

24

RAMADHAN
1446 AH
MONDAY
MAR 24, 2025

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PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR

04:52 AM

DHUHR

12:18 PM

ASR

03:45 PM

MAGRIB

06:24 PM

ISHA

07:35 PM

omanobserver.com

INBRIEF

EID AL FITR HOLIDAY
FOR PUBLIC AND
PRIVATE SECTORS

As per Royal orders, it has been decided that the Eid Al Fitr holiday 1446 AH for employees of the State’s Administrative Apparatus, other legal entities and establishments of the private sector will start on Saturday (March 29) and end as per the two following probabilities: If the first day of Eid is on Sunday (March 30), the holiday ends on Tuesday (April 1). Official work will resume on Wednesday (April 2).

If the first day of Eid is on Monday (March 31), the holiday ends on Thursday (April 3). Official work will resume on Sunday (April 6). The Ministry of Labour pointed out that employers may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday - if deemed necessary - provided they compensate them for the holiday. — ONA



The fisheries sector in the Sultanate of Oman achieved good growth rates in 2024, further boosting its contribution to economic diversification during the 10th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025). The 10th five-year plan targets raising the sector’s growth to 10 per cent annually. It also targets the augmentation of the sector’s contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) by about 2 per cent.

DETAILS ON P13

DECREE
ESTABLISHES
INVESTMENT
AND TRADE
COURT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued Royal Decree No (35/2025), establishing the Investment and Trade Court and promulgating its law. The Decree reads as follows.

Article (1) states that a court to be named the “Investment and Trade Court” shall be established and affiliated to the Supreme Judiciary Council. It stipulates that the new court’s headquarters shall be in the Governorate of Muscat and

the provisions of the law attached to this Decree shall be applied to the same court.

Article (2) states that courts shall continue to adjudicate lawsuits, orders and requests that, pursuant to the attached law, have become subject to the jurisdiction of the Investment and Trade Court, provided that the lawsuits, orders and requests had been filed prior to the date of enforcing provisions of the attached law.

Article (3) states that the Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judiciary Council shall issue a decision regulating the functions of the Investment and Trade Court and its administrative divisions.

Article (4) annuls all that contradicts the attached law or contravenes its provisions.

Article (5) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall be enforced from October 1, 2025. — ONA

GAZA DEATH TOLL PASSES 50,000

Israeli air strike kills senior Hamas official

AN ISRAELI air strike in southern Gaza killed a Hamas political leader, Salah al Bardaweel, on Sunday, the group said, as Palestinian officials put the death toll from nearly 18 months of conflict at over 50,000.

Hamas said the air strike on Khan Younis killed Bardaweel and his wife.

The Israeli military confirmed in a statement on Sunday that it had killed the Hamas official on Saturday. After two months of relative calm in the war, Gazans have again been fleeing for their lives after Israel effectively abandoned a ceasefire, launching a new all-out air and ground campaign last Tuesday against Hamas.

Explosions echoed throughout the north, central and southern Gaza Strip early on Sunday, as Israeli planes hit several targets in those areas in what witnesses said was an escalation of the attacks that began earlier last week. At least 30 Palestinians had been killed in Israeli strikes on Rafah and Khan Younis so far on Sunday, health authorities said. Those killed included three municipal employees, medics said. Bardaweel was a member of the Hamas decision-making body, the political office, and had held posts such as heading the Hamas delegation for indirect truce talks with Israel in 2009 and led the group’s media office in 2005.

“His blood, that of his wife and martyrs, will remain fuelling the battle of liberation and independence,” the group said.

Hamas has accused Israel of breaking the terms of the January ceasefire agreement by refusing to begin negotiations for an end to the war and a withdrawal of its troops from Gaza. But Hamas has said it is still willing to negotiate and was studying “bridging” proposals from US President Donald Trump’s special envoy, Steve Witkoff.

At least 50,021 Palestinians have been killed and 113,274 wounded since the beginning of the war, the health ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

Israeli military spokesperson Avichay Adraee issued an evacuation warning



Palestinians rush an injured girl away from the site of Israeli strikes on a makeshift displacement camp in central Gaza City on Sunday. — AFP

on X for residents in the Tel Al Sultan neighbourhood in western Rafah in the south of the strip. The military later said troops had encircled Tel Al Sultan in order to reinforce control and expand the security zone in southern Gaza.

It said soldiers were allowing the

evacuation of civilians from the combat zone via organised routes for their safety.

Dozens of families quit their homes in Tel Al Sultan heading northward to Khan Younis, some on foot, while others carried their belongings and children on donkey carts and rickshaws. SEE ALSO P6

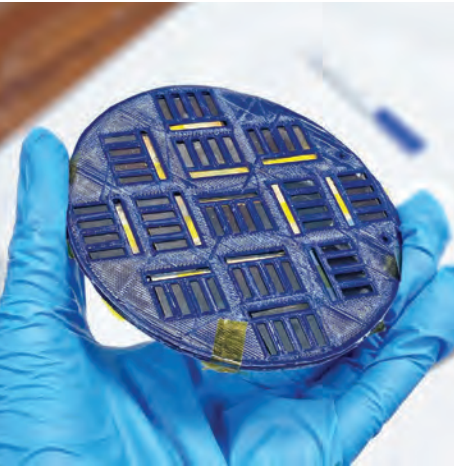
Student company manufactures solar cells using new technology

MUSCAT: Aura, a company from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), is the first student-led startup to manufacture perovskite solar cells. The cells are characterised by high efficiency, low cost, flexibility and environment friendly and aim to support the Sultanate of Oman’s vision of relying on solar energy.

Nour bint Mohammed al Mayyahiyah, the company’s public relations manager, said that Aura specialises in developing and producing solar energy solutions, with a focus

on perovskite technologies to enhance solar energy efficiency. The goal is to provide clean and efficient energy sources, reduce reliance on traditional solar panels, and contribute to achieving environmental and economic sustainability.

She added that the idea to establish the company came after seeing the challenges faced by traditional solar energy technologies, such as low conversion efficiency, high production costs, and the difficulty in manufacturing.



After research and study, we discovered that perovskite technology offers an innovative and more efficient solution. The company was established to develop this technology and transform it into practical products that meet market needs.

Al Mayyahi said that there has been growing interest in our products and concept after we created a prototype and presented it to those interested in this field, particularly companies and institutions seeking clean and

efficient energy solutions. “We are witnessing a significant growth in demand, and we are working to expand the scope of our services to better meet customer needs.”

She pointed out that Aura’s most notable achievements include developing the first local prototype of perovskite solar cells, participating in numerous competitions, including Injaz Oman and the Science Festival, and attracting public and private sector interest in this product as a sustainable energy source. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



FIRMS TOLD TO PAY SALARIES BY MARCH 27

MUSCAT: On the occasion of the upcoming Eid Al Fitr for the year 1446 AH, the Ministry of Labour has informed all private sector establishments, subject to the provisions of the Labour Law issued by Royal Decree No 2023/53, of their obligation to ensure the early payment of wages to their workers for March 2025 by no later than March 27, 2025.

MoH CALLS FOR URGENT BLOOD DONATION

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health has urged all individuals to proactively donate blood and its components on a priority basis. The Central Blood Bank in Bausher will require a significant increase in the number of blood donors in preparation for the upcoming Eid al Fitr holiday, during which there is typically a notable decrease in both blood and blood component donations.

Ramadhan Blood donation hours at the Central Blood Bank Bausher are from 7.30 pm to 11.30 pm, 8 am to 12.30 pm and the last moment for platelet donations is 10:30 pm.

The Department of Blood Bank Services (DBBS) has issued an urgent appeal for blood and platelet donations during Ramadhan, emphasising the critical need to support patients across the Sultanate of Oman.

‘Central Blood Bank in Bausher urges all the donors to donate blood and platelets during Ramadhan. Our goal is to provide more than 2,900 blood units and 270 platelet units to meet the urgent needs of patients. Join us in saving lives and offering hope to those in need,’ DBBS release stated. With limited time available for donations during fasting hours, the Central Blood Bank has called for potential donors to come after Iftar. Donors are advised to drink plenty of fluids before and after donating blood.



GOOD RESPONSE TO CMYF BLOOD CAMP

MUSCAT: The Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), a voluntary organisation, conducted a blood donation camp on Friday. The camp held at Bausher Blood Bank, opposite to the Royal Hospital, received a good response as many volunteers turned out to donate blood. CMYF founder-president Ramdas Chandaka thanked all those who came forward for this humanitarian cause. The CMYF has been honoured by the Ministry of Health on several occasions in recognition of its continuing support for blood collection services in Oman.

Traditional Omani halwa warms up for Eid al Fitr

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

No festival in Oman is complete without the rich, aromatic taste of traditional Omani halwa. As Eid al Fitr approaches, expected on March 31, halwa makers across the Sultanate of Oman are already stirring up this beloved delicacy, ensuring it adds sweetness to the celebrations.

From bustling commercial outlets to humble family-run grocery stores, shelves are being stocked with freshly prepared Omani halwa. For centuries,

this glutinous, saffron-infused dessert has been at the heart of Omani hospitality, always served alongside dates and kahwa. Whether in offices or homes, a platter of Omani halwa is a signature of warmth and welcome. During festive seasons and special occasions, tonnes of Omani halwa are sold across the country and beyond. Visitors often take back a box of this cherished sweet as a memento of their time in Oman, making it a popular gift for birthdays, weddings, Ramadhan, and Eid. The art of halwa-making is deeply rooted in Omani heritage, with many



makers concentrated in the Batinah. As Eid draws near, they are busy blending ghee, honey, and aromatic spices in large pans, a technique originally influenced by Zanzibar.

“Omani halwa is a perfect, healthy mix of cornflower flour, sugar, saffron, water, and dry fruits, all carefully balanced to achieve the perfect taste,” explains Mahmoud al Hosni, a renowned halwa maker. “The finest varieties are crafted using premium sugar cane and walnuts.” The legacy of Omani halwa dates back to the 1950s in Zanzibar,

where the late Ali bin Suleiman Al Hosni’s halwa was so famous that his home was known as ‘The Halwa Home.’ After late Sultan Qaboos invited Omanis abroad to return in the 1970s, Ali bin Suleiman established a small shop in Al Seeb, which later passed to his son Salim.

“Omani halwa is not just a dessert; it is a symbol of our culture and heritage,” Mahmoud adds. “It represents our tradition, our hospitality, and our national pride. It is our duty to preserve this sweet legacy for generations to come.”

Research explores CO2 storage in North Oman

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

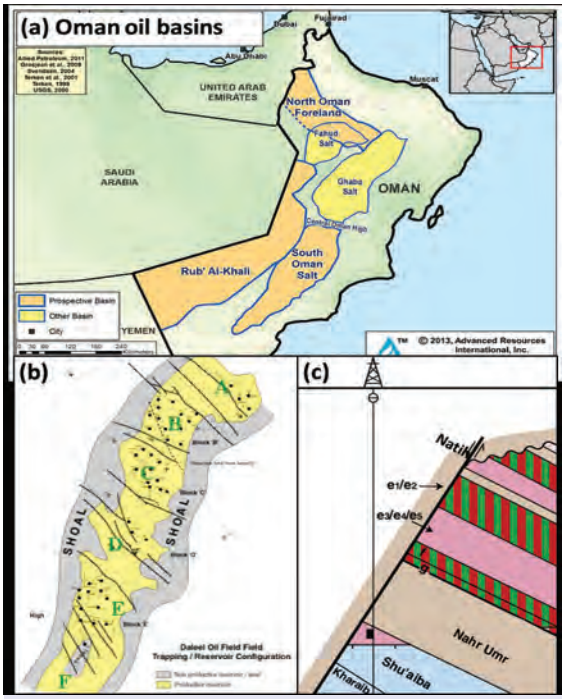
THE work of Principal investigator Dr Mingjie Chen, Researcher at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), is among the winning innovative research projects at the 11th National Research Award, organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI).

The researcher won for his work in the energy and industry field in the PhD category, titled ‘Use closed reservoirs for CO2 storage and heat recovery: A two-stage brine-extraction and CO2-circulation strategy.’

Dr Mingjie mentioned that integrated CO2 (carbon dioxide) geologic storage (CGS), and CO2 plume geothermal (CPG) production provide an attractive approach not only to reduce atmospheric CO2 concentration but also to generate carbon-free geothermal energy to supplement electricity power. Small to moderate scale closed-boundary reservoirs have rarely been evaluated for CGS-CPG. One of the major reasons is that the closed system has limited storage volume, and native brine has nowhere to escape to free storage space for injected CO2.

For this study, Dr Mingjie and his research team aimed to provide a solution to the issue by implementing an innovative two-stage operational strategy to realise CGS-CPG in closed fault-blocks in oil/gas fields in North Oman.

The proposed strategy extracts pure hot brine and CO2 in two sequential stages by two separate horizontal wells and can effectively avoid brine-CO2 separation on ground surface. A suite of numerical models is developed to evaluate the approach with a variety of reservoir conditions and operations.



The main findings revealed that CO2 sequestration is achieved mainly during the CGS stage, and supplementary during the CPG stage, in which negative net storage could happen in situations of extremely low porosity and high extraction rate. During CGS, the higher the porosity, the more the store CO2. The higher the regulated overpressure, the more the compressed CO2 in the pore space freed by produced brine. The largest CO2 storage achieved is 6.1 Mt in 16 years of lifespan for the simulation with highest porosity and overpressure.

Moreover, the total recovered heat energy from produced hot brine and circulated CO2 is determined merely by porosity and increases almost linearly from 2.2 to 3.6 (×1015 Joules) with it, whereas the heat flux averaged in the lifespan (thermal power capacity) is controlled by both permeability



DR MINGJIE CHEN
SQU Researcher, and Principal investigator

and overpressure, varying from 0.5 to 7.5 MW with the increase of both parameters.

Dr Mingjie also added that the IW-PW2 (injection well- CO2 production well) well space (L) should not be larger than 500 m in order to meet the required 0.94 of minimal CO2 cut in produced fluids from PW2.

Under this constraint, the total heat energy from CO2 circulation is controlled by L only and can reach up to 6×1015 Joules. The CO2 thermal power capacity, however, is controlled by extraction rate (Q), and almost linearly increases from 2 to 7 MW with Q from 6 to 18 kg/s.

The results demonstrated the feasibility of our solution for implementing CGS-CPG in closed underground reservoirs, and indicate the tremendous potentials to use depleted oil/gas reservoirs as the candidate fields, which widely exist in North Oman and the world.

Comprehensive economic evaluation using Levelised Cost Of Energy (LCOE) and Net Present Value (NPV) are undergoing for the proposed approach: paving the way for pilot-scale field experiments and possible commercialisation.

This research project was published in Sustainable Energy Technologies and Assessments. The research team consisted of Dr Mingjie along with Dr Ali al Maktoumi, Dr Azizallah Izady from Sultan Qaboos University, Prof Jianchao Cai from China University of Petroleum, and Dr Yanhui Dong from Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Oman marks World Meteorological Day

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), celebrated World Meteorological Day on Sunday to commemorate the anniversary of the World Meteorological Organization Convention that was formed in 1950.

This year’s celebration, under the theme ‘Bridging the Early Warning Gap Together,’ aims to reduce the impacts of tropical cyclones, severe storms, and floods. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) recently confirmed that 2024 was the hottest year since records began, as changes in our environment lead to more extreme weather events.

The frequency of tropical cyclones, which rapidly intensify after their formation, is also increasing, as are devastating rainfall, storm surges, floods, deadly droughts and wildfires. In addition, sea levels are rising, making densely populated coastal areas vulnerable to coastal flooding and ocean surges.

These events leave lasting impacts on communities long after the events have passed. As we reach

Over the past 75 years, we have contributed trillions of dollars to the global economy and saved billions more by avoiding economic losses from weather, climate, and water-related risks. We have also saved hundreds of thousands of lives

PROFESSOR
CELESTE SAULO
Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization



the midpoint of the Early Warning for All initiative, significant progress has been made in saving lives, protecting livelihoods, and strengthening community resilience. As climate risks escalate, the need for the initiative grows more urgent and greater. Furthermore, as the initiative enters its next phase, partnerships are expanding to accelerate progress.

Collaboration with bilateral and multilateral donors, climate funds, and development banks is increasing support for early warning efforts. Regional partners and specialised centres are being leveraged to enhance impact and build lasting capacity.

National responsibility and ownership remain at the core of the initiative, with governments,

particularly represented by National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs), leading efforts to strengthen resilience and establish sustainable early warning systems. Governments are also expected to lead the way, with public-private collaboration supporting the Early Warning for All initiative.

