



RAMADHAN 1

FAJR - 05:04 AM
DHUHR - 12:22 PM
ASR - 03:46 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:20 PM
ISHA - 07:30 PM



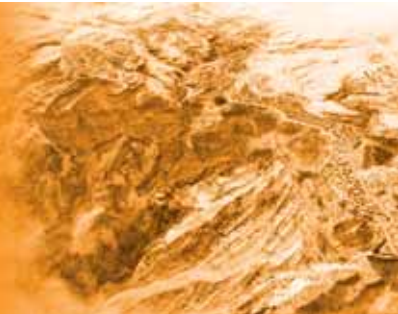
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VINGEGAARD
TAKES TIRRENO-
ADRIATICO IN ONE
OF 'BIGGEST WINS'



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OMAN TO
SHOWCASE LANDMARK
REAL ESTATE PROJECTS
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HOW TO
AVOID THE
PITFALLS OF
RAMADHAN



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY EMIR OF KUWAIT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, Shaikh Mishal expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation for His Majesty's sincere sentiments, wishing His Majesty good health and well-being. Shaikh Mishal also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty. He also wished the bilateral relations further development and growth.

HM CONDOLENCES TO SHARJAH RULER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Shaikh Dr Sultan Mohammed al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Ruler of Sharjah, on the death of Shaikh Saqr Rashid Saqr al Qasimi. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased's soul in peace in paradise and grant Shaikh Dr Sultan and his family patience to bear the loss.

POLYSILICON PLANT AT SOHAR PORT

يخون في المنطقة ال



United Solar Holding Inc celebrated the laying of the foundation stone for its pioneering polysilicon factory project in Sohar Port and Freezone. This landmark project, representing an investment exceeding RO 520 million (\$1.3 billion), is poised to have a production capacity of 100,000 tones annually. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance. **DETAILS ON P13**



His Majesty extends Ramadhan greetings

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has extended his greetings on the occasion of the advent of the blessed month of Ramadhan.

The Royal gesture was expressed in a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court reading as follows: “With Muslims in the east and west of the globe celebrating the advent of the blessed month of Ramadhan for this year 1445 AH, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has extended his greetings to the noble citizens, residents in the land of the Sultanate of Oman and the entire Islamic nation, congratulating them on

the Almighty Allah's bounty of making them witness to the blessed days and nights of this holy month. While voicing these greetings, His Majesty the Sultan prays to the Almighty Allah to bring back this occasion at a time all are enjoying wellbeing and peace.

“May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan and guard him as a source of strength and pride for dear homeland Oman, its people and its residents. Happy Ramadhan to Everyone.”

In the Sultanate of Oman, the first day of the holy month of Ramadhan 1445 AH begins on Tuesday. — **ONA**

Smart prepaid meters to resolve issue of unpaid water bills

VINOD NAIR
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The new smart prepaid meters introduced by Nama Water Services will help maintain healthy relationship between the landlords and tenants and all new buildings or apartments will be encouraged to use them, said a senior official of Nama Water Services.

The prepaid system will also eliminate the issue of accumulating debt, particularly for commercial accounts and rental properties as landlords can ensure tenants are responsible for their water usage, preventing unpaid bills.

Speaking to the *Observer*,

Prepaid meters will have the same tariff as the postpaid ones and will help landlords to have good relationship with the tenants

QAIS AL ZAKWANI
CEO of Nama Water Services

Qais al Zakwani, CEO of Nama Water Services, said: “Prepaid meters will have the same tariff as the postpaid ones and will help landlords to have good relationship with the tenants

when it comes to controlling water consumption and issues related to payment of water bills.”

These meters will help household consumers to control water consumption on an hourly, daily, and monthly basis. Devices will be provided free with installation for the first time.

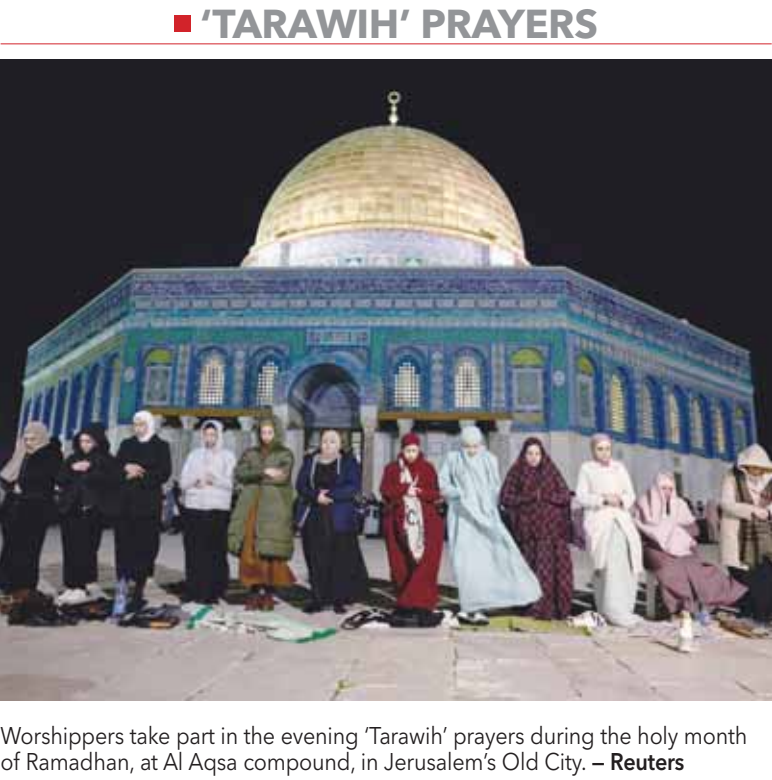
Using Internet of Things (IoT) technology, prepaid water meters offer a smarter way to manage water consumption.

These meters connect to the utility company's subscriber system via satellite, transmitting hourly updates on key data points. This includes both the amount of water used and the remaining balance from your prepaid credit. **SEE ALSO P15**

SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES THAILAND AMBASSADOR



Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received at his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Monday Suwat Kaewsook, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty. HH Sayyid Shihab thanked the ambassador for the efforts he exerted to enhance bilateral relations, wishing him continuous success. On his turn, the ambassador underscored the advance relations between Oman and Thailand. He also expressed his pride and appreciation for the cooperation extended to him during his tour of duty in the Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**



Worshippers take part in the evening 'Tarawih' prayers during the holy month of Ramadhan, at Al Aqsa compound, in Jerusalem's Old City. — **Reuters**

Auction system to optimise use of resources

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Energy and Minerals accords great attention to attracting investors and major companies to compete in open concession areas, in the oil, gas and minerals sectors.

The ministry also takes measures to ensure optimal exploitation of mineral resources with which the Sultanate of Oman abounds. It enacts laws and legislation that ensure the proper use of these resources and attract investors to make use of modern technologies, develop local added value of mineral resources and increase their contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP).

Oman possesses investment potential that would encourage local and foreign investors to engage in various investments in the field of



Measures to ensure optimal exploitation of mineral resources.

energy and minerals. The advantages include the strategic location overlooking regional and international sea lanes and the existence of Omani ports capable of exporting oil, gas and minerals to various countries of the world.

Dr Salah bin Hafeez al Dhahab, Director-General of Investments at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, said that the ministry's plan for the oil and gas sector aims to ensure that petroleum concession areas garner not less than 75 per cent of the total petroleum concession areas identified in Oman.

The plan focuses on the intensification of exploration operations, ensuring productivity and reduction in the cost of extraction operations, while at the same time ensuring quality and safety and using carbon emission reduction.



MoH plans to produce 30% of medicines domestically

OHOOO AL JAILANIYAH
MUSCAT, MARCH 11

The Ministry of Health (MoH) affirmed it is seeking to localise and encourage investing in drug manufacturing to localise the industry and attain pharmaceutical security. The aim is to set up a number of pharmaceutical factories with a view to minimising reliance on imported medicines that presently makes up 90 per cent. The MoH plans to produce 30 per cent of the country's needs for medicines from domestic production over the decade as well as boosting the state's reserve of vital medicines and medical supplies as well as finding other alternatives to provide medicines in emergencies or disruption of global supply chains.

This was stated by Ibrahim bin Nasser al Rashdi, Director-General of Medical Supplies at the Ministry of Health in an interview with *Oman* Arabic newspaper in which he explained the ministry's efforts to achieve medicine security and boost the drug stock.

The Sultanate of Oman was among the first countries in the region to build a stock of vital medicines and medical supplies since the beginning of the 1980s to confront emergencies, ward



The Sultanate of Oman was among the first countries in the region to build a stock of vital medicines and medical supplies since the beginning of the 1980s to confront emergencies, ward off the impact of epidemics

Directorate-General of Medical Supplies is making great efforts to meet the needs of 280 health institutions including referral hospitals, health complexes and health centres for some 12,000 types of medicines and medical materials

off the impact of epidemics.

Asked whether the Sultanate of Oman is likely to see a medicine shortage and how to rapidly response to the population's increasing need for medicines, Al Rashdi said that the Directorate-General of Medical Supplies is making great efforts to meet the needs of 280 health institutions

including referral hospitals, health complexes and health centres for some 12,000 types of medicines and medical materials. In the event of a greater unexpected increase in consumption or in the event of a delay or disruption of supplies due to issues with global production, the state's reserve fills the shortage. Other

possible solutions are to use the alternatives available in hospitals, or provide alternative stock through urgent direct purchase from the UK or India.

Presently, there are three pharmaceutical factories in the Sultanate of Oman which cover 10 per cent of the country's needs while other pharmaceutical factories are under construction. Medical intravenous solution factories will be inaugurated this year in the wilayats of Salalah and Nizwa while a third factory has entered the operation phase in Khazaen in the Wilayat of Barka. Many investors have expressed their desire to set up pharmaceutical factories. Efforts are underway to attract international investments to establish factories in the Sultanate of Oman. There are factories in Salalah and Muscat that produce medicines for some diseases and the ministry is working to attract factories for biological medicines production.

Another project in the operation phase is the Menagen Pharmaceutical Industries Factory project in Rusayl. It is one of the leading factories in the Middle East region specialising in medicines for chronic and rare diseases, the official said.

Royal Office Minister receives Qatar Ambassador



The meeting reviewed the advance relations between the two countries and areas of joint cooperation. – ONA

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received in his office on Monday Shaikh Mubarak bin Fahad bin Jassim al Thani, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting reviewed the

advance relations between the two countries and areas of joint cooperation.

The two sides also exchanged views on regional topics of common interest.

For his part, the ambassador lauded the advance relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Qatar.

Rain, drop in temperatures likely from today

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 11

The Oman Meteorology Office said on Monday that the Sultanate of Oman is likely to experience a relative drop in temperatures from Tuesday, March 12 to Wednesday, March 13.

This coincides with the activity of northwesterly winds, according to the Met Office, which said the northern governorates, including Musandam, Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi, Al Batinah North and Al Hajar Mountains are predicted to



receive scattered rain (5-30 mm) associated with fresh downdraft with a speed of 15-30 knots on Tuesday.

It added that the sea state may rise along the coastal strip of the Sultanate of Oman (1.25-2.5 m2).

1,000 bags, boxes of smokeless chewing tobacco seized

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More than 1,000 pieces of smokeless chewing tobacco were seized in the Al Batinah South Governorate in Barka, as part of the efforts made by the Consumer Protection Authority to control prohibited goods that have an impact on the behaviour and health of community members.

Dr Montasir al Harrasi, Director of the Consumer Protection Department in Al Batinah South Governorate, Barka, said: "By investigating the violators, they admitted to their involvement in the illegal



activities, leading to the seizure of the identified quantities of smokeless chewing tobacco, which amounted to 1,660 boxes and bags."

"Legal measures were

taken against the offenders, including the imposition of an administrative fine, and they were subsequently referred to the appropriate authorities for further action," he added.

The Consumer Protection Authority calls on everyone to report anyone who dares to violate the rights of consumers and cause harm to them and to report any violations they may observe through its various communication channels. The extensive monitoring and inspection efforts continue in all governorates, coinciding with combating the spread of these toxins and scourges among members of society, stopping their circulation, controlling the violations of their perpetrators, and holding them accountable in accordance with the Consumer Protection Law and its executive regulations.

System to optimise use of mineral resources

FROM P1

The ministry also checks companies' commitment to obligations in accordance with the agreements and requirements specified in their respective contracts, he added.

He said that the ministry's plan for the renewable energy and hydrogen sector deals with enacting laws and regulating the sector in a manner that guarantees the sustainability of investment, acting in cooperation with Oman Energy Development Company and Hydrogen Oman. Hydrogen

Oman offers investment opportunities in the field of energy through specific bids and conditions. Oman envisages that, by 2030, it would be one of the largest hydrogen exporters in the region, he observed.

Dr Al Dhahab pointed out that the ministry implemented the bidding system with the aim of optimally exploiting mineral resources to advance development and economic diversification, besides attracting and developing local and foreign investments by introducing real investment opportunities. — ONA

Pay extra caution on the road during Ramadhan: ROP

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Accidents during the first few days of the holy month of Ramadhan is always high and the Royal Oman Police (ROP) have urged all behind the wheels to apply extra caution and enjoy a safer month.

It has been found that a large number of accidents reported during the holy month are said to be due to lack of attention in driving due to heat coupled with fatigue, and sleep deprivation which can result in loss of attention, resulting in accidents, often fatal.

"Pay extra caution on the road and always follow defensive driving hoping that the other person on the road

might err and cause an accident thus one can safeguard him/her and others as well. Also, one shouldn't continue to drive if he or she is fatigued while driving and instead, he/she should pull the car aside and take sufficient rest before proceeding the journey," an ROP official told the *Observer*.

Usually, the holy month is decorated with long night hours of prayers and thus believers might be lacking in sleep which can cause lack of attention on the road resulting in accidents.

"The change in the patterns of sleeping and duty timings during the holy month tends to impact the attention of motorists who are fasting," he said. Hence, it has been urged



The casualty rate in Ramadhan was found to be 1.5 per cent and non-Ramadhan months was 1.2 per cent

that one should ensure, before driving during the day, that he or she is fit to drive and that he is not driving under fatigue or

lack of sleep.

"If you feel sleepy or find yourself lost while diving at night, pull your car to the

shoulder and rest for a while before you continue your journey", the official said.

According to statistics, the

casualty rate in Ramadhan was found to be 1.5 per cent and that in non-Ramadhan months was 1.2 per cent which indicates that the average number of traffic accidents was slightly higher in Ramadhan than in non-Ramadhan months.

Reports suggest that yet another reason contributing to the traffic accidents during this month is when motorists fail to leave enough safe distance between vehicles.

"It is better to follow different timings of work and reduce the number of vehicles so that one can drive in less traffic. Also, in the hurry, motorists should avoid tailgating with the vehicle in the front in order to stay safe on the roads during the month," the official said.



SALALAH AIRPORT RATED HIGH FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE: ACI

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Airports Council International (ACI) World in partnership with Amadeus, has announced the best airports for customer experience worldwide — as chosen by passengers. The Airport Service Quality (ASQ) programme is a global airport customer experience measurement and benchmarking program, using scientific methodology.

Including Salalah, nine regional airports have won ASQ Awards in five departure categories.

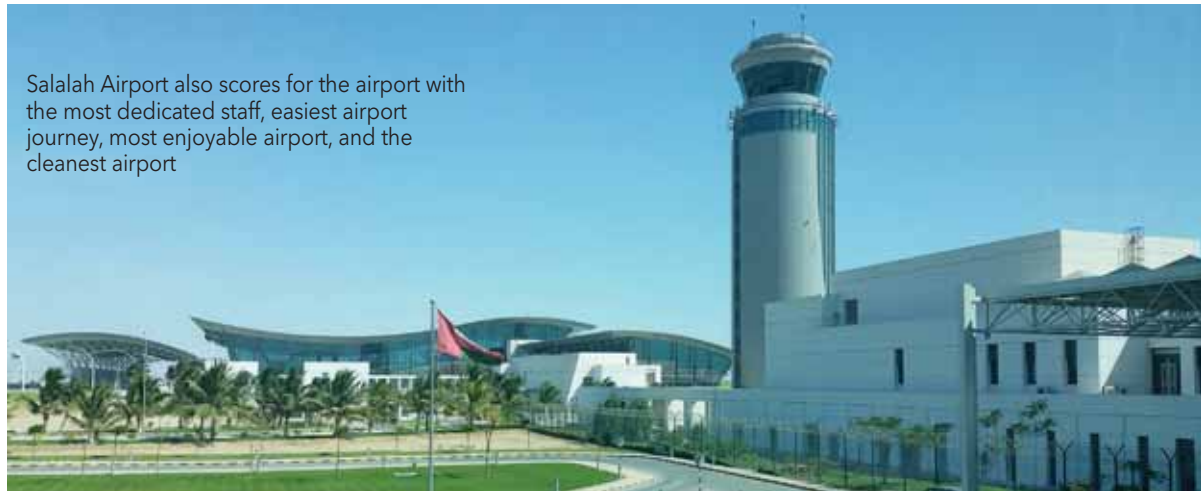
Including Muscat, eight airports were inducted into the ACI World Director General's Roll of Excellence — a recognition given to airports that have won multiple ASQ awards over five years in the last 10 years.

