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RAMADHAN
1446 AH
SUNDAY
MAR 2, 2025

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PRAYER TIMINGS

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05:13 AM

DHUHR

12:24 PM

ASR

03:45 PM

MAGHRIB

06:15 PM

ISHA

07:25 PM

omanobserver.com

INBRIEF

HM GREETS BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Željka Cvijanović, Chairwoman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the occasion of her country's Independence Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the chairwoman and to the people of her friendly country to achieve their aspirations for progress, stability and development.

FIRST OMANI TO FINISH 7 SUMMITS CHALLENGE



Omani adventurer Suleiman bin Hamoud al Naabi managed to reach the highest peak of Mount Carstensz, which is classified as one of the highest peaks in Indonesia, with a height of about 4,884 metres above sea level. Al Naabi was able to achieve an unprecedented accomplishment as the first Omani to complete the Seven Summits Challenge according to the two internationally recognised classifications, after having previously climbed all the highest peaks on every continent around the world, most notably the Mount Everest, which is 8,849 metres high and Lhotse, the fourth highest peak in the world, which is 8,516 metres high.

Oman sees 17.6% rise in FDI amid investment reforms

MUSCAT: Foreign direct investment (FDI) in the Sultanate of Oman has grown by 17.6 per cent over the past five years, reaching a cumulative value of RO 26.677 billion by the third quarter of 2024. This steady increase underscores Oman's success in positioning itself as a key global investment destination, driven by strategic reforms, a business-friendly environment and advanced infrastructure.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, attributed the positive FDI trends to Oman's well-defined strategies and supportive policies. He emphasised that the establishment of the Investment and Trade Court is a key step towards ensuring a stable legal framework that encourages foreign investments. The ministry, he noted, is committed to offering competitive

incentives and streamlined processes to attract investors and foster economic growth. Al Yousef also highlighted that enhancing the investment landscape remains a top priority for driving sustainable development. The government continues to implement various initiatives aimed at economic diversification and job creation across multiple sectors. Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroojiyah, Under-Secretary

of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, outlined the ministry's ongoing efforts to evaluate and refine investment policies, laws and incentives. She noted that Oman actively promotes its investment opportunities through regional and international investment forums, exhibitions and marketing campaigns to attract foreign capital. SEE P13

Uncertainty looms as first phase of truce expires

UN chief warns return to Gaza war would be ‘catastrophic’

THE first phase of the Israel-Hamas truce drew to a close on Saturday, but negotiations on the next stage, which should secure a permanent ceasefire, have so far been inconclusive.

The ceasefire took effect on January 19 after more than 15 months of war sparked by October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, the deadliest in the country's history.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Saturday warned against a return to hostilities in war-torn Gaza, saying such an outcome would be “catastrophic.”

As the first phase of the Israel-Hamas truce agreement drew to a close with uncertainty over the next steps, Guterres said in a statement that “a permanent ceasefire and the release of all captives are essential to preventing escalation and averting more devastating consequences for civilians.”

Over the initial six-week phase, Hamas freed 25 living captives and returned the bodies of eight others to Israel, in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

A second phase of the fragile truce was supposed to secure the release of dozens of captives still in Gaza and pave the way for a more permanent end to the war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had sent a delegation to Cairo and mediator Egypt said “intensive talks” on the second phase had begun with the presence of delegations from Israel as well as fellow mediators Qatar and the United States.

But by early Saturday, there was no sign of consensus and Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said the group rejected “the extension of the first phase in the



An Israeli military bulldozer demolishes a home at the Nur Shams camp for Palestinian refugees east of Tulkarem in the occupied West Bank on Saturday. — AFP

formulation proposed by the occupation (Israel)”. He called on mediators “to oblige the occupation to abide by the agreement in its various stages”.

Max Rodenbeck, of the International Crisis Group think tank, said the second phase cannot be expected to start immediately. “But I think the ceasefire probably won't collapse also,” he said.

Hamas released footage showing what appeared to be a group of Israeli captives in Gaza, accompanied with the message: “Only a ceasefire agreement brings them back alive”. AFP was unable to immediately verify the video.

A Palestinian source close to the talks said that Israel had proposed to extend the first phase in successive one-week intervals with a view to conducting hostage-prisoner swaps each week, adding that Hamas had rejected the plan. Domestic political considerations are a factor in Netanyahu's reluctance to begin the planned second stage. SEE ALSO P6

Ramadhan begins for hundreds of millions across the world

CAIRO: The holy month of Ramadhan began on Saturday for hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world.

In the Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia, March 1 was declared the first day of fasting. The start of Ramadhan is determined by the sighting of the new crescent moon, which can vary by country. In Iran and India Ramadhan begins on Sunday.

There are approximately 1.9 billion Muslims worldwide, with the majority living in Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

In Gaza, this year, the start of Ramadhan coincides with the expiration of the first phase of a fragile ceasefire that had temporarily paused the 15-month-long war between Israel and the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Images showed residents shopping and preparing for



A volunteer distributes children's toys during Ramadan to people on the first day of the holy month at Souq Waqif in Doha on Saturday. — AFP

Ramadhan amid the ruins of the largely destroyed coastal strip. Ramadhan is considered a time of heightened tensions, particularly in the occupied Palestinian Territories and Jerusalem.

Hamas has called on its supporters to increase their presence at the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem during Ramadhan. Meanwhile, in Syria, the fasting month also began, marking the first Ramadhan after decades of war.

In the capital Damascus and nationwide, people experienced an unprecedented rush on the first day of the holy month. For the first time in 50 years, experts gathered on a mountain north of Damascus to observe the crescent moon and determine the beginning of Ramadhan.

In many Middle Eastern countries, widespread concerns about the future cast a shadow over the start of Ramadhan. — dpa



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SHORTTAKES



AL MAZAYNA CAMEL BEAUTY CONTEST CONCLUDES

AL MUSANNAH: The Al Mazayna competition, organised by the Oman Camel Racing Federation, concluded at the Tawi Al Shawi field in the Wilayat of Al Musannah, Al Batinah South Governorate. The final day featured three rounds for the one-year-old camel category. In the Silver Round, Rajwa, representing the Royal Cavalry Corps and trained by Suleiman bin Mohammed al Jahouri, claimed first place. Ramz Al Sharqiya, also from the Royal Cavalry Corps and trained by Al Jahouri, secured second place, while Intikahat, trained by the same handler, finished third.

The highly anticipated Main Round saw Mukhifa, owned by Jumaa bin Hamid al Durai, emerge as the champion, followed by Al Ghazal, owned by Rashid bin Saeed al Saeedi, in second place. Jumayel, owned by Ghalib bin Saeed al Saeedi, secured third place.

In the Talad Round, Maali, owned by Khamis bin Abdullah al Sunaidy, claimed victory. Raghad, owned by Adel bin Saeed al Mughairy, finished second, while Masiha, owned by Hamid bin Abdullah al Quraini, secured third place. — ONA



The MTC celebrated its annual day with national songs performed by RAO Music Band and RAFO Music Band

MTC MARKS ANNUAL DAY WITH GRAND CELEBRATIONS

MUSCAT: The Military Technical College (MTC) celebrated its annual day with a vibrant evening of events, featuring heritage performances, national and folk songs performed by the Royal Army of Oman Music Band and the Royal Air Force of Oman Music Band. The festivities also included a thrilling motorcycle parade, as well as spectacular light and fire shows.

As a premier academic institution, the Military Technical College plays a vital role in equipping personnel with integrated training programmes that blend theoretical and practical learning. The college offers specialisd education in various technical and engineering disciplines, including systems engineering, aeronautical engineering, marine engineering, civil engineering, quantity surveying and geomatics engineering. Additionally, it provides advanced technical courses in high-tech military fields, catering to the evolving needs of the Sultan's Armed Forces.

The event was held under the auspices of Lieutenant General (Retired) Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani, with the presence of Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Military Technical College. Senior officers, faculty members and distinguished guests also attended the celebration. — ONA

Enhancing consumer trust through friendly initiatives

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

THE Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has successfully concluded the 2024 edition of the Consumer-Friendly Institutions Initiative, recognising participating shopping centres for their commitment to enhancing consumer services in the retail sector. Now in its second edition, the initiative aims to elevate service standards, foster competition among establishments and reduce consumer complaints — ultimately strengthening the relationship between consumers and service providers.

By encouraging businesses to adopt best practices, the initiative enhances service quality, operational efficiency and consumer awareness. It also promotes sustainability by guiding establishments toward strategic development that aligns with consumer needs.

Issa bin Muslim al Nabhani, Director of Studies and Research at the Consumer Protection Authority, highlighted the key pillars of the initiative, including:

- Customer service excellence — Ensuring senior management prioritises consumer needs within their strategic planning and service monitoring.
- Service mechanisms and after-sales support — Enhancing transparency,



المؤسسات الصديقة للمستهلك
Consumer friendly establishments

credibility and responsiveness to consumer concerns, thereby strengthening trust between consumers and businesses.

Innovation and development — Encouraging commercial institutions to implement modern solutions that improve shopping experiences, transaction efficiency and customer engagement.

The initiative also plays a crucial role in educating both consumers and service providers about their rights and responsibilities.

By fostering a more informed consumer base, businesses can enhance their service delivery, while consumers gain confidence in the marketplace. Additionally, the initiative helps retail establishments align their operations with international best

practices, ensuring that Oman's consumer landscape remains competitive and trustworthy.

A panel of evaluators from various ministries and entities, under the supervision of a specialised company, assessed the participating centres. Notably, this year saw a significant increase in participation, reflecting a growing commitment to consumer satisfaction and confidence in the Consumer Protection Authority.

The Consumer-Friendly Institutions Initiative is a key component of the Authority's tenth strategic plan, aligning with the Oman Vision 2040 framework. It aims to enhance service efficiency across retail, commercial, industrial and economic sectors while ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations. The initiative also provides insights into its strengths and areas for improvement, fostering continuous development and higher service standards.

By recognising businesses that uphold consumer interests, the initiative not only strengthens the bond between retailers and consumers but also contributes to a more transparent, fair and efficient marketplace. Moving forward, the Consumer Protection Authority aims to expand its reach, encouraging even more establishments to adopt consumer-friendly policies and elevate the overall retail experience in Oman.



FIRST BELARUS TOURIST FLIGHT ARRIVES IN SALALAH

SALALAH: The first Belavia Airlines flight arrived on Thursday at Salalah Airport in Dhofar Governorate from Belarus capital Minsk. Belavia Airlines will operate charter flights between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus at a rate of one flight per week. This reflects the keenness of relevant departments to enhance the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman. The move also stems from efforts undertaken by Oman Airports company to attract international flights to the airports of the Sultanate of Oman, including Salalah Airport, which experiences observable tourism growth during the winter season. — ONA

Oman harnesses astronomy for national identity

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The Sultanate of Oman is reaping significant benefits from the fields of astronomy and astrophysics, according to Dr Ishaq bin Yahya al Shueili, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Society for Astronomy and Space.

Speaking to Observer on the sidelines of the first workshop on 'How Oman Has Benefited from Astronomical Science in Tackling Navigation, Seafaring, Distribution of Aflaj, Fishing and Agriculture,' Dr Al Shueili emphasised the crucial role of preserving Oman's astronomical heritage in strengthening national identity and fostering scientific progress.

The workshop, held at the National Museum under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, brought together a distinguished group of scientists, researchers and enthusiasts of astronomical heritage. The discussions centred on how the ancestors of Oman skillfully applied



The workshop was held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of MoHT along with scientists and researchers

astronomical knowledge to govern daily life — from navigation and seafaring to agriculture, irrigation systems and even fishing practices.

"In alignment with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises the preservation of national identity, Oman's astronomical heritage stands as a testament to our ancestors' profound understanding of astronomy, heritage and culture. These aspects are critical in shaping the future and

preserving them is essential for advancing scientific research and innovation, which are integral to the progress of society," Dr Al Shueili stated. A key highlight of the workshop was the launch of a national initiative aimed at documenting Oman's astronomical heritage. The workshop featured the presentation of nine papers by leading astro-scientists, addressing various topics, including how stargazing can aid in predicting weather patterns.

Other papers focused on the historical role of astronomy in guiding navigation, seafaring and the distribution of aflaj. One of the key presentations came from Ali bin Salem al Ubais, an astro-scientist from Dhofar, who shared insights on navigation and astro-science.

"It is vital that we preserve our astronomical heritage and national identity within the framework of Oman Vision 2040. This allows us to make significant strides in preserving, documenting and globally sharing our heritage, positioning Oman as a regional and international leader in astro-science," Al Ubais said.



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Ramadhan is a month of worship, charity and self-discipline, not excessive consumption. By adopting responsible spending habits, families can ensure financial stability and embrace the true essence of the holy month. The less we consume, the more we uphold the values of Ramadhan.

RAMADHAN



SHORT TAKES



The forum attracted 150 scouts and guides, alongside leaders and supervisors from special education schools

SCOUT, GUIDE FORUM FOR DISABILITIES CONCLUDES

MUSCAT: The 7th Scout and Guiding Forum for Persons with Disabilities concluded under the theme ‘Towards a Sustainable Digital Future.’ The event, held at Al Amal Club in Airport Heights, Muscat Governorate, was graced under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Hujaijah bint Jaifer al Said.

This forum is part of ongoing efforts by relevant authorities to support and empower people with disabilities, increase their community participation, and promote their full integration into various sectors of life. Additionally, the event sought to enhance the role of individuals with disabilities in building a sustainable, digitally-driven future.

The closing ceremony featured a musical performance by the Omar bin Al Khattab Institute for the Blind, followed by presentations from scouting and guiding units affiliated with special education schools. The event also recognised participants, as well as supporting and participating organisations.

Rashida bint Ali al Zadjalayah, Head of the Stages Development and Guiding Membership Department, shared that the forum attracted 150 scouts and guides, alongside 50 leaders and supervisors from special education schools.

She emphasised that the forum served as a vital platform for exchanging experiences and ideas, raising awareness of issues faced by people with disabilities, and showcasing their potential in the digital field. This contributes to their integration and participation in building an advanced and inclusive digital society. — ONA

MARKET READINESS FOR RAMADHAN ENSURED



Al Dhahirah municipality will intensify monitoring in the last ten days of Ramadhan

IBRI: Authorities in Al Dhahirah Governorate are implementing various measures to ensure the availability of essential food commodities across markets and commercial centres during the holy month of Ramadhan.

Saleh bin Saeed al Musalhi, Director of the Department of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in Al Dhahirah Governorate, confirmed that all consumer goods, including food, bakery products, and essential commodities, are stocked in sufficient quantities. He emphasised that this ensures a steady supply to meet consumer demand throughout Ramadhan without shortages.

The department has intensified field inspections to monitor market availability, enforce pricing regulations, and ensure product quality. Coordination with commercial centres and suppliers is also in place to maintain stock levels and provide alternative options to consumers amid rising demand.

