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OF THE HISTORIC
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MANAH



HONOURABLE LADY GREETINGS ON MOTHER’S DAY



MUSCAT: Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, congratulated mothers in the Sultanate of Oman and the whole world on the occasion of

Mother’s Day. The congratulations text reads as follows: “I am pleased to congratulate the dear mothers in our beloved country and the mothers in the entire world on the occasion

of Mother’s Day which falls on March 21 every year, wishing them goodness, success and safe and reassured life. I hope that they make greater and more effective contributions to all development programmes and areas of life. “Celebrating this day is nothing but enhancing the meanings of gratitude and reverence, intensifying feelings of love and pride, and further highlighting the roles of the great mothers and their high standing that was recommended to us by Allah the Almighty and Prophet Muhammed (PBUH). “On this occasion, as we experience the blessed days of the holy month of Ramadhan, the month of goodness, mercy and benevolence, we pray to Allah the Almighty to protect mothers in all parts of the earth especially in the occupied Palestine and to bless them with peace, security and liberation. Happy Mother’s Day to the mothers of the world.” — ONA

6 more lanes for Muscat Expressway

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality floated a major tender for the expansion of Muscat Expressway, the main carriageway in the capital city, on Wednesday. Once completed, the project will reflect positively on the vehicular movement and individual and goods transportation. Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, stated that the Muscat Expressway expansion project constitutes a qualitative leap in terms of enhancing connectivity to the capital’s regions. The project, he said, would help to meet the rapid growth witnessed by the transportation sector as a result of economic boom and urban growth taking place in the Sultanate of Oman. He added that the project would contribute to achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040



The project would help to meet the rapid growth in transportation sector.

by providing the infrastructure required for the comprehensive development process. The Muscat Expressway expansion project involves the construction of three more lanes in both directions bringing to 12 the total lane number with 6 lanes in each direction making it the widest road in the Sultanate of Oman. The project also involves boosting the efficiency of some multi-level intersections and increasing the acceleration and deceleration lanes on the expressway. This is in addition to expanding existing bridges, implementing water drainage channels and slopes protections, building concrete barriers and other protective barriers as well as replacing the current lighting system with an environmentally friendly LED system. — ONA

■ **MUSCAT**
**HM GREETINGS TO
NAMIBIA PRESIDENT**
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Nangolo Mbumba of the Republic of Namibia, on his country’s Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to President Nangolo Mbumba. His Majesty also wished the people of Namibia further progress and prosperity.

**NOD TO IMPORT
217,370 LIVESTOCK**
The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has authorised the import of 217,370 heads of livestock to meet current demand in the Sultanate of Oman. Dr Samah Mahmoud al Sharif, Director of Veterinary Quarantine, said that the ministry took steps to supply the local market with livestock and red meat in co-ordination with livestock import companies. He pointed out that the ministry streamlined procedures for livestock import companies, noting that the imports this year include 87,755 heads of goats, 120,565 heads of sheep, 6,550 heads of cattle and 2,500 camels.

31,923 Palestinians killed in Israeli offensive

U N H A I L S O M A N ’ S S U P P O R T T O P A L E S T I N E

NEW YORK: Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, met Alice Nderitu, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, at the headquarters of the Sultanate of Oman’s permanent mission to the United Nations in New York. The meeting touched on the situation in the Gaza Strip and the Israeli continued attacks on the Palestinian people which amount to violations of international humanitarian law, collective punishment, war crimes and genocide. Nderitu appreciated the stance adopted by the Sultanate of Oman which stems from the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in support of the inalienable rights of the



A Palestinian boy views the site of an Israeli strike on a residential building at Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza Strip on Wednesday. — Reuters

Palestinian people and their legitimate right to live in security and dignity on their land as well as their right to establish a Palestinian state on the basis of the two-state solution and the international resolutions and references in this regard. Meanwhile, the Gaza health ministry said in a statement on Wednesday that more than 31,923 Palestinians have been killed and 74,096 have been injured in Israel’s military offensive on Gaza since October 7. Some 104 Palestinians were killed and 162 injured in the previous 24 hours, the ministry added. A senior Lebanon-based Hamas official said that Israel’s response to the latest proposal from the Palestinian group for a six-week truce in Gaza was “generally negative”, as talks continued in Qatar. — Agencies

Biker on a Gulf tour with message of friendship

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If you happen to see a bike carrying Indian registration plate and flags of Oman and India swaying in the wind, rest assured, a man is on a mission to spread the message of friendship, camaraderie and bonding between peoples of different countries. Sharath Kumar Shiri, a passionate biker and a campaigner of ‘Say No to



Sharath Kumar in Oman.

Drugs’ back in Karnataka, is on a Gulf Tour spreading the message of friendship and has been touring Oman since Thursday on his way to Yemen and Saudi Arabia. During his long journey which began in Mangalore, India, on February 11 through Goa, Mumbai, the UAE, the Sultanate of Oman, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, he has been staying with friends or relatives who are scattered everywhere. “Only in places where I don’t

have friends or cousins, I stay in hotels. After living in Oman for more than two decades, I have earned friends for lifetime,” Sharath says. Since he could not secure a visa at the Pakistan border, he had to travel back to Mumbai from where he transported his bike to Dubai, and resumed his journey from there. He had secured a worldwide bike transportation licence from Mumbai prior to his journey.

TURN TO P2



IFTAR IN SUWGRA

This Ramadhan, Suwgra has emerged as an extraordinary tourist gem, drawing visitors seeking a distinctive Ramadhan experience. Suwgra’s allure extends beyond its culinary delights, inviting guests on an immersive journey through its rustic charm. Visitors can savour authentic Omani fare.

DETAILS ON P18



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ظفار الإسلامي
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Oman, Croatia vow to boost bilateral cooperation

ZAGREB: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met with Andrej Plenković, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia at the headquarters of the Presidency in the capital, Zagreb, on Wednesday.

The meeting comes as part of the foreign minister’s official visit to the friendly Republic of Croatia.

During the meeting, the two sides stressed their keenness to further fostering friendly relations and bilateral cooperation in various fields for the mutual benefits of the two countries and the two friendly peoples.

They exchanged views on a number of current regional and international issues, emphasising the importance of supporting all peaceful efforts and boosting the rule of international law in order to strengthen positive cooperation and mutual respect in a way that secures the foundations of security and peace for all peoples.



The meeting comes as part of the foreign minister’s official visit to the friendly Republic of Croatia. – ONA

The meeting was attended by Grlčić Radma, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, Yousef bin Ahmed al Jabri, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Croatia, and a number of officials from both sides.

Meanwhile, the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Croatia held a political talks session in the Croatian capital, Zagreb to discuss ways of fostering bilateral cooperation relations and trade exchange and the

promising sectors such as green economy, renewable energy, information technology, digital transformation, food security and tourism.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister led the Sultanate of Oman’s side while the Croatian side was led by Grlčić Radma, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs.

On the political aspect, the two sides exchanged views on the current regional and international developments, with special



focus on war in Ukraine and its repercussions as well as the Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip.

Sayyid Badr stressed the necessity of urgently reaching a permanent ceasefire, facilitating flow of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, and launching a political process to facilitate the two-state solution to achieve security and just and comprehensive peace in accordance with the rules of international law and the principle of justice for all.

The two sides signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in the field of political consultations.

After that, the two ministers held a press conference in which they emphasised the history of good bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Croatia which are based on trust, mutual respect and bilateral cooperation and partnership in various economic, cultural and scientific fields.

The two sides agreed to sign

more agreements, memorandum of understanding and cooperation programmes in various fields including education, culture, tourism, and renewable energy.

The two sides also discussed regional and international issues of common interest and agreed to continue their consultation and coordination within the framework of international organisations to address security, economic, climate and environmental challenges.

The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Croatia underscored the significance to end the war on the Gaza Strip, speed up delivery of humanitarian aid, and work hard to translate the existing international will and resolutions into a reality based on the two-state solution and the establishment of an autonomous Palestinian state to achieve just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

— ONA

Oman’s Ambassador presents credentials to President of Albania

TIRANA: President Bajram Begaj of the Republic of Albania on Wednesday received HH Sayyid Nizar bin al Julanda bin Majid al Said who presented his credentials as Oman’s non-resident ambassador to Albania. The reception took place in Albania’s capital city, Tirana.

The Ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his best wishes of good health and happiness to him. He also conveyed His Majesty’s wishes of continuous progress and prosperity to the government and people of Albania.

For his part, the Albanian President asked the Ambassador to convey his sincere greetings to His Majesty, wishing him continuous good health and wellbeing.



Ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. – ONA

Further, the Ambassador expressed the keenness of His Majesty the Sultan’s government to enhance bilateral relations and boost

cooperation in all fields in a manner that serves the common interests of the two countries.

— ONA

Biker spreads message of friendship

FROM PAGE 1

As an erstwhile Oman-resident, Sharath feels this journey is a tribute to his long sojourn in Muscat, and this is a token of gratitude to Oman-India relations and is amazed to see how the two countries complement each other.

“My short-term plans are to travel to Saudi Arabia next week from where I will head to Bahrain, then Kuwait, Qatar, and then Iran and Iraq before I visit the Wagah border enroute Karnataka,” he adds.

Sharath is planning a European journey soon where he is planning to visit EU countries and UK and the US which, according to him, is one of the biggest dreams of his life.

Sharath shared a message to the youth on travel. “My message



is that travel can teach plenty of lessons and it will transform oneself. When you travel with

friends, you walk more, but travelling alone one would gain wisdom as well.”