Professor Celeste Saulo, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, said, “Over the past 75 years, we have contributed trillions of dollars to the global economy and saved billions more by avoiding economic losses from weather, climate, and water-related risks. We have also saved hundreds of thousands of lives.” He added, “The World Meteorological Organization represents the backbone and central nervous system of global weather forecasting.” As António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said on this occasion, “The United Nations Early Warnings for All initiative aims to protect society everywhere through a warning system by 2027. The world must unite and urgently intensify its efforts and investments to achieve this goal.”

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SHORT TAKES



Dr Chona Thomas awarded the prestigious TMC Lifetime Achievement Award

RENOWNED PLASTIC SURGEON RECEIVES LIFETIME AWARD

MUSCAT: Renowned plastic surgeon and former head of plastic surgery services in Oman, Dr Chona Thomas, was awarded the prestigious TMC Lifetime Achievement Award by the Trivandrum Medical College Alumni Association (TMCAA) during its Platinum Jubilee Convention in Thiruvananthapuram.

The award was conferred on March 9 by Kerala State Chief Secretary Sarada Muralreedharan, IAS, in recognition of Dr Thomas’ outstanding contributions to healthcare, social development and medical mentorship.

Currently serving at Aster Royal Al Raffa Hospital, Muscat, Dr Thomas was honoured for his pioneering work in plastic surgery, his commitment to medical excellence and his role in mentoring future generations of healthcare professionals.

At the convention, Dr Thomas also delivered a presentation on the modern management of cleft lip noses, sharing insights from his extensive expertise in the field.



OVER 3,000 ATTEND IFTAR IN AL RUSAYL

MUSCAT: The mega Iftar attended by over 3,500 people was hosted in Al Rusayl, Muscat by the KV Group of Companies recently. This is an annual Iftar traditionally held on the third Friday of Ramadhan.

AL RAYYAN PROJECT ENHANCES RAMADHAN SPIRIT

SUHAR: The Directorate of Endowments and Religious Affairs in Al Batinah North Governorate continues its implementation of the Al Rayyan Ramadhan Project, a comprehensive initiative designed to enrich the spiritual atmosphere during the holy month. The project offers a diverse programme catering to various segments of society, fostering religious awareness, social cohesion and charitable engagement.

Khalid bin Abdullah al Hosni, Director of the Endowments and Religious Affairs Department in Al Batinah North Governorate, emphasised that the initiative seeks to promote positive integration between institutions and the community. It also aims to uphold humanitarian and Islamic values, reinforce social responsibility, and



The Al Rayyan Project promotes national identity and balanced thinking

encourage voluntary charitable efforts, all while preserving Oman’s rich Islamic traditions.

The Al Rayyan Ramadhan Project features a wide range of activities, including religious evenings that blend education and

inspiration, Quranic study circles focused on recitation, intonation and deeper understanding of verses, as well as Ramadhan gatherings that strengthen communal ties. Additionally, the project organises lectures and lessons highlighting Islamic principles and their relevance to daily life.

Al Hosni further noted that Al Rayyan is part of the Rakeza Initiative, recently launched to promote national identity and balanced thinking. This initiative includes intellectual programmes addressing key themes of national identity, alongside educational and recreational activities aimed at instilling core values. Moreover, it activates the role of mosques and the local community in spreading religious awareness and moral teachings. — ONA

Seeking Laylat Al Qadr in Ramadhan’s final nights

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

AS Ramadhan enters its final ten days, believers across the Sultanate of Oman are intensifying their worship and prayers, seeking the Night of Power (Laylat Al Qadr) — a night described in the Holy Quran as better than a thousand months.

This sacred period is marked by Qiyamul Lail (night prayers), Thikr (remembrance of Allah), and charitable deeds, as the faithful prepare for the approaching Eid celebrations.

Hadith narrations emphasise the significance of these nights, quoting Aisha (RA): “When the last ten days of Ramadhan began, the Prophet (PBUH) would stay up at night, wake his family, and devote himself to worship.” It is believed that whoever prays on Laylat Al Qadr with sincerity will have their past sins



The last 10 days of Ramadhan are crucial for spiritual reflection and devotion

forgiven, making these final days crucial for spiritual reflection and devotion.

With just over a week until Eid, community Iftars are in full swing across Muscat, as associations and organisations bring people together

in the spirit of Ramadhan. In Al Athaiba, the A’Sahwa Tower Community recently hosted an Iftar gathering, bringing together over 600 residents at its Tower 2 premises. The lively event fostered a strong sense of unity, with participants sharing meals and conversations in an atmosphere of warmth and inclusivity. As the final phase of Ramadhan unfolds, believers are urged to reflect on their deeds, prayers, and supplications. Speaking on this, Shaikh Ismail Menk, Mufti of Zimbabwe, remarked: “As Ramadhan draws to a close, believers should introspect on their spiritual journey and maximise these nights of blessings.” Across Oman, both citizens and expatriates continue to embrace the spirit of Ramadhan, sharing positivity, gratitude and generosity, reinforcing the values that define this sacred month.

Sleep deprivation poses hidden health risks

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

During the holy month of Ramadhan, a shift in lifestyle and eating habits is inevitable. While fasting serves as a cleansing process for both the body and mind, many people tend to overlook the importance of maintaining adequate sleep, which can have significant negative effects on overall health and well-being.

Dr Hamed Al Sinawi, senior consultant and old-age psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, explains that during Ramadhan, many people stay up late for prayers, social gatherings, or meals with family and friends. This results in reduced sleeping hours at night, often leading to exhaustion during the day.

“Studies show that sleep deprivation can cause increased fatigue, irritability, mood swings, and reduced patience, which sometimes manifests as road rage,” points out Dr Al Sinawi.

Dr Dilip Kumar Singvi, a specialist in internal medicine and diabetes at Burjeel Hospital, defines sleep deprivation as a condition where a person is either not getting enough sleep (ideally eight hours per



Maintain at least eight hours of quality sleep daily to function optimally

night) or is experiencing poor-quality sleep over an extended period of time. “One of the common causes of sleep deprivation is a disrupted sleep cycle, which is particularly evident during Ramadhan, as nighttime sleep is shortened,” he noted. According to Dr Singvi, the effects of sleep deprivation are far-reaching. Symptoms include fatigue, daytime drowsiness, mood swings, impaired judgement, memory lapses, and headaches. He warns that prolonged lack of sleep can impact several bodily systems, increasing the risk of heart

disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Additionally, sleep deprivation can worsen conditions like obstructive sleep apnea and elevate the likelihood of car accidents. Dr Al Sinawi stresses the importance of maintaining at least eight hours of quality sleep daily to function optimally. “Loss of sleep affects memory, concentration, and decision-making abilities, all of which are essential for work and daily activities. Even if working hours are reduced during Ramadhan, individuals still need sharp decision-making skills. Additionally, sleep deprivation can significantly impact a driver’s reflexes and reaction times, increasing the risk of road accidents.” Some individuals attempt to compensate for lost sleep by napping during the day. However, Dr Al Sinawi warns that this may not be sufficient and could lead to further complications. “Mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder can be at risk of relapse due to disturbances in the circadian rhythm, especially when individuals choose to sleep all day and remain awake at night. This disrupts the body’s natural biological clock, leading to emotional instability.”

RAMADHAN

FOR MANY WORKING WOMEN, Ramadhan brings added responsibilities, requiring efficient time management to balance work, home and social commitments while maintaining personal well-being. Experts emphasise that while women often prioritise their families, self-care is equally essential. Dr Saleha al Jadidi, Consultant Psychiatrist, highlights that the demands of fasting, household chores and spiritual obligations can lead to fatigue, mood swings and stress. She advises women to delegate tasks, hydrate properly and maintain a balanced diet to sustain their physical and emotional health. Dr Sara Ahmed, an English lecturer, underscores the importance of time management in ensuring 'me time'. She suggests planning Iftar meals in advance, organising household tasks and setting aside moments for self-care. Psychologist Sabah al Azri recommends deep breathing exercises, sufficient rest and seeking emotional support to alleviate stress. Hawra, a working mother, shares her personal approach, ensuring evening walks and weekend rest to recharge. Social worker Naashiah al Kharusi emphasises that spiritual strength derived from worship can help women cope with the challenges of Ramadhan. Leena Francis, Principal, Indian School Al Seeb, advocates for a self-sustainable plan that includes 'me time' to maintain well-being. Experts also stress the importance of simplifying daily routines, delegating household chores, reducing screen time and getting adequate sleep. Dr Faryal, Senior Consultant at Royal Hospital, advises women to focus on nutrient-rich foods, mindful reflection and self-compassion to foster both physical and emotional resilience. By implementing these strategies, women can successfully balance home, work and self-care, ensuring a fulfilling and spiritually enriching Ramadhan.

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

BALANCING HOME, WORK AND WELL-BEING

Experts stress the importance of simplifying daily routines, delegating household chores, reducing screen time and getting adequate sleep

SHORT TAKES



Knowledge Oman and volunteers from NUST created a festive atmosphere

FESTIVE CELEBRATION HELD AT AL KHOUDH CHILD CARE CENTRE

MUSCAT: Volunteers and partners came together to spread happiness and excitement among the children of Al Khoudh Child Care Centre. The celebration, organised by Oman’s community knowledge-sharing platform, Knowledge Oman (KO), in collaboration with Techno and volunteers from the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), created a vibrant and festive atmosphere filled with laughter, activities and thoughtful gifts.

The event featured lively entertainment, including a bouncing castle and interactive games, bringing smiles to the children. Volunteers also distributed gifts, making the day extra special for the young participants.

Tariq al Barwani, Founder of Knowledge Oman, emphasised the importance of such initiatives, saying: “We believe every child deserves to feel valued and cared for, especially during special occasions. This initiative reflects our commitment to giving back to the community and creating memorable experiences for those who need it most. I am grateful to our dedicated volunteers and partners who helped bring this celebration to life.”

This event is part of KO’s ongoing efforts to promote social responsibility and foster a culture of kindness and inclusion across Oman. The successful collaboration between volunteers and partners made the day truly meaningful, marking another impactful community-driven initiative aimed at spreading joy and strengthening social bonds.

Ramadhan evening explores business future in AI, cybersecurity

SALALAH: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) — Dhofar Branch hosted an insightful Ramadhan evening titled ‘The Future of Business in Light of Artificial Intelligence and Cybersecurity: Opportunities and Challenges.’

The event, held in Salalah, was organised as part of ongoing efforts to foster discussions on technological advancements and their implications for businesses. It was conducted under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The evening brought together experts, business leaders and technology enthusiasts to discuss the transformative impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and the growing importance of cybersecurity in today’s digital economy.

In his opening address, Ghazi bin Saeed al Hamar, Director of the Chamber’s Dhofar branch, emphasised the significance of such discussions in preparing businesses for the evolving technological landscape.

“This evening serves as a platform for constructive dialogue and knowledge-sharing on the opportunities AI presents and the challenges it poses to businesses amid rapid digital advancements. It also highlights the essential role of cybersecurity in protecting data, digital assets and critical infrastructure,” he said.

The discussions centred around three key themes:

1. Introduction to AI Programmes, Advanced Technologies and the Digital



The meeting saw experts, business leaders and tech enthusiasts discuss the growing importance of cybersecurity in today’s digital economy

Economy — Experts elaborated on how AI is reshaping industries, driving efficiency and transforming traditional business models.

2. AI Agents and the Future of Work — Panelists explored the role of AI-powered automation, its impact on employment and how businesses can adapt to a workforce increasingly influenced by AI-driven solutions.

3. AI Legislation and Regulatory Frameworks — Legal experts delved into the evolving landscape of AI governance, discussing regulatory measures, ethical considerations and the need for compliance with international best practices.

The evening also featured an interactive discussion on cybersecurity, with a special presentation from an Omani startup specialising in the field. The startup shared its insights on emerging cyber threats and best practices for securing digital infrastructure in an AI-driven economy. — ONA

Harat Al Ghafat in Bahla embraces Ramadhan

AMAL AL RIYAMI
BAHLA, MARCH 23

EVERY Friday during the holy month of Ramadhan, Harat Al Ghafat in Bahla comes alive with vibrant cultural and community events, blending heritage with celebration. This historic neighbourhood, over 150 years old, was abandoned for five decades, but thanks to the dedicated efforts of Al Kour Charity Caravan, part of the Al Kour Sports Team in Al Ghafat, it has been beautifully restored and brought back to life.

Ahmed bin Abdullah al Hinai, a resident of Al Ghafat, reflected on this remarkable transformation: “Al Ghafat was once home to our ancestors, where they built markets and homes. However, it remained deserted for decades. Today, thanks to the remarkable efforts of Al Kour Charity Caravan, the neighbourhood has been revived through renovation, lighting and cleaning, restoring its former beauty and charm.”

The restoration efforts began with street lighting installations, followed by renovation of the eastern mosque and the revitalisation of the main square into a hub for celebrations and community gatherings. Now, for the third consecutive year, Al Ghafat hosts weekly Ramadhan events, drawing visitors from across the governorate.

Last Friday, the neighbourhood witnessed the ‘Children’s Tahloola’ event, where over 500 children, dressed in traditional attire, joyfully walked through the alleys, chanting Ramadhan prayers and supplications. The heartwarming scene revived Oman’s cherished customs and traditions.

The evening continued with a community Iftar in the old neighbourhood, held under the auspices of Dr Hamad bin Salem al Rawahi, Member of the State Council. The celebrations also



Al Ghafat was once home to our ancestors, where they built markets and homes. However, it remained deserted for decades. Today, thanks to the remarkable efforts of Al Kour Charity Caravan, the neighbourhood has been revived through renovation, lighting and cleaning, restoring its former beauty and charm.

AHMED BIN
ABDULLAH AL
HINAI



The ‘Children’s Tahloola’ event saw over 500 children dressed in traditional attire, chanting Ramadhan prayers

featured a children’s theatre, charity market, candy distribution, fireworks displays and a photography exhibition showcasing Al Ghafat’s rich history.

Through the tireless dedication of Al Kour Charity Caravan, Al Ghafat

has been transformed — not just physically, but socially — fostering a renewed sense of unity and cultural appreciation. Their efforts stand as a testament to the power of collective commitment in reviving and celebrating Oman’s heritage.

TENDER NOTICE

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources
(Directorate General Of Agriculture and Livestock Research) Announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Description	Tender Documents Price (R.O)	Class	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Documents
178/2025/ MAFWR/ DGALR-25	Supply and insulation lab furniture food processing Lab in Research Center Al-Rumais	25/-	Specialized	Tuesday 8/4/2025	Monday 28/4/2025
179/2025/ MAFWR/ DGALR-26	Supply and installation of laboratory furniture for the Biocontrol Research Department	25/-	Specialized	Tuesday 8/4/2025	Monday 28/4/2025

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- Preference will be given to companies whose bid includes the largest percentage of Omanization and possible purchase of national products.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration (regarding the exemption from submitting a bid bond in tenders).
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: [+968 24402200](mailto:etenderhd@mtcft.gov.om) or etenderhd@mtcft.gov.om

SUB-TENDERS COMMITTEE
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK RESEARCH
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



People cast their ballot during the presidential primaries, in Ankara. — AFP

ISTANBUL MAYOR VOWS TO FIGHT ON AFTER ARREST

ISTANBUL: Istanbul’s embattled opposition mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu, vowed on Sunday to fight on after a court formalised his arrest — a move that has sparked Türkiye’s worst street unrest in more than a decade. Four days after he was detained up in a pre-dawn raid by hundreds of police, a court formally placed Imamoglu under arrest in a graft investigation, one of his lawyers said, vowing to appeal. But the court decided against formalising his arrest in a separate “terror” probe, he said.

The rulings came after a fourth night of street protests across Türkiye that descended into heavy clashes with riot police in Istanbul and the capital Ankara. The court’s decision came as the main opposition CHP party cast its ballots in a long-planned primary to elect Imamoglu as its candidate in the 2028 presidential election.

The move against him sparked protests that quickly spread from Istanbul to at least 55 of Türkiye’s 81 provinces, with police arresting 323 people overnight, officials said. — AFP



This picture shows the damage following an Israeli strike in the southern Lebanese city of Tyre. — AFP

NEW ISRAELI DRONE STRIKES HIT SOUTHERN LEBANON

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s health ministry said one person was killed on Sunday in an Israeli drone strike, a day after the most intense escalation since a November ceasefire in the war with Hezbollah. “The Israeli enemy raid with a drone on a car in Aita Al Shaab led to the death of one citizen,” the health ministry said, after the official National News Agency (NNA) had reported the strike on the southern village. The NNA also reported separate Israeli strikes on Sunday on Naqurah, Shihin and Labbouneh in the south, near the Israeli border.