Al Musalhi stressed the importance of supporting locally made products, noting that Omani markets offer a wide range of high-quality national goods. He encouraged traders to prioritise ‘Made in Oman’ products, reinforcing the national economy and promoting local industries. — ONA

RAMADHAN FOOD BAGS INITIATIVE BRINGS HOPE ACROSS OMAN

MUSCAT: The Ramadhan Food Bags Initiative, led by Syed Shaandar Ali Shah Bukhari, continues a legacy of welfare and community service started by his late father in the 1970s. Since 2019, this initiative has focused on Ramadhan charity, and this year, Bukhari and his dedicated team are distributing essential food bags to 200 families, benefiting nearly 1,000 individuals. Each bag provides sustenance for five people, ensuring support reaches communities



across Oman, regardless of race or background. The initiative was formally inaugurated by Dr Syed Naveed Safdar Bokhari, Ambassador of Pakistan, alongside Sheikh Syed Fayyaz Ali Shah, Sheikh of

the Pakistani community. Both dignitaries commended the donors and volunteers who made this endeavour possible. This year’s initiative is supported by Mohammed Ali Fazal and Hafiz Mohammed Ibrahim, who managed funds and procurement. Through the collective efforts of these individuals, the Ramadhan Food Bags Initiative continues to be a beacon of generosity, ensuring that families in need experience the joy and blessings of this sacred month.

be’ah forms ‘Sustainability Labs’ for teachers

OMAN Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah), in collaboration with the Specialised Institute for Vocational Training for Teachers, has launched the ‘Sustainability Labs’ programme. This initiative aims to equip teachers with essential environmental knowledge and skills, enabling them to serve as champions of sustainability and environmental awareness in schools.

The programme is designed to instil sustainable practices within the education system by promoting responsible waste management - focusing on reduction, reuse, and proper disposal - ultimately fostering a culture of sustainability among students and the wider community.

The programme unfolds in three key stages, namely Central training: A select group of trainers undergoes intensive training at a central level.

Decentralised training and digital accessibility

Hafsa bint Hamoud al



“We aim to empower teachers to become catalysts for change within their communities by instilling sustainable environmental practices that shape a greener future,” she said.

HAFSA BINT HAMOUD AL HARRASIYAH

The initiative aims to equip teachers with essential environmental knowledge and skills

Harrasiyah, Communications Specialist at be’ah, emphasised that ‘Sustainability Labs’ is more than just an educational initiative — it is a strategic investment in both education and environmental stewardship.

“We aim to empower teachers to become catalysts for change within their communities by instilling sustainable environmental practices that shape a greener future,” she said.

The programme is structured to drive three levels of

transformation: Cognitive change, Behavioural change and practical application.

Implementing environmental activities in schools to integrate sustainability into everyday learning and extend its impact to the wider community.

Dr Khalfan bin Saleh al Nasri, a trainer in the First Teachers Programme at the Specialised Institute for Vocational Training for Teachers, highlighted the programme’s goal of empowering educators with new skills to enhance their teaching methodologies while embedding environmental sustainability into school curricula.

Dr Al Nasri further noted that the programme is expected to cultivate a generation of environmentally conscious individuals who can translate knowledge into tangible, sustainable behaviours, reinforcing a culture of sustainability in educational institutions and contributing to Oman’s national sustainable development goals. — ONA



Special children showcased their talents at the annual CSE event as the guests, dignitaries were honoured.

Special children showcase their talents

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

Scores of children with special needs put on a heartwarming display of talent at the annual Care & Special Education (CSE) event, ‘A Rainbow Path to Inclusion’, held recently at the Indian School Muscat’s multipurpose hall.

A mesmerising musical play captivated the audience, who responded with a standing ovation for the young performers. The excitement continued throughout the programme, featuring an array of artistic and cultural showcases, leaving the attendees inspired and moved.

The occasion was graced by guests, including Sabah bint Mohammed al Bahlaniyah, CEO of the Association of Early Intervention Center, as the chief guest, and Rajeesh Mani, CEO of Special Technical Services as the guest of honour.

In his address, Shameer

P T K emphasised the 34-year journey of CSE, highlighting its commitment to inclusive education and the advancement of special needs facilities in Muscat. He pledged ongoing efforts to enhance infrastructure and learning opportunities for children with special needs.

Rajeev Nair, President of the CSE Management Committee, acknowledged the vital role played by parents, the community, and well-wishers in supporting CSE’s mission.

Dimple Mathew, CSE In-Charge, stressed the importance of inclusion in building a progressive society.

The highlight was the musical play ‘A Rainbow Path to Inclusion’, which conveyed a message of acceptance and unity. With fairy tale characters and seven colours of the rainbow, the play symbolised kindness, empathy and courage—qualities that create a more inclusive world.



Taghleef Industries SAOC
P.O. Box 38, PC 327, Sohar Industrial City, Sultanate of Oman - Tel: 26751823/24, Fax: 26751822

Invitation and Agenda of the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of Taghleef Industries SAOC (the “Company”)

The Board of Directors of Taghleef Industries SAOC is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting to be held on Wednesday, 19th March 2025 at 3:00 pm via the electronic platform for general meetings which may be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository’s website ([www.mcd.gov.om](#)). In the event that the quorum to convene the Annual General Meeting is not complete, the second general meeting will be convened at 3:00 pm on Sunday, 23rd March 2025 to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ Report on the activities of the Company and its financial status for the financial year ended on 31 December 2024.
- To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ Report on the organization and management of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2024.
- To consider the Auditor’s Report on the financial statements of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2024.
- To notify the general assembly of the related party transactions entered into by the Company during the financial year ended on 31 December 2024.
- To consider and approve the related party transactions which will be entered into by the Company during the financial year ending on 31 December 2025.
- To consider and approve the proposal to distribute cash dividends (by the date of AGM) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2024 at the rate of RO 0.750 for each share from retained earnings to the shareholders.
- To appoint Auditors for the Financial Year ended 31 December 2025 and specify their fees.

Pursuant to the Articles of Association of the Company and the Rules for Convening General Meetings of Closed Joint Stock Companies issued by the Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, we would like to bring your attention to the following:

- Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on any of the items on the agenda shall commence no more than three days before the date of the general meeting and until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting. If a shareholder’s balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder must cast his vote again on the day of the general meeting.

To prevent delay in starting the meeting, shareholders are requested to attend the meeting at least half an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

For any clarification regarding the matters mentioned in the above agenda, please contact **Mr. Khaled Kharousi on 26650229 OR Mr. Zacharias Chacko on 26650268.**

Deputy Chairman

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A supporter flashes a victory sign, in Diyarbakir, southeastern Türkiye. — AFP

PKK DECLARES LANDMARK CEASEFIRE WITH TÜRKIYE

ISTANBUL: Outlawed Kurdish militants on Saturday declared a ceasefire with Türkiye following a landmark call by jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan asking the group to disband and end more than four decades of struggle. It was the first reaction from the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) after Ocalan this week called for the dissolution of the group.

“In order to pave the way for the implementation of leader Apo’s call for peace and democratic society, we are declaring a ceasefire effective from today,” the PKK executive committee said. “We agree with the content of the call as it is and we say that we will follow and implement it,” the committee based in northern Iraq said. “None of our forces will take armed action unless attacked,” it added. The PKK said on Saturday it was ready to convene a congress as Ocalan wanted but “for this to happen, a suitable secure environment must be created” and Ocalan “must personally direct and lead it for the success of the congress”.

— AFP

NAMIBIA BIDS FAREWELL TO FOUNDER NUJOMA



Mourners hold Namibian flags during the burial of Sam Nujoma, at Namibia’s Heroes’ Acre, near the capital Windhoek, Namibia. — Reuters

WINDHOEK: Thousands of Namibians and dignitaries gathered on Saturday to mourn the country’s independence leader, Sam Nujoma, as nearly a month of homage climaxed with a state funeral. Nujoma, the guerrilla leader who won independence for the desert nation from apartheid South Africa, died on February 9, aged 95. Several African leaders including South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, Angola’s Joao Lourenco, Emmerson Mnangagwa from Zimbabwe and foreign officials counting Cuba’s parliamentary speaker Esteban Lazo Hernandez attended the burial.

Namibia’s President Nangolo Mbumba opened the tributes and called Nujoma “the most distinguished son of the soil”. He was a “giant” among leaders, he said of the man who headed the South West People’s Organisation (SWAPO). “You were the ultimate statesman,” he said, adding: “May your legacy become a source of strength as we continue to uphold your command of maintaining unity of purpose.” Nujoma’s black-clad widow did not speak at Saturday’s ceremony but in a speech read on her behalf the previous day, she described him as “steadfast, resolute, honest and disciplined.”

— AFP

DEADLY ROADS

37 dead in Bolivia after two buses collide



Two passenger buses collided on a highway in southern Bolivia, leaving at least 37 dead, including two children, and some 30 people injured, police said. “So far we have 37 confirmed deaths,” Colonel Wilson Flores said about the crash near the city of Uyuni in the department of Potosi. The accident, the country’s most serious so far this year, occurred on a narrow two-way road early on Saturday. Bolivia’s winding mountain roads are notoriously deadly.

— AFP

US FEDERAL WORKERS RECEIVE SECOND E-MAIL ON JUSTIFYING JOBS

WASHINGTON: A second e-mail asking US federal workers to justify their jobs was sent on Friday, as part of President Donald Trump’s initiative to slash spending, media outlets reported. It came a week after Elon Musk, the billionaire appointed by Trump to downsize the government, engineered a first mass e-mail to the federal government’s two million employees, ordering them to justify their work or risk being fired.

The message, sent from the US

Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the government’s HR department, had created confusion among an already anxious workforce, as multiple federal agencies told staff to ignore it. Friday’s e-mail once again asked staff to respond with around five bullet points describing what they accomplished in the past week and added that it would become a weekly task.

The second round of e-mails started going out late on Friday,

The New York Times, NPR and CBS News reported, stating that they had seen copies of the second message. The e-mail had the subject line, “What did you do last week? Part II” and went out to workers at various agencies, including the FBI, the Treasury Department and the Department of Homeland Security. Unlike with the first e-mail, the second message also asked workers to send their list of accomplishments by the end of Monday on a weekly basis going forward.

— AFP

Ready to complete Gaza truce deal, says Hamas

HAMAS said on Saturday it was ready to go ahead with the “remaining stages” of a ceasefire agreement in Gaza, as the first phase drew to a close with uncertainty over the following stages. “We affirm our keenness to complete the remaining stages of the ceasefire agreement, leading to a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire, full withdrawal of the occupation forces from the Gaza Strip, reconstruction and lifting the siege,” the Palestinian militant group said in a letter to the Arab League summit due to be held on March 4. “We categorically reject the attempt to impose any non-Palestinian projects or forms of administration or the presence of any foreign forces on the territory of the Gaza Strip,” it added.



Palestinian youths sell Ramadhan lanterns at the old Zawiya market in Gaza City. — AFP

Over the initial six-week phase, Gaza militants freed 25 living hostages and returned the bodies of eight others to Israel, in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. A second phase of the fragile truce was supposed to secure the release of dozens of hostages still in Gaza and pave the way for a more permanent end to the war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had sent a delegation to Cairo, and mediator Egypt said “intensive talks” on the second phase had begun with the presence of delegations from Israel as well as fellow mediators Qatar and the United States. But by early on Saturday, there was no sign of consensus, and Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said the group

The truce enabled greater aid flows into the Gaza Strip, where more than 69 per cent of buildings were damaged or destroyed, almost the entire population was displaced, and widespread hunger occurred because of the war

rejected “the extension of the first phase in the formulation proposed by the occupation (Israel)”. He called on mediators “to oblige the occupation to abide by the agreement in its various stages”. Max Rodenbeck, of the International Crisis Group think tank, said the second phase cannot be expected to start immediately. “But I think the ceasefire probably won’t collapse also,” he said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the Israel-Hamas ceasefire “must hold”. “The coming days are critical. The parties must spare no effort to avoid a breakdown of this deal,” Guterres said in New York. The truce enabled greater aid flows into the Gaza Strip, where more than 69 per cent of buildings were damaged or destroyed, almost the entire population was displaced, and widespread hunger occurred

because of the war, according to the United Nations. The Gaza war began with Hamas’s October 7 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,218 people, according to official figures. The Israeli retaliation has killed 48,388 people in Gaza, a majority of them civilians, according to the health ministry in the Palestinian territory, figures the UN has deemed reliable. Though the truce has effectively held, there have been a number of Israeli strikes. On Friday the military said it targeted two “suspects” approaching troops in southern Gaza, where a hospital said it had received the body of one person killed in a strike.

Meanwhile, Switzerland said it will host an international conference on March 7 on the protection of Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories, as called for in a United Nations vote.

— AFP



THOUSANDS JOIN PROTEST IN SERBIA

NIS: Thousands of protesters amassed in the southern Serbian city of Nis on Saturday, in the latest mass student-led anti-corruption rally to rock the Balkan nation after the fatal collapse of a train station last year killed 15 people. The collapse of the station roof in Novi Sad in November followed extensive renovations to the building, and ignited long-smoldering anger in the country over corruption and the alleged lack of oversight on construction and development projects.

President Aleksandar Vucic and other officials have waffled between issuing calls for talks and also firing off allegations that the protests are being backed by foreign powers.

— AFP

SPACE EXPLORATION

Two lunar landings in a week for NASA



Two more missions are set to follow within a single week, marking a bold push by NASA and its industry partners to make Moon landings a routine. Recently, first up is Firefly Aerospace’s Blue Ghost Mission 1. It is targeting touchdown near Mons Latreille, a volcanic feature in Mare Crisium on the Moon’s northeastern near side. The golden lander, about the size of a hippopotamus, carries ten instruments, including one to analyse lunar soil.

— AFP

DISASTROUS FLAMES

Japan battles biggest wildfire in decades



Japan was battling its largest wildfire in more than three decades, one of several blazes that have killed one person and forced the evacuation of more than a thousand. Flames are estimated to have spread over about 1,200 hectares in the forest of Ofunato. Around 1,700 firefighters were being mobilised from across the country. Aerial footage from public broadcaster NHK showed white smoke billowing up and covering an entire mountain.

— AFP

The New York Times

Democrats see political opening in GOP budget



CATIE EDMONDSON

The writer is a congressional correspondent for The New York Times

IN 2018, Democrats won back the House, flipping 41 seats including in conservative-leaning places like the suburbs of Utah and Oklahoma by focusing narrowly on a single issue: Republican efforts to overturn a popular health care programme, the Affordable Care Act. Now, as Republicans push a budget resolution through Congress that will almost certainly require some kind of cuts to Medicaid to finance a huge tax reduction, Democrats see an opening to use the same strategy. “I don’t know why Republicans are doubling down on the same playbook,” said Sen. Ben Ray Lujan of New Mexico, who in 2018 served as the chair of House Democrats’ campaign arm. “The town halls, people coming forward, showing up in communities all across America, filling the phone lines here in Washington, D.C.,” Lujan continued, “I think you can draw a direct comparison to the outcome of what happened in 2018.”

In the early weeks of President Donald Trump’s second term, Democrats labored to pick their political targets amid a near-daily barrage of executive orders and moves by Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency to defund and dismantle federal programmes and fire government employees. But in the prospect of cuts to Medicaid, which covers more than 70 million Americans, they

see a clarifying issue that they hope can help them capture the same kind of energy that catapulted them back to power in 2018.