Editorial Announcement

Elevate Your Iftar Experience:

Eco-Friendly Vibes Merge Tradition with Sustainability for a Better World during the Holy month of Ramadan, Live Music, and Cultural Fusion Await in a Unique Blend of Tradition and Modern Atmosphere at Hilton Garden Inn Muscat, Together & Co. Restaurant!

Partnership with Oman Food Bank: The Hilton brand is proud to announce strategic partnership with the Oman Food Bank to further extend the impact of the initiative. Surplus food from Iftar events will be donated to the food bank, supporting efforts to address food insecurity and ensuring the benefits of this initiative extend beyond the immediate community.

Ozge Yilmaz, General Manager of Hilton Garden Inn Muscat Al Khuwair commented, “The Sustainable Ramadan Iftar initiative embodies our dedication to creating a Ramadan experience that is both meaningful and sustainable. Through local sourcing, plant-based promotion, waste reduction, plastic-free operations, and collaboration with the food bank, we hope to inspire positive change within our community and this initiative will set the standards for years to come by encouraging local food sourcing and reducing food waste.”

As the Sustainable Ramadan Iftar initiative unfolds, Hilton Garden Inn Muscat, Together & Co restaurant invites you to join in the celebration of a Ramadan that nourishes the soul, embraces sustainability, and fosters a sense of shared responsibility. Together & Co. Restaurant believes in the power of collective action to make a positive impact on the environment. Join us in this celebration of unity and sustainability.

For inquiries and reservations, please contact +968 9459 6202 or email us MCTAK-Sales@hilton.com

Hilton Garden Inn Muscat has a responsibility to lead the industry in the pursuit of sustainable solutions. We are delighted to embrace the holy month of Ramadan with the introduction of our sustainable Ramadan initiatives. Focused on promoting a harmonious blend of tradition and environmental responsibility, the initiative is designed to create a positive impact on the community through conscious choices and actions.

Key Highlights of our Sustainable Ramadan Initiative:

Local Food Sourcing: Emphasizing the importance of supporting local communities, the initiative prioritizes the sourcing of ingredients from local farmers and producers. By doing so, we aim to strengthen regional economies, reduce carbon footprint, and offer fresher ingredients for a healthier Iftar experience.

Promotion of Plant-Based Dishes: Recognizing the environmental and health benefits of a plant-based

diet, we encourage the inclusion of plant-based dishes in traditional Iftar menus. This initiative aligns with Hilton’s commitment to sustainability, contributing to lower greenhouse gas emissions and promoting a more compassionate approach to food consumption.

Wastage Reduction: In a concerted effort to minimize food wastage, we have implemented strict measures across its Iftar operations. By accurately estimating quantities, optimizing portion sizes, and collaborating with local charities, we aim to reduce food wastage significantly, ensuring that every meal served contributes to the wellbeing of the community.

Plastic Usage Restrictions: Taking a stand against single-use plastics, and we are implementing comprehensive measures to restrict plastic usage throughout the hotel operations. This commitment aligns with the organization’s sustainability goals, contributing to the reduction of pollution and fostering a cleaner environment.

Iftar kits big boon for workers

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As the holy month enters the second phase, the number of companies distributing iftar kits has increased.

Muscat, like many other cities, is witnessing a beeline of people, mostly bachelors and passersby, awaiting take-away Iftar kits to break their fast on time.

“We distribute 50 to 100 iftar kits every day, which is a regular practice during the holy month to show that we care for those who fast from morning till sunset,” says representatives of Unimoni Exchange, which offers iftar kits at its branches.

This year too, although there is a decline in mass iftars,



Take-away Iftar kits help people to break their fast on time

these kits are a great boon for labourers, individuals on the move and bachelors living and working in the city.

Mass Iftars and public gatherings are part of the holy month to cement social relations. Such gatherings also aim at bridging the gap between

the rich and the poor. “For me, it is not very realistic to reach my room for iftar in Ghala from Wadi Al Kabir where I work. I find iftar kits a great boon and gives me confidence about fasting the next day,” Nurul Islam, an expatriate labourer, told the *Observer*.



Traders at Mawaleh central market ready to relocate

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The wholesalers and retailers at Mawaleh Central Fruits and Vegetables Market are all set for relocation, probably by the second half of this year.

Speaking to *Observer*, the merchants at the market said, “While we have been operating in harmony since 1997, time has come to move to the new location to meet the growing footfall of customers and changing requirements such as more cold storage and air-conditioned halls for retailers and customers from various parts of the country.”

The annual Ramadhan Iftar attended by over 2,000 to 3,000 people reflects the harmony of workers of various nationalities employed under the same roof at the Mawaleh Market.

Hamed bin Saeed bin Salim al Hajri, manager of the market, said, “The current market has been growing every year with more facilities and we have products



The current market has been growing every year with more facilities and we have products from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Egypt, and not to forget the growing presence of Omani agricultural produce.”

HAMED AL HAJRI
manager of the market



No date has been set for relocation, but it will be happening this year as announced.



from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Egypt, and not to forget the growing presence of Omani agricultural produce.”

He added, “The market has been growing, and shifting to new places such as Khazaen Economic City will help it expand with better facilities. No date has been set for relocation, but it will be happening this year as announced.”

A few customers commented that moving the market to 50 km away from the current location will be a bit difficult for some customers, but it won't be a

problem for those residing in places like Bausher, Al Seeb, and Muscat Heights.

Abdulwahid, managing director, Suhool al Fayha, one of the leading wholesalers at the market, said, “The market opened in 1987 but closed soon after to reopen in 1997 and was operational full-fledged by 2000. Initially, 90 per cent of the products were imported via neighbouring countries, but today 90 percent of our products are directly imported from different countries with around 400 export-importers

operating at the market.”

“This market has nostalgic importance for all merchants and we won't operating here next year. Muscat Municipality played a big role in developing this market but keeping in mind the traffic congestion in the area, the decision was taken to relocate the market to around 60 km from the current home,” he added.

Suhool al Fayha itself is investing around RO 2 million in the new market area and around RO10 million in the economic city.

According to sources, the

new market will have facilities such as cold and dry stores, main wholesale halls, truck sales area, shaded areas for sorting and sale of onions and potatoes, agricultural inspection areas, office spaces for operating companies, forklifts servicing, electrical charging stations, vegetables, and fruit sorting yards, several gates for customs inspection for Vegetables and Fruit, laboratory for testing agricultural samples under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Hazy weather in Muscat, rain expected

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As spring season officially began, on Wednesday saw a hazy morning in Muscat as high and medium clouds continued to flow over most governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, with chances of local clouds forming over the Al Hajar Mountains later.

The weather forecaster at Oman Met Office said rains are expected over Al Hajar Mountains and nearby areas on Thursday. There is also chance of dust rising over deserts and open areas.

Low clouds or fog formation are expected over parts of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates and parts of Oman Sea coasts.

Along Oman Sea coasts, winds will be easterly to northeasterly light to moderate, while over rest



The weather forecaster at Oman Met Office said rains are expected over Al Hajar Mountains and nearby areas on Thursday

of the governorates winds will be easterly to southeasterly light to moderate and occasionally it will be moderate to fresh along the Arabian Sea coasts and over deserts and open areas.

The sea waves are expected to be light to moderate along the Oman Sea coasts with maximum wave height of 1.5 metres and slight rest of coasts with maximum wave height of 1.25 metres.

Horizontal visibility might reduce during rain, fog formation and dust rising.

Samayil and Sur recorded maximum temperature with 36 degrees Celsius. Minimum temperature was recorded in Jabal Shams with a high of 16 degrees Celsius and a low of 11 degrees Celsius. Salalah is experiencing a high of 28 degrees and a low of 25 degrees Celsius.

Talks begin for Schengen visa waiver

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 20

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiated talks with the European Union (EU) on Monday for a waiver on Schengen visas for citizens in the region.

Jasem Mohamed Al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the GCC, met with the special representative of the EU for the Gulf region, Luigi Di Maio, in the Belgian capital to discuss the matter, among other issues.

“During the meeting, they discussed the GCC-European bilateral relations, including issues related to the visa waiver process for GCC citizens in the Schengen area,” the statement said.

If the GCC region secures a waiver, Gulf citizens travelling to the Schengen states will no longer need to secure a visa before their



Once approved, GCC citizens traveling to the Schengen states will no longer need to secure a visa before their trip

trip.

“Our presence, as Gulf citizens, in Europe is positive in terms of education, tourism, medical treatment, purchases or trade exchange,”

Al Budaiwi earlier told the Saudi TV Channel.

“We are stable countries and export whatever is positive. We don't export anything negative,” he added.

ASMED hosts sessions to inspire entrepreneurs

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The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) organised Entrepreneurship Talk on Tuesday. It discussed an entrepreneur's journey, experiences and opportunities.

The sessions target officials, decision makers, owners of small and medium enterprises and start-up companies, and owners of student companies, in addition to those wishing to establish their own business projects, and those with inspiring stories and experiences that made them successful.

The sessions aim to enlighten business aspirants about success and failure, encourage them to continue and sustain their projects and initiatives, benefit from the previous experiences of successful entrepreneurs, shed light on the challenges they faced and ways to address them,



The sessions aim to enlighten business aspirants about success and failure, encourage them to continue and sustain their projects

and provide an open dialogue platform for exchanging ideas.

ASMED is keen to hold direct meetings with entrepreneurs in various governorates to

discuss the challenges facing entrepreneurs.