Salalah Airport is the best in the Middle East (under two million passengers per year) while Muscat International Airport

comes under the 15 to 25 million passengers per year category.

Salalah Airport also scores for the airport with the most dedicated staff, easiest airport journey, most enjoyable airport, and the cleanest airport.

As per the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of passengers travelling through Salalah Airport in January 2024 was 120,506, an increase of 14 per cent from 2022.



Salalah Airport also scores for the airport with the most dedicated staff, easiest airport journey, most enjoyable airport, and the cleanest airport

‘Hate speech criminal act’

ABDULLAH AL NASRI
MUSCAT, MARCH 11

The Sultanate of Oman called for an early containment of the phenomenon of hate speech and religious intolerance, through taking collective and preventive measures and by working on criminalising the public desecration of sacred books and symbols as well as places of worship for all people and nations.

This came in a statement by Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations and International organisations in Geneva, through their participation in the discussion panel about religious hatred organised by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva during the 55th session of the Human Rights Council.

Al Khanjari stated, “The desecration of holy books, places of worship and religious symbols are considered criminal acts, and have intentional goals and are not random or accidental. Regardless



Oman expresses its readiness to participate actively in spreading the culture of tolerance and peace in all international dialogue forums

Regardless of the intention of the parties behind these acts, regardless of their multiple forms and methods, it still remains a criminal act and a violation of the right of others to freedom of religion and belief

IDRIS AL KHANJARI

Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations

of the intention of the parties behind these acts, regardless of their multiple forms and methods, it still remains a criminal act and a violation of the right of others to freedom of religion and belief.”

“Their consequences extend to others, fuel feelings of hatred and incite violence between members of the same community,” he added, noting that the weakness of awareness level and the absence of deterrent rules, in addition to the divisive sectarian rhetoric, misunderstanding and intolerance are among the main reasons that cause religious hatred.

He explained that secularism and digital diffusion are a reality and a means that facilitated the spread of these actions and ideas on a wider scale.

Al Khanjari confirmed that the Sultanate of Oman expresses its readiness to participate actively in spreading the culture of tolerance and peace in all international dialogue forums, especially during the commemoration of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia.

Agreement signed to fund knee surgeries



The agreement will help cut down waiting lists and ease the burden on government health institutions. — ONA

MUSCAT: Athar Health Endowment Foundation and Saud Bahwan Charitable Foundation on Monday signed a financing agreement to the tune of RO 250,000 to perform knee replacement surgeries for patients with limited income.

The agreement's signing was in implementation of a strategy to achieve sustainability in financing health services (by finding alternatives), accelerate pace of health procedures, consolidate public-private sector partnership and encourage charitable collaboration among

members of society through Athar Health Endowment Foundation.

The agreement will help cut down waiting lists, ease the burden on government health institutions and enable patients to perform operations in the shortest possible time. The agreement was signed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Athar Endowment Health Foundation, and Sarah bint Mohammed Bahwan, who represented Saud Bahwan Charitable Foundation. — ONA

Strategies to enhance, empower national products bear fruits

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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While the Sultanate of Oman seeks to strengthen the national industry and protect it from unfair competition to ensure material gains for the national economy, Omani products are witnessing a renewed interest by consumers who are keen to support national industry.

The Ministry of Education witnessed the signing of an agreement with the Karwa Automobile Company and the Development Bank to replace 5,000 school buses with 1,000 buses every year. The project will be implemented within five years, starting from 2024 until 2028 in support of local content in the manufacture of these buses.

In its first phase during the year 2024, the project targets school transportation by replacing buses with a year of manufacture from 1980 to 1997, starting with the oldest and gradually moving up.

Those targeted in the replacement project and its controls will be communicated by the school transportation departments in the educational directorates in the governorates.



The Ministry of Education witnessed the signing of agreement with the Karwa Automobile Company and the Development Bank to replace 5,000 school buses with 1,000 buses every year

The Development Bank undertakes interest-free financing, in accordance with a number of specifications, namely financing the owners of the school transportation means to be replaced at a maximum amount of RO 22,500 and that each bus owner is entitled to one contract for those who meet interest-free financing conditions with the financing period of a maximum of 8 years.

As for bus owners who do not

meet the interest-free financing conditions, the bank will finance them at a rate of 3 per cent.

Majid bin Saeed al Bahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs, stated that Karwa Motors will provide the required number from the Ministry of Education annually, so that these buses are distinguished by security and safety systems, sensors and tracking devices, with high

specifications and technologies.

The drivers of these buses will be trained on defensive driving courses in coordination with one of the specialised training institutes such as the traffic safety institutes of the Royal Oman Police or the Oman Energy Association (OPAL), while the Development Bank is responsible for providing financing to the owners of the targeted school transportation means.

Dr Ibrahim bin Ali al Balushi,

CEO of Karwa Automotive Company, explained that the company's signing of these two agreements, the first: a framework agreement for government purchases, and the second includes 1,000 buses annually for 5 years, is an important step towards the localisation of the bus and vehicle industry in the Sultanate of Oman.

Among the campaigns to strengthen the local industry is the “Made in Oman” campaign, as it contributes to strengthening and diversifying the national economy and comes within

the industrial strategy with the aim of supporting the national industry by creating the appropriate investment climate for establishing new industries as well as developing existing industries by addressing existing challenges.

It is noteworthy that Omani products have a good reputation abroad in terms of quality and efficiency, and these products are sold as exports in more than 130 countries around the world in the construction, food and other promising sectors.



The Ministry of Education witnessed the signing of an agreement with the Karwa Automobile Company and the Development Bank to replace 5,000 school buses with 1,000 buses every year



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DOUBLE JOY

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THE first day of Ramadhan presents double joy — the joy of fasting and the joy of family gathering. The month of Ramadhan is an ideal opportunity to take advantage of its feasts with family and friends in order to benefit from oneness. In the midst of endless tasks, the first day is so busy that it is sometimes difficult to communicate with your family, so meeting around the iftar and suhoor table is a good opportunity to talk and communicate among family members. When preparing the Ramadhan table, it is important to understand and pay attention to the nutritional needs during the month by knowing the amount of energy and nutrients that the body needs. Ramadhan table must consist of foods rich in proteins, fiber, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. During Ramadhan, it is possible to reduce obesity as studies have shown that eating with family members reduces the rate of eating unhealthy food, and also prompts the individual to eat balanced amounts of food. This is exactly what we need in the month of Ramadhan when there are many fatty and

tempting food items. It is recommended to break the fast with food items that are easy to digest by starting breakfast with drinking water and eating dates and soup or salad and then waiting for 10-15 minutes before the main dish to avoid indigestion and other health problems. The Ramadhan table must consist of healthy dishes and foods that provide the body with the complete nutritional elements. Dates, which are one of the most important food items that should be present on the Ramadhan table, are rich in fiber and important minerals. They are also among the nutritious natural sugars that provide the body with energy. It is recommended to start breakfast with one to three dates to raise the sugar level in the body after long hours of fasting. While soups are one of the most important and indispensable foods on the Ramadhan table, it is recommended especially before the main course, because they are light on the stomach and do not cause any digestive problems and contribute to hydrating the body and enhancing the feeling of fullness. Among the most important healthy soups that can be included are lentil soup, vegetable soup, and soups that contain starchy foods, such as vermicelli soup.



Also, when preparing the Ramadhan table, you must pay attention to the presence of fresh vegetables among the dishes, and it is recommended to include leafy green vegetables in the salad. As salad gives refreshment and makes the fasting person eat less of the main dish, it

is recommended to use nuts with salad to increase the fiber content. For many, the main dish is the most important dish on the table and has priority. Attention must be paid to include the presence of most of the nutritional elements in the main dish and following healthy methods of

preparation. The most important components that must be present in the main dish are proteins, carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins and minerals. You should also make sure to drink a sufficient amount of water, as you should drink two to three cups of water every hour

from iftar to suhoor. Avoid eating too many sweets. Sweets contain added sugars and carbohydrates that are digested quickly and reduce fluids in the body, so it is recommended to replace them with fruits, especially those that contain a percentage of fluids, such as watermelon.

Editorial Announcement

Zen Development and Investment Unveils the Future of Harmonious Living with the Launch of Zen Residences at Muscat Bay

Muscat, Oman – March 2024, Under the patronage of His Excellency Khalfan bin Saeed Al-Shueili, the Omani Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, Zen Development and Investment announced the launch of its inaugural project, Zen Residences - Muscat Bay. The grand unveiling took place on March 6th at Jumeirah Muscat Bay at a unique ceremony attended by key stakeholders of the company, marking a momentous occasion in the Omani real estate sector. “In unveiling Zen Residences, we are not just launching a project, but bringing to life the very essence of our mission and vision at Zen Development and Investment,” expressed Mohammed Assaf, Partner and Director of Operations. “Our mission has been to create refined, innovative, and high-quality living environments that positively impact the community. With Zen Residences, we embody this commitment,



infusing every aspect of our design with sustainability, architectural brilliance, and a focus on community well-being. Zen Residences stands as a beacon of peaceful, harmonious, and inspiring living, encapsulating five state-of-the-art buildings nestled in the heart of Muscat Bay. The development offers an array of living options, ranging from studios to spacious 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom, 3-bedroom

apartments, and uniquely designed lofts. Each residence is crafted to blend seamlessly with the picturesque beauty of Muscat Bay, ensuring an unmatched living experience. Speaking at the event, Sheikh Hamood Al Hosni, CEO of Muscat Bay, expressed his profound excitement for the launch of Zen Residences within Muscat Bay community. He emphasized Muscat Bay's dedication to providing residents with an unparalleled living

experience centered around harmony, community, and modern comfort. He also underscored the collaboration with Zen Residences as a testament to this vision, aiming to offer residents a tranquil and fulfilling lifestyle that aligns perfectly with the ethos of Muscat Bay. Mr. Assaf continued: “Investing in Oman offers a unique opportunity; it's a land rich in culture and beauty, and at Zen Residences, we've

harnessed these elements to create a gated community in Muscat Bay that stands apart. Here, we offer not just homes, but a lifestyle that is harmonious with nature, filled with amenities that encourage community interaction and personal well-being. This is what makes Zen Residences a truly unique and valuable investment.” Zen Residences masterplan was revealed at the event. The exclusive development in Muscat Bay offers residents an enriching lifestyle with features like an Infinity Pool for serene relaxation, an Outdoor BBQ Area perfect for social gatherings, and an Outdoor Gym for health enthusiasts. The development also includes a dedicated Kids Play Area, a scenic Running Track, and a tranquil Zen Garden for relaxation and introspection. Beyond the comforts of home, residents have exclusive access to the unique attractions of Muscat Bay.



In the midst of endless tasks, Ramadhan days are so busy that it is sometimes difficult to communicate with your family, so meeting around the iftar and suhoor table is a good opportunity to indulge in family matters



ROP WARNS OF FAKE JOB OFFERS

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 11

The Directorate General of Criminal Investigations at the ROP has detected a new activity targeting youngsters, whereby a fraudulent announcement for fake jobs is sent via SMS to lure the victims and persuade them to carry out specific online businesses in return for financial profits.

“Once these amounts are transferred



to their bank accounts, they are asked to pay money to obtain a tempting prize, followed by other requests without the victims realising that they have fallen victim to an organised scam,” The Royal Oman Police (ROP) said in a statement.

ROP all citizens and residents to verify the authenticity and source of published announcements and report any relevant suspicions to the authorities concerned.

‘Oman reported 140 cases of cybercrime in 2023’

KABEER YOUSUF
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With the fast advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) comes a potential threat to people online which are mostly identity theft and imminent financial implications, according to a study conducted by Trend Micro, a leading global player in cybersecurity solutions.

In its recently released Security Predictions Report for 2024 titled ‘Critical Scalability’, the study emphasises the crucial need for organisations to adopt an advanced multilayered security approach to counter the growing attack surface.

Oman reported 140 cases of cybercrime in 2023, compared to 126 in 2022 while cases related to online content increased to 2,686 in 2023 from 2,519 in 2022.

On other hand, reports suggest that AI-enhanced phishing has affected over 90 per cent of organisations and contributed to a 222 per cent surge in email attacks in 2023 as compared to the second half of 2022.

The report underscores that in 2024, approximately 69 per cent of IT leaders view the integration of machine learning as a critical operational priority as a growing number of enterprises will adopt artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML)



Reports suggest that AI-enhanced phishing has affected over 90 per cent of organisations and contributed to a 222 per cent surge in email attacks in 2023

technologies in a bid to outgrow their competitors.

Although these technological advancements are anticipated to drive organisational growth, they also pose substantial risks, with bad actors exploiting these innovations to orchestrate attacks.

“With the launch of our Security Predictions Report for 2024, we aim to illuminate the path forward for enterprises in these dynamic times. We are able not only to identify emerging cyber threats but also to equip businesses and individuals with the strategies and tools to navigate this complex digital

terrain,” said Dr Moataz bin Ali, Regional Vice-President and Managing Director, MMEA, Trend Micro.

He added that understanding cybersecurity trends is vital for organisations navigating the rapidly shifting tech landscape and that this report is a testament to the dedication to proactive security, empowering regional organisations to stay ahead in an ever-evolving cyber landscape.

The report also predicts a major shift in the phishing landscape due to the widespread adoption and enhanced capabilities of Generative AI (GenAI)

and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs).

This shift allows for the use of highly realistic audio and video content at a lower cost, leading to an increase in sophisticated scams such as business email compromise (BEC), virtual kidnapping, and similar frauds.

The report further suggests that the 2024 landscape is expected to see heightened vulnerabilities in cloud environments, along with targeted attacks on software supply chains and blockchain technology, which could result in ransom demands or attempts to encrypt entire blockchains.

Symposium looks at technical, scientific transformation

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 11

A scientific symposium entitled ‘Technical and Scientific Transformation: Future Opportunities and Challenges’ was organised as part of the conclusion of the National Science, Technology and Mathematics Week programmes. The event was held under the auspices of Saud bin Said al Maawali, Vice-President of the Municipal Council, Al Batinah South Governorate.

The scientific symposium was held at the Omani Women Association’s building in Wadi Al Maawil in the presence of supervisors from the Al Batinah South’s Directorate of Education, school principals, teachers and parents.

Dr Zamzam bint Saif al Lamkiyah, Director of the National System Project for Capacity Building and Talent Management, Ministry of Labour presented her working paper entitled ‘The National System for Building Capabilities and Talent Management’.

The second paper entitled ‘Developing the Emerging Skills of Innovators’ was presented by Nabil bin Saif al Habsi, a researcher in the field of STEM while the third paper was presented by Bushra bint Mohammed al Ghaithiyah, PhD candidate in strategic



At the conclusion of the symposium, Saud bin Said al Maawali, Vice-President of the Municipal Council, Al Batinah South Governorate honoured the participants and supporters



planning and e-learning, an educational supervisor, Ministry of Education, under the title ‘Planning to Integrate Technology into Education’.

Yaqoub bin Zahir al Shaqsi, Head of the Applied Sciences Department, Al Batinah South Governorate’s General Directorate of

Education presented the recommendations of the symposium, most importantly building a comprehensive and detailed database of skilled people in the Sultanate of Oman, educators and parents must keep up with the rapid technological development to carry out their guiding role.

GLOBINVEST

The Global Omani Investment Company SAOC

ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

The Board of Directors of The Global Omani Investment Company SAOC is pleased to invite the Company’s shareholders to attend the company’s ordinary Annual General Meetings, to be held at 2:00 pm on **Wednesday, 27/03/2024**, via the electronic platform to hold general meetings which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, a second annual ordinary general meeting will be held on **Monday 01/04/2024** at the same time and place to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ report for the financial year ended December 31, 2023.
- To consider the Auditors’ Report and to approve the Financial Statements, Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account, for the financial year ended December 31, 2023.
- To consider and approve the transactions entered into by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended December 31, 2023.
- To consider and approve the transactions the company will enter into with related parties during the financial year ending on December 31, 2024.
- To approve the sitting fees of the Board meetings paid to the Board members for the financial year ended on 31/12/2023, and to determine the sitting fees for the next financial year ending on 31/12/2024.
- To consider and approve the proposal of distributing the total sum of RO 142(Thousand as remuneration for the Board of Directors of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2023.
- To appoint the Auditors for the Company for the financial year ending December 31, 2024, and to determine their fees.

According to the Company’s Articles of Association and the controls of holding General Meetings using electronic plat form, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Juristic persons only, have the right to appoint a natural person as a proxy to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder’s shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information, please contact Mr. Jamal Ahmed Al-Shanfari on phone 24489009 GSM: 92839933

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Consultante

SalamAir to restart summer destinations in June

MUSCAT: SalamAir has announced the revival of two of its summer destinations, Baku in Azerbaijan, and Almaty in Kazakhstan.

“The decision to restart services to Baku and Almaty is a testament to the popularity of these destinations and a response to the consistently high seat factor of 85 per cent and 87 per cent, respectively, experienced last year.

The robust demand has encouraged SalamAir to prioritise these routes, ensuring that travellers can once again enjoy the enchanting beauty and cultural richness that Baku and Almaty have to offer,” the airline said in a statement. “We are

thrilled to announce the reopening of Baku and Almaty due to popular demand,” said Capt Ahmed bin Mohammed al Shaithani, Acting CEO of SalamAir.

SalamAir operates two flights a week starting June 16 for Baku and June 18 for Almaty. About Almaty Nestled in the picturesque foothills of the Trans-Ili Alatau mountains, Almaty captivates visitors with its stunning natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. As the largest city in Kazakhstan, Almaty seamlessly blends modernity with tradition, boasting vibrant markets, ornate mosques, and bustling city squares.

Arabia Falcon Insurance

Notice and Invitation to Attend the Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of ARABIA FALCON INSURANCE CO. SAOG (the “Company”) has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Saturday at 05:00 PM on 30/03/2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om). If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting shall be held on Monday at 05:05 PM on 01/04/2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om)to discuss the following agenda:

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agendas :

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors on Company’s activity and its financial position for the financial year ended 31st December 2023.
- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors on corporate governance for the financial year ended 31st December 2023
- To consider the statutory auditors’ report and to approve the financial statements and the profit and loss account for the financial year ended 31st December 2023.
- To approve the sitting fees paid to Directors’ for attending meetings of the Board and sub committees for the previous financial year and to determine the Directors’ sitting fees for the upcoming financial year (as per annexure).
- To consider and approve the proposed Directors Remuneration of RO 70,000 (Seventy Thousand Omani Rials) for the financial year ended on 31st December 2023.
- To ratify the transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2023 (as per the annexure).
- To ratify the amounts paid towards social responsibility activities during the year ended 31st December 2023 (as per annexure).
- To consider the allocation of an amount of RO 10,000 (Ten Thousand Omani Rials)for Corporate Social Responsibility for the financial year ending 31st December 2024.
- To elect a new board of directors. Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete the nomination form. The completed forms should be sent to the Company at least five days prior to the AGM date. Nomination forms received after 5:00 pm on Monday, 25th of March 2024 shall not be accepted. The candidate must consider fulfilling the conditions prescribed for membership of the board of directors.
- To appoint statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31st December 2024 and determine their fees.

According to the Company’s Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority , we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder’s shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on telephone No 93329174 or email: a.altayeb@afic.om

Chairman
MAROUN KYRILLOS

Legal Advisor
ALBUSAIDY, MANSOOR JAMAL
BARRISTERS & LEGAL CONSULTANTS

External Auditor
MOORE STEPHENS



Ramadhan brings no relief as war rages

Jordan says Al Aqsa mosque restrictions risk ‘explosion’



A Palestinian searches for his belongings amid the rubble of houses destroyed by Israeli bombardment in Rafah. – AFP

GAZA: Gaza’s deadliest war showed no signs of abating as the Muslim holy month of Ramadhan began on Monday amid a gruelling humanitarian crisis that has pushed much of the territory to the brink of starvation.

UN and aid groups say only a fraction of the supplies needed for Gaza’s 2.4 million people have been allowed in since Israel placed it under near-total siege after the October 7 attack.

As the Muslim world welcomed Ramadhan with the customary daytime fast, many Gazans awoke to bombardment that saw residents once more search through the rubble of destroyed

homes for survivors and bodies.

“The start of Ramadhan has been sad and covered in darkness, with the taste and stench of blood everywhere,” said one displaced Palestinian man, Awni al Kayyal, 50.

“The Israeli occupation does not want us to have any joy during Ramadhan. We do not have any food for our iftar table,” he said, referring to the fast-breaking evening meal.

Fighting meanwhile raged on across Gaza, with the Israeli military reporting that troops killed 15 Palestinian fighters “in close encounters, sniper fire and air strikes”.

Many Gazans awoke to bombardment that saw residents once more search through the rubble of destroyed homes for survivors and bodies

It added that “several operatives were arrested” during raids on homes in southern Gaza, while witnesses reported violent clashes in several areas through the night.

Gaza’s health ministry said at least 67 people were killed over the past 24 hours.

The government media office said separately that more than 40 air strikes targeted homes in Khan Younis, Gaza City and other areas.

In Saudi Arabia, King Salman called in his Ramadhan message for the international community to “uphold its responsibilities to put an end to these heinous crimes” in Gaza.

UN Chief Antonio Guterres expressed his “solidarity and support to all those suffering from the horrors in Gaza. In these trying times, the spirit of Ramadhan is a beacon of hope, a reminder of our shared humanity.”

Responding to growing US and domestic pressure, Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday said most Israelis back “the action that we’re taking to destroy the remaining battalions”.

He said Israel’s military had killed “at least 13,000 fighters”, without detailing how the figure was derived.

Israel believes that 99 hostages still in Gaza remain alive and 31 have died.

The UN has reported particular difficulty in accessing northern Gaza for deliveries of food and other aid.

What is available in the south is sold at exorbitant prices, residents say, making this Ramadhan harder than any before. — AFP

AMMAN: Jordan’s Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said on Monday restrictions imposed by Israel on Muslim worshippers’ access to Al Aqsa Mosque compound during the Muslim fasting month was pushing the situation towards an “explosion”.

In remarks on state media, Safadi said his country, which overviews the holy site, rejected Israel’s announced move to limit access during Ramadhan, citing security needs with war raging in Gaza.

“We warn that desecrating the sanctity of Al Aqsa Mosque is playing with fire,” Safadi said in a joint news conference with the Vatican’s foreign minister Archbishop Paul Gallagher.

Jordan echoes the Palestinian view that such restrictions on Muslim worshippers, already facing war and hunger in Gaza, were an attack on freedom of worship.

“Not allowing worshippers to perform their religious duties and their rituals in this holy month and restricting freedom to enter the Aqsa mosque, all that pushes towards an explosive situation which is what we are warning about,” Safadi added.

Israel was also risking wider violence in the Israeli occupied West Bank by what Safadi said were unilateral Israeli measures to change the status quo citing accelerated Jewish settlement building on Arab land and what he termed as stepped up “terror attacks by armed settlers on Palestinian villagers.”

The West Bank is boiling,” Safadi added.

The West Bank has since the Gaza war seen a surge of confrontations, with around 400 Palestinians killed in clashes with security forces or Jewish settlers.

The holy month of Ramadhan came at a time when Palestinians in the enclave were dying of hunger with Israel using food as a weapon of war, Safadi said.

“Ramadhan comes with Gaza bombed by Israel and women unable to find food for their children and five months that have passed with the world failing to preserve human dignity,” Safadi said. — Reuters

UN chief urges ‘silencing the guns’ in the enclave

UNITED NATIONS: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on Monday for “silencing the guns” in Gaza in honour of the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadhan.

Guterres told reporters that Ramadhan celebrates “peace, reconciliation and solidarity. Yet even though Ramadhan has begun — the killing, bombing and bloodshed continue in Gaza.”

He urged the release of captives and removal of all obstacles to “ensure the delivery of lifesaving aid at the speed and massive scale required.”

The United Nations says that lack of humanitarian aid means famine is a growing risk in Gaza, where 2.4 million people are under near-total siege by the Israeli military, as it battles Palestinians.

The war, started by the October 7 attack on Israel, has resulted in the deaths of 31,112 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in Gaza.

US President Joe Biden called for a temporary ceasefire ahead of Ramadhan but his call went unanswered as Muslims in Gaza marked the start of the one-month holiday on Monday.

Guterres said, “The eyes of history are watching.”

“We cannot look away. We must act to avoid more preventable deaths,” Guterres said.

“We have witnessed month after month of civilian killing and destruction at a level that is



A picture shows smoke billowing over Khan Yunis during Israeli bombardment. – AFP

unprecedented in all my years as Secretary-General,” he said.

But aid “is coming in trickles — if it comes at all. International humanitarian law lies in tatters.”

The war between Israel and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip has cast a long shadow over festivities in the region, with hopes dashed that a ceasefire agreement could be reached before Ramadhan began.

At a market in Rafah, the southern Gaza city where nearly 1.5 million people have sought refuge, Palestinians on Sunday bemoaned food shortages and wartime uncertainty hanging over the holy month.

We have witnessed month after month of civilian killing and destruction at a level that is unprecedented in all my years as Secretary-General

ANTONIO GUTERRES
UN Secretary-General

“Of course, this Ramadhan is completely different from all the Ramadhans that have gone before it,” said Bassel Yassin, an agricultural engineer.

Hassuna Tabib Hassnan, a dentist displaced from Gaza City in the north, said he didn’t know how the month would end — “in our homes, in a tent, by the sea in the north or in the south”.

The United Nations has warned that famine in the Palestinian territory is “almost inevitable” unless something changes in the war, with aid trickling in at levels far below the pre-war norm. — AFP

Aid ship stuck in Cyprus still not on its way

GAZA: The delivery of humanitarian aid for the Gaza Strip from Cyprus continues to be delayed, with still no clarity as of Monday afternoon about when the Open Arms ship would leave the harbour in Larnaca.

Cypriot Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos said on the radio that the delay is related to issues concerning the unloading and distribution of the aid supplies. “There have been problems with some of these issues,” he said.

A second shipment of humanitarian aid is waiting at the port of Larnaca and could be delivered to Gaza in the next few days.

Professor of political science and head of the Cyprus Research Centre (KYKEM), Christos Iakovou, said on Cypriot television that the ship’s repeatedly postponed departure

is due to Israel wanting to ensure that the aid is not accepted and distributed by the Palestinian organisations.

According to the Cypriot government in Nicosia, the ship Open Arms, which is set to tow a cargo platform, has around 200 tonnes of drinking water, medicine and food on board.

The launch of the aid corridor by sea last weekend was announced by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides on Friday. Larnaca is around 400 kilometres from Gaza. Experts estimate that the journey there could take 48 to 60 hours.

The US military wants to set up a temporary port together with international partners, but according to the US, its construction will take two months. — dpa



The Open Arms vessel (C) is pictured in the Cypriot port of Larnaca. – AFP



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In brief

■ JAKARTA



DEATH TOLL FROM FLOODS, LANDSLIDES RISES TO 26

The death toll from flash flooding and landslides on the Indonesian island of Sumatra has risen to 26, an official said on Monday, with at least 11 people still missing.

Torrential rains triggered the disaster in West Sumatra province, where rivers overflowed and landslides swallowed homes. “Eleven people are still missing while 26 others have been found dead,” said Abdul Muhari, spokesman for the National Disaster Mitigation Agency.

In Pesisir Selatan, 23 people were found dead and six were still missing, according to Fajar Sukma, an official from West Sumatra agency. — AFP

■ NEW DELHI



INDIA TESTS MISSILE CAPABLE OF CARRYING WARHEADS

India has successfully test-fired a domestically developed ballistic missile capable of carrying multiple nuclear warheads for the first time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday.

Modi said he was “proud” the launch of “the first flight test of indigenously developed Agni-5 missile with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology”, in comments on social media platform X.

The MIRV enables the Agni-5 to carry several nuclear warheads at once. Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh said that India had “joined the select group of nations” capable of the missile technology. — AFP

■ KINGSTON



EMERGENCY SUMMIT TO ADDRESS SPIRALING HAITI CRISIS

Envoys from key nations were set to meet on Monday in Jamaica to address the spiraling instability in Haiti, where gang violence has crippled the capital and forced foreign diplomats to evacuate over the weekend.

The CARICOM group of Caribbean nations has summoned its leaders as well as envoys from the United States, France, Canada and the United Nations to a meeting in Kingston, Jamaica to discuss the crisis. The United States was sending its top diplomat, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who departed Washington for Kingston on Monday morning. — AFP

Ukraine says downed 15 of 25 Russian drones targeting Odesa

KYIV: Ukrainian air defences shot down 15 out of 25 Russian drones launched in an overnight attack on the southern Odesa region, but an infrastructure facility was hit, the military and regional officials said on Monday.

The military said in a statement that 10 drones were downed in the skies over the Black Sea port of Odesa.

“Another massive nighttime drone attack by the Russians in the Odesa region. Combat work lasted for one hour and a half,” said Oleh Kiper, the Odesa regional governor.

“Air defence units repelled many waves of drones coming from the Black Sea via complex manoeuvres and between residential buildings and industrial districts, that made air defence work more difficult.”

Kiper said that an infrastructure facility, an administrative building, and some commercial buildings were damaged. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The southern Odesa region has come under six Russian drone attacks so far this month.

Russia has intensified bombardments of Ukrainian ports, including Odesa, and grain infrastructure after Moscow last summer pulled out of a UN-brokered deal that allowed some food exports to flow, despite the war, now in its third year.

Ukraine is a major agricultural producer and exporter and Kyiv has since set up an alternative corridor to ship its products via its Black Sea ports near Odesa.

Ukrainian officials have said that exports of different cargo



A woman walks past a medical vehicle of the Russian Army with portraits of Russian servicemen, in Saint Petersburg. — AFP

Air defence units repelled many waves of drones coming from the Black Sea via complex manoeuvres and between residential buildings and industrial districts

OLEH KIPER

Odesa regional governor

— including grains and metal — from Ukrainian Black Sea ports reached nearly pre-invasion levels last month.

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said late on Sunday that the Russian military had launched 175 drones on different targets in Ukraine since the start of March. Ukraine downed 151 of them, he said.

Meanwhile, former US leader Donald Trump will not give money to help Ukraine fight Russia if he wins the presidency again and that will hasten an end to the war, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said after meeting him.

Nationalist premier Orban, who is backing his long-time ally's bid to return to White House, met Trump in Florida on Friday.

“He will not give a penny into the Ukraine-Russia war and therefore the war will end,” Orban told state television late on Sunday. “As it is obvious that Ukraine on its own cannot stand on its feet.”

“If the Americans do not give money and weapons, and also the Europeans, then this war will be over. And if the Americans do not give money the Europeans are unable to finance this war on their own, and then the war will end.” — Reuters

Nato marks Sweden with flag-raising

BRUSSELS: Nato marked Sweden's entry into the alliance on Monday with a flag-raising ceremony on a cold and rainy morning in Brussels.

“Sweden has taken its rightful place at Nato's table,” Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said at alliance headquarters, speaking alongside Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson.

Sweden's accession expands the Western defence alliance to 32 members, and the country is now protected by Nato's powerful collective defence pact, article 5, after breaking from a 200-year tradition of non-alignment.

Finland and Sweden both asked to join the alliance in May 2022, following Russian President Vladimir Putin's full-scale attack of Ukraine in February of that year.

Finland managed to join Nato ahead of Sweden after Turkiye, and later Hungary, opposed Stockholm's entry. Ankara pursued and received greater commitments from Sweden to combat terrorism.

All Nato members have to formally approve new members. Budapest never spelled out a specific objection to Swedish membership and promised Hungary would not be the last country to ratify, although it did turnout this



Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg (C) gives a speech next to Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden and Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson during a flag raising ceremony for Sweden's accession to Nato at the North Atlantic Alliance headquarters in Brussels. — AFP

way.

Russia warned Finland and Sweden against joining the alliance with ambiguous threats of a retaliation, however Kristersson detailed no major concern.

“We should not be naive. And I think we are more aware of the risks that they pose to us now than we have ever been before,” he said. “So simply still stay alert,” Kristersson added.

Sweden's accession expands the Western defence alliance to 32 members, and the country is now protected by Nato's powerful collective defence pact

The new Nato member would also not be hosting US nuclear weapons for the moment, according to the Swedish prime minister.

“We fully understand the need for all of Nato's defence capabilities, including the nuclear strategy,” he said, stressing that Sweden does not see the need to place US nuclear weapons on Swedish soil during peace time.

As a Nato member, Sweden could potentially become part of the nuclear sharing concept. This is based on US nuclear weapons stationed in Europe and deployed via European countries like Germany.

The Bundeswehr, for example, has fighter planes available to be able to deploy US nuclear bombs in an emergency. Around 20 thermonuclear B61 gravity bombs belonging to the US armed forces are said to be stored in Büchel in the Eifel region, although this has never been officially confirmed.

Another part of nuclear sharing involves the use of nuclear weapon shield by the European Nato states like Great Britain and France. As well as Germany, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands are also involved in nuclear sharing. — dpa

South Korea to suspend licences of 4,900 striking doctors

SEOUL: South Korea said on Monday it had started procedures to suspend the medical licences of 4,900 junior doctors who have resigned and stopped working to protest government medical training reforms, causing healthcare chaos.

The walkout, which started on February 20, is over government plans to sharply increase the number of doctors, which it says is essential to combat shortages and serve South Korea's rapidly ageing population.

Nearly 12,000 junior doctors — 93 per cent of the trainee workforce — were not in their hospitals at the last count, despite government back-to-work orders and threats of legal action, forcing Seoul to mobilise military medics and millions of dollars in state reserves to ease the situation.

The health ministry on Monday said it had sent administrative notifications — the first step towards suspending medical licences — to thousands of trainee doctors after they defied specific orders telling them to return to their hospitals.

“As of March 8 notifications have been sent to more than 4,900 trainee doctors,” Chun Byung-wang, director of the health and medical policy division at the health ministry, told reporters.

The government has previously warned striking doctors that they face a three-month suspension of their licences, a punishment it says will delay by at least a year their ability to qualify as specialists.

Chun urged the striking medics to return to their patients. “The government will take into account the circumstance and protect trainee doctors if they return to work before the administrative measure is complete,” he said, indicating that doctors who come back to work now could avoid the punishment.

“The government will not give up dialogue. The door for dialogue is always open ... The government will respect and listen to opinions of the medical community as a companion for the medical reforms,” he added.

The government last week announced new measures to improve pay and conditions for trainee medics, plus a review of the continuous 36-hour work period, which is a major gripe of junior doctors. The strikes have led to surgery cancellations, long wait times and delayed treatments at major hospitals.

Seoul has denied that there is a full-blown healthcare crisis, but Chun said that military doctors will start working in civilian hospitals from Wednesday this week. — AFP



Medical workers walk outside a children hospital in Seoul. — AFP

Ramadhan and Eid across Islamic nations



Dr Khalfan Hamed Al Harrasi

The writer is In-Country Manager, University of Cambridge (Oman)

As the crescent moon signals the arrival of Ramadhan, millions of Muslims around the world embark on a month-long journey of fasting, prayer, and reflection. This holy month holds immense significance in Islam, commemorating the revelation of the Quran to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and the beginning of the Prophet message. From dawn till dusk, believers abstain from food, drink, and other physical needs as an act of worship and obedience to Allah, focusing instead on spiritual growth, charity, and community. Muslims engage in increased acts of worship, including recitation of the Quran, nightly prayers known as Taraweeh, and acts of charity. The fast, known as Sawm, serves as a reminder of the plight of the less fortunate and encourages empathy and compassion towards those in need. The culmination of Ramadhan is marked by Eid al Fitr, a joyous occasion celebrated with prayers, feasts, and acts of generosity. This festival not only signifies the completion of fasting but also emphasises the values of gratitude, compassion and unity among Muslims worldwide. Across Arab and Islamic countries, Ramadhan and Eid al Fitr are

observed with unique cultural traditions and fervour, enriching the tapestry of diversity within the Muslim community. From Morocco to Indonesia, each region adds its own flavour to the festivities, creating a mosaic of celebrations that showcase the richness of Islamic heritage. In countries like Saudi Arabia, the call to prayer resonates through the streets, signalling the breaking of the fast at sunset. Families gather around lavish Iftar meals, often featuring traditional dishes like dates, lentil soup and lamb kebabs. In Egypt, the streets come alive with vibrant decorations, colourful lanterns, and bustling markets known as ‘Ramadhan tents’ where families gather to break their fast together. Traditional dishes like ‘koshari’ and ‘fattah’ are prepared alongside sweet treats such as ‘qatayef’ and ‘katayef ashta,’ adding to the festive atmosphere. While in Turkey, the month of Ramadhan is synonymous with the sound of drums echoing through the neighbourhoods before dawn, awakening residents for their pre-dawn meal, known as ‘Suhur.’ The breaking of the fast at sunset, or ‘Iftar,’ is a communal affair, with families and friends sharing meals at lavish feasts called ‘Iftar parties.’ Also in Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim-

IN OMAN,
THE SPIRIT OF
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SOCIETY

majority country, Ramadhan is a time of spiritual introspection and social solidarity. The streets are adorned with decorative lights, and mosques are filled with worshippers performing nightly prayers, known as ‘Taraweeh.’ Families visit the graves of their loved ones and engage in acts of charity, known as ‘Zakat,’ to help those in need. While the essence of Ramadhan and Eid al Fitr remains consistent across borders, each country adds its own cultural nuances and traditions to the festivities. In Oman, the spirit of Ramadhan is deeply ingrained in the fabric of society. Omani families gather for ‘iftar’ meals that feature traditional dishes, with Eid celebration featuring ‘orsiyah,’ mashed rice served with ‘shuwa,’ a slow-cooked lamb or goat marinated in a blend of spices and cooked in an underground oven. In Ramadhan, communities come together at mosques for nightly prayers and Quran recitations. The spirit of giving and compassion is evident throughout Oman during Ramadhan and Eid al Fitr, as families distribute food and gifts to those in need, ensuring that everyone can partake in the joyous festivities.

AI talent war heats up in Europe

MARTIN COULTER

An influx of artificial intelligence (AI) startups is heating up the battle for technical talent in Europe, leaving companies like Google DeepMind to choose between paying big or losing out on the region’s best minds. The runaway success of OpenAI’s ChatGPT has energised investors, who have been pouring money into promising AI startups, eager to uncover the next overnight success. Riding the investment wave, a crop of foreign AI firms — including Canada’s Cohere and US-based Anthropic and OpenAI — opened offices in Europe last year, adding to pressure on tech companies already trying to attract and retain talent in the region. Founded in 2010 and acquired by Google in 2014, London-based DeepMind made its name applying AI to everything from board games to structural biology. Now the firm faces a host of well-funded rivals flooding its territory, while a growing number of its employees have quit to launch their own ventures. Recent high-profile exits include co-founder Mustafa Suleyman, who left to set up California-based Inflection AI alongside LinkedIn billionaire Reid Hoffman, and research scientist Arthur Mensch, now CEO of Mistral AI. Both companies have received multi-billion dollar valuations in the short time they have been active. In an apparent effort to discourage staff from joining other companies or starting their own, DeepMind gave a handful of senior researchers access to restricted stock, worth millions of dollars, earlier this year, according to a source familiar with the matter. “It’s a competitive space for sure,” a DeepMind spokesperson said, adding that the company “continues to do well in attracting and nurturing talent”. According to executive search firm Avery Fairbank, there has been an “exponential increase” in pay for C-suite staff at AI companies in Britain over the last year. “The entrance of foreign AI giants such as Anthropic and Cohere into London’s market will further escalate the competition for AI talent,” said Charlie Fairbank, the firm’s managing director. Executives on base salaries of around £350,000 have seen pay packets jump between £50,000 and £100,000, he said. Cohere, which designs in-house chatbots and other tools for its customers, hired Phil Blunsom, a lead researcher at DeepMind for seven years, as its chief scientist in 2022. Sebastian Ruder also joined Cohere from DeepMind in January. — Reuters

The role of advanced technologies in wars



Dr Muamar bin Ali Al Tobi

The writer is Omani academic and researcher

Follow Western journalism and media, both written and visual, out of a desire to understand how they handle various global issues, including the Palestinian conflict with the occupying Israeli entity. The Western media’s coverage of this issue often exhibits a double standards - by comparing their reactions to similar global conflicts - and systematic falsification aimed at distorting facts to support the oppressor and occupier, the Israeli entity. This is not to generalise, as there are Western efforts by individuals and political and humanitarian organisations that adhere to journalistic integrity. The falsification has reached the point of publishing fake images using artificial intelligence technologies, such as fabricating a video clip of the bombing of the Al Mamdani Hospital in Gaza, which was bombed by the occupying entity. Israel tried to deny this heinous crime and attribute it to the Palestinian resistance. However, the video Israel published was proven to be fake and altered, exposing the falsehood of the Israeli narrative and confirming their commission of the crime and deliberate lying. Similarly, claims of the Palestinian resistance burning an Israeli child and publishing a photo of a charred child’s body were later debunked as fake, created using AI technologies and originally a photo of a ‘dog’. American political activist Jackson Hinkle was among the first to point out the falsification of this image by comparing it to the original. Hinkle, like others in the West and East who defend the Palestinian cause, has faced and continues to face pressures from government and private institutions supporting the Israeli entity. This resulted in the shutdown of his YouTube channel, which had over 300,000 followers, and actions like The Guardian’s dismissal of British cartoonist Steve Bell for drawing a satirical cartoon of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, disregarding the values of freedom of speech advocated by the West. The role of smart technologies is not limited to falsifying images and videos but extends to introducing “self-serving” AI algorithms on various social media platforms like those owned by Meta (Instagram, Facebook,



A Palestinian child plays with sparklers in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, on the eve of the holy month of Ramadhan on Monday. – AFP

and Threads) and Google’s YouTube. These platforms are among the most supportive of the occupying entity through their intelligent algorithms designed to selectively filter content and ban specific accounts based on political or religious orientations, reflecting these platforms’ ethical double standards, bias, and lack of freedom of expression. These policies, influenced by the pressures from some Western governments, aim to sway public opinion in favour of the Western stance that supports the existence and victory of the occupying entity, even at the expense of the Palestinian cause and the oppression and killing of its people. THE FALSIFICATION HAS REACHED THE POINT OF PUBLISHING FAKE IMAGES USING AI TECHNOLOGIES This strategy has been relatively successful on most social media platforms mentioned earlier and relatively unsuccessful on others like the X platform (formerly Twitter), where owner Elon Musk has adhered to principles of free speech and neutrality despite pressures from some Western governments. In any case, this behaviour by some social media platforms is expected,

especially in military conflicts. The West is concerned with its political and economic interests, partly tied to the existence and dominance of the Israeli entity, among other historical reasons. These platforms, owned by Western companies, have no choice but to follow the policies of their governments and owners. The policies of supporting the occupying entity are not limited to this aspect; channels like Al Aqsa TV, which supports the Palestinian cause and reports on its events, have been shut down by stopping their broadcast via the Eutelsat satellite following pressures from the French government. The impact of smart technologies on the course of these events and their influence on public engagement is evident. However, we have not lost the counter-efforts that strive to convey the true picture and expose all forms of falsification. It’s crucial that such digitally influenced events guide our directions in digital and technological investments and redefine our understanding of the importance of these technologies. Nations committed to human justice should allocate a special place for developing independent smart technologies like social media platforms, satellites, cloud computing, and AI systems. Achieving this requires a comprehensive and serious development of education at all levels, attention to and generous support for scientific research, encouragement for establishing digital and technological companies, and supporting them.

Opportunity to realign, rethink...

After eleven months every year this beautiful month arrives - the holy month of Ramadhan. Everyone sails into another zone to cleanse thoughts and words with fasting and prayers. It takes determination to move from the comfort zone filled with patterns and habits.

Habits make us they say, but here is a chance we get after 11 months to review our habits and leave behind what is not useful or the ones that are harmful.

The beauty of Ramadhan is that the whole society goes through the same process and so it is a collective motivation. Some are of the view that they feel so energised and motivated leading to clarity of mind, which is why they feel it could be the most productive month of the year.

Dr Elva Selhub in her article on Harvard Health Blog, titled 'Nutritional Psychiatry: Your brain on food,' says that the brain is working constantly and so it needs fuel. She points out that the type of fuel is important, "This means your brain requires a constant supply of fuel. That "fuel" comes from the foods you eat — and what's in that fuel makes all the difference. Put simply, what you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and, ultimately, your mood."

So the next few days there is an element of intermittent fasting too.

We care for our vehicles and we would want the best fuel for them. We think of its engine performance and longevity. We are quick to think of services. Yet we never think about the fuel we use for our brain.

Dr Selhub points out that, "Since about 95 per cent of serotonin is produced in the gastrointestinal tract, and the gastrointestinal tract is lined with a hundred million nerve cells, or neurons, it makes sense that the inner workings of the digestive system don't just help you digest food, but also guide your emotions."

Think about it, a pen needs ink, even if you say who writes with a pen these days in the digital world, the fact is even



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THE BEAUTY OF RAMADHAN IS THAT THE WHOLE SOCIETY GOES THROUGH THE SAME PROCESS AND SO IT IS A COLLECTIVE MOTIVATION

the equipment needed to be charged and they need energy, whether it is solar, wind or electricity.

Even in energy today we have to consider whether we want to use clean energy or fossil fuel. We know their attributes have an impact on environment. And so we can imagine the impact of refined, sweetened and modified food we consume.

Then of course we have to consider what fuel we are using for our mind. What is that we listen to, what do we read and watch. Information Age has come with advantages and disadvantages like everything thing else in the world.

Access to information is everywhere. We don't have to carry books around it is all on our phones. What we read and watch have great impact on our thinking process. So often it even impacts the personality. An example is the negative impact of video gaming on people's behaviour.

However video learning has many benefits for students because it has proven to be successful in getting student engagement and the ability to grasp. There is an element of dualism here — where we realise it could have negative impact but it can also have positive qualities. The choice is ours. That is the beauty of life.

In other words, we just don't have exams in schools and colleges, life is full of tests and exams. It is full of multiple choices (MCQs). We have to choose the correct answers and to do that we need to continuously learn, from books and experiences of people as well as by contemplating.

In the past, families collected stories to teach the young ones.

People have beautiful personal stories too. How they learned what they learnt.

In life we need to learn to make intelligent choices. This is were the experts ask, "What fuel are we using for the brain?"

It consists of nutritional and intellectual elements.

What company are we keeping? What are we talking about? What are we reading about and listening to? And after 11 months here is our opportunity to rethink, realign and redesign.

ANIMAL SUPPORT!



Belgian Wendy Adriaens, the founder of De Passiehoeve, an animal rescue farm where animals support people with autism, depression, anxiety, or drug problems, offers a hug to Pino, a 10-month-old male ostrich at Passiehoeve farm, in Kalmthout, Belgium. — Reuters

Making climate finance affordable

Emerging-market and developing economies (EMDEs) will need an estimated \$2.4 trillion in climate investment annually to meet climate goals, according to the Independent High-Level Expert Group on Climate Finance, with \$1 trillion coming from external sources. Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will require even more financing: an increase of \$3.5 trillion in new investments annually by 2030. These are daunting figures. But they are also nonnegotiable.

Raising trillions of dollars in new external finance would be difficult at the best of times. It is even trickier when the world is facing an escalating debt crisis. After examining newly available data on 108 EMDEs, the Boston University Global Development Policy Centre found that more than half – 62 countries — are already at high risk of debt distress. Moreover, an additional 33 countries are severely constrained in their ability to access capital markets, owing largely to poor economic-growth prospects following the Covid-19 pandemic, advanced-economy interest-rate hikes, and below-investment-grade bond ratings.

The vast majority of EMDEs are thus facing debt distress or prohibitively high borrowing costs. But these are precisely the countries that are most in need of financing to meet climate and development goals. Of these 95 countries, 83 have higher needs for



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investment in climate-change mitigation (lowering emissions) or adaptation (building resilience against extreme weather events) than the typical (median) country. And 73 of them have more potential to expand their national protected areas, either on land or in their coastal waters, than the typical country.

A key problem is that investments in, say, protecting nature do not necessarily boost short-term economic growth. Instead, they build long-term resilience – including a greater ability to withstand extreme weather events like hurricanes and droughts – thereby making future crises less likely. This includes future debt crises: climate vulnerability and nature loss can undermine debt sustainability, and climate change increases sovereign risk and the cost of capital.

To break the cycle of environmental and economic crises, and move towards a new cycle of sustainable growth, countries must invest now. That is why any strategy for addressing climate change and delivering on the SDGs must include measures to lower barriers to new finance, including targeted debt relief and more creative financing arrangements.

Debt relief is unavoidable. An ambitious debt-relief initiative akin to the Highly Indebted Poor

Countries Initiative, which the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank established in 1996, should be created to provide meaningful debt relief for the dozens of countries facing full-blown sovereign-debt crisis.

For this to work, all creditors must actively participate. To understand why, consider that at least half of the total external sovereign debt stock in 27 debt-distressed countries – many of which are low-income countries or small island developing states – is owed to multilateral creditors. This means that, even if all bilateral and private debt were cancelled, some of the world's most vulnerable

countries would remain weighed down by debt.

Major creditors must also take steps to reduce the cost of capital for certain types of investments, such as those that advance climate goals. To this end, many proposals have already been put forward. For example, Sustainable Future Bonds may allow for longer repayment terms and lower interest rates, making them better suited for investments with longer-term payouts.

Multilateral development banks (MDBs) also have an important role to play in providing EMDEs with easier access to capital. For example, they can raise the

threshold for countries to access concessional lending, pursue capital increases that support higher lending, and work with governments and the private sector to reduce and share risks.

Making financing for climate action and conservation affordable is among the most urgent challenges confronting the world. The solution is clear: a combination of targeted debt relief, credit enhancements, and MDB reform. But so far, there has been a lack of will to implement it. If this does not change soon, we will learn firsthand that the costs of inaction far outweigh the costs of prevention.

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Raising trillions of dollars in new external finance would be difficult at the best of times.

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Inter Miami's #5 Sergio Busquets fights for the ball against Montreal's #4 Fernando Alvarez, #25 Gabriele Corbo and #16 Joel Waterman. — AFP

MESSI-LESS MIAMI BEATEN BY MONTREAL IN MLS

Miami: Inter Miami slumped to their first defeat of the Major League Soccer season on Sunday, losing 3-2 at home to Montreal after the Herons opted to rest Argentine superstar Lionel Messi.

Fernando Alvarez, Matias Coccaro and Sunusi Ibrahim scored the goals for Montreal, who moved into second place in the Eastern Conference standings where they trail Miami on goal difference.

Miami coach Gerardo “Tata”

Martino opted to rest several of his first choice starting line-up, with Messi omitted from the squad altogether and Luis Suarez and Sergio Busquets on the bench.

But the wisdom of that decision soon came under scrutiny after Montreal dominated the early exchanges before Alvarez headed the visitors into the lead from a corner in the 13th minute.

Miami slowly worked themselves into the game thereafter, and Jordi Alba had the

ball in the net in the 17th minute only for it to be disallowed for offside.

The hosts came close to an equaliser just before half-time after Julian Gressel’s superb through ball released Robert Taylor.

Finland international Taylor deftly lifted his finish over advancing Montreal goalkeeper Jonathan Sirois, only to watch as it crashed back off the cross bar.

Taylor should have equalised moments later but his header

from ‘Tomas Aviles’ inviting cross went straight at Sirois who gathered easily.

Miami continued to carve out openings in the second half, and had the ball in the net in the 59th minute when Taylor was adjudged offside after setting up Leonardo Campana.

But Miami finally got back on level terms in the 71st minute, with Campana heading home at the back post after a pinpoint cross from Lawson Sunderland.

Yet Miami’s hopes of

preserving their unbeaten start to the season were left in tatters after Montreal scored twice in three minutes soon afterwards.

Coccaro made it 2-1 after heading home Mathias Choiniere’s cross, and then Nigerian forward Sunusi Ibrahim made it 3-1 with a deflected effort after a sweeping Montreal counter-attack.

Alba raised hopes of an Inter Miami fightback with a fabulous 80th minute strike from the edge of the area that curled into the

top corner, but despite a late Miami onslaught, the visitors held on to take all three points.

In other MLS games on Sunday, Cincinnati were held to a 0-0 draw at home to D.C. United, while in Nashville, Los Angeles Galaxy recovered from 2-0 down to snatch a 2-2 draw on the road. Teal Bunbury’s penalty and Dru Yearwood’s 58th-minute goal put Nashville 2-0 up, but Galaxy fought back to draw with goals from Riqui Puig and Dejan Joveljic. — AFP

Oman to host bodybuilding and fitness championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAR 11

The Sultanate of Oman represented by the Oman Bodybuilding Committee (OBC) will host the West Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Championship in August in Muscat.

The announcement of hosting this major event took place during the 17th edition of the Oman bodybuilding and fitness championship which was concluded recently at the main hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher with the participation of more than 165 athletes across the Sultanate of Oman.

The forthcoming wide event will be held in Muscat during



August 15 to 17, at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. It is expected the event will feature attendance of many athletes representing different part of the West Asian zone.

During the Oman bodybuilding and fitness championship, Rafael Santonja, President of the International Fitness and Bodybuilding Federation (IFBB) attended the two days event beside attendance of many other officials including Chairman of Jordan bodybuilding Association, Chairman of West Asian Federation, Executive Director of Saudi bodybuilding Association and many other official delegates.

The event saw also awarding four Professional cards to the

winners of the Championship. The tournament was dedicated for the Oman’s and expatriates athletes to give more chances for the athletes who are living in the Sultanate of Oman. The first day of the championship was for physique category while the following day was for the competitions of the bodybuilding.

HH Sayyid Khalid bin Ghalib al Said was the chief guest of the final day and he delivered the awards to the top winners in presence of Dr Salim bin Said al Bahri, Chairman of OBC. The top winners of both categories will represent the Sultanate of Oman during the forthcoming wide Bodybuilding and Fitness events.

Vingegaard takes Tirreno-Adriatico in one of ‘biggest wins’



Jonas Vingegaard crossing finish line

MILAN: Jonas Vingegaard won cycling's Tirreno-Adriatico on Sunday as local favourite Jonathan Milan claimed the final stage on the San Benedetto del Tronto seafront in a bunch sprint.

Milan pipped Alexander Kristoff to the line after a high-tempo 154 kilometres race around the Adriatic coast resort as Vingegaard made sure of overall victory.

Double Tour de France winner Vingegaard did the hard work by winning the previous two mountain stages in convincing manner, and there was kittle chance of the Dane giving up

his lead of one minute and 24 seconds on Sunday.

Those two stage wins also secured the King of the Mountains jersey for Visma rider Vingegaard, who is looking in hot form in a year where he will attempt a hat-trick of Tour victories.

"It's one of the biggest wins of my career, I'm really happy to have won two stages as well as the blue jersey (for the overall winner)," said Vingegaard.

"I really like racing in Italy. I like the country, the food, everything. I won't rule out trying to win the Giro d'Italia one day."

Milan said he was delighted to have won two stages as well as the points jersey.

"Now we've got the classics coming up and we'll be at the start of Milan-San Remo with a very strong team... time will tell if I can win it one day," he added.

Vingegaard's winning margin over Spanish climber Juan Ayuso in second place was 1min 24sec with Australian former Giro winner Jai Hindley third at 1min 52sec.

Rounding out the top five were top placed Italian rider Isaac del Toro and another Australian climber Ben O'Connor.

UAE's Ayuso said the all-

round showing of his team was motivating.

"We got a stage win, and two places in the top five, so that's quite good and we'll keep pushing and see what the future brings," said the 21-year-old.

Sunday's stage started with climbs which could have isolated the sprinters in the peloton but an early break led by Ben Healy was caught just as the bell sounded for the last 14 km lap of San Benedetto del Tronto.

And with the riders jostling for position Milan gave the local fans something to smile about with his second stage win of the race.— AFP

Carey shines as Australia find a way to win

Christchurch: Alex Carey scored a magnificent unbeaten 98 to drive Australia to victory over New Zealand by three wickets in a tense conclusion to the second test in Christchurch on Monday, sealing a 2-0 series sweep for the visitors.

Wicketkeeper Carey combined with Mitchell Marsh in a match-winning partnership of 140 for the sixth wicket and then teamed up with captain Pat Cummins as Australia chased down their 279-run victory target before tea on day four.

"It was pretty tense," said Cummins, who scored 32 not out and hit the winning runs with a four to the point boundary.

"I think the story of this series was in key moments, someone stood up and made themselves a match-winner so yeah, keep finding ways to win. It's a pretty awesome squad."

New Zealand, chasing a first home win over their neighbours in 31 years, had put the tourists on the back foot with four wickets in the last 90 minutes of play on day three.

After rain delayed the start of day four for an hour, skipper Tim Southee struck with the eighth delivery to dismiss Travis Head for 18 and reduce the tourists to 80-5.

In retrospect, however, Rachin Ravindra fumbling a straightforward catch that would have sent back Marsh for 28 off the previous delivery was perhaps the more significant moment.

"I think whenever you've finished a close game you always look back on a number of things," said Southee, who with fellow stalwart Kane Williamson was playing his 100th test.

"This morning was always going to be a crucial period with the ball still reasonably new, and we were able to beat the bat a few times but they were able to weather that storm."

"Obviously, the partnership between Mitch Marsh and Alex Carey just sort of broke the back of our attack."

CROWD SUBDUED

The defeat left the Black Caps with just one test win in 24 attempts against their closest rivals this century, while Australia will now move above them into second place in the World Test Championships standings behind India.

After the early setback, Carey came out to join Marsh and the pair scored at a fair lick, subduing the crowd and gradually putting the pressure on the New Zealand bowlers.

Marsh picked up his ninth test half century and Carey his eighth but both had scares along the way.

Carey kept his wicket by virtue of reviews when he was on 19 and 37, while Marsh was saved on 55 when the technology showed the tiniest bit of bat on a Glenn Phillips delivery that hit him on the toe.

Lunch came and went with the atmosphere flat but the crowd burst into life when seamer Ben Sears (4-90) was brought on and trapped Marsh lbw before having Mitchell Starc caught by Will Young at square leg on successive balls.

Cummins came in to fend away the hat-trick ball, however, and Carey survived another scare when Phillips failed to reach a tough catch that would have given Sears a five-wicket haul on his test debut.

The New Zealand bowlers lacked nothing in effort but edges flashed wide of the cordon and anything on the stumps was blocked as Australia's kept the scoreboard ticking over.

Carey was ultimately denied his second test century but cared little as he and his captain steered their side to their target 281-7 and a sixth win in seven tests over the Australasian summer.

"Although at times we've been a little bit under pressure, we've stayed resilient throughout," said Carey, who also took 10 catches over New Zealand's two innings to match Adam Gilchrist's Australian record.— Reuters



Australia's Pat Cummins (R) and Alex Carey celebrate their victory.— AFP

24 teams in OQ Ramadan Football

MUSCAT: As part of OQ's dedication to sports and youth development, OQ Ramadan Championship is scheduled to be on March 12, at the Group Stadium in Al Fahl Port.

Nearly 600 players, including Omanis and residents divided into 24 teams, will take part in this event.

OQ has been organising football competitions for the local community since the 1980s. This tournament stands out as one of the most sought-after Ramadan competitions for local teams in the Muscat Governorate, attracting 24 teams from across the Muscat Governorate and nearby areas.

24 teams divided into 4 groups, each consisting of 6 stages. In the first group, the Youth of Zahia team leads the pack, alongside Future, Sod Roy, Shabab, Sayh Al Dhaba, and WK teams. OQ Refinery heads the second group, accompanied by teams such as Cosmos, Al Muta, Al Najd Sports, Al Ghala Sports, and Al Noor Sports.

The third group, captained by the Al Sahwa team, features Al Mahout, Brothers Stars, Al



Shabab Al zahiya, last edition champion

Wahda, Diesel, and Al Maliki. Lastly, the fourth and final group is helmed by the Zak team, joined by Al Ahli Club, Roy Club, Rawasco Al Hail, Al Merrikh Club, and Al Aila Club.

The organising committee has established the tournament system, with 24 teams participating and divided into 4 groups, each consisting of 6 teams determined by a draw. Priority is given to long-standing teams in the tournament, based on their position in the team rankings table. Additionally, each year, four new teams are given the opportunity to participate after an assessment of their performance in external competitions and recommendations from the organising committee. Team rankings are determined by



From current edition draw

aggregating points earned over the last three participations within the past five years. The top four ranked teams are placed at the head of their respective groups during the draw. Any team participating for the first time and failing to advance to the round of 16 for a period of two to five years is ineligible for subsequent editions. Similarly, any team participating for two or more years and failing to qualify for the round of 16 for two consecutive years is barred from participating in subsequent editions for a period of one to three years. Victorious teams earn three points, drawn matches result in one point, and losing teams receive zero points. The top four teams from each group progress to the round of 16.

ISC MKW win Women's Domestic League

MUSCAT: ISC MKW beat ISWK Women's convincingly by 9 wickets in the Finals of the Oman Cricket Women's Domestic League 2023-24.

ISWK Women managed to score 100/5 in 20 overs put to bat first courtesy a 73-run stand by Shreya Suresh Prabhu scoring 39 and Akshada Gunasekar scoring 32. Merita Pinto picked 2 wickets while Sushama Shetty and Raksha Prabhakar bagged 1 wicket. In response, ISC MKW's openers swash-buckled to the target as Priyanka Mendonca scored 47 and Trupti Pawde scored 34 remaining not out to take the team through with 28 balls to spare. Alifiya Sayed bagged the sole wicket.

Oman Cricket witnessed a record participation of 9 teams in the league this season through it's Cricket4Her – Women's Cricket Development Program. The teams were divided in two groups wherein ISWK Women's



ISC MKW, Domestic League Champion

topped Group A winning 3 out of 3 matches while ISC MKW won 4 out of 4 matches in Group B. OCA Women and PSM Women were the other teams qualified for the Semi Finals but lost to the finalists.

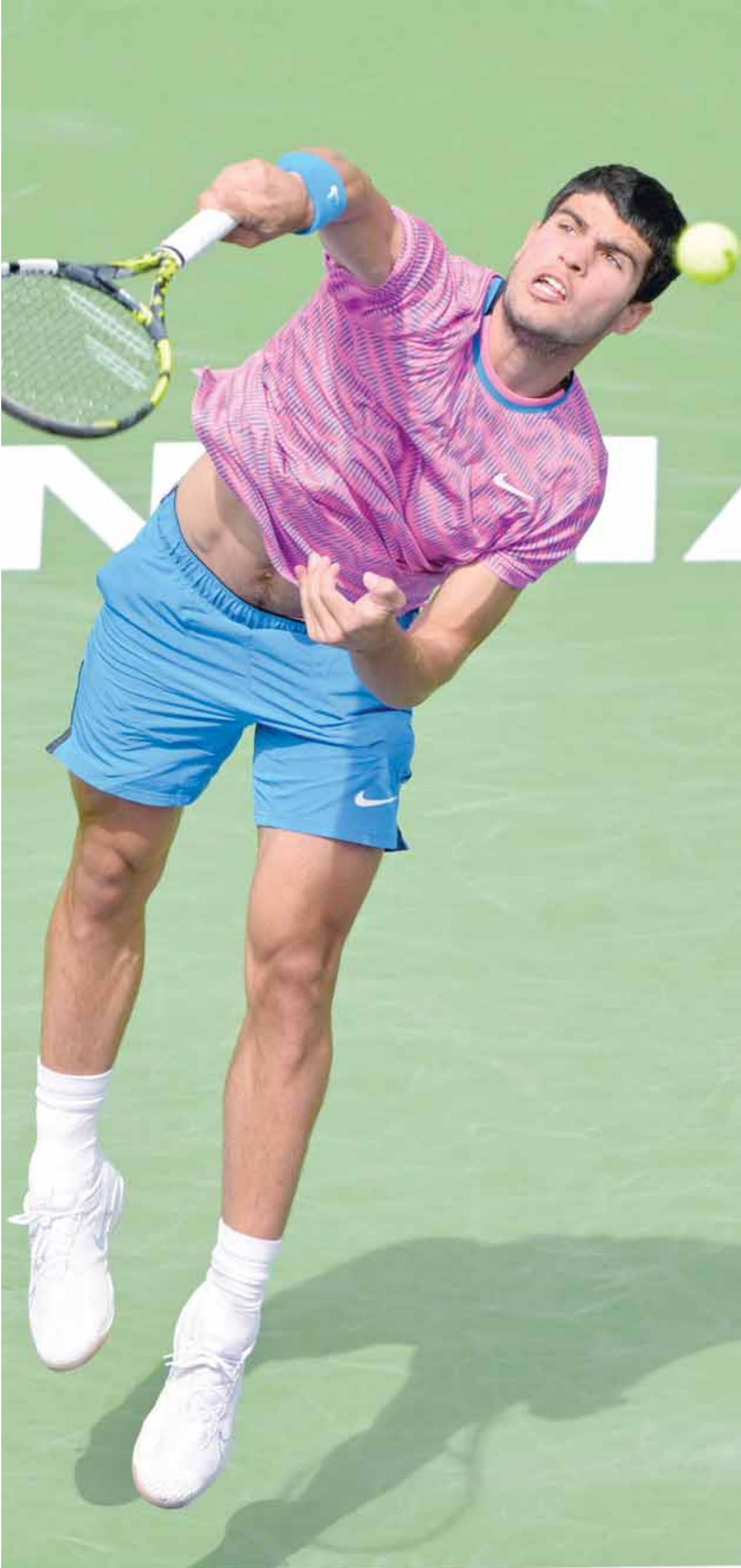
In the closing ceremony, Ms. Deepa Khimji – Women's Cricket Committee Member, Oman Cricket presented the awards. The player of the match for the final was handed to ISC MKW's skipper Priyanka Mendonca. The league accolades starting with Best Batsman was Shreya

Suresh Prabhu of ISWK Women's scoring 185 runs in 5 innings. Best Bowler was Suranjie Dias of OCA Women's picking 13 wickets in 5 innings and Best All-Rounder was adjudged to Priyanka Mendonca for scoring 172 runs and picking 8 wickets.

Brief Scores: ISWK Women 100/5 in 20 overs (Shreya Suresh Prabhu 39(56); Merita Pinto 2/21) lost to ISC MKW 101/1 in 15.2 overs (Priyanka Mendonca 47(37); Alifiya Sayed 1/16) by 9 wickets.



Jannik Sinner (ITA) hits a shot as he defeated Jan-Lennard Struff (GER). – USA TODAY Sports



Carlos Alcaraz (ESP) hits a shot in his third round match. – USA TODAY Sports

Sinner, Alcaraz demolish Indian Wells opponents

INDIAN WELLS: Reigning Grand Slam champions Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz turned in dominating performances on Sunday to roll into the fourth round of the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters. The two hottest young racquets in the sport showed no mercy in quick-fire victories, with Australian Open champion Sinner overwhelming Jan-Lennard Struff 6-3, 6-4.

“Almost perfect” Alcaraz, the reigning Wimbledon champion, stepped up his Indian Wells title defence with a 6-2, 6-3 victory over Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime. The world number two Spaniard allowed his Canadian opponent no room to move, reaching the fourth round with his eighth match win in a row at the event. A pair of women’s veterans showed new life in maternity comebacks.

“It was almost the perfect match for me,” said Alcaraz, who broke Auger-Aliassime’s serve four times. “I moved

well, played aggressive and had less mistakes.”

Sinner was equally ruthless as he attacked Struff, with the Italian winning his 17th match in succession dating to his country’s Davis Cup victory in November.

Sinner fired 27 winners past Struff, whose style gave the third seed a target on court.

“We prepared very well, I tried to learn his moves,” Sinner said. “I played well and served well under pressure.

“Overall I can be really happy about today, I felt really good on the court.”

Alcaraz won the last five games of the opening set and broke to start the second on his way to repeating his win over Auger-Aliassime from the 2023 quarter-finals.

The second seed finished off victory on his first match point as Auger-Aliassime hit the net with his 23rd unforced error.

It was a welcome show of strength from Alcaraz, who hasn’t won a title since winning his second Grand Slam with a stunning triumph over Novak Djokovic at the All England Club last year.

He exited the Australian Open in the quarter-finals then lost in the semi-finals at Buenos Aires last month before spraining his ankle and retiring from his opening match in Rio de Janeiro.

“I played at a really high level of tennis, so much higher than the first round,” the Spaniard said.

Alcaraz may still be feeling the effects of the ankle, which has left him short of 2024 match play.

“My confidence has gone down a little bit, I’ve been struggling during the practice every day,” he admitted. “I’m trying to keep my confidence as high as I can.”

In other matches, fifth seed Andrey Rublev was knocked out 6-4, 6-4 by

rising Czech Jiri Lehecka

Alex de Minaur, seeded 10th, dominated Dubai finalist Alexander Bublik 7-5, 6-0.

The Australian now plays sixth seed Alexander Zverev, a 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 winner over Tallon Griekspoor.

Greek 11th-seed Stefanos Tsitsipas eliminated a home crowd favourite with his 6-3, 6-3 defeat of Frances Tiafoe, who reached the Californian quarters a year ago.

SWIATEK REVENGE

In WTA play, Iga Swiatek claimed quick revenge for a January loss as she hammered Czech Linda Noskova 6-4, 6-0 to reach the fourth round.

The Polish top seed was defeated by the 29th-ranked challenger in an Australian Open third-round upset.

On Sunday, world number one Swiatek quickly recovered after going down an early break to the 19-year-old,

levelling at 4-all and sweeping through the remainder of the third-round match.

Swiatek will next face Kazakh Yulia Putintseva, who beat Madison Keys 6-4, 6-1.

The Pole said she learned from her loss to Noskova in Melbourne.

“It was much smarter to think about how to just play against Linda rather than focusing on my mistakes,” she said.

“I was motivated to just play better and not make the same mistakes but to improve my game in some aspects.”

Germany’s three-time Grand Slam winner Angelique Kerber earned a win as her comeback from last year’s maternity continued to gather steam.

The 36-year-old defeated Veronika Kudermetova 6-4, 7-5.

She next faces former world number one Caroline Wozniacki, another comeback candidate after becoming a mother who advanced past Katie Volynets 6-2, 4-6, 6-0. — AFP



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Oman breaks ground for RO 520 million polysilicon factory in Sohar Freezone

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 11

United Solar Holding Inc recently broke ground on a groundbreaking polysilicon factory project in SOHAR Port and Freezone, marking a significant investment exceeding RO 520 million (\$1.3 billion).

Expected to have an annual production capacity of 100,000 tonnes, this project is set to be the largest of its kind in the Middle East and is aligned with Oman Vision 2040's goals of promoting green hydrogen production and reducing solar panel costs.

The inauguration ceremony, held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, was attended by esteemed officials and dignitaries, emphasising the project's importance in driving economic diversification and creating job opportunities, especially for Omani youth.

Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroojiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, emphasised the project's alignment with Oman's Vision 2040 to bolster local



The inauguration ceremony was held under the auspices of Sultan al Habsi, Minister of Finance, and was attended by esteemed officials and dignitaries.

investment and attract foreign direct investment.

Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, emphasised that the project aligns with the ministry's efforts to attract high-tech industries.

"Currently, the ministry focuses on drawing knowledge

and technology-based industries, crucial for the strategic industrial goals and the future industries initiative".

The project's focus on clean energy, particularly solar, aligns with Oman's Manufacturing Strategy 2040 and renewable energy goals, with solar energy production already making substantial contributions to the country's energy mix.

Dr Saleh emphasised the project's potential to enhance GDP and integrate Oman into the global supply chain, initiating new modern industries and boosting economic growth.

Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation, praised the project as a major investment in the region, supporting Oman's green

hydrogen policies and driving localisation of alternative energy industries.

The project is expected to provide specialised training for Omanis and contribute to lowering operational expenses in the solar sector, ultimately attracting more global investments.

Omar al Mahrizi, CEO of SOHAR Freezone and Deputy CEO of SOHAR Port, highlighted the strategic role of SOHAR in fostering investment and growth in the region, emphasising the project's contribution to global trade and downstream industries.

The expansion of SOHAR Freezone's infrastructure further supports the growing demand for industrial space and innovation, aligning with Oman's economic development goals.

Abbas al Lawati, Investment Analyst at Invest Oman, noted the project's potential impact on various sectors in Oman, particularly in green hydrogen and alternative energy production. The venture is expected to pave the way for future investments in the renewable energy sector, positioning Oman as a key player in sustainable energy solutions.

Oman to showcase landmark real estate projects at MIPIM event



Artist's rendering of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar development.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 11

The Sultanate of Oman will make its first appearance at MIPIM, the world's premier real estate event, held on March 12-15 in Cannes, France. MIPIM attracts over 18,000 attendees, including a significant number of top international investors, and features over 7,000 companies.

Oman's delegation, led by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, will use the platform to highlight key investment opportunities, showcasing projects like Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Al Khuwair Downtown.

Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, is also expected to participate in one of the conference sessions.

Standing out as Oman's highest real estate development, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar boasts a unique location 150km from Muscat and an elevation of 2,400 metres.

The ambitious project envisions a mix of residential and hospitality offerings, featuring 2,527 homes, 2,000 hotel rooms, and a dedicated wellness village dubbed "The Vessel".

Capitalising on its cool, year-round climate thanks to its high altitude (average temperature of 22°C), Al Jabal Al Akhdhar aims to attract a vibrant community of residents and day visitors, with projections exceeding 8,000, including an average of 2,350 residents and 2,000 daily visitors.

Oman's participation in MIPIM signifies a strategic move to bolster the nation's housing, investment and industrial sectors. By showcasing these developments, Oman positions itself as an attractive destination for future international investment.

Oman LNG signs MoU to reduce carbon emissions and produce synthetic methane

MUSCAT: Oman LNG signed yesterday a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Japanese companies, Hitachi Zosen and Hitachi Innova, related to providing the necessary consultations for the project to reduce carbon emissions and produce synthetic methane.

This step confirms the aspirations of the Oman LNG towards finding the best mechanisms and ways to regulate carbon emissions by developing community partnerships with innovation and sustainability, searching for alternative sources of energy and reducing its carbon footprint.

The two companies are expected to provide the necessary consultations to the Oman LNG to reduce carbon emissions and manufacture synthetic methane.

This memorandum emphasises the pivotal role played by the Sultanate of Oman in providing energy to Japan.

This is with the aim of evaluating the technical, economic and environmental feasibility of



Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auqi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, explained that the memorandum comes within the zero-neutrality programme and the regulatory framework to reduce carbon emissions.

producing synthetic gas from carbon dioxide and hydrogen emissions, which can then be re-injected back into the operations of the Oman LNG either to produce natural gas, liquefied or consumed as fuel gas.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Auqi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, explained that the memorandum comes within the zero-neutrality programme and the regulatory framework to reduce carbon emissions, especially in the natural

gas liquefaction station, indicating that reducing emissions will give the station room for marketing at more preferential prices and for new markets looking for low-carbon liquefied gas.

Al Auqi said in a statement to Oman News Agency, "The process of capturing carbon and reusing it to produce industrial methane, then re-liquefying it again, then producing liquefied gas and exporting it to markets, to both Europe and Asia that are

looking for low-carbon liquefied gas and giving a longer life to the Oman LNG.

Hamed bin Mohammed al Numani, Chief Executive Officer of the Oman LNG, explained that MoU represents the company's starting point towards finding environmentally friendly and more sustainable energy solutions, as the Oman LNG shares with the signatory parties the necessity of committing to methane production with the aim

of shaping a carbon-free future using modern technologies.

He pointed out that the Oman LNG, along with the Japanese companies Hitachi Zosen and Hitachi Innova, will respond to all the details of the MoU and identify areas of joint research, development and implementation of technologies in line with the strategy of the Oman LNG towards zero neutrality and the national efforts of the Sultanate of Oman to achieve net-zero by 2050.

For his part, Bruno Frederic Baudouin, CEO and member of the Advisory Board of the Japanese company Hitachi Zosen, stressed that this is an opportunity to work together and review the feasibility of this technology, and signing this memorandum is an important step towards achieving this.

He added that this technology can be applied more widely and can contribute to changing societies in terms of its potential to remove carbon dioxide.

— ONA

Omantel Group records 9.7% rise in 2023 revenues

MUSCAT: Omantel Group has posted a 9.7% increase in revenue to RO 2.942 billion at the end of 2023, up from RO 2.682 billion in 2022. The Group's net profit grew by 13.1% from RO 278.9 million in 2022 to RO 315.5 million at the end of year 2023.

Net profit attributable to shareholders (after excluding the non-controlling interest) is RO 74.8 million for 2023 compared to RO 91.3 million in 2022.

At the level of domestic operations, Omantel's revenues grew by 7.3% to reach RO



Omantel headquarters in Muscat.

606.5 million, compared to RO 565.5 million reported in the same period of 2022, driven by

growth in wholesale transit voice revenue which increased by RO 17.2 million and device revenue

which increased by RO 19.3 million. Growth in retail revenue is contributed by Mobile Postpaid revenue which increased by 10.2% and Fixed Broadband revenues which increased by 4.2%.

Net Profit of the domestic operations stood at RO 63.3 million for 2023, compared to RO 85.7 million in the previous period, a decline of 26.1%. Net profit for the year 2022 included Capital gain on Sale of Towers for RO 28 million (Net of taxes).

Excluding the Capital gain from the profit for year 2022, the

net profit for year 2023 shows an increase of 9.7% compared to the previous year. This increase was on account of stable EBITDA and a decrease in finance costs.

Zain Group Performance:

Zain Group revenues for 2023 reached RO 2.361.4 billion compared to RO 2.129 billion in 2022, an increase of 10.9%. EBITDA stands at RO 871.3 million, compared to EBITDA of RO 828.6 million in 2022, recording an increase of 5.2%.

Net profit stands at RO 359.7 million compared to RO 276.5

million of the previous period, an increase of 30.1%.

Key operations in Kuwait, Iraq, KSA and Jordan delivered impressive profit growth. The completion of Tower sales during the year in KSA and Iraq helped in creating value and efficiencies for Zain Group.

Omantel Board of Directors recommended to the Company's Annual General Meeting that will be held on March 30, 2024 a cash dividend of 55 Baiza per share for the year (subject to shareholders approval).

Ooredoo introduces new recharge bundle Hala Flex

MUSCAT: Introducing Ooredoo's Hala Flex, a prepaid direct recharge that bundles it all: WhatsApp data, Internet data, and Flexi minutes for local calls and calls to India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Hala Flex provides an easy way to control your data costs with no unexpected costs. You won't be tied into any long-term contract and, therefore, have the flexibility to switch to another Hala Flex deal as according to your changing needs!

Starting from an amazing RO 2 for one week, up to RO 10 for four weeks, the plans can cover up to 150 Flexi Minutes, 5 GB WhatsApp data and 15 GB of data to access the Internet. All you need to do is buy the Hala Flex physical voucher.

It is really a one-step recharge for the ultimate in flexibility! So, head to your nearest authorised dealer, supermarket, or recharge outlet and just ask for Hala Flex. Ooredoo's popular Hala prepaid plans always make sure customers are spoilt for choice with a mix of data, voice, and social data, all enhanced by Ooredoo's fantastic network,



allowing customers to connect and enjoy in a way that is best for them.

To recharge using a Hala Flex voucher, just dial *999*Recharge Code#. And for more information about Hala prepaid plans, including Hala Flex, visit one of the many Ooredoo stores, authorised dealers, or other sales points across Oman or visit Ooredoo's website: www.ooredoo.om/halaflex.

Own a Lincoln from the luxury range and get exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Lincoln Oman is offering luxury car enthusiasts an opportunity to discover Lincoln luxury. Now is the perfect time to own a Lincoln and get service 5 years / 100,000 kms, registration 1 year and manufacturer's warranty 5 years / 100,000 kms.

The campaign is valid from March 10, 2024 up to May 9, 2024. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Lincoln showroom Wattayah.)

Lincoln's luxury range of vehicles in Oman include the Corsair, Nautilus, Aviator, and Navigator. The two-row Lincoln Corsair SUV combines refined power and a wealth of purposeful technologies. Staying true to its Quiet Flight DNA, Corsair is engineered to deliver an effortless drive experience and sensation of gliding over the road.

Turbocharged four-cylinder engine options are available – a standard 2.0-litre with a targeted 250 horsepower 380 Nm torque. Each is paired to a new 8-speed automatic transmission with SelectShift capability for agile performance.

The Corsair is designed to give luxury customers technology to make their drive



effortless, such as Lincoln Co-Pilot360 driver-assist features. The all-new 2024 Lincoln Nautilus offers a luxurious environment besides delivering amazing SUV flexibility.

The Nautilus offers a stunning exterior design with a new Lincoln signature grille, new tail lamps, and applique light bar, spoiler and upper rear fascia.

Complementing the new design features and affording the Nautilus a more luxurious stance, is an all new wheel line up featuring 20"

bright machined aluminium with premium painted pockets available for the Reserve trim. The Lincoln Nautilus is equipped with a turbocharged engine line-up.

A 2.7-litre twin-turbo V6 engine boasts an AWD drivetrain with adaptive suspension and all-wheel drive disconnect.

It delivers 335 hp and 515 Nm of torque and includes standard Auto Start-stop capability, plus a new eight-speed automatic transmission with SelectShift capability.

BANK MUSCAT HIGHLIGHTS SUCCESSFUL JOURNEY IN PROVIDING BANKING SERVICES FOR INSTITUTIONS

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, is keen to enhance its Banking services for corporate and institutional customers.

It aims to offer diverse banking solutions and facilities tailored to the specific requirements of this crucial sector.

Presently, the Bank takes pride in its contributions to the growth of these institutions, fostering the emergence of new businesses that play a vital role in supporting and developing the national economy.

In this context, as a part of its periodic series of media visits, the Bank organised a media visit to showcase the latest advancements and updates within the Banking group, specifically aimed at acquainting institutions with these developments and new services.

The gathering took place at the Bank's Head Office in Airport Heights and was attended by Ilham bint Murtadha al Humaid, General Manager of Corporate Banking at Bank Muscat, along with several Bank executives, journalists, and media representatives from various media channels.

During the meet, a presentation was delivered encompassing various information pertaining to the services offered to government institutions and corporates.

The focus was on highlighting the electronic services extended by the Bank to this sector.

The questions and inquiries of media representatives were answered by the Bank's team.



The gathering was attended by Ilham bint Murtadha al Humaid, GM of Corporate Banking at Bank Muscat, with several bank executives, journalists and media representatives.

This meet is a testament to the Bank's commitment to strengthen its collaboration with the local media, recognising the significant role it plays as a key partner in the growth and development process and in acquainting the community with the Bank's events, programmes and products.

Bank Muscat officials emphasised, at the media gathering, the Bank's commitment to ongoing success and accomplishments in delivering business and Banking services to government institutions and companies, with a particular emphasis on electronic services.

In the recent period, the Bank has introduced a range of new services, facilities, and features aimed at adding value to diverse institutions.

These innovations facilitate seamless and secure Banking transactions through new electronic channels, harnessing modern technologies to enhance service delivery.

On this occasion, Ilham bint Murtadha al Humaid, the General Manager of Corporate Banking at Bank Muscat, emphasised the importance and priority accorded to the institutional sector.

"This commitment is aimed at providing a diverse range of Banking facilities and services that cater to the needs of these institutions, facilitating the development of their businesses.

At the Bank, we view ourselves as partners in the success and progress of these institutions.

Consequently, we strive to enhance our services and

operations to align with the evolving needs of these entities.

This involves active participation in events and meetings to better understand the requirements of the institutions, enabling us to offer services, products, and facilities that not only meet their needs but also contribute to their growth and development.

Additionally, our efforts extend to expediting financial transactions efficiently and supporting these institutions in their crucial roles to realise the objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

I would like to extend gratitude and appreciation to all corporates within this sector for their trust in the comprehensive range of facilities and services provided by

Bank Muscat.

Afaf Ali Moosa, Assistant General Manager, Large Corporate, Bank Muscat, elucidated the pivotal role played by internet-based electronic solutions in contemporary economic development.

She highlighted the increasing adoption of these services by numerous companies and institutions to propel various facets of their operations, ranging from marketing and supply chain management to financial oversight.

She said: "This strategic transition towards leveraging electronic services not only boosts efficiency but also results in cost reduction, heightened speed, scalability, and improved efficiency in completing transactions swiftly

and effectively."

She emphasised: "Digital transformation is no longer a choice but an imperative for all institutions, particularly given the array of innovative Banking and technological advancements in the online realm.

To align with these developments, Bank Muscat actively invests in technology, offering electronic Banking services to cater to institutional needs and deliver added value.

As a dependable Banking partner in the Sultanate of Oman, the Bank is dedicated to supporting diverse institutions, whether governmental or private, and fostering a thriving business environment.

This commitment involves providing a spectrum of innovative Banking services and facilities that leverage modern technologies, delivering electronic banking services via Bank's digital channels. Bank Muscat underscores its determination to persist in this approach, staying attuned to evolving developments and continuously offering technology-based services and facilities to Bank's esteemed customers."

From his side, Ibrahim bin Khamis al Balushi, Senior Assistant General Manager, Small and Medium Enterprises Bank Muscat, highlighted the array of Banking services, facilities, and tailored solutions extended to customers across diverse institutions and companies.



Tender floated for Muscat Airport Free Zone infra works

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 11

Asyad Group, Oman's global integrated logistics provider, launched a tender for the construction of phase one infrastructure for the highly anticipated Muscat International Airport Free Zone. This invitation extends to all private entities, offering an opportunity to participate in a vital logistics project that supports Oman's economic growth.

In line with the goals set out in Oman Vision 2040 and Asyad's commitment to fostering partnerships within the private sector, this initiative underscores the group's efforts to involve private companies in the most recent venture in its logistics journey.

The construction scope includes – but is not limited to – site clearance, earthworks, site grading, and the construction of access roads, entry points and utilities.

Since signing an agreement in December 2023 to manage, operate and develop the free zone, Asyad Group has made rapid progress in delivering its plans to build an additional enabler of Oman's economic growth.

The Muscat International Airport Free Zone is set to play a vital role in strengthening air freight access and logistics, becoming an integral piece of Asyad's integrated logistics ecosystem, and enhancing connectivity between land crossings, seaports, free and economic zones, and the dry port in Oman.

Supported by this interconnected network of

logistics hubs, the coming free zone will offer the ultimate support for air freight and seamless access to supply chains that extend from Oman to the biggest global markets, ideal to transport pharmaceuticals, food products, e-commerce shipments, and other goods.

Faisal Ali al Balushi, Director – Muscat International Airport Free Zone at Asyad Group, said: “We invite all local companies to submit their bids and take part in this vital project, and we look forward to building our partnership with the private sector.

This free zone will offer an excellent opportunity for Oman's private sector to grow and capitalise on the competitive advantages and investment prospects it offers.”



ICC to draft new building codes for Oman



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 11

In a significant move aimed at enhancing building safety and construction standards in the Sultanate of Oman, the International Code Council (ICC) has signed a contract with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) to develop a series of six comprehensive building codes.

Leveraging ICC's renowned expertise in crafting and implementing building codes for jurisdictions around the world, the initiative aims to tailor these codes to suit local contexts, reflecting the nation's priorities and aspirations.

This endeavour exemplifies ICC's extensive experience in executing similar projects, underscoring its commitment to fostering safe, affordable, and sustainable communities worldwide.

Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, and ICC's Senior Vice President of Global Operations and Solutions, Judy Zakreski, signed the agreement in Muscat recently.

Collaboratively, ICC and MoHUP are dedicated to setting new benchmarks in building safety and construction practices in the country.

The project's primary areas of focus include safety standards, sustainability, and technology integration, with the entire endeavour slated for finalisation by early 2026.

Oman's adoption of building

codes based on the 2021 and 2024 International Codes (I-Codes) will serve as a catalyst for raising standards and promoting best practices nationwide.

By embracing advanced building regulations that also align with regional standards, the country not only ensures the safety and well-being of its citizens but also positions itself as a leader in fostering safety and sustainability in construction.

Director General of Urban Planning at the MoHUP, Dr Hanan al Jabri, said: “With rapid infrastructure growth and urban development happening in the country, the demand for robust building codes prioritising safety and resilience, has become increasingly important. The strategic cooperation between MoHUP and the ICC underscores a shared responsibility to advancing safety, sustainability, and innovation in the Sultanate of Oman's construction industry and represents a significant milestone in the journey towards achieving the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.”

ICC's Senior Vice President of Global Operations and Solutions, Judy Zakreski said: “We are honoured to collaborate with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on this exciting and important project.

The Oman Building Codes will serve as a blueprint for safe, sustainable, and resilient construction practices in the country and align Oman's building safety regulations with others in the MENA region.”

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 11

In a landmark move for Oman's water services sector, Nama Water Services unveiled a prepaid water metre service, a groundbreaking initiative in the water services sector for the GCC countries, and the first in the Middle East to utilise cutting-edge technology.

The unveiling took place during a recent press conference held Grand Hormuz Hotel on Monday. Nama Water Services also showcased its new e-services accessible through a mobile app and e-portal.

Qais al Zakwani, CEO of Nama Water Services, highlighted the company's dedication to improving customer service through the launch of new metres: “These metres, incorporating cutting-edge global technology, represent a significant advancement in the water sector.

Rigorous testing ensured a smooth activation process and a positive subscriber experience for this service, which aligns with Nama Water Services' commitment to continuous development and improved offerings within this vital industry.”

“To ensure a smooth rollout, the initial phase of the prepaid water metre service. This pilot provided valuable training for our staff in managing this new system and troubleshooting any potential issues.

To enhance our approach, we drew upon valuable insights from



Nama Water Services officials are pictured during the unveiling of prepaid water metre service held yesterday.

thriving prepaid water initiatives implemented globally, which gives us great confidence in the service's success within the Sultanate of Oman. We have plans to expand this initiative to encompass all governorates served by the company,” he added.

“We are confident that the implementation of the prepaid metre service will empower subscribers to manage their water consumption effectively,” explained Al Zakwani.

“The metres will provide real-time usage data, allowing customers to monitor and control their water consumption.

The prepaid system will also eliminate the issue of accumulating debt, particularly for commercial accounts and

rental properties. Landlords can ensure tenants are responsible for their water usage, preventing unpaid bills.”

Leveraging Internet of Things (IoT) technology, prepaid water metres offer a smarter way to manage water consumption.

These metres connect to the utility company's subscriber system via satellite, transmitting hourly updates on key data points.

This includes both the amount of water used and the remaining balance from your prepaid credit. For user convenience, the metre features a digital display for real-time data access.

Existing customers may request the change at no additional cost, while new connection requests will only incur standard connection

fees. The prepaid metre system seamlessly integrates with the Nama Water Services mobile app and the company's online portal.

This allows customers to manage their prepaid metres entirely electronically, including requesting installation, replacing existing metres, checking remaining credit, monitoring water consumption, and even switching back to traditional billing if desired by changing the settings through the mobile App or the e-portal.

Subscribers may top up their prepaid water metres with amounts ranging from RO 5 (minimum) to RO 100 (maximum) for recreational accounts and from RO 10 to RO 500 for commercial accounts.

Mining giant Vale firming up plan for Mega Hub in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, MARCH 11

Construction work on a new low-carbon industrial complex, planned by Brazilian mining conglomerate Vale at Duqm in the Sultanate of Oman, could commence as early as from 2027, according to a top company executive.

Oman is among a trio of Gulf countries tipped to host what Vale has described as ‘Mega Hubs’ designed to produce a greener version of its iron ore concentrates and hot briquetted iron (HBI) as feedstock for steels mills operating in the wider Middle East region.

In November 2022, Vale signed an agreement with Omani authorities to jointly study the

development of one such Mega Hub at the Special Economic Zone in Duqm.

A land lease agreement, covering a 6.78 sq km site, was also signed with the Port of Duqm for the establishment of the proposed industrial complex.

Similar pacts were also inked with authorities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE for the development of Mega Hubs in those countries.

Plans for these ambitious Mega-Hubs are currently being firming up, said Vale CEO Eduardo Bartolomeo. “We are maturing our agreements with authorities in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Oman and a partner in Brazil for joint assessments on the construction of Mega Hubs, with works for a first facility starting



Vale Oman's pelletising complex at Sohar Port.

in 2027,” he stated in Vale's newly published 2023 Annual Report.

According to Vale, hot briquetted iron (HBI) and other commodities produced by these Mega Hubs will enjoy a far lower carbon footprint than current types of feedstock supplied to steel mills.

“The parties aim to cooperate in the development of these Mega Hubs to produce hot briquetted iron (HBI) and steel products to supply both local and transoceanic markets, with significant reduction of CO2 emissions.

The production of HBI using natural gas emits approximately 60

per cent less CO2 when compared to the production of pig iron using the integrated Blast Furnace-Basic Oxygen Furnace (BF-BOF) route. In the future, replacing natural gas with hydrogen and using renewable energy could eliminate CO2 emissions,” said Vale in the report.

“Vale expects to build and operate the iron ore concentration and briquetting plants at the hubs, ensuring the supply of high-quality agglomerated products; that local partners promote the construction of the necessary logistical infrastructure; and that investors and/or customers build and operate the direct reduction plants and are the purchasers of HBI for the export and domestic markets.

These Mega Hubs are supposed to supply different markets around the world, supporting the decarbonisation of the steel industry,” it further stated. When eventually implemented, the new Mega Hub will add to Vale's already sizable investments in Oman.

The mining giant currently operates a pair of iron ore pelletising plants with a total capacity of 9 million tonnes per year (Mtpy) at Sohar Port and Freezone.

Wholly owned by Vale, the complex is integrated with a 40 Mtpy capacity distribution centre which supplies DRI pellets as feedstock to steel mills in the Middle East, among other markets.

Bridging digital skills gap between academia and industry



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is Knowledge Oman Founder knowledgeoman.com

Many fresh graduates complain about not easily getting a job. On the other hand, many organisations complain that fresh-graduates do not have the necessary skills required by the industry to operate. This is indeed a common challenge that many encounter as far as employment is concerned, and my article today will shed light on the reason of

the same. If I were asked the reason why some graduates find it difficult to get a job, or why many organisations still require to provide additional training to fresh-graduates before they can even be considered for work, I would say that's because of the wide-gap between the academia and the industry – i.e. both entities do not talk, in the sense that there is no knowledge-sharing between the two entities on what is happening in the industry, and how can the students/graduates add value to the same. Of course such a practice needs to happen well ahead of the graduation time. Being an ICT professional myself, I'm happy to share my thoughts and recommendation based on what is happening in the ICT sector itself. In the rapidly evolving landscape of today's technology, there is a growing demand for individuals well-versed in the

latest breakthroughs. Most what is taught in an academic institution are either too traditional and not up to date on what the industry needs. The expanding field of ICT specialisations, including cybersecurity, cloud computing, data analytics, and artificial intelligence, presents numerous opportunities. Recognising this need, organisations across various industries are dedicated to nurturing the next generation of ICT specialists, aiming to bridge the digital divide and cultivate talent and creativity. There's broad recognition that university studies alone are inadequate for the students to thrive in a highly dynamic sector. Therefore, the need to form strategic partnerships with governmental bodies, businesses, and academic institutions can help bridge the education/academia divide by equipping emerging technologists with essential tools, materials, and opportunities for success in our dynamic digital environment. These programmes serve as catalysts for social and economic empowerment, creating pathways for success at both individual and community levels. By democratising access to ICT education and training, they open doors to new opportunities and contribute to inclusive growth. To build a workforce capable of driving innovation and competitiveness, forward-looking organisations foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement through investments in ICT skills development. This lays the foundation for a future where technology positively contributes to change, enriching lives and building a more sustainable world. For example, in Middle East and Central Asia, I am impressed to see Huawei at the forefront of ICT talent development. Working with various government agencies and academic institutions, they

actively drive talent development initiatives in the field of information and communication technology (ICT) through initiatives such as the Huawei Developer Programme, Seeds for the Future, the Huawei ICT Academy to name a few. Huawei's talent training and education projects have been implemented in more than 150 countries and have benefited more than 2.83 million people so far. During the Mobile World Congress event I attended few weeks ago, Huawei hosted the Huawei Talent Summit that was centered around the theme 'I C Talent: Nurturing Excellence in a Digital World.' During the event, ITU officially launched the ITU Generation Connect Young Leadership Programme that invites individuals aged 18 to 28 to submit ideas for community projects addressing the digital divide, offering funding, mentoring, and training for implementation. Clearly a great move to bridge the gap between industry and the academia. Bridging the gap between academia and industry should be among the top agenda for countries that wish to see their nation prosper, especially with employment is concerned. Such an agenda will promote knowledge exchange that will help foster innovation which would ultimately drive economic and social progress. Predictions indicate that by 2025, most jobs will require a basic understanding of IT, emphasising the crucial role of ICT education in the global economy and societal development. Governments worldwide are enacting ICT-related laws and investing in school infrastructure to integrate ICT into classrooms, aligning with global education goals like Education for All and the World Summit of Information Society objectives. Until we catch up again next week, stay positive.

Opportunity Oman: The flourishing Oman – South Korea collaboration



DR YOUSUF BIN HAMED AL BALUSHI

The author is Founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, Economists, Board Advisor & Business Transformation Mentor

The Middle East is currently undergoing substantial advancement marked by the flourishing partnership between Oman and South Korea. This strategic cooperation, centred around trade, investment, and joint ventures, presents a myriad of opportunities for Omani businesses. Omani companies can exploit this collaboration to explore new markets, acquire advanced technology, and actively contribute to the nation's pursuit of economic diversification. This partnership, originating in the 1970s through engagements in oil trade and construction projects, has evolved into a versatile collaboration spanning across various sectors. This transformation underscores the commitment of both nations to harness their respective strengths for mutual benefit. It is noteworthy that South Korea, boasting the position of the 6th largest exporter globally, excels in ICT infrastructures, and stands as a major hub for manufacturing, housing 18 Fortune 500 companies. Trade forms the backbone of this partnership. South Korea, a major importer of Omani oil and liquefied natural gas

(LNG), presents a significant market for Omani resources. In return, Oman benefits from importing Korean machinery and manufactured goods, contributing to its technological advancement and infrastructure development. The impressive bilateral trade volume of US\$5.66 billion reflects the robust commercial ties. Investment is another key driver. South Korean companies actively contribute to Omani infrastructure projects, particularly in the Duqm Special Economic Zone, Oil & Gas companies and the power sector.

This collaboration presents Omani businesses with numerous opportunities:

- **Collaborative Ventures:** Omani businesses can partner with South Korean companies to leverage their expertise and technology in various sectors, including infrastructure development, renewable energy, and shipbuilding.
- **Subcontracting:** By providing services and supplies to South Korean firms involved in infrastructure projects, Omani companies can foster local economic participation and skills development.
- **Knowledge Transfer:** Collaboration can provide valuable knowledge and technology transfer opportunities, enabling Omani businesses to become more competitive in the global market. Beyond these immediate benefits, the 2003 investment protection agreement has paved the way for many South Korean firms to operate in various sectors within Oman. This diverse presence opens further doors for Omani businesses:
- **Integration into Supply Chains:** Omani businesses can integrate into the supply chains of established South Korean firms operating in Oman, gaining access to new markets and international customers.
- **Embracing Innovation:**



Oman and Korea have long-standing ties in the conventional and emerging clean energy arenas.

Collaboration can provide access to cutting-edge technologies and expertise in areas like renewable energy, healthcare, and education, enabling Omani businesses to embrace innovation. Gateway to Global Markets: Partnering with Korean firms can offer Omani businesses a gateway to the South Korean market, facilitating the export of Omani products and services. A fertile ground for collaboration: Business-Friendly Policies: Oman's commitment to attracting foreign investment is evident in its business-friendly policies, such as the Foreign Capital Investment Law. Stable Political Landscapes: Both nations boast stable political landscapes, fostering investor confidence essential for long-term business ventures. Several exciting initiatives are further strengthening the Oman-South Korea partnership: Free Trade Agreement (FTA): This agreement between the GCC (including Oman)

and South Korea is expected to further bolster trade and economic cooperation by removing trade barriers and facilitating the movement of goods and services. Green Hydrogen Project: This collaborative project paves the way for joint ventures and technology transfer opportunities in this critical sector for the future. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU): This agreement focuses on several key areas related to the green transition, including: Enhancing knowledge sharing Promoting cooperation on developing environmentally friendly technologies Building capacity to address climate change challenges Strengthening global cooperation The partnership extends beyond traditional industries, offering a vibrant landscape of possibilities for Omani businesses in emerging fields: Trade and Investment: Explore avenues to boost bilateral trade by identifying sectors with complementing interests. Infrastructure Development: Collaborate in areas like construction, energy, transportation, and smart city initiatives. Technology Transfer: Facilitate the transfer of technology and know-how to Oman, leading to advancements in various sectors. Tourism Promotion: Increase travel between the two countries through joint marketing initiatives, cultural exchanges, and investments in the hospitality industry. Education and Skill Development: Foster the exchange of students and expertise, leading to enhanced skill development in Oman. Healthcare Cooperation: Explore opportunities for collaboration in medical research, exchange programmes for healthcare professionals, and investments in healthcare infrastructure. Cultural Exchanges: Strengthen people-to-people ties and build a deeper understanding through joint cultural events and art

exhibitions. Renewable Energy: Collaborate on renewable energy projects to support Oman's efforts in diversifying its energy sources. Financial Services: Establish new partnerships in banking and financial services to facilitate smoother trade and investment transactions. Logistics and Transportation: Leverage South Korea's expertise in these sectors to improve connectivity between the two countries. The Oman-South Korea partnership is a compelling story of collaboration, innovation, and shared vision. By embracing this dynamic partnership, Omani businesses stand to gain significantly, not only in terms of access to new markets and technology, but also in contributing to the nation's economic diversification and shaping a brighter future. This model of collaboration sets a powerful precedent for other countries seeking to leverage their strengths and foster mutual prosperity in an increasingly interconnected world.

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HADITH

GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said:

"Whenever you sight the new moon (of the month of Ramadhan), observe fast, and when you sight it (the new moon of Shawwal), break it, and if the sky is cloudy for you, then observe fast for thirty days".

– Sahih Muslim

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Applying eye drops,
does it invalidate fast?

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is sensed in the throat, the
day should be made up a
later time.

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

The month of Ramadhan [is that] in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey – then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful.

Surah Baqarah Ayah 185

Ramadhan

TUESDAY | MARCH 12, 2024 | RAMADHAN 1, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



Ramadhan Customs Around the World

BY BALQEES AL ORAIMI

Due to differences in customs and traditions among peoples, the expressions of joy for the arrival of the Holy Month among Muslims vary, highlighting the goodness and mercy it brings. However, certain aspects of these celebrations may appear peculiar when compared across different countries.

Indonesia, one of the world's

BBC Radio website.

In Malaysia, local administrations undertake street cleaning upon sighting the Ramadhan crescent, followed by adorning main squares with electric decorations to commemorate the holy month's arrival. Another notable custom involves women visiting homes to recite the Quran between iftar and suhoor.

Yemenis prepare for Ramadhan by painting their homes as a festive welcome to

steps and surrounding gardens throughout Ramadhan, a cherished inherited custom. Elderly women prepare the first Ramadhan suhoor, featuring the famous Turkish malaban, a widely distributed delicacy to mark the holy month.

Chinese Muslims refrain from eating breakfast until after performing the Maghreb prayer, typically consuming a date with heavily sweetened tea. Chinese Islamic kitchens are stocked with cakes and local sweets. Some individuals break their fast with red watermelon before heading to the mosque for prayers.

Sudanese customs include renewing dining utensils before Ramadhan, with iftar often being a communal affair held in large courtyards, where families convene to break their fast together.

In Morocco, the pre-dawn meal is announced by blowing the horn seven times upon confirming the sighting of the Ramadhan crescent. People exchange congratulations with the phrase "Mabrouka tenths," signifying the blessed days with the onset of fasting and its three tenths: mercy, forgiveness, and blessings.

Egyptian customs entail street decorations, social invitations, and staying awake



largest countries with a Muslim majority, boasts a population exceeding 260 million, constituting 88 per cent of its populace. Upon the sighting of the crescent marking the commencement of Ramadhan, the Jakarta government grants students leave during the first week to acclimate to fasting. The most prevalent manifestation of celebration in Indonesia is the tradition of beating traditional drums, known as "Badouq," as reported by the

its advent. Collective iftars are organised daily in the streets, adorned with elaborate decorations, accompanied by celebratory gunfire.

Upon confirmation of the holy month's sighting in Türkiye, the tradition of "zaghareed" (sounds women make to express happiness) resonates in every home to convey the joy of impending fasting. Residents commence the ritual of sprinkling rose water and perfumes on door-

until the dawn prayer. Stuffed meats, chicken, béchamel, and molokhiya are popular breakfast choices, complemented by juices such as tamarind, khashaf, qamar al-din, and carob.

Suhoor typically consists of beans, yogurt, cheese, and salad. Musaharati take to the streets at one o'clock in the night, drumming and chanting names to rouse people for suhoor, while the last ten days are marked by seclusion in mosques for worship.

FILM

Atomic bomb movie 'Oppenheimer' crowned best picture at the Oscars

"OPPENHEIMER," THE BLOCKBUSTER biopic about the race to build the first atomic bomb, claimed seven Academy Awards including the prestigious best picture trophy on Sunday as Hollywood celebrated a triumphant year in film.

Irish actor Cillian Murphy won best actor for playing theoretical physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, leader of the US effort in the 1940s to create a weapon that ended World War Two. "Oppenheimer" director Christopher Nolan took home the directing Oscar.

"We made a film about the man who created the atomic bomb, and for better or worse we are living in Oppenheimer's world," Murphy said as he held his trophy on stage. "So I would really like to dedicate this to the peacemakers everywhere."

A three-hour historical drama about science and politics, "Oppenheimer" became an unlikely box office hit and grossed \$953.8 million, in addition to widespread critical praise.

It was the first of Nolan's films to win best picture. The director has previously won acclaim for "The Dark Knight" Batman trilogy, "Inception," "Memento" and other movies.

As he accepted his gold statuette, Nolan noted that the movie business was a century old and still evolving.

"To know you think I'm a meaningful part of this means the world to me," he said.

EMMA STONE WINS BEST ACTRESS

Emma Stone was named best actress for playing a woman revived from the dead in the dark and wacky comedy "Poor Things." It was

the second Academy Award for Stone, who landed the best actress honour for 2016 musical "La La Land."

"This is really overwhelming," she said on stage.

The best actress race had been considered one of the tightest competitions with Lily Gladstone nominated for "Killers of the Flower Moon." Had she prevailed, Gladstone would have been the first Native American to win an acting Oscar.

In supporting actor categories, Robert Downey Jr. of "Oppenheimer" and "The

Holdovers" star Da'Vine Joy Randolph claimed their first Academy Awards.

Downey, who was nominated for an Oscar in 1993 before his career was derailed by drug use, won his honour on Sunday for playing Oppenheimer's professional nemesis, Lewis Strauss.

"I'd like to thank my terrible childhood and the Academy, in that order," Downey joked before he saluted his wife Susan, who he said found him as a "snarly rescue pet" and "loved him back to life."

Randolph received the best supporting actress trophy for playing a grieving mother and cafeteria worker in the comedy set in a New England boarding school.

"For so long, I always wanted to be different, and now I realise I just need to be myself,"



she said. "I thank you for seeing me."

Winners were chosen by the roughly 10,500 members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.

After 2023 was marred by labour strikes by actors and writers, the Oscars gave Hollywood a chance to celebrate two blockbusters, "Oppenheimer" and "Barbie," which brought in a combined \$2.4 billion at theatres and made movies the centre of pop culture last summer.

"Barbie" ended the night with one Oscar.

Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell landed best original song for the ballad "What Was I Made For?" The pair had performed the song on stage earlier with Eilish singing at a microphone next to O'Connell, her brother and co-writer, on piano.

Ryan Gosling donned a hot pink suit, gloves and a cowboy hat to belt out rock ballad "I'm Just Ken," surrounded by male dancers dressed in black.

Amid the upbeat moments, international conflicts were on the minds of attendees, winners and protesters outside the theatre.—Reuters

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF MUSLIM FAITH

570

Prophet Muhammad is born in Mecca.

Prophet Muhammad was born into the most powerful tribe in Mecca, the Quraish, around 570 AD. He was the son of Abdullah ibn Abd Al Muttalib and Amina bint Wahb. At the age of six he, became an orphan and was taken into the care of his grandfather. When the latter dies, he was entrusted to his uncle. He lived in Mecca for the first 53 years of his life (c. 570–632 CE) until the Hijra.

RAMADHAN AROUND THE WORLD

INDONESIA



Ramadhan holds a significant place in Indonesian culture, intertwined with the country's Islamic history dating back to the 13th century. Today, Ramadhan in Indonesia is marked by vibrant celebrations filled with spiritual reflection, fasting, prayers, and charity. Families gather for Iftar, sharing traditional dishes like nasi goreng and sate. Taraweeh prayers are conducted in mosques, enhancing spiritual connections. Generosity flourishes through Zakat, aiding the needy. Ramadhan bazaars offer a festive atmosphere where diverse communities enjoy Indonesian delights. Evolving over time, modern celebrations include competitions and cultural festivals, showcasing talent and creativity while honouring the sacred month.

DOS & DONTs: ETIQUETTE GUIDE DURING THE HOLY MONTH

RECITE THE HOLY QURAN

During the sacred month of Ramadhan, the act of reciting the holy Quran holds profound significance for Muslims around the world. The holy month is a time for spiritual introspection and devotion. Reciting Quran verses is not only a virtuous act but also a means of seeking guidance for righteous living. People should recite and reflect on the verses of holy Quran in their lives.

HEALTH TIPS TO GUIDE YOU THIS RAMADHAN

DON'T SKIP SUHOOR.

Suhoor, the pre-dawn meal, is more than just a tradition—it's essential. Skipping it extends fasting, leading to dehydration and fatigue. Without proper nourishment, relying solely on the last meal until Iftar becomes taxing. Additionally, skipping Suhoor often leads to overeating during Iftar, promoting unhealthy weight gain. Prioritise Suhoor for a balanced and fulfilling fasting experience. Start your day with a nutritious meal, ensuring sustained energy and vitality throughout the day-long fast.



OVERSPENDING AND OVERCONSUMPTION: HOW TO AVOID THE PITFALLS OF RAMADHAN

BY KHETAM AL BUSAIDY

As the month of Ramadhan approaches, the desire to make the most out of the festive season is understandable, but it's crucial to remember that Ramadhan is not about excess. It's about self-discipline, sacrifice, and spiritual growth. Unfortunately, the constant bombardment of advertising and marketing messages has made it difficult for people to differentiate what is necessary and what is not. One of the main areas where overspending occurs is food. During Ramadhan, families often gather around a table of delicious dishes for Iftar, the meal that breaks the fast. However, many end up purchasing more food than they need, resulting in waste and overspending.

Merchants in Oman have reported a steady rise in the purchase of Ramadhan supplies over the past two weeks. They are confident that the coming days will witness a significant surge in purchasing movement with the payment of salaries and the midst of Ramadhan.

During Ramadhan, Issa Khalfan bin Hadeeb al Rahbi, a grill and traditional food vendor in Barka, experiences high popularity and excellent purchasing value. Al Rahbi reported that this value is due to the enormous amounts of traditional meals, particularly grills, that people consume during Iftar and in the evenings when gatherings with friends and family increase the demand for these dishes. In an unofficial Instagram poll conducted by a private account shows that the majority of respondents are investing extra cash in clothes during Ramadhan to get ready for both Ramadhan and Eid al Fitr. More than 30 per cent of the respondents stated that they allocate more money for food and gifts, and 20 per cent allocate it to decorations.

Rahma bint Mohammad al Ajmiyah, a consumer, said that balancing life's demands and managing expenses can be challenging these days, particularly for those who only earn their monthly salary.

She added, "Due to the numerous requirements, the

monthly expenses that are set may go beyond half of the salary. Therefore, a balance should be achieved by reducing unnecessary requirements, postponing them, or possibly dividing them for several months to avoid putting a burden on the family."

Al Ajmi said that the pressure on monthly expenses has increased due to societies failing to catch up with influencers and celebrities on social media, and most of the extra requirements are completely unnecessary and lack validity in advertisements or other temptations.

She explained that companies use Ramadhan as a marketing opportunity to promote their products and services. They create ads that showcase extravagant meals, lavish gifts, and luxurious lifestyles. These ads often create unrealistic expectations and fuel the desire to spend more. Moreover, the pressure to keep up with the latest trends and fashions has led people to spend beyond their means.

"During the Holy Month, it's important to merely buy what you need and avoid storing large quantities of food and drinks that can go to waste, as certain items cannot be stored for long periods and end up being discarded," she added.

In the same context, shopper Fail bin Salim al Busaidy explained, "The month of Ramadhan is a means of changing some bad patterns of consumption and expenditures, and based on what has been firmly established in the minds of many people, is that the month of Ramadhan is a month of generosity. People seem to be more inclined towards hypocrisy in this month, chanting Ramadhan Kareem."

"In comparison with previous years, the prices of materials have increased significantly. In addition, consumers' appetite for purchasing has been stimulated by the presence of major supermarkets as well as products offered.

Al Busaidy emphasised, "Retailers and vendors offer real sales, promotions, discounts, or vouchers to attract customers and give them the best price by offering cheaper products that encourage consumers to buy goods they do

not need. Ten years ago, we were able to buy the same items at RO 50 but this time we're spending twice as much and putting a strain on our families."

Regarding compulsive buying behaviour, Issa al Nubi,

"Companies use marketing and advertising to entice consumers to purchase more products before and during Ramadhan. Also, special deals and promotions are offered to create a sense of urgency and anxiety, leading individuals to



director of marketing and community relations at Gulf College, explained that excessive shopping behaviour arises when individuals may feel a constant urge to shop, regardless of their financial ability or the usefulness of the items purchased, often driven by emotional or psychological factors rather than true necessity.

According to Al Nubi, cultural and social factors contribute to shopping addiction during Ramadhan. Al Nubi said that social expectations and customs push people to spend extravagantly on various foods and drinks, whether they are traditional or trendy, pushing them to engage in excessive shopping to meet societal pressures and appear as capable and luxurious.

make purchase decisions without much thought. This can result in unnecessary purchases," he added.

Also highlighted by Al Nubi: Excessive shopping can lead to financial stress and debt, which can eventually lead to bankruptcy. It can also cause psychological stress, leading to feelings of guilt, anxiety, and psychological strain. This is especially true when individuals realise that they lack control over their shopping habits or have difficulty managing their finances after they reach the stage of bankruptcy.

Ramadhan is a time for reflection, and it is crucial to set a budget, practice mindfulness before committing to a purchase, and avoid situations that trigger impulsive behaviour, Al Nubi advised.



GETTING CREATIVE WITH A RAMADHAN POPUP EXHIBIT

BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

Engaging in discussions about art during Ramadhan holds significant value on multiple fronts. Firstly, it enriches cultural understanding and appreciation by offering glimpses into diverse histories, perspectives, and creative expressions. Secondly, art serves as a catalyst for spiritual reflection, fostering deep emotional connections and prompting contemplation, which aligns with the heightened spirituality experienced during Ramadhan.

But days before the holy month, Dana and Lyne Kawadari were on a quick visit to Oman, showcasing a Ramadhan Pop Up in collaboration with Bait Muzna.

Their collection from their venture, The Tableware, Dubai, could be displayed on tables, and can be showcased as art pieces on walls, or arranged strategically in rooms as part of interior decoration.

"We have items made of wood, ceramic, and metal. Each piece comes from different locations," Dana said. "It is a whole mood."

"We have table linens too - some of them handmade in Syria. We try to support women artisans who have talent and who just need to be discovered and launched to the world. We are always on the lookout for someone who has something nice to offer," she explained. The artefacts bring in the culture by depicting architecture, calligraphy, art, and so on.

She explained how during Ramadhan, people come together for Iftar - a moment of gratitude and joy. Tableware embodies anything related to Arab identity, said Lyne Kawadari. "We are really proud to say that we continue to strive to work on our Arab identity and show the world that there is so much talent in the GCC and the Middle East. So as we contemplate and pray, it is also nice to showcase creativity."

This is how Lynne defines Arab identity: "I think it comes from Arab generosity. That is because generosity leads our lives. Everything we do has a purpose, and we hope this purpose echoes to the world."

According to her, this identity is defined by



beauty, enjoying little things, and, most importantly, family time because everything in Arab culture surrounds the idea of spending time together. "This is why we like to produce items, curate products that bring families together. So plates, napkins - all things that people would use all the time are on our list," she noted.

INSTAGRAM
TOP PICKS OF THE DAY

vibes_of_oman with 4 others
Salalah, Oman

GREEN PARADISE

whisk_and_zoom with 2 others
Suhar, Al Bāṭīnah, Oman

BEFORE SUNSET

A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

Youths having to grow up 'too quickly' amid climate fears: Thunberg

Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg (second left) and a group of fellow activists block the main entrances of the Swedish Parliament during a protest due to the lack of action from the Swedish authorities, on Monday, in Stockholm, Sweden. — AFP

Swedish climate campaigner Greta Thunberg said on Monday that young people like her have had to grow up "too quickly" to resolve a climate crisis caused by previous generations.

Denouncing inaction by politicians on climate change, Thunberg made her remarks just days ahead of the fifth anniversary of a global youth climate protest that drew over a million participants.

On Monday, she sat on the steps of Sweden's parliament, blocking the main entrance in a protest with around 10 other youth activists, holding a banner reading "Climate Justice Now".

"We are way too many young people who have had to grow up in the climate movement and who have had to grow up way too quickly, to take the responsibility to try to clean up after the older generations," Thunberg said.

"The Swedish government as well as all other governments in the world are not treating the climate crisis like a crisis at all."

"They are still letting short-term economic profits be prioritised over human lives and the planet," she said, adding that she and her fellow activists "feel a bit like broken records, we have been repeating the same message over and over again".

News agency TT reported that politicians were still able to enter parliament through side entrances.

When Thunberg started sitting outside the Swedish parliament in August 2018 with her "School Strike for the Climate" sign, she was an anonymous teenager in a world she saw as dying in silence.

Five years later, Thunberg's "Fridays for Future" movement and its subsequent global marches had had a global impact, politi-

cal science researcher Joost de Moor said in October.

"It has raised awareness for the issue," he said.

It has also "contributed to the increased legitimacy of pro-climate policy-making, which has in turn made it easier for willing politicians to act on the issue," he said, citing as an example Frans Timmermans, the former EU climate commissioner responsible for the Green Deal currently being debated in the bloc.

Despite this, and "as Greta Thunberg has said herself many times... climate policy making continues to fall far behind what climate scientists say is necessary", de Moor said. A report by the European Environment Agency (EEA) on Monday warned of "catastrophic" consequences if Europe failed to take urgent action to adapt to risks posed by climate change. — AFP