“The American people were upset in 2005 when Republicans tried to privatize Social Security. The American people were upset in 2017 when Republicans tried to repeal the Affordable Care Act,” Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, the Democratic leader, said in an interview, citing two campaign cycles in which his party wrested back control of the House under a Republican president. “The American people are very upset right now, including in the communities I represent, about the Republican effort to take away their health care and enact the largest cut to Medicaid in our country’s history.” He said Democrats would continue to hammer away at the “clear contrast” that they emphasised in the past to maximum political advantage.

They are already putting money behind the message. House Democrats’ political action committee announced on Friday that it had bought advertising time in over 20 districts across the country savaging Republicans for opening the door to \$880 billion in Medicaid cuts. “They claimed they’d lower costs,” the narrator says. “Instead, Trump and Speaker Johnson are set to kick millions off of health insurance.”

In 2017, protesters swarmed Republican

In the early weeks of President Donald Trump’s second term, Democrats labored to pick their political targets amid a near-daily barrage of executive orders and moves by Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency to defund and dismantle federal programmes and fire government employees.

town halls across the country and urged their lawmakers not to vote to replace the Affordable Care Act. “When it comes to health care, all politics is personal,” Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California, the Democratic leader, said in 2018 the day after her party reclaimed the House. “We made our own environment. While the GOP tried relentlessly to distract and divide, our candidates kept their focus on that subject.”

One of the Republicans who ultimately opposed the repeal effort, Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, said she saw parallels between the 2017 push and current attempts to cut Medicaid. “I feel like we are going back to the days of the ACA when I was trying to explain to colleagues how Alaska was so disproportionately impacted,” Murkowski said. House Republicans have yet to write legislation laying out specific spending reductions. Speaker Mike Johnson has insisted in recent days that they want to find “efficiencies” in Medicaid.

Many Republicans are comfortable with establishing work requirements for the programme, but that change is estimated to save only around \$100 billion. House Republicans’ budget plan requires the committee that oversees Medicaid and Medicare to find more than eight times that in savings.

MEASLES OUTBREAK IS SCARIER THAN IT LOOKS IN TEXAS



ZEYNEP TUFEKCI

The author writes about sociology and the social effects of technology

The news that an outbreak in Texas has caused the nation’s first confirmed measles death in a decade — an unvaccinated child — is as unsurprising as it is tragic. Spreading largely in rural Mennonite communities that typically have low vaccination rates, the outbreak has already grown to at least 146 cases since late January. Almost all of them are children. Parents whose children got infected but survived are no doubt grateful that their family was spared. But startling research about the virus unfortunately tells a new and very different story, recasting what was previously known about how measles works and making clear why the Trump administration’s approach to vaccines is nowhere even close to meeting the moment.

That research, conducted over the past decade by immunologist Dr. Michael Mina and others, revealed that measles destroys immune cells. Even people who recover from the virus lose much of their immune memory, and therefore the protection they had acquired from prior infections or vaccines to all the other childhood illnesses. This leaves survivors more vulnerable to many other diseases for years afterward.

Worse, these victims may now face those childhood diseases, to which they lost immune protections, as older children, which puts them more at risk for complications. Before vaccines were introduced, Mina told me, earlier measles infections may have been implicated in as many as half of all childhood deaths from all infectious diseases. Which, given these findings, would mean the true harm of measles is far greater than its death toll, and the legacy of this outbreak may still be felt years after it’s officially contained.

A newly circulating virus would mean some unvaccinated people would encounter measles for the first time in adulthood, when the danger it poses is much higher.

This effect was evident in World War I, when healthy young conscripts from rural areas had their first exposure to the disease in Army training camps. The result was the worst outbreak the military had seen in almost a century. Thousands of soldiers died.

The situation in Texas may be the wake-up call that gets some holdouts to bring their children to the doctor and request the protection they need and deserve. In 2015, when an unvaccinated 6-year-old died a horrible, prolonged death from the “strangulation disease” of diphtheria, the distraught parents vaccinated their surviving child, while lamenting they’d been conned by anti-vaxxers.

Trump berates Zelensky, exposing allies break

THE UNITED STATES’ relationship with Ukraine erupted in a storm of acrimony as President Donald Trump and Vice-President JD Vance berated President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine in an explosive televised Oval Office showdown and abruptly cut short a visit meant to coordinate a plan for peace. In a fiery public confrontation unlike any seen between a US president and foreign leader in modern times, Trump and Vance castigated Zelensky for not being grateful enough for US support in Ukraine’s war with Russia and sought to strong-arm him into making a peace deal on whatever terms the Americans dictated.

With his voice raised and temper flaring, Trump threatened to abandon Ukraine altogether if Zelensky did not go along. After journalists left the Oval Office, Trump canceled the rest of the visit, including a planned joint news conference and signing ceremony for a deal on rare minerals, and US officials told the Ukrainians to leave. A grim-faced Zelensky strode out, climbed into a waiting black SUV and departed the White House grounds. “I have determined that President Zelensky is not ready for Peace if America is involved, because he feels our involvement gives him a big advantage in negotiations,” Trump wrote on social media. “I don’t want advantage, I want PEACE. He disrespected the United States of America in its cherished Oval Office. He can come back when he is ready for Peace.”

The White House later sent out Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a close Trump ally, to tell reporters that Zelensky should consider stepping down. “He either needs to resign and send somebody over that we can do business with or he needs to change,” Graham said on the White House driveway. The president’s verbal assault on Zelensky was a stunning display of anger and resentment toward the leader of a country that has been attacked by a larger power intent on eliminating it as an independent state. No other president in memory has lashed out at a visiting foreign leader in



President Donald Trump, right, meets with President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine in the Oval Office.



PETER BAKER

The author is the chief White House correspondent for The New York Times

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the Oval Office on camera in such a vituperative way, not even at an adversary of the United States, much less a putative ally.

Talking over the Ukrainian leader, Vance called Zelensky “disrespectful” for coming into the Oval Office and making his case in front of the American news media and demanded that he thank Trump for his efforts to broker a peace deal with Russia. Trump jumped in and told the Ukrainian leader that “you’re not really in a good position right now” and that “you’re gambling with World War III.” “You’re either going to make a deal or we’re out,” Trump added. “And if we’re out, you’ll fight it out, and I don’t think it’s going to be pretty.”

The spectacle underlined how radically Trump has reoriented US foreign policy in less than six weeks back in office, all but switching sides in the war in Europe as he expresses sympathy for President Vladimir Putin of Russia and antipathy for Zelensky. Even as he shouted at the Ukrainian leader in the Oval Office, the president spoke of Putin as if they were friends, saying that the Russian leader has “been through a lot with me” in enduring the “Russia hoax,” referring to the investigation of Putin’s clandestine efforts to help Trump win the 2016 election.

The confrontation provided a major boost to Putin, who has long sought to drive a wedge between Ukraine and its most important patron,

the United States. Russian officials seemed overjoyed on social media. “The insolent pig finally got a proper slap down in the Oval Office,” Dmitry Medvedev, a top Putin lieutenant, wrote online.

After leaving the White House, Zelensky tried to smooth over the rupture with a social media post aimed at Vance’s complaints about ingratitude. “Thank you America, thank you for your support, thank you for this visit. Thank you @ POTUS, Congress, and the American people,” he wrote, using the acronym for president of the United States. In a later interview with Fox News, Zelensky refused to apologize to Trump but expressed regret about the exchange and appreciation to the United States for its support. “We are thankful and sorry for this,” he said. Trump seemed less interested in making up. Speaking with reporters on the South Lawn before heading to Florida for the weekend, the president said that Zelensky opposes peace. “He’s looking to go on and fight, fight, fight,” Trump said. Asked if he wanted Zelensky to step down, he said, “I want somebody that’s going to make peace.”

Graham later called the meeting a “complete, utter disaster” but blamed it on Zelensky, saying that he had advised the Ukrainian leader in a meeting earlier in the day: “Don’t take the bait. Don’t let the media or anyone else get you into an argument with President Trump.”

OPINION

Ramadhan: A month of discipline and virtue



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AS the holy month of Ramadhan begins, millions of Muslims worldwide embark on a spiritual journey of fasting, prayers, and self-reflection. But beyond its religious significance, Ramadhan serves as a school of discipline, instilling virtues that extend far beyond its 30 days.

One of the most valuable lessons Ramadhan teaches is time management. When fasting, your daily routine gets structured differently from other times of the year as you wake up before dawn for ‘suhoor’, perform prayers at designated times, and break your fast at sunset. Your working and sleeping time also get altered. This system reinforces the importance of organising one’s day. When such discipline is carried forward, it can help individuals lead more productive and purposeful lives long after Ramadhan ends.

Fasting also nurtures “self-control and patience”. The ability to refrain from eating, drinking, and engaging in sexual activities from dawn to sunset is a profound exercise in willpower. It strengthens one’s capacity to endure hardships and respond to life’s challenges with composure and grace. Whether it is resisting anger, avoiding

arguments, or forgiving others’ mistakes, Ramadhan trains the soul to embrace patience as a way of life.

Moreover, Ramadhan fosters a heightened sense of “compassion and empathy”. Experiencing hunger, even temporarily, allows individuals to better understand the struggles of the less fortunate. This awareness often translates into acts of charity, as seen in the widespread distribution of iftar meals and increased donations to those in need. In essence, Ramadhan teaches us that true wealth lies not in material possessions but in the generosity of spirit.

An equally significant lesson is the “refinement of character”. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasised that fasting is not merely about abstaining from food and drink but also about purifying one’s speech and actions. The hadith states, “Whoever does not give up false speech and acting upon it, Allah has no need for him to give up his food and drink.” This highlights the importance of ethical conduct — refraining from gossip, dishonesty, and harmful words.

Beyond individual growth, Ramadhan strengthens “social bonds”. The shared experience of fasting brings families and

Ramadhan, with its structured routine and emphasis on discipline, provides the perfect opportunity for self-improvement

communities closer together. Mosques overflow with worshippers, streets are lined with volunteers distributing food, and the atmosphere is filled with a spirit of unity and kindness. The principle of “no harm and no reciprocation of harm” is deeply ingrained, encouraging people to treat others with respect and understanding.

Psychologists tell us that sustained habits can lead to long-term and that it takes approximately 30 days to break a bad habit or develop a new one. Ramadhan, with its structured routine and emphasis on discipline, provides the perfect opportunity for self-improvement. Whether it is controlling one’s temper, speaking kindly, or practising gratitude, these habits, once ingrained, can positively shape a person’s life beyond the holy month.

In my opinion, Ramadhan is a transformative experience that refines the soul and enhances moral character. If its lessons are truly internalised, they can lead to a life of greater patience, kindness, and spiritual fulfilment. The challenge, however, lies in carrying these values forward, ensuring that the virtues cultivated in Ramadhan becomes a permanent part of our daily life.

UN SAYS SUDAN FACING ‘ABYSS’ UNLESS WAR ENDS

ROBIN MILLARD

Sudan is facing the abyss and potentially hundreds of thousands of deaths unless the devastating war in the country ends and aid pours in, the United Nations warned. UN human rights chief Volker Turk painted a bleak outlook for Sudan, where famine has already taken hold and millions have fled their homes amid intense fighting between rival forces. Since April 2023, Sudan has been locked in a brutal conflict between army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who leads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

“Sudan is a powder keg, on the verge of a further explosion into chaos, and at increasing risk of atrocity crimes and mass deaths from famine,” Turk warned the UN Human Rights Council.

He called the country “the world’s largest humanitarian catastrophe”. “We are looking into the abyss. Humanitarian agencies warn that without action to end the war, deliver emergency aid, and get agriculture back on its feet, hundreds of thousands of people could die.” Turk said more than 600,000 people were “on the brink of starvation”, with famine reported to have taken hold in five areas, including the Zamzam displacement camp in North Darfur.

Turk said five more areas could face famine in the next three months, while a further 17 are considered at risk. He said an estimated 8.8 million people had been forced from their homes within Sudan, while 3.5 million more have fled across borders. “This is the biggest displacement crisis in the world,” he said. “Some 30.4 million people need assistance, from healthcare to food and other forms of humanitarian support,” he said.

Presenting his annual report on the human rights situation in Sudan, Turk said some of the acts it documented may constitute war crimes and other atrocity crimes. Turk said the Sudanese people had endured “unfathomable suffering and pain” since the conflict began, “with no peaceful solution in sight”.

Responding to the report, Sudanese justice minister Muawiya Osman blamed the RSF for starting the war and accused them of having “forced people out of their regions, humiliating them, and trying to cleanse specific regions from their original populations, just like West Darfur”.

He accused the RSF of “blocking humanitarian deliveries” and said the government was committed to “just peace and stability across the country, to address the needs of the Sudanese people, maintain their dignity and end the suffering”. — AFP

The physical benefits of Salah: A wellness routine

SALAH, the Islamic prayer, is often recognised as a vital spiritual practice, but beyond its spiritual essence, it also serves as a full-body wellness routine!

Research shows that Salah is essentially a fitness and relaxation routine wrapped in a few minutes of devotion. Salah is proof that when Allah commands something, it is ultimately for our own good: body, mind, and soul. How?

One of the biggest perks of Salah is how it strengthens muscles, improves flexibility, and boosts posture. The different prayer movements: standing (Qiyam), bowing (Ruku), prostration (Sujood), and sitting (Juloos) aren’t just part of worship; they are like mini stretches and strength exercises.

Standing helps tone leg and core muscles, keeping your posture on point. Bowing stretches the hamstrings, calves, and lower back, offering relief to those who spend hours sitting.

The prostration position, where the forehead touches the ground, does not just humble you but also increases blood flow to the brain, possibly making you sharper! And Juloos is your built-in cool-down session, helping maintain joint flexibility and warding off arthritis.

Salah also benefits cardiovascular health. The fluid movement between prayer postures helps improve blood circulation, reducing the risk of hypertension, so in a way, it is like a built-in heart health routine.

Studies have shown that individuals who perform Salah regularly tend to have lower blood pressure and better heart health. The controlled, deliberate movements lower stress levels and promote relaxation; think of it as a meditation session wrapped in movement.



Worshippers attend prayers at London Islamic Cultural Society mosque in London. — Reuters



DR KHALFAN
AL HARRASI

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And if you are watching your weight, good news! Research indicates that a person weighing 80 kg burns approximately 80 calories per day through prayer. Plus, the Juloos position aids digestion by keeping things flowing smoothly and reducing acid reflux.

Beyond the physical benefits, Salah improves mental well-being. Research suggests that Salah reduces cortisol (the stress hormone), making you feel more relaxed and at ease. The focus required during prayer enhances brain activity in the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for decision-making, memory, and learning. And if you are struggling with sleep, Salah might just be the remedy. Regular prayer has been linked to better sleep quality, as it encourages relaxation and helps regulate melatonin, the hormone responsible for sleep cycles.

Some researchers have even compared Salah to yoga.

Studies published in the Journal of Alternative Medicine have found that many Salah postures resemble

yoga poses. Sujood is quite similar to the child’s pose in yoga, which helps increase circulation to the brain and relieve stress. The bowing position offers the same spinal benefits as a forward bend. So if anyone tells you that you need yoga for flexibility, just remind them that Salah has been doing the job for over a thousand years!