The first session, which was attended by Halima bint Rashid bin Sulaiman al Zariyah,

ASMED Chairperson, discussed pioneering experiences in coffee making and coffee cup production. Khalid al Abri, a founding partner of Coffee Fleet

Café, made a presentation on specialty coffee and his beginnings of the company along with his partners Khalil al Abri and Hatem al Muzaini. Khalid said ‘for any

project to succeed it is important one must create opportunities for others and delegating tasks and responsibilities’.

Khalil al Abri spoke about customer experiences and the importance of taking into account all tastes and ways of dealing with them. Hatem al Muzaini focused on the coffee roasting stage, which is the most important element in providing high-quality coffee.

Amal al Dakhri, owner of the Amal Cups Project, spoke about her experience making cups and exporting them to specialised cafes in Kuwait, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, the UK and USA.

The Authority is organising three sessions during the holy month of Ramadhan. The second session will host inspiring entrepreneurs from different generations in Al Aqr neighbourhood in the Wilayat of Nizwa in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate followed by another session in the Wilayat of Sur in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.



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A SOUND SLEEP IS ESSENTIAL FOR A PRODUCTIVE HOLY MONTH

IT IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE FASTING PERSON TO SLEEP FOR A PERIOD OF NO LESS THAN FOUR HOURS AT NIGHT AFTER IFTAR. RETURN TO SLEEP FOR A FEW HOURS AFTER SUHOOR BEFORE GOING TO WORK

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Getting enough sleep is important for maintaining our health and function well throughout the day. During the holy month, our normal sleep schedule can be disrupted by social gatherings and activities, which often last until late night. This can change our sleeping and eating habits and lead to insomnia. It can also disrupt our biological clocks and affect our overall health in many ways.

It is appropriate for the fasting person to sleep for a period of no less than four hours at night after Iftar. Return to sleep for a few hours after Suhoor before going to work.

The body needs the same number of hours of sleep on normal days, meaning an average of 8 hours a day. When you don't give your body the necessary hours of sleep, you accumulate "sleep debt," making you feel tired during the day. Short naps in the afternoon are essential. Sleep as early as possible at night.

The Ministry of Health explained through its social media account that the hours and quality of sleep at night are not comparable to the hours and quality of sleep during the day, due to the effect of the sleep hormone melatonin, which the body secretes more at night.

A sudden change in sleep schedules can lead to distraction, lack of concentration, forgetfulness, stress, and nervousness. Some

physical symptoms may appear, such as headache, loss of appetite and lethargy.

Scientific studies have proven that night sleep is much more important than day sleep, and the reason is due to the biological clock of the human body, which activates many glands in the body only during the night.

Melatonin is responsible for vitality and strengthening immunity. During the day, the body does not secrete this hormone, which explains the fatigue and lethargy we feel when we sleep during the day.

During the month of Ramadhan, we must focus on the importance of improving sleep quality and getting enough rest during the night. Studies have shown that sleep also affects our levels of satiety and hunger, and partial sleep

deprivation is linked to changes in the appetite-regulating hormones (leptin and ghrelin), which may make fasting more difficult. Some studies have also concluded that without getting consistent sleep, the immune response is negatively affected, making people more susceptible to infections in general, in addition to taking longer to recover from them.

There are three important factors behind sleep quality: setting a fixed schedule, getting a sufficient period of uninterrupted sleep, and adopting habits that help healthy sleep such as turning off digital screens.

People who rush to drink tea and coffee at Iftar may find it difficult to sleep during the night as it takes 4 to 6 hours for the body to come out from the impact of stimulants.



The flash flood triggered by heavy rain washed away some of the debris which caused falaj to appear on the surface

New canal found in Ibri after rain

IBRI: A water canal was found in the Wilayat of Ibri after the end of heavy rains due to low pressure condition which hit the Governorate of Al Dhahirah recently.

Hilal bin Amer al Qasmi, a researcher author of a book on the engineering structure of the Omani aflaj across ages, said that the flash flood triggered by heavy rain washed away some of the

debris which caused a water canal to appear on the surface.

It is built of stone and clay and coated with sarooj (a water resistant mortar substance) and stones for protection, he said.

He added that this flaj starts from al Ghabi area near the northern side where the source of Al Mafjour is located. He said that the channel is an individual falaj, the source of which is assumed to

be 15 metres in length.

Another researcher Ahmed al Nasser said that the width of this water channel is 90 centimetres and the length is approximately 115 metres with a diameter of 67 centimetres.

There is a vent at the top for cleaning and maintenance of the channel.

The area located in Wadi Al Kabir in the Wilayat of Ibri

used to get water for irrigation purposes from three aflajs which are Al Mabouth, Al Mafjour and this one.

The area adjacent to the wadi is currently a residential area known as Kawas. Other citizens of the area said that this falaj was known as Al Radidah falaj and was used for irrigation purpose of Al Mulainah area.

— ONA

Fitness campaign evokes sound response

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A fitness campaign is gaining good response from Omanis and expatriates. This comes in the wake of the recent finding that more than half of the Omani population are now overweight or obese with 30 per cent of the population having a BMI of more than 30.

Obesity among school children is on the rise too. These figures showed a rise in the prevalence of obesity in Oman since the last Ministry of Health survey in 2008, especially amongst women.

The 40-day Fitness Challenge Season 2 initiated by KIMS Health Muscat Hospital is designed in such a way to underscore the significance of maintaining fitness and raise awareness among



The 2-months-challenge that also endeavours to inspire young individuals to adopt healthier lifestyle choices also has motivational health talk sessions

the general public regarding the health risks associated with obesity.

“We have been receiving an overwhelming response from the fitness-conscious people ever since the registration opened on March 10. We anticipate the participation of over 100

individuals from diverse backgrounds and nationalities while companies are also encouraged to participate with a maximum of ten participants per group,” Suneinah Joseph, Certified Sound Meditation Therapist, said.

The event will officially commence on April 15, and

conclude on May 25. Medical checkups will be conducted to ensure participants meet the eligibility criteria.

Participants may register individually or under corporate affiliations, with the age group ranging from 22 to 45 years.

The winners will be selected based on the maximum weight reduction, determined by BMI loss and there will be three winners in the individual category.

While the first prize winner will be awarded RO 500 in cash, the second prize winner will receive 12-day ayurvedic treatment at Saham Ayurvedic Hospital in Saham. RO 100 will be awarded to the third prize winner.

In the group category, the team with the maximum weight reduction will be honoured with a memento.

Students launch campaign to promote tourism in Sur

STAFF REPORTER
SUR, MARCH 20

Public relations students at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences Sur launched an awareness campaign named ‘Legacy’ (Erth) which aims to promote tourism potential of Sur combined with spreading awareness on tourism led employment opportunities and sustainable tourism practices.

Assistant Vice-Chancellor of the UTAS Sur, Dr Rashid al Matani, revealed the campaign logo marking the official launch of the campaign activities. The launch was attended by Sultan al Sarai, Deputy of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Deputy of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Electronic Systems and Student Services; Dr Ahmed al Barashdi, Deputy of the Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs; Dr Tahir al



UTAS Sur Students at the launch of Legacy campaign

Najadi, Deputy of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies, Scientific Research, and Innovation; and Yaqub al Farsi, Director of Career Guidance Centre of UTAS Sur attended the programme along with students and teachers.

This campaign aims to enhance tourism prospects in Sur and nearby areas, in line with the National Tourism Strategy. The primary objectives include increasing the publicity of tourist attractions in Sur and neighbouring areas, along with

raising awareness about small business and employment opportunities linked to tourism promotion and educating Sur community about sustainable tourism practices.

While inaugurating the launch of the campaign Dr Al Matani, said, “I would like to express deep gratitude to your invitation to attend the campaign launch. It should be noted that all previous public relations campaigns organised were fantastic and inspiring, and showed creativity and attention to detail and implementation. Your choice for this topic reflects your commitment and interest to strengthen the tourism sector in this region, which is very relevant and timely.”

The Legacy campaign aims to target diverse segments of the audience, including local and international tourists who want to explore the beauty and history of the city of Sur.

International nutrition congress to be held in Muscat

MUSCAT: Following the success of the first and second editions in the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, this year the Middle Eastern Alliance for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition Congress (MEAPEN 2024) is set to be hosted on May 3 and 4 in Muscat. This conference marks the first international event on parenteral and enteral nutrition in the Sultanate of Oman, aiming to provide a platform for exchanging expertise among physicians, clinical nutrition specialists, nurses, clinical pharmacists, and nutrition experts.

Parenteral nutrition is employed when a patient is unable to receive nutrition or fluids orally, typically due to weakened digestive capabilities, especially in cases of refractory diseases or those requiring prolonged treatment, such as major surgeries, chronic illnesses, as well as comatose patients. Parenteral nutrition involves delivering essential nutrients directly into the bloodstream through a vein, bypassing the digestive system using a feeding tube. It provides liquid nutrients containing carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and additives.

The first edition in 2022 was held in the United Arab Emirates, MEAPEN highlighted the crucial role of parenteral and enteral nutrition (PEN) in inpatient care and emphasised the importance of clinical nutrition practices among specialised healthcare providers, physicians, pharmacists, clinical dietitians, and nurses. The second edition was held in Jordan last year, discussing topics such as the significance of parenteral and enteral nutrition in hospitals, outpatient clinics, and home care settings to enhance clinical nutrition practices within healthcare institutions and community services.

