFP

ROHIT SHARMA made a combative 76 to back up a potent spin bowling display as India beat New Zealand by four wickets to win a record third Champions Trophy title on Sunday. Chasing 252 to win, India got off to a fast start through their captain's first half-century of the tournament before K L Rahul hit an unbeaten 34 to help seal victory with six balls to spare in the final in Dubai.

India added to their trophies in 2002 and 2013 to go past Australia, who have two titles.

The world number's one ODI team, India finished unbeaten in the eight-nation tournament played in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

In a battle of spin on a sluggish Dubai pitch, New Zealand's bowlers put India in trouble at 203-5 with Rohit and Shreyas Iyer, who hit 48, back in the pavilion.

But Rahul kept calm and along with Hardik Pandya (18) and Ravindra Jadeja, who hit the winning boundary, steered the team home to loud cheers from a largely Indian crowd in a sea of blue.

India played all their matches at the Dubai International Stadium after they refused to tour hosts Pakistan due to political tensions.

India played four spinners in their

New Zealand's spinners attempted to pull things back and a stunning catch from Glenn Phillips secured a key breakthrough



India's KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja celebrate their victory at the end of the ICC Champions Trophy one-day international (ODI) final cricket match between India and New Zealand at the Dubai International Stadium in Dubai. — AFP

last three matches, which proved telling in deciding the outcome.

Varun Chakravarthy and Kuldeep Yadav took two wickets each to help restrict New Zealand to 251-7 after the Black Caps elected to bat first.

In reply, Rohit came out firing as he took on the pace bowlers with regular boundaries including a six and two fours in one over off Nathan Smith.

The captain reached his fifty in

41 balls to put the pressure on the opposition.

New Zealand's spinners attempted to pull things back and a stunning catch from Glenn Phillips secured a key breakthrough.

Phillips went airborne to pluck a flying ball at extra cover to dismiss Shubman Gill for 31 off skipper Mitchell Santner.

Virat Kohli fell in the next over, trapped lbw for one off Michael Bracewell's off spin and the momentum shifted as runs dried up for India.

Rohit, after a maiden over from Bracewell, jumped out of his crease against Rachin Ravindra only to be stumped by Latham as India slipped from 105 without loss to 122-3.

Iyer controlled the chase aided by a dropped catch by Kyle Jamieson but soon fell to Santner.

India lost Axar Patel and Pandya but Rahul stood strong to drag his team over the line.

New Zealand missed their pace spearhead Matt Henry after he was forced out of the final due to a shoulder injury.

Kane Williamson also could not come out to field after his batting effort of 11 due to a quad strain.

Daryl Mitchell hit 63 and Bracewell made a quickfire 53 not out for New Zealand, but it was not enough against an Indian side with considerable batting depth. — AFP

ADVERTORIALS

SUPPORTING SMES



The exhibition aims to generate income and create marketing opportunities for SMEs.

BANKDHOFAR
DIAMOND SPONSOR
OF DAR AL ATTA'A
EXHIBITION

MUSCAT: This sponsorship underscores BankDhofar’s unwavering commitment to engaging with and supporting the communities it serves, particularly during the holy month of Ramadhan.

Organised by Dar Al Attaa, Oman’s esteemed non-profit charitable organisation, the exhibition aims to generate income and create marketing opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), thus supporting their sustainability. providing a significant platform for participating SMEs and entrepreneurial businesses.

The event will also feature a wide range of volunteer opportunities and activities such as the sale of Eid necessities, clothes and food.

By collaborating with Dar Al Attaa, BankDhofar aims to contribute to the association's objectives, which include providing Eid clothing to 3,755 children from underprivileged families and supporting the overall improvement of family income and the national economy.

BankDhofar’s diamond sponsorship will feature a dedicated area showcasing the bank’s products and services, further strengthening its connection with the community. It demonstrates its broader strategy of engaging with and uplifting the communities in which it operates.

Commenting on the bank’s ongoing commitment to social responsibility Said Juma al Busaidy, head of Marketing & Corporate Communication stated: “At BankDhofar, we believe in making a difference in the communities we serve. By supporting the Dar Al Attaa Exhibition, we are not only showcasing our products and services, but also standing behind the efforts that make a lasting social and economic impact.

We are proud to be part of an event that provides much-needed support to families in need and offers an important platform for small and medium enterprises to grow. We believe in empowering SMEs and helping those in need, and this exhibition provides a perfect platform to achieve both.”

With over one million lives impacted through various programmes, including family welfare, education, distress relief and disaster relief, Dar Al Attaa’s mission is to improve the lives of individuals and families in need, enabling them to lead sustainable and stable lives.

EXPERIENCE
A SENSE OF
ADVENTURE
THIS RAMADHAN
WITH BMW
MOTORRAD
OFFERS

MUSCAT: Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, the official importer of BMW Motorrad in Oman, is celebrating Ramadhan with an exclusive offer for motorcycle enthusiasts, making it the perfect time to embrace the thrill of two-wheel adventure.

Whether you’re hitting the open road or exploring the Sultanate of Oman’s rugged landscapes, BMW Motorrad is here to elevate your riding experience this season.

Throughout the holy month, customers can benefit from BMW Motorrad service for 3 years or 30,000



km, whichever comes first and BMW warranty for 5 years with unlimited mileage. In addition, every new BMW Motorrad purchase comes with free first-year registration, ensuring a hassle-free start to the ownership experience.

For those looking to take home a BMW Motorrad bike, exclusive Ramadhan pricing is available across the range, ensuring that every rider finds their perfect companion.

The lightweight and agile GS 310 starts from just RO 2,999, while the iconic R 1250 GSA and R 12 begins at RO 7,999, embodying BMW Motorrad’s spirit of innovation and endurance. For those seeking pure grandeur on two wheels, the R 18 and K1600 B are available from RO 8,999 and RO 9,999 respectively, while the all-new R1250 GSA debuts at RO 8,888 + VAT and the R 1300 GS at RO 10,999.

Ignite the spirit of
Ramadhan with BYD Atto 3

THIS Ramadhan, get ready to embark on a new journey of your life with BYD’s powerful fully electric SUV Atto 3.

3. Crafted using high standards of luxury, advanced innovations and world-class safety features, the BYD Atto 3 makes every trip memorable.

BYD, the world’s #1 leader in new energy vehicle manufacturing, brings a great opportunity for customers to own a BYD Atto 3 at unbeatable prices. Starting at RO 9,990, BYD offers service perks of up to 5 years/100,000 km, first-year free insurance, along with a chance to win a Qin Plus Classic in the grand raffle.

Head over to BYD showrooms in Al Wattayah, Al Mouj and Mall of Oman to unlock unmatched value for money before the offer ends on April 24, 2025.

Drawing inspiration from the Chinese dragon, the Atto 3’s design embodies strength and elegance.

The BYD Atto 3 is an absolute



Crafted using high standards of luxury, advanced innovations and world-class safety features, the BYD Atto 3 makes every trip memorable.

dream to own, accelerating with 201 horsepower.

It reaches 0 to 100 km/h in just 7.3 seconds, making it the fastest SUV in its segment. Recharge and explore the city with a range of 420 km on a full charge. The Atto 3 offers a smooth, fun and efficient urban ride.

Designed to appeal to a younger, more energetic crowd, its gym-themed cockpit ignite excitement through innovation. The Atto 3 boasts a dynamic waistline and 18-inch alloy wheels, ensuring excellent road handling with the exhilarating performance of the Blade Battery.

Seamlessly integrated into the dashboard, BYD’s revolutionary

12.8-inch rotatable touchscreen is a great companion on every journey.

The sporty cockpit features dumbbell-shaped vertical AC vents, rhythmic interactive ambient lighting and ergonomic seats, making every ride fun, engaging and stress-free.

Emphasising utility and spaciousness, the Atto 3 offers a double-layered storage compartment and a smart power tailgate with sensors for convenient luggage loading.

Also equipped with two front and rear cameras, parking radars and displays panoramic images of the road to mitigate risks of collision and avoid life-threatening situations. The BYD Atto 3 is a testament to BYD’s commitment to ‘technological innovations for a better life’.

The Blade Battery, compared to conventional battery packs, provides enhanced energy efficiency, an extended range and an impressive lifecycle of approximately 5,000 charge cycles.

AL WATHBAH RAMADHAN SOUQ: A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

MUSCAT: Al Wathbah Ramadhan souq, organised by Bank Muscat in cooperation with the SMEs Development Authority, has once again reported a remarkable turnout and vibrant atmosphere at this year’s event, held at the Bank’s headquarters in Airport Heights.

This year’s souq featured the participation of a large number of entrepreneurs and home business owners, further reinforcing the Bank’s unwavering dedication to social responsibility and the development of the business sector.

During a span of three days, the souq provided an invaluable platform for participants to present their diverse



The souq featured the participation of a large number of entrepreneurs and home business owners.

range of products, from fashion items, health and beauty products, home décor,

accessories, culinary delights, heritage tools and perfumes, attracting a large number of visitors eager to support local enterprises.

The event’s success was highlighted by the enthusiastic engagement of the public, who were treated to a unique shopping experience in preparation for Eid Al Fitr. The variety and quality of products on display demonstrated the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of the participants, drawing praise from visitors.

Ibrahim bin Khamis al Balushi, Senior Assistant General Manager, SMEs, remarked: “The annual Al Wathbah Ramadhan souq stands as a testament to our commitment to

nurturing small and medium businesses, which are vital to the national economy.

We are proud of the overwhelming response from the public this year which underscores the importance of such initiatives in empowering entrepreneurs and they not only fuel economic activity but also as platforms to strengthen social ties and promote cultural heritage through the displayed products. I would like to thank the participants, the SMEs Authority and the customers for their trust and support.”

Bank Muscat continues to champion the growth of SMEs through strategic initiatives like the Al Wathbah Academy and comprehensive banking and non-banking solutions.

‘Marjanah’ captures tradition, elegance and unparalleled hospitality

MUSCAT: This Ramadhan, The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort transforms its ballroom into an elegant indoor retreat with ‘Marjanah — A Ramadhan Experience’, a celebration of heritage, culinary artistry and world-class hospitality.

Designed to inspire reflection, connection and indulgence, Marjanah offers an exceptional Iftar, featuring refined settings, immersive flavours, live melodies and a serene ambiance for a truly memorable season.

Drawing inspiration from the sea, this Ramadhan experience is brought to life in The St Regis Ballroom, where green and gold combine to create a refined and inviting ambiance.

As the night unfolds, a thoughtfully curated menu awaits, where culinary traditions and global influences come together in an exceptional dining experience.

Interactive stations bring a lively energy,



with Lebanese Saj master “Chef Halima” preparing delicate, freshly baked saj and Lebanese dishes, a Turkish expert crafting Shawarma, Iskender and other time-honoured specialties. A selection of

regional and international favourites further enriches the menu, each dish prepared with the signature sophistication of St Regis hospitality.

“With Marjanah, we set out to create a Ramadhan experience that feels both personal and exceptional,” says Wassim Daageh, General Manager. “Every element, from the setting to the flavours, has been thoughtfully designed to bring people together in a space that honours tradition while offering the elegance and hospitality that define The St Regis.”

Adding to the ambiance, the melodic strains of the oud, qanun, and keyboard drift through the air, performed by a three-piece ladies’ band. Their music enhances the setting with a touch of tradition, while VIP semi-private cabanas offer a secluded retreat for intimate gatherings, within the Marjanah venue.

Beyond Iftar, Ramadhan at The St Regis

Al Mouj Muscat Resort extends into the late hours with Suhoor by the pool at The Lobby Lounge. Flickering lanterns, a gentle breeze and a specially curated set menu create an atmosphere of tranquility and indulgence.

For a distinct culinary experience, guests can dine at Em Sherif, where a regal Levantine feast showcases refined Middle Eastern flavours for iftar and suhoor, or COYA, which reinterprets Ramadhan Iftar through a vibrant Peruvian lens.

To complete the experience, The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort presents a Ramadhan staycation — a seamless blend of spiritual reflection and indulgent relaxation. With access to the resort’s private beachfront, every stay is designed with timeless luxury in mind.

From exquisite dining to serene retreats, Marjanah invites guests to embrace the essence of Ramadhan in an atmosphere of elegance, tradition and hospitality.

BUSINESS



Container terminal at Sohar Port operated by Hutchison Ports Sohar.

BLACKROCK MAKES OMAN FORAY WITH INDIRECT STAKE ACQUISITION IN HUTCHISON PORTS

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

GLOBAL asset manager BlackRock is set to make its debut in the Sultanate of Oman with the indirect acquisition of a major stake in Hutchison Ports Sohar, the owner and operator of Sohar Port’s container terminal.

It follows last week’s announcement by the consortium of BlackRock and Terminal Investment Limited (TiL), a subsidiary of Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), that it has reached in-principle agreements to acquire an 80 per cent controlling interest in Hong Kong based global multinational conglomerate CK Hutchison.

Hutchison Ports Holdings (HPH), a global operator of ports and terminals (including Hutchison Ports Sohar), is a subsidiary of CK Hutchison.

Under the provisional agreements, the BlackRock — TiL consortium will acquire 80 per cent of CK Hutchison’s interests in a vast portfolio of subsidiary and associated companies owning, operating and developing a total of 43 ports comprising 199 berths in 23 countries. Included in this list is Hutchison Ports Sohar (previously known as Oman International Container Terminal — OICT).

Collectively dubbed the ‘HPH Ports Sale Perimeter’ transaction, the aggregate enterprise value of this global deal (which includes Panama Ports in Panama) has been agreed at \$22.8 billion. The parties have set an April 2, 2025 deadline for the formalisation of the transaction, pending regulatory approvals where applicable.

Significantly, Terminal Investment Limited (TiL) is the world’s 6th largest global container terminals group, with a portfolio of terminals located on the key trades served by the world’s largest shipping line, the Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC).

TiL is part of the portfolio of Global Investment Partners (GIP), a leading global infrastructure investor with around \$170 billion in assets under management. These assets are distribution across the energy, transport, digital infrastructure, decarbonisation, and water and waste management sectors. Just last October, GIP was formally acquired by BlackRock.

CEOTALK

Promoting Dhofar as a global tourism destination

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

SAID Ahmad founded Al Fawaz Tours in 1989 in Salalah. At the time, Oman’s tourism sector was in its infancy, particularly in the southern Dhofar Governorate.

By launching Al Fawaz Tours, Said Ahmad became a pioneer, establishing one of the first dedicated destination management companies (DMCs) in the area.

Initially, the company focused on showcasing Dhofar’s unique natural beauty and cultural heritage — from its monsoon-fed green hills to the historic frankincense trails — to a largely regional clientele. Said Ahmad’s hands-on leadership and deep passion for his homeland quickly helped Al Fawaz Tours gain a reputation for offering authentic, immersive experiences.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Under Said Ahmad’s guidance, Al Fawaz Tours evolved from a small local operation into a premier tourism provider with a national reach. By the 1990s and early 2000s, the company expanded beyond Dhofar, opening a branch in Muscat to serve visitors across Oman. Significant milestones included diversifying tour offerings to cover the entire Sultanate of Oman and attracting international markets.

Al Fawaz Tours became synonymous with comprehensive travel services — from airport pickups to guided expeditions — delivering quality experiences at every step.

Said Ahmad also established strong partnerships with hotels and global travel agents, earning industry accolades through positive reviews and a high rate of repeat clientele.

Today, Al Fawaz Tours is celebrated as a trusted guide to Oman’s wonders, offering everything from cultural city tours to desert safaris and coastal getaways, all with seamless service. His 35+ years of dedication highlight his remarkable success in building a sustainable



SAID AHMAD
Founder Al Fawaz Tours

tourism brand from the ground up.

LONG-TERM VISION

Said Ahmad envisions Al Fawaz Tours as a global leader in showcasing Oman’s cultural and natural treasures. His goal is to position Dhofar as a must-visit destination beyond the regional market, expanding its appeal to travellers worldwide.

Beyond merely growing the business, he is dedicated to preserving Oman’s authenticity — ensuring that tourism development respects local traditions and the environment. His company also plays a vital role in Oman’s economic diversification, providing employment opportunities and contributing to the nation’s tourism sector growth.

To achieve this vision, Said Ahmad has implemented several key strategies:

- Diversification of Services:** Al Fawaz Tours offers a broad spectrum of experiences, from northern Oman’s cultural tours to southern Oman’s eco-adventures, desert camping in the Rub al Khali and bespoke travel packages. By catering to diverse market segments — including families, adventure seekers, cultural tourists and cruise travellers — his company remains resilient in fluctuating travel seasons.
- Commitment to Quality:** Said Ahmad emphasises high service standards, ensuring well-trained guides, seamless logistics and top-tier customer experiences. His insistence on quality has led to strong client loyalty and positive reviews, reinforcing Al Fawaz Tours’ reputation.
- International Partnerships:** Recognising the power of global outreach, Said Ahmad forged ties with international tour operators and actively participated in travel expos like ITB Berlin and World Travel Market in London.

Collaborating with airlines and Oman’s Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, he successfully facilitated direct charter flights from new source markets like Hungary, broadening Dhofar’s international appeal.

- Adaptive Business Development:** He expanded Al Fawaz Tours’ infrastructure, opening a Muscat office and investing in a modern fleet of vehicles. He also established a Desert Camp to enhance the company’s adventure offerings, vertically integrating services for seamless travel experiences.

PROMOTING DHOFAR

Said Ahmad’s work has been instrumental in elevating Dhofar’s profile in global tourism. His company played a key role in launching direct charter flights to Salalah and integrating Dhofar into Middle Eastern cruise itineraries. Additionally, he promotes Dhofar’s year-round tourism potential, advocating for its lush summer monsoon season as well as its mild winter months for adventure activities.

His efforts have positioned Salalah as “Oman’s southern gem,” attracting visitors seeking a blend of relaxation and exploration. A forward-thinking entrepreneur, Said Ahmad has embraced digital transformation in tourism.

Al Fawaz Tours was among the first Omani tour companies to launch an online booking platform, integrating e-commerce tools for seamless reservations. He also leverages social media to engage travellers and utilises customer feedback to refine offerings.

Beyond technology, he champions sustainable tourism. Under his leadership, Al Fawaz Tours employs eco-friendly practices, such as operating a fuel-efficient vehicle fleet, minimising waste at its desert camp and supporting conservation initiatives in protected natural areas.

He believes that responsible tourism benefits both the local community and the environment, ensuring Oman’s beauty is preserved for future generations.

REAL ESTATE TRADING IN OMAN REACHES RO 185.5 MILLION

MUSCAT: The total value of real estate transactions in the Sultanate of Oman declined by 10.8% at the end of January 2025, reaching RO 185.5 million, compared to RO 207.8 million during the same period in 2024.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), fees collected from legal transactions rose by 5.6% to RO 7 million. However, the total value of sale contracts fell by 20.9% to RO 79.9 million, with 5,688 sale contracts recorded — a 7.1% drop in volume.



Mortgage transactions also saw a slight decline of 0.8%, amounting to RO 104.5 million across 1,705 contracts. Meanwhile, exchange contracts totalled 152, valued at RO 1 million.

The number of issued property titles stood at 20,588, reflecting a marginal decline of 0.1%.

In contrast, property ownership by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nationals increased by 19%, with 119 properties issued, underscoring continued regional interest in Oman’s real estate market. — **ONA**

Advancing cancer care: A vision for Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 9

GCC’S LEADING integrated healthcare provider, Aster DM Healthcare, is redefining cancer care in Oman by bringing world-class treatment closer to home with the launch of Aster Al Raffah International Comprehensive Cancer Care Centre. With many patients traditionally travelling abroad for specialised oncology services, the healthcare provider aims to bridge this gap by offering advanced, subspecialised cancer care within the country.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Alisha Moopen, Managing Director and Group CEO of Aster DM Healthcare GCC, emphasised that the initiative is designed to ease the physical, emotional and financial burden on patients and their families.

“For years, we have seen patients leaving Oman in search of advanced oncology treatments,” Moopen said.

“But being sick and having to travel for treatment is not the same as going on a holiday. We believe care needs to be available at people’s doorsteps, with the best doctors and the highest standards, so they no longer have to uproot themselves while battling disease.”



ALISHA MOOPEN
Managing Director and Group CEO of Aster DM Healthcare GCC

RAISING THE BAR IN CANCER TREATMENT

Aster DM Healthcare has introduced a highly specialised, multidisciplinary approach to oncology in Oman, a move that Moopen describes as a game-changer for the country’s private healthcare sector.

The new facility is designed to provide subspecialised cancer care — ensuring that each patient receives treatment from experts in their specific type of cancer.

“The biggest shift in cancer care is subspecialisation,” Moopen explained.

“Previously, a single surgeon might handle all types of oncosurgeries. Now, we have dedicated specialists for head and neck cancers, gastrointestinal cancers, breast cancer, colorectal surgeries, and urological cancers, among others. This targeted approach ensures patients receive the best possible care tailored to their condition.”

A key element of Aster’s model is

the integration of a Tumor Board and a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT), which bring together medical oncologists, surgical oncologists and radiation specialists to develop personalised treatment plans. “With a dedicated MDT and tumor board in place, we are ensuring that every patient’s journey is guided by collective expertise,” she added.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY AND EARLY DETECTION

While cutting-edge treatments are essential, Moopen stressed that early detection remains the cornerstone of successful cancer treatment. She acknowledged the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and data-driven diagnostics but pointed out that basic screening habits must improve before these technologies can have their full impact.

“We are investing in AI, but let’s be honest — technology is only as good as its implementation,” she said.

“The real challenge is that people don’t screen themselves. Whether it’s mammograms, cervical cancer tests, or other early screenings, there is still reluctance. AI can enhance detection, but first, we need to create awareness and encourage people to come in for screenings.

That’s something we hope to work on alongside the government.”

Aster’s long-term vision includes expanding community outreach efforts to drive greater participation in preventive care. Moopen emphasised that AI-powered analytics could improve patient outcomes by identifying risks early, but the first step remains making screenings more routine and accessible.

THE FUTURE OF CANCER CARE IN THE GCC

Aster DM Healthcare has positioned oncology as a core pillar of its clinical expertise, reflecting the growing need for specialised cancer treatment across the GCC. Moopen highlighted the dramatic evolution of cancer care, stating that today’s medical advancements offer significantly better prognoses than in the past.

“A decade ago, a cancer diagnosis felt like the end of the road,” she said. “But that’s no longer the case. With the right medical support, technology and emotional care, we can help patients not just survive but recover and thrive. At Aster, we are committed to building a system that supports both the patient and their families — ensuring comprehensive care from diagnosis to cure.”

OPINION

With new US tariffs trade war will be inevitable



ANDY JALIL

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

US commerce secretary-nominee Howard Lutnick has hinted that some of the tariffs being imposed by Donald Trump — the ones aimed at Mexico and Canada, to mention two, — are short-term tactics that countries can avoid if they bend to the US President’s demands.

Others, however, including potentially towards the European Union (EU), may serve longer-term goals of reshaping global trade and manufacturing. The EU exports more goods to the US than Canada, Mexico and China.

Moreover, unlike China, the EU’s trade deficit with the United States has grown since 2016 when Trump was first elected. Trump is ever unpredictable, but there are signs that he may wait for some weeks before potentially imposing any such trade measures on the EU and some other powers.

This was outlined in the ‘America First Trade Policy’ memorandum he released on his first day back in office on 20th January.

This points to a potential multi-month window of opportunity for Europe to try to lobby Trump and strike new economic bargain.

For instance, Trump has previously demanded that ‘the one thing they (the EU) can do quickly is buy our oil and gas’ when asked how Europe could avoid heavy tariffs.

So this appears part of a policy by Trump to ramp up US fossil fuel production and exports to deliver on his ‘America first’ strategy.

Following Russia’s war of Ukraine in 2022, the United States is already the EU’s second largest gas supplier of Liquid Natural Gas (LNG). To date in 2025, EU countries have imported over half of their LNG from the United States.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has given a potential green light to importing more US LNG, displacing Russia LNG. She said recently “it’s something where we can get into a discussion, also (where) our trade deficit is concerned”.

The UK government believes that Britain may escape this fate as its trade balance with the United States is much more balanced than the EU’s. Trump said last month that “we have a \$350 bn deficit with the EU. They treat us very badly, so they’re going to be in for tariffs”.

Trump’s January 20 memo indicates that his team will seek to develop analyses of persistent US trade deficits, perceived unfair trade practices and currency manipulation among partner countries. It also asks, before April 1, for recommendations on remedies, including a potential “global supplement tariff”.

Any US move to impose much higher tariffs on the EU, as Trump has threatened many times in the past, could badly damage

The UK government believes that Britain may escape this fate as its trade balance with the United States is much more balanced than the EU’s. Trump said last month that “we have a \$350 bn deficit with the EU.”

Europe’s economy. Moreover, higher US tariffs on China could redirect cheap products to Europe, undermining the bloc’s domestic manufacturers.

A key further question for business is whether there will be reciprocal moves by Europe and other powers in response that potentially ultimately lead into ‘trade war’ territory. Trump’s political style is to try to knock his opponents off balance with unpredictable, ‘shock and awe’ tactics.

So markets may be very volatile in coming weeks as this all plays out.

However, this cannot be taken for granted, as mentioned by an associate at LSE Ideas. As the IMF highlighted last autumn, there has been a big disconnect in recent years between higher geopolitical risk and lower market volatility.

This indicates that asset prices may not fully reflect the potential impact of wars and trade disputes. Such a disconnect makes shocks more likely, because higher geopolitical tension could trigger immediate sell-offs. So there is no guarantee that this disconnect will continue in the next few years which could increase economic volatility.

In such scenarios, some financial institutions may be forced to sell assets to affect balance sheets to meet margin calls or satisfy risk limits.

A HOSTILE \$7 BN CHIP DEAL LEANS ON ELECTRIC FAITH

BY ROB CYRAN

THE PRESENT looks grim for automotive chipmaker Onsemi. A \$6.9 billion hostile offer for rival Allegro MicroSystems could compound the near-term pain. Even with cost cuts, returns promise to be meager, while tariffs and economic gloom cast a bleaker shadow.

Yet, despite it all, it’s easy to compute the logic: underlying trends in ever-more-connected cars might deliver more electrifying returns.

If a deal happens at the \$35.10 per share price unveiled Wednesday night, it would be steep for Onsemi. Allegro’s estimated operating profit in 2026, according to LSEG, is about \$200 million.

If the buyer can cut 20% of operating costs it would glean \$60 million of savings. That would simply offset the burden of tax at the 21% statutory rate, implying a 3% return overall. Moreover, Allegro is resisting, perhaps anticipating a bump. No wonder the bidder’s stock fell 6% on Thursday morning.

That said, a combination makes some sense. Both companies serve the auto market and cars are including more chips over time as manufacturers add assisted driving or more-elaborate entertainment systems.

Electric vehicles usually have about twice as many chips, for battery management and power delivery. Research outfit Yole Group predicts that the market for auto semiconductors will reach \$100 billion in revenue by 2029, doubling from 2023.

The real tension, though, is timing. An industry semiconductor shortage in the early days of the pandemic turned into a glut; more car buyers are missing loan payments; on-again-off-again US tariff threats could brutalise manufacturers. Onsemi’s revenue is expected to decline by 16% year-over-year in 2025.

Worse, EVs have taken off more slowly than hoped, while new US President Donald Trump has said that he wants to end subsidies. Various executive orders could lower EVs’ share of the US automotive market from 32% to 23% in 2030, analytics firm Wood Mackenzie reckons.

Onsemi’s stock is down roughly 60% from its 2023 peak, while Allegro is down over 40%. Yet the truth remains that global sales of EVs keep rising, growing 25% in 2024 to 17.1 million, according to Rho Motion.

Falling prices as manufacturers across the globe roll out cheaper models will increase their appeal relative to conventional cars, raising the possibility of a sudden jump in adoption, similar to other technologies. That may indicate earnings estimates and enthusiasm for both companies, may be too low.

It’s a risky bet with lots of asterisks attached, but that would mean that Onsemi is striking while the notoriously cyclical semiconductor market is nearing a nadir. — Reuters

Gender parity: Driver of economic growth

THE global gender gap score for 146 countries is 68.5%; compared to last year, the gender gap has been closed only by +.1 percentage points.

Despite the efforts, the lack of widespread change has slowed the progress towards gender parity. If we progress at this rate, it will take the world 134 years to reach full gender parity, which roughly equals five generations.

Though the increase is only +.01 percentage points compared to last year, 97% of the 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index have closed more than 60% of their gender gaps. Iceland is the only country that has closed 90% of its gender gap.

While Iceland tops the list of the top 10 countries, seven spots are taken by European economies in addition to Iceland. Eight top 10 countries have closed over 80% of their gender gap.

The Global Gender Gap Index measures gender parity across four dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment.

Among the 146 countries analysed, the Health and Survival gender gap closed by 96%, the Education Attainment gap closed by 94.9%, the Economic Participation and Opportunity gap closed by 60.5%, and Political Empowerment by 22.5%.

The parity in labour force participation stands at 66.7%. Though women’s participation in the workforce is increasing globally, parity advances vary differently across sectors.

Women’s participation in leadership roles remains low across every industry and economy. Women account for 42% of the global market and represent 31.7% of senior leadership roles.

LinkedIn data shows that women’s hiring into leadership had begun to deteriorate from 37.5% to 36.4%. In 2024, 60 national elections represented the most significant global population that voted in many major economies.

Gender parity in parliamentary representation reached a record



97% of the 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index have closed more than 60% of their gender gaps.



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

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

high of 33.3% in 2024 and improved over time. LinkedIn data also reflects that men have more extensive and vigorous networks than women. Stronger networks are indicative of accessibility to more opportunities and outreach.

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), women’s participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and non-STEM has increased. Yet, women remain underrepresented in STEM roles, comprising only 28.2% of STEM compared to 47.3% in non-stem sectors, as AI is increasingly used in businesses.

Data shows that female talent in AI has doubled since 2016 — gender parity in the AI industry, education, professional services, manufacturing, technology and media have increased.

According to Coursera, gender parity is the highest in collaboration and leadership skills, teaching and mentoring, empathy and active listening, leadership and social influence. Still, it is lower in AI and big data.

As men and women enter the workforce after graduation, their skill sets are still shaped and valued differently.

In conclusion, the scale and speed of progress are deeply insufficient to reach gender parity by 2030. The

global community must recognise and accept that gender parity is difficult.

All stakeholders, governments, businesses, academia and civic societies — must collectively participate and collaborate for broader engagement and strive to bring incremental change to accelerate progress towards gender equality in all sectors worldwide.

Striving for gender parity has longer-lasting implications in a highly competitive and dynamic business environment and is a cogent thought that must be ingrained in every human mind.

The world must raise the required resources and adopt economic policies to bridge the gender gap. It is only possible when there is a fundamental change in mindset to recognise gender parity as a driver of high-quality growth.

The world must elevate to a condition of equitable and sustainable development, where we can make 50/50 a reality in the new paradigm of thinking.

Gender equality leads to stronger, more resilient economies by promoting economic growth and labour productivity. It would be a sustainable and crucial step in working towards a society that considers an individual based on merit, not gender.

CLASSIFIEDS



Contact No: 99074072

IZDIHAR_INFO

Ramadhan

4

BASIC
RAMADHAN
GUIDES

FATWA

HIS EMINENCE SHAIKH
AHMED BIN
HAMAD AL KHALILI
Grand Mufti of Oman



A person who has been fasting in Oman is suddenly required to travel to the United Kingdom, where the fasting hours are much longer. At what time should he break his fast?

The Almighty says: Eat and drink until the white thread you found from the black thread of dawn (Baqarah: 187). It means fasting time doesn't depend on the number of hours. He should be fasting before the sunrise until sunset.



HADITH GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Marwan ibn Salim al-Muqaffa' said:

I saw Ibn Umar holding his beard with his hand and cutting what exceeded the handful of it. He (Ibn Umar) said that the Prophet said when he broke his fast: Thirst has gone, the arteries are moist and the reward is sure, if Allah wills.

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY



Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the People of the Elephant? Did He not make their plan go wrong? He sent against them swarms of birds. Throwing at them rocks of baked clay. Leaving them like chewed up leaves.

(al Feel)



DUA SUPPLICATION TO ALLAH

O Allah, on this day, help me with its fasts and prayers, and keep me away from mistakes and sins of the day, grant me that I remember You continuously through the day, by Your assistance, O the Guide of those who stray.



HOW THE YOUNG GENERATION PUT A SPIN TO CELEBRATING RAMADHAN

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

AS THE holy month of Ramadhan unfolds in Oman, a vibrant wave of celebration led by Generation Z is reshaping how this sacred time is observed. This tech-savvy generation is blending centuries-old traditions with modern innovations, creating a Ramadhan experience that is both deeply rooted in culture and refreshingly contemporary. From digital storytelling to eco-conscious initiatives, Gen Z in Oman is making the month more engaging, inclusive and meaningful, all while staying true to the spirit of Ramadhan.

One of the most striking trends this year is the rise of Ramadhan-themed content creation. Young Omanis are turning to platforms like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube to share their personal Ramadhan journeys. Through daily vlogs, they document their suhoor and iftar routines, offering glimpses into their lives during this holy month. Some creators are even sharing tutorials on preparing traditional Omani dishes like shuwa, harees and thareed, showcasing the rich culinary heritage of the region. These digital stories not only celebrate Omani culture but also connect with a global audience, offering a window into the beauty of Ramadhan in Oman.

Social media has also become a hub for Ramadhan-related challenges that foster a sense of community. Hashtags like #RamadhanInOman and #Omani-Iftar are trending, with young Omanis sharing creative content such as Quran recitation challenges, DIY Ramadhan décor ideas and acts of kindness initiatives. One popular trend is the 30 Days

of Gratitude challenge, where participants post daily about something they are thankful for. Another is the Ramadhan Recipe Swap, where participants exchange recipes for traditional and modern dishes, creating a virtual cookbook that celebrates Omani culinary heritage. These challenges not only bring people together but also encourage reflection and gratitude, core values of Ramadhan.

Sustainability is another key focus for Gen Z in Oman this Ramadhan. Many young Omanis are organising eco-friendly iftars, using reusable utensils and minimising food waste. Social media influencers are promoting initiatives like Green Ramadhan, encouraging their peers to reduce plastic use and donate excess food to those in need. This eco-conscious approach reflects a growing awareness of environmental issues and a desire to align Ramadhan practices with the principles of sustainability and responsibility.

With busy schedules and geographical barriers, virtual iftar gatherings have become a lifeline for many young Omanis, especially those who live abroad. Platforms like Zoom and Instagram Live are being used to host online iftars, where friends and family can break their fast together, even if they are miles apart. These gatherings often include Quran recitations, games and even virtual cooking sessions, making them a lively and interactive experience. Virtual iftars have become a way to maintain connections and share the joy of Ramadhan, even when physical gatherings are not possible.

Fitness and wellness have also become a priority for Gen Z during Ramadhan. Many young Omanis are sharing their Ramadhan-friendly workout routines on social media,

emphasising light exercises during non-fasting hours. Yoga, stretching and walking are popular choices, helping them stay active while fasting. This focus on wellness reflects a broader trend of self-care and balance, as Gen Z seeks to make the most of the spiritual and physical benefits of Ramadhan.

Charity, a cornerstone of Ramadhan, has also taken on a digital twist. Instead of traditional charity methods, many young Omanis are using apps and online platforms to donate to causes or organise crowdfunding campaigns. This modern approach to charity reflects Gen Z's ability to innovate while staying true to the values of compassion and generosity that define Ramadhan. By leveraging technology, they are ensuring that the spirit of giving reaches even more people, both locally and globally.

What stands out most about Gen Z's approach to Ramadhan in Oman is their ability to honour tradition while embracing innovation. Whether it's through digital content creation, eco-friendly practices, or virtual gatherings, they are finding new ways to make Ramadhan more meaningful and accessible. Their creativity and passion are not only preserving Omani culture but also inspiring a global audience to see Ramadhan in a whole new light.

This Ramadhan, Gen Z in Oman is proving that tradition and modernity can coexist, creating a celebration that is both deeply rooted and refreshingly new. Through their efforts, they are ensuring that the essence of Ramadhan — community, reflection and generosity — remains alive and vibrant in an ever-changing world. Their innovative spirit is a testament to the enduring relevance of Ramadhan, as they find new ways to connect with their faith, their culture and each other.



Ramadhan in India Brings Together People of Different Faiths in Solidarity

BY KABEER YOUSUF
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IN INDIA, where nearly 204 million of the world’s Muslim population reside (according to a 2019 estimate), Ramadhan is celebrated as a demonstration of the rich cultural and religious diversity of the country, highlighting its cultural pluralism and commitment to religious freedom.

India’s Muslim population is the third-largest in the world and the largest Muslim-minority population. Muslims make up approximately 14 per cent of the country’s total population. India is home to 10.9 per cent of the world’s Muslim population and what makes the holy month unique in India is the way political leaders, corporate moguls, celebrities and other prominent figures organise iftar gatherings. These events serve as a means for networking and socialising, thus bolstering the strong social fabric of the country.

These iftar events are instrumental in helping leaders engage with their Muslim constituents, promote communal harmony and demonstrate solidarity with the vast Muslim population across the nation.

SUHOOR OR SEHRI:
A PRE-DAWN MEAL

The Suhoor meal, or Sehri, as it is known by various names in different regions of India, is consumed before the Fajr (dawn) prayer and is considered crucial as it provides nourishment to sustain individuals throughout the day of fasting. In many parts of India, the tradition of Sehri involves family gatherings, where Muslims come together before dawn to savour the suhoor delicacies and pray together.

A typical suhoor consists of light, nutritious food that helps sustain energy, such as fruits, yogurt, bread and eggs, or porridge, or rice soup. Recently, there has been a growing inclination towards lighter, juicy and hydrating foods, thanks to the awareness created by socio-cultural organisations.

IFTAR: BREAKING THE FAST

The act of breaking the fast, known as ‘Iftar’, is one of the most anticipated moments of the day for Muslims observing fasting during the holy month of Ramadhan. In India, this tradition is viewed as an occasion to strengthen family ties and foster brotherhood. Consequently, Iftar is celebrated with exuberance, often featuring large gatherings of family, friends and neighbours. It is a time for

community members to come together, share a meal and rejoice in the blessings of the holy month.

Towns and bazaars come alive with iftar delicacies, and the air is filled with the enchanting aroma of snacks and other iftar items tantalising passersby from small confectionery and coffee shops. One cannot resist the temptation of these snacks, leading many to purchase some to take home for their families.

In cities such as Hyderabad and Lucknow, Iftar is a grand event. In Hyderabad, the streets around the famous Charminar become a bustling hub of food vendors selling local Iftar specialties like samosas, pakoras and dahi puris. The aroma of freshly prepared biryani fills the air as people eagerly await the Maghrib (sunset) prayer, which signals the time to break their fast. In Lucknow, the culinary traditions of Mughlai cuisine come alive during Iftar, with rich dishes such as tunday kebabs and sheermal (a sweet flatbread) served alongside refreshing beverages like rooh afza (a sweet rose-flavoured drink).

TARAWEEH, THE NIGHT PRAYERS

Each day of fasting culminates in a longer set of night group prayers at the mosques, known as Taraweeh, which refers to special Sunnah prayers performed exclusively during the Islamic month of Ramadhan.

In India, these prayers involve the recitation of long portions of the Quran and can consist of any number of Rakaat (cycles of prostration in Islamic prayer) ranging from 8 to 20, depending on regional practices and traditions.

IN THE SPIRIT OF GIVING: ZAKAT

The act of charity, or zakat, is one of the five pillars of Islam. During the holy month, Muslims are encouraged to give generously to the poor and needy. They believe that Ramadhan is not solely about fasting, iftar and suhoor; it is also about giving and helping those in need, as the month is referred to as ‘a month of giving.’

In India, this spirit of charity is evident in various forms, from donations to mosques and religious institutions to providing food for the less fortunate during Iftar. Many mosques organise large-scale charity events throughout Ramadhan, where food is distributed to the poor and needy, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their background or faith, has access to a meal during Iftar. In cities like Kerala, Kolkata and Delhi, charitable organisations and individuals unite to prepare and distribute thousands of Iftar meals to homeless and marginalised communities.

RAMADHAN TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

“Aash” (traditional soup), fasting rituals and Quran recitation in Iran

In Iran, Ramadhan is steeped in spiritual significance and cultural heritage. The month is marked by a dedicated focus on prayer, Quran recitation and community. As Iranians begin their day with “Sehri,” they prepare their souls for fasting, which is observed with deep reverence. Each evening, families come together for iftar, often enjoying “Aash,” a hearty traditional soup made with various vegetables and grains. Special prayers and gatherings take place at mosques, where communities unite in reflection and devotion. Charity plays a significant role during this time, with many individuals contributing to food packages for the needy. The nights of Ramadhan are filled with gatherings where stories and wisdom are shared, solidifying bonds among friends and family. In Iran, Ramadhan is a month that nourishes the spirit while connecting individuals to their faith, their history and each other.

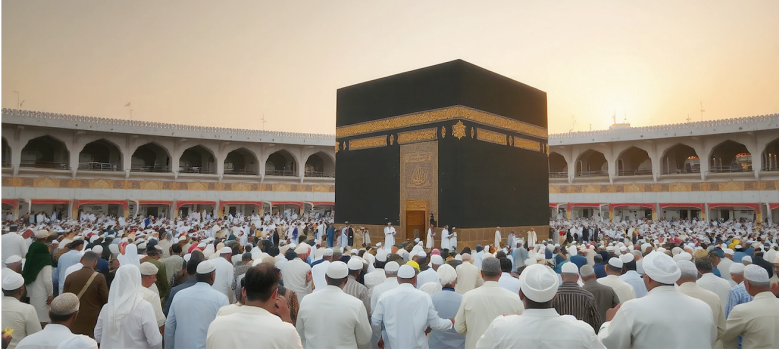
DAILY HEALTH TIPS TO REMEMBER



Avoid Sugary Drinks

While indulging in sugary beverages during Ramadhan, especially at iftar, may be tempting, it’s wiser to minimise or avoid them for better health. Sugary drinks, such as sodas, sweetened teas and energy drinks, can lead to rapid spikes and crashes in blood sugar, leaving you feeling fatigued. They also contain empty calories with little nutritional value, which can undermine your balanced diet during fasting. Instead, consider healthier alternatives like fruit-infused water, herbal teas, or natural fruit juices without added sugar. These options hydrate while providing essential vitamins and minerals. Furthermore, drinking water or herbal tea aids digestion and helps prevent the bloated feeling associated with sugary drinks. By choosing these healthier beverages, you support your overall health and enhance your Ramadhan experience, helping to keep your energy levels stable and your focus on spiritual reflections during this holy month. Remember, moderation is key.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS IN ISLAM



632 CE: Farewell Pilgrimage

In 632 CE, during Ramadhan, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) delivered his Farewell Sermon at the Hajj pilgrimage, a significant event for Muslims. This sermon encapsulated his teachings, emphasising key Islamic principles such as social justice, equality and unity. He urged his followers to treat one another with respect and uphold women’s rights, profoundly impacting Islamic social ethics. The address marked the culmination of his prophetic mission, reminding the community of their responsibilities. It remains a vital reference for Muslims, guiding their ethical conduct and social interactions in today’s society.

BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI

IN THE fast-paced world of marketing, where consumer attention is fleeting, brands are increasingly turning to the art of photography to make a lasting impression. The trend of powerful product photography has emerged as a vital strategy for companies hoping to differentiate themselves in saturated markets. But why are brands investing so heavily in this visual medium?

Professional product photography goes beyond simply taking pictures. It is about creating visuals that convey value and engage potential customers. Consumers increasingly rely on visual content and base their purchasing decisions on these visuals. High-quality product photography plays a crucial role in driving sales.

In a highly competitive landscape of product photography, where numerous professional photographers operate across various industries, it is essential for a photographer to carve out a unique presence. This can be achieved by developing a distinct style that shines through in their captured images.

Yusra bint Hamood al Numaniyah has established herself as a prominent photographer specialising in product and food photography for some of Oman's most significant business ventures. She emphasises the importance of lens selection to ensure that product details are captured with clarity and vibrancy.

“The type of camera has a minimal effect on showcasing fine product details,” she explains. “Instead, the lens choice and adjustments made in design software are critical to achieving image quality. From my experience, I recommend using prime lenses, such as the 50mm lens, along with macro lenses for photographing intricate details in products and food. Additionally, using proper lighting accessories and reflectors to reduce shadows is essential for producing high-quality product images. Various paper and wood backgrounds are also fundamental for presenting images in a professional manner.”

Product photography is distinct from other areas like portrait or sports photography. It requires specific accessories, lighting and backgrounds that align with the product's theme, as well as creative techniques to adapt the studio with the necessary tools and digital processes. While photography in other fields captures scenes as they are, product photography often involves subtle alterations made through photo editing software.

The rise of e-commerce has further accelerated the need for compelling imagery. With consumers unable to physically interact with products, high-quality images serve as a substitute, providing detailed visual information. Brands are investing in 360-degree views, lifestyle shoots and even video content to offer a comprehensive understanding of their products. This strategy not only enhances the online shopping experience but also builds consumer trust, as customers feel more confident in their purchasing decisions.

The process begins when Yusra consults with the client to understand their desired models or concepts. She then organises her ideas by reviewing various images and feedback from professional photographers and photography websites.

“The key is to discuss my ideas with the client to create a shared vision,” she explains. “After that, I prepare the appropriate backgrounds, lighting and accessories for the product shoot. The final step involves editing the images with graphic design software to enhance their beauty and colours.”

Yusra also advises anyone looking to photograph their own products to seek out feedback in product photography. “It opens up new ideas and creative avenues, helping them to better visualise the final image in their mind,” she added.

The quality of product photography reflects the photographer's professional skills by effectively balancing the clarity of the product, showcasing it in the best



Expert shares insights on how to stand out as powerful product photographer



light and presenting the brand in a way that attracts viewers.

She shares, “The key element that makes product photos appealing is the colour wheel, which helps in selecting suitable colours for backgrounds and accessories. I often use black and white to maintain the primary focus on the product itself. A single high-quality advertising image, featuring attractive colours and a professional product presentation, can significantly enhance marketing efforts.”

Platforms like Instagram and Pinterest have transformed product photography into a cornerstone of marketing strategies. Brands are now curating their visual identities to create cohesive and memorable brand imagery. Influencer partnerships have also become common, leveraging the power of high-quality visuals shared by individuals who embody the brand's values. This form of photography creates authenticity and builds a sense of community among consumers, further boosting brand loyalty.

Product photography also requires specific safety tools and skills, particularly when handling items like hot foods and light-sensitive products that can be challenging during the shoot. “I handle hot items carefully, wearing gloves while moving them and ensuring an appropriate surface beneath the shooting area. In some cases, the products can be cooled down and we can create a hot effect digitally during photo editing,” she added.

As the landscape of marketing continues to evolve, the importance of quality product photography cannot be overstated. Brands that choose to invest in compelling, well-thought-out visual content are not merely selling products; they are crafting stories and building connections. In a world where every image competes for attention, powerful photography has emerged as a vital tool that can make or break a brand's success. As we move forward, it is clear that those who master this art will likely emerge as the leaders in their industries.