What are the key benefits of Salah in short? Stronger muscles, better flexibility, improved posture, and heart health. It enhances cognitive function by sharpening memory, increasing focus, and reducing stress. The physical movements also help relieve pain, particularly for those with chronic back pain or arthritis.

Plus, Salah supports weight control, digestion, and metabolism while also proving beneficial for stroke recovery and elderly mobility. While Salah is an essential part of Islam, it is also an incredible wellness routine disguised as prayer. By making it a consistent part of daily life, you are nurturing your spiritual side and keeping your body and mind in top shape.

Lotteries... Made round to go round, surely



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

BEING perpetually poor, well no, not really, that would be disingenuous to those genuinely in poverty, so, how about if I say, just perpetually not rich? That's a bit better I think. But I do like to buy lottery tickets once in a while.

Just in case you aren't 'au fait,' with what a lottery is, here is a dictionary definition: "A game, often organised by a state, or a state permitted charity, in which numbered and coded tickets, with lines of randomly chosen numbers from a set selection (ie numbers 1-50), are sold to 'players.' If a player's line of numbers matches those drawn in a 'lucky' draw, those ticket holders will be lottery winners.

The names of some of the state lotteries around the world have their own character too. New Zealand has the 'Golden Kiwi,' named after its national symbol, a nocturnal, flightless bird, which so far perfectly describes my lottery winning efforts. Nigeria has a 'Give-and-Take (sounds dicey!),' Malaysia has a 'Special CashSweep,' South Korea its 'Special Lottery 500,' Denmark the 'Landbrugslotteriet,' Germany a 'Glukspirale,' but I like best the 'El Gordo de la Primitiva,' the 'big fat one,' or its Christmas themed counterpart, the El Gordo de Navidad,' which must be the big fat Christmas one, I guess.

In the England, since 1698, it has been illegal to run a lottery unless sanctioned by the state and to generate money for 'good

causes.' Ironically, or maybe oxymoronically, the 'Million Lottery,' and the 'Malt Lottery,' had been used by the British Government of the time to... wait for it... fund successive wars, namely against the Jacobites in Scotland, France and Spain. You couldn't make it up, could you?

They do say you can't buy love and some lottery winners have counted themselves unlucky, but honestly, you would have to be as thick as two short planks to not make even a couple of million work for you, wouldn't you? John McGuinness was one, after winning £10 million in 1997, he decided to back his local football club, Livingston FC, who promptly went bust and left McGuinness the next best thing to a pauper. Sixteen-year-old Callie Evans, cashed a £1.8 million winner's cheque in 2003, and in 2022 confessed that the lot had been swallowed up by cosmetic surgery and a dissolute lifestyle. I guess now she is pretty and penniless? Well, they do say "fools and their money are soon parted."

American Edwin Castro was the sole winner of the California Lottery Jackpot in 2022, winning the incredible sum of \$2.05 billion, which was to be spread over 30 years. However, Castro opted for an instant payment option of just \$872 million instead. No matter how you look at it, or even which option you would choose, that is an awful lot of cash isn't it?

In Europe, the largest pay out so far has been the Italian Super Enalotto Jackpot win

In the England, since 1698, it has been illegal to run a lottery unless sanctioned by the state, and to generate money for 'good causes'

in February of 2024, which saw a syndicate of 90 players pocket nearly €4 million each, a total of €359 million. Spain's La Primitiva Lottery, in 2015, paid out €98.4 million to a sole player from Barcelona, while previously, in 2006, France's SuperLotto paid out €30 million to two lucky winners. The largest EuroMillions Jackpot pay out thus far saw a single anonymous ticket-holder scoop £195 million in 2022. The national Lottery in the UK, somewhat strangely hasn't paid out a record amount since 1996, when three players scooped £14 million each.

So, to move to the crux of my thoughts. It's all very well marketing these lotteries as multi and mega-millions prizes, but rather than having one winner of £100 million for example, wouldn't any society be better served by having a hundred different millionaire winners? Imagine it... a hundred families could pay off their mortgage, maybe retire creating more jobs, buy a new car, boosting local industry, and with greater spending power, maybe get them off benefits, maybe get them onto private medical schemes, thus supporting their local communities... and so much more.

That way, as well as raising money for genuine good causes, lotteries could help more people, more families who genuinely need it. The world really doesn't need more millionaires, like mega-millionaires, but wouldn't it be nice to see a greater of families get the ultimate helping hand?

'TOGETHERFORWARD' — A THINKING IN ADVANCE FORUM



DR MUSALLAM AL MA'ANI

The writer is Dean of Al Zahra College for Women

The 'Together forward' annual forum closed its third version last Thursday. The event is important for two main reasons. The first is that it is held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, whose presence is marked by vigour and effect. The second is it is directed to the people of Oman.

Starting with some inaugurating addresses by key ministries in Oman, which in essence represented the driving force of the economy. There were speeches and presentations by Minister of Energy and Minerals, Minister of Economy, Minister of Transport, Communication and Information Technology; and Minister of Housing and Urban Planning. Each one of them talked about what has been achieved in their respective ministries, mainly focusing on efforts made to diversify economy as a sustainable source of job creation, support for SMEs as well as some key outputs of their ministries.

In addition, the Minister of Economy offered an evaluation of the significance, worth, and condition of the Tenth Five-Year Plan. With a careful appraisal and study of the performance indicators of the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2016-2020), the minister highlighted how the plan has been mapped with Oman Vision 2040, expressing the deeds achieved through the implementation of the directions, policies, programmes, projects and activities. The Economy Minister also explained the way the mechanism for the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) shall be prepared.

What is so important about the forum is that it is attended by various categories of the society. The Omanis attending the forum, without doubt, were listening attentively and heeding to what the ministers were saying... an inherent trait about Omanis who never interrupt a speaker with frequent questions, nor do they stop or hinder a speaker when he speaks by breaking in with questions or remarks while another is speaking. Instead, they respect the uniformity and continuity of the conversation and never talk unless they are given the opportunity to do so. Another equally important factor that accompanied the forum is the freedom of speech.

In conclusion, the forum is from the people to the people. It is an initiative made with generous blessings from and gracious approval and support of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the benefit of Omani people. Attended by around 7,000 Omanis, the forum is characterised by its breadth in orientation and scope, collective effort and a focus on public matters.

What EU security requires

NEVER has it been so obvious that Europe must stand on its own. But as European leaders debate how to do so, they should not fall for the bogus trade-off between security and competitiveness, on one hand, and climate goals on the other. Doing so would squander one of Europe's major strategic advantages: its substantial lead in the transition to a low-carbon economy.

This advantage is not just a luxury for calmer times or a distraction from the pursuit of security and economic resilience. After all, energy is at the heart of Europe's security challenge. Dependence on Russian gas proved to be a critical vulnerability in 2022, triggering economic and political shocks that are still reverberating. Higher energy costs have constrained many EU member states' fiscal capacity – and thus their ability to invest more in defence.

In the three years since Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his full-scale war on Ukraine, Europe has made positive strides in weaning itself off Russian gas. But while liquefied natural gas (LNG) from other suppliers has provided short-term relief, it does not offer lasting energy security. This winter's colder temperatures sent gas prices higher again, highlighting Europe's continued vulnerability. Investing in more LNG infrastructure will not solve this problem. The LNG market, perpetually subject to cold snaps, supply disruptions, and increased demand from other regions, is inherently volatile.

The only path to genuine energy security runs through the transition to a clean, domestic energy system based on renewables, batteries, and related technologies. Such a system would stabilise prices for households and businesses while insulating Europe from external pressure.

Europe has already made headway on this front. Renewables generated 47 per cent of the European Union's electricity in 2024, surpassing fossil fuels, which fell to 29 per cent – their lowest share on record. But we must maintain this momentum. No energy-intensive industry – including AI – can hope



Higher energy costs have constrained many EU member states' fiscal capacity.



LAURENCE TUBIANA

The writer is a former French ambassador to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, is CEO of the European Climate Foundation and a professor at the École Normale Supérieure

to invest and scale up in Europe if it remains exposed to fossil-fuel volatility.

The European Commission is rightly focusing on strengthening Europe's clean industrial base: the design and production of the materials and technologies that will drive both economic competitiveness and decarbonisation. The EU's work toward a Clean Industrial Deal represents a chance to position Europe as a global leader, not just a participant, in the economy of the future.

But given budget constraints, any new funds must be deployed wisely. That means emphasising emerging clean technologies like batteries – a market projected to grow by 30 per cent annually up to 2030. While China has a head start with its vertically integrated battery supply chains and advanced expertise, Europe still has a chance to compete and establish a strong position. Indeed, Poland is already the world's second-largest lithium-ion battery producer. Europe's strategy must align with our values. The Clean Industrial Deal will be a test of the EU's ability to ensure that no region or community is left behind. The EU is at its best when helping member states bolster social and regional cohesion. It has a strong track record of managing economic integration, mitigating the downsides

of globalisation, and fostering regional development through tools like cohesion funds. It now must devise bold social and employment policies (including retraining) to create high-quality jobs in all regions – especially those with carbon-intensive industries.

This will require strong cooperation among member states. A free-for-all of national state aid and industrial policies would deepen regional divides. Last year's Letta Report on the EU's single market proposed that member states contribute a fixed percentage of their state aid allocations to a common fund. Contributions in the range of 5-15 per cent could generate €8.5-51 billion (\$8.9-54 billion) annually, some portion of which could be allocated for clean industrialisation.

Lowering Europe's climate ambition in the name of competitiveness would be a grave mistake. Companies across the continent are vying to secure a share of a global clean-technology market that is projected to exceed \$2 trillion by 2035.

The EU Green Deal remains central to this vision, providing certainty for businesses by guaranteeing a growing market for their products. Changing course now would significantly complicate matters, derailing countless business models and leaving Europe behind.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



SEEB AND AL SALAM CLINCH WIN IN OMAN VOLLEYBALL LEAGUE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

Al Seeb clinched a hard-fought victory against Majees with a 3-2 scoreline in an exciting encounter held on Friday, as part of the final qualifiers for the Oman Volleyball League (OVL). The match took place at the main hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The game witnessed an outstanding performance from Seeb players, with Mahmoud al Saadi, Ahmed al Toubi, Saud al Maamari, and Ismail Al Haidi standing out. On the other side, Majees’ duo Ibrahim al Mazini and Pakistani professional Imal delivered an impressive performance, contributing significantly to their team’s strong showing.

The match began with Majees taking control early on, capitalising on Imal’s powerful spikes and Al Mazini’s precise serves and defensive coverage. Majees gradually extended their lead, exploiting Seeb’s defensive errors to claim the first set 25-19.

In the second set, Seeb responded strongly, regaining balance and improving their defensive organisation. The team relied on an offensive duo of Mahmoud Al Saadi and Ahmed Al Toubi, who formed a formidable presence at the net, supported by Saud al Maamari in back-row attacks. Additionally, Seeb’s effective serving disrupted Majees’ defence, allowing them to dominate the set and win it 25-18, levelling the match at 1-1.

Majees bounced back in the third set, with Imal continuing his stellar performance in attack and Al Mazini excelling in blocking. This dominance helped Majees secure the set 25-17, regaining the lead at 2-1.

Potential podium slips from grasp for Al Harthy

ROUND one of the FIA World Endurance Championship season

started impressively but ended in disappointment for Ahmad al Harthy, Valentino Rossi and Kelvin van der Linde at Lusail in Qatar on Friday, 28th February, when a realistic podium challenge ultimately became an 11th place finish.

After a strong qualifying performance from Team WRT’s No.46 BMW M4 LMGT3, where Oman’s Al Harthy was sixth fastest to progress to the all-important Hyperpole session in which Rossi achieved eighth on the LMGT3 grid for the Qatar 1812km, hopes were justly high for the 10-hour encounter.

Everything began incredibly well on raceday with Al Harthy moving up from the fourth row of the grid into the podium placings, during a sensational triple stint throughout the first third of the race at the Middle Eastern track.

Team-mates Rossi and van der Linde shared the remainder of the contest but their challenge was stunted due to an as-yet unidentified issue with the car, which badly impacted pace, and some track limits penalties later on.

Tremendous triple stint from Oman’s Al Harthy confirms 2025 potential Al Harthy lined-up eighth on the LMGT3 grid for the start of the race, the highest placed of the BMWs, and quickly moved up a place into seventh after a clean start. Running strongly, he broke into the top six after just 10 minutes of action and with half an hour gone he was into fifth position.

Fifth swiftly became fourth as he moved towards podium contention and with 50 minutes elapsed the No.46 BMW M4 was only six seconds shy of third. Following the first pit stops Al Harthy stayed in the car for a double stint, continuing to lap



I Huge promise for possible season-opening WEC podium dashed in Qatar

2 Superb triple stint from Ahmad al Harthy sets-up chance for silverware

3 Unidentified car issue and late track limits penalties derail squad’s hopes

4 Next-up will be first European race of year with visit to Imola in Italy

impressively and consistently.

With 50 laps complete, one hour and 45 minutes gone, the OQ Group, Sohar International, Omantel, BMW Oman, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Experience Oman supported driver had closed to within two seconds of the podium.

At the end of hour two, as the next batch of pit-stops played out, Al Harthy moved into second and then briefly the lead of LMGT3 early in hour three.

The No 78 Lexus RC F reclaimed first place after emerging from its stop, with the Omani comfortably holding second for the bulk of the next hour prior to the next pit visit — concluding an outstanding triple stint for the Bronze graded racer.

Rossi took his first miles of the race next, moving up from seventh when he joined the action into the top six.

When the Safety Car was deployed at the mid-point of the contest, Rossi handed over the No.46 car to van der Linde and he rose as high as second

position in hour seven.

With the South African and Italian team-mate Rossi sharing the concluding hours, pushing hard for the best possible finish under the night skies of Qatar, it became obvious there was an issue which had begun to impact the pace of the BMW. Coupled with two drive-through penalties for track limits infringements, this had a significant bearing on the end result.

As the final hour neared, van der Linde had moved back up into ninth place before making a pit-stop with just over three quarters of an hour to go. After re-emerging in 11th he moved up into 10th, but a 30 second stop/go penalty followed with only 15 minutes to go meaning he ended in 11th spot.

Ahmad al Harthy: “I was really, really happy with the way I drove during the first three hours of the race. We decided to keep me in the car as we were climbing up the order, we were surprised by the pace and where we were so that was a very positive part of the race.

OOC prepares for 3rd GCC Beach Games

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) in collaboration with Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) beside the sporting associations organised the first meeting of the directors of the sports missions who will participate in the 3rd GCC Beach Games “Muscat 2025” in presence of the representatives of the gulf countries. During the meeting, all the latest preparations and arrangements were reviewed as Muscat will host the prestigious gulf event during April 5 to 11, 2025 in different venues across Muscat Governorate. The tournament will feature participation of all the gulf countries including: UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the hosts Oman. Eight sports featured in this edition of the Games including: beach soccer, beach handball, beach volleyball, beach athletics, marine sports, open water swimming, air sports and equestrian (tent pegging).