MEAPEN 2024 will feature various subjects and workshops that tackle fruitful topics related to the field of nutrition during its two-day duration. These topics encompass various medical conditions and specialities, including an

This conference marks the first international event on parenteral and enteral nutrition in Oman, aiming to provide a platform for exchanging expertise among physicians, clinical nutrition specialists, nurses, clinical pharmacists, and nutrition experts

emphasis on intravenous and enteral nutrition. Furthermore, discussions will delve into enhancing nutritional practices in both pre- and post-surgical procedures. Additionally, the conference will explore optimal approaches for addressing obesity, highlighting the role of browning adipose tissue in combating obesity. This involves the transformation of white fat cells into brown cells, which burn more calories to generate increased heat production.

Dr Wafaa Ayes, chairperson of MEAPEN Congress 2024, said, “The conference stands as a beacon of excellence, facilitating the convergence of luminaries in clinical nutrition from across the globe and the region, fostering a rich exchange of experiences and insights within the realms of parenteral and enteral nutrition.”

Dr Ayes further expounds, “The meticulously curated agenda of the conference is poised to showcase the latest breakthroughs and best practices in the realm of nutrition. This invaluable platform is crafted to empower medical and paramedical professionals, including esteemed physicians specialising in adult and paediatric care, clinical pharmacists, nurses, clinical dietitians, and nutritionists, equipping them with the tools to seamlessly integrate cutting-edge insights into their respective treatment modalities.”

Over 400 participants, including healthcare professionals, are expected to attend the congress, where they will witness more than 60 expert speakers in 16 scientific sessions.



OMAN CRICKET CLUB (OCC)

Invitation to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Club for the year 2024

The Board of Management of the Oman Cricket Club (OCC) will be holding its Annual General Meeting of the club for the year 2024. The meeting will be held on Tuesday, 23rd April, 2024 commencing at 6.00 pm at the Oman Cricket Academy. All Members wishing to attend this meeting and whose membership may have expired are requested to proceed with renewal of the membership with effect from the date of this announcement. The last date for renewal of membership is Monday, 15th April, 2024 before 5.00 pm.

As per Article No.29 of the Statute of the Sports Clubs No 124/2008, the meeting will be considered valid in the presence of an absolute majority of members of the club who are entitled to attend (half + one). If the required number of members are unavailable at 6.30 pm., the meeting could be postponed to another date within 15 days from the date of the first meeting, or be held on the same day at 7.00 pm.

The second meeting held on the same day will be considered valid in the presence of (quarter) of working members. Agenda will be available at OCC office before 7 days of the scheduled meeting.

**Secretary of the Club
Chairman of the Board of Directors**



Occupation forces raid Gaza hospital killing 90

GAZA: Israel's military said on Wednesday it had killed around 90 people and arrested 160 in a raid on Gaza's Al Shifa hospital, an allegation the Palestinian group denied.

Al Shifa, the Gaza Strip's biggest hospital before the war, is now one of the few healthcare facilities even partially operational in the north of the territory, and had also been housing displaced civilians.

"Over the past day, the troops have eliminated fighters and located weapons in the hospital area, while preventing harm to civilians, patients, medical teams, and medical equipment," the military said in a statement.

It also published the names and photographs of two Israeli soldiers killed in the operation.

Israel's raid at the hospital began in the early hours of Monday. The military, which published videos of weapons stashes inside the facility, said it had sent in special forces supported by infantry and tanks, based on intelligence that the hospital was again being used by gunmen.

Ismail Al-Thawabta, director of Gaza's government media office, said all of those killed had been wounded patients and displaced persons inside the hospital.

"The Israeli occupation army practices lying and deception in spreading its narrative as part of justifying its continuous and law-breaking crimes, which violate international law, international humanitarian law," he said.

Israel faced fierce criticism last November when troops first raided Al Shifa hospital. The troops uncovered tunnels there,

Al Shifa is now one of the few healthcare facilities even partially operational in the north of the territory, and had also been housing displaced civilians

which they said had been used as command and control centres by Palestinian groups. Hamas and medical staff deny that the hospital is used for military purposes or to shelter fighters.

"What happens in Al Shifa Hospital is a war crime and is part of the war of genocide conducted by the Israeli occupation," said senior Hamas official Basem Naim, who has previously served as a health minister.

In the Jabalia refugee camp, hungry Gazans hold out pots to receive soup during the holy month of Ramadhan.

Residents of the besieged strip are lucky to find a few scraps of food, or sips of water, after more than five months of Israeli bombardment in its war.

The United Nations human rights chief on Tuesday said Israel's restrictions on humanitarian aid for Gaza may amount to a starvation tactic that could be a war crime, after a UN-backed report found famine is likely by May without an end to the fighting.

Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed more than 30,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, and reduced much of the enclave to rubble.

— Reuters



Smoke plumes billow after Israeli bombardment over Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

Blinken begins new Middle East trip

CAIRO: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken embarked on a Middle East mission on Wednesday as strain showed in the relationship between President Joe Biden's administration and the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In Gaza, where hopes were dashed for a ceasefire in the nearly six-month-old war in time for Ramadhan last week, residents of Gaza City in the north described the most intense fighting for months around the Al Shifa hospital.

Blinken was due in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday and Cairo on Thursday to talk to regional leaders about efforts to secure a truce.

Unusually, no stop in Israel was announced at the outset of his trip, and Israel's foreign ministry said on Tuesday it had not been notified to prepare for one.

A US State Department official did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether a stop in Israel might be added to the itinerary later. Blinken has visited Israel on each of his five previous visits to the region since the war began.

Recent days have seen an intensification of fighting in northern parts of Gaza captured by Israeli forces early in the war, including Al Shifa, once Gaza's biggest hospital, now one of the few even partially functioning in the north.



People inspect the rubble and debris of a building that collapsed following an Israeli air strike in Rafah. — AFP

Blinken was due in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday and Cairo on Thursday to talk to regional leaders about efforts to secure a truce

The Israeli prime minister on Tuesday rebuffed a plea from Biden to call off plans for a ground assault of Rafah, the city on the southern edge of Gaza sheltering more than half the enclave's 2.3 million people.

Netanyahu told lawmakers he had made it "supremely clear" to Biden in a phone call "that we are determined to complete the elimination of these battalions in Rafah, and there's no way to do that except by going in on the ground".

Israel says Rafah is the last major holdout of armed fighters from Palestinians. Washington says a ground assault there would be a "mistake" and cause too much harm to civilians.

More than a million Gazans, ordered into Rafah earlier in the war by advancing Israeli

forces, have nowhere further to flee. Israel says it has a plan to evacuate them.

Long-running ceasefire talks have resumed this week in Qatar after Israel rejected a counter-proposal last week. Both sides have discussed a truce of around six weeks during which Palestinian groups would release around 40 Israeli captives in return for hundreds of Palestinian detainees. But despite months of talks mediated by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, they still differ on what would follow any truce. — AFP

Saudi Arabia boosts funding to UNRWA targeting Gaza relief

RIYADH: A Saudi-funded humanitarian agency pledged on Wednesday to boost the kingdom's funding to the UN Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) by \$40 million, according to a statement.

The donation by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief), which is dedicated to Gaza, comes as UNRWA faces a severe funding crunch after the United States and Britain paused support following Israel's accusations that a dozen of its 13,000 staff in Gaza took part in the October 7 attack on the country.

UNRWA manages shelters, and provides food and healthcare for nearly 2 million people in Gaza, according to its website.

A UN-backed report warned on Monday that northern Gaza

faced imminent famine and as global pressure mounts on Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into the enclave of 2.3 million people. Canada, Australia, and Sweden have recently restored funding to UNRWA, while several Gulf countries, in addition to Saudi Arabia have increased funding.

But that still may not be enough. "The US is our largest, largest donor so no amount of compensation by other donors, as generous as they are, can actually fill the gap that is left by the US," said Tamara al-Rifai, an UNRWA spokesperson.

Saudi Arabia previously announced a \$2 million contribution to UNRWA in October, while KSrelief provided \$15 million to the agency in November. — Reuters



Palestinians walk past the ruins of houses destroyed during Israel's military offensive, in Gaza. — Reuters



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In brief

■ MOSCOW



RESCUERS SCRAMBLE TO SAVE 13 TRAPPED UNDER GOLD MINE

Russian rescuers were scrambling to save 13 workers trapped inside a giant gold mine near the Chinese border for a second day on Wednesday, as officials warned of a “difficult situation”.

Russia has said the miners have been stuck since Monday after a rockslide covered them in rubble at the Pioneer mine in the Far Eastern Amur region. “The situation remains difficult,” regional governor Vasily Orlov said on social media after visiting the scene. He has introduced a regional state of emergency.

Authorities have said that they are some 125 metres underground. — AFP

■ JUBA



SOUTH SUDAN GUNMEN KILL 15 PEOPLE IN A DEADLY AMBUSH

Fifteen people, including a regional commissioner, died when their convoy was ambushed in South Sudan’s eastern Pibor region near the Ethiopian frontier, a senior official said on Wednesday.

Suspected armed youths belonging to the Anyuak ethnic group from Pochalla county ambushed the convoy on Tuesday morning, said Abraham Kelang, information minister of the Greater Pibor Administrative Area.

The convoy had only travelled 10 kilometres when it encountered gunfire “which led to the killing of the commissioner plus 14 others”, Kelang said. — AFP

■ DUBLIN



IRISH PM LEO VARADKAR ANNOUNCES SHOCK RESIGNATION

Leo Varadkar on Wednesday announced that he was stepping down as Ireland’s prime minister and leader of the Fine Gael party in the governing coalition, citing “personal and political” reasons.

Deputy Prime Minister Micheal Martin, leader of the Fianna Fail coalition partner, said the announcement was “unexpected.”

An emotional Varadkar, 45, said he felt he was no longer the “best person” to lead the country.