Saturday saw the most intense escalation since a November ceasefire halted the war between Israel and Hezbollah. The Lebanese health ministry said seven people were killed on Saturday, including in an attack on Tyre.

Israel said the strikes were “a response to rocket fire towards Israel and a continuation of the first series of strikes carried out” in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah denied any involvement in the rocket attack, and called Israel’s accusations “pretexts for its continued attacks on Lebanon”. — AFP

NUMEROUS KIDNAPPINGS

4 political activists abducted in Burkina Faso



Four political activists in Burkina Faso, belonging to a political movement denouncing civilian massacres blamed on the army and allied groups, have been kidnapped. Their abduction follows that of another member of the same Servir et Non Se Servir (SENS) movement, and added to numerous other kidnappings of people viewed as critical of the country’s military rulers. The abduction on Tuesday was of another member of the same national coordination committee, journalist Idrissa Barry. — AFP

EXPELLED SOUTH AFRICA ENVOY TO US BACK HOME ‘WITH NO REGRETS’

CAPE TOWN: The South African ambassador who was expelled from the United States in a row with President Donald Trump’s government arrived home on Sunday to a raucous welcome and struck a defiant tone over the decision.

Ties between Washington and Pretoria have slumped since Trump cut financial aid to South Africa over what he alleges is its anti-white land policy, its genocide case against Israel at

the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and other foreign policy clashes.

“It was not our choice to come home, but we come home with no regrets,” expelled ambassador Ebrahim Rasool said in Cape Town after he was ousted from Washington on accusations of being “a race-baiting politician” who hates Trump.

Rasool was greeted with cheers and applause from hundreds of placard-waving supporters mostly

clad in the green and yellow of the ruling African National Congress party at Cape Town International Airport.

“I want to say that we would have liked to come back with a welcome like this if we could report to you that we had turned away the lies of a white genocide in South Africa, but we did not succeed in America with that,” he said with a megaphone after a more than 30-hour trip via Qatari capital Doha. — AFP

Israeli recognition of new WB settlements rejected

THE Palestinian foreign ministry condemned on Sunday an Israeli decision to recognise more than a dozen new settlements in the occupied West Bank, upgrading existing neighbourhoods to independent settlement status. The decision by Israel’s security cabinet was a show of “disregard for international legitimacy and its resolutions”, said a statement from the Palestinian Authority’s foreign ministry. The West Bank, occupied by Israel since 1967, is home to about three million Palestinians as well as nearly 500,000 Israelis living in settlements that are illegal under international law.

Israel’s Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a far-right leader and settler who was behind the cabinet’s decision, hailed it as an “important step” for Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Smotrich is a leading voice calling for Israel to formally annex the West Bank -- as it did in 1967 after capturing east Jerusalem in a move not recognised by most of the international community. “The recognition of each (neighbourhood) as a separate community... is an important step that would help their development,” Smotrich said in a statement on Telegram, calling it part of a “revolution”. “Instead of hiding and apologising, we raise the flag, we build and we settle,” he said. “This is another important step towards de facto sovereignty in Judea and Samaria,” added Smotrich.

In its statement, the Palestinian foreign ministry also mentioned an ongoing major Israeli military



Residents leave the Al Ain camp for Palestinian refugees west of Nablus in the occupied West Bank. — AFP

The 13 settlement neighbourhoods approved for development by the Israeli cabinet are located across the West Bank. Some of them are effectively part of the bigger settlements they belong to while others are practically separate.

operation in the northern West Bank, saying it was accompanied by “an unprecedented escalation in the confiscation of Palestinian lands”. The 13 settlement neighbourhoods approved for development by the Israeli cabinet are located across the West Bank. Some of them are effectively part of the bigger settlements they belong to while others are practically separate.

Their recognition as separate communities under Israeli law is not yet final. Hailing the “normalisation” of settlement expansion, the Yesha Council, an umbrella organisation for the municipal councils of West Bank

settlements, thanked Smotrich for pushing for the cabinet decision. According to EU figures, 2023 saw a 30-year record in settlement building permits issued by Israel.

Meanwhile, Israel’s military pressed ground operations across the Gaza Strip on Sunday, urging Palestinians to flee an offensive in Rafah city nearly a week into a renewed assault on the territory. The latest evacuation warning follows a deadly flare-up in Lebanon and missiles fired from Yemen, while Israeli troops are again deploying to parts of Gaza despite calls to revive a January truce. — AFP

CONGO M23 TO WITHDRAW IN PEACE PUSH

Rwanda-backed M23 rebels staging an offensive in east Congo said they would withdraw forces from the seized town of Walikale in support of peace efforts, having previously said they were leaving troops there as they pushed on to the capital. The government said it hoped the move would be translated into concrete action, after M23 this week pulled out of planned talks with Congolese authorities at the last minute due to EU sanctions on some of its leaders and Rwandan officials. It would have been their first direct engagement with Congo’s government after President Felix Tshisekedi reversed his longstanding refusal to speak to the rebels. The Congo River Alliance, which includes M23, said in a statement that it had “decided to reposition its forces” from Walikale and surrounding areas that M23 took control of this week. — Reuters

PIPELINE SABOTAGE

Ecuador says Amazon fuel leak an ‘attack’



Ecuador found a new leak in a fuel pipeline in the Amazon region and dubbed it an “attack”, days after another spill affected hundreds of thousands of people. The energy ministry did not report the size of the new spill nor say whether it extended to the Coca River, where the country’s main hydroelectric plant is located. In a statement, the ministry said “a leak of oil derivatives” had happened in the eastern province of Napo. — AFP

DEADLY FIGHTING

Attack on Kenyan police station kills 6



Six Kenyan police officers were killed by suspected Al Shabaab militants who overran a reservist base on Sunday, police said. The militants attacked a police reservist camp at Biyamadhow in Garissa County on the border with Somalia. The attack happened early on Sunday morning and the spokesperson said the “suspected group used assorted weapons to overrun the camp”. Six fatalities were confirmed by police. A further four people were injured and taken to hospital. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Pope Francis waves from a window of the Gemelli hospital before being discharged, in Rome. — AFP

POPE RETURNS HOME FROM HOSPITAL, THANKS FAITHFUL

VATICAN: Pope Francis was discharged from hospital on Sunday after more than five weeks being treated for pneumonia, waving to cheering crowds and thanking everyone for their support. Looking tired and worn, the pontiff sat in a wheelchair on one of the hospital balconies to say goodbye, waving softly to hundreds of people who had gathered below to wish the head of the Catholic Church a full recovery. Pilgrims chanted his name at the first public sighting of Francis since February 14, when he was admitted to Rome’s Gemelli hospital with breathing difficulties and a respiratory illness which developed into pneumonia.

“Thank you, everyone,” a weak-sounding Francis said into a microphone, as he waved his hands from his lap, occasionally lifting one to wave in the air and doing an occasional thumbs-up sign. “I can see that woman with yellow flowers, well done,” he said with a small smile, to laughter from the crowd.

Francis was on the balcony for two minutes before being discharged from the hospital immediately afterwards. He left by car, waving from the closed window of the front seat as he drove past journalists, and could be seen wearing a cannula -- a plastic tube tucked into his nostrils which delivers oxygen.

The pope, in a white Fiat 500 L, was driven past the Vatican and on to Santa Maria Maggiore, the Rome church where he stops to pray before and after trips. He was then seen arriving back at the Vatican. This was the pope’s fourth and longest hospital stay since his 2013 election.

Francis, who had part of one lung removed as a young man and lost weight in hospital, still faces a long recovery of at least two months. The increasingly fragile state of Francis’s health has spurred speculation as to whether he could opt to step down and make way for a successor, as his predecessor Benedict XVI had done. — AFP

GEORGIA CRACKS DOWN ON PRO-EU PROTESTS WITH CRIPPLING FINES

TBILISI: Nadim Khmaladze has been joining thousands of fellow Georgians on the streets every evening since November when Tbilisi’s increasingly repressive government shelved EU membership talks. The 60-year-old rights activist said he was “ready to face police violence” when he first joined the anti-government rallies in Tbilisi, but he never imagined that standing on the street for a few hours could cost him more than 22 months’ salary.

Three months into the protests, he received a summons: a total of 45,000 lari (around \$16,000) in fines for briefly blocking traffic along Tbilisi’s central avenue. “The government is using Russian-style methods to abolish freedom of assembly in Georgia,” he said.

Braving bitter frost, protesters continue to rally daily in Tbilisi and cities across the Black Sea nation, in what has become an unprecedented protest movement against Georgian Dream’s perceived

democratic backsliding and growing rapprochement with Moscow. The mass protests first erupted following disputed parliamentary elections in October, which the opposition rejected as rigged in favour of Georgian Dream.

The movement intensified after Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze’s November 28 announcement that his cabinet would not seek to open EU membership talks with Brussels until 2028 — a move that shocked many. — AFP

Kremlin expects ‘difficult negotiations’ over Ukraine

THE Kremlin on Sunday downplayed expectations of a rapid resolution to the Ukraine conflict, saying talks were just beginning and that “difficult negotiations” lay ahead.

Delegations from Russia and Ukraine are to hold separate talks with US officials in Saudi Arabia over the next 48 hours as President Donald Trump pushes for a rapid end to more than three years of fighting. Despite both sides proposing different plans for temporary ceasefires, attacks have continued unabated. A Russian strike on the Ukrainian capital killed three civilians overnight.

“We are only at the beginning of this path,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian state TV on Sunday, ahead of the talks in Saudi Arabia. He said there were many outstanding “questions” and “nuances” over how a potential ceasefire might be implemented. Russian President Vladimir Putin has rejected a joint US-Ukrainian call for a full and immediate 30-day pause, proposing instead to halt attacks only on energy facilities. “There are difficult negotiations ahead,” Peskov said in the interview, published on social media.

Originally scheduled to take place simultaneously in Saudi Arabia on Monday, the talks on a partial truce could now happen one after the other. President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukrainian and US delegations would meet on Sunday, without giving further details on what appeared to be a change in format.

Peskov said Russia’s “main” focus in its talks with the United States would be discussing a possible resumption of a 2022 Black Sea grain deal that ensured safe navigation for Ukrainian agricultural exports in the Black Sea. “On Monday we mainly intend to discuss President Putin’s agreement to resume the so-called Black Sea initiative, and our negotiators will be ready to discuss the nuances around this problem,” Peskov said. Moscow pulled out of the deal in 2023, accusing the West of failing to uphold its commitments to ease sanctions on Russia’s own exports of agricultural products and fertilisers.

A senior Ukrainian official previously said that Kyiv would propose a broader ceasefire,



A firefighter works at a site of an apartment building hit by a Russian drone strike, in Kyiv, Ukraine. — Reuters

covering attacks on energy facilities, infrastructure and naval strikes. Both sides launched fresh drone attacks on the eve of the negotiations. Ukrainian officials said a Russian drone attack killed three civilians in the capital Kyiv, including a five-year-old girl and her father. An 11-month-old child was among some 10 also wounded in the strikes on Kyiv, officials said on social media.

Reporters in the capital saw emergency workers treating the wounded in the early hours of Sunday in front of damaged residential buildings, hit in the strike. The Kyiv city prosecutor’s office published photos showing a multi-story building engulfed in flames. Deadly strikes on the well-protected capital are rarer than elsewhere in the country. Ukraine’s air force said Russia launched 147 drones at the

country in the latest barrage.

Zelensky urged his country’s allies to put fresh pressure on Russia. “New decisions and new pressure on Moscow are needed to bring an end to these strikes and this war,” he posted on social media. The head of Zelensky’s office, Andriy Yermak, said on Telegram: “Russia is not ceasing fire. Putin wants to kill more civilians. This must be stopped.” Russia said it had repelled nearly 60 Ukrainian drones overnight and announced one man killed in the southern Rostov region when his car caught fire from falling debris.

Living in the gutted-out eastern Ukrainian city of Kostyantynivka, Maryna has learned to recognise the sound of the devastating Russian glide bombs that have pounded her city for months. — AFP

Chinese premier calls for ‘dialogue’ as US senator visits Beijing

BEIJING: China’s number two leader on Sunday called for “dialogue” with Washington, during a meeting in Beijing attended by prominent US business executives and a key congressional ally of President Donald Trump. Relations between the world’s two largest economies have plunged in recent weeks, as blanket tariffs imposed by Trump threaten China’s trade prospects.

Premier Li Qiang’s comments came during a meeting with Trump supporter Steve Daines, a Republican senator from Montana. His visit has been viewed as a bid to ease strained relations, with an eye toward setting up a summit between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping. “Our two sides need to choose dialogue over confrontation, win-win cooperation over zero-sum competition,” Li told Daines. CEOs of major firms including FedEx, Pfizer and Qualcomm were also present.

Li said he hoped Washington

would “work together with China to promote the steady, sound and sustainable development” of relations. Earlier on Sunday, Li told the China Development Forum that Beijing would pursue economic globalisation despite “fragmentation”, a thinly veiled reference to trade turmoil sparked by Trump.

Chinese leaders have been attempting to steer economy onto a more stable path since the end of the pandemic, particularly by boosting consumption. They are seeking to position the country as a defender of the multilateral economic system, as Trump wages tariff wars with major US trading partners including China, Canada and Mexico.

“China will firmly stand on the correct side of history, that of fairness and justice, and act in a righteous manner amid the rough waters of the times,” Li said at the annual forum, attended by business



Chinese Premier Li Qiang (R) meets US Senator Steve Daines in the Fujian Room at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. — AFP

leaders including Apple CEO Tim Cook.

Beijing will “adhere to the correct direction of economic globalisation, practice true multilateralism and strive to be a force for stability and

certainty”, Li said. In an apparent reference to renewed trade wars sparked by Trump, Li said that “global economic fragmentation is intensifying” and that “instability and uncertainty are on the rise”.

Talks were also expected to discuss the flow of the deadly drug fentanyl and its precursor chemicals from China into the United States. Trump says his new tariffs on China are due to Beijing’s failure to stem shipments of the chemicals, which underpin a devastating drug crisis. Beijing insists it has already cracked down on the illicit production and trade of drugs, describing the issue as one for Washington to solve.

Daines on Saturday also met with Vice Premier He Lifeng, a close adviser to President Xi Jinping on economic matters. During his meeting with Daines, He said that China “firmly opposes the politicisation, weaponisation and instrumentalisation of economic and trade issues”. The vice premier added that China was willing to “engage in candid dialogue” with the United States, saying they had “many common interests and broad space for cooperation”. — AFP

OPINION

Teaching innovations keep students engaged



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

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WHILE Ramadhan is a period of faith and community bonding, it is also a time when one’s daily routine substantially changes, with more focus on nighttime activities and a changed eating pattern.

This impacts college and university students, who often find it challenging to stay focused in class. Keeping up their motivation requires innovation and experimentation.

No two classrooms are the same, and recognising this difference is the key to a successful teaching session. While there are a number of tips for students to stay focused and motivated in Ramadhan, there are fewer suggestions for teachers on ways to ensure student engagement. This is especially true in institutions of higher education where the rules for attendance and preparation are less restrictive.

At any time of the year, keeping students engaged is imperative but challenging. In Ramadhan, students’ capacity to focus may be altered, so teachers need to find ways of keeping their interest and commitment to learning alive.

An important suggestion often given by

universities world wide is to focus less on texts in the class and shift to more student-led activities. While the content may remain the same, changing teaching methods to web-based games like Kahoot or Quizlet will increase student interest and retain their engagement.

Pacing the class work can also help as students find it challenging to work with a lot of content in a shorter class period, or at a time when their concentration is not at its optimum.

Ideally, this adjustment should happen when planning for the new semester, but in the case that it is not, alterations can be made without compromising on the final course outcomes.

Planning these changes ahead of time is important as, ideally, a typical course should have the same components at any given time. Ensuring that the academic year or semester is well planned will result in coverage of content while also allowing for certain times when the tempo could differ.

Certain strategies like increased collaborative work, project-based learning

Ramadhan brings a shift in daily routines, affecting students’ focus and energy levels in the classroom. Ensuring engagement requires innovative teaching methods, from interactive web-based tools to collaborative learning

and peer teaching could all add to more effective learning at a time when there may be a deficit in attention. Collaborative learning offers an opportunity for students to prepare within a class time in a scenario where not everybody is prepared ahead of time. Splitting content would ensure that students are learning from each other.

Similarly, focusing on a specific project would not only help students to apply their knowledge, but also create opportunities to look up digital sources, watch videos and apply this knowledge to solve a real-world problem. The satisfaction of addressing authentic scenarios would further motivate learners.

Peer teaching is another strategy to keep the attention of students on a given task. Listening to each other and being made to comment or critique others’ ideas helps to retain attention span and increase focus.

These are not, of course, strategies limited to teaching in Ramadhan. Student-centred teaching has to be the norm, but Ramadhan is a unique time when such teaching techniques can be implemented successfully.

MELONI TORN BETWEEN TRUMP AND EUROPEAN ALLEGIANCE

CRISPIAN BALMER & ANGELO AMANTE

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni finds herself playing a political balancing act as Europe moves to bolster its defences.

A nationalist with deep admiration for US President Donald Trump, she is battling to reconcile the growing gulf between her ideological instincts, which lie with Washington, and Italy’s strategic ties to the European Union, analysts say.

Meloni was the only EU leader to attend Trump’s inauguration in January and has carefully steered clear of any criticism of the US president, even as he has hit Europe with tariffs and threatened to abandon Ukraine in its war with Russia.

While she has taken part in emergency talks with European partners on how to navigate the upheavals caused by Trump’s foreign policy, her engagement at times has seemed unenthusiastic, prompting critics at home to accuse her of isolating Italy within the EU.

Meloni, who has been in power since 2022, dismissed suggestions that she was under the sway of Trump as she headed into a summit of European leaders this week.

“I don’t blindly follow either Europe or the United States... I am in Europe because Italy is in Europe, so it’s not like we’re thinking of going somewhere else, but I also want the West to be compact,” she told parliament.

Ever since Meloni founded her Brothers of Italy group in 2012, she has placed close ties with the United States at the heart of her foreign policy, while watering down initial, fierce euroscepticism.

Trump’s strong-arm tactics with old allies as he looks to enhance American power has wrong-footed pro-Atlanticists, while forcing Europe to hastily review its geopolitical options and shore up its defences.

The turmoil has put on hold Meloni’s hopes of serving as a bridge between Europe and the White House, with Europe’s two nuclear powers France and Britain taking the lead in forging a response to Trump, while Germany grabs headlines with plans for a huge spending splurge to scale up its military.

“Right now, Meloni does not have the leverage to play a mediating role with Trump,” said Giovanni Orsina, a politics professor at Rome’s Luiss University.

“If Trumpism enters a second, more constructive phase, she might be able to play a role, leveraging political and personal affinities.”

Meloni last month called for an “immediate summit” between the United States and its allies after Trump lambasted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in the White House, but Washington ignored her appeal. — AFP

Trump’s conflict resolution efforts hit roadblocks

WHEN IT comes to confronting global conflicts, President Donald Trump is a man in a hurry.

Even before his inauguration, the president claimed credit for what he called an “EPIC ceasefire” in the Gaza Strip. He has raced to get Ukraine and Russia to quickly embrace a pause in fighting. And with Iran, Trump wants an agreement within two months to prevent Tehran from developing a nuclear weapon.

It is the foreign policy version of the president’s “flood the zone” approach in Washington, where he and his lieutenants have used blitzkrieglike tactics to dismantle the bureaucracy, consolidate executive power and attack his political enemies. On the world stage, too, Trump has embraced a hurry-up foreign policy approach designed to quickly resolve the disputes he inherited.

But his diplomatic impatience is now running headfirst into the complexity of war and peace, raising questions about the durability of what he has achieved so far. The ceasefire between Hamas and Israel has collapsed. Trump’s proposal for an immediate 30-day ceasefire was rejected by President Vladimir Putin of Russia. And an Iran nuclear agreement — not unlike the one he withdrew from during his first term in office — seems to remain far over the horizon despite his push for a speedy deal.

“Trump’s MO is to always be in a hurry, looking for the transaction, for the temporary, for the now,” said Aaron David Miller, a former Middle East negotiator and a fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

“American foreign policy — Ukraine, Gaza — they’re not measured in terms of administrations. It’s generational time,” Miller said. He added that rushing a solution was risky, “because he’s in such a hurry to get results, he’s sort of misdiagnosing the problem.”



Displaced Palestinians flee with their belongings after the Israeli government issued warnings to evacuate their homes in Gaza City.



MICHAEL D SHEAR

The writer is a White House correspondent for The Times

The president’s allies reject that assessment. They argue that his approach is designed to create momentum to obliterate what they derisively call the “international, rules-based order” that has dominated global foreign policy for decades. In addition to Iran, Israel and Ukraine, they note that Trump has shocked the world with threats to use force to acquire control of both Greenland and the Panama Canal.

“Geopolitically, it’s all gas, no brake,” Steve Bannon, a former Trump administration strategist, said in an interview. He said the president is dispatching aides — what he calls “shock troops” — to quickly confront the global conflicts in much the same way that he has deployed Elon Musk and his Department of Government Efficiency inside the federal government.

“What he’s doing geo-strategically and geo-economically, it far, far surpasses what he’s doing domestically,” Bannon said. “If you look across the board, the method to his madness is deep, it’s meaningful,

and it’s going to have the biggest implication for national security.”

The president’s push for momentum has been at the heart of his approach to the two most searing global conflicts in recent times: the yearlong fighting between Hamas and Israel in Gaza; and the three-year war that began when Russia attacked Ukraine.

In both, Trump has repeatedly blamed former president Joe Biden for failing to prevent — and then move quickly enough to resolve — the conflicts. In his speech to a joint session of Congress earlier this month, the president boasted that “a lot of things are happening in the Middle East.” Of the conflict in Ukraine, he declared his impatience: “It’s time to stop this madness. It’s time to halt the killing. It’s time to end this senseless war.”

Clifford D May, the founder of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said Trump appears eager to move past global crises so he can focus his attention elsewhere.

— The New York Times

Ramadhan... a path to reconnection and renewal



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and a communications professional

HAVE YOU ever felt the need to pause the disorder of life and reset? Ramadhan is the perfect opportunity for this. Ramadhan is considered one of the holiest months of the year for Muslims around the world. This month of fasting was chosen by the Almighty Allah to reveal the Quran, the holy book of Islam, to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This divine connection makes Ramadhan a time of heightened spirituality and purpose.

The relevant verse states: “It was in the month of Ramadhan that the Quran was revealed as guidance for mankind, clear messages giving guidance and distinguishing between right and wrong. So, anyone of you who is present that month should fast, and anyone who is ill or on a journey should make up for the lost days by fasting on other days later. Allah wants ease for you, not hardship. He wants you to complete the prescribed period and to glorify Him for having guided you, so that you may be thankful.”

This verse from the Quran about fasting emphasises the spiritual link and thankfulness connected to this holy month by relating the Quran’s revelation to the practice of fasting during Ramadhan. That is why, during Ramadhan, Muslims commemorate the revelation of the Quran.

Revealed over 1,400 years ago, this holy

book marks the direct word and message of Allah. The Holy Quran is not just a book for Muslims, but a guide for life, offering wisdom, comfort and answers to life’s deepest questions and doubts. In fact, the Holy Quran is a source of wisdom and inspiration for anyone willing to approach it with an open heart. Whether you are seeking peace, answers, or a deeper understanding of life’s purpose, the Holy Quran speaks to the human soul in ways that exceed culture and time.

As you explore the Holy Quran, you will encounter profound ideas about justice, mercy, patience, and the beauty of creation. The Holy Quran challenges humans to think deeply, reflect and act with compassion. This could be the message your soul has been waiting for! Accordingly, during Ramadhan, Muslims dedicate extra time to reading, reciting and reflecting on the Holy Quran.

This deep engagement with the Holy Quran’s message elevates Ramadhan from a sacred observance to a reflective journey of self-discovery, spiritual renewal and reconnection with the Almighty Allah. It provides an opportunity to discard bad habits, realign the soul and embrace a fresh start.

The revelation of the Holy Quran is believed to have occurred during the last ten days of Ramadhan. This makes the month not

The Holy Quran is not just a book for Muslims, but a guide for life, offering wisdom, comfort and answers to life’s deepest questions and doubts

only a time for spiritual discipline, but also a time for deep gratitude for the guidance and mercy that the Holy Quran brings. Likewise, during the last 10 days of Ramadhan, there is a special focus on seeking Laylat Al Qadr, the Night of Power, which is believed to be the night when the Holy Quran was first revealed.

Muslims believe that prayers made during this night are especially powerful and that it is a time of great mercy from Allah. This Night of Power is considered holier than a thousand months and holds immense spiritual significance. It is believed to occur on an odd night during the last 10 days of Ramadhan. Ramadhan stands as one of the most sacred times for Muslims. It is the month in which the Holy Quran was revealed as guidance for men and women, a declaration of direction and a means of rescue. Ramadhan holds huge significance for Muslims; it is time of spiritual reflection, self-improvement and heightened devotion.

The true essence of Ramadhan lies in the fact that people pray for forgiveness of all their past sins. They practice self-control through fasting and purify themselves by performing various good deeds and religious rituals. Ramadhan is a reminder that the soul’s nourishment is just as vital as the body’s. Whether you are fasting or simply curious, this month offers a chance to reflect, renew and reconnect.

ARE TOURISTS TURNING AWAY FROM TRUMP’S AMERICA?

ELODIE MAZEIN

In just a few weeks, the US tourism outlook has clouded as a result of some of President Donald Trump’s policy decisions, which have angered some foreign visitors and prompted fear of a surge in prices and a stronger dollar.

Foreign traveller arrivals in the United States are expected to decline by 5.1 per cent in 2025 compared to last year, against a previously projected increase of 8.8 per cent, Tourism Economics said in a report published late last month. Their spending is expected to slide 10.9 per cent.

Since the report’s publication, “the situation has deteriorated further”, and the outcome will likely be even worse, Tourism Economics president Adam Sacks said, citing “the effects of antipathy towards the US.”

In recent weeks, the Trump administration has slapped tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China – and threatened to impose them on the European Union. A sweeping plan to curb immigration has intensified.

Government bodies like the US Agency for International Development have been decimated, thousands of civil servants from lawyers to park rangers have been laid off, and Trump has drawn up controversial plans for the wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

“A situation with polarising Trump Administration policies and rhetoric... will discourage travel to the US,” said Tourism Economics, a subsidiary of Oxford Economics.

“Some organisations will feel pressure to avoid hosting events in the US, or sending employees to the US, cutting into business travel,” it added.

The World Tourism Forum Institute said a mix of stringent immigration policies, a strong dollar and global political tensions “could significantly affect” international arrivals, “potentially reshaping the nation’s tourism sector for years to come.”

Among residents of 16 European and Asian countries surveyed by YouGov in December, 35 per cent of respondents said they were less likely to come to the United States under Trump, while 22 per cent were more likely.

For tourists from France, Uzbekistan and Argentina interviewed in New York’s Times Square, Trump’s stance has not upended their plans. Marianela Lopez and Ailen Hadjikovakis, both 33, nevertheless used their European passports rather than their Argentine ones to avoid any problems at the border.

“We were a bit scared about the situation, but we didn’t change our plans,” said Lopez.

The Lagardere family, who came from France, said it hadn’t impacted their plans either.

The Americans “elected this president. It’s democracy. If they’re not happy, they’ll change it in four years,” said Laurent Lagardere, 54. “He is who he is” and avoiding the United States “won’t change anything,” Lagardere added.

— AFP

Biofuel sham could worsen global hunger and inequality

ANOTHER

MAJOR source of greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions

is poised to use biofuels to “decarbonise”. The shipping industry has now joined the auto and aviation industries in viewing this “cleaner” alternative to fossil fuels as a means of reducing its emissions, without meaningfully changing its activities. But the benefits of biofuels have often been overstated, and their costs underestimated.

International shipping uses more than 300 million tonnes of fossil fuels annually – some 5 per cent of global oil production. The industry is responsible for 3 per cent of global GHG emissions – above the level of industrial powerhouses like Germany or Japan.

The United Nations’ maritime regulator, the International Maritime Organization (IMO), is seeking to change this. In 2023, the IMO committed to target a 20-per cent reduction in shipping emissions (striving for 30 per cent) by 2030, and a 70-per cent reduction (striving for 80 per cent) by 2040. Since then, it has been working with its 176 member states to negotiate a set of measures that would advance these objectives and bring shipping emissions “close to zero” by 2050.

But the April 2025 deadline for a final framework is looming, and last month’s negotiations in London produced limited progress. As Constance Dijkstra, IMO Policy Manager at the advocacy group Transport and Environment, noted, “We still do not know how much ships will be expected to reduce their emissions, and which fuels and technologies will count as green.” The answers to those questions – including whether biofuels are embraced or rejected – will be the difference between important progress and environmental disaster.

As matters stand, the IMO will implement a “global fuel standard”, which would require ships to use lower-emission fuels during the transition to zero-emission alternatives. Some IMO members



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International shipping uses more than 300 million tonnes of fossil fuels annually.

– notably, Brazil – say that biofuels should be central to this initiative. Brazil, a major producer of crop-based biofuels, would profit handsomely from such an approach. But there is nothing sustainable about it.

One recent study projects that, if included in the IMO’s global fuel standard, biofuels could power up to 36 per cent of global shipping activity by 2030, 59 per cent by 2035, and 76 per cent by 2040. Since waste-based biofuels would be able to cover only a small percentage of demand from the shipping sector, production of crop-based biofuels, made from palm oil, soy and maize, would have to increase substantially.

Cultivating these crops would require vast amounts of land – about 35 million additional hectares, equivalent to the land area of Germany or Zimbabwe, by 2030, according to the same study. That could mean razing forested land and thus removing the stores of carbon located there. It could also mean diverting land from food and feed production, though in practice, this would likely necessitate the expansion of agricultural land to compensate.

The effects of such indirect land-use change would negate any emissions savings from switching away from fossil fuels. Moreover, as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN has warned,

using farmland to fuel ships, rather than to feed people, will drive up food prices and make it harder for vulnerable populations to access sufficient nutrition at a time when hunger and malnutrition are already on the rise. According to the World Bank, a mere 1 per cent increase in global food prices can push a whopping 10 million people into extreme poverty.

Making matters worse, the kind of large-scale monocropping typical of biofuel production uses huge amounts of water and polluting fertilisers. The resulting environmental degradation threatens future food production, meaning that even the “temporary” embrace of biofuels as a transition fuel would lead to greater food insecurity, worse health, and increased poverty in the long term. The embrace of biofuels would also exacerbate poverty in another way: the economic benefits of biofuel production are disproportionately captured by large-scale agribusinesses, to the detriment of small farms.

Given all this, it is imperative that the IMO exclude crop-based biofuels from its final framework, focusing instead on sustainable alternatives like e-fuels and wind power. Early investments are essential to guarantee a sufficient supply of such fuels, so that the shipping industry can meet the IMO’s targets.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Takaful Oman celebrate the championship title

TAKAFUL OMAN CLINCH OMINVEST RAMADHAN FOOTBALL TITLE

MUSCAT: The highly anticipated Third Ominvest Ramadhan Football Championship, concluded successfully after two weeks of intense competition and memorable moments. Held under the esteemed auspices of Abdulaziz al Balushi, Group CEO of Ominvest, the tournament, which took place at the Military Technological College from March 2 to March 11, exemplified the Group’s dedication to promoting sports and people well-being, active lifestyles and fostering a strong sense of unity.

The final match delivered an unforgettable spectacle as Takaful Oman emerged victorious over Liva Insurance in a nail-biting penalty shootout (4-4 FT then 2-0 on penalties). The event was graced by the presence of Ominvest executives, CEOs from participating companies, and spectators supporting each team.

Abdulaziz al Balushi, reflected on the championship’s impact, stating: “This event has been a truly exceptional experience, with participants displaying remarkable competitiveness and outstanding performances. The final match was particularly exciting, showcasing the dedication and teamwork of both finalists.

We are proud that this championship has evolved beyond just a sporting event, becoming a platform for strengthening professional relationships and fostering a collaborative corporate culture within the Ominvest Group.” Waleed al Yaarubi, Chief People, Corporate Communication and Sustainability Officer, added, “Beyond the excitement of the matches, this championship embodies our commitment to holistic well-being. By fostering a culture of health and active engagement, we are directly contributing to the achievement of the third United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) — ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. This initiative strengthens our social fabric and reinforces our dedication to creating a thriving and sustainable community.”

Oman Olympic team to battle Jordan for West Asia U-23 title

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

The Omani Olympic national team has qualified for the final of the Under-23 West Asia Championship after a deserved victory over the Bahrain national team, winning 2-0 in a semifinal match at the Seeb Stadium.

The match began with intense pressure from Bahrain without any early testing of the waters, and during the first half, our team was under pressure with dangerous chances for Bahrain, the most notable being a shot from Saud Ibrahim, which was saved by goalkeeper Mazen Zayed. As the match progressed, our team began to move out of their defensive areas and launched some dangerous attacks, which added some pressure on Bahrain’s defence, ending the first half in a goalless draw.

In the second half, Sultan al Marzouqi opened the scoring in the 53rd minute with a powerful shot, and Turki Bait Rabia added the second goal from a corner kick in the 60th minute. Our



team continued to dominate the game, while Bahrain attempted to reduce the deficit but failed to break through our strong defensive organisation. The team maintained their superiority until the final whistle, securing a vital 2-0 victory. Jordan Qualifies for the Final with a Hard-Fought Win Over Syria Jordan secured a place in the final of the WAFF Championship with a 1-0 win over Syria in a match held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex

in Bausher, booking a date with our national team in the final. The match started strongly for Jordan, and Bakar Kalbouna scored the only goal of the game in the 3rd minute after following up on a cross inside the penalty area. Jordan continued to apply pressure, while Syria struggled to reach the goal of goalkeeper Murad Al Fallouji. Syria tried to improve their performance gradually and launched several dangerous

attacks, the most notable being a shot from Anas Dahan and a header that was cleared off the line by Jordan’s defence. However, all attempts were thwarted by the solid defence and the outstanding performance of the Jordanian goalkeeper. Meanwhile, Jordan wasted several chances to extend their lead, including an attempt by Ali Al Azayzeh and other shots that lacked precision. The match ended with

Jordan securing a 1-0 win, earning them a spot in the final against our national team. Saudi Arabia Beats UAE 2-0 Saudi Arabia achieved a well-deserved 2-0 victory over the UAE in a match held at the Seeb Sports Complex as part of the West Asia Championship’s fifth to eighth-place classification matches. Hammam al Hamami opened the scoring for Saudi Arabia in the 17th minute with a powerful shot, and Mishari al Nimr added the second goal from a penalty in the 42nd minute, ending the first half with a clear Saudi lead. The UAE tried to come back in the second half by attacking substitutions, but Saudi Arabia’s defence remained firm. Both teams continued to play with intensity until the end of the match, with no change in the score, giving the Green team a 2-0 win. Kuwait wins 1-0 Over Lebanon. Kuwait managed to secure a 1-0 victory over Lebanon, with the only goal coming from Abdulrahman al Rashidi, giving the “Blues” the win in this match.

Oman on high confidence before Kuwait clash



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

THE CONFIDENT Oman will complete their technical readiness for Kuwait clash on Monday as they will have the final training session at the Jaber International Stadium venue which will host the clash between both parties on Tuesday as part of group B matches for AFC Asian Qualifiers — Road to 26.

Oman team delegation arrived to Kuwait city on Friday and commenced their training sessions at Khaitan SC. Furthermore, the fitness team directed the players to perform some physical training to ensure their fitness level ahead of the awaiting clash on Tuesday.

Red Warriors are on high confidence following their late draw against South Korea last Thursday at Goyang Stadium. Oman players including the experienced member Ali al Busaidy delivered a crucial goal in the second half of the match to lift Oman hopes for automatic spots to the Fifa World Cup and to advance competing for the playoffs.

Kuwait match will feature returning of many national stars including Harib al



Saadi who was stopped in the previous match due to accumulated yellow cards. Oman’s squad will be further strengthened by the presence of stars like Salah al Yahyaei, Al Munther al Alawi, Mohsin al Ghassani and Issam al Subhi. Head coach Rasheed Jaber and his team recognise the significance of this match, as a win would propel Oman to 10 points — bringing them closer to securing a playoff spot. Following the hard-fought draw against South Korea, Jaber emphasised that the team will capitalise on their positive momentum and push forward in the remaining fixtures. With two more qualifiers left — one at home in Muscat and another away against Palestine — securing three points against Kuwait would significantly ease Oman’s path in the campaign. Free tickets ‘We Are All With You’ campaign will provide 100 tickets for some Omani fans to attend and support the national team in the upcoming match against Kuwait at Jaber International Stadium. The fans will travel and return back in the same day beside that there will be 2000 tickets allocated for Omani fans and they will be distributed to Omanis who are available in Kuwait.

SHORTTAKES



Chicago Bulls guard Josh Giddey (3) shoots against Los Angeles Lakers forward Dorian Finney-Smith (17) during the first half at Crypto.com Arena. — Reuters

BULLS ROUT LAKERS IN LEBRON JAMES’ RETURN

LOS ANGELES: Coby White, Matas Buzelis and Josh Giddey led the hot-shooting Chicago Bulls to a 146-115 win over the host Los Angeles Lakers on Saturday night, spoiling the returns of LeBron James and Rui Hachimura.

White finished with 36 points on 12-of-17 shooting from the field, making 6-of-9 attempts from 3-point range for Chicago. Buzelis, a rookie, added 31 points on 12-of-18 shooting. Giddey perhaps one-upped them both, notching his 15th career triple-double by tallying 15 points, 17 assists and 10 rebounds. Giddey was also a decisive factor on defence with eight steals.

Luka Doncic led the way for the Lakers (43-27), scoring 34 points on 10-of-18 shooting, including 8 threes. Doncic scored 29 in the first half to keep it close briefly. Austin Reaves added 25 points on 9-of-13 shooting, while James chipped in 17 points on 7-of-16 shooting. He added six rebounds and four assists.

James played in his first game since leaving the Lakers’ 111-101 loss in Boston on March 8 with a groin injury. The Lakers went 3-4 in James’ absence, and they have lost six of their last nine overall. Pacers 108, Nets 103 Tyrese Haliburton returned to the Indiana lineup from a three-game absence to put up 16 points, 12 assists and eight rebounds, and the Pacers rallied after nearly coughing up a 20-point lead to hold off Brooklyn in Indianapolis.

Pascal Siakam scored a game-high 26 points while Obi Toppin scored 10 points off the bench as one of five Indiana scorers in double figures. Myles Turner finished with 22 points and eight rebounds, while Bennedict Mathurin went for 13 points off the bench.

Trendon Watford, who was ejected from Thursday’s matchup between these teams after a scuffle with Turner, returned to score 26 points. Cameron Johnson had 20 points and nine rebounds for the Nets, while Nic Claxton recorded nine points and 10 rebounds. Hawks 124, Warriors 115 Trae Young scored 25 points and posted his 41st double-double of the season to help Atlanta defeat visiting Golden State. — Reuters

Kishan ton powers Hyderabad to big win over Rajasthan in IPL

HYDERABAD, India: Top-order batter Ishan Kishan hammered his first century in the Indian Premier League on Sunday as he powered Sunrisers Hyderabad to a mammoth 286-6 and a 44-run win over Rajasthan Royals.

Hyderabad were invited to bat first and fell just one short of their best of 287, which remains the T20 tournament’s highest ever total, with England and Rajasthan bowler Jofra Archer in particular having a day to forget.

The left-handed Kishan stood out as he hammered a ton in 45 balls to pummel the opposition attack after Travis Head smashed 67 off 31 deliveries in the second match of the league that began on Saturday.

Rajasthan finished on 242-6 after half-centuries from Sanju Samson and Dhruv Jurel. Shimron Hetmyer hit 42 off 23 balls.

Batting first, Hyderabad’s Australian import Head came out roaring with opening partner Abhishek Sharma and the two handed the team a blazing start.

The left-handed Head hammered fast bowler Archer for 23 runs in one over to set the pace for the onslaught.

Archer went on to concede 76 runs in four overs for the most expensive spell in the IPL.

Head and Kishan, playing his first match for Hyderabad, put on 85 runs off 39 balls for the second wicket to lay the foundations for



Sunrisers Hyderabad’s Ishan Kishan celebrates after reaching his century. — Reuters

NZ hand Pakistan biggest defeat to clinch T20 series

NEW ZEALAND’S ruthless pace attack carved up Pakistan to deliver a crushing 115-run win in the fourth Twenty20 on Sunday and clinch the five-match series.

The home side moved 3-1 ahead after defending 220-6 in Mount Maunganui and then dismissing a ragged Pakistan for just 105 in the 17th over.

Jacob Duffy claimed 4-20 and fellow seamer Zak Foulkes 3-25 as Pakistan suffered their biggest T20 loss by runs against all nations, eclipsing a 95-run defeat against New Zealand in Wellington nine years ago.

The tourists were reduced to 9-3 after two overs with Duffy bagging two scalps in his first over, both caught by wicketkeeper Mitch Hay.

Duffy’s first victim was Hasan Nawaz for one, two days after the Pakistan opener blasted a maiden century in game three in Auckland to keep the series alive.

Teetering at 56-8, Pakistan’s innings had some credibility restored thanks to 44 off 30 balls from all-rounder Abdul Samad.

The only other batsman to score in double figures was Irfan Khan with 24.

Pakistan captain Salman Agha said New Zealand’s bowlers exploited some helpful conditions under lights.

“They bowled really well and they outplayed us,” Salman said.

“I mean, the ball talked. It was swinging and it was turning as well. But we are international cricketers, so we have to adapt that and we have to be better.

“We need to regroup and we need to win the last game.” It was New Zealand’s second biggest T20 win by runs, nearly surpassing their 119-run drubbing of the West Indies in 2018 at the same Bay Oval venue.

Earlier, Finn Allen raced to 50 off just 20 balls, putting on 59 for New Zealand’s opening stand with Tim Seifert, whose 44 took 22 deliveries.

Seifert was the first of three batsmen dismissed by seamer Haris Rauf, who claimed 3-27.

Allen struck six fours and three sixes while captain Michael Bracewell was nearly as effective at the death, blasting 46 not out off 26 balls.

Bracewell was delighted with his team’s all-round response to the loss at Auckland.

“Bouncing back only a day or so after the performance at Eden Park was outstanding,” he said.

“It shows the benefit of those guys batting so well at the top, they got us well ahead of the game.

“All the seamers bowled brilliantly tonight. It’s nice when you give bowlers a go, like Zak Foulkes coming into the match. Three wickets for him was a brilliant performance.” Game five is in Wellington on Wednesday. — AFP



New Zealand’s Jacob Duffy bowls during the second Twenty20 international cricket match between New Zealand and Pakistan. — AFP

SPORTS



DRAPER
LOSES,
ZVEREV
ADVANCES IN
MIAMI OPEN

Alexander Zverev serves against Jacob Fearnley on day five of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — Reuters



Joao Fonseca hits a backhand against Ugo Humbert on day five of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — Reuters



Czech Jakub Mensik hits a forehand against Jack Draper on day five of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — Reuters

BRITAIN'S JACK DRAPER, the winner at Indian Wells, came back down to earth with a bump on Saturday, beaten by 54th ranked Czech Jakub Mensik in his opening match at the Miami Open.

Draper moved into the top 10 of the world rankings for the first time in his career with his triumph over Holger Rune in the Indian Wells final last Sunday, having beaten Carlos Alcaraz in the last four.

But the 19-year old Mensik rose to the occasion, winning two tie-breaks to enjoy a 7-6 (7/2) 7-6 (7/3) win.

"It was tough, obviously I came up against someone today who was playing incredibly well," said Draper.

"He served 10 out of 10, I couldn't get a read or a look on his serve at all. There were some things I could do better and obviously a big change in surface from last week," he said, noting he had struggled to adjust to the faster courts.

Rune was caught out, too, falling 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) to American Reilly Opelka.

Top seed Alexander Zverev eased into the third round with a 6-2 6-4 win over Britain's Jacob Fearnley.

Zverev's title hopes received a boost on Friday when second-seed Carlos Alcaraz crashed out with a shock defeat to Belgian veteran David Goffin.

With no Jannik Sinner while the Italian serves a doping ban, the German Zverev's main challenger, on paper, should be Novak Djokovic.

Zverev lost his opening game at Indian Wells but looked sharp on his debut on the South Florida stadium court.

"I'm generally happy with my level today," said Zverev, a 2018 Miami finalist. "In Indian Wells it was very different, so I hope I can continue playing this way and have a great week here." The 27-year-old took 74 minutes to take care of business against Fearnley and said his extra time off as a result of his surprise defeat to Tallon Griekspoor had been valuable.

"Had two weeks time to practice and work

on my game again and I did that - hopefully this is the first of many matches for me here," he added.

There was an upset for 13th seeded American Ben Shelton, who was knocked out by 20-year-old wildcard Coleman Wong of Hong Kong.

Wong, 128th in the world, battled his way to a 7-6 (7/3) 2-6, 7-6 (7/5) victory despite letting a slip a 5-2 lead in the final set.

- For Hong Kong -

His victory provides him with a place in the third round of a Masters 1000 for the first time in his career.

"I always trust myself to play in these big stages... I had a tough time (during) the Covid times. I didn't play for a year and a half and I'm really lucky my team keeps supporting me. I'm really happy and this is for you Hong Kong," said Wong.

Brazilian 18-year-old Joao Fonseca delighted his large and loud group of supporters with another energetic display as he knocked out 19th seed Ugo Humbert 6-4, 6-3 and reach the third round at a Masters 1000 for the first time.

In the women's draw, top seed Aryna Sabalenka moved into the fourth round after Romanian opponent Elena-Gabriela Ruse had to retire after the Belarusian won the first set 6-1.

Ruse received medical treatment on her right thigh but was unable to continue.

Third seed Coco Gauff progressed with a 6-2, 6-4 win over a struggling Maria Sakkari, who has slumped down the rankings from the top 10 to her current 51st.

Naomi Osaka met some determined resistance from American wild card Hailey Baptiste before emerging with a 7-6 (8/6), 3-6, 6-4 win.

"Today was an emotional day for me," said Osaka. "I'm a little embarrassed for how much I threw my racquet, which is something that I don't like to be known for." Ons Jabeur of Tunisia also retired allowing sixth-seed Jasmine Paolini to go through -- the Italian was 4-3 and a break up in the first when Jabeur could no longer continue due to a left leg injury. — AFP



Naomi Osaka hits a backhand against Hailey Baptiste on day five of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — Reuters



Coco Gauff hits a forehand against Maria Sakkari on day five of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium. — Reuters



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The sector’s GDP contribution at constant prices reached RO 274.4 million.

Oman’s fisheries sector expands with key investments

MUSCAT: Oman’s fisheries sector has continued its steady growth, recording a 7.5% increase from January to September 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.

As one of the key sectors under the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), fisheries play a critical role in economic diversification, food security and employment creation. The government aims to accelerate its annual growth to 10% and enhance its contribution to GDP by 2%, reinforcing Oman’s position as a sustainable and competitive player in the global fisheries industry.

According to Dr Salem al Sheikh, spokesperson for the Ministry of Economy, the sector’s GDP contribution at constant prices reached RO 274.4 million, accounting for 1% of Oman’s total GDP, which stood at RO 28.1 billion during the first three quarters of 2024.

At current prices, the fisheries sector contributed RO 294 million, reflecting a 7.4% growth rate compared to the same period in 2023, when the total GDP stood at RO 30.64 billion. This sustained expansion has been driven by increased production, rising exports and significant government investments in infrastructure and sustainability initiatives.

Oman has achieved self-sufficiency in fish production, meeting domestic demand while boosting exports. Several major projects have contributed to this growth, including the fishing port and fish canning complex at Al Duqm, which serves as an industrial hub within the Special Economic Zone and the Al Khuwayma shrimp farm in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, a key aquaculture project. — ONA

New court to reinforce Oman’s competitiveness

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

THE Supreme Judicial Council has hailed the establishment of the Investment and Commercial Court, pursuant to Royal Decree 35/2025, as a significant step in modernising Oman’s legal framework, while also enhancing the country’s competitiveness and investment appeal.

The initiative, the Council affirmed, reflects the continuous efforts of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to advance Oman’s judicial system, uphold legal sovereignty and ensure the protection of citizens’ and investors’ rights.

The new court aims to introduce a specialised judicial framework that provides a safe and trusted environment for both local and international investors, directly supporting economic development and reinforcing Oman’s global competitiveness.

This aligns with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to build a sustainable and diversified economy supported by robust legal institutions.

The new court is designed to meet several key objectives. Among these are enhancing judicial specialisation, accelerating litigation procedures, developing investment-friendly legislation and strengthening the

The jurisdiction of the Investment and Commercial Court covers a wide range of legal areas.

confidence of both foreign and domestic investors in Oman’s legal system. By doing so, the court contributes to creating a secure, transparent and efficient judicial ecosystem.

The Supreme Judicial Council expects the court to work in full coordination with other government entities to drive sustainable development and reduce litigation timelines through clear and efficient legal rulings.

It will also foster an environment of legal and procedural innovation, supported by qualified judicial and legal professionals.

Procedurally, the court stands out through several innovations, including the creation of a dedicated electronic system for managing cases and a specialised case preparation office.

This office is composed of

judges and legal assistants responsible for reviewing case files and ensuring all legal procedures are met before they reach the court.

The preparation process includes reviewing documents, statements, parties’ data, witness information and legal fees.

Notably, the system introduces a qualitative leap by enabling the exchange of pleadings and supporting documents electronically before submission to the presiding judge, once all documentation is completed between the parties.

The jurisdiction of the Investment and Commercial Court covers a wide range of legal areas. These include disputes related to commercial assets, maritime sales, investment in foreign capital and economic activity,

insolvency and bankruptcy proceedings and partnership contracts between public and private sectors.

The court also handles cases involving arbitration-related requests, digital commercial transactions, shareholder conflicts and intellectual property rights, including trademarks, patents, industrial designs and trade secrets.

It further addresses disputes related to monopolistic practices, unfair competition and damage to both local and international products, in addition to financial matters involving banking, securities, insurance, finance companies and transport-related incidents.

In terms of ongoing cases, the Supreme Judicial Council has clarified that commercial and investment disputes already filed before the date of the court’s establishment will continue to be heard by the previously competent courts.

These cases will remain under their jurisdiction until the Investment and Commercial Court begins operating under its full legal mandate.

The launch of this court marks a significant step in modernising Oman’s legal framework and signals the nation’s resolve to provide a more efficient, specialised and transparent judicial environment, one that both protects rights and supports the national vision of economic diversification and global integration.

RO 55 million water purification plant to be built at Wadi Dayqah Dam

MUSCAT: Nama Water Services has signed an agreement with the private sector to establish a water purification plant at Wadi Dayqah Dam in the Wilayat of Qurayat.

The project, valued at over RO 55 million, will be implemented under a 20-year build, own and operate (BOO) model in coordination with relevant government agencies.

The plant is expected to be completed within 22 months and will have a total production capacity of 65,000 cubic metres per day. Of this, 35,000 cubic metres per day will be supplied as drinking water through Nama Water Services’ network, while 30,000 cubic metres per day will be allocated for agricultural use via an irrigation network, in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The facility will also be integrated into the broader water infrastructure network, ensuring emergency backup and enhancing

The agreement was signed by Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, CEO of Nama Water Services and Sultan bin Abdullah al Jaafari, Chairman of Al Tayer Engineering Services.

the reliability of Oman’s main water transmission system.

The agreement was signed by Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, CEO of Nama Water Services and Sultan bin Abdullah al Jaafari, Chairman of Al Tayer Engineering Services, which will implement the project.

KEY BENEFITS AND STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Eng Ali bin Mohammed al Abri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Water Resources, highlighted that this project is part of the broader Wadi Dayqah Dam initiative to fully utilise stored

water. He noted that the project would help restore water supply to previously affected farms while creating employment opportunities for Omanis.

Additionally, studies are underway to explore the potential use of dam water for energy production.

Nama Water Services CEO Qais bin Saud al Zakwani emphasised that the project aligns with the company’s water security goals, ensuring a stable supply amid rising demand driven by urban expansion.

He added that the initiative would provide more than 100 indirect jobs during construction and operation, with at least 50% Omanisation for direct roles, prioritising residents of Qurayat. Furthermore, Nama has committed RO 100,000 to community development in the Wilayat of Qurayat.

ENHANCED RESILIENCE AGAINST CLIMATE CHALLENGES

Eng Abdullah bin Mohammed al Nuaimi, Chief Operations and Maintenance Officer at Nama Water Services, stressed that the purification plant will diversify Muscat’s water supply sources, reducing reliance on desalination plants. This is particularly crucial during extreme weather events such as cyclones and red or green tides, which can disrupt seawater desalination.

He also noted that the lower salinity of dam water compared to seawater will lead to significant energy savings and lower operational costs. The project will include a 7-kilometre transmission line, a pumping station and a 20,000 cubic metre storage tank, connecting to Muscat’s main water network.

The agreement signing was attended by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, along with senior officials from both the government and private sectors. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



THE ST REGIS AL MOUJ MUSCAT RESORT JOINS ANNUAL ‘IFTAR FOR CABS’ INITIATIVE

MUSCAT: Embracing the spirit of generosity and community during the holy month of Ramadhan, The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort participated in the annual ‘Iftar for Cabs’ initiative. Originally established by Marriott International in 2010, this heartfelt tradition has since been embraced by prominent hotel brands regionally and globally.

In a gesture reflecting the St Regis commitment to thoughtful hospitality and community engagement, hotel hosts from various departments gathered at the hotel’s main entrance to distribute Iftar meals to Otaxi and Marhaba Taxi drivers, offering them nourishing refreshments and a moment of respite as they broke their fast.

The ‘Iftar for Cabs’ initiative falls under Marriott International’s Sustainability and Social Impact Platform, Serve 360: Doing Good in Every Direction, which guides how the company makes a positive and sustainable impact wherever it does business.

Serve 360 supports initiatives ranging from empowerment programmes to sustainable hotel development, ensuring business growth while considering the well-being of employees, customers, owners, the environment and local communities.

OMANTEL PARTNERS WITH TEKNOLEDGE TO ENHANCE EMPLOYEE SKILLS

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAR 23

OMANTEL, Oman’s first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider, has announced a partnership with TeKnowledge, a global leader in AI, customer experience and cybersecurity solutions, to launch an advanced AI and Data Science skilling programme for its employees.

This initiative aims to equip Omantel’s workforce with advanced digital skills, supporting digital transformation, economic diversification and future technology capabilities development.

The collaboration with TeKnowledge will accelerate AI and data science training across Omantel’s technology, operations and commercial divisions, enabling employees to tackle real-world challenges and explore new opportunities. The programme combines onsite training at Omantel’s headquarters with virtual learning, ensuring an interactive and hands-on experience for all participants.

Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed Ahmed al Riyami, General Manager of Talent Management at Omantel, emphasised the importance of this initiative saying that by investing in AI, data analytics and digital skills training, Omantel continues to strengthen its position as the Sultanate of Oman’s leading technology and innovation company.

“AI and data science are at the core of Omantel’s strategy to lead in AI-driven solutions, foster innovation and enable sustainable digital transformation. By equipping our teams with future-ready AI capabilities, we are not only enhancing customer experiences but also positioning Oman as a leading digital economy.

This initiative reaffirms our commitment to building an AI-driven ecosystem that accelerates technological advancement and unlocks new opportunities for growth.”

“This collaboration with Omantel demonstrates how digital skilling should be done — learning, innovating and applying AI solutions to real-world business challenges. We appreciate Omantel’s trust in TeKnowledge and share their commitment to driving sustainable innovation and economic growth,” Ayman Majzoub, VP of Sales META at TeKnowledge, said.

EMBRACE ADVENTURE THIS RAMADHAN WITH THE INEOS GRENADIER

MUSCAT: This Ramadhan, embrace the spirit of adventure with the INEOS Grenadier, a vehicle designed to take you beyond limits. Built for those who dare to explore, the Grenadier offers unmatched capability, durability and reliability — perfect for Oman’s diverse landscapes.

Starting at just RO 26,995, the INEOS Grenadier comes with an exclusive Ramadhan offer: 3 years / 45,000 km service package; 5 years unlimited mileage warranty; 5 years roadside assistance; and complimentary side runners.

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, commented: “Ramadhan is a time of reflection, renewal and new beginnings. The INEOS Grenadier embodies this spirit — offering adventurers and explorers a vehicle built for



The Grenadier offers unmatched capability, durability and reliability.

resilience, power and ultimate performance. We are delighted to present this exclusive Ramadhan offer, making it even easier for customers to own a true off-road legend designed for Oman’s landscapes.”

Combining rugged British spirit and design with German engineering rigour, the INEOS Grenadier is a tough, go-anywhere vehicle with best-in-class off-road capability combined with the modern comfort, refinement and quality standards expected by today’s drivers. This Ramadhan, embark on a journey of resilience, discovery and unmatched performance.

For more information or to book a test drive, please visit the INEOS showroom in Ghala or contact 80080666.

BYD unveils Super e-Platform with flash charging for EVs

BYD recently launched the Super e-Platform, featuring flash-charging batteries, a 30,000 RPM motor and new silicon carbide (SiC) power chips.

The platform upgrades the core electric components, achieving a charging power of 1 megawatt (1000 kW) and a peak charging speed of 2 kilometres per second, making it the fastest for mass-produced vehicles — 5 minutes of charging for 400 kilometres of range.

The Super e-Platform also delivers a single-module single-motor power of 580 kW and a top speed over 300 km/h. It will first be available on the Han L and Tang L, which are now open for pre-order in China.

Despite advancements in EV technology, “charging anxiety” is still a major concern. Wang Chuanfu, Chairman and President of BYD, candidly stated at the launch event, “The ultimate solution is to make charging as quick as refuelling a gasoline car.”

To achieve this, ultra-high voltage and current are necessary. The newly launched Super e-Platform is the world’s first mass-produced “full-domain 1000V high-voltage architecture” for passenger vehicle. It brings the battery, motor, power supply, air conditioning and other components up to 1000V.

BYD has also officially launched the “Flash Charging Battery”. From the positive to the negative



It will first be available on the Han L and Tang L, which are now open for pre-order in China.

electrode, it has built ultra-fast ion channels, reducing the battery’s internal resistance by 50%. The charging current reaches 1000A and the charging rate achieves 10C, both of which are world records.

With the support of ultra-high voltage (1000V) and ultra-high current (1000A), BYD “Flash Charging Battery” can achieve the world’s largest mass-produced charging power of 1 megawatt (1000kW).

The Megawatt Flash Charging enables the world’s highest peak charging speed of “1 second for 2 kilometres”, providing users with an ultimate charging experience. The Han L equipped with the Flash Charging Battery can achieve 400 kilometres of range with just 5

minutes of charging.

In the past, refuelling a gasoline car took 5-8 minutes; now, for the same range, electric vehicles also take only 5-8 minutes to charge, ultimately making the charging time as short as refuelling time.

At this launch event, BYD also unveiled the world’s first mass-produced 30,000 RPM motor. Luo Hongbin, BYD’s Senior Vice President, stated at the event: “The 30,000 RPM motor not only significantly boosts the vehicle’s speed but also greatly reduces the motor’s weight and size, enhancing power density.

To match the ultra-high power charging, BYD has self-developed and mass-produced the next-generation automotive-grade SiC power chips. These chips have

a voltage rating of up to 1500V, making them the industry’s first mass-produced automotive-grade SiC power chips with the highest voltage rating.”

The Megawatt Flash Charging also demands higher standards for charging stations.

Lian Yubo, Executive Vice President of BYD and President of the Automotive Engineering Research Institute, stated: “BYD has self-developed the world’s first all-liquid-cooled Megawatt Flash Charging terminal system, with a maximum output capacity of up to 1360kW.

In the future, we plan to build over 4,000 ‘Megawatt Flash Charging stations’ in China. Additionally, BYD’s unique ‘dual-gun charging’ technology can instantly transform existing supercharging piles into flash charging ones and fast charging piles into supercharging ones.

Our world-first ‘intelligent voltage boost’ charging technology is fully compatible with public fast charging piles, ensuring users can charge at any station.”

As the first models to feature BYD’s Super e-Platform, the Han L and Tang L have officially started pre-sales in China and are set to launch in April.

BYD’s Super e-Platform, the world’s most powerful professional pure electric platform, will redefine electric mobility and lead the development trend of pure electric technology worldwide.

BANKDHOFAR’S TRAVEL INSURANCE POLICY OFFERS GLOBAL COVERAGE

MUSCAT: Travel insurance is more than just an add-on — it’s a safety net for passengers heading on family vacations, business trips, or work assignments. In today’s unpredictable world — where weather disruptions, missed connections and medical emergencies can derail plans — comprehensive coverage ensures peace of mind.

Recognising this need, BankDhofar — Oman’s leading financial institution — has partnered with Dhofar Insurance Company to offer a travel insurance policy that provides extensive protection against a wide array of travel-related risks and inconveniences.

Designed for broad geographical coverage with unparalleled benefits and flexible options, the policy stands out as a reliable and customer-centric offering.

Fully underwritten by Dhofar Insurance, the policy delivers up to \$1 million in emergency medical evacuation and repatriation, including hospitalisation coverage of up to \$1 million. This ensures travellers receive immediate medical care abroad, along with financial assistance for unforeseen emergencies.

The coverage also extends to travel inconveniences, such as lost luggage and passports, with claims of up to \$300 available for document replacement. Trip cancellations and non-refundable expenses are also



The policy stands out as a reliable and customer-centric offering.

protected, with reimbursements of up to \$2,000 to help offset unexpected losses.

Going beyond standard travel insurance benefits, the policy includes compassionate visit coverage, allowing a loved one to join the insured person in case of hospitalisation abroad. If minor children are left unattended due to an emergency, arrangements are made for their safe return home. Emergency dental

coverage is also available, ensuring that travellers can access urgent dental care when needed.

This insurance policy is globally applicable and customisable based on travel destinations and individual preferences. Whether travelling within the region or across continents, customers can tailor their coverage to meet their unique requirements.

The travel insurance policy is part of a broader suite of bancassurance products offered by BankDhofar, covering Motor, Home, Accident and Health & Critical Care. These products are underwritten by leading local and international insurers, reinforcing the bank’s commitment to quality and customer satisfaction.

These bancassurance offerings complement BankDhofar’s diverse portfolio of banking solutions designed for various customer segments. Structured savings and investment plans, such as fixed and recurring deposits, children’s education funds and retirement savings solutions, further enhance the bank’s services.

Beyond traditional banking, BankDhofar’s mobile app offers customers seamless access to account management, bill payments, fund transfers and new account openings — anytime, anywhere.

BUSINESS



OQGN is conceptualising the rollout of a pipeline network for the transportation of carbon dioxide in support of Oman’s decarbonisation and Net-Zero goals.

‘TRAILBLAZER PROJECTS’ STATUS FOR 3 CCUS VENTURES IN OMAN

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

OQ GAS NETWORKS (OQGN), the majority state-owned operator of Oman’s gas transportation network, says it has begun conceptualising the rollout of a pipeline network for the transportation of carbon dioxide (CO2) in support of the country’s broader decarbonisation and Net-Zero strategies.

Also as part of this initiative, OQGN — part of OQ Group — is collaborating with a number of energy companies and public sector stakeholders in the development of ‘trailblazer projects’ based on carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) technologies.

The revelations came during an online discussion on OQGN’s 2024 financial and operational performance during 2024, hosted by the company as part of its obligations as a publicly listed entity. Representing OQGN were Ali Mohammedi, Head of Network & Business Development, Khalifa al Maamari, Chief Operating Officer, Khalid al Qassabi, Chief Financial Officer and Faisal al Maamari, Chief People, Technology and Culture Officer.

The officials noted that CO2 transportation represents an “attractive” business opportunity for OQGN, in addition to its role in supporting green hydrogen transportation when the country’s energy transition advances. Decarbonisation by carbon capture, they pointed out, is one of the key pillars to achieving Net-Zero by 2050, with OQGN set to play a big role in the transportation of CO2 from generators to end-users.

According to the officials, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals is currently developing CCUS and Blue Hydrogen regulations and key policies with sector stakeholders. To spur investment in this key segment of the energy transition journey, the Ministry has set up a CCUS Core Team with representatives from, amongst others, Oxy Oman (with a focus on carbon capture), OQGN (transportation), Petroleum Development Oman (CO2 storage), Shell (Blue Hydrogen products and Synthetic Fuels) and the Ministry (CO2 utilisation for Oil & Gas and International investment in CCUS).

Already, three commercial-scale CCUS initiatives have been designated as ‘Trailblazer Projects’ by the Ministry as part of its support for first-movers. “Some of the opportunities we’re looking at as part of this core group are projects identified as trailblazers. These are projects that are in a bit more advanced stage, where transportation will be required, along with other parts of the value chain,” one official said.

“So we’ve been working with our partners over the past one year to mature these opportunities, one of which is the Northern Ecosystem opportunity, which is looking at potential decarbonisation of the Suhar industrial area, finding sinks and usage of the CO2. This could entail a CO2 pipeline extending more than 200 kilometres potentially.”

RESISTING RISKS

Chinese premier warns of ‘rising instability’



Chinese Premier Li Qiang urged countries to open their markets to combat “rising instability and uncertainty” at a business forum in Beijing on Sunday, as China braces for further US tariffs.

“In today’s increasingly fragmented world with rising instability and uncertainty, it is more necessary for countries to open up their markets and enterprises... to resist risks and challenges,” Li said. — Reuters

CEO TALK

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

AFTER graduating with a bachelor’s degree in Translation, Ahoud bint Rashid al Shibliyah spent nearly a decade in search of a job.

However, inspired by her husband’s hobby of beekeeping at the time, Al Shibli embarked on an award winning entrepreneurial journey. In today’s edition of CEO Talk, we interviewed Al Shibli, the CEO and Co-Founder of ‘Ypyap and Param’, an award winning Omani honey brand that has garnered national and international attention.

THE BEGINNING

What started as a hobby soon evolved into a full-fledged business. “Initially sparked by my husband’s hobby of beekeeping at the time, we started the project in 2010 as a home-based venture,” shared Ahoud, who was actively seeking employment for eight years.

“However, due to the growing demand for honey, [we] eventually decided to open the first “Ypyap and Param” store in Liwa [in 2018], which became the only job I truly enjoyed.”

Today, the company operates two branches, in Suhar and Liwa, along with a retail outlet at Muscat International Airport and a sales point in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Last year, the brand was recognised with the Entrepreneurship Award for Best Micro Business in Al Batinah North.

CHALLENGES

The road to entrepreneurship was not without its challenges, one of the biggest being the saturation of the local honey market. “We faced several challenges — one of the most difficult was the saturation of the Omani honey market and figuring out how we could stand out,” said Ahoud.

“We had to come up with new marketing ideas that would bring something fresh to



With perseverance, determination and by participating in several programmes, courses and workshops in management, marketing and financial planning, we were able to get to where we are today.

AHOUD BINT RASHID AL SHIBLIYAH

learning and perseverance were key to the company’s success. “But with perseverance, determination and by participating in several programmes, courses and workshops in management, marketing and financial planning, we were able to get to where we are today.”

Additionally, she emphasised the importance of values. “Honesty, credibility and integrity are the foundation for all other values — and these are the principles our company is built on. The honey trade relies on trust, especially when it comes to quality and packaging.”

On a personal level, the CEO shared that balancing entrepreneurship with family responsibilities is one of the most demanding aspects of her journey. “This is the hardest part of my daily life as a female

the world of Omani honey.

We also worked to correct some of the misconceptions about honey, its importance, how it’s produced and what the proper strategies are for beekeeping and producing Omani honey.” Product development and packaging also presented their own challenges.”

There were also challenges related to product development and packaging, especially considering that society has a fixed, traditional image of what Omani honey should look like — and changing that isn’t easy.”

However, according to the CEO, continuous

entrepreneur, but with God’s help first and then by organising priorities and having a set schedule for everything — whether related to work or family — I’m able to manage it all,” she said.

She added that family support also plays a big role in keeping things under control. “The most important thing is to maintain balance — neither side should overwhelm the other. Balance is the foundation of life.”

MILESTONES AND MOTIVATION

Since the launch of the company, Ahoud has marked several milestones in her entrepreneurial journey which fuelled her growth.

She was honoured by the Ministry of Social Development on Omani Women’s Day for her contribution to the economic sector In 2021 and in 2023, she received the Al Batinah North Entrepreneurship Award and was named Promising Entrepreneur for Al Batinah North and South at the Women’s Conference in 2024.

However, a significant moment in her career came when she presented her success story to HH The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, at the launch ceremony of the “Reefi” financing product in 2021.

“It was a strong source of motivation for me to continue, as I saw in her a role model and a source of encouragement to keep going and strive for excellence,” she said. Additionally, she was selected to share her success story at the Saudi-Omani Investment Forum in Riyadh in 2023. “It made me feel that reaching the top is not impossible and not far out of reach,” she said.

KEY TAKEAWAY

In conclusion, the CEO offered advice for those interested in entrepreneurship, “Business is an adventure — and those who love adventure should start a business. It’s true that the business world is full of challenges and obstacles, but it excites you with the thrill of competition, achievement and overcoming hurdles.

OPAZ SIMPLIFIES PROCEDURES TO ENHANCE INVESTOR SERVICES

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 23

THE Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has enhanced its investor services by unifying the service pathway, enabling investors to conduct economic activities across all areas under its supervision.

This streamlined process allows investors to access all incentives, privileges and facilitations offered by the Authority through a single registration when starting their projects.

Dr Said bin Khalifa al Quraini, Director General of the Investment Development Sector at OPAZ, stated that the package of simplified procedures was launched in conjunction with the unification of service procedures and fees across all



This initiative allows businesses to operate seamlessly across all zones under OPAZ’s supervision.

special economic zones and free zones under the Authority’s supervision.

This initiative contributes to encouraging investment in economic and free zones as well as industrial cities, leading to an increase in the number of investors. He explained that

these measures aim to enhance the investment environment, facilitate economic activities across different zones and enable investors to diversify and expand their investments in various locations.

Dr Al Quraini further explained that the unified

service pathway is part of an integrated service system offered by the Authority through the One-Stop Shop.

This platform allows investors from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman to submit investment applications, open commercial registrations and obtain the necessary licenses electronically.

He pointed out that the unified pathway offers significant flexibility for investors, enabling them to expand their economic activities in any of the areas under the Authority’s supervision without the need to obtain a separate commercial registration for each zone.

This system has reduced administrative and financial burdens on companies, enhancing their ability to grow and expand.

FUNDING BACKSTOPS

EU officials weigh if they can rely on Fed



Some European central banking and supervisory officials are questioning whether they can still rely on the US Federal Reserve to provide dollar funding in times of market stress

The sources said they consider it highly unlikely the Fed would not honour its funding backstops — and the US central bank itself has given no signals to suggest that. — Reuters

FINANCIAL TARGETS

UK finance minister to stick to fiscal rules



British finance minister Rachel Reeves said that she will stick to her fiscal rules despite global upheaval, raising the prospect of belt-tightening measures to meet her financial targets.

Reeves sought to show investors that she could be trusted with the public finances by announcing a rule to bring day-to-day spending into balance with tax revenue by the end of the decade. — Reuters

OPINION

London closes in on New York as top financial hub



ANDY JALIL

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

LONDON has edged closer to becoming the world's top financial centre, fresh research shows, but concerns have been raised over the City's future competitiveness. The 37th edition of Z/Yen Group's Global Financial Centres Index (GFCI 37) showed London maintained its second-place ranking amongst the world's top financial centres, whilst climbing 12 points from its last rating in September. New York topped the table yet again, but its lead over London has narrowed. London dominates the European rankings, with a 19-point lead over Frankfurt which missed out on a spot in the top ten, ranking eleventh globally. The capital was in the top three centres for all eight major industries and scored first for banking. Elsewhere, in fintech London was at the heels of the Big Apple, reducing the gap between first and second place to a singular point. The survey also questioned respondents on their home centre prospects, with London ranking as one of the top centres anticipated to become more competitive. However, concerns exist over risks to London's future status, given that business confidence has taken a hit since the Chancellor Rachel Reeves' Autumn Budget. The latest release from the Office for National Statistics showed the economy

shrank 0.1 per cent in January, in another blow to growth prospects. Reeves had pledged to unlock growth across the country, which has included the launch of a National Wealth Fund and slashing regulation. London market's woes have continued into 2025, after 2024 saw the largest outflow of listed companies since the global financial crisis, according to data from auditing giant EY. In total, 88 companies moved out of the market last year, compared to just 18 new listings. London ranked 12th on a sub survey focusing on future prospects, with only 17 respondents mentioning the City as a centre they consider likely to grow in significance over the next two to three years. The Middle East and Asia dominated the top 15, with seven of the centres in the Asia/Pacific region and six in the Middle East and Africa. Dubai scored first with 63 mentions and Seoul second at 48. Professor Michael Mainelli, chairman of Z/Yen and former Lord Mayor of London, said: "Confidence in leading international financial centres remains strong, with a high degree of stability in rankings." However, Mainelli noted the index period of the report falls outside of the new US administration, which has triggered a period of economic uncertainty. "A slowdown in US centres may indicate some projected

London dominates the European rankings, with a 19-point lead over Frankfurt which missed out on a spot in the top ten, ranking eleventh globally. The capital was in the top three centres for all eight major industries and scored first for banking.

decoupling from global markets," Mainelli added. The GFCI generates ratings through a combination of survey respondents and a statistical model. GFCI 37 used 140 instrumental factors combined with 31,314 survey assessments of financial centres and 4,946 respondents to an online questionnaire for the research. **LONDON TO BE REPRESENTED AT MAJOR NEW YORK TRAVEL SHOW** Two of the City of London's most important cultural venues (The Barbican and the Ned) will promote the area at a New York travel show later this month. The Barbican and the Ned will attend SMU International, an event that connects industry experts with travel buyers looking to invest worldwide. Jenny Waller, head of sales at the Barbican, said the event is a "perfect platform" to "share our vision and inspire international event organisers. She added: "London's Square Mile is not just the financial heart of our capital; it's a cultural beacon". A spate of new buildings with sustainable and public-facing initiatives are also on the way and are going to be incorporated into the plan. "The City of London is a shining example of how London is constantly evolving, building upon history and discovering something new," Rachel Lajom, Head of Groups & Events Sales at The Ned said.

WEST AFRICA'S VERSION OF BREXIT IS AS BAD AN IDEA

BY STREISAND NETO

LONDON: West Africa is undergoing its own version of Brexit. By July Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger will have quit the 15-strong Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). While the specifics are rather different from the UK's 2016 decision to leave the European Union, the upshot — self-harm for those departing and a weakened group left behind — is all too familiar. ECOWAS, which dates back to the 1975 Treaty of Lagos, allows its members to benefit from lower trade barriers, freedom of movement and a common security strategy. It also has meaningful economic left. Including the likes of Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, its GDP amounts to over \$700 billion — over 25% of Africa's \$2.8 trillion collective output. On the face of it, ECOWAS has different problems to those of the EU. Europe's states may have differing growth rates in the periphery and core, but are nominally democracies; in West Africa, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are now run by military juntas after a series of coups. There's also a colonial context. The presence of France as an ECOWAS funder makes it possible for the three breakaway states to claim they are defending their sovereignty against a former European ruler — especially as Paris supported ECOWAS threats to intervene militarily against the juntas. The other Brexit parallel is that, like Britain, those choosing to leave are hurting themselves. While Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger represent 17% of ECOWAS's 424 million population, they only account for 7% of total West African GDP. Meanwhile, nearly a quarter of Niger's exports go to ECOWAS states. While the bloc will still allow the three exiting states' citizens to travel visa-free and their goods and services to keep access to the trading bloc, their exit is unlikely to spur growth. In some ways, a genuinely unified ECOWAS was no more likely than pre-Brexit hopes that Britain would get closer to the EU despite not being in the euro. The West African Union is a confusing mix of Francophone and Anglophone states — eight of its number are part of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), who share a common currency pegged to the euro. Efforts to fold English-speaking states into a wider single currency have foundered. And with half the ECOWAS population and over 60% of its GDP, Nigeria naturally influences proceedings as much as EU kingpins Germany and France. Still, a hacked-back ECOWAS sounds worse. It might persuade others to distance themselves too: Togo is already pondering joining the breakaway trio's Alliance of Sahel States (AES). — Reuters

Trade war 2.0: Implications for global steel landscape

THE global steel industry faces overcapacity, trade barriers and regional demand fluctuations. Recent tariffs and trade policies are upending and reshaping steel industry dynamics. According to the OECD, the overcapacity of steel production stands at 553 million tonnes and this imbalance will keep pressure on prices for most of 2025. As per the World Steel Association, it is projected to increase 1.2% in 2025 after years of decline. However, the growth is unevenly distributed across regions, with emerging economies more resilient than advanced economies. The Trump administration has imposed a 25% tariff on all steel and aluminium imports into the USA. Unlike the previously imposed tariffs, this time, the tariffs apply to all national imports universally and to derivatives of steel and aluminium for all countries and importers without any exemptions. The new tariffs will have far-reaching implications on manufacturing costs and supply chains. It will affect the US metals manufacturing industry, which is import-dependent on steel by 24% and aluminium by 35%. Various industries and consumer sectors will be significantly affected. Some analysts predict that the tariffs will reshape the US steel industry. There will be an increase in prices in six months, additional revenue will be generated and new projects will begin. However, the historical experience narrative is different. As of 2018, the tariffs introduced increased capacity utilisation by 83%, but the import surges eroded gains by 2024. The cyclic patterns indicate that tariffs will bring short-term benefits and not lasting industrial revival. China is the world's largest steel producer, but it has scaled down production in early 2025. Despite production cuts, China exported over 110 million tonnes in 2024 and continued into early 2025. However, the export value fell by 3.9%, indicating weaker global market pricing power. Steel consumption in Europe is downturned due to war-related disruptions, unprecedented rises in energy prices and production costs and recession in construction and automobile industries. The overall demand for steel remains volatile.



The Trump administration has imposed a 25% tariff on all steel and aluminium imports into the USA. Image for illustration only.



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

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

RETALIATORY TARIFFS TABLE BY US ALLIES				
Country/Region	Value	Status	Implementation Date	Products Affected
Canada	C\$30 billion (\$30.6 billion)	Started	March 4, 2025	Orange juice, peanut butter, wine, spirits, beer, coffee, appliances, apparel, footwear, motorcycles, cosmetics, pulp and paper products
Canada	Additional C\$125 billion (\$86 billion)	Proposed	March 25, 2025	Electric vehicles, fruits and vegetables, beef, pork, dairy, electronics, steel, aluminium, trucks, and buses.
Canada	C\$29.8 billion (\$20 billion)	Started	March 14, 2025	Computers, sports equipment, cast iron items, steel and aluminium products.
Mexico	Unspecified value	Proposed	Details announced March 9, 2025	Specific products not yet publicly detailed
European Union	26 billion euros. (\$28 billion) total	Proposed	Two phases: - Phase 1: April 1, 2025 - Phase 2: April 13, 2025	Phase 1: Roofs, bourbon, motorcycles. Phase 2: Steel, aluminium, textiles, household goods, plastics, and agricultural products (poultry, eggs, dairy, sugar, vegetables).
India	Unspecified value	Proposed	200 days (pending final determination)	Wide range of steel products, including hot-rolled coils, steel sheets and plates, cold-rolled coils, and sheets.

China's real estate crisis has increased exports; thus, there is now a large surplus in the global market amid weakening demand. As an unpredictable, unexpected and unfavorable surge could cause permanent damage to the domestic industry, India, the second-largest producer of Steel, is proposing a 12% tariff on a wide range of imported steel products for 200 days. All trading partners are willing to negotiate to resolve the trade tensions while preparing robust countermeasures as necessary defensive measures to protect their economic interests. The UK government is pragmatic in negotiating a broader economic agreement with the US to eliminate additional tariffs. The UK has not imposed retaliatory measures yet but has kept all options open. In conclusion, the Trump Trade War 2.0 indelibly impacts the global steel landscape. Now, governments and businesses are preparing for the short-term and long-term implications. Steel companies worldwide are adopting strategies for capacity rationalisation, cost efficiency and pivoting towards higher-growth markets. The ramifications of the Trump administration tariffs are that the global steel industry is in flux, characterised by persistent overcapacity, intensifying trade barriers, potential retaliatory measures and divergent regional demand patterns.

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INDIAN male MBA , 20 years experience in Oman & GCC in Project sales/ Dealer market in All construction materials including Cables & Accessories having D/L looking for the post of Sales Manager/ Assistant Manager. Contact: 00968 78099493

SIT. WANTED

CHIEF accountant, MBA finance, 9+ years experience in financial statements, auditing, budgeting, VAT, tax, fixed assets, reconciliation, payroll. Seeking a full-time or part-time position in a senior role. Contact: akramhaniffa@yahoo.com / 93988825.

B. COM. 35 years of experience in accounts, sales coordinator, admin, HR, personal assistant, document controller with Oman D/L, looking for a job. Contact: 92558734

SEEKING a new Job / Logistics & supply chain professional with 10-plus years experienced in Export & Import of Sea, Land & Air transport modes (Email: nouchimp1986@gmail.com, Mob: 79820286)

ACCOUNTS/ Finance: Indian male (MBA Fin) having more than 19 years of experience in Oman accounts & finance looking for suitable placement, NOC available and can join immediately. Contact: 92076716

MASTER'S graduate in MSc Global logistics, operations & supply chain management from London, seeking a full-time job in Oman. Possess 2 years of sales executive experience in London and 1 year as a purchase executive in Oman. Holding a valid Oman D/L. Contact: 77231865, email: finan8157@gmail.com

INDIAN Male, Storekeeper / Document Controller 2+yrs of experience in GCC, Completed BCA, ready to join immediately. Email: swamierzhasouth@gmail.com GSM: +968 71818173

FINANCE Manager, CA,CPA,20 years experience (Oman& India). Financial reporting, Budgeting, Taxation, Financial modelling, Feasibility, Valuation. Available to join immediately. 92148608

INDIAN male (Mechanical Engineering) with 3 years experience in Diesel engine works (Gensets/ Engines), 2 years in Machine Maintenance, seeks job. Contact: 78022420

A SUDANESE resident in Salalah, BSc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet). Contact: +968 98510880.

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SIT. WANTED

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Does cracking one’s knuckles invalidate ablution?

Cracking one’s knuckles does not invalidate ablution, although it is considered disliked. However, not everything that is disliked nullifies ablution. Allah knows best.



FASTING IN EXTREME CLIMATES: HOW MUSLIMS ADAPT

BY AHMED AL KAABI

FASTING, one of the five pillars of Islam, embodies profound spiritual devotion and self-discipline. From dawn until sunset, Muslims refrain from food and drink, yet for many, these fundamental practices come with immense challenges in regions characterised by extreme climates. Whether it be the sweltering heat of the Gulf states or the exceedingly long daylight hours of the Arctic, these believers navigate environments that test their resilience and commitment to their faith.

In certain regions, the challenges posed by fasting can be quite significant. In countries near the North Pole, such as Norway and Sweden, the sun can remain above the horizon for over 19 hours during the summer months. This results in fasting hours that are extraordinarily long, necessitating a careful approach to nutrition and hydration. Conversely, in the Gulf states, where temperatures frequently exceed 45 degrees Celsius, the risk of dehydration becomes a key concern for those observing the fast.

The experience of fasting varies markedly depending on geographical conditions. In regions with extended daylight, fatigue can become overwhelming as individuals struggle to replenish essential nutrients and fluids within a short window. Similarly, in hot climates, excessive sweating from the body’s natural cooling processes can lead to dehydration, dizziness and heat exhaustion, making adherence to fasting a real test of both physical and spiritual endurance.

To combat these hardships, Muslims employ various strategies tailored to their specific environments. In areas with long days, individuals often stagger their activities throughout the day to mitigate fatigue. Meanwhile, in hot

ter climates, emphasis is placed on consuming hydrating foods during Suhoor, the pre-dawn meal. Fresh fruits and vegetables help maintain hydration levels throughout the fasting hours.

In Oman and the Gulf states, Muslims often minimise daytime physical exertion, preferring to undertake strenuous tasks after sunset. Many seek refuge in air-conditioned spaces or shade to shield themselves from the harsh sun, adapting their fasting rituals to safeguard their health and well-being.

For example, Mohammed al Balushi, a scholarship student residing in Oregon, shares, “Fasting for over 18 hours is a significant challenge, but I focus on nutritious meals for Suhoor, opting for items like oats, nuts and yoghurt that keep my energy levels stable.” He relies on Islamic applications to track prayer and fasting times, particularly important in places without mosques. Despite the formidable challenges of prolonged fasting, he believes it enhances his patience and willpower, prompting him to arrange his day to ensure sufficient rest after Suhoor.

Similarly, Maryam al Hanaei, studying in Canada, discusses her experience: “Balancing studying with fasting, especially during exams, poses its own challenges. I schedule time to sleep after Suhoor and allocate periods specifically for studying. The local Muslim community is incredibly supportive, often organising group Iftars. During the day, I avoid caffeinated drinks, which can lead to dehydration and I ensure to drink plenty of water during Iftar. For Suhoor, I choose slow-digesting foods such as eggs and brown bread, which keep me satiated for longer.”

Nutrition specialist Dr Reem al Zaabi underscores that proper nutrition during Ramadhan is essential for those fasting in challenging climates. She advises that people in hot regions consume foods high in water content, like cucumbers and watermelons, while

avoiding salty items that can stimulate thirst. Remaining hydrated between Iftar and Suhoor is crucial for replenishing lost fluids.

General medicine specialist Dr Sami al Balushi suggests that individuals fasting in hot climates limit sun exposure and reduce strenuous physical activities during the day. If outdoor activity is necessary, he recommends wearing light-coloured clothing and using hats or umbrellas for protection against the sun’s direct rays.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY AND MODERN TECHNIQUES

In the modern world, technology significantly aids Muslims in navigating the difficulties of fasting under extreme conditions. Applications such as “Prayer Times” and “Islamic Times” provide precise information regarding Suhoor and Iftar timings, especially helpful in areas with drastically changing day lengths. Social media platforms and online resources further offer essential dietary guidance, stressing the importance of consuming hydrating foods and reducing caffeine intake that can lead to dehydration.

Despite the considerable obstacles faced, Muslims remain steadfast in their commitment to fasting as an integral part of their faith and spiritual identity. This sacred act goes beyond mere abstinence; it reflects a journey towards heightened piety, patient endurance and self-discipline. For those fasting in places like Norway and Canada, where days are particularly lengthy, the act of fasting becomes a cherished path towards spiritual growth and resilience.

Fasting in extreme climates ultimately serves as a true testament to faith. Through smart strategies related to nutrition and lifestyle, and supported by technology, those who observe this sacred practice find ways to adapt and thrive amid challenging circumstances while remaining true to their beliefs.



HADITH GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Sahl b Sa’d (Allah be pleased with him) reported Allah’s Messenger as saying:

In Paradise there is a gate which is called Rayyan through which only the people who fast would enter on the Day on Resurrection. None else would enter along with them. It would be proclaimed: Where are the people who fast that they should be admitted into it? And when the last of them would enter, it would be closed and no one would enter it.

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY



“And each [story] We relate to you from the news of the messengers is that by which We make firm your heart. And there has come to you, in this, the truth and an instruction and a reminder for the believers.”

(Surah Hud - 120)



DUA SUPPLICATION TO ALLAH

O Allah, on this day, open for me the doors of Your Grace, send down on me its blessings, help me towards the causes of Your mercy and give me a place in the comforts of Paradise, O the one who answers the call of the distressed.



Beyond detox: Embracing health and mindfulness in Ramadhan

BY SIHAM AL SAIDI

FASTING during Ramadhan is often perceived as a period of spiritual and physical rejuvenation. Many individuals believe that abstaining from food and drink offers a chance for the body to detoxify, ridding itself of harmful substances and enhancing overall health. But how valid is this notion?

Interestingly, while science indicates that our bodies naturally detoxify through the liver and kidneys, personal testimonies suggest that fasting can indeed reset our habits and foster improved well-being. Dr Jawaher al Hudrami, a specialist in clinical nutrition, points out that while this idea is widely held, it's essential to understand that the body possesses its own inherent detoxification system. The liver and kidneys work tirelessly to filter out toxins and eliminate waste. Thus, fasting does not “cleanse” the body in the manner that some might envision. However, it can indirectly support detoxification by reducing exposure to unhealthy foods and encouraging better dietary choices.

For some, the benefits of fasting during Ramadhan are striking. Take Suad al Sinani, a 35-year-old fitness enthusiast, who observes how this holy month transformed his lifestyle: “I used to feel bloated and lethargic due to my poor eating habits. However, after embracing fasting, I noticed

a remarkable improvement in my digestion and energy levels. By cutting out snacks and limiting sugary meals, I felt lighter and more focused.”

Reham al Khawaldi, a mother of two, views Ramadhan as an opportunity to refresh her body. “I use this month to enjoy more water, nourishing soups and freshly squeezed juices. It feels like a detox after months of less healthy eating. Rather than obsessing over food, I find myself feeling more energetic and revitalised,” she explains.

While the notion of fasting as a natural detox is compelling, others assert that its true benefits hinge on the dietary choices made during non-fasting hours. Alia al Hashmi, a working mother, offers a different perspective: “I don’t believe fasting alone detoxifies the body. If anything, some people indulge in heavier meals during Iftar, which could burden digestion. The secret lies in maintaining a balanced diet, not merely fasting.”

This viewpoint underscores a crucial element of detoxification: fasting alone isn't sufficient. It's the selections made at Suhoor and Iftar that ultimately determine whether fasting leads to health improvements or simply shifts unhealthy eating patterns to a different time of day.

When Dr Jawaher was asked about the indirect benefits of fasting on body detoxification, she remarked, “Absolutely. When a person fasts and adheres to a balanced diet, it

allows the digestive system to rest, potentially enhancing metabolic efficiency. Fasting also encourages greater mindfulness regarding food choices. Many people tend to focus on consuming more natural and unprocessed foods during Ramadhan, which can reduce inflammation and bolster overall well-being.”

While fasting may not medically cleanse the body, it undeniably serves as a catalyst for adopting healthier routines. By making conscious choices — such as opting for whole foods over processed ones, ensuring proper hydration and controlling portion sizes — individuals can experience the true advantages of fasting beyond its spiritual dimensions.

Dr Al Hudrami offers valuable advice for those observing Ramadhan: Firstly, it's crucial to stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water between Iftar and Suhoor, supporting the body's natural detoxification processes. Secondly, opt for a balanced diet rich in proteins, fibre and healthy fats, while steering clear of fried and sugary foods. Thirdly, engaging in light physical activity, like walking after Iftar, is vital for maintaining circulation and energy levels. Finally, it's wise to gradually reduce caffeine and sugar intake before Ramadhan to ease withdrawal symptoms.

Ultimately, fasting may not be a miraculous detox solution, but when approached with the right habits, it can pave the way for a healthier body and mind.

RAMADHAN TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

“Benachin” (one-pot dish), communal feasting and festive prayers in Gambia

In Gambia, Ramadhan is a vibrant and heartfelt occasion filled with tradition and unity. The holy month brings communities together as families prepare to share the beloved dish “Benachin,” a one-pot rice meal often cooked with fish and vegetables. As sunset approaches, families gather with neighbours and friends for Iftar, celebrating faith and fellowship. The spirit of Ramadhan is palpable during communal prayers at mosques, where worshippers come together to strengthen their spiritual ties. Special recitations and teachings from the Quran foster a deep sense of reflection and purpose. Acts of charity and outreach are highlighted, with many Gambians participating in initiatives to support the less fortunate. Ramadhan serves as a reminder of compassion, gratitude and community spirit, creating a lasting impact on social bonds and cultural identity in Gambian society.

DAILY HEALTH TIPS TO REMEMBER



Limit Snacking

It's common to crave snacks between Iftar and Suhoor, but being mindful of what and how much you consume can greatly affect your health during Ramadhan. While enjoying your meals is important, overindulging in snacks may lead to excessive calorie intake and diminish the nutritional value of your meals. Instead of frequent snacking, focus on two well-balanced meals for proper nourishment. When snacking, choose healthy options such as fruit, nuts, yoghurt, or vegetable sticks with hummus. These choices are nutritious and help maintain energy levels. Practice portion control by measuring servings or preparing snacks in advance and reflect on your hunger cues to foster a healthier relationship with food.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS IN ISLAM



1258 CE: The Sack of Baghdad

The Mongol invasion and subsequent sack of Baghdad in 1258 resulted in widespread devastation, marking a dramatic end to the Islamic Golden Age. The city, once a thriving centre of culture, learning and commerce, faced a catastrophic loss of life and knowledge, with libraries and institutions destroyed. The fall of Baghdad represents a significant turning point in Islamic history, disrupting the political and social fabric of the Abbasid Caliphate.

FEATURES

6 sources of protein that aren't meat



SCIENTISTS have long recognised the drawbacks of consuming red and processed meats. These dietary choices have been linked to increased risks of health issues such as heart disease, various cancers and premature mortality. Research indicates that swapping red meat with non-meat protein alternatives, including legumes, nuts, whole grains and more, can significantly benefit long-term health.

Moreover, such dietary shifts can positively impact the environment and prove to be more economical. “You often hear that eating healthily is costly,” remarks Sara Elnakib, a dietitian at Rutgers University. However, many plant-based protein sources, like canned beans and ready-to-heat whole grains, are affordable and convenient. “Incorporating these foods into your diet can be straightforward,” she advises.

Here are six excellent sources of protein that do not involve red or processed meat, along with the reasons why they are favoured by experts.

LEGUMES
Legumes — such as beans, peas, lentils and peanuts — are described as “affordable, nutritious and delicious” by Julia Wolfson from Johns Hopkins University. They are excellent for reaching protein goals, with a half-cup of cooked lentils providing nearly 9 grammes. Rich in fibre, antioxidants and essential nutrients like B vitamins and iron, legumes are associated with reduced risks of heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. They are also one of the least resource-intensive protein sources.

EGGS
Although prices may fluctuate, eggs represent a cost-effective, versatile protein source that can be prepared in numerous ways. One egg contains 6 grammes of protein, along with vital nutrients like vitamin B12 and vitamin D. They are particularly beneficial for vegetarians and can be included in various meals, not just breakfast.

FISH
Oily fish varieties, such as salmon and sardines, are considered healthier alternatives to meat. A 3.5-ounce portion of wild-caught salmon has around 22 grammes of protein and is rich in heart-healthy unsaturated fats, in contrast to the saturated fats found in red meat. Experts recommend opting for fish that are low in mercury and high in omega-3 fatty acids.

DAIRY
Low-fat and non-fat dairy products, including milk, yoghurt and cottage cheese, are often economical and versatile protein sources. They provide high-quality protein and essential nutrients and can easily be incorporated into various meals without extensive preparation.

NUTS AND SEEDS
Nuts and seeds, such as almonds, walnuts and chia seeds, are packed with protein and healthy fats. They can be easily added to meals or enjoyed as snacks.

WHOLE GRAINS
Whole grains like quinoa, oats and rice are not only nutritious but also provide additional protein and fibre, making them excellent staples in a health-conscious diet. — NYT



‘It was beautiful’: Mount Kenya’s glaciers melting away



CHARLES KIBAKI Muchiri traced the water trickling across the surface of the Lewis Glacier with his fingers, illustrating how quickly climate change is melting the huge ice blocks off of Africa’s second-highest mountain.

For nearly 25 years, the affable 50-year-old guide has been taking hikers to the peaks of Mount Kenya, nearly 5,000 metres (16,400 feet) above sea level and observing their transformation from a landscape of snow and ice, to brown rock.

“It was very beautiful,” he said mournfully on a recent ascent.

He recalled the ice caves and thick layer of snow that lasted several months on the peaks of this ancient volcano.

The Lewis Glacier once covered one of Mount Kenya’s slopes.

The imposing mass of ice visible in archive photos has now been reduced to just two blocks — the biggest only a few dozen metres wide.

Muchiri said he fears the glacier will be entirely gone in a few years, transforming the landscape and discouraging visitors.

His observations are backed up by numerous studies, while scientists have found ice loss from the world’s glaciers has accelerated over the past decade as the planet warms. Mount Kenya is one of the only mountains on the African continent with glaciers and scientists fear that as soon as 2030, it could become one of the first to turn entirely ice-free in modern times.

The Lewis Glacier lost 90 per cent of its volume between 1934 and 2010, according to a 2011 study led by Rainer Prinz of Austria’s University of Innsbruck.

A satellite study last year, published in the journal Environmental Research: Climate, found that the surface area of the ice on Mount Kenya was just 4.2 per cent of the size compared with the first reliable observations in 1900.

That is in keeping with other African mountains, including the highest, Mount Kilimanjaro, which has just 8.6 percent of its ice surface left, according to the study.

— ‘JUST MELT AWAY’ —

Although less well-known than Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya is also a Unesco World Heritage Site that attracts thousands of visitors each year. Elephants can sometimes be seen in the dense forest at its base, while the trees give way to verdant hills on the ascent. After long hours of hiking, the brown rocks of the summit appear.

Prinz said the ice shrinkage is down to temperature changes at the surface of the Indian Ocean that transport moisture throughout east Africa “and, hence, affected by our warming planet”.

The mountains no longer receive sufficient snow and are deprived of the white blanket that protects the glaciers from the effects of solar radiation, he said.

“If they don’t have that, they will just melt away,” he said.

Porter and guide Godfrey Mwangi, 28, said he has already seen many glaciers disappear.

He pointed to a whitewashed cliff overlooking Shiptons Camp at an altitude of 4,200 metres, once covered in a sheet of ice.

The mountain is still home to atypical flora and unique landscapes, Muchiri added, but the loss of glacier ice has put a stop to certain types of technical climbing.

— ‘ICE CUBES’ —

Rivers are also drying up, with consequences for the flora, fauna and residents of villages at the foot of the revered mountain.

The glaciers were never large enough to constitute significant water reservoirs, according to scientists, but had considerable tourist and scientific importance.

There are other ice blocks left on the mountain, but Prinz said they are now “more or less a pile of ice cubes”.

The Lewis Glacier did once have an effect on local water supplies, added Alexandros Makarigakis, a Unesco hydrologist, but it has become so small that its contribution to the local environment has evaporated.

Makarigakis welcomes projects led by young Kenyans to plant trees around the base of the mountain in the hope of slowing the loss of snow.

But he said it will only delay the inevitable.

“Pretty soon we will have a generation that will never associate Africa with glaciers,” he said. — AFP