Taha al Kishry, Secretary-

General of OOC and Director General of the Games, began the meeting with a warm welcoming to all the attendees. “Oman is hosting this prestigious sporting event underscores its leadership in organising major sports tournaments. Oman had managed to host different regional and continental events during the past years. These events reflects the country’s commitment to promoting beach sports. Oman’s unique location and extensive coastline provide an ideal setting for such competitions. The event also reflects Oman’s dedication to strengthening sports cooperation among GCC countries and supporting the development of beach sports in line with international standards,” he said

These efforts reflect Oman’s commitment to enhancing its national teams’ competitiveness and preparing them to achieve top positions on the podium,” OOC Chief ended.

Rashid al Kindi, Chairman of the Technical Committee for the Beach Games, delivered a comprehensive



The tournament will feature participation of all the Gulf countries.

visual briefing. “The 3rd GCC Beach Games is a distinguished regional event featuring a diverse range of sports and activities. Officially recognised on the GCC sports calendar as the event is organised under the directives of the GCC Olympic Committee Chairmen. The organising committee is committed to delivering a world-class event that contributes to the expansion of beach sports in the region,” he added

Several subcommittees have been established to ensure smooth execution including committees for technical affairs, sports facilities, public relations, security, medical and anti-doping, finance, IT, media and marketing, opening and award ceremonies; and coordination and secretariat.

The opening ceremony is scheduled on April 5, 2025. The Beach soccer competitions will be held at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex during April 7-11 while Beach volleyball at Athaiba Beach during April 8-11. The action of Beach handball will take place at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex From April 5 to 11 while Long-distance swimming will be at

The Wave, Muscat and North Al Hail Beach starting from April 9 until April 11 and Sailing events will be at North Al Hail Beach during April 6-10. Tent pegging (equestrian) competitions will take place at Al Rahba Farm from April 8 to 10 while Beach athletics at Al Athaiba Beach from April 8 to 10. Paragliding competitions to be held at North Al Hail Beach from April 5 to 7. A total of 43 medals across 30 events will be comprised in these competitions.

GROUP DRAWS AND COMPETITION SCHEDULE

As part of the meeting, the group draws for the team sports were conducted in presence of team’s representatives. Oman will begin their campaign at Beach Handball competition against Bahrain on April 5. The final rounds will be held on April 10 and 11. Beach Soccer competitions will start on April 7 as Oman will take on Bahrain in the opener while they will take on Kuwait, UAE and Saudi Arabia in the other rounds. The finals are scheduled on April 11.

SHORT TAKES



Atalanta's Marten De Roon applauds fans after the match. — Reuters

ATALANTA HELD TO GOALLESS DRAW BY LOWLY VENEZIA

BERGAMO, Italy: Atalanta were held to a 0-0 home draw by second-bottom Venezia in Serie A on Saturday as Gian Piero Gasperini's side put on an underwhelming display that saw them miss the chance to move provisionally level on points with leaders Inter Milan.

Atalanta, who exited the Champions League and Coppa Italia last month, are struggling to regain momentum in the title race and have been winless at home in the league since the end of December.

Despite winning just three of their last 10 Serie A games, they remain third on 55 points, one point behind second-placed Napoli and two off Inter before those sides meet at the Diego Armando Maradona Stadium later on Saturday.

Venezia extended their winless run to 10 games as they sit 19th with 18 points.

Atalanta renewed their hopes of first top-flight title when they cruised to a 5-0 win at lowly Empoli last Sunday but looked slow and predictable against a promoted Venezia side.

Striker Ademola Lookman, who scored a brilliant double with a goal in each half in their last game, should have put Atalanta in front after 20 minutes but sent his effort just wide.

Davide Zappacosta and Juan Cuadrado could have given Atalanta the lead before the break but both hit the woodwork from tight angles.

Goalkeeper Marco Carnesecchi, meanwhile, had to intervene to keep the score level, denying Venezia's Alessio Zerbin in first-half stoppage time after the forward tried to lob him from close range.

With Italy coach Luciano Spalletti in the stands, Atalanta's league-leading scorer Mateo Retegui blasted over in the 50th minute after missing the target with two headers in the first half.

The frustration among the home fans grew as Atalanta, who had a run of 11 wins between October and December, continued to waste good chances, with Lookman sending one over from point-blank range late in the game.

Atalanta travel to Juventus on March 9 before they host Inter and visit Fiorentina later this month.

Venezia have now gone four consecutive matches without scoring in a single Serie A season for the first time since the 1998-99 campaign.

— Reuters



South Africa's David Miller and Rassie van der Dussen shake hands with umpire Ahsan Raza and England's Joe Root after the match. — Reuters

South Africa reach semifinal with big win over England

HEINRICH Klaasen and Rassie van der Dussen scored half-centuries as South Africa eased to a comfortable seven-wicket win over ailing England in Karachi on Saturday to book a semifinal place at the Champions Trophy.

South Africa bowled England out for 179 in 38.2 overs after the latter had chosen to bat, before reaching their target with a huge 125 balls to spare following a 127-run third-wicket stand between Klaasen (64) and Van der Dussen (72 not out).

They top Group B and join Australia, India and New Zealand in the semi-finals, with the fixture line-up to be confirmed when the latter two meet in Dubai on Sunday.

The match was the last in charge for England captain Jos Buttler, who is to step down from his role after the side lost all three pool fixtures in the tournament.

England were already out of the tournament going into the game and, after winning the toss, their innings never got going as they played some poor shots on a good batting wicket that had just a hint of variable bounce.

South Africa did well to expose England's desire to chase the run-rate with injudicious shots but also bowled both sides of the wicket and will need to tighten up their lines, whoever they face in the semi-finals.

Joe Root top-scored for England with a well-constructed 37 before he was bowled by seamer Wiaan Mulder (3-25), while Buttler



South Africa's Lungi Ngidi takes the catch to dismiss England's Jamie Overton, off the bowling of Kagiso Rabada. — Reuters

managed 21 in his final game as skipper.

There was little else to enthuse over for the side, with Ben Duckett (24) and Jofra Archer (25) also managing starts.

South Africa lost Tristan Stubbs (0) early in their chase, as he played on to his wicket from a delivery by Archer (2-55).

But once Klaasen and Van der Dussen got together they constructed a fine partnership that showed the England batters how to play on the wicket. Van der Dussen's unbeaten 72 came from 87 balls and included three sixes as he anchored the innings along with the more explosive Klaasen. — Reuters

Cavs rally to top Celtics in battle of NBA Eastern heavyweights

LOS ANGELES, United States: Donovan Mitchell scored 41 points to fuel the league-leading Cleveland Cavaliers in a 123-116 come-from-behind statement win over the reigning NBA champion Celtics in Boston on Friday.

The Cavs posted their ninth straight victory, withstanding Boston star Jayson Tatum's near triple-double of 46 points, 16 rebounds and nine assists.

Darius Garland scored 20 points and Evan Mobley added 17 points and 12 rebounds for Cleveland, which took the lead for the first time on Mobley's three-pointer with 8:43 left in the fourth quarter.

Boston star Jaylen Brown -- who scored 37 points -- tied it up at 114-114 with 3:15 remaining, but

Mitchell responded with a pair of driving baskets and the Cavaliers held on for a win that pushed their league-best record to 49-10 -- 7.5 games ahead of Boston atop the Eastern Conference.

"It's a measuring stick," Mitchell said of the gritty win over the defending champs, who beat Cleveland in the second round of the playoffs last season.

"These guys have won a championship and we want to continue to get to where they're at."

Despite the absence of Kristaps Porzingis and Jrue Holiday, Boston burst out of the gate -- roaring to a 25-3 lead in less than six minutes.

Tatum scored 18 points in the opening quarter as the Celtics out-scored the Cavs 38-26.



Cleveland Cavaliers guard Donovan Mitchell (45) fakes out Boston Celtics forward Torrey Craig (12) during the first quarter at TD Garden. — Imagn Images

But Cleveland had already steadied the ship and pulled within two points midway through the second period before Boston pulled away again to lead 74-64 at halftime.

The Celtics pushed their lead to as many as 17 midway through the third quarter, but still the Cavaliers wouldn't go away.

"The biggest thing is we fought," Mitchell said. "The biggest thing is just resiliency."

In Los Angeles, Luka Doncic celebrated his 26th birthday by scoring a game-high 31 points in the Lakers' 106-102 victory over the LA Clippers. LeBron James added 28 points and 13 rebounds for the Lakers, who repelled a late challenge from a Clippers team led by Ivica Zubac's 27 points and 16 rebounds.

THUNDER ROLL

It was smooth sailing for Western Conference leaders Oklahoma City in Atlanta, where Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points to lead the Thunder to a 135-119 victory over the Hawks.

Luguentz Dort and Jalen Williams scored 20 points apiece for Oklahoma City, with Dort drilling six of the Thunder's 23 three-pointers.

The Denver Nuggets, fueled by Nikola Jokic's 28th triple-double of the season, ended the Pistons' eight-game winning streak with a 134-119 victory in Detroit.

Jokic, the reigning NBA Most Valuable Player, scored 23 points with 17 rebounds and 15 assists before sitting out most of the fourth quarter.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Tennis player Aryna Sabalenka reacts during a special WTA event. — Reuters

SABALENKA PRAISES WTA’S NEW MISSION, WELCOMES SAUDI INVESTMENT

LOS ANGELES: World number one Aryna Sabalenka praised on Friday the WTA’s mission to highlight the personalities of its athletes and called Saudi Arabia’s investment in the women’s tennis tour an important part of growing the game.

The WTA rebranding, complete with a new logo and “Rally the world” tagline, comes amid a rise in global viewership and a record \$4.8 million prize awarded last year to Coco Gauff for winning the WTA Finals in Riyadh, a tournament sponsored by Saudi’s Public Investment Fund (PIF).

“It means a lot. We needed this refreshing moment for so long,” Sabalenka said at a WTA-hosted cocktail party in Hollywood celebrating the tour’s new look and mission.

“It’s a big move and I hope it’s going to help our sport to get better.”

Sabalenka, a big-serving Belarusian who grew up admiring the power games of Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova, said giving fans a more intimate look at the stars of the tour would pay off.

“The WTA should show our personalities and what it takes to become a top athlete,” she said.

“We all have to be an inspiration for the younger generation.”

Announced in May, the multi-year partnership with PIF marked the latest move in a dramatic shift by the women’s tour, which was previously reluctant to embrace Saudi partnership amid criticisms of the Gulf nation’s human rights record.

“I’ve been there a lot and they have passion for sport. Their help means a lot for us,” Sabalenka said. “Their support is very important for the WTA. I think all of us will be very grateful for their support.” — Reuters

Tsitsipas beats Aliassime to clinch Dubai title

STEFANOS TSITSIPAS won his first title in almost a year and broke a finals hoodoo as he cruised past Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-3 6-3 in the Dubai final on Saturday.

“There is nothing that ensured the win today, it was just pure fighting,” said Tsitsipas after winning in one hour and 28 minutes.

The victory ended a losing streak in ATP 500-level finals for the Greek. He has won the season-ending ATP Finals and at the tour’s top-level 1000 events, but had lost all of his previous 11 finals at 500 tournaments.

Those defeats included two losses in Dubai -- to Roger Federer in 2019 and Novak Djokovic in 2020.

“It’s a big relief that I’m able to hold that trophy after the third attempt,” the fourth-seeded Tsitsipas said on court.

“It’s something that I had in the back of my mind, and I’m happy to say I accomplished it.”

Auger-Aliassime, an unseeded Canadian, had made a strong start to the season, winning tournaments in Adelaide in January and Montpellier in February.

“I had a great opponent on the other side of the net, I knew it was a difficult task,” said Tsitsipas. “I’m just proud of the way I managed the pressure and was able to perform in those crucial moments.”

Tsitsipas dominated from the baseline. He did not drop serve, despite facing break points twice in each set. In the first set he broke the Canadian in the seventh and ninth games and in the second took the decisive break in the eighth game.” — AFP



Greece’s Stefanos Tsitsipas celebrates with the trophy on the podium after winning the final match of the ATP Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championship in Dubai. — AFP

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RAMADHANSESSIONS

The sessions will feature officials, experts and decision-makers discussing critical topics affecting businesses in Oman.

OCCI HOSTS RAMADHAN EVENINGS ON KEY ECONOMIC ISSUES

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) is organising four Ramadhan evenings to address economic challenges and opportunities for the private sector. The sessions will feature officials, experts and decision-makers discussing critical topics affecting businesses in Oman.

The annual Ramadhan evenings serve as a platform for dialogue between the private and public sectors, allowing business owners to present challenges, propose solutions and explore policy changes in collaboration with relevant authorities. This year's discussions align with the Chamber's strategy to improve the business environment, attract investments and foster economic diversification. The sessions will cover:

- March 10: The significance of Expo Japan 2025 for Oman's private sector, including participation objectives and potential economic benefits.
- March 12: Labour market regulations, private sector contributions, and banking challenges for workers and employers.
- March 17: The role of taxation in economic development, financial sustainability, and its impact on investments.
- March 19: The economic value of local content, the national strategy for local content development, and its role in supporting SMEs.

By fostering discussions on these pressing issues, the Chamber aims to encourage innovation, raise awareness of policies and support private sector growth. — ONA

Oman's FDI surges by 17.6% amid investment reforms

FOREIGN direct investment (FDI) in the Sultanate of Oman has grown by 17.6% over the past five years, reaching a cumulative value of RO 26.677 billion by the third quarter of 2024.

This steady increase underscores Oman's success in positioning itself as a key global investment destination, driven by strategic reforms, a business-friendly environment and advanced infrastructure.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, attributed the positive FDI trends to Oman's well-defined strategies and supportive policies.

He emphasised that the establishment of the Investment and Trade Court is a key step towards ensuring a stable legal framework that encourages foreign investments.

The Ministry, he noted, is committed to offering competitive incentives and streamlined processes to attract investors and foster economic growth.

Al Yousef also highlighted that enhancing the investment landscape remains a top priority for driving sustainable development. The government continues to implement various initiatives aimed at economic diversification and job creation across multiple sectors.

Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroojiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, outlined the Ministry's ongoing efforts to evaluate and refine investment policies, laws and incentives.

She noted that Oman actively promotes its investment opportunities through regional and international investment forums, exhibitions and marketing campaigns to attract foreign capital.

To strengthen investor confidence, the government ensures that investment opportunities are backed by feasibility studies. The focus is on accelerating

This steady increase underscores Oman's success in positioning itself as a key global investment destination.

QAIS BIN MOHAMMED AL YOUSEF
Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

foreign investments, boosting economic diversification and increasing non-oil revenues.

Al Farooji stated that the Ministry and other investment authorities are aligning their efforts with Oman Vision 2040, prioritising sectors such as transportation and logistics, renewable energy, information technology, food security, tourism, mining and industries. Other key areas include the circular economy, healthcare and education.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the United Kingdom remains Oman's largest foreign investor, with RO 13.66 billion in FDI as of Q3 2024. The United States follows with RO 5.25 billion, while other major investors include:

- United Arab Emirates: RO 836.5 million

- Kuwait: RO 833.5 million
- China: RO 817.8 million
- Switzerland: RO 551.9 million
- Qatar: RO 488.3 million
- Bahrain: RO 375.7 million
- Netherlands: RO 359.1 million
- India: RO 286.1 million

Among the top-performing sectors, manufacturing attracted RO 2.13 billion, followed by financial brokerage (RO 1.36 billion) and real estate (RO 969.1 million).

The Invest in Oman platform has been instrumental in promoting new investment opportunities, with 20 projects already listed across tourism, real estate, aviation, logistics and industry.

Additionally, industrial lands have been allocated in Al Rusayl, Suhar and Samayil through a collaboration with Madayn to facilitate manufacturing investments.

Oman's global outreach efforts have also intensified. Over the past year, the Ministry has participated in 21 international events, hosted delegations from 23 countries, organised 8 local promotional events, and targeted 6 G20 markets in partnership with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Oman's HyDuqm GH2 project targets \$7-8 billion investment

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

INVESTMENTS in HyDuqm – a major green hydrogen (GH2) project envisaged for implementation in Al Wusta Governorate – are estimated to total around \$7–8 billion at full capacity, according to a key executive associated with the mega-scale venture.

An international consortium, jointly led by global low-carbon energy developer ENGIE and Korean steel conglomerate POSCO, has secured a 340 km2 concession block in Duqm for the project – one of eight land blocks awarded by Hydrom, the country's GH2 orchestrator, to international developers so far.

The project will include up to approximately 5 GW of new wind and solar capacity, and a renewable hydrogen plant with a capacity of up to 200,000 tonnes per annum (tpa). The hydrogen will then be transported by a hydrogen pipeline to an ammonia plant at the Port of Duqm. Green ammonia of around 1.2 million tpa is proposed to be shipped to Korea starting in 2030.

Speaking at the Oman Climate Week

HYERIN PARK
Vice-President, Hydrogen Business Development, ENGIE AMEA

forum held in Muscat last week, Hyerin Park, Vice-President, Hydrogen Business Development, ENGIE AMEA, shared insights into financing and bankability challenges associated with the global green hydrogen industry.

Taking part in a panel discussion, Park, who is also Chief Financial Officer, HyDuqm, underlined the complexities involved in funding large-scale hydrogen projects. Duqm alone, with a target to produce 1 million tpa of renewable hydrogen by 2030, will necessitate an estimated \$35 billion in investment.

HyDuqm, contributing 200,000 tpa of hydrogen to be converted into 1 million tpa of ammonia, carries an approximate cost of \$7-8 billion. Given these figures, securing financing is not just a matter of capital availability but also ensuring appropriate risk allocation, she noted.

According to the ENGIE executive, project risk is distributed across various stages of the hydrogen value chain, from renewable energy production to hydrogen conversion, transportation and offtake.

Investors are hesitant to fund projects where risks are overly concentrated, making public-private partnerships (PPPs) and policy-driven risk mitigation essential for bankability.

Government-backed incentives, such as loan guarantees and subsidies, play a crucial role in bridging the financing gap, she said. Significantly, a project's bankability can also be enhanced by securing offtake agreements, Park stressed.

HyDuqm, for its part, aims to supply green ammonia to Korea to decarbonise coal-fired power plants, ensuring a long-term demand base. However, the broader hydrogen market remains in its early stages, with pricing mechanisms still evolving.

Greater clarity on hydrogen pricing structures and long-term contracts will enhance financial predictability, making projects more attractive to investors, she explained.

Also weighing on a project's bankability is

the cost of electrolysis technology. HyDuqm will require 2 GW of electrolyser capacity, whereas the largest operational projects today operate at only 100-200 MW.

This gap necessitates further investment in advancing electrolyser technology to scale up capacity while reducing costs. Without such advancements, projects remain vulnerable to high capital expenditure (CapEx), affecting financial viability, she warned.

Beyond CapEx, operational expenditure (OpEx) subsidies are also critical. Contract-for-difference mechanisms, wherein governments subsidise the cost gap between hydrogen production and market price, can enhance financial feasibility, Park noted.

Citing HyDuqm's experience thus far in the project's development, the executive underlined the important role of collaboration among stakeholders – governments, financial institutions and industry players – in addressing financing challenges.

Risk-sharing frameworks, innovative funding models and strategic public-private cooperation will be instrumental in accelerating green hydrogen development in Oman and beyond, she added.

ADVERTORIALS

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Guests were captivated by the stunning power and refined luxury of each model, reinforcing Hongqi’s reputation as a pioneer in the premium SUV segment.

MHD ACERE UNVEILS HONGQI’S LATEST LUXURY SUVs

MUSCAT: MHD ACERE, the official distributor of Hongqi in Oman, successfully hosted an exclusive evening of luxury, innovation and automotive excellence at Crowne Plaza, Al Qurum, Muscat, unveiling the all-new Hongqi H6 & HS7, alongside the reimagined H9 & HS5.

The grand event, held on February 26, 2025, brought together distinguished guests, automotive enthusiasts, media and industry leaders who experienced firsthand Hongqi’s latest masterpieces — each representing a fusion of performance, technology and timeless elegance.

A NIGHT OF INNOVATION & PRESTIGE

The evening commenced with an exhilarating reveal of the new Hongqi lineup, showcasing state-of-the-art features, sophisticated designs and advanced safety technologies.

Guests were captivated by the stunning power and refined luxury of each model, reinforcing Hongqi’s reputation as a pioneer in the premium SUV segment.

THE STAR ATTRACTIONS – HONGQI’S LATEST LUXURY SUVs

Hongqi H6 – A 2.0T luxury SUV with dynamic aesthetics, smart driving features, ambient interior lighting and advanced safety, setting new standards in comfort and technology.

Hongqi HS7 – Offered in three spacious variants (6-seater & 7-seater 4WD models), boasting wireless fast charging, a premium Dynaudio sound system, an intelligent 4WD system and smart technology for seamless convenience.

Hongqi H9 – The reimagined flagship SUV featuring a waterfall-inspired front grille, AI-integrated intelligent chassis, Dream Wings lighting, and a high-strength steel structure for a luxurious and secure drive.

Hongqi HS5 – A refined SUV that blends bold design, superior aerodynamics, 20-inch aluminium wheels and integrated LED lighting, offering an elevated driving experience.

Speaking at the event, Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, expressed his enthusiasm: “We are thrilled to witness the overwhelming response to the latest Hongqi lineup in Oman. These models reflect the brand’s commitment to excellence, blending luxury, performance and innovation seamlessly.

“The new Hongqi H6, HS7, and the reimagined H9 and HS5 set new benchmarks in the premium SUV category, and we are excited to bring these exceptional vehicles to our valued customers.”

The all-new Hongqi H6 & HS7, along with the reimagined H9 & HS5, are now available for bookings at Hongqi showroom.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL LAUNCHES TREASURY SINGLE ACCOUNT FOR THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE

MUSCAT: As part of its commitment to enhancing financial governance and optimising public expenditure, Sohar International has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Finance to officially launch the Treasury Single Account (TSA).

The bank has distinguished itself as a leader in the initiative, demonstrating exceptional efficiency in the development and administration of the TSA framework.

Notably, Sohar International remains one of the first financial



The bank remains one of the first financial institutions to have completed the signing and announced the full-scale launch of the TSA initiative in Oman.

institutions to have completed the signing and announced the full-scale launch of the TSA initiative in Oman.

Commenting on the announcement, Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Government and Private Banking Officer at Sohar International, stated: “We recognise that fiscal prudence and strategic resource allocation are paramount to national economic stability. We are, therefore, honoured to collaborate with the Ministry of Finance in shaping a more efficient and dynamic public finance framework.

Enjoy blessed moments with Ford exclusive benefits

OWN any Ford vehicle from the latest range and get exclusive benefits. The benefits include 5 years/100,000 km of free service, a 5-year/100,000 km manufacturer’s warranty, 5 years/100,000 km of roadside assistance, free insurance, and 1-year free registration. Customers can also get a chance to win 1 out of 8 iPhone 16 Pro Max in the raffle draw (Conditions apply. Please visit the Ford showroom for details.).

The offer ends on April 17, 2025. Commenting on the campaign, a Ford Oman representative said, “Our range of vehicles offers exceptional value, with key advantages such as spaciousness, comfort, power and safety, making them perfect for large families.

With this campaign, we are making Ford ownership even more attractive, offering hassle-free, peace-of-mind experiences for our customers.”



Ford Oman’s impressive product line-up includes the Territory, Taurus, Expedition and Everest 4x4, each delivering distinct advantages for different lifestyles.

The Ford Territory, a value-driven 5-seater SUV, combines a striking design with modern technology and spacious interiors, making it an ideal choice for young professionals and busy families.

Its 1.8L EcoBoost engine

delivers 320 Nm of torque and 190 horsepower, ensuring confident performance with efficient fuel use, while its seven-speed automatic transmission ensures smooth and responsive driving.

For those seeking seamless connectivity and top-notch performance, the Ford Taurus impresses with a sleek, modern design and a powerful 2.0-litre EcoBoost engine.

Producing 232 horsepower

and 388 Nm of torque, the Taurus is paired with an eight-speed automatic transmission, offering front-wheel drive and multiple driving modes (Normal, Sport, Eco).

Its fuel efficiency, rated at 15.3 km/l, further enhances its appeal as a flagship sedan.

Engineered for tough challenges, the 7-seater Ford Everest 4x4 is powered by a 2.3L EcoBoost Turbo engine paired with a 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission.

With 296 horsepower and 420 Nm of torque, the Everest handles tough terrains with ease, delivering power and efficiency in one dynamic package.

The Ford Expedition stands out with its 3.5-litre EcoBoost engine, featuring Auto Start-Stop technology and a class-exclusive 10-speed automatic transmission. Delivering best-in-class fuel economy, it offers up to 380 horsepower and 637 Nm of torque.

NEXT GENERATION OF MINI MODELS UNVEILED IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The wait is over! Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, the exclusive importer of BMW and MINI in Oman, has officially launched the all-new, fully electric MINI Aceman, ushering in an exciting new MINI era in the Sultanate of Oman.

Alongside the Aceman, the latest generation of the MINI 3-Door Convertible, 3-Door Electric and 5-Door models have also arrived, giving MINI lovers more ways to experience the brand’s signature fun, go-kart handling and unmistakable charm.

The all-electric MINI Aceman is a game-changer - striking in design, packed with smart technology, and built for urban adventurers who want both style and sustainability. From its bold new octagonal grille to its dynamic LED lighting and recycled aluminium alloy wheels, the Aceman makes an instant statement.

Inside, the world’s first circular OLED display is the highlight, acting as both an infotainment hub and a digital cockpit. And because no adventure should be limited, the Aceman offers seamless at-



Alongside the Aceman, the latest generation of the MINI 3-Door Convertible, 3-Door Electric and 5-Door models have also arrived.

home and on-the-go charging, ensuring that every journey is electrified.

MINI fans can also look forward to the launch of the refreshed MINI 3-Door Convertible perfect for those who love the open road. The new MINI 5-Door

arrives with a bigger, more aerodynamic body, yet still delivers the iconic MINI experience, making it the ideal choice for those who need extra space without sacrificing driving fun. And for those ready to make the switch to electric, the MINI 3-Door

Electric is here to prove that sustainability and excitement can go hand in hand.

Speaking about the launch, Rachid Zamani, Managing Director of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, said: “The MINI brand has always been about pushing boundaries and embracing individuality. The new MINI Aceman is a perfect reflection of that philosophy - it’s bold, electric and full of personality. At Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, we are proud to bring this next generation of MINI models to Oman, offering drivers a range of choices that deliver MINT’s signature driving fun with cutting-edge technology and sustainable innovation. We invite all MINI fans to visit our showroom and experience these exciting new models firsthand.”

Step into a new era of driving excellence with Geely Starray

MUSCAT: Introducing the Geely Starray, a revolutionary 4WD SUV that sets new benchmarks in design, technology and performance. Designed to suit the demands of today’s drivers, the Starray combines innovation, safety and road command in perfect harmony while offering outstanding value as an affordable family SUV.

The much-awaited launch ceremony was held on February 25, 2025, at Crowne Plaza - Grand Lawn, and was graced by industry leaders, automotive enthusiasts and dignitaries.

Michael Song, Vice-President of Geely Auto and General Manager of GAIC, says, “Geely Starray is the future of intelligent mobility, combining aesthetic excellence with safety and digital innovation. It represents the evolution of design philosophy and engineering prowess, crafted for discerning drivers.”



The Starray raises the bar in performance and versatility, redefining the driving experience.

THE ULTIMATE URBAN-TO-ADVENTURE SUV

The Geely Starray 4WD is designed for those who seek both versatility and adventure. With an advanced 4WD system and the performance of an 8-speed automatic trans-

mission (8AT), it offers exceptional control, power and smoothness — whether driving on city roads or conquering off-road adventures.

With advanced technology, lavish comfort and uncompromising safety, the Starray raises the bar in performance and versatility, redefining the driving experience on urban and highway terrains. Highlights include:

4WD system: Advanced traction and control technology to handle varied terrain with confidence, from city streets to sand, mud and gravel.

8-speed automatic transmission (8AT): Provides seamless gear shifting, improved fuel economy, and enhanced driving dynamics for performance and comfort.

Smart safety features: Innovative ADAS technologies, such as adaptive cruise control and lane-keeping assist, for a level of secu-

urity like no other.

Premium design: A bold exterior matched with a spacious, tech-laden interior, offering both style and substance.

“With the Starray 4WD, we’re not just introducing a new car; we’re redefining what versatility means for modern drivers,” said Alex Gu, Geely Middle East & Africa General Manager. “Its powerful 4WD system and advanced 8AT transmission ensure a smooth, confident driving experience, no matter where the road leads.”

BOLD YET AERODYNAMIC EXTERIOR DESIGN

The Geely Starray features an aerodynamically streamlined shape, exuding confidence and flair. Its striking and dynamic exterior design boasts Stars-Aligned Daytime Running Lights and a distinctive front face, with the Flying Arrow Full-Width Taillight that enhances both visibility and road presence.

BUSINESS

5-YEARPROJECT



Officials from both sides at the agreement signing.

KARWA MOTORS INKS \$43M STRATEGIC FUNDING PACT

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

QATAR National Bank (Oman Branch) has signed a strategic funding agreement worth \$43 million with Karwa Motors, a joint investment initiative between the State of Qatar and the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement aims to finance the implementation of a five-year project between Karwa Motors and the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman, with a total value of \$287 million. The project is designed to enhance the efficiency of the school transport sector in line with the latest global standards.

The agreement was signed by Khalid al Barwani, CEO of Qatar National Bank in Oman, and Dr Ibrahim al Balushi on behalf of Karwa Motors, in the presence of senior officials from both parties.

In addition to supporting the school transport sector in the Sultanate of Oman, the new partnership agreement reflects Qatar National Bank's commitment to expanding its customer base and strengthening its position as a trusted financial partner for corporate clients in Oman by providing them with comprehensive banking services and solutions.

The agreement also marks another step forward in enhancing the bank's status as a leading financial institution, following its success in securing several significant deals across various economic sectors. This aligns with its strategy to support national industries in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Khalid al Barwani, CEO of Qatar National Bank in Oman, said, "As one of the leading financial institutions in the Sultanate of Oman, we are always keen to support projects that encourage innovative solutions across all economic sectors, including transportation. This initiative will contribute to accelerating the implementation of plans related to the National Programme for Economic Diversification."

Dr Ibrahim al Balushi, CEO of Karwa Motors in Oman, stated, "Under this agreement, Karwa Motors will receive financial facilities from Qatar National Bank, reflecting the mutual trust between the two parties in strengthening the company's financial capabilities and expanding its business scope."

"These banking facilities will enable Karwa Motors to achieve its expansion goals and strengthen its presence in the regional automotive sector. The financial support will enhance our operational processes and services, allowing us to provide the best options to our customers."

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

THE Oman Real Estate Association (ORA) has outlined plans to organise a conference and exhibition during the upcoming khareef season events. It is also discussing with a consultancy firm the preparation of a study on the impact of value-added tax (VAT) on real estate transactions.

This announcement was made during the association's annual meeting, held at W Muscat Hotel on Thursday, attended by association members, officials from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, real estate sector stakeholders and media representatives.

The meeting featured discussions on real estate market developments, challenges in real estate financing, and initiatives aimed at diversifying housing options and facilitating access for citizens. These efforts are expected to sustain the sector's positive impact.

Younis bin Khasib al Harrasi,

FSA launches digital remote trading platforms

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1

AS part of its continuous efforts to enhance financial inclusion by facilitating access to financial services in the Omani capital market, the Financial Services Authority (FSA) has launched digital remote trading platforms for licensed brokerage firms.

These platforms will serve as unified and integrated digital stations within each brokerage firm, streamlining investment processes in the capital market and making investments faster and more efficient.

This initiative is expected to boost trading activity in the Muscat Stock Exchange, aligning with modern financial market regulations and adopting a methodology that enhances service quality, ensures data protection and ultimately strengthens investor confidence.

Speaking exclusively to the Observer, Shaikh Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, FSA Executive President, highlighted that the newly launched digital platforms will significantly ease market access for investors.

Previously, challenges such as the necessity for personal



Al Salmi explained that these digital platforms will serve as gateways for investment in the securities market.

connections could impede entry. The launch event, organised by the Authority, was also attended by senior officials from capital market institutions in Oman.

The event celebrated the launch of five digital platforms owned by Ubhar Financial Investments, United Securities, International Securities, Jabal Asset Management, and CFI Financial. This initiative was carried out in collaboration with key stakeholders, including the National Programme for Financial Sustainability and Sector Development (Istidama), the Muscat Stock Exchange, Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, and

the Oman Credit and Financial Information Center (Mala'a).

In his opening speech, the FSA Chairman stated, "The announcement of these platforms marks a significant milestone and adds great value.

"It will facilitate access for individuals and institutions, regardless of the size of their investment portfolios, to the necessary services and procedures for entering the investment world in the Omani capital market through a unified and integrated station. This will help attract investments and enhance trading activity efficiently and effectively."

Al Salmi explained that

OHB TO PROVIDE OVER RO 145 MILLION IN HOUSING LOANS

MUSCAT: Oman Housing Bank (OHB) has announced plans to finance housing loans worth over RO 145 million by the end of 2025, benefiting 3,250 citizens across various governorates. This initiative aligns with the bank's ongoing efforts to support the housing sector and enable Omanis to own homes.

The highest financing was allocated through the bank's main branch in Muscat, amounting to RO 38.3 million for 837 beneficiaries, followed by Al Rustaq branch with RO 34.58 million for 813 beneficiaries, and Nizwa branch with RO 19.38 million for 423 beneficiaries.

Mousa bin Masoud al Jadidi, CEO of Oman Housing Bank, emphasised that these financings reflect the bank's strategy to enhance housing stability by providing soft loans with competitive terms, contributing



MOUSA BIN MASOUD AL JADIDI
CEO of Oman Housing Bank

commitment to delivering innovative financing solutions that support urban development and improve the quality of life for citizens.

To enhance efficiency, the bank is

to Oman Vision 2040's housing and social development goals.

The loans cover a range of needs, including home purchases, land acquisition for construction and direct home-building, offering flexible options for beneficiaries.

Al Jadidi reaffirmed the bank's

implementing comprehensive updates to its services, including a new digital system that will provide integrated electronic services for loan and account management.

He highlighted that Oman Housing Bank has significantly reduced waiting times for loan approvals by restructuring internal mechanisms and expanding specialised teams, cutting the waiting period from four years to just eight months.

He also noted that the bank remains dedicated to providing accessible financing solutions across all governorates, ensuring a balanced distribution of funds to support Omani families in securing suitable housing.

Looking ahead, Oman Housing Bank plans to enter a new phase of development and expansion, reinforcing its role in creating a sustainable and integrated housing environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

Significant uptick in real estate transactions last year: ORA

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 1



The Oman Real Estate Association (ORA) held its annual meeting at the weekend.

ORA Chairman, stated that civil society organisations serve as comprehensive work platforms that aim to promote sustainable development. They are a fundamental component of civil work in any modern state, and their effectiveness depends on the efforts of each member.

He emphasised that the real estate sector witnessed significant momentum last year, with a noticeable increase in transaction volumes, reflecting investor confidence.

He noted that various regulatory improvements and measures have positively stimulated real estate activity, increasing demand. He stressed that initiatives to diversify housing options and facilitate access for citizens would contribute to sustaining this positive impact.

Furthermore, when such initiatives are accompanied by streamlined processes for obtaining serviced residential lands or financial support for eligible individuals wishing to own properties within development

projects, it would not only drive market growth, but also enhance social security and citizens' well-being.

He added that with the continued positive momentum and the recent announcement by the Central Bank of Oman regarding updated regulatory measures, which have made RO 4.5 billion available to banks for housing and construction loan financing, there is great anticipation for a swift and effective response from financial institutions.

This would enhance citizens' ability to own properties, thereby supporting the real estate market and elevating transaction levels, with far-reaching effects on supply chains and the national economy. To maximise the positive impact of financial solutions, it is essential that funding initiatives also extend to companies operating in the real estate sector.

Many of the financing initiatives introduced in recent years have not included real estate companies,

despite the sector's extensive projects, economic significance and ability to create diverse employment opportunities for Omanis — whether through direct employment, business contracts, or opportunities for Omani entrepreneurs.

Al Harrasi further explained that the Oman Real Estate Association has been actively engaging with various partners through initiatives and activities aimed at raising awareness, strengthening the role of real estate companies, contributing to sector-related strategic plans, and providing input on legal and regulatory projects.

He highlighted the association's partnership with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and Connect Company in organising the Oman Real Estate Conference and Exhibition.

He also mentioned the association's initiatives concerning VAT on real estate transactions, particularly on first-time sales of residential properties.

OPINION

Enterprise and sustainability: Prospects and suggestions



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

A specialist in local content/In-country value, the writer is the Acting Director-General of Local Content, previously assigned to the General Secretariat of the Tender Board

WHERE Oman differs from many other nations is the work it is doing towards integrating sustainable practices within the enterprise ecosystem. As part of Vision 2040, Oman is working to enhance sustainable practices in businesses such as ensuring that profits made are not detrimental to the environmental and social aspects of the economy. Oman aims for its enterprises to be able to grow in profitability while also ensuring long term sustainability and resilience.

SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENTS
1. *Policies and programmes of the government:* There are policies formulated by the Government of Oman that attempt to promote sustainability. The Oman Vision 2040, National Energy Strategy, and the incorporation of ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) frameworks into corporate governance provide comprehensive guidelines that encourage enterprises to shift towards more responsible business practices.
2. *Expansion in the use of renewable energy:* Reliance on fossil fuels is reduced with the help of projects, such as Ibri Solar Plant, along with other investments made by Oman into renewable energy sources such as solar and wind.

INTEGRATED SUSTAINABILITY SUPPLY CHAINS
Businesses in Oman are working to implement sustainability within their supply chains.

Numerous companies are moving towards greener approaches that include eco-friendly sourcing, waste reduction and circular economy approaches for lowering their ecological footprint.

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES PRIORITISE CSR AND ESG
Businesses in Oman are focusing more on embedding corporate social responsibility (CSR). A good number of companies have started implementing ESG principles to operationalise sustainable business practices and enhance corporate image.
There are, however, sustainability integration gaps that continue to persist even in the face of significant positive changes in the Omani enterprise sector:
Initial investment barriers: Outlays on green technology and green infrastructure are often prohibitively high and result in a disparate impact of the immediate effect on the business.
Skill gaps: A large company needs to have adequate knowledge resources regarding sustainability and sustainable development which most do not.
Policy gaps: While policies are changing, many existing policies would benefit from additional revisions in order to better enable sustainable business practices.
Demand levels: Demand for sustainability products and services remains at a low growth level and requires business to cut profits or subsidise short-term loss while switching to ecologically responsible practices.

Businesses in Oman are focusing more on embedding corporate social responsibility (CSR). A good number of companies have started implementing ESG principles to operationalise sustainable business practices and enhance corporate image.

IMPROVING SUSTAINABILITY: SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
1. *Promoting public private partnerships:* The collaborative efforts of the government with private businesses can catalyse sustainability practices. Initiatives like joint businesses in renewable energy, waste management and green buildings increase the chances of developing joint ventures.
2. *Green financing programmes:* The government should provide and offer tax breaks, grants and subsidies to companies that practice sustainable initiatives. These policies would help tackle the limitation in available green investment opportunities to businesses.
3. *Education and awareness campaigns:* Technology can be used to provide everything ranging from workshops and training sessions to even knowledge engagement platforms. Business schools and universities can also have sustainability as a core part of their course structure.
4. *Enhancing and developing standards:* Stricter rules and regulations integration is needed to make sure that companies engage in green practices and initiatives. A set standard with which the business's sustainability goals can become achievable rather than elusive.
5. *New product development and brand sustaining strategies:* Smart and sustainable technologies USB powered AI energy management system, supply chain blockchain, and IOT devices for resource management are some of the many novel ways enterprises must invest in.

US BUDGET BOTCHES SUBTRACTION AND MULTIPLICATION

NOT every dollar in the US budget equals a dollar. Some are worth far more, which only further distorts the math congressional Republicans are using to justify spending cuts.
The main goal is to extend as much as \$4.5 trillion of tax savings, over 10 years, from President Donald Trump's first term and to scrounge up money to fund border security. To do so, lawmakers want to slash some \$1.5 trillion of expenses over the next decade. The GOP plan involves chopping in places that are as financially confounding as they are politically problematic.
House Republicans, without any Democratic votes, passed a blueprint this week that establishes the basics. For one, it designates the panel that oversees Medicaid, a programme that helps cover medical costs for poorer Americans, to find ways to knock out \$880 billion of spending over a decade, or roughly equivalent to its annual budget.
There simply isn't that much waste and fraud to eliminate, which means making patients and states shoulder more of the burden. The rough draft also aims to lop off \$230 billion of food assistance, potentially hitting about 9 million average monthly recipients, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities estimates.
These ideas endanger an already bloated \$1.8 trillion deficit, which exceeds 6% of GDP. Medicaid spending, for example, punches above its weight economically. Every \$1 spent leads to \$1.50 of output, largely by keeping Americans healthier, according to research by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.
Subsidising grocery bills is even better, with \$1 triggering \$1.79 of activity, including from farmers, retailers and other parts of the supply chain, the US Department of Agriculture says.
Republicans are also separately targeting funds for tax enforcement, even though crippling tax collectors would be the most detrimental move. Every \$1 devoted to policing avoiders and evaders returns \$6.40, the Congressional Budget Office estimates.
If the proposed tax cuts more than paid for themselves, they could theoretically make some sense. Most of them, however, accrue to wealthier individuals more likely to sock extra cash away than spend it. There's little evidence to support the trickle-down effect promised by Trump and generations of Republicans.
Altogether, these are ominous signals to send. Fears of persistent inflation and unpredictable trade policy have left yields on 10-year Treasury bonds at around 4.3%, compared to the recent 3.6% low in mid-September when Democratic presidential hopeful Kamala Harris led in pre-election polls.
Moreover, Republicans are aiming to raise the US borrowing limit by another \$4 trillion, leaving no end in sight for Washington's profligacy. — Reuters

11th 5-year plan to broaden economic diversification

OMAN is preparing to launch its Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), a pivotal milestone in the journey towards achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040. This plan follows the Tenth Five-Year Plan, which laid the foundation for economic recovery after challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and declining oil prices.
In this article, we provide an objective and critical analysis of the Tenth Plan's achievements and challenges, examine the preparation process and inclusiveness of the upcoming plan, and discuss the impact of economic diversification on GDP and employment opportunities.
Additionally, we will highlight the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing the new plan and conclude with recommendations to enhance its success.

10TH FIVE-YEAR PLAN: SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES
The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) achieved significant economic milestones despite difficult initial conditions. The GDP recorded a stronger-than-expected recovery, with economic growth exceeding targeted levels in the plan sectors.
This growth helped maintain economic momentum despite a decline in oil sector contributions, underscoring the success of economic diversification strategies in reducing reliance on oil revenues.
Regarding development initiatives, the Tenth Five-Year Plan oversaw the implementation of numerous strategic programmes aligned with Oman Vision 2040's priorities.
While several programmes were fully completed, others remain ongoing, and some were merged or cancelled to adapt to evolving circumstances.
The plan also witnessed developmental spending and a rise in allocated funds for projects. Global economic fluctuations — such as the Covid-19 pandemic, supply chain disruptions and rising global inflation — placed pressure on the timely implementation of some projects.
Furthermore, Oman's continued reliance on oil revenues remains a structural challenge; for example, a decline in oil production during certain periods led to a notable contraction in oil-related



Economic diversification is the cornerstone of Oman's economic strategy, and its benefits have begun to materialise.



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The writer is the head of Oman Observer's Business section

activities, highlighting the economy's vulnerability to energy market shifts.
Creating sufficient job opportunities for Omani citizens remains a pressing issue, as workforce development and employment generation require continuous efforts. While economic conditions have improved, sustaining job creation and ensuring adequate employment opportunities for the country's growing youth population remain top priorities.

11TH PLAN'S PREPARATION AND INCLUSIVENESS
The Eleventh Five-Year Plan was designed with a high level of inclusiveness and community participation, ensuring alignment with Oman Vision 2040's economic priorities.
The new plan identifies high-value economic sectors that contribute to economic diversification while achieving Oman's long-term vision.
The planning process integrated multiple strategic, developmental and special tracks, ensuring coherence between Oman Vision 2040's long-term strategy, five-year development plans, and annual national and sectoral plans.
This holistic approach ensures that the plan remains aligned with the four pillars of Society and People, Economy and Development,

Environmental Sustainability, and Governance and Institutional Performance — while fostering balanced growth across these areas.
A notable aspect of the Eleventh Plan's preparation was its emphasis on stakeholder participation. The Ministry of Economy announced that community engagement was a fundamental methodology in shaping the new plan.
Numerous discussion sessions, brainstorming workshops and stakeholder consultations were conducted with participation from government entities, private sector representatives and civil society institutions.
This participatory approach ensured that the plan reflected a shared vision between the government and development, enhancing its practicality and public support. By adopting an inclusive and integrated planning framework, the Eleventh Plan is well-positioned for effective implementation.

GDP AND EMPLOYMENT
Economic diversification is the cornerstone of Oman's economic strategy, and its benefits have begun to materialise. The non-oil sector's contribution to GDP has steadily increased, supporting economic growth even during periods of weak oil sector performance.

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Ramadhan

4

BASIC
RAMADHAN
GUIDES

FATWA

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



I am an Omani student, studying in the UK. The day is too long here, around 19 hours and a half. Can I break my fast and compensate later?

In the event of travelling abroad, breaking the fast is permissible. The Almighty says: “For a specified number of days. But whoever among you is sick, or on a journey, then a number of other days,” Al Baqarah, 184.



HADITH GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Huraira reported
Allah’s Messenger as saying:

Allah, the Majestic and the Exalted, said: Every act of the son of Adam is for him except fasting. It is done for My sake, and I will give a reward for it. By Allah in Whose Hand is the life of Muhammad, the breath of the observer of fast is sweeter to Allah than the fragrance of musk.

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY



“And say, the truth is from your Lord. Whoever wills — let him believe. And whoever wills — let him disbelieve”. We have prepared for the unjust a Fire, whose curtains will hem them in. And when they cry for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten brass, which scalds the faces. What a miserable drink, and what a terrible place.

(the Cave, 29)



DUA SUPPLICATION TO ALLAH

O Allah, on this day make my fasts the fasts of those who fast (sincerely), and my standing up in prayer of those who stand up in prayer (obediently), awaken me in it from the sleep of the heedless, and forgive me my sins , O God of the worlds, and forgive me, O one who forgives the sinners.



VIRTUAL IFTARS: CONNECTING FAMILIES WORLDWIDE DURING RAMADHAN

BY BALQEES AL ORAIMI

MILLIONS of Muslims embrace the cherished moment of Iftar during the holy month of Ramadhan. This special time goes beyond simply satisfying hunger; it’s about reinforcing the bonds of family and community.

However, in our modern world of global mobility, where loved ones often reside across different continents and time zones, the tradition of gathering around a shared table has transformed. Enter virtual Iftars — a heartfelt solution that helps maintain these vital connections, no matter the distance.

Thanks to technological advancements, families can now enjoy the joy of breaking the fast together, even if they’re separated by thousands of miles. The popularity of virtual Iftars surged during the Covid-19 pandemic, as health protocols set the stage for a creative shift towards online gatherings. Platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, FaceTime and Google Meet became lifelines, keeping the spirit of Ramadhan alive and thriving during challenging times.

Even now that health restrictions have lifted, this practice has blossomed into a beloved ritual for many. For expatriates, students studying abroad, and professionals working far from home, virtual Iftars bring a warm sense of belonging and family togetherness that transcends borders.

Take the Omani expatriates, for instance, who eagerly anticipate Iftar with their families back home. Despite the hurdles of time differences, they set

their electronic devices on the dining table to share the call to prayer and the joy of breaking their fast as a collective experience. Nasser al Hatrooshi, an Omani student in the UK, shares, “I may not be physically present, but seeing my family’s faces and hearing the call to prayer alongside them creates an unbreakable bond.”

For the Khan family, originally from Lahore but now living between the United States and Oman, virtual Iftars have been instrumental in honouring family traditions. “We all coordinate our meals, ensuring we prepare the same delicious dishes like samosas, hummus and dates, which makes it feel like we’re eating together, no matter the miles between us,” says Ahmad Khan, the eldest son.

With a sizable Indonesian expat community in Oman, virtual Iftars often extend beyond just family to include friends and fellow believers. Ulya, an international school administrator in Muscat, connects with her family in Jakarta and her local Muslim community online. “It’s wonderful to see people from diverse backgrounds unite for prayer and breaking fast. It’s a beautiful testament to Ramadhan’s spirit of unity.”

Technology enriches these virtual gatherings, creating enjoyable experiences. Families utilise Zoom and Google Meet for larger family reunions, allowing loved ones from various locations to connect. WhatsApp and FaceTime for intimate Iftar moments with close relatives. Live broadcasts to share their Iftar celebrations on social media with an even wider circle.

Shared playlists and recipes to cultivate a sense of togetherness through

shared sounds and flavours.

While these digital gatherings offer countless benefits, they also present challenges like time zone discrepancies, where some may break their fast while others are still waiting. To bridge these gaps, some families opt to gather during the Maghrib prayer or even meet for Suhoor. Technical glitches can also occasionally disrupt the experience, but families have become adept at navigating these hurdles.

To enhance interactivity, creative solutions have emerged, including Themed Iftars: Each gathering centres around a fun theme, like “Childhood Favourites”, with everyone preparing dishes dear to their hearts. People are also doing storytelling and shared Dua where each member shares a memorable Ramadhan story, a poignant Hadith, or a meaningful Dua, enriching the spiritual aspect of the gathering.

As technology continues to advance, the way families celebrate Ramadhan will only evolve further. The possibilities of virtual reality (VR) and the metaverse may soon bring us even closer, allowing loved ones to feel as if they are sharing the same table. AI-powered assistants could help coordinate schedules, remind families of prayer times and create synchronised meal plans tailored to collective preferences.

While nothing can replicate the warmth of in-person gatherings, virtual Iftars offer a beautiful way to uphold family connections in our ever-changing world. They embody the heart and essence of Ramadhan — connection, love and solidarity — showing us that no distance can diminish the ties of faith and family.

MEMORIES OF RAMADHAN

A Journey of Reflection and Community



BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MOHAMMED Al Salti hails from the peaceful town of Sur, where he cherishes vivid memories of Ramadhan from his childhood. Now, however, the blessed month unfolds in the bustling city of Muscat, where his job has taken him.

“Ramadhan is a tranquil month, offering us a chance to shed bad habits and rejuvenate our body and soul,” shares Al Salti. “With shorter working hours, we find the space to read the Holy Quran, engage in prayer, and even participate in sports.” For him, Ramadhan is more than a calendar month; it’s a time to regain balance in life.

The impacts of Ramadhan are both visible and subtle. Many people experience weight loss during this month, but perhaps more importantly, they cultivate a sense of peace and positivity. “This month serves as a reminder that each year presents us with an opportunity to reconnect with our faith and our community. It transforms us, fostering empathy and prompting us to reflect on broader issues, including our responsibilities to those beyond our immediate circles,” explains Al Salti.

During Ramadhan, an heightened awareness guides people as they consider the consequences of their actions. “I believe Ramadhan is a divine signal. In our fast-paced lives, we often lose sight of what truly matters. This month invites us to pause and nourish our souls, prompting us to forge deeper connections with others,” he reflects.

He elaborates on the transformative power of hunger. “Hunger narrows

our perspective, making us more conscious of those who suffer from food scarcity worldwide, transcending cultural boundaries. Ramadhan encourages self-reflection and reconnects us with nature,” he notes.

Community giving takes on a special significance during Ramadhan. With technology at our fingertips, opportunities to support those in need have multiplied. “In Sur, we embrace community work wholeheartedly. We prepare meals at home, curate



thoughtful menus, and deliver them to our local mosque, ensuring that we also extend our kindness to expatriates in our neighbourhood,” he recounts.

These gestures create lasting Ramadhan memories for all involved. “We prioritise supporting expatriate workers, many of whom face challenges during this month. We provide meals daily, sharing the spirit of generosity,” he adds.

Al Salti fondly reminisces about the serene days of his youth. “Ramadhan felt different back then – more peaceful, with a simpler pace of life. I’ve been observing the fast for over 30 years, and while the population has grown and modernity has

changed our surroundings, Ramadhan still connects us to those cherished memories,” he muses.

He emphasises the vital role parents play in teaching their children about Ramadhan. “It’s a gradual process. Parents first introduce the practice of fasting, instilling the importance of compassion and community. As children grow, they learn that these values are fundamental to their faith,” he explains. “In childhood, losing the fast may come with understanding, but as adults, we recognise the unwavering commitment to our prayers and fasting.”

Throughout Ramadhan, certain habits change, as the community comes alive in new ways. “The mornings begin with prayer, and as sunset nears, crowds flock to the souqs to gather special foods. In Sur, we enjoy unique treats like Tablannah, Fateh, Harees and Haseedhah, with many delicate sweets making an appearance, often prepared by mothers as a celebration for each fasting day.”

Fish remains a staple in Sur’s cuisine, especially during Ramadhan. “Our meals often feature roasted fish, accompanied by dates, followed by an array of dishes. As our families grow, we treasure the moments shared outdoors – whether in gardens, at the beach, or on farms. We often invite neighbours to partake, emphasising the spirit of community. For me, there’s a special day each month when I break bread with former colleagues. It’s a cherished reunion, highlighting how Ramadhan unites us,” he concludes.

In this month of reflection and generosity, memories of Ramadhan continue to weave a tapestry of connection, faith and love, bringing people together in beautiful and lasting ways.

RAMADHAN TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

CANNONS SOUND FOR IFTAR IN SYRIA

As the sun dips below the horizon, the air fills with the resounding boom of cannons, marking the moment when people can break their fast. This vibrant tradition, known as Midfa Al Iftar, has deep roots that trace back over 200 years to Egypt. Legend has it that during the Ottoman reign, a ruler named Khosh Qadam was testing out a cannon at sunset when the unexpected blast echoed through the streets of Cairo.

The unmistakable sound sparked a new custom, as locals enthusiastically embraced it as a signal to end their daily fast. This heartwarming practice quickly spread beyond Egypt, finding a cherished place in the hearts of communities across Syria and Lebanon. Today, the thunderous cannon fire is not just a mere signal; it’s a captivating reminder of cultural history and a joyous herald of gathering families around the Iftar table.

DAILY HEALTH TIPS TO REMEMBER



STAY HYDRATED

Staying hydrated during Ramadhan is crucial for maintaining overall health and well-being, especially when fasting for extended periods. To ensure adequate hydration, aim to drink fluids multiple times throughout the night, even if you don’t feel particularly thirsty – thirst often indicates that your body is already experiencing dehydration. Opt for non-caffeinated beverages since caffeine can have a diuretic effect, leading to increased fluid loss.

It’s important to be mindful of fluid intake; drinking excessively at once may lead to water intoxication, a rare but serious condition that can dilute your electrolytes and disrupt bodily functions. Instead, pace your fluid consumption throughout the evening and strive to include hydrating foods, such as fruits and vegetables, in your meals. Mindful hydration is essential for a healthy and fulfilling Ramadhan.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS RELATED TO RAMADHAN



The Revelation of the Quran

“The month of Ramadhan [is that] in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion.” 2:185 Ramadhan is the month in which the Holy Quran was revealed. Before Prophethood, the Prophet Muhammad would often retreat to Mount Hira to seek solace. It was there that the Angel Jibrail first came to him with revelation. Over the next 23 years, the Prophet (PBUH) would continue getting revelations until the entirety of the Quran was revealed. In this holy month of Ramadhan, Muslims recite, memorise and reflect upon the holy verses given to them by Allah.

FEATURES

BY KHALED ABDUL MALAK

THE VAST, arid landscapes of the desert are home to the Bedouins, a nomadic people whose rich culture and traditions have thrived in some of the harshest environments on Earth. Their way of life is intricately connected to the desert, where sand dunes stretch endlessly, and wildlife adapts to survive in extreme conditions.

Bedouins are known for their deep-rooted traditions centred around herding, trade and hospitality. Their nomadic lifestyle is characterised by moving from one place to another in search of water and grazing land for their livestock, primarily camels, goats and sheep. The camel, often referred to as the “ship of the desert”, is central to Bedouin culture. These remarkable animals are not only a means of transportation, but also provide milk, meat and wool, making them invaluable.

The desert is a mesmerising landscape, with towering sand dunes that can reach heights of over 500 feet, shaped by the wind into stunning patterns changing with the seasons. For the Bedouins, the dunes are more than just a backdrop; they are a source of inspiration and a vital part of their identity. The Bedouins possess a profound understanding of the desert’s geography, using their knowledge to navigate the shifting sands and find resources.

Despite the harsh conditions, the desert teems with life. Bedouins have learned to coexist with the unique wildlife inhabiting this environment. Creatures such as the Arabian oryx, sand gazelles, and various reptiles have adapted to extreme temperatures and scarce water sources. The Bedouins often observe these animals, drawing lessons from their survival strategies. The oryx can go for long periods without water, relying on moisture from the plants it consumes.

The desert holds deep cultural significance for the Bedouins. Their poetry, music and storytelling often reflect the beauty and challenges of desert life. The vastness of the landscape inspires a connection to nature celebrated in their traditions. Hospitality is a cornerstone of Bedouin culture, with guests welcomed with open arms and offered traditional dishes, such as lamb and rice, accompanied by sweet tea.

The life of the Bedouins is a testament to human resilience and adaptability. Their deep connection to the land, the majestic dunes and diverse wildlife showcase a unique way of life that has endured for centuries. As modernity encroaches upon their traditional lifestyle, the Bedouins continue to embody the spirit of the desert, preserving their rich heritage while navigating new challenges. Through their stories, they remind us of the beauty and complexity of life in one of the most unforgiving environments on Earth.

Twenty years ago, I had the incredible opportunity to meet Obeid al Wahibi, an exceptional Bedouin who has spent his entire life in the mesmerising Rimal Al Sharqiya.

This encounter marked my first experience with the desert. Obeid, now in his late fifties, runs a camp which serves as a gateway for visitors seeking to immerse themselves in the beauty of the desert, particularly during breathtaking sunrises and sunsets over the undulating dunes.

Every evening, as the sun dipped below the horizon, Obeid would gather guests around a crackling campfire, sharing captivating stories of his life as a Bedouin. His tales were rich with tradition and wisdom, painting a vivid picture of a lifestyle interconnected with the desert. Today, this storytelling legacy has been passed down to his son, Abdullah, a 25-year-old engineer who embraces his heritage by working alongside his father to manage their family business.

Abdullah’s passion for Bedouin life is evident as he shares insights about their profound relationship with camels. “In the past, the camel was our only means of transport,” he explains, eyes sparkling with pride. “We would carry goods like dates, limes and mangos from the north and trade



A Journey Through the Rimal Al Sharqiya: The legacy of Obeid al Wahibi and his son Abdullah



them for dried sardines from the fishermen in the south. This exchange was vital for our survival.”

He continues, “We utilise every part of the camel. For instance, we collect dew by hanging camel skin vertically during the night, providing us with precious water. We eat the meat, drink the milk and make butter from the camel’s milk. The shoulder bone serves as a writing board, while charcoal acts as our pen.” Abdullah’s enthusiasm is infectious; the camel is not just an animal to them; it is a lifeline, a companion, a symbol of their culture.

Camel racing, a beloved tradition, has also become a significant source of revenue

for their community. “Our camels are the best in the Gulf,” Abdullah boasts, reflecting the pride that comes from generations of breeding and training these magnificent creatures.

As I reflect on my experiences with Obeid and Abdullah, I am reminded of the richness of their culture and the lessons they impart. The Rimal Al Sharqiya are not just a backdrop; they represent a living testament to a way of life that continues to thrive against the odds, thanks to the dedication of individuals like Obeid and Abdullah. Their stories echo the importance of preserving traditions and the deep connections we share with the world around us.