“I believe this government can be re-elected,” Varadkar said in a statement read on the steps of Government Buildings in the Irish capital. — AFP

EU agrees new caps on Ukraine farm imports

BRUSSELS: EU member states and lawmakers on Wednesday reached a deal to cap duty-free imports of a range of Ukrainian farm goods, which were allowed in the wake of Russia’s attack but have drawn fierce protests from farmers in the bloc.

The agreement renews for one year a broad tariff exemption first granted in 2022, but adds “safeguards” for a list of products including maize, oats, eggs, poultry, sugar and honey to stop cheaper imports from flooding the market.

The 27-nation bloc initially dropped tariffs on Ukrainian imports in a bid to help keep Ukraine’s economy afloat after the country was attacked by its neighbour.

Two years into the conflict, EU farmers complain they are being undercut by less expensive imports from Ukrainian producers not bound by the bloc’s stricter rules — for example, on animal welfare — with the issue fuelling angry protests across the bloc.

In response to those concerns, the regulation “provides for an emergency brake for poultry, eggs and sugar” as well as “oats, maize, groats (grain kernels) and honey”, the European Parliament said in a statement.

The “brake” would be used to stop duty-free imports rising beyond the average volumes of 2022 and 2023.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal, in Brussels for talks with EU leaders, called the overnight deal a “very good decision”.

European Parliament rapporteur Sandra Kalniete said the accord “reinforces the EU’s continued commitment to stand by Ukraine” in the face of the Russian attack.



Polish farmers use tractors as they protest against the import of agricultural products from Ukraine, at the Polish-German border, Germany. — Reuters

The 27-nation bloc initially dropped tariffs on Ukrainian imports in a bid to help keep Ukraine’s economy afloat after the country was attacked by its neighbour

She said it also “bolstered safeguard measures that would alleviate the pressure on EU farmers should they be overwhelmed by a sudden surge in Ukrainian imports”.

Wheat and barley will not be subject to import safeguards, a decision that triggered an angry response from farmer groups that said this was a key demand.

Polish farmers have been

blocking checkpoints with Ukraine in anger at imports from their war-torn neighbour, and this week expanded their protests to the western border with Germany.

Member states had signed off last month on an initial European Commission plan for narrower safeguards, but the EU parliament subsequently called for cereals and honey to be included, prompting a new round of negotiations.

The European Parliament statement said lawmakers “attained firm commitments from the (European) Commission to take action if there is a surge of Ukrainian imports of wheat”.

The agreement has yet to be formally adopted by EU member states, and by EU lawmakers meeting in late April, with a view to having it come into force on June 6. — AFP

Vietnamese president resigns amid major graft purge

HANOI: Vietnam’s President Vo Van Thuong has resigned after just one year in the job, the ruling Communist Party announced on Wednesday, as the country mounts a sweeping anti-graft purge.

The party said Thuong was guilty of “violations and shortcomings” and his resignation was accepted by the central committee.

The 53-year-old’s dramatic fall comes as Vietnam undergoes major political upheaval, with his predecessor forced out in an anti-corruption drive that has seen several ministers fired and top business leaders tried for fraud and corruption.

A statement on the party’s website said Thuong had violated unspecified “regulations” and failed to set a proper example as head of state.

“Comrade Vo Van Thuong’s violations and shortcomings have caused bad public opinion, affecting the reputation of the Party, State and himself personally,” said the statement, initially reported by the state Vietnam News Agency.

“Fully aware of his responsibility to the Party, State and People, he submitted his resignation from his assigned positions.”



President Vo Van Thuong looks on during a meeting at the Presidential Palace in Hanoi. — AFP file photo

The National Assembly will hold an extraordinary session on Thursday to confirm the resignation.

Thuong became president on March 2 last year after president Nguyen Xuan Phuc resigned in a sudden move unusual for Vietnam, where political changes have long been carefully orchestrated, with an emphasis on stability.

Before Phuc, only one other Communist Party president had ever stepped down, and that was for health reasons.

When he took office, Thuong said he was “determined to fight corruption”, and he was believed to be close to party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong -- who is seen as the most powerful figure in the country.

Detailed reasons for Thuong’s

Comrade Vo Van Thuong’s violations and shortcomings have caused bad public opinion, affecting the reputation of the Party, State and himself personally

departure have not been made public. But the Ministry of Public Security this month announced it was expanding a probe into an infrastructure development company in three provinces, including central Quang Ngai, where Thuong was formerly the party chief.

The ministry said the Phuc Son company was suspected of falsifying financial statements in order to dodge taxes, and its investigators arrested nine people including five officials from Quang Ngai.

But analyst Benoit de Treglode of the Institute of Strategic Research in Paris said machinations within the Communist Party were likely behind the move.

“This departure is part of clan rivalries within the party before a renewal of the elites, given that Trong’s health is deteriorating,” he said. — AFP

UK police asked to probe attempted breach of Kate medical notes

LONDON: Police have been asked to look at claims that at least one worker attempted to access the confidential medical records of Catherine, Princess of Wales during her hospitalisation for abdominal surgery, a minister said on Wednesday.

The request follows a report in the Daily Mirror newspaper which said at least one attempt was made to access the private information at The London Clinic, a private hospital in central London.

Catherine, who is widely known as Kate and whose husband is heir to the throne Prince William, spent two weeks there in January.

Details of her condition have not been released but her Kensington Palace office previously said it was not cancer-related and that the princess wished her personal medical information to remain private.

Health minister Maria Caulfield said the rules on accessing patient information were “very, very clear”.

“Unless you’re looking after that patient, or unless they’ve given you their consent, you should not be looking at patients’ notes,” she told LBC radio. “My understanding is that police have been asked to look at it,” she said. A statement from London’s Metropolitan Police said it was “not aware of any referral... at this time”.



Britain’s Catherine, Princess of Wales

The UK’s data protection watchdog meanwhile said it would examine the matter.

“We can confirm that we have received a breach report and are assessing the information provided,” a spokesperson for the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) said late on Tuesday.

In a statement to the Mirror, The London Clinic said: “We firmly believe that all our patients, no matter their status, deserve total privacy and confidentiality regarding their medical information.”

Kate was at the centre of controversy last week after she admitted editing an official portrait of her and her three children that was released by Buckingham Palace on Mothering Sunday.

— AFP

Ramadhan is time to reflect on environment



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Ramadhan not only marks a period of spiritual introspection but also presents an opportunity to reflect on our environmental footprint, particularly in the realm of waste generation. In Oman, the environmental narrative is increasingly dominated by concerns over waste management. Statistics reveal a compelling challenge, with the country generating approximately 1.5 million tonnes of solid waste annually, a figure that underscores the urgent need for sustainable waste practices.

The month of Ramadhan, with its emphasis on purity, self-restraint, and mindfulness, offers a unique lens through which to view our environmental responsibilities. The practice of fasting, abstaining from food and water from dawn till dusk, is inherently a lesson in moderation and conservation. These principles, deeply ingrained in Islamic teachings, can significantly inform our approach to waste management, urging us to reconsider our consumption habits.

This sacred time encourages us to embody the values of simplicity and sustainability, reminding us of the Hadith that teaches us not to be wasteful,

even if we are beside a flowing river. The wisdom in these words is starkly relevant today, as we grapple with the consequences of over consumption and environmental degradation. In Oman, where the beauty of our natural landscapes is a testament to the earth's generosity, the challenge of waste is not just an environmental issue but a moral one, calling us to action in line with our stewardship of the planet.

The lessons of Ramadhan prompt us to look beyond the month itself and adopt practices that contribute to a more sustainable and waste-conscious lifestyle. Reducing food waste, one of the significant challenges during Ramadhan, can start with simple measures like preparing meals thoughtfully and sharing surplus food with those in need.

Moreover, the ethos of Ramadhan inspires us to engage in broader environmental initiatives, advocating for systemic change that addresses the root causes of waste proliferation. Supporting policies that promote recycling, waste reduction, and sustainable consumption are critical steps towards mitigating Oman's waste challenge. Community clean-up campaigns, recycling drives, and educational programmes can harness the collective energy

BY ADOPTING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES AND ADVOCATING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES, WE CONTRIBUTE TO A HEALTHIER PLANET AND A MORE FULFILLING SPIRITUAL LIFE.

of Ramadan to foster a culture of environmental stewardship. In embracing the values of Ramadhan, we are called to embark on a journey of self-improvement that extends beyond the confines of the month. The challenge of waste management in Oman, mirrored in the global struggle against environmental degradation, requires a sustained and collective effort.

Let this month be a catalyst for change, inspiring us to adopt a lifestyle that respects and protects the natural world. By doing so, we not only adhere to the teachings of Islam but also take meaningful steps towards addressing one of the most pressing environmental challenges facing our nation.

This Ramadhan, let our fasts be a reminder of our responsibility towards the planet. Let us commit to reducing waste, conserving resources, and protecting the environment.

In the harmony of our spiritual practice and environmental consciousness, we find the true essence of Ramadhan—a time for renewal, reflection, and profound change. Together, we can embark on a journey towards sustainability, leaving a legacy of care and respect for our beautiful Oman and the world beyond.

Girls cling to glitchy, lonesome online learning

AYSHA SAFI AND SUSANNAH WALDEN

Sequestered at home in a remote Afghan town, 18-year-old Shekiba often roams the house hunting for the patchy internet signal that is her last link to an education. Shekiba has turned to online learning since the Taliban returned to power in 2021 and shut her out of classrooms, signing up for live economics lectures she squints at on a pocket-sized phone screen.

She hopes to save for a laptop but is forced to buy expensive mobile data packages that still don't guarantee a signal in the town of Ishkashim perched high in mountainous Badakhshan province.

Boys and men returned to classes with the start of the Afghan new year, but girls and women will be left behind again by a Taliban government education blockade that is part of a raft of restrictions the United Nations has labelled "gender apartheid".

While online alternatives have sprung up, a dearth of computers and internet, as well as the isolation of learning via screen, makes them a poor substitute for in-person learning, students and teachers say.

Many of those alternatives also cannot provide diplomas, which offer a promise that qualifications will be acknowledged.

It's unclear exactly how many girls and women are involved in online learning, but two higher education platforms report Afghans registering or applying in the tens of thousands since the Taliban takeover.

Begum Academy, an online platform with some 8,500 free videos in Dari and Pashto covering the Afghan secondary school curriculum, launched in December 2023 and quickly had more than 3,000 users.

Director Hamida Aman said parents are grateful but it's hard for girls to stay driven.

"It's difficult to get motivated when everything is closed to you and there's no perspective of future," she said from France, where she is based.

"These girls cannot have certificates, or they cannot have the ambition to go to the university or to have any job later."

Education for girls and women was a key aim of the US-backed government but gains were largely limited to cities, with only 23 per cent of girls aged 13 to 18 in school nationwide, according to the International Crisis Group.

The think tank said that figure dropped to 13 per cent after the Taliban government issued its edicts barring female education in 2022. — AFP



Karim Easterbrook

The author is former
School Principal
Cambridge UK

Colon cancer: Know it early and save a life

Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer worldwide, accounting for approximately 10 per cent of all cancer cases and is the second leading cause of death from all cancers. This is tragic because it shouldn't be and doesn't have to be.

I don't wish to risk boring you with a repeat admonishment about the dangers of ignoring even the smallest symptom of colon cancer, however I will risk this because even if my experience helps to save the life of just one of you reading this article it is a worthwhile risk. I am quite confident that most of you who take the trouble to read my article will ignore my advice. This is of course your privilege and besides most of you won't, God willing, ever be given a diagnosis of colon cancer (also known as colorectal cancer.)

You have busy lives. The car needs repairing, there's that shopping for the weekend and you mustn't forget to take your cat to the vet's. You really don't have 30 minutes' spare time to visit the doctor to check out why you're feeling breathless, more fatigued climbing the stairs these days and finding out why your stools have specks of blood in them or why you have discomfort in the area of your stomach. And you certainly don't have 40 minutes' spare time to have a colonoscopy. You eat healthy food, you exercise and you're young (or youngish.)

I am not a qualified physician and my experiences are just that, mine. But having watched a fair number of colon cancer survivors on YouTube telling their own stories I discovered that we have a lot in common. When you are given a diagnosis of cancer all those things which seemed so important suddenly become as nothing. Getting the car repaired? Who needs a car? And as for shopping, that can wait and the fridge is full of food already. Sorry but the cat's upset stomach is no longer an emergency. Because when you first receive the diagnosis of the big "C" the world, that world when all those other things seemed so important, stops spinning. If nothing else that diagnosis makes you understand what really matters.

It is true that eating healthily, keeping reasonably fit and not



The reason why colon cancer and other cancers are often deadly is because doctors are often presented with them at an advanced stage when of course they are more difficult to cure.

THE MEDICAL ADVICE USED TO BE THAT YOU SHOULD GET YOURSELF SCREENED FOR COLON CANCER AFTER THE AGE OF 55 THAT ADVICE NOW SUGGESTS 45

becoming obese reduces your chances of getting colon cancer. But unfortunately it doesn't eliminate the chances. Colon cancer, having wreaked emotional havoc and death on the elderly above the age of 55 for many years, has decided to turn its attention to the young. There are many reasons for this and clinical studies are ongoing to try to find out those reasons. But whereas the medical advice used to be that you should get yourself screened for colon cancer after the age of 55 that advice now suggests 45.

Whilst recovering from my Colon Cancer surgery I was informed by a member of the colorectal cancer surgical team headed by Dr Aamed al Aرامي that a boy of 27 was being treated for colon cancer in the Royal Hospital. Many thousands if not hundreds of thousands of young people under the age of 45 are now being diagnosed with colon cancer. And many of these are having their lives cut short by this disease. But of course most cancers including Colon

Cancer can be cured and are cured if caught early.

The reason why colon cancer and other cancers are often deadly is because doctors are often presented with them at an advanced stage when of course they are more difficult to cure. Colon cancer is usually discovered by chance. By this I mean that, as in my own case, a patient visits the doctor for some symptom which appears to have no connection to cancer. In my case it was fatigue and breathlessness. Cancer was the last thing on my mind. It was only due to the expert advice given by my excellent Omani doctor that I agreed to have that colonoscopy which saved my life. I've now had the surgery and it would appear that my cancer was caught early enough to allow the colorectal surgery team to remove all the cancer. Thank God it hadn't spread to distant organs (metastatic cancer.)

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for all the nurses and doctors in the Royal Hospital where I was treated as an Omani resident for their expertise, professionalism, kindness and care. I genuinely don't believe I could have received better treatment anywhere else in the world. Oman's health care service originally built on the foresight of that remarkable leader the late Sultan Qaboos is in my experience now reaching new levels of excellence under Oman's current leader, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. As a British resident married to an Omani wife I feel privileged to have been given such world-class treatment in my hour of need.

The blurred boundaries of media practice

Different minds and perspectives can only enhance or destroy our understanding of the changes taking place in the world, the media, and especially journalism. Diversity is more than just the technical aspects of reporting or creating social media content; it goes far deeper. It requires knowledge and awareness of past and current issues.

Most events are not isolated. They fit within a chain of decisions and social, political and economic interests, and they differ from country to country. To reflect such complexity, media professionals need much more than basic skills.

The lack of story ideas is a sign that reading is not a habit, and the failure to use multiple sources or even the same writing styles illustrates the comfort zone of media practice. Let us not forget that there are those who establish the news agenda, so even if one is creative, he ends up wrapped within the boundaries. Reasons for accepting being curtailed can vary.

Real people, real heroes and real stories are absent from our news feed. The media in general, and journalism in particular, is becoming increasingly disconnected from regular people.

The elite has an agenda, while ordinary people have a reality. That is, probably, one of the reasons we see a growing number of people posting on social media about news and events: the citizen journalists. Ok, it is not an 'official source', but if it offers the information ordinary people require, so be it. Unfortunately, the lines between journalism, public relations, marketing, advertising and entertainment are being blurred. It is almost impossible to ignore the influence of the many media players, particularly during natural disasters and periods of emergencies. Everyone with a mobile phone is a potential publisher. It is important, though, not only to understand the role of citizen journalism, but also its purpose and the problems associated with it. Some professionals have become social media journalists or specialists, while many adventurers who



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The writer is journalist, academic, researcher in media studies

have not been trained are becoming media experts. Thousands of bloggers, Twitter (X) accounts, Snapchatters, and TikTokers are broadcasting the events in their neighbourhood or about topics the media organisations ignore.

It will not be long before the audience, or readers, will just consume information via social media. Attention-grabbing media content will dominate the information landscape, where bias is amplified and context gets lost. Audiences are already choosing what they read and what facts they want to believe. We see an increase in the number of private, closed online communities and content channels. Tailored information within premium subscriptions is already a reality. The formation of diverse groups of interrelated interests and audience fragmentation are widespread. Meanwhile, the media, particularly journalism, is losing public trust and integrity, as well as a significant lack of transparency.

Yes, journalism is going through major changes. For decades, this industry has been going through crises, and we don't know what the future holds. But most recently, it has faced challenges from a swamp of social media platforms that fuel polarisation and spread mis- and disinformation, including viral levels of hatred. The amount of junk news that people consume is astonishing, if not frightening, in terms of where we are heading. Still, journalism should have its place in society. It should not be about who talks in the news and who is talked about because, within this formula, we see a narrative for stratifying society. In the interest of better journalism, we should think about the purpose of news, not public opinion build-up.

Handling words, images, and sometimes sounds to make a message meaningful is complex, but journalism is much more than putting phrases together. There are infinite possibilities to make journalism and the media truly relevant. This crossroads between ethics, reporting styles, and understandings also points to challenges for journalism and media education.

THE MEDIA IN GENERAL, AND JOURNALISM IN PARTICULAR, IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY DISCONNECTED FROM REGULAR PEOPLE

FESTIVAL OF COLOURS!



■ Revellers daubed in colours take part in Lathmar Holi celebrations, the spring festival of colours, at Nandgaon in India's Uttar Pradesh state on Wednesday. – AFP

A big defeat for big tech

Last year, US President Joe Biden's administration infuriated lobbyists representing Big Tech firms and others that profit from our personal data by denouncing a proposal that would have gutted domestic data privacy, online civil rights and liberties, and competition safeguards. Now, Biden's new executive order on Americans' data security reveals that the lobbyists had good reason to worry.

After decades of data brokers and tech platforms exploiting Americans' personal data without any oversight or restrictions, the Biden administration has announced that it will ban the transfer of certain kinds of data to China and other countries of concern. It is a small, but important, step towards protecting Americans' sensitive personal information, in addition to government-related data.

Moreover, the order is likely a precursor to additional policy responses. Americans are rightly worried about what is happening online, and their concerns extend well beyond privacy violations to a host of other digital harms, such as mis- and disinformation, social media-induced teenage anxiety, and racial incitement.

The firms that make money from our data (including personal medical, financial, and geolocation information) have spent years trying to equate "free flows of data" with free speech. They will try to frame any Biden administration public-interest protections as an effort to



Joseph E Stiglitz

The writer is a Nobel laureate in economics and University Professor at Columbia University, is a former chief economist of the World Bank

TECH COMPANIES KNOW THAT IF THERE IS AN OPEN, DEMOCRATIC DEBATE ABOUT DATA SECURITY, CONSUMERS' CONCERNS ABOUT DIGITAL SAFEGUARDS WILL WIN OUT

shut down access to news websites, cripple the Internet, and empower authoritarians. That is nonsense.

Tech companies know that if there is an open, democratic debate, consumers' concerns about digital safeguards will easily trump concerns about their profit margins. Industry lobbyists thus have been busy trying to short-circuit the democratic process. One of their methods is to press for obscure trade provisions aimed at circumscribing what the United States and other countries can do to protect personal data.

It might seem obvious that a US president should protect Americans' privacy and national security, both of which could be jeopardised depending on how and where the vast amounts of data that we all generate are processed and stored. Yet, amazingly, former president Donald Trump's administration sought to prohibit the US from placing any restrictions on "the cross-border transfer of information, including personal information" to any country if such transfers were related to the business of any investor or service provider operating in the US or other countries signing the agreement.

The Trump administration's proposal to include this rule in the World Trade Organisation did provide for one exception, which ostensibly would allow some

regulation "necessary to achieve a legitimate public policy objective," but it was designed not to work in practice. While Big Tech lobbyists cite the exception to rebut criticism of the broader proposal, the provision's language comes straight from a WTO "General Exception" that has failed in 46 of 48 attempted uses.

The ban on cross-border data regulation was just one of four proposals that Big Tech lobbyists convinced Trump officials to slip into the revised North American Free Trade Agreement and to propose at WTO-related talks. Written in arcane jargon and buried among hundreds of pages of trade-pact language, these provisions were misleadingly branded as "digital trade" rules.

By prohibiting governments from adopting certain policies, the proposal's industry-written terms

threatened bipartisan efforts in the US Congress to counter Big Tech's abuses of consumers, workers, and smaller businesses. They also undercut the US regulatory agencies responsible for protecting our privacy and civil rights, and for enforcing antitrust policy. In fact, had the Trump-era rules banning government restrictions on data flows gone into effect at the WTO, they would have barred the Biden administration's own new data-security policy.

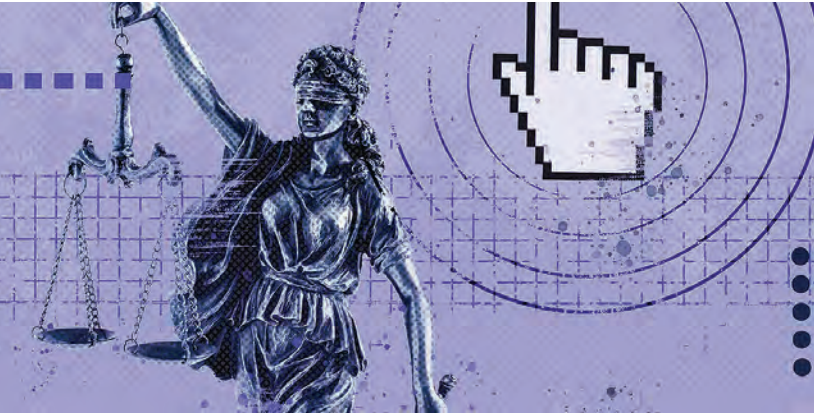
Few people realised the Trump-era proposal even existed — except, of course, for the lobbyists who had been quietly commandeering trade talks. While no previous US trade pacts had included provisions pre-empting executive and congressional authority over data regulation, digital platforms suddenly would have been granted special secrecy rights. The kinds

of algorithmic assessments and AI pre-screenings that Congress and executive-branch agencies deem critical to protecting the public interest would have been banned.

After Trump's loss in the 2020 election, industry lobbyists still hoped to make these anomalous rules a new norm. Their plan was to get the same provisions added to a Biden administration agreement called the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. But instead of going with the lobbyists, Biden administration officials worked with Congress to determine that the Trump-era proposals were not compatible with congressional and administration goals for digital privacy, competition and regulation.

Now, we can understand why tech lobbyists were so incensed by the Biden administration's decision to withdraw support for the Trump-era proposal. They recognised that by casting aside Big Tech's favoured "digital trade" handcuffs, the Biden administration was reasserting its authority to regulate the large platforms and data brokers that Americans across the political spectrum think have too much power.

Trade agreements have gotten a bad name precisely because of this kind of behaviour by corporate lobbyists.



Americans are rightly worried about what is happening online.

sport+



AIM TO CAPITALISE ON HOME ADVANTAGE

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 20

Oman will aim to take advantage of home conditions as they will host Group D leaders Malaysia on Thursday for the third round of the Preliminary Joint Qualification — Round 2 for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027. The match will begin at 10:00 pm at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. In the same group, Chinese Taipei will take on Kyrgyzstan in another clash of the group as both teams will be looking for the three points to keep alive their qualification chances.

Oman players, under the supervision of the new coaching staff headed by Jaroslav Silhavy, are in good shape after completion of eight days domestic warm-up sessions. Coach Silhavy will be looking to make a strong start in his new career. Moreover, the national team will target nothing less than a win that will ensure reviving Oman's chances in topping the group.

It is expected the Czech coach will depend on the key experienced players in Thursday's assignment as he recalled



Oman coach Jaroslav Silhavy and captain Mohammed al Musallami attend a press conference. (Right) Malaysia coach Kim Pan Gon talks to reporters.



many former players including Mohammed al Musallami, Hatim al Rushdi and Abdulaziz al Maqbali who is out due to his recent knee injury. The expected players who will be available in the squad may include Mohsin al Ghassani, Esam al Subhi, Omar al Malki, Salah al Yahyaei, Harib al Saadi, Abdullah Fawaz and besides others who could positively add a value to the technical performance of the match.

On the other hand, opponents Malaysia will eye another win after their perfect campaign with two victories against Kyrgyzstan and Chinese Taipei. Malaysia played a closed-door friendly match against Nepal which served as preparation game.

Malaysia are currently topping the group by six points from two games while Oman are second with three points.

POSITIVE START

Oman's Jaroslav Silhavy voiced confidently in the press conference that the team is ready to win the match. "The national team completed the training sessions and I am pleased with the players' performance and discipline in the camp. I am confident the team can register a positive result in today's clash," he said.

"Despite the time was very short to understand the players, we managed to see all the players performance during the league and also all the players in the

squad attended the last eight days training sessions," he added.

Responding to an inquiry relevant to the performance of the opponent, the head coach said: "We observed and analysed the Malaysian players. We are aware of their weakness and strength points. This will help us to plan a good tactics for the game."

Oman captain and experienced defender Mohammed al Musallami said the match against Malaysia will be very tight. "We understand the difficulty of the match but will aim to register three points from this game and as players we are ready for this game."

"Despite the short period for the new head coach, as players we are ready to implement his

instructions. Also, during the last couple days in the camp, we managed to get better idea on his technical approach and coaching style," Al Musallami added.

"Mohammed is one of the experienced players in the squad and we are playing as one group in the team. Our target is to win the game and get the three points," the coach added.

Malaysia head coach Kim Pan Gon said the team faced many difficulties including the league completed in Malaysia last December and the new season will begin in May and the team had only one preparatory match against Nepal. "Despite all the obstacles, we are expecting to provide very competitive and exciting game and our goal is to

capture the winning points and travel to Malaysia with victory vibes."

"Malaysia team delivered top show in the recent games and we can compete with top teams. This experience can help the team in today's match against Oman. Our target is to make the Malaysian fans happy," Kim said.

"Another difficulty for today's game is Oman will play with a new coaching staff. We are not aware with the characteristics of the new coaching staff. However, we have some information on Oman players as individuals," the coach said.

The Malaysian coach affirmed that he is very proud of Malaysia national team players. "We would like to maintain our lead in the group. It is going to be a crucial match specially Oman is better team in the world ranking," he added.

Malaysian player Dion Cools said that he is very confident for the game. "I am going to work very hard with my team-mates to register a positive result in today's tie. We have big dream and big target to finish this match with a perfect result and then to think for the home game in Kuala Lumpur," he said.



Shahid hits 95 as Al Haseena beat Trichmeir XI in PSM cricket

MUSCAT: Shahid Rehmani smashed 95 runs from 34 balls to set up the win for Al Haseena Jewellers against Trichmeir XI in the Pakistan School Muscat (PSM) Ramadan cricket tournament on Tuesday night.

In the ninth match of the tournament, Trichmeir XI's decision to bowl first didn't go their way as Al Haseena Jewellers' batter Shahid Rehmani hammered Trichmeir bowlers to all parts of the ground. Shahid's hit a tournament-high 95 which included 12 sixes and 3 fours with total reaching 123 for 2. In reply, Trichmeir XI fought hard to come closer as Imran Rizvi scored 35 runs in 16 balls but were restricted to 94 in 8 overs.

Salalah King got off to a great start with veteran tape ball player Faisal blasting 39 runs from 17 balls

Al Haseena won the match by 29 runs with Shahid getting the man of the match. Earlier, Mazoon Dairy posted a total of 103 runs in their 8 overs against Salalah King. Washil ahmad

scored 23 runs while Salalah King's Mohammad Siddique took 2 wickets for 21 runs in 2 overs .

In reply, Salalah King got off to a great start with veteran tape ball player Faisal blasting 39 runs from 17 balls with four sixes and two fours.

A quick-fire 14 off just 5 balls by Siddique won the match for Salalah King. Siddique was adjudged man of the match for his all-round performance.

Stars Light are the main sponsors of this event, with Air Sial, Salam Air, PIA, Modern Exchange (Bank Al Falah), Khurshid Trading, ATS, Meerath Restaurant, Al Sarooj Water, Adam Jewellers, Rashid Hussain & Partners LLC and Al Minhaj International joining as co-sponsors.

On Thursday, Hadi XI will take on Orient Travels at 8.30 pm, while SE Muscat meet Al Minhaj International at 10 pm.



Kohli, Pant in spotlight as IPL mega-show returns



RCB have a strong line-up featuring (from left) Glenn Maxwell, Mohammed Siraj, Faf du Plessian and Virat Kohli.

NEW DELHI: Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant will be under scrutiny on their return to action as the Indian Premier League begins on Friday, with the T20 World Cup hot on its heels.

The 17th edition of the world's richest cricket league is expected to end close to the June 1 start of the World Cup in the West Indies and United States.

Organisers have released only the first two weeks of the IPL schedule so far because it clashes with India's six-week-long general election.

Last season the 10-team IPL lasted eight weeks.

"This is a world stage for cricket," IPL chairman Arun Dhumal said on Wednesday, boasting the "quality is above any T20 league in the world".

"Not only the Indian players but also the overseas players will be looking to give their best performance in the run-up to the World Cup," Dhumal said.

Master batsman Kohli, who missed India's 4-1 Test series victory over England because of the birth of his second child, is back with Royal Challengers Bengaluru, previously the Royal Challengers Bangalore.

They take on defending champions Chennai Super Kings, led by MS Dhoni, in the opening match in Chennai on Friday.

"Kohli is crucial for India in the T20 World Cup," former chief selector MSK Prasad told the IPL's official broadcaster.

"He has been in form for a



Rishabh Pant is back as captain of the Delhi Capitals, returning to cricket for the first time since being seriously hurt in a car crash in 2022.

long time. He will make runs in this IPL as well."

Kohli has still never won the IPL but Bengaluru broke their title jinx when the women's team lifted the WPL under Smriti Mandhana on Sunday.

Pant is back as captain of the Delhi Capitals, returning to cricket for the first time since being seriously hurt in a car crash in 2022. They face the Punjab Kings on Saturday.

The wicketkeeper-batsman has been on an intensive rehabilitation programme since surviving the crash with a damaged ligament in his right

knee, a hurt wrist and ankle, and abrasions to his back.

If he proves his form and fitness, Pant is another in line to play for India at the World Cup.

Another with something to prove is Hardik Pandya, the new captain of five-time IPL winners the Mumbai Indians.

Pandya has been out of action since October after an ankle injury and replaces Rohit Sharma as skipper. Rohit, who led Mumbai to their five title wins, remains with the team.

DHONI SWAN SONG?

The move to replace Rohit, who captains India in all formats, has not gone down well with pundits and fans, but Pandya brushed off any problems with the national skipper. "I don't think it will be awkward," Pandya, who led Gujarat Titans to the 2022 IPL title in their debut season, said. "I've played my whole career under him and I know he's going to have a hand on my shoulder always."

The season could be Chennai veteran Dhoni's swansong, after the warhorse led the team to its fifth title in 2023. He said then that another year was a "gift" to his fans.

He underwent knee surgery last year and has hit the training nets in Chennai. "He's preparing really well," CSK batting coach Mike Hussey said. "His knee seems good at this stage and he's batting extremely well at the moment." — AFP



Registrations open for virtual Bundesliga Intl Series

MUSCAT: In an exciting development for eSports and football fans across the GCC region, TOD, the premier sports and entertainment streaming platform in the MENA region, is thrilled to announce its collaboration with the Bundesliga for the Virtual Bundesliga International Series 2024 during Ramadan.

Organised by Zawaya Gaming, the tournament is open for citizens and residents of Bahrain, Kuwait, KSA, Oman, Qatar, and UAE kicking off with online qualifiers taking place on March 22, 23.

The top eight players from the Gulf region will participate in a mini-tournament live-streamed by TOD on March 24.

The winner of the virtual competition will win an all-expenses paid trip to Germany, to attend the 2024 International Series Grand Final in May, and compete for a share of the €10,000 prize pool. They will be accompanied by a Key Opinion Leader (KOL) and compete alongside other global qualifiers from the USA, Brazil, Thailand, Vietnam, and India.

This initiative aims to bring the spirit of the Bundesliga closer to its fans in the GCC region, fostering a sense of community and engagement during Ramadan.

John-Paul Mckerlie, Vice-President of Marketing & Sales at TOD, says, "This collaboration with the Bundesliga is a fantastic way to connect with our grassroots fans. eSports is growing in the GCC like never before, and given its prominence during Ramadan, it is a great way for TOD to build community spirit among players of the game."

Peer Naubert, Bundesliga International Chief Marketing Officer, says, "Since 2012, when the Bundesliga became the first professional football league to have its own eSports competition, more than a million players have competed across our virtual tournaments — from the Club Championship and the VBL Open, to the Virtual Bundesliga International Series. Global interest continues to grow, and our partnership with EA Sports has gone from strength to strength, as indicated by the contract extension announced earlier this month."

Interested candidates can register for the online esports competition at todvbl.com for more details and tournament terms and conditions.

Gayle wants Shamar in Windies squad for home World Cup

NEW DELHI: Fast bowling sensation Shamar Joseph should be fast-tracked into the West Indies squad for the home T20 World Cup in June, said former captain Chris Gayle.

Joseph burst onto the scene in his debut series in Australia earlier this year, grabbing a five-wicket haul in his maiden Test in Adelaide.

He followed that up with a magical display in Brisbane where, bowling with a broken toe, the pacer claimed 7-68 to help West Indies record their first test win in Australia in 27 years.

The 24-year-old has played only two domestic T20 matches but Gayle says West Indies need Joseph's firepower at the World

Cup. "He's strong, he should be in the squad," Gayle, who launched the T20 World Cup trophy tour in New York on Tuesday, said in a telephone interview.

"We already have Alzarri Joseph, so to have the two Josephs there (will be great).

"Both might not play at the same time, but we would need him in this squad just in case anybody picks up an injury.

"It's a good headache to have for the selectors."

West Indies failed to make the Super 12 stage of the 2022 World Cup in Australia but have registered series victories against South Africa, India and England over the past year.

In Daren Sammy, they have a



coach who knows what it takes to win a global trophy having captained West Indies to T20 World Cup titles in 2012 and 2016.

Gayle was happy with the "all-round" look of the group under captain Rowman Powell.

"Andre Russell back in

the squad, there's some more experience in the squad in Jason Holder and Nicholas Pooran," Gayle said.

"Those guys will have a big part to play for West Indies to lift the trophy." A T20 pioneer whose entertaining batting made him a sought-after name in franchise leagues, Gayle said 20-over cricket had made other formats a lot more result-oriented.

"You watch Test cricket these days, it's played a bit faster than a couple of years back. Teams scoring 300 within a day with ease, that's because of T20 cricket," he said.

"It's the same in 50-over cricket. Teams can score and chase down 400 as well.

Everything has changed in the game, thanks to T20 cricket."

Gayle, who smashed the first hundred in T20 Internationals at the 2007 World Cup, was pleased to have played his role in the growth of the format.

"Being the first person to score the first T20 century, that was fantastic. I think from there, the game actually blossomed," Gayle, who played 103 Tests and 301 one-day internationals, said.

"When that happened, it just opened the door for other players to realise that there's an opportunity to get centuries there." The World Cup will be played in West Indies and the United States between June 1-29.

— Reuters



RICHARD HUGHES

LIVERPOOL APPOINT HUGHES AS NEW SPORTING DIRECTOR

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool have named departing Bournemouth technical director Richard Hughes as their new sporting director from the end of the 2023-24 season, the Merseyside club said on Wednesday, as they prepare for the post-Juergen Klopp era.

Earlier in March, Bournemouth announced that the 44-year-old former Scotland midfielder will leave his position as the technical director at the end of the current season, having taken charge in 2016.

Hughes also had two playing spells at the south coast side between 1998-2002 and 2012-2014.

He replaces Jorg Schmadtke and joins Michael Edwards, who was appointed by Liverpool owners Fenway Sports Group as their Chief Executive Officer of Football last week following 10 highly successful years at the club.

"I am incredibly proud to be offered this opportunity... People rightly talk about the rich history this organisation can boast, but it is the present and future which really excites me," Hughes said in a statement.

"It will be my job, working with Michael and leading the football operations team already in place, plus the wider staff at the AXA Training Centre, to make good decisions."

Hughes will take over responsibilities at Liverpool on June 1.

Klopp, 56, in January announced his decision to step down as Liverpool manager at the end of the current campaign after trophy-laden eight-and-a-half-years at the club, citing dwindling energy levels.

"As one very successful chapter will come to a close for Liverpool in the summer, the objective of everyone here is for another one to begin - and with Richard I am confident we have the right person in position for us to achieve this aim," Edwards said. — Reuters



China's Croatian head coach Branko Ivankovic during the press conference. — AFP

COACH IVANKOVIC URGES CHINA TO 'PLAY WITH PASSION'

SINGAPORE: New China coach Branko Ivankovic said on Wednesday that his men must "play with passion" as they embark on two crucial World Cup qualifiers against Singapore.

The Croat replaced Serbia's Aleksandