

P12

BARAKAT, MAZOOM
EMERGE FASTEST AS
FINAL ROUND OF OAA
LEAGUE CONCLUDES



P13

EDO SUCCESSFULLY
REDUCES BORROWING
COSTS ON
\$2.5 BILLION LOAN



P20

THE
AFRICAN
MUSIC IN
OMAN



MUSCAT

MOU SIGNED TO
BUILD 300 HOMES

Al Rahma Association for Motherhood and Child Welfare and Sobha Group signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the SAS project initiative - to build 300 homes for orphans and needy families, at a total value of RO 9.6 million over the next 10 years. The MoU was signed by Sana bint Abdulrahman al Khanjariyah, Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of Al Rahma Association, and P N C Menon, Founder and Chairman of the Sobha Group. The agreement provides for the establishment of integrated housing complexes for the target group. **DETAILS ON P3**

BANK MUSCAT POSTS
RO 51M NET PROFIT

Bank Muscat posted a net profit of RO 51.30 million during the first quarter of 2023 compared to RO 48.26 million reported during the same period in 2022, constituting an increase of 6.3 per cent, according to the preliminary unaudited results announced by the bank. Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 91.71 million for the three months period ended on March 31, 2023 compared to RO 82.08 million for the same period in 2022. **DETAILS ON P14**



OMAN OBSERVER
FIRST DEDICATED ENGLISH
NEWS APP IN OMAN

DOWNLOAD TODAY

INSIDE



EUROPE'S LARGEST N-REACTOR
ENTERS SERVICE

P7



WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO PREVENT
FUTURE PANDEMICS?

P9

Decree on Omanis' marriage to foreigners

H I S M A J E S T Y I S S U E S O N E R O Y A L D E C R E E

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued Royal Decree No 23/2023 on Omanis' marriage to foreigners.

Article (1) cancels Royal Decree No 58/93 and annuls all decisions issued in implementation of its provisions.

Article (2) states that the provisions of this Decree shall not prejudice the provisions of the Islamic Sharia or public order or any provision cited in the laws, Royal decrees or applicable systems stipulating non-marriage to a foreigner as

a condition for occupying or continuing to occupy certain public jobs of significance or special nature.

Article (3) stipulates that documents proving the cases of marriage of Omanis to foreigners within the Sultanate of Oman shall be documented in accordance with the provisions of the relevant laws and Royal decrees. Foreign documents proving these cases of marriage are treated as official Omani documents after being authenticated by the competent authorities in the respective foreign

country/countries, as well as the Omani Foreign Ministry.

Article (4) validates the documents evidencing the marriage of Omanis to foreigners that are issued by foreign official authorities prior to the date of entry into force of this Decree — even though they might be in violation of the provisions regulating the marriage of Omanis to foreigners in force at that time - on condition that those documents be authenticated by the Omani Foreign Ministry, and in a manner that does not

contradict the provision of Article (2) of this Decree.

Article (5) states that Units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and other public legal persons shall implement the provisions of this Decree, each in their own areas of jurisdiction.

Article (6) repeals all that contravenes this Decree or contradicts its provisions.

Article (7) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publishing. — ONA

ROYAL OPERA TO PRESENT ALL STARS ENSEMBLE



The Royal Opera House Muscat announced the Friday night concert (May 5) with the Accademia Stauffer All Stars Ensemble. It is a talented and extraordinary ensemble of musicians from the Stauffer Academy of Cremona in Italy. The academy is an institution which nurtures education in stringed instruments. The evening concert offers a programme of two special composers, Vivaldi and Piazzolla, each exploring the seasons of the year through compositions arranged for stringed instruments.

No fine for ferrying friends and family

KABEER YOUSUF

[@kabeeryousef](#)

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology on Sunday issued a clarification regarding the recent inspection campaign aimed at finding illegal taxis run by expatriates in the country.

The ministry clarified that people who transport their acquaintances and friends without any financial reward will not be fined. Expatriates in the Sultanate of Oman have been expressing concerns across social media platforms regarding the recent inspection campaign by the ministry.

Many said they were fined RO 200 while travelling with friends and family. Some wrote to the Observer, saying he got a fine of RO 200 while ferrying an injured friend for medical aid. Another said, he was fined while dropping his wife at the airport, who is on a different visa.

"I was fined for taking my friends in my car after a sports practice in Al Wadi Al Kabir because we all were holding resident cards under different com-

panies," an expat said.

Another expatriate lamented that he was fined while taking his friend to airport last week.

"I was shocked to receive a fine because the world is talking about car pooling and here I'm fined for carrying an additional person to the airport," he said.

INSPECTIONS

"The ministry would like to clarify that the inspection campaigns on land transport, which the ministry has recently begun to implement, are aimed at ensuring compliance with the requirements of the Land Transport Law.

The implementation of regulations is to ensure the safety of users of land transport and the safety of goods and to preserve the rights of the parties of land transport carriers (the sender and the consignee)," the ministry statement says.

The statement added, "The inspection teams came across a number of violations, including violations of the requirements for carrying out transport activities concerning transportation of goods and ferrying individuals."

Million-year-old viruses help fight cancer, say scientists

LONDON: Relics of ancient viruses — that have spent millions of years hiding inside human DNA - help the body fight cancer, say scientists.

The study by the Francis Crick Institute in London showed the dormant remnants of these old viruses are woken up when cancerous cells spiral out of control. This unintentionally helps the immune system target and attack the tumour.

The team wants to harness the discovery to design vaccines that

can boost cancer treatment, or even prevent it. The researchers had noticed a connection between better survival from lung cancer and a part of the immune system, called B-cells, clustering around tumours, BBC news reported.

B-cells are the part of our body that manufactures antibodies and are better known for their role in fighting off infections, such as Covid. Precisely what they were doing in lung cancer was a mystery but a series of intricate



experiments using samples from patients and animal tests showed they were still attempting to fight viruses. Retroviruses have the nifty trick of slipping a copy of their genetic instructions inside our own. Some of these foreign instructions have, over time, been co-opted and serve useful purposes inside our cells, but others are tightly controlled to stop them spreading.

However, chaos dominates inside a cancerous cell when it is growing uncontrollably and

the once tight control of these ancient viruses is lost. These ancient genetic instructions are no longer able to resurrect whole viruses but they can create fragments of viruses that are enough for the immune system to spot a viral threat. The antibodies summon other parts of the immune system that kill off the "infected" cells — the immune system is trying to stop a virus but in this case is taking out cancerous cells.

— Agencies



Surge in accident cases as Ramadhan nears end

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Despite repeated warnings and preventive measures, accidents continue to happen on a regular basis, some of them being serious and fatal.

Some of the cases reported and shared by the eyewitnesses on social media, however, have not been confirmed by the authorities.

“Around 13-14 cases have been reported in the last 10 days and most of these accidents from outside the big cities Ibri, Nizwa and Wadi al Alaq, which points out that rules are not strictly followed in the absence of strict

vigilance or patrol on the roads,” said a social post.

Royal Oman Police (ROP) has been urging motorists to follow road safety guidelines during Ramadhan as there has been surge in road accidents over the past week or so.

Fatigue driving is particularly common during Ramadhan as people adjust to the fasting schedule and tend to stay up for long hours, which may lead to a lack of attention and slower reaction times.

“Ensure to get enough rest and avoid driving during peak fatigue hours, especially before iftar,” ROP said.



One citizen critically said, “Some people do not mind donating some riyals to the treasury by violations but in the process, he puts himself, his family, and that of others in danger.” According to National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), most of the accidents reported in the Sultanate of Oman are due to speed, fatigue, negligence, overtaking, weather, and sudden stopping, among others.

In its advisories, ROP said that getting too close to the vehicle in front of you (tailgating) increases

the risk of crashing into it. It is also considered a violation if the driver did not leave the safety distance.

For those driving after sunset, it is important to have a thorough cleaning of the windshield, check on headlights and taillights, and avoid looking directly at the lights of oncoming vehicles. Keep a safe distance and slow down the vehicle.

“The motorist must focus only on driving at all times and avoid using everything that would distract attention such as using the phone.” To avoid traffic congestion, the Royal Oman Police has restricted trucks from the main roads during busy hours.

To avoid any possible traffic congestion Royal Oman Police -D.G of Traffic announced that the movement of trucks is forbidden during the holy month of Ramadhan. The trucks are banned Sunday to Thursday from 6 am- 9 am & 12 pm and 4 pm. Saturday: from 6 pm - 10 pm on the main roads in Muscat Governorate, Al Dhakhiliyah Road (Muscat - Bidbid Bridge), Al Batinah Highway (Muscat - Shinas).

To avoid traffic congestion and accidents, this year the Ministry of Labour also announced flexible hours and remote working options, as people rush for work in the morning or return home.

Oman Medical Association gets new BoD

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

Dr Walid bin Khaled al Zadjali has been elected the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Medical Association (OMA) for the year 2023 -2025 while Dr Rashid al Abri was chosen to be the Vice-Chairman at the recently held general assembly of the association at the headquarters of the Association in Al Khuwair.

While Dr Sultan al Harthy became the Secretary-General, Dr Mahmoud al Rahbi was elected to be the Treasurer. Dr Jaafar



Suleiman, Dr Taha al Lawati, Dr Taimur al Balushi, Dr Said al Mughairy, Dr Badr al Hadhrami, Dr Abdulaziz al Sawai, Dr Sheikhan al Hashemi, and Dr Rashid al Said are the new members of the Board of Directors for the said period.

Elections to the Board of Directors was held with the participation of members, under the supervision of representatives from the Ministry of Social Development. The meeting began with a visual presentation by Dr

Walid al Zadjali during which he dealt with the Association's achievements, goals and plans that were achieved, in addition to the efforts made by the organisation during the years 2021 and 2022.

The achievements were made possible with a strong strategic partnership and constructive collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the authorities concerned with the health and medical sectors, in addition to the implementation of the Mu'afa initiative, which implied managing a hospital for those affected by Covid 19 crisis.

■ RAFO JOINS SEARCH EFFORTS FOR MISSING MAN



MUSCAT: A helicopter belonging to the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), in coordination with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), carried out an intensified search operation for a citizen who went missing in the sea in the Niyabat of Al Ashkhara (Khuwaima area) in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate. The operation was still ongoing at press time. -ONA

Step in to luxury with the All-New Hongqi Ousado



MHD ACERE, the exclusive distributor of **Hongqi** in Oman, is proud to announce the arrival of the all-new **Hongqi Ousado**. This luxury car embodies elegance, sophistication, and modernity, making it the perfect choice for young Omanis in the corporate world and entrepreneurs who want to experience the world of automotive luxury.

The **Hongqi Ousado** boasts a prominent exterior that reflects a strong and sophisticated aura, with lines that trail from the core, offering a powerful, quiet, and smooth drive. The interior design distinctly balances comfort and harmony with nobility and luxury, making driving a unique and pleasurable experience.

According to Mr. Mohsin Hani AL Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, “We are thrilled to introduce the all-new **Hongqi Ousado** to Oman. This car is a masterpiece of design and engineering, and we are confident that it will exceed the expectations of our discerning customers.”

The car is powered by a high-performance aluminum 2.0T turbocharged engine that produces 223 horsepower and 340 Nm of torque, offering better combustion and lower fuel consumption. Coupled with an 8-speed

transmission, the car accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in just 7.8 seconds.

The **Hongqi Ousado** also leads its class in spaciousness, thanks to its long wheelbase measuring 2920 mm. The seats are finished with soft material specially designed to suit everyone, and it sports a 12-position electronic setting for the driver's seat in the Flagship category, contributing to a unique and enjoyable trip.

Equipped with nearly 100 shock absorbers and more than 30 acoustic technologies, the car mitigates road noise while driving by emitting an inverted sound wave to maximize the cabin's silence. The DYNAUDIO surround sound system with 12 loudspeakers in the Flagship category creates an immersive feeling for passengers as they indulge in the musical ambiance.

The **Hongqi Ousado** also features a one-of-a-kind panoramic sunroof measuring 1010x890mm, providing an unbelievably wide view to enjoy the sunlight during the day and the twinkling stars at night. It also has an adaptive driving beam, parking assist system, and wireless charging capability for various devices to ensure fast and safe charging.

Safety features in the **Hongqi**



Ousado include 9 airbags carefully distributed within the vehicle, a strong steel structure, and a SMART Emergency call function. With all these features, the **Hongqi Ousado** promises an extremely comfortable driving experience that ensures the safety of the family.

The **Hongqi Ousado** is now available in Oman, and interested customers can visit MHD ACERE's **Hongqi** showroom to experience the car's luxury and performance firsthand.

HONGQI is a luxury automotive marque of FAW Group, China, which is ranked 66 among global fortune 500 companies. **Hongqi** strives to be an icon in the automobile industry with its pursuit of new technologies, intelligent-driving features, and absolute safety assurance – all combined with excellent design aesthetics.

About MHD ACERE
MHD ACERE [Automotive, Construction Equipment and Renewable Energy] is one of the largest and most successful privately owned business conglomerates in the Sultanate of Oman and the Gulf region. It boasts of a diversified portfolio of products and services and brand partnerships from across the continents and is the exclusive distributor of some of the finest automotive brands in the world.

To know more, visit:
<https://mhdacere.com/>



Follow us on **Twitter**
@omanobserver

oman

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

MONDAY | APRIL 17 | 2023

3

I CHOSE OMAN BECAUSE IT CREATED ME AND MY CAREER: P N C MENON

Businessman to build 300 homes for the needy in Oman

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The millionaire businessman who started his professional career in the Sultanate of Oman, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Al Rahma Association of Motherhood and Childhood in Muscat to contribute RO9.6 million to build 300 homes for orphans and needy families over ten years.

P N C Menon, the chairman of Sobha Group, a real estate developer in UAE and India, signed the MoU with Sana bint Abdulrahman al Khanjariyah, chairwoman of Al Rahma Association of Motherhood and Childhood Welfare.

Menon who had decided to devote half of his wealth to charitable causes began his entrepreneurial journey in Oman, designing and building palaces, royal facilities, and mosques, including the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, and he and his family were granted Omani citizenship in 1995 by late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

Speaking to the Observer, Menon said, "The project may take less than ten years, maybe even five. I chose Oman because it created me, and my career and my entire young age were spent here. Apart from housing, food, and education are the most important necessities."



Al Rahma Association seeks to provide a better life for orphans and underprivileged families registered with it, by implementing the SAS project which aims to provide suitable housing for them.

The project was launched on December 12, 2022, and involved cooperation with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning to provide land for those who do not have a suitable home, as well as for those who live in rented accommodation or in old and dilapidated houses. The project aims to help the target group by establishing integrated housing complexes (where land is available), or by building separate houses for those who will be given land or for those who own unconstructed land or a dilapidated house. The building area for each dwelling will be

200 square meters, and the cost of building each house will be around RO35,000.

"Having started my business in Oman in 1976, I have the utmost respect for the country. I have therefore always cherished the idea of making the greatest possible contribution to the nation. I am truly elated to contribute to the construction of 300 homes in Oman over the next ten years for orphans and needy families," Menon said.

"Through this initiative, I look forward to providing financial, as well as non-financial support to the less fortunate members of the Omani society and aid them in raising their living standards," he added.

Sana bint Abdulrahman al Khanjariyah, Chairwoman of Al Rahma Association of Motherhood and Childhood

Welfare, stated: "The association sponsors more than 1,600 orphans from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and around 600 underprivileged families on a monthly basis, in addition to 1,700 families on a seasonal basis (aid is provided to them during Ramadhan and holidays)."

"The association aims, through aid programmes provided to the underprivileged, to provide them with a decent life using all available means. Hence, the SAS project was launched to build homes for orphans and needy families registered with the association on December 12, 2022. Priority in construction is given to the neediest group, and they have been classified as land-owning and landless families," she added.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning is now working on completing the procedures for granting lands to the list of families that have been selected by us, as well as those that will be selected to be among the recipients of assistance in building a house for the first phase of the project's life.

Rahma Association of Motherhood and Childhood Welfare offers moral, financial, and in-kind support to underprivileged families and children, in addition to educational and recreational services to encourage academic growth.

Sayyid Firas appointed as WTITC patron



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 16

World Telugu Information Technology Council (WTITC) has appointed His Highness Sayyid Firas bin Fatik al Said as a patron of the council for Oman. This appointment was made during a visit by a WTITC delegation led by Sundeep Kumar Makthala to Oman on last week.

During the visit, the delegation met with Sayyid Firas to discuss collaborations between Oman and the Telugu States. The discussion covered investment opportunities, business policies in Oman, and technology exchange initiatives in the IT and ITES sectors.

Sundeep Kumar Makthala, the leader of the delegation, handed over the appointment letter to Sayyid Firas, formally appointing him as a patron of WTITC Oman. The delegation also visited Telugu people facing difficulties in Muscat and Suhar labour camps, providing them with hope and support.

Makthala, who is the Chairman of WTITC, said, "We are delighted to meet Sayyid Firas and discussed the immense

potential for cooperation between Oman and the Telugu States. Our discussions focused on investment opportunities and technology exchange initiatives in the IT and ITES sectors, which can create a win-win situation for both sides."

On his part, Sayyid Firas said, "I am honoured to be appointed as a patron member of WTITC. This reflects the importance we attach to the collaboration between Oman and the Telugu States. I believe that this partnership will create new opportunities for investment, trade, and technology exchange, and contribute to the growth and development of both our economies."

The delegation included Ritzy Group CEO MNR Gupta, SSR Cloud CEO Shasidhar Sharma, and WTITC - President Kareem Shaik, WTITC Members Hemanth Sarvabotla, and Abishek Reddy Arrabolu.

This appointment of Sayyid Firas as a patron member of WTITC is expected to strengthen ties between Oman and the Telugu States and facilitate more collaboration in the IT and ITES sectors.

ROP arrests suspects in Bahla murder case



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, APRIL 16

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Sunday arrested a number of people over the murder of an Omani citizen in the Wilayat of Bahla. In a statement, ROP said the security services managed

to arrest and close the case of a murder that took place in Bahla on April 13, 2023.

"A number of citizens accused of involvement in the crime have been arrested. Legal procedures are being completed against them," ROP statement said.

Take safety measures while purchasing livestock

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) said people have to exercise caution when purchasing livestock and ensure that they are free of diseases, stressing the importance of slaughtering livestock in municipal slaughterhouses in order to preserve public health.

The ministry has outlined many precautionary measures that must be taken into account before, during, and after slaughter. They include ensuring that livestock is free of external parasites, for instance, ticks as their presence does not necessarily mean the presence of a disease.

Generally, there are some diseases, which do not show any obvious symptoms in livestock. The person involved in the slaughtering process has to be in



good health and free from any injuries or wounds, with the need to wear protective clothing, the ministry emphasised.

The ministry stressed the need to dispose of slaughter waste in a healthy manner in order

to curb any possible source of infection. "For the sake of safety and prevention of infection with common diseases transmitted from animals to humans during slaughter, such as Crimean haemorrhagic fever, the slaughter

must be done in slaughterhouses. If it is not possible, necessary preventive measures must be followed, such as wearing protective clothing and gloves, the ministry reiterated," the ministry stated.

Embassy of India's blood donation drive evokes good response

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health inaugurated the annual Ramadhan blood donation campaign organised by the Embassy of Oman in association with the Ministry of Health on Sunday.

The campaign welcomed blood donors who comprised teachers from several schools and the general public at the Embassy multi-purpose hall.

This is the second consecutive year that the Embassy of India is organising the blood donation

drive during the holy month of Ramadhan.

The last year's drive was a resounding success, with an overwhelming participation of more than 1,500 people who contributed 1,397 units of blood. This year's drive is set to exceed expectations in terms of participation and enthusiasm.

"This blood donation drive is an important initiative by the Embassy of India to help address the shortage of blood at the Sultanate of Oman's blood banks, usually experienced during the holy month of Ramadhan. The week-long drive is



being simultaneously organised in Muscat, Salalah and Suhar," Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health told the media.

He also appreciated the efforts

of the Indian community in Oman for their wholehearted participation in the drive and for promoting the cause of blood donation.

Speaking to the Observer, Dr

Zainab al Arai, Director at the Bausher Blood Bank said that there's a minimum requirement of 100 blood units a day in the country but the supply is drastically reduced during Ramadhan.

"On a given day, there is a need for at least 100 units in all the hospitals but the supply is way down and we organise blood donation campaigns in association with embassies and other organisations," she said, adding that there are many mobile blood donation services in use which plies from wilayat to wilayat.

Amit Narang, Ambassador of

India to the Sultanate of Oman, said the Indian community in Oman remains committed to supporting the health needs of the local society, especially during the holy month of Ramadhan when our local Omani friends are involved in fasting and prayers.

The support for the drive came from Sewa International, Bahwan Engineering Group, Al Naba Group, Al Ansari Group, Al Tasnim Group, Indian Social Club branches in Salalah and Suhar, various Yoga organisations in Oman, Indian Schools in Oman, Lulu Hypermarket and others.



O B S E R V E R R O U N D T A B L E

‘ISLAM IS WELL BLENDED WITH SCIENCE’



KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

Every aspect of the holy month of Ramadhan is well blended with science and do's and don'ts are based on various facets of science, according to the speakers who took part in the third edition of the 'Observer Round Table' held at the Ministry of Information premises last week.

The Round Table discussions, aiming at shedding light on a contemporary topic on which the experts shared with the participants, had panel of sharing their views on 'Ramadhan in the eyes of science'. Experts included Dr Khalid Shaikh, Senior Diabetologist and Specialist Medicine at the Royal Oman Police Hospital, Engineer Abdulwahab al Busaidy, PDO Amateur Astronomer; and Mini Padikkal, Clinical Dietician at NMC.

They shared their views on how fasting and hunger help in abstaining from evils, benefits of fasting, how 'revenge' eating is landing us in trouble as well as lessons learnt during Ramadhan that can be followed through the rest of the year. Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili, Editor-in-Chief, Oman Daily Observer was the Chief Guest of the event that was moderated by Shaddad al Musalmy, Senior Editor at the newspaper.



Dr Khalid Shaikh



Abdulwahab al Busaidy



Mini Padikkal

BENEFITS OF FASTING

Dr Shaikh said during fasting, a person goes through several processes. "During fasting, a man goes through several stages that vary in degrees. They include feeds stage, energy stage, ketosis stage, starvation stage, and the like," he said.

"All these stages have their role in a fasting regime and these stages help in staying hydrated hence, one should avoid unhealthy foods immediately after breaking the fast," Dr Shaikh added.

In regards to broken sleeping patterns during Ramadhan, Dr Shaikh said fasting, energy and sleeping go for a drastic change during the first few days of fasting but the fasting person gets used to it as the days progress.

"We tend to move around a circadian clock which is already set by our past habits and habitual actions. The circadian clock has an internally driven 24-hour rhythm that tends to run longer than 24 hours but resets every day by the sun's light/dark cycle," he said.

Need for physical exercise, good diet

One can do mild to moderate physical exercise post-Iftar to strengthen the muscles. "Light to moderate exercises are suggested after breaking fast, but not immediately after iftar and one should avoid heavy exercises for the sake of our breathing and heartbeat patterns," Dr Khalid said.

Mini Padikkal, who joined the discussions online from her workplace, said an eating regime that incorporates fruits, vegetables, and other foods rich in fibre content is highly suggested for Iftar and above all, one should follow a disciplined lifestyle. "Any fruit, vegetable or any food which is rich in fibre or leafy vegetables are highly desired. The dates with which we break our fast are ideal for the digestive system. Furthermore, it is all about falling into a disciplined lifestyle during the holy month and after," she said, joining live from her workplace.

LUNAR SYSTEM AND ISLAM

Abdulwahab al Busaidy, retired PDO official and Amateur Astronomer, said Islam as a religion and Ramadhan fasting and all other rituals are based on the lunar system and that Islam rotates around human beings to make us a better person and Ramadhan is a period for expanding horizons.

"All Islamic rituals are based on the planet movements star sightings and timings are followed according to the lunar movements," Al Busaidy said. This is because Islam emerged in Arabia at a time when travel along the desert trade routes was largely by night, and navigation depended upon the position of the moon and stars. The moon thus represents the guidance of God on the path through life. If the crescent moon is visible shortly after sunset on the evening of day 29, the following day is the first day of the new month. If no sighting is made, a 30th day is added to the current month, which is then followed by the first day of the subsequent month. Since the Islamic calendar is lunar, the days change relative to the Gregorian calendar.

The panel members of the Observer Round Table discussions concluded that Islam is closely intertwined and all celebrations and observations are based on lunar, and star movements which keep the believers grounded and lead to truthfulness.





Follow us on **instagram**
omanobserver

Yemen fighters, government complete prisoner exchange

SANAA: Yemeni fighters and government forces freed scores of prisoners on Sunday, including a woman, on the last of a three-day exchange of nearly 900 detainees, boosting hopes of ending their protracted war.

Five flights carrying nearly 200 detainees from both sides flew between the Ansar Allah fighter-held capital of Sanaa and the government-controlled northern city of Marib.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said that brought the number of prisoners freed over the three days to 869 under a deal agreed in Switzerland last month.

Among those exchanged on Sunday was one woman, Samira March, whom government forces detained five years ago and accused of organising explosions that killed dozens, a government official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"She was freed in exchange for the release of journalists held by the Ansar Allah," government negotiator Majed Fadail confirmed. The four journalists had been sentenced to death by the Ansar Allah.

"Let us not forget the real purpose of these releases: reuniting loved ones," ICRC media adviser Jessica Moussan said.

"These past three days have brought back joy to so many shattered families who have been torn apart by conflict. We only hope more of these releases will happen in the near future."

Some of those released on Sunday were taken to the Red Cross aircraft in wheelchairs. Those boarding at Marib were given plastic bags containing food



A relative embraces a freed prisoner upon his arrival on an ICRC-chartered plane at Sanaa Airport, amid a prisoner swap between two sides in the Yemen conflict, in Sanaa. — Reuters

for when the daily Ramadhan fast was over.

At the airport in Sanaa, Ansar Allah fighters staged a ceremonial dance with swords to greet their comrades.

On Friday, 318 prisoners were transported on four flights between Sanaa and government-controlled Aden, reuniting detainees with their families just before the holiday of Eid al Fitr.

On Saturday, 357 detainees took flights between the Saudi city of Abha and Sanaa. Saudis were among the prisoners freed.

It is not known how many prisoners each side still has.

The Ansar Allah seized Sanaa in 2014, prompting the intervention the following year. Hundreds of thousands have died in the

conflict which triggered a major humanitarian crisis.

A UN-brokered ceasefire that started in April 2022 has sharply reduced casualties. The truce expired in October, but fighting has largely remained on hold.

Marib governorate, an oil-rich region, saw some of the most bitter fighting in the last two years.

The city of Marib is the last northern bastion of the government, which is now based in the southern city of Aden.

The prisoner exchange, the largest since more than 1,000 prisoners were freed in October 2020, is a confidence-building measure coinciding with an intense diplomatic push to end the war, as it nears its nine-year mark.

The exchange and the truce

negotiations come a month after Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to re-establish diplomatic ties.

A Saudi delegation has travelled to Sanaa to push for a more durable ceasefire, even as the Ansar Allah generally object to Saudis mediation, insisting the neighbouring kingdom has played a central role in the conflict.

The delegation left on Thursday without a finalised truce but with plans for more talks that the Saudi foreign ministry said on Saturday would take place "as soon as possible".

Political chief Mahdi al Mashat said the next round of talks with Saudi Arabia would start after Eid al Fitr expected on April 21, Yemen's Saba news agency reported — AFP

Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter — including in Kiev, Antakya

ATHENS/MOSCOW/KIEV: Millions of Orthodox Christians around the world rang in Easter on Sunday with large midnight Masses.

The predominantly Orthodox countries include Greece, Russia, Ukraine, Cyprus and Serbia, but people also celebrated the solemn Easter Mass in German Orthodox churches.

The festival was overshadowed again this year by Russia's war against Ukraine, where fighting continues.

According to official figures, around 70 per cent of the pre-war population of more than 40 million in Ukraine are Orthodox or Greek Catholic Christians.

In Kiev, Easter celebrations were to take place under high security precautions. During the night, as usual, a curfew was in force until 5 am.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky encouraged his compatriots to keep on believing in victory over Russia in his Orthodox Easter message.

"The war could not erase us, our values, our traditions and our holidays," he said in a video released on Sunday.

"Today we celebrate the resurrection of Christ. The main symbol is victory: the victory of good, the victory of truth, the victory of life. We celebrate Easter with an unshakeable faith in their reversibility of these victories."

Zelensky said that a year ago, just after Russia's attack, prayers were being said for Ukraine to survive at all. Since then, they have forced Russians away from capital Kiev and other areas, although fighting remains intense in the east. — dpa



An elderly woman lights a candle before the Orthodox Easter service at the Church of the Intercession of the Holy Virgin in Moscow. — Reuters

Many hurt in Easter fireworks

ATHENS: Several people were injured during Easter fireworks displays in Greece and Cyprus on Saturday night.

In the most serious accident, a 7-year-old girl on the tourist island of Rhodes suffered severe burns and had to be taken to hospital. On Cyprus, a 9-year-old boy was injured in the eye. The police are searching for those responsible, the media of both countries reported unanimously, citing the police.

In Athens, youths hurled dozens of incendiary bottles onto one of the central streets, state radio reported.

People are injured in Greece and Cyprus every year around Easter time. Mainly youthful Orthodox Christians set off large fireworks during the main Mass on Saturday night. On some islands, like Kalymnos, people use home made dynamite bombs.

The Orthodox Churches stick to the Julian calendar in connection with Easter. For Catholics and Protestants, the Gregorian calendar applies. — dpa

IS attack on Syria truffle hunters kills at least 26

BEIRUT: Suspected IS group fighters killed at least 26 people on Sunday in Syria, a war monitor said, the latest in a spate of attacks targeting people foraging for desert truffles in the impoverished war-ravaged country.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said "civilians and at least 10 pro-regime fighters" were among "the 26 people killed in an attack by IS fighters while they were collecting truffles in the desert east of (the central city of) Hama".

Syria's desert truffles fetch high prices in a country battered by 12 years of war and a crushing economic crisis.

Between February and April each year, hundreds of impoverished Syrians search for truffles in the vast Syrian desert, or Badia — a known hideout for fighters that is also littered with landmines.

Since February, more than 200 people — most of them civilians — have been killed in IS attacks targeting truffle hunters or by landmines left by the extremists, according to the Observatory.

The victims included 15 people foraging for truffles who had their throats slit by IS last month. In February, IS fighters on motorcycles opened fire on truffle hunters and killed at least 68 people, the war monitor said at the time.

The Syrian desert is renowned for producing some of the best quality truffles in the world. The prized fungus can sell for up to \$25 per kilo depending on size and grade — in a country where the average monthly wage is around \$18.

Separately on Sunday, suspected IS fighters killed four shepherds in the eastern Syrian region of Deir Ezzor, said the Observatory that relies on a wide network of sources on the ground. — AFP



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services Company invites reputable contractors for carrying out below said tender in Dhofar Governorate.

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/ 2023/051	CLEANING AND DESINFECTING OF WATER RESERVOIRES AND TANKS	7 th May 2023	24 th May 2023	RO. 52.500
DISC/ 2023/065	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF WASTEWATER MASTER PLAN AND BUSINESS PLAN FOR DHOFAR REGION	7 th May 2023	29 th May 2023	RO. 105.000

- To view the tender details, you can visit www.dhofarservices.nama.om / scan the QR code.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 3.00pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using "isupplier portal". No hard copies are accepted.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.
- For any clarifications contact us on:
Tel No. 23232554
email: purchase@dhofarservices.nama.om



Nama Dhofar Services
P.O.Box: 2609, P.C.: 211, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman
Phone Number: +968 23232523 - Fax: 23201183
www.dhofarservices.nama.om



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee in Ministry of Information announces its International Tender for the following work:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
1/2023	Supply, Instillation, Testing and Commissioning a New Data Center Infrastructure in MOI Premises in Salalah	International Excellent Frist	1/5/2023	28/5/2023	25/-

- All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Bidder shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of the a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to the Ministry of Information. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for (90) days. Any tenderers which do not meet the required bond shall not accept. Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am . Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically
- The Ministry has the right to:
 - Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.
 - Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone: 24943785, 24943177, Email: Moi.Tenders@omaninfo.om



Smoke rises over the city as army and paramilitaries clash in power struggle, in Khartoum. – Reuters

Over 50 civilians, three UN workers killed as Sudan battles rage on

KHARTOUM: Fighting in Sudan raged for a second day on Sunday in battles between rival generals who seized power in a 2021 coup, leaving over 50 civilians including three UN staff dead and sparking international alarm.

Deafening explosions and intense gunfire rattled buildings in the capital Khartoum's densely-populated northern and southern suburbs as tanks rumbled on the streets and fighter jets roared overhead, witnesses said.

Violence erupted early on Saturday after weeks of power struggles between army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, commander of the heavily-armed paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), with each accusing the other of starting the fight.

“The situation is very worrying and it doesn't seem like it will calm anytime soon,” said Ahmed Seif, a Khartoum resident, who fears his building had been damaged by gunfire but said it was too dangerous to go outside to check.

Both sides claim they control key sites, while state television broadcasted patriotic songs without commentary.

Daglo's RSF say they have seized the presidential palace, Khartoum airport and other strategic sites, but the army insist they are in charge.

Footage showed heavy smoke billowing from a building near the army headquarters in Khartoum, with the military saying a building had “caught fire” amid the clashes but that it had been contained.

On Sunday, the stench of gunpowder wafted through

Khartoum's streets, deserted except by soldiers as frightened civilians sheltered inside their homes.

The Central Committee of Sudan Doctors said they had recorded 56 civilians killed as well as “tens of deaths” among security forces, and around 600 wounded.

Fighting has also erupted outside Khartoum, including in the troubled western Darfur region and in the eastern border state of Kassala.

The United Nations said three employees of its World Food Programme (WFP) had been killed in clashes in North Darfur.

It was not immediately clear whether the three deaths on Saturday were included in the tally provided by the medics.

UN Special Representative Volker Perthes condemned the

killings in a statement, saying “civilian and humanitarian aid workers are not a target.”

He said he was also “appalled by reports of projectiles hitting UN and other humanitarian premises in several locations in Darfur”.

UN chief Antonio Guterres called for “an immediate cessation of hostilities”, while US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the fighting “threatens the security and safety of Sudanese civilians”.

Similar appeals came from the African Union, Britain, China, the European Union and Russia, while Pope Francis said he was following the events “with concern” and urged dialogue.

The AU is to hold an emergency meeting on Sunday, as is the Arab League, following a request by Egypt and Saudi Arabia. — AFP

South Korea fires warning shots after North's boat crosses sea border

SEOUL: South Korea fired warning shots towards a North Korean vessel that crossed the maritime border, South Korea's military said on Sunday, a day after the incident that further raised tension over the North's missile tests.

The South's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said it fired warning shots and broadcast warnings to expel a North Korean patrol boat that breached the Northern Limit Line (NLL), the de facto sea boundary, around 11 am on Saturday.

“Our military maintains decisive battle posture while monitoring the enemy's movements in preparation for potential provocations regarding NLL violations by North Korean patrol boats,” the JCS said in a statement on Sunday.

During the operations, a South Korean patrol ship came into “minor contact” with a nearby

Chinese fishing vessel due to bad visibility, resulting in no safety issues but slight injuries among the South Korean crew, the JCS said.

The North's incursion came as tension flared over the North's stepped up military activities in recent weeks, including Friday's test of a new solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile that experts say would facilitate missile launches with little warning.

In October the two Koreas traded warning shots in the western waters, accusing each other of breaching the sea border in an area where confrontations have often occurred.

Pyongyang threatened military action as South Korea and US forces have been carrying out their annual springtime exercises since March, calling them a rehearsal for nuclear war. — Reuters



FILE PHOTO: US Air Force B-1B bombers, F-16 fighter jets and South Korean Air Force F-35A take part in a joint air drill.

Israeli judicial protest movement again crowds Tel Aviv

TEL AVIV: Thousands of Israelis again took to the streets of Tel Aviv late on Saturday to protest government judicial reforms they view as an attack on democracy.

The 15th consecutive week of protest came after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on March 27 announced a “pause” to allow for dialogue on the reforms which were moving through parliament and split the nation.

“Let's save democracy” read signs in a sea of Israeli flags waved by demonstrators. Journalists also reported smoke bombs and flares being set off.

Smaller protests also took place in the northern port of Haifa and outside the home of Justice Minister Yariv Levin in Modiin.

Israeli media reported tens of thousands had turned out,



An aerial view shows people during a demonstration against Israeli PM and his judicial overhaul, in Tel Aviv. – Reuters

as occurred in some previous demonstrations.

“We are fighting for our democracy. We have no other country,” one demonstrator, Nadav Tamir said.

Karen Baron, a 45-year-old Tel Aviv psychiatrist, said: “I didn't want to come today but my sister told me, ‘We have no choice’, and it's true. We have no choice — we can't lower our guard. We have to defend our country.”

The proposals would curtail the authority of the Supreme Court and give politicians greater powers over the selection of judges.

Netanyahu's government, a coalition between his Likud party and extreme-right and ultra-Orthodox Jewish allies, argues the changes are needed to rebalance powers between lawmakers and

the judiciary.

Demonstration came a day after US rating agency Moody's announced it was lowering Israel's outlook from “positive” to “stable”.

It said the change “reflects a deterioration of Israel's governance, as illustrated by the recent events around the government's proposal for overhauling the country's judiciary.

“While mass protests have led the government to pause the legislation and seek dialogue with the opposition, the manner in which the government has attempted to implement a wide-ranging reform without seeking broad consensus points to a weakening of institutional strength and policy predictability,” Moody's noted. — AFP

DUBAI

Apartment block fire kills 16

A fire in a residential building in Dubai killed 16 people and injured nine others in the Gulf emirate, the government said on Sunday. The fire broke out on the fourth floor of the building in the Al-Ras neighbourhood in the old part of the city.

The civil defence force said preliminary investigations showed the fire was caused by a “lack of compliance with building security and safety requirements”, the government's media office said in a statement. — AFP



Firefighting teams were at the blaze within six minutes of being notified, it added.

The nationality of the victims has not been revealed.

The city has experienced spectacular fires in the past, causing extensive damage but few casualties.

JAKARTA

Soldier killed as separatists ambush military

Armed separatists ambushed a group of Indonesian soldiers searching for a kidnapped New Zealand pilot in the Papua region, killing at least one, the army said on Sunday.

Indonesia's military said the group was scouring the remote, hilly Nduga district on Saturday when gunmen opened fire, leaving at least one soldier dead.

The soldiers were part of a group deployed to search for Phillip Mark Mehrkens, a pilot for the Indonesian airline Susi Air



who was kidnapped by the rebels at Nduga airport in February.

The West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB), the military wing of Papua's main separatist group, claimed responsibility for the attack and said they had killed nine soldiers. — AFP

LUCKNOW

Former lawmaker shot dead live on TV

A former lawmaker in India's parliament, convicted of kidnapping, was shot dead along with his brother while police were escorting them for a medical check-up in a slaying caught on live television.

The dramatic footage of the men being killed was shared across broadcast channels and social media.

A gunman is seen reaching over the shoulders of police to point a pistol at the temple of the former lawmaker, Atiq



Ahmed, whose turban is blown off as the gun discharges.

His brother, Ashraf Ahmed, was shot a split second later.

The two victims died within minutes, while police quickly detained three men suspected of carrying out the slaying. — Reuters



omanobserver.com/podcast

world

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

MONDAY | APRIL 17 | 2023

7

In brief

■ LONDON



PHANTOM OF THE OPERA ACTOR DEAD

Actor Murray Melvin, who appeared in the 2004 film version of The Phantom of the Opera, has died, his friends said. He was 90.

Melvin, who rose to prominence as Geoffrey, the gay art student, in Shelagh Delaney's A Taste of Honey, died at St Thomas' hospital in London.

"It's with great sadness that I have to announce the death of Murray Melvin — actor, director and theatre archivist," theatre director Kerry Michael wrote on Twitter. "He had a fall in December, from which he never fully recovered."

"He was one of my closest friends and will be missed by so many of us who had the privilege to know him."

■ WASHINGTON



20 SHOT AT ALABAMA BIRTHDAY PARTY

At least 20 people were shot and wounded late on Saturday at a Sweet 16 birthday party in the southern US state of Alabama, local media reported.

Television station WRBL early on Sunday reported heavy police activity and crime scene tape around a building in Dadeville, Alabama, where it said white sheets could be seen covering parts of the floor.

Law enforcement agencies have not publicly confirmed any injuries or fatalities, but local media and witnesses have said several wounded people, the majority of them teens, were transported to local hospitals for medical attention.

■ LONDON



UK CANCELS NEW 'SMART MOTORWAYS'

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has cancelled the building of new "smart motorways" amid concerns about safety and cost, the Department for Transport said.

Fourteen planned smart motorways, which use technology to regulate traffic flow and ease congestion, will be removed from the governments road building plans, the department said.

"All drivers deserve to have confidence in the roads they use to get around the country," Sunak said in a statement at the weekend. "That's why last year I pledged to stop the building of all new smart motorways, and today I'm making good on that promise."

Europe's largest nuclear reactor enters service in Finland

HELSINKI: Finland's next-generation Olkiluoto 3 nuclear reactor, the largest in Europe, has gone into regular production after months of delays, its operator said on Sunday, hours after Germany ended its nuclear era.

Olkiluoto 3, now producing around 14 per cent of the country's electricity, is expected to remain operational for "at least the next 60 years", according to the site's operator TVO.

The European pressurised water reactor (EPR), already more than 12 years behind schedule, was supposed to come fully online in December, but the start was pushed back several times during its testing phase.

Built by the French-led Areva-Siemens consortium, the reactor was first started up in December 2021 and connected to the Finnish power grid in March last year.

"Test production has been completed and regular electricity production started today," TVO said. "From now on, about 30 percent of Finnish electricity is produced in Olkiluoto," which already had two reactors.

On Sunday, more than 50 percent of Finnish electricity was being produced from nuclear power, according to Finland's transmission system operator Fingrid.

The most powerful nuclear



Specialists work inside Olkiluoto-3 nuclear reactor in Eurajoki, Finland. – Reuters file photo

reactor in Europe, with a capacity of generating 1,600 megawatts, Olkiluoto 3 reached full power in late September for the first time since construction began in 2005.

Finland had been hoping to rely on the new reactor for its electricity needs earlier this winter, given fears of energy shortages

after Russia, a major supplier to Europe, invaded Ukraine and cut off gas exports in response to Western sanctions.

The EPR was designed to relaunch the European nuclear industry after the Chernobyl catastrophe of 1986, and was touted as offering higher power

and better safety.

But several EPR projects have been plagued by delays and billions of dollars in cost overruns.

At the end of last year, France's state-owned energy group EDF had to announce another six-month delay for a new reactor being built at Flamanville, in

northwest France, pushing back its projected start to mid-2024.

Hinkley Point in Britain and the Taishan plant in China have also suffered EPR production setbacks, cost overruns and delays. The two EPR units in China have already entered commercial production, making Olkiluoto 3 the third to go into operation in the world.

Germany meanwhile has officially ended decades of atomic energy use by turning off its last three nuclear reactors on Saturday. Europe's largest economy had been looking to leave behind nuclear power since 2002, but the phase-out was accelerated by former chancellor Angela Merkel in 2011 after the meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan.

The decision was popular in a country with a powerful anti-nuclear movement, stoked by lingering fears of Cold War tensions and the risk of accidents.

But some have criticised Germany's insistence on exiting nuclear while ramping up its reliance on coal, as it tries to manage an energy crisis cause by the war in Ukraine.

Markus Soeder, the conservative premier of the southern state of Bavaria, called on the federal government to let his state continue using nuclear power.

— AFP

EU says unilateral action on trade unacceptable

WARSAW: Unilateral action on trade by European Union member states is unacceptable, a European Commission spokesperson said on Sunday, after Poland and Hungary announced bans on grain and other food imports from Ukraine to protect the local agricultural sector.

After Russia's war blocked some Black Sea ports, large quantities of Ukrainian grain, which is cheaper than that produced in the European Union, ended up staying in Central European states due to logistical bottlenecks, hitting prices and sales for local farmers.

The issue has created a political problem for Poland's ruling nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party in an election year as it has angered people in rural areas where support for PiS is usually high.

"We are aware of Poland and Hungary's announcements regarding the ban on imports of grain and other agricultural products from Ukraine," the spokesperson said in an emailed statement. "In this context, it is important to underline that trade policy is of EU exclusive competence and, therefore, unilateral actions are not acceptable."

"In such challenging times, it is crucial to coordinate and

align all decisions within the EU," the statement added.

Poland and Hungary have been embroiled in long-running conflicts with Brussels over issues including judicial independence, media freedoms and both have had funds withheld due to concerns over the rule of law.

The Polish ban, which came into effect on Saturday evening, will also apply to the transit of these products through the country, the development and technology minister said on Sunday.

"The ban is full, including the ban on transit through Poland," Waldemar Buda wrote on Twitter, adding that talks would be held with the Ukrainian side to create a system that ensures goods only pass through Poland and do not end up on the local market.

Ukraine's ministry of agrarian policy and food said on Saturday that the Polish ban contradicted existing bilateral agreements on exports, and called for talks to settle the issue.

Ukraine's state-run Ukrinform news agency said Ukrainian and Polish ministers are due to meet on Monday in Poland and the transit arrangement would be focused on in the talks.

— Reuters

Conservatives could lose more than 1,000 seats in UK local elections

LONDON: The British Conservative Party is on course to lose more than 1,000 seats in May's local elections, the party's chairman has said.

Greg Hands was forced to defend the government's record on fulfilling Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's five pledges in broadcast interviews ahead of the May 4 polls.

He insisted the government is "still working very hard in delivering" the prime minister's priorities — halving inflation, growing the economy, reducing debt, stopping boats carrying migrants across the Channel, and reducing hospital waits. But Hands admitted that a wave of strikes "haven't helped" with the vow to bring down National Health Service (NHS) waiting lists, which stand at a record high of 7.2 million people.

In an apparent attempt to manage expectations for England's local elections, the Cabinet minister told Sky News's "Sophy Ridge On Sunday" programme: "The independent expectations are that the Conservatives will lose more than 1,000 seats and that Labour need to make big gains."

Asked by stand-in host Trevor Phillips whether he might be moved on from his job if the results are dire, Hands said: "Well let's see Trevor, but what I would say is that those are the independent predictions from the most credible academic sources."

A Lib Dem source said: "This admission of defeat shows the Conservatives have already thrown in the towel before a single vote has been cast."



Greg Hands was forced to defend the government's record.

"This Conservative government has crashed the economy, plunged the NHS into the crisis and allowed filthy sewage to be pumped into our rivers."

"Rishi Sunak is facing a Blue Wall bloodbath as people who voted Conservative all their life say never again, and turn to the Liberal Democrats instead."

Phillips asked him why anyone should vote for the Tories when people are suffering because of the public sector industrial action under their watch.

Hands replied: "Because I think the government is delivering on overall what the people want us to be delivering on."

"No one is pretending this job is in any way easy."

Sunak is "personally involved" in trying to tackle NHS backlogs, Hands said when pressed on how he will achieve that in the face of strikes.

Hands, who had notes scribbled on his hand in blue ink, told the BBC's "Sunday With

Laura Kuenssberg" programme: "The strikes haven't helped but nonetheless, there's a real focus there, (Health Secretary) Steve Barclay, the Prime Minister personally involved here, in making sure that we do what we can to bring down those waiting lists."

He insisted the government is "definitely not giving up" on the prime minister's pledge, arguing it has "budded" in the pay dispute with nursing unions.

Pressed on Sunak's pledge on halving inflation, which has gone up since he made it, Hands replied that "nobody has said that it's going to be easy to tame inflation" as he blamed higher energy prices driven by Russia's war on Ukraine.

When it was put to him that the UK's economy showed no growth in February, the Tory chairman said: "Well, in February it was not one of the better results but January grew by 0.3 per cent. And we've had the best growth in the G7 in 2021 and 2022. — dpa

Digital detox is necessary for the body and the mind



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

As the Eid holidays have been announced, many are dreaming of a long time off work commitments, maybe spending time with family and friends. But many are also looking forward to endless days of streaming movies and playing games, staying away from the sunny days outside.

None of this is very helpful. As Ramadhan allowed us to detox and connect with our inner selves, the Eid break should make us find pleasures outside the multiple digital devices around the house. Gadgets are now present everywhere, but using them diligently is both a skill and an art.

Everyone knows that addiction to electronic devices is affecting the

mind in more ways than we can even imagine. Living in a virtual world of social media is impacting one's self-image and also affects the way we think and act.

Considering that algorithms dictate what we watch and read online, the Internet is a big echo chamber in which we just listen to what we want, or at least, what the Internet thinks we want.

Tearing ourselves away from such an attractive platform is not easy. But it is necessary if we want a more meaningful life that is not dictated by what people we don't even know feel.

This is more important in the case of parents because setting an example for a child is the single

RECONNECTING WITH PEOPLE AND THE WORLD AROUND US IS PERHAPS A DIGITAL DETOX'S SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOME

most successful way of being a parent.

It is impossible to set rules, and times, determine sites or even control use of the Internet if parents are not following suit.

The best way to spend quality time these holidays would be to stay as far away from digital devices as possible. This can help in many ways.

Reconnecting with people and the world around us is perhaps a digital detox's single most important outcome. Not being able to compulsively reach out for a smartphone will help in improving conversations in a family, and even make a simple walk on the beach pleasurable.

Improving concentration and attention span are perfect and guaranteed outcomes as well. As we all well know, it is most difficult now to stay focused on one task, one book, or one channel.

The persistent habit of scrolling and refreshing the smartphone only ensures that we flit from one idea to another, giving little thought or reflection on any single opinion.

That only raises a narrow-minded individual.

We seem to have now forgotten what we liked to do as children. Painting, reading, or just walking are all forgotten hobbies for most. Avoiding devices can help us to reconnect with some of these age-old hobbies, bringing families together in shared moments of togetherness.

If all else fails, we could learn to use technology judiciously. That means that we limit our time with a device, use it in limited ways, and understand that information in it is to be read sceptically. In the long run, such a healthy relationship may work better than avoiding technology altogether.

Indigenous Indonesians face new risks in 'green' climate drive

LAURIE GOERING

In the Indigenous community where Rukka Sombolinggi grew up, on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, strict rules governed how a slaughtered buffalo's meat was divided.

The elderly, the sick and other vulnerable people received choice pieces — the head, the liver and the small intestine, considered a particular delicacy once roasted.

Others, better off, waited their turn for a share, risking condemnation from the community if they took too many of the best bits for themselves.

"People in powerful situations need to be controlled. If we don't, the powerful will eat everything," said Sombolinggi, now the General-Secretary of Aman, an alliance that represents 15 million Indigenous people in Indonesia.

That message of managing the powerful — and keeping the communal good at the forefront of decisions — is one the world needs to learn from Indigenous people as it struggles to tackle big problems from climate change to pandemics, she said.

"We believe in the collective," Sombolinggi said in an interview this week at the Skoll World Forum, an expert gathering focused on solving global problems. Particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, "the global community, even people in cities, now realise that solidarity, reciprocity are very important — and that the global economic structure is failing us," she said.

Aman — the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago — got its start in 1999 and has since fought to secure Indigenous rights — and rights to 26 million hectares of Indigenous territory it has mapped across Indonesia, a country spread over about 17,000 islands. This week it won a \$2.25 million prize for social innovation from the US-based Skoll Foundation for its efforts.

But some of those have had limited success.

While Aman has helped push a range of regulations to protect Indigenous rights, a broad draft Indigenous rights law has been awaiting approval for about a decade, according to Sombolinggi. So far, only about 3 million hectares of Indigenous land have been recognised even at the local level, and just 100,000 hectares officially returned to Indigenous people as customary forest, she said.

That is considered a big problem as long-time threats to Indigenous land — such as expanding palm oil plantations — are joined by a host of new ones as companies and governments line up the minerals, clean energy installations and water storage dams needed to combat climate change and deal with its impacts.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

‘Kids can’t read’: The revolt that is taking on the education establishment



Sarah Mervosh

The writer is a national reporter at NYT covering education

In suburban Houston, parents rose up against a top-rated school district, demanding an entirely new reading curriculum.

At an elementary school in Hutchinson, Minnesota, a veteran teacher is crusading for reform, haunted by the fear that, for 28 years, she failed children because she was not trained in the cognitive science behind reading.

And Ohio may become the latest state to overhaul reading instruction, under a plan by Gov Mike DeWine.

"The evidence is clear," DeWine said. "The verdict is in."

A revolt over how children are taught to read, steadily building for years, is now sweeping school board meetings and statehouses around the country.

The movement, under the banner of "the science of reading," is targeting the education establishment: school districts, literacy gurus, publishers and colleges of education, which critics say have failed to embrace the cognitive science of how children learn to read.

Research shows that most children need systematic, sound-it-out instruction — known as phonics — as well as other direct support, like building vocabulary and expanding students' knowledge of the world.

The movement has drawn support across economic, racial and political lines. Its champions include parents of children with dyslexia; civil rights activists with the NAACP; lawmakers from both sides of the aisle; and everyday teachers and principals.

Together, they are getting results.

Ohio, California and Georgia are the latest states to push for reform, adding to almost 20 states that have made moves in the past two years. Under pressure, school districts are scrapping their old reading programmes. Even holdouts like New York City, where hundreds of elementary schools were loyal to a popular but heavily criticised reading curriculum, are making changes.

About 1 in 3 children in the United States cannot read at a basic level of comprehension, according to a key national exam. The outcomes are particularly troubling for Black and



A phonics class at Panther Valley Elementary School in Nesquehoning, Pa. on April 4, 2023. — The New York Times

A REVOLT OVER HOW CHILDREN ARE TAUGHT TO READ, STEADILY BUILDING FOR YEARS, IS NOW SWEEPING SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS AND STATEHOUSES AROUND THE COUNTRY

Native American children, nearly half of whom score "below basic" by eighth grade.

"The kids can't read — nobody wants to just say that," said Kareem Weaver, an activist with the NAACP in Oakland, California, who has framed literacy as a civil rights issue and stars in a new documentary, "The Right to Read."

Science of reading advocates say the reason is simple: Many children are not being correctly taught.

A popular method of teaching, known as "balanced literacy," has focused less on phonics and more on developing a love of books and ensuring students understand the meaning of stories. At times, it has included dubious strategies, like guiding children to guess words from pictures.

The push for reform picked up in

2019, when national reading scores showed significant improvement in just two places: Mississippi and Washington, DC. Both had required more phonics.

But what might have remained a niche education issue was supercharged by a storm of events: a pandemic that mobilised parents; Covid-19 relief money that gave school districts flexibility to change; a fresh spotlight on racial disparities after the murder of George Floyd; and a hit education podcast with a passionate following.

"There is this urgency around the story, this unbelievable grief," said Emily Hanford, a journalist at American Public Media. Her podcast, "Sold a Story," detailed how stars of the literacy world and their publisher diverged from scientific research. It racked up nearly 5 million downloads.

The movement has not been universally popular. School districts in Connecticut and teachers unions in Ohio, for example, pushed back against what they see as heavy-handed interference in their classrooms.

Even within the movement, there are quiet rumblings of worry. There is no established curriculum for the science of reading — it refers to a large body of research that must be woven into the craft of teaching.

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Counting down days of learning and sharing

This holy month of Ramadhan, usually, holds a special significance for Muslims worldwide. Above and beyond being the month of fasting, a key pillar of Islam, it stands as a distinct school of learning for individuals and society alike. Ramadhan brings various religious, health and personal-development teachings that Muslims could learn through fasting other than the tolerance of being fasting.

All that one should do is to recognise the real message and reason behind fasting, while understanding the values of fasting as a sacred ritual. Generally, Muslims observe a change on their daily routine due to their adaption to the spirit of Ramadhan, which instills calmness and tranquility to people's personality. Their attitudes and behaviours change to reflect the moral of mercy during this month, tending to be more compassionate and tolerant. Besides, Ramadhan revives people's sense of care and sympathy.

Actually, fasting does not only promote refraining from eating and drinking, but ceasing all the selfish desires and wrong doings. Fasting is not just intended for the body, but for the spirit too. In fact, the physical fasting symbolises and expresses the real and inner fasting. Fasting is a spiritual practice that is targeting the spirit and body at the same time. That is why Ramadhan is urging Muslims to discover, master and discipline themselves in various tasks they perform.

Accordingly, there are many objectives and lessons behind the ritual of fasting during Ramadhan. The major one is that fasting enables Muslims to develop and strengthen their self-control, so they can resist wrongful desires and get rid of bad habits and behaviours. Therefore, one can control personal behaviours, attitudes, thoughts and wishes too. The month-long fasting marks a great motive to help Muslims give up bad conducts and avoid wrong deeds, which they used to do before Ramadhan.

Another important lesson that



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

An author, columnist,
creative writer,
translator and a
communications
professional

RAMADHAN
URGES MUSLIMS
TO DISCOVER,
MASTER AND
DISCIPLINE
THEMSELVES IN
VARIOUS TASKS
THEY PERFORM

one can learn while fasting is that by being away from all the bad things and refraining from personal desires, one can have a closer and stronger relation with the Almighty Allah. Knowing that Allah knows what we all do, think of and plan to do, whether good or bad, it increases one's consciousness and remembrance of the Almighty Allah in our hearts. This uplifts our spiritual bar, so we become more compliant to Allah's instructions and seriously attached to Him during this sacred month. That is why one can see people more devoted and kindhearted.

Furthermore, fasting teaches Muslims to think about the poor and needy people who have shortfall of food and cannot afford getting food supplies and daily meals. Through such learning, fasting allow others to experience hunger like those poor families and individuals. In this regard, Ramadhan brings the focus on the importance of charity and voluntary work in the society. Consequently, you see people strive to do different sorts of charitable deeds with poor people and needy families. This reflects people's spirit of compassion, mercy and solidarity, which all revive in Ramadhan.

As one becomes more compassionate in Ramadhan, people contribute a lot in helping others through various charitable activities. Their interest to support voluntary work and charities is not only limited to this month, though it increases in Ramadhan as the reward of such deeds is getting doubled. That is why Ramadhan marks the month of generosity, where one can be more supportive to his family, colleagues, friends and society overall. In other words, people tend to be more emotional more than any other time of the year.

Overall, the holy month of Ramadhan is an opportunity, which should not be missed or undervalued. Its religious and social advantages are many and we should all invest on this time of the year that brings blessings to our life and unites people together. May the Almighty Allah bestow us the great rewards and blessings from this month. Wish you all a rewarding fasting!

ROTTERDAM MARATHON



Participants run across the Erasmus Bridge during the 42nd edition of the Rotterdam Marathon in the Netherlands on Sunday. – AFP

What will it take to prevent future pandemics?

Although Covid-19 restrictions are rapidly fading around the world, we are still reeling from the impact of the past three years. More than 6.8 million deaths from Covid-19 have been officially reported, but the true number may be closer to 15 million. There has been immense suffering and social and economic turmoil, and the virus itself still poses a clear and present risk, with one in five Americans reporting ongoing "long Covid" symptoms.

Worse, Covid-19 is far from the last zoonotic disease with the potential to devastate the global population. Innumerable other viruses — many of which remain understudied — have been discovered in animals. Any of them could serve as a source of new human viruses, which often originate from repeat-offender virus families such as coronaviruses, orthomyxoviruses, and filoviruses. When viruses from these families show up in mammals or birds, there is always a risk that they could develop the potential to infect humans. And when that happens, the fact of globalisation means that those viruses can spread faster than ever before.

A key challenge, then, is to discover and identify which viruses pose the greatest risks to humans. If we can



William A Haseltine

The writer is a scientist,
biotech entrepreneur,
and infectious disease
expert, is Chair and
President of the
global health think
tank ACCESS Health
International

detect a new human virus in the earliest days of a disease outbreak, we will have a much better chance of implementing the measures needed to prevent another global pandemic. To that end, a recent article in Science proposes setting up an experimental pipeline whereby researchers can test animal viruses for four crucial properties consistent with human infection.

By identifying the viruses that pose the highest risk for zoonosis (transmission across species), we can then rapidly roll out diagnostic panels to detect new human infections. Serology- and polymerase-chain-reaction-based diagnostics are currently the most practical solutions for health-care settings around the world. But they are pathogen-specific, so they are effective only when clinicians and scientists know which pathogens they should be testing for.

An animal virus needs four essential biological properties in order to infect humans: it must use the human version of its cellular entry receptor to gain access to human cells; it must use human intracellular proteins to replicate and exit human cells; it must overcome humans'

innate immune responses; and it must evade pre-existing human adaptive immunity functions such as antibodies and T cells.

Animal viruses that have most of these properties — such as primate arteriviruses — obviously warrant targeting by new diagnostic tools. Such tests can be grouped into regional panels for use in diagnosing unusual or unattributable human illnesses, as well as to monitor healthy populations for virus-surveillance purposes.

The first zoonotic property — an ability to enter human cells — is often the easiest to study, because we can test the surface protein of an animal

virus by engineering it onto a reporter virus. (A reporter virus genome lacks genes essential for viral replication, making it safe for research and surveillance purposes.) This method has been shown to demonstrate that some poorly studied tibroviruses from the Rhabdoviridae family can enter human cells, though their multiplication within human cells is uncertain.

The ability to multiply — the second biological property viruses need to infect humans — involves a complex process that requires interactions with several intracellular host proteins. Even a single incompatibility can prevent an animal virus from multiplying

in human cells.

There is scarce research on the third property: how animal viruses interact with human-innate immunity beyond the interferon response. This is a first line of defence against virus infections. It functions by generating an intracellular environment that restricts virus replication and signals the presence of a viral pathogen to the adaptive arm of the immune response. Further study is needed to determine, for example, why some ebolaviruses can multiply in human cells, yet rarely infect humans in nature. In these cases, there seem to be powerful innate immune mechanisms protecting animals, including humans, from cross-species transmission.

The final property is an ability to overcome pre-existing human adaptive immunity, such as neutralising antibodies and cytotoxic T cells. While human responses raised against one virus can be tested for reactivity against a second virus, it is unknown how much cross-neutralisation would be enough to protect humans from infection or severe disease if exposed to potentially zoonotic viruses.



An animal virus needs four essential biological properties in order to infect humans.

sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports
sport@omanobserver.om



Oman Racing’s Ahmad al Harthy qualifies
P5 for 6hrs of Portimao

Yellow flags while on fastest lap prevent
hopes of front-row grid slot

Al Harthy positive and confident for race
two of the FIA WEC season

FIFTH ON GRID FOR AL HARTHY IN PORTIMAO AHEAD OF FIA WEC RD2

Ahmad al Harthy mounted a strong challenge for the GTE Am pole position during qualifying for round two of the FIA World Endurance Championship at Portimao in Portugal on Saturday, 15th April, but had to settle for fifth place due to yellow flags while on his quickest lap. Ultimately ending up just half a second shy of pole, and only 0.3 seconds away from the front row of the grid, the Oman Racing with TF Sport driver was very

happy with his performance and confident the team has a strong car for this afternoon’s race at the Autodromo Internacional do Algarve. Producing a best lap time of 1m49.904 seconds, the Aston Martin Vantage racer had posted best sectors in the first and second portions of the lap and was on course for more. Due to the yellow flags though, the result of a stricken car, the Omani missed out on a front row

starting slot. Prior to the all-important qualifying run, Al Harthy and team-mates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood had made good progress with the No.25 car across the three free practice sessions – two on Friday, 14th April, and one more on Saturday morning. Improving by almost 1.5 seconds between FP1 and FP3, the Oman Racing with TF Sport squad clearly delivered a competitive car for qualifying and Al Harthy

– who is supported by prestigious partners Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS – is sure the same will be true for the 6 Hours of Portimao later today. Going into his second race in the FIA World Endurance Championship, Al Harthy and the Oman Racing squad hold ninth in the driver and team standings following a ninth place finish during the season-opening event last month at Sebring in the USA.

AHMAD AL HARTHY: “We gave it all we had in qualifying. I had a very quick lap, I did my best sectors in sector one and sector two, but then there was a yellow flag so I had to back off. It’s when the tyres were at their best as well, so it was unfortunate, but we still start a respectable P5 for the race. I’m looking forward to a good, clean six hours of racing. “We worked hard during practice for a good qualifying and

race set-up, and the Oman Racing with TF Sport guys have done a fantastic job as they always do. We can definitely fight strongly from P5 so we’re aiming for a strong race and to come away with a good result.” Round two of the FIA World Endurance Championship, the 6 Hours of Portimao, will begin at 12.00 local time later today. Live timing and live coverage is available through the FIA WEC App and at www.fiawec.com

Muscat Municipality concludes Ramadhan sports tournaments

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

Muscat Municipality successfully concluded its annual Ramadhan sports tournaments for this year. The competitions included football, volleyball and table tennis, with a total of 285 players participating. The tournaments were held in the General Directorate of Muscat Municipality building in Seeb and ended with a grand closing ceremony held under the auspices of Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality. The football tournament saw nine teams and a total of 153 players competing for the championship title. The team of the General Directorate of Muscat Municipality in Al Amerat emerged as the champions, while the team of the General Directorate of Information Technology secured the runner-up position. Younes al Rushdi was declared the best player of the



tournament, Badr al Hinai won the best goalkeeper award, and Mahmoud al Harrasi received the tournament’s top-scorer award. The volleyball tournament saw seven teams and 105 players participating, with the General Directorate of Projects and Landscaping winning first place, followed by the General Directorate

of Muscat Municipality in Bausher. Mansour al Qanoubi was declared the best player in the tournament. In the table tennis tournament, 27 players participated and Ali al Hashemi from the General Directorate of Muscat Municipality in Muscat emerged as the champion, followed by Yaqoub al Amri from the General Directorate

of Muscat Municipality in Al Amerat. Fahad al Azri from the Events and Awareness Department secured the third position. The tournaments witnessed intense competition among the participants, highlighting their skills and technical performance levels. In recognition of their role and sponsorship of the championship, Ahmed al Humaidi honoured Al Seeb Sports Club, Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals and Clinics, Al Amiri Shopping Center and Telatala al Rafidain Trade Store. The Muscat Municipality organises sports activities for its employees to invest in their sports energies and talents, utilise their time for physical and mental benefits, promote commendable competition, strengthen relations between employees and participating teams from all municipal units and achieve goals through purposeful activities that develop capabilities.

OOC launches Advanced Sports Management Diploma programme



SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) kicked off the second chapter of the Advanced Sports Management Diploma Programme 2023 for sports institutions, at Oman Olympic Academy (OOA), in cooperation with International Olympic Solidarity, from April 16 to 18. ‘Strategic Management in the Olympic Sports Institution’ is the title of the second programme, which contains the preparation, implementation and evaluation of a good strategic plan, to achieve strategic objectives, and assisting the board of directors in evaluating their impacts.

Hisham bin Salim al Adwani, the accredited director of the Advanced Sports Management Diploma Programme from International Olympic Committee (IOC), led the programme with the participation of more than 20 students. The programme is held in a workshop system for three days per month in seven chapters, to cover the seventh chapters of the book ‘Management Olympic sports organisations’, by the International Olympic Solidarity. The programme aims to provide the highest level of development for the Olympic administration and to highlight the basic dimensions that serve these bodies, organisations and committees.

Delhi suffer fifth straight IPL loss, Punjab enter top four

BENGALURU: Delhi Capitals captain David Warner remains hopeful of a turnaround despite his team's fifth straight loss in the IPL after their 23-run defeat by Royal Challengers Bangalore on Saturday.

Virat Kohli struck 50 to guide hosts Bangalore to 174-6, a total their bowlers defended by restricting Delhi to 151-9 in the first match of the day.

Later, Zimbabwe all-rounder Sikandar Raza's 57 and an unbeaten cameo by Shahrukh Khan led Punjab Kings to a two-wicket win over Lucknow Super Giants as they entered the top four in the table.

"The positives were great... the bowling and the fielding were exceptional. I said that to the guys that their energy and attitude were absolutely amazing," Warner said after Delhi's loss.

"It's just our batting. We need to work out how to take on the powerplay and not lose early wickets."

Delhi were never in the chase, losing regular wickets.

Even Warner, who has scored 228 runs with three half-centuries in the tournament but has struggled with his strike rate, only scored 19.

Manish Pandey made 50, but the rest of the batting fell apart as debutant and local boy Vijaykumar



Delhi Capitals' Aman Hakim Khan plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Royal Challengers Bangalore and Delhi Capitals at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on April 15, 2023. – AFP

Vyshak returned figures of 3-20 for RCB.

The returning Mitchell Marsh, back after getting married in

Australia, struck first for Delhi with the wicket of Faf du Plessis and later dismissed Mahipal Lomror.

Kohli makes another fifty
Left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav also took two wickets, but Bangalore scored enough to claim a second victory in four matches.

Kohli posted his third fifty of the season before falling to Lalit Yadav in the 11th over.

Kohli smashed six fours and one six in his 34-ball knock.

Lucknow skipper KL Rahul anchored his team's innings of 159-8 against Punjab with 74.

But questions remained over Rahul's batting approach after his 56-ball stay.

Raza's maiden IPL half-century kept Punjab, captained by Sam Curran in the absence of the injured Shikhar Dhawan, on track in their chase before his departure in the 18th over.

The big-hitting Shahrukh then hit the winning runs in his 10-ball 23 as Punjab achieved their target with three balls to spare.

Curran, who became the most expensive IPL player in the auction, posted his best bowling figures of the tournament so far, taking 3-31.

"Raza played nicely in the middle, and the way Shahrukh came in and finished," said Curran.

"The word around the dressing room is that he (Shahrukh) has worked very hard and the coaching staff have been clear with his role."

Karunaratne, Mendis make Ireland toil in Sri Lanka Test



Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis (R) celebrates with his captain Dimuth Karunaratne after scoring a century (100 runs) during the first day of the first cricket Test match between Sri Lanka and Ireland at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle on April 16, 2023. – AFP

GALLE, Sri Lanka: Centurions Dimuth Karunaratne and Kusal Mendis made Ireland's wayward bowlers toil on Sunday to put Sri Lanka in a commanding position on day one of the first Test in Galle.

At stumps in hot and humid conditions in the sides' first Test series, the hosts were 386 for four with Dinesh Chandimal unbeaten on 18 and night-watchman Prabath Jayasuriya 12 not out.

After winning the toss and opting to bat, captain Karunaratne completed his 15th Test hundred before making 179 while Mendis scored 140, his eighth ton in the five-day format. Opener Nishan Madushka was caught behind for 29 off Curtis Campher to give the Irish an early breakthrough.

But Karunaratne and Mendis added 281 runs for the second wicket, beating the previous record in Galle of 253 set by India's Shikhar Dhawan and Cheteshwar Pujara in 2017.

Still seeking their first win after securing Test status in 2017, Ireland's bowling lacked penetration and there were too many short and wide balls that were duly punished.

The partnership was finally broken when Mendis missed a

sweep shot off the left-arm spin of George Dockrell to be trapped leg before wicket in the final hour of play.

Former captain Angelo Mathews then fell for a three-ball duck, swinging hard at a wide delivery by leg-spinner Benjamin White to be caught behind.

The second new ball brought about Karunaratne's downfall as he fell with six overs left for stumps, attempting a drive off Mark Adair without much foot movement and was caught behind. His 179 came off 235 balls with 15 boundaries.

During the knock, he became the fifth-highest run scorer for Sri Lanka in Tests going past the great Aravinda de Silva with now 6,409 runs in 85 Tests.

There was turn and bounce for the spinners, as is always the case in Galle, but the Irish bowlers failed to make the most of the conditions and apply enough pressure.

Sri Lanka were quick to punish the loose balls going at a brisk 4.39 runs an over as they took control of the game.

Ireland have lost all of their previous four Tests, including to Bangladesh earlier this month, and this is the first time Ireland has been involved in more than one Test match in a series.

ZIMBABWE UNVEILS NEW T10 FRANCHISE TOURNAMENT

HARARE: Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC), in association with T Ten Global Sports, has unveiled the country's eagerly awaited franchise-based T10 tournament that is aiming to feature cricket stars from across the world.

The inaugural edition of the new competition, known as the Zim Afro T10, will be played in August this year, with six privately-owned teams involved.

The participating franchises, player auction dates, fixtures and other details will be announced in due course.

This is the latest tournament franchise established by T Ten Global Sports, the same company behind the Abu Dhabi T10 in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Lanka T10 in Sri Lanka.

ZC Chairman Tavengwa Mukuhani said he



was confident the league would provide great fans entertainment, top-level competition for the players and vast exposure for investors.

"We are thrilled to unveil our own franchise-based T10 league, a powerful format that we believe is exactly what our changing, fast-paced world needs right now," Mukuhani said.

"We are confident the Zim Afro T10 league will

excite a global fan base, create massive mileage for its commercial partners and, more importantly, propel our cricket forward and lay a positive roadmap for how the game is perceived for future generations."

T Ten Global Sports Founder and Chairman Nawab Shaji Ul Mulk – the UAE-based investor behind the state-of-the-art Zim Cyber-City real estate project that is being developed in Mount Hampden on the outskirts of Harare – said he was excited to be bringing the magic of T10 cricket to Zimbabwe.

"As our association with cricket continues to grow, we are delighted to bring to Zimbabwe an exciting format that will not only advance the reach, attractiveness and growth of the sport but will also present a massive opportunity for private investment into the franchises," Mulk said.

Cauvery derby – Confident CSK take on unpredictable RCB



Two IPL teams that have incredible fan following. Much of it certainly comes because of its icon players that are heroes to millions of people. On one side it's the man who won tournaments and trophies for fun through his career – Mahendra Singh Dhoni. On the other side, it's the man who set fitness standards for the youth that wanted to take-up on this game – Virat Kohli. Virat's aggressive nature/attitude was one factor that has got him a lot of praises. Although many blame Virat Kohli for the dirty politics that resulted in him benefiting with the captaincy from Dhoni and he is also blamed for Dhoni's exit from international cricket. All said and done, it certainly feels like everything is resolved and forgotten about now.

MATCH 24 of 74 – ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE (RCB) VS CHENNAI SUPER KINGS (CSK) AT BENGALURU

- **INTRODUCTION** – With two wins from four games, Its RCB that's trying its level best to get the right combination. RCB is known for its unpredictable game play, where it can beat the best and even lose from the worst. That win against Delhi, after two back-to-back losses would have surely cooled things down in the camp. Chennai was in a pretty good flow with back-to-back wins, before they were stunned by the act of brilliance from Sandeep Sharma and Rajasthan Royals. Both teams would like to win this one and move up the table to the top half.
- **Head-to-Head** — Played — 31; Won by CSK – 20; Won by RCB – 10; No Result — 1
- **CSK possible XI** – David Conway, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Ajinkya Rahane, Moeen Ali, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Ravindra Jadeja, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Mahesh Theekshana, Tushar Deshpande, Akash Singh, Sisanda Magala/Ambati Rayudu
- **RCB possible XI** – Virat Kohli, Faf Du Plessis, Mahipal Lomror, Glenn Maxwell, Shahbaz Ahmed, Dinesh Karthik, Wanindu Hasaranga, Harshal Patel, Wayne Parnell, Mohammed Siraj, Vijaykumar Vyshak
- **Pitch & Weather Report** – The track at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium



has been a batting paradise as batters can hit through the line and the shorter dimensions also help their cause. As dew can come into play, the toss-winning skipper should elect to bowl. With temperature around 36 degrees Celsius and no chance of rain, it going to be perfect cricketing conditions.

- **Our Match Prediction** – It's a game between RCB's bowling vs CSK's batting, where If RCB's bowling could stand-up and put up a decent show against the long batting line up of CSK, only then RCB will have any chance. The main concern for RCB is the lack of any quality in the lower-middle order, which

makes them extremely vulnerable. This one has to be in favour of Chennai, with Chennai having the more

- **Fan Comments** – "Jadeja has befuddled both Kohli and Maxwell, as he has dismissed Maxwell 6 and kohli 3 times. Virat has a strike rate of 107 and maxwell has an average of just 8.2." – Rahul Sargam, Founder of bounceravenue.com, 28 years, Indian. "Supporting CSK because of Captain Dhoni, death bowling and heavy batting." – Tavish Sharma, Host of #askTavish, 22 years, Indian. "With both sides have numerous world-class match winners, this match is going to be a delight for the fans. RCB will have an advantage with home conditions and crowd support." – Subhash Suvarna, Accounts Executive/ Al Maya Group, 30 Years, Indian. "CSK are formidable team in the IPL, known for their consistent performances and excellent leadership under MSD. #whistlepodu" – Meeraj Mahesh, Supervisor/Oasis Trading & Equipment, 35 Years, Indian. "The daddy's army is going about about the job they are renowned for. RCB flatters to deceive. The CSK-RCB game is going to be a battle involving tactics and brilliance." – Sharad Krishnamoorthy, Group Advisor – Special Projects/Towell Group, 60 Years, Indian.

Barakat, Mazoon emerge fastest as final round of OAA League concludes



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

The Oman Athletics Association (OAA) concluded the expanded edition of OAA League competition in its fifth and last round late on Saturday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The event was part of the OAA's preparatory plans for the national runners and athletes to shape their readiness for the forthcoming regional and international assignments in the next period and to explore new and potential athletes.

Oman's star sprinter Barakat

al Harthy raced in 100 metres distance running competition for senior level. He clocked 10.39 seconds to win the race. Ali bin Anwar al Balushi took the second place in a timing of 10:40 seconds while Mohammed bin Obiad al Saadi was third in a time of 10.47 seconds.

In the 100 metres hurdles, Khalfan al Jabri bagged the gold in a time of 14:94 seconds while Faisal al Azki came in second with a time of 15.15 seconds for senior level. In the 400 metres run for senior level, Osama al Ghailani finished the race in first place with a timing of 48.83 seconds while

Dawood al Hamadani came in second at 49.15 seconds. Majid al Jahdhami emerged champion of the 800 metres run with a timing of 1 minute 54.99 seconds. Abdullah al Quraini won first place in the 1,500 metres as he cleared the distance in a timing of 3 minutes 57.07 seconds. In 200 metres, Mohammed al Saadi finished in first place as he clocked 20.93 seconds.

In long jump competitions for seniors, Salim al Yarubi bagged first place as he cleared 7.49 metres while Humaid al Mahruqi was the champion for the javelin competitions. Fatik Abulghafoor

claimed the gold in the long jump competition as he cleared 2.10 metres while Loai al Omrani won first place in the shot put competition.

Mubeen al Kindi won the gold in the hammer throw as he registered a mark of 55 metres in the senior level competition while his rival Muhannad al Omrani ended as runner-up with a mark of 47.41 metres.

MAZOOON WINS 100M
In the ladies open category, Oman's fastest woman sprinter Mazoon al Alawi bagged gold in 100 metres run with a timing of

12.06 seconds while Azza al Yarubi came in second with a timing of 12.38 seconds and Hajer al Habsi finished third (12.78 secs).

Hanaa al Qasmi won the women's 800 meters run with a time of 2 minutes 25.76 seconds. Azza al Yarubi claimed the top place in women's 200 metres run with a timing of 25.50 seconds.

Asad al Hosni, Secretary-General of OAA, said in a statement that the OAA has improved the domestic competition.

"The OAA League comprised five rounds and the top three results will be taken into account among the five rounds. The league was

open for different levels including senior, ladies, U21, U19 and junior levels. The competitions were in different categories including running, long jump, javelin, shot put, hammer throw and other competitions," he added.

Mazoon al Alawi, who represented Oman for second successive participation in the last Olympics Games in Tokyo, said the competitions were very tough. "I am very glad with my record in this round of the competition as I broke my previous record and registered 12.06. I am looking to register a record in the forthcoming participation," she said.

String of defeats for struggling Chelsea

ANDY JALIL.
LONDON, APRIL 15.

Having spent £600,000 million in signing new players, more than any other club, Chelsea are gradually reaching a crisis. They went down 2-1 at home to Brighton, following defeats against Wolverhampton Wanderers and Real Madrid in the Champions League, all within a week. Their last five matches have resulted in four defeats and a goalless draw. Their goal against Brighton was the first in five matches. For an elite club the situation is unacceptable.

Chelsea's interim manager, former player Frank Lampard, in his first home match in his new position, said: "It wasn't good enough. All the basic parts of football – to fight, to run – we were short on. I'm disappointed on every level. The better team won and they could have won by more. It's a really good Brighton team so we must give them credit.

"I didn't like what I saw today. We have to address that very quickly. There should

be a feeling when you play for Chelsea of pride involved. It's not for me to talk about where the lack of intensity and aggression is coming from. But it's for me to try to get to the bottom and change it."

He added: "The things that are a must in a performance for Chelsea are sprints, recovery runs, getting up to people and recovering. And then when you get the ball to stick to ideas you want to stick to. We came away from that, the capacity wasn't there. We certainly have work to do."

While there was a deflating, dispiriting performance from Chelsea, Brighton were organised, composed and committed and good to watch. However, it was Chelsea who went into the lead, in the 13th minute, against the run of play with an element of luck. Mykhailo Mudryk picked up the ball and progressed into Brighton's half before passing to Conor Gallagher whose shot took a big deflection off Lewis Dunk and looped into the net.

Two excellent saves by Kepa Arrizabalaga denied Brighton. First in

the 25th minute from a shot by Kaoru Mitoma and then in 33rd minute he tipped over a header from Evan Ferguson who then went off injured. But three minutes before the break, Brighton equalised with substitute Danny Welbeck heading in a cross to the far post from Pascal Gross.

Chelsea used their substitutes but it made little difference, instead in the 59th, came Brighton's marvellous winning goal. Solly March intercepted a pass by Reece James and passed to substitute Julio Enciso who fired in a 25yard shot into the top corner.

Brighton manager, Roberto De Zerbi said: "I'm very lucky to be a coach at Brighton. I'm trying to bring in my ideas. We like playing in this style. To play in that way at Stamford Bridge, you have to have a clear idea and also a big personality."

He added: "It's an amazing day for us – the result, the performance. This game gives more energy, more confidence, more enthusiasm to finish the season in the best way."



Brighton & Hove Albion's Solly March celebrates after Julio Enciso scores their second goal. – Reuters



*Terms & Conditions Apply

Take advantage of reduced interest rates on car loans

*Offer valid for Omani & Non-Omani | *The offer is valid till 4th May 2023

2479 11 11

www.bankdhofar.com

f

t

@

in

3.25%

Interest p.a.

CAR LOAN For Your Dream Car

بنك ذوفار

BankDhofar

TRA grants new licence to provide VoIP services

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) granted a new licence to Oman Data Park (ODP) to provide voice or video telecommunication services over Internet protocol (VoIP), which contributes to expand the base of services provided via Internet Protocol in the Sultanate of Oman.

This service is considered as a qualitative addition to the telecommunications sector, while the new license reflects the confidence enjoyed by Oman Data Park in the effective contribution to the development of information and communication technology in Oman.

The issuance of the licence is based on the Telecommunications Regulatory Law which is in force in the Sultanate of Oman, and its executive regulations, issued by the Ministerial decision No 144/2008.

In accordance with this approval, ODP will work to contribute to enhance the benefit of users of the telecommunications sector in the Sultanate of Oman from the technology of voice transmission, sending and receiving phone calls over the Internet Protocol (VoIP) instead of transmitting it via the landline telephone network.

The technology of transmitting voice and receiving calls over Internet Protocol (VoIP) has

many advantages such as the feature of transferring calls to smart phones or computers, in addition to dial international calls and a lot of professional communication via the Internet such as video chats, chatting and sharing files that become more flexible when using such technology, while ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of user data.

The new technology works by digitally transmitting information via a high-speed Internet connection by converting audio signals from the phone to a digital one via the Internet, based on what is known as PST packet switching technology, which divides digital signals into small packets of data to be transmitted over the Internet in order to dial and receive audio calls.

Commenting on this subject, Eng Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park, said, “Our obtaining of this license confirms our company’s readiness to provide this type of advanced services at a time when the Sultanate of Oman is keen to keep abreast of the latest developments to take advantage of all the latest and useful in Internet protocol technologies.”

EDO successfully reduces borrowing costs on \$2.5 bn loan

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY:
Interest savings amount to \$100 million

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

EDO Achieves Cost Savings of USD 100 million in interest due to Successful Renegotiation of its USD 2.5 Billion Loan

The borrowing cost of EDO is largely based on the Sultanate’s credit rating. The improvement in Oman’s credit outlook is a strong testament to the government’s ongoing efforts to ensure financial sustainability. Hence, EDO managed to renegotiate the terms of its loan, resulting in significant savings in interest.

Energy Development Oman (EDO), a 100 per cent government-owned entity, has successfully renegotiated the terms of its \$2.5 billion loan, resulting in cost savings of \$100 million in interest.

The move sets a new benchmark for EDO and represents a significant saving for the company and the Sultanate of Oman. The exercise is part of a broader initiative aimed at reducing interest costs across government-related entities in Oman in line with the government’s objectives to achieve financial sustainability.

The borrowing cost of EDO is largely based on the credit rating of the Sultanate of Oman.

In 2022, the rise in oil and gas prices along with the government’s continued efforts to ensure financial sustainability led to two ratings agencies, Fitch Ratings and Standard and Poor’s (S&P), raising their rating assessments. This improvement in the credit outlook attracted more investors to the Sultanate of Oman.

S&P Global Ratings has revised its outlook on Oman to positive from stable while affirming its ‘BB/B’ long- and short-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings.

According to the report, Oman’s government is repairing its balance

sheet, with debt repayments and strong nominal GDP growth.

Mazin bin Rashid al Lamki, the CEO of EDO, commented on the country’s improved credit rating, saying, “The latest credit rating upgrade by S&P Global Ratings is a strong testament to the government’s prudent fiscal policies and ongoing economic reform efforts.

As a result of this upgrade, we expect to see increased investor

confidence and interest in Oman, which will, in turn, support economic growth. For EDO, this means that we will have access to more favourable borrowing terms and is a positive step towards achieving our goal of supporting Oman’s long-term development.”

Taking advantage of the country’s improved credit profile, EDO proactively sought to renegotiate its seven-year \$2.5 billion loan, issued in August 2021

and signed initially at a fixed credit margin of 2.95 per cent.

While EDO could have taken a brand-new loan to repay the 2021 facility, the cheaper option was to ask the bank group to voluntarily amend the existing loan to a lower margin.

The company worked closely with the Debt Management Office (DMO) of the Ministry of Finance to set the margin at 2.05 per cent.

“We are pleased with the successful outcome of the loan renegotiation. The repricing of the loan is a fantastic result and highlights the company’s ability to identify market opportunities and minimise risks,” said Mazin al Lamki.

“The move sets a new benchmark for EDO and is expected to impact the company’s future operations significantly. We are grateful for the support of our Board of Director, the Debt Management Office, and our colleagues in EDO who made this possible.”

Digital tax stamps must for trade in fizzy drinks in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 16

Effective from May 3, 2023, fizzy drinks and sweetened juices will be brought under the purview of the Oman Tax Authority’s Digital Tax Stamp System, which requires all excisable goods to be digitally tagged before they are imported and distributed within the Sultanate of Oman.

Accordingly, carbonated drinks, energy drinks, sweetened beverages and other flavoured and sweetened juices must come affixed with digital tax stamps to be eligible for distribution and sale within the country.

The move represents a new phase in the roll-out of the Digital Tax Stamp scheme, which was first introduced last year with an initial focus on cigarettes and later expanded to include shisha and

other tobacco products.

Also known as digital tagging, the action is mandated by Ministerial Decision 21/2022 issued by Oman Tax Authority setting out the terms and conditions for the implementation of the Digital Tax Stamp Scheme.

“Manufacturers and importers engaged in the production, import and distribution of carbonated drinks, energy drinks and sweetened drinks, in the Sultanate of Oman, will be first required to register for the digital tax stamp system and thereafter ensure that the tax stamps are procured and placed on the respective excise products, within the timelines prescribed,” explained international professional services firm PwC in a recent advisory to clients.

According to PwC, manufacturers, importers and

WIDE COVERAGE: CARBONATED DRINKS, ENERGY DRINKS, FLAVOURED AND SWEETENED BEVERAGES, CANNED JUICES AND MOST POWDERED DRINK MIXES MUST COME AFFIXED WITH DIGITAL TAX STAMPS TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR DISTRIBUTION AND SALE IN OMAN.

distributors of beverages subject to Excise Tax can start requesting the Tax Authority, effective from May 3, 2023, for tax stamps to affix on their products.

About ten weeks thereafter, imported beverages bereft of the tax stamps will be barred from entry into the country, effective from July 20, 2023. A further ten

weeks thereafter, local distribution of stamp-free beverages will be prohibited with effect from October 12, 2023.

Significantly, hefty penalties are liable to be imposed on traders those found in breach of Ministerial Decision 21/2022, PwC has warned.

“Manufacturers and importers of the respective excise products who do not comply with the Digital Tax Stamps scheme will be penalised in accordance with the penalty provisions prescribed under the Oman Excise Tax Executive Regulations (administrative penalty of RO 500 to RO 5,000).

Additionally, we recommend that manufacturers and importers are ready to meet the requirements in the prescribed dates to avoid supply chain disruption,” the accounting, audit and consultancy

firm stated.

Under laws that came into force in mid-2019, Oman began levying an excise tax ranging from 50 to 100 per cent on a range of merchandise, notably cigarettes and tobacco products, alcohols and spirits, and carbonated and energy drinks, among other products.

The list of excisable goods was broadened in October 2020 to include a wide range of sugar-sweetened drinks, canned juices and other ready-to-drink beverages.

By introducing digital stamps – also known as digital tagging – Oman’s authorities hope to, on the one hand, clamp down on any illicit import and sale of excisable goods in the country, and on the other, ensure that the excise tax payable on these products is fully recovered in a streamlined fashion.

Bank Muscat posts RO 51.30m net profit for Q1 2023

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the flagship financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced its preliminary unaudited results for the three months ended March 31, 2023.

The bank posted a net profit of RO 51.30 million for the period compared to RO 48.26 million reported during the same period in 2022, an increase of 6.3 per cent.

The key highlights of the results for the period are as follows:

1) Net interest income from conventional banking and net income from Islamic financing stood at RO 91.71 million for the three months period ended March 31, 2023 compared to RO 82.08



million for the same period in 2022, an increase of 11.7 per cent.

2) Non-interest income was RO 31.50 million for the three months period ended March 31, 2023 as compared to RO 31.83 million for the same period in 2022.

3) Operating expenses for the three months period ended March 31, 2023 was RO 48.70 million as compared to RO 45.76 million for the same period in 2022, an increase of 6.4 per cent.

4) Net impairment for credit and other losses for the three months period ended March 31, 2023 was RO 13.69 million as against RO 12.0 million for the same period in 2022.

5) Net loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 8.4 per cent to RO 9,765 million as against RO 9,009 million as at March 31, 2022.

6) Customer deposits including Islamic customer deposits increased by 1.6 per cent to RO 8,992 million as against RO 8,853 million as at March 31, 2022.

The full results for the three month period ended March 31, 2023 along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the Board of Directors of the bank at its meeting scheduled later during April 2023.

Khimji Ramdas hosts annual Iftar gathering



MUSCAT: In the spirit of the holy month of Ramadhan, the Khimji Ramdas Group (KR) organised its annual iftar dinner for over 1,000 invitees at the Oman Convention and Exhibitions Centre (OCEC) where the company's Board of Directors, senior management, employees and their families, media and business associates broke fast together.

The annual tradition of the KR Group aims to continue the legacy of the company's renowned family spirit, where every attendee embodies a common sense of purpose and

mutual respect.

Anil Khimji, Director of Khimji Ramdas Group stated, "At the core of our iftar dinner is the spirit of the holy month of Ramadhan which unites us in breaking fast and bread as one big family.

It is the perfect time to reconnect and reinforce our people-centric values and showcase our appreciation to our employees and business associates year on year. As a family, we will continue to work hand-in-hand towards building a better future for the nation and its people."

Lulu announces next set of Ramadhan Shop and Win promotion winners

MUSCAT: Lulu Group Oman announced the third, fourth, fifth and sixth set of winners of its Ramadhan Shop and Win Promotion. The promotion, which coincides with Ramadhan, kicked off on March 1, 2023 and will run till April 29, 2023 at all Lulu stores in Oman.

The winners of the third, fourth fifth and sixth draws were selected through the e-Raffle draw held on March 22, March 29, April 5 and April 12 at the Mall of Muscat, Barka, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and Nizwa stores, respectively.

Assam Ali, Naresh, Abdullah and Salim Abdullah al Mukbali won cash prizes of RO 5,000 each. While 136 winners took home cash prizes ranging from RO 750 to RO 500, RO 200 to RO 100.

Shabeer K A, Regional Director — LuLu Hypermarkets Oman, stated "I congratulate all the winners of the third, fourth and



fifth draws. As we understand the importance of the holy month for our customers, we strive to provide the best products and services to make the season even more special. We are glad that the Shop and Win promotion has received a very positive response till date. We have 3 more draws,

which will be conducted across different Lulu outlets in the next three consequent weeks."

"As part of Ramadhan, Lulu has also launched special deals, promotions and offers both for offline and online shoppers. There are also special Ramadhan kits with all the essential grocery items

being offered at the lowest prices. Customers can also check out the daily deals in our online shopping apps, which will make shopping more convenient for them."

Customers who spend just RO 10 at any Lulu stores can participate by registering for the e-Raffle draws. The promotion will give 281 customers the opportunity to win amazing cash prizes.

There will be a grand prize of RO 10,000 cash as well as weekly cash prizes of RO 5,000, RO 750, RO 500, RO 200 and RO 100. Lulu always provides the best quality products at cheaper rates and also renders online services which help them create a strong customer relationship

All of Lulu's promotions and offers are intended to show their appreciation and gratitude for the continued loyalty and support of their customers.

Omantel, BankDhofar sign pact for cloudification journey with Omantel

MUSCAT: As resistance to cloud migration is dissolving globally, cloud technology is playing a pivotal role in reshaping the banking industry. Once considered unlikely, core computing in the cloud is now seen as a game-changer and a necessity to be secure, scalable, and agile in an ever-changing marketplace.

Through its subsidiary company Oman Data Park, Omantel continues to enable large corporates and enterprises to migrate to cloud and stay competitive in dynamic markets by designing cost-effective solutions that streamline the customers' operations and achieve the desired growth without compromising on data security.

Omantel and BankDhofar have recently inked a five-year contract to provide the bank with a bespoke hybrid solution and wide suite of data centre offerings from co-location & connectivity solutions into disaster recovery, followed by stepping stones for workload migration into cloudification. The long-term strategic partnership was signed at Omantel's headquarters by Eng Baha al Lawati, VP of Enterprise Business Unit at Omantel and Dr



Tariq Taha, Chief Information Officer at BankDhofar.

"Enterprises are constantly evolving, and their success is strongly linked with their ability to adopt new technologies and serve their customers with unique offerings to elevate their experiences. We are thrilled to sign a strategic partnership with BankDhofar and be part of their successful journey into cloudification. With our hybrid solution delivered through Omantel's Data Centre and hosting arm Oman Data Park, we will be moving the workload and operations of

BankDhofar into our data centre as a part of their journey towards digital transformation and cloud adoption. This strategic move will optimise their operation, increase agility in product offering, and improve the customer experience.

By leveraging the power of cloud technology, we are confident that this move will not only enhance the scalability and reliability of their operations but also enable them to stay ahead of the curve in a rapidly evolving industry.

We are committed to delivering a seamless transition and ensuring that our clients' needs and expectations are met with

the highest level of excellence," commented Eng Baha al Lawati, Vice President of Enterprise Business Unit at Omantel.

Dr Tariq Taha, Chief Information Officer at BankDhofar, said "Core computing in the cloud has become a reality and it is reshaping the banking industry. At BankDhofar, we are keen on embracing the future as we are always looking for ways to stay ahead of the curve. Therefore, adopting state-of-the-art solutions provided by our partner, Omantel, is key towards streamlining our operations and be more agile in a dynamic market while at the same time ensure maximum data security. I am confident that this partnership will bear fruit and it will foster cloudification among large entities."

Hassan Abdul Ali, General Manager of Business Development at Oman Data Park, commented "We are excited to have been given the opportunity to shift BankDhofar's data centre to the cloud. This is a major step forward for streamlining the bank's operations, enabling it to focus on strategic initiatives while reducing operational expenses and avoiding capacity constraints."

ahlibank launches Souq initiative aiming to support SMEs

MUSCAT: ahlibank, has launched its first Souq initiative aimed at supporting the growth and development of local SMEs. The initiative, which is the first of its kind in the bank's history, is part of the bank's commitment to aiding the overall socio-economic development in the region and is in line with Oman's Vision 2040.

The ahlibank Souq, part of the bank's Ramadhan CSR programmes, providing a platform for 40 SMEs from different sectors to showcase their products and services, supporting the local community's development, youth projects, and female entrepreneurs.

This comes as part of the bank's commitment to support SMEs and facilitate their growth and expansion by providing them with the necessary exposure to a wider audience contributing towards a brighter future for Oman's economy.

Jumana Aflah al Hashmi, Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications of ahlibank, said, "The ahlibank Souq marks a significant milestone in our commitment



to supporting the growth and development of the Sultanate of Oman's economy and community.

By empowering local SMEs, we are not only contributing to achieving the Oman Vision 2040 plan, but we are also investing in the future of our nation. We remain dedicated to driving positive change and building a brighter future for the Sultanate of Oman and are proud to take this step forward in our impactful community engagement roadmap."

"Supporting SMEs is not just a corporate social responsibility for ahlibank, but it is also considered as a duty being a leading bank in the Sultanate of Oman which contributes towards building a sustainable economy," Al Hashmi added.

NAVIGATING LEGAL AND REGULATORY CHALLENGES

A guide to compliance for entrepreneurs and startups



KAMLA SAID
AL RAHBIYAH
kamlaa2040@gmail.com

The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.



Starting and growing a business can be a challenging task, but navigating the legal and regulatory landscape can be even more complex. Entrepreneurs and startups need to be aware of the various laws and regulations that apply to their business in order to ensure compliance and avoid costly penalties.

Legal and regulatory compliance is a critical aspect of any successful business, and it's important to take the time to understand what's required in order to operate within the

boundaries of the law.

There are several important laws and regulations that entrepreneurs and startups should be aware of, including those related to taxes, employment, health and safety, and data protection. One of the most important laws

for businesses is tax law.

Entrepreneurs and startups need to be aware of the tax obligations that apply to their business, including the requirement to register for VAT, file accurate tax returns, and pay taxes on time. It's also

important to understand the rules around deductions, such as the deductibility of business expenses, as this can have a significant impact on the bottom line.

Employment law is another critical area for entrepreneurs and startups to be aware of.

Employers need to understand the rules around hiring and firing employees, paying employees, and providing benefits and time off. It's also important to understand the various employment laws that apply to your business, such as the minimum wage, discrimination laws, and health and safety regulations.

In addition to taxes and employment law, entrepreneurs and startups also need to be aware of the regulations surrounding health and safety.

This includes the rules around providing a safe working environment, as well as the regulations surrounding the use of hazardous substances and materials.

Failing to comply with these regulations can result in fines and legal penalties, so it's important to understand your obligations and take steps to ensure compliance.

Finally, data protection is a critical issue for businesses operating in the digital age. With the growing amount of personal and sensitive information being stored and processed by businesses, it's important to

understand the rules around data protection and take steps to ensure that your business is in compliance with these regulations.

This includes understanding the rules around data storage and processing, as well as the rights of individuals to access and control their personal information.

In conclusion, legal and regulatory compliance is a critical aspect of any successful business, and it's important for entrepreneurs and start-ups to take the time to understand the various laws and regulations that apply to their business.

Whether it's tax law, employment law, health and safety regulations, or data protection, taking the time to understand your obligations and take steps to ensure compliance can help you avoid costly penalties and operate a successful business.

So, are you ready to navigate the legal and regulatory landscape with confidence? With the right knowledge and understanding of the various laws and regulations, you can be well on your way to building a successful and compliant business.

Europe only has space for a small gas refill in 2023

JOHN KEMP

Europe needs to put a smaller-than-average volume of gas into storage this year after a mild winter left the region with record high inventories.

The smaller refill requirement is weighing down prices for deliveries this summer, but because limited storage is an imperfect replacement for imports, prices will probably still need to be high next winter to restrain consumption.

As a result, futures prices have moved into an increasingly steep contango to cover storage costs, incentivise more consumption this summer, divert some LNG to other markets, and encourage conservation next winter.

The European Union and the United Kingdom have capacity to store around 1,129 terawatt-hours (TWh) of gas, according to data compiled by Gas Infrastructure Europe (GIE).

On April 1, the start of the traditional refill season, storage was 56 per cent full — a record high for the time of year — with inventories of 633 TWh.

Over the last ten years, storage increased by an average of +612 TWh from April 1 to the post-summer peak. If storage behaves similarly this year, inventories are projected to reach a post-summer peak 1,245 TWh, with a range of 1,102 TWh to 1,412 TWh.

Europe's storage capacity limit implies it only has room to add one of the smallest volumes of gas in the last ten years.

Prices and spreads are now moving decisively to limit the amount of gas added to storage this summer.

Lower prices will encourage gas-fired generators to run for more hours and energy-intensive industrial users to re-open some plants closed last winter to reduce costs.

Given the limited volume of gas that can be stored, however, high prices will still probably be needed to encourage careful consumption during the winter.

Prices for deliveries in January 2024, usually the coldest winter month, were €60 per megawatt-hour on March 31, a more modest reduction from €84 on December 30 and €174 on September 30.

The weakening spread reflects both the increasing abundance of inventories and the rising cost of adding more to them given the shortage of storage space.

In the short term, cold weather at the start of April has delayed the onset of refilling and eased some concerns about capacity running out.

Inventories are estimated to have reached their post-winter low as early as March 17 compared with a median date over the last ten years of March 30. But there was no net increase between March 17 and April 6 owing to the arrival of colder weather, effectively postponing the start of the refill season.

The delayed start to refilling probably prevented an even sharper fall in prices and calendar spreads. Nevertheless, storage space is still under pressure.

Refill in 2023 will therefore need to be much slower and end far earlier than in 2022, and one of the lowest on record, which means lower prices and a deeper contango to limit the build up of inventories. — Reuters



JIM O'NEILL

The writer, a former chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management and a former UK treasury minister, is a member of the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development.

Russia's war in Ukraine, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping's recent meeting in Moscow, and China's apparent success in brokering a diplomatic rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia have fuelled renewed chatter about threats to the global primacy of the United States – and particularly to that of the US dollar.

I encountered such commentary in the responses to my recent Global Policyarticle assessing the future of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). The group is now considering an enlargement that would bring in countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia, raising questions about its criteria for membership and the role of its own New Development Bank.

But would a larger and more influential BRICS-Plus really create risks to the dollar?

Perceived threats to the dollar's role in the global financial system are nothing new; they have been a frequent occurrence since I began my career in the 1980s.

Obviously, if there comes a time when the US ceases to be the world's largest economy, the dollar's status will be called into question. The same was true of pound sterling in the first half of the twentieth century (though



the pound was not knocked off its global perch until well after the United Kingdom had been surpassed economically).

The eclipse of the dollar would not necessarily be a bad thing for the US, given all the added responsibilities that come with issuing the world's main reserve currency.

In a global economy where the US already is no longer as dominant as it once was, it is not optimal to have everyone else be so dependent on the American monetary system and the Federal Reserve's domestically driven priorities.

Other economies would much prefer that their own currencies, monetary policies, and trade patterns not be so influenced by those of the US. But the fact that a US-excluding group of emerging powers has higher aspirations for itself does not necessarily mean anything for the US-centred financial system.

After all, the BRICS and potential BRICS-Plus countries face many significant challenges of their own, and it is not clear what they hope to achieve together beyond issuing symbolic statements. Crucially, the group's most important economies are China and India, bitter

adversaries that rarely cooperate on anything.

Until that changes, it is fanciful to think that the BRICS or even an expanded grouping could mount any serious challenge to the dollar. I often despair at the lack of cooperation between China and India – the world's two most populous countries by far.

If they could overcome their historic animosity and develop an ambitious shared agenda for expanding trade and tackling issues like health threats and climate change, the idea of a BRICS-driven challenge to the financial and monetary status quo would become not just plausible but imminent.

In this spirit, I have long argued that China should make the first move by inviting India to help co-design elements of its signature Belt and Road Initiative.

Realising the BRI's ambitious agenda of transnational infrastructure investments in cooperation with India would make a far more powerful and lasting contribution to Asia and beyond.

Otherwise, the BRI will remain a narrowly Chinese initiative that exists primarily to impose Chinese preferences on others.

The potential addition of

Saudi Arabia and Iran comes with similar caveats.

Yes, bringing on two major oil producers (in addition to Russia) increases the likelihood of some oil being priced in currencies other than the dollar. But unless edging out the dollar is an explicit, genuinely shared, and deeply held goal, such invoicing changes will be exciting only to niche financial writers.

I have lost count of the times I have heard arguments about why oil could soon be priced in a new currency. First it was going to be the Deutsche Mark, then the yen, then the euro. It's still the dollar.

Finally, and most importantly, for any BRICS (or BRICS-Plus) member to pose a strategic challenge to the dollar, it would have to permit – indeed encourage – foreign and domestic savers and investors to decide for themselves when to buy or sell assets denominated in its currency.

That means no capital controls of the kind that China has routinely deployed. Until the BRICS and potential BRICS-Plus countries can find a credible alternative to the dollar for their own savings, the greenback's dominance will not really be in doubt. ©Project Syndicate, 2023

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

أوربيت ORBIT Car Rental & Lease

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease



ramadhan



African music in Oman

Close cultural and trade ties between Sur and Africa existed in the past. The Omani town was a major port in the 17th and 18th centuries that was used to export dates, dried fish, carpets woven from sheep wool, and frankincense to East Africa and India. This writer tracked down the African music influence in Sur... **P20**



QUR'AN VERSE OF THE DAY

{And establish prayer at the two ends of the day and at the approach of the night. Indeed, good deeds do away with misdeeds. That is a reminder for those who remember.}

Surah Hüd, 114

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Jarir reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Allah Almighty will not show mercy to the person who does not show mercy to other people."

Sahih (Al-Albani)

HEALTH TIPS

If you feel full quickly and are unable to complete your Iftar, you can delay your main course until after your Maghreb prayer. This will ensure that you have enough time to digest your dates, soup and salad, preventing you from feeling uncomfortable as a result of overeating after a long day of fasting.



STORIES FROM THE QURAN

Prophet Ibrahim and the Fire

(Part 2 of 2)

TO CONVINCE THEM THAT the idols could not harm him, he challenged: "I have already condemned them; if they had any power they would have harmed me by now!"

He explained to them the beauty of Allah's creation, His power and wisdom. Idol worship is detested by Allah, for Allah is the Lord of the universe Who created mankind, guided him, provided him with food and drink, and cured him when he was sick, and Who will cause him to die and be raised up again. It was He to Whom Abraham prayed and Who would forgive his sins on the Day of Judgment. However, they would not give up but

clung fast to idolatry.

Abraham left his father's house and abandoned his people and what they worshipped. He decided to do something about their state of disbelief, but did not reveal it. He knew that there was going to be a great celebration on the other bank of the river which would be attended by all the people. Abraham waited until the city was empty, then came out cautiously, directing his steps towards the temple. The streets leading to it were empty and the temple itself was deserted, for the priests had also gone to the festival outside the city.

Abraham went there carrying a sharp ax. He looked at the stone and wood statues of the gods

and at the food laid in front of them as offerings. He approached one of the statues and asked: The food in front of you is getting cold. Why don't you eat?" The statue kept silent and rigid. Abraham asked the other statues around him: "Will you not eat (of the offering before you)?" Quran Ayah 37:91

He was mocking them for he knew they would not eat. He once again asked them: "What is the matter with you that you do speak not?" Quran Ayah 37:92

He then raised his ax and started smashing the false gods worshipped by the people. He destroyed them all except one, on whose neck he hung the ax. After this his anger subsided and he felt at peace. He left the temple. He had fulfilled his vow to show his people a practical proof of their foolishness in worshipping something other than Allah. When the people returned, they were shocked to see their gods smashed to pieces, lying scattered all over the temple. They began to guess who had done that to their idols, and Abraham's name came to their minds.

Allah the Almighty said: They said: "Who has done this to our aliah (gods)? He must indeed be one of the wrongdoers." They said: "We heard a young man talking (against) them who is called Abraham." They said: "Then bring him before the eyes of the people, that they may testify." They

said: "Are you the one who has done this to our gods, O Abraham?" (Abraham) said: "Nay, this one, the biggest of them (idols) did it. Ask them, if they can speak!"

So they turned to themselves and said: "Verily, you are the Zalimun (polytheists and wrongdoers!)." Then they turned to themselves (their first thought and said). "Indeed you (Abraham) know well that these (idols) speak not!" (Abraham) said: "Do you then worship besides Allah, things that can neither profit you, nor harm you? Fie upon you, and upon that which you worship besides Allah! Have you then no sense?" Quran Ayah 21:59-67

Furious, they demanded that Abraham be arrested and tried. Abraham did not resist. This was precisely what he had been aiming for, so that he could show them up in public for their foolish beliefs.

At the trial, they asked him if he was responsible for breaking the idols. Smiling, he told them to ask the biggest idol, which was still whole. He told them that he must be the culprit! They replied that he knew well that the idol could not speak or move, which gave Abraham the chance to prove the foolishness of worshipping these lifeless objects. Anger was burning in their hearts. They decided to throw Abraham into the biggest fire

they could build. All the citizens were ordered to gather wood as a service to their gods.

They dug a deep pit, filled it with firewood and ignited it. They brought a catapult with which to cast Abraham into the fire. Abraham was put on the catapult, his hands and feet tied. The fire was ready with its flames reaching the sky. The people stood away from the pit because of the great heat. Then the chief priest gave his order to cast Abraham into the fire.

The catapult was shot, and Abraham was cast into the fire, but his descent into the blaze was as a descent on steps in a cool garden. The flames were still there, but they did not burn, for Allah the Almighty had issued His command: "O fire! Be you coolness and safety for Abraham." Quran Ayah 21:69

The fire submitted to the will of Allah, becoming cool and safe for Abraham. It only burned his bonds, and he sat in the midst of the fire as if he were sitting in a garden. He glorified and praised Allah the Almighty, with a heart that contained only his love for Allah. There was not any vacant space therein for fear, awe, or worry. It was filled with love only.

Fear and awe were dead, and the fire was turned into coolness, making the air pleasant. Those who love Allah as Abraham did do not fear.

IN PHOTOS



People prepare food for Iftar, the fast-breaking meal eaten by Muslims at sundown during the holy month of Ramadhan, at a parking lot in Osdorp neighbourhood. The event is organised by the supermarket chain Albert Heijn for its customers and staff. — AFP



Two hikers take pictures of the sunset at the Fossil Rock Nature Reserve as they make their way to share an Iftar (breaking fast) meal during the holy month of Ramadhan in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. — Reuters



A Palestinian girl prepares traditional date-filled cookies with her family at their home in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip ahead of Eid Al Fitr. — AFP



Ramadhan in Nepal

By Kabeer Yousuf
@kabeeryousef

Muslims in Nepal, a country where Islam is the third-largest religion, have been observing fasting since the beginning of the holy month and a variety in the cultures, diversity in the delicacies if that is concern for many, and the duration of fasting make fasting in Nepal different. Muslims in Nepal fast for seventeen hours every day. They usually get up around 3 am in the morning, offers prayers and takes pre-dawn light meal "suhoor" before fasting and get prepared for the day till around 7 pm when the Magrib call for prayers sound from the mosques when they break the day's fast.

According to a report by the Nepal Muslim Commission in 2018, there were approximately 4,000 mosques in Nepal. The majority of mosques are located in urban areas, such as Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Biratnagar, and serve the country's Muslim population. The Pancha Kashmiri Takiya Masjid commonly known as the Kashmiri Masjid, build in 15th century AD, is one of the oldest mosques of Nepal situated in the heart of Kathmandu next to Kings Palace.

"Nepal has a small but vibrant Muslim community and there are around two million Muslims in the country comprising 6 per cent of the total population of Nepal for whom Ramadhan is an important religious observance and we observe fasting to the fullest meaning," said Dornath Aryal, Nepalese ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

Like all the Muslims around the world Nepalese believers are



undertaking the month-long fasting during the month of Ramadhan as they believe that in this month, the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, the messenger of the Allah, may peace be upon him.

To observe this holy month, during the entire period, like elsewhere, Nepalese Muslims also fast from dawn to dusk

While also adhering to rules like not drinking, smoking, as well as not engaging in physical fights. Although the first meal before sunrise, suhoor, is eaten in the presence of immediate family members, for iftar friends

and family members get together to break the day's fast, and many even have their meals at the mosque.

"Ramadhan's true essence lies in celebrating in each other's company or in groups," in Nepal items like dates,

appear happy to take part in religious and cultural activities of the community. Mohammed Arshatulla, 20 years old student from Sirahawas believes that it's their duty to carry on the culture to the next generation.

Eid Al Fitr is celebrated on the 1st day of the new month after Ramadhan when everyone wears new clothes and rushes to the mosques for Eid Prayers and then



sewai, and Rooh Afza are normally consumed during this month." Similarly, one of the specialties during this month is a special prayer called tarawih performed in the mosques. Tarawih is the additional set of prayers performed by the imam, a spiritual person who leads the prayers at mosques after the final prayer.

In Nepal, the younger generation seems to be equally devoted and

visits their relatives where the feast of meat and sweet sewai is a traditional way to celebrate the biggest festival of Muslims.

"Overall, Ramadhan is a time of spiritual reflection and renewal for Muslims in Nepal. It is a time to strengthen one's faith, shows compassion for others, and seek forgiveness from Allah," adds Bikal Jha, President of Nepali Social Club.

Kebbeh Nayah – Lebanon's famous delicacy for Ramadhan

By Liju Cherian

AFSHAN JABEEN is an influencer based in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. For Ramadhan, Afshan has prepared Kebbeh Nayah, one of Lebanon's most famous delicacies and is a quintessential festive food of the Arabic region.

Kebbeh Nayah is freshly-butchered meat that is traditionally prepared and consists of minced raw lamb mixed with fine bulgur and spices.

It is made of finely ground raw meat mixed with bulgur, onions, mint, and spices, then drizzled with olive oil.

During the old days, the Lebanese and Syrians used to kill animals on Sundays and on feast days. Raw meat was eaten immediately. Lebanese tradi-

tionally relied on that freshness to help guarantee the meat's safety.

Kebbeh Nayah stands for 'raw kibbe', kibbeh being the patties made from ground meat, bulgur (cracked wheat) and spices. It is a rustic, authentic Lebanese dish of raw minced lamb. The secret to this much-loved Lebanese dish is using only the freshest meat that is finely minced on the day, and it should be eaten the day it is made.

There are two main ways to grind meat for Kebbeh Nayah. The first method used is from the olden days beating the meat using a pestle and mortar. The other method is to use a good food processor or meat grinder.

Afshan was recently selected for the Panasonic Influencer



Affiliate Programme ('PIAP') 2022 from Oman by Panasonic. She does restaurant reviews, food photography and shares new recipes on social media platforms. Her social media handles on Instagram, Tiktok, Youtube and Facebook are @afshaan_foodblog.



INGREDIENTS
500 gms lean leg of goat /lamb/ veal
1 cup fine bulgur
1 Onion
2 red chilies fresh
15 leaves fresh mint
10 leaves fresh basil
1/2 teaspoon 7 spices (Lebanese spice blend)
1/2 teaspoon Cayenne/black pepper
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil

METHOD:
Wash and soak bulgur for 10 minutes
Mince the meat finely in a processor
Finely chop the onion, herbs and all spices to the processor give it a blitz.
Add bulgur and onion herb paste to the minced meat and mix with wet hands for 5 min.

Form a large patty with all the meat and flatten it by giving it the shape of the serving dish about 3

inches (7 cm) thick. Using a knife or fingers, make decorative patterns on the top of the meat. Drizzle the olive oil over the entire surface of the meat. Garnish with slices of hot pepper, turnip, chives, pine nuts and a few mint leaves. Serve immediately with pita bread.

KEBBEH NAYAH TIPS
Serve immediately with pita bread. Make sure you keep the fresh meat cold until you are ready to prepare it, and come serving time, you want it to be almost at room temperature.

Using a good food processor takes out most of the work or getting it done by butcher you trust to give you the highest quality meat is and also getting it done with sterilised blades is just as important.

You can make pretty indents to hold the oil or score knife patterns as you wish, and use a bit of water to smooth it down if it gets sticky.

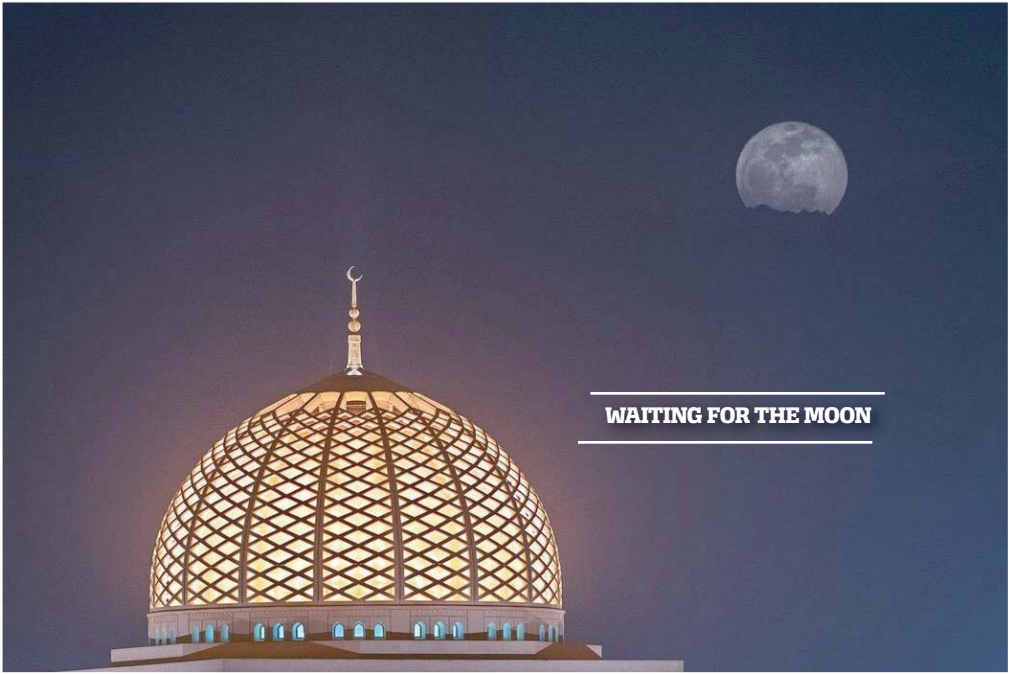
HOW TO SERVE KEBBEH NAYAH
Use the very best extra virgin olive oil and fresh bread to accompany. It is also customary to serve fresh herbs, radishes, cucumber and raw or spring Is it safe to eat raw meat? Ultimately this depends on the quality of the meat and try to get it as fresh as possible from the butcher the same day.



sanak_roychoudhury

Muscat مسقط, Oman سلطنة عُمان

Follow





thespicytravelgirl

Jebel Hatt

Follow



SHARE 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**.



AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

Peruvian archaeologists unearth 500-year-old Inca ceremonial bath



ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN THE Peruvian Andes have discovered an Inca bathing complex built half a millennia ago, which they believe may have served the elite of the sprawling empire than once dominated large swathes of South America.

Found near the "House of the Inca" in the Huanuco Pampa archaeological zone in central Peru, local archaeologists believe that the bath may have served a religious purpose for high-ranking members of the Inca empire, which 500 years ago extended from southern Ecuador to the centre of Chile.

Luis Paredes Sanchez, project manager at Huanuco Pampa, said the structure was similar to "more hierarchical, restricted and sacred spaces within the Inca administrative centres, because rather than having a utilitarian or hygienic function, they



also served for religious functions and worshipping ancestors."

The "finely carved" bath averages some two-metres in depth, with independent pools and spillways and a central passage taking water into a drainage duct that divides the room into two small platforms, or "benches" for the Inca, Peru's culture ministry said in a statement.

The Huanuco Pampa archaeological site is part of the Qhapaq Nan project, a complex 25,000-kilometre-long road network that linked Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Argentina. The road system was declared a World Heritage Site in 2014.

Peru is home to hundreds of archaeological sites across the country, including the Machu Picchu citadel in the Inca capital of Cusco, and the Nasca lines, massive designs drawn in Ica's coastal desert region over 1,500 years ago. — Reuters

LIFESTYLE

Bad Bunny: the reggaeton performer transforming pop music



HIGH-OCTANE HITS, dance breaks, fireworks and a bonus lesson on the history of Caribbean music: with his groundbreaking Coachella set, Puerto Rican megastar Bad Bunny showcased a Latin revolution in pop fuelled by his skyrocketing fame.

The reggaeton titan born Benito Antonio Martinez Ocasio first appeared at the influential music festival in 2018, as a guest of rapper Cardi B.

Five years on, the 29-year-old artist drew tens of thousands of screaming fans to the event's main stage in the California desert as the first-ever Spanish-language headliner.

His two-hour catalogue-spanning performance sent fans — and the industry — home with a message: the lineage of Latino music in the Americas is deep, rich and having a profound impact on today's most popular and most profitable music.

It's a message that music's power players are only starting to accept and process.

"I don't think the narrative of the nation of the US as a white, English-speaking nation is really fully changing anytime soon," said Vanessa Diaz, a professor at Loyola Marymount University who teaches the course "Bad Bunny and Resistance in Puerto Rico."

But "I think that we see a reckoning with the demand of the people and not necessarily just what the industry would normally prescribe."

Case in point: Coachella fans roared with delight for the hits off "Un Verano Sin Ti," his massively successful latest album, which was the first entirely Spanish-language work to earn a Grammy nomination for the coveted Album of the Year award.

Bad Bunny also did some of his earlier work, interspersing his songs with documentary-style footage tracing the heritage of the Latin music — and, specifically, Caribbean rhythms — that have fueled his blistering ascent to global stardom.

It culminated with an ode to the classics including Bronx-born Puerto Rican Pete Rodriguez's "I Like It Like That" — the song sampled by Cardi B on her smash "I Like It" that featured.... you guessed it, Bad Bunny.

- AUTHENTICITY -

Bad Bunny — the son of a truck driver and a teacher — grew up in Vega Baja, a small town near the

island's capital San Juan.

Young Benito honed his vocal skills in the children's choir at church, before growing into a pre-teen who loved spending hours developing beats on his computer, as he also began delving into everything from bachata to the Bee Gees.

He was working at a supermarket bagging groceries when he got a call from a label over his viral plays on the DIY platform SoundCloud.

Thus began his rapid explosion to the top of global music — the highest-grossing tour, the most-streamed artist — over the course of which he's remained



firmly rooted in his own heritage.

He proudly celebrates Puerto Rico and its traditions through his music and his public persona, while also evoking a comfort with contemporary societal evolutions including gender fluidity, which is particularly appealing to youth.

"His artistry comes out of his experience as a person who was born in a colony and who grew up under direct colonialism and the struggles in Puerto Rico," said Diaz, noting that his authenticity is part of his mass appeal.

"Everyone understands that intimate connection to a homeland," Diaz said.

"His dedication to that, I think, resonates deeply on a global level."

- PRICE OF FAME -

From urgency over hurricane relief to the 2019 street protests demanding the ouster of Puerto Rico's governor, Bad Bunny's art and actions have also made him a de facto political poster child — whether he wants to be or not.

"That's part of what makes him such a revered figure," said Petra Rivera-Rideau, a professor at Wellesley College who has also

studied the reggaeton star.

But the constant eye of celebrity has heaped pressure on him to meet the varying expectations of loyal — and therefore oft critical — fans, a particular challenge for an artist widely known to enjoy spending time alone.

Some are unhappy about his purported relationship with model Kendall Jenner — they don't think she's right for him. Others are disappointed that he seems to waver somewhat when taking a stand on racial politics.

But, as Diaz puts it: "If we want something polished and dressed up and strategic, then we don't want the same Bad Bunny we

wanted before."

Bad Bunny addressed his audience head-on Friday night: "Humbly speaking, people think they know the lives of famous people but they don't."

"They don't know what we feel, what we live through. (...) Don't believe everything you hear."

For all the influences he honored at Coachella, Bad Bunny has grown into an influential icon himself, freshening reggaeton — a fusion of hip-hop and reggae with Afro-Caribbean origins — and imbuing it with Latin trap, which draws on rap from the American south.

He works regularly with fellow Latino artists and featured collaborators including Puerto Rican rapper Jhayco at Coachella.

When Post Malone, whose performance was marred by technical difficulties, joined him onstage, he smiled along quizzically as Bad Bunny addressed him in Spanish.

He was definitely in the minority: early in the set, Bad Bunny asked the crowd their language preference.

The response from the masses was unequivocal: "Espanol."

— AFP

MUSIC

Hamburg Philharmonic to debut at Carnegie Hall on April 22



THE HAMBURG PHILHARMONIC State Orchestra conducted by Kent Nagano will make its debut on April 22 at one of the most prestigious concert venues in the world: New York's Carnegie Hall.

"It is probably the most important event in the history of the Hamburg Philharmonic State Orchestra to take place outside its home city: the debut in the most legendary of all concert halls, Carnegie Hall in New York," the state orchestra announced.

Nagano will lead a concert that brings together cellist Jan Vogler, 90 musicians from the orchestra and 100 young choral singers



between the ages of 11 and 27 from Hamburg and New York.

The programme also takes up the unifying idea by combining Johannes Brahms' "Schicksalslied" for choir and orchestra from Hamburg and Ludwig van Beethoven's 8th Symphony, probably the most important German composer in the world, with a contemporary US composer living in New York.

Sean Shepherd's work "On a Clear Day," which will be premiered at the concert, is based on a cycle of poems by the Hamburg-based poet Ulla Hahn. Shepherd's composition for violoncello, choir and orchestra was commissioned by the Philharmonic State Orchestra and the Dresden Music Festival.

"We are proud that the state orchestra will perform in this famous concert hall as a musical ambassador of Hamburg as a city of culture," said Senator for Culture Carsten Brosda. — dpa



African music in Oman

By Dr Khaled Abdul Malek

A few years ago, I was part of a team that was working on a production for the French channel FR3 about African music in Oman. The team of four people included journalist Veronique Nizon, her cameraman, her sound engineer, and myself, standing as interpreter and guide. We travelled to Sur, where we stayed for almost a week, meeting Omani musicians who are keen on perpetrating old traditional music from east Africa. We were warmly welcomed by

major port in the 17th and 18th centuries that was used to export dates, dried fish, carpets woven from sheep wool, and frankincense to East Africa and India. During that period, the Omani empire ruled much of East Africa's coast and the islands of Zanzibar. Omani sailors played a key role in introducing African instruments, music, dance, and the Swahili language. The openness of Omani people, thanks to Oman's long history as a seafaring nation, is felt in the amalgamation of different traditional types of music they play. One example of this amalgam



the enthusiastic musicians, who were happy to share with us their musical heritage. In Oman, music is mostly played on special occasions like weddings, in parks, and at official events. "The music was a way to encourage and entertain sailors on their long journey in the seas between Zanzibar and Oman," said Mohamed, who plays the Msundu, a long cylindrical drum. "Nowadays we play music to have fun and create a joyful atmosphere wherever we perform." During our stay in Sur, we were lucky enough to assist in a wedding in the suburbs of the town. Men and women danced and sang together in an extraordinary ambiance of happiness and joy. We could feel the rhythm flowing in their veins! Close cultural and trade ties between Sur and Africa existed in the past. The Omani town was a

of music is the one played in Razha, which originally referred to the sword dance. It includes drumming, clapping, and rowing movements. After a week of shooting in Sur, we headed to Sifa, a coastal village close to Muscat, where we rented a wooden dhow to film a group of musicians from Sur in "action". It was great to see these young Omanis enjoy playing the music of their ancestors. "Today we are lucky to play and enjoy the music of our parents, but in the days when they used to spend several weeks at sea on a sailing boat to reach the African coast, it was a way to make their journey less tiring and boring," says Khalfan, one of the musicians. It is fortunate to have the youth perpetuate the traditions of their ancestors; otherwise, all countries would look the same and the world would be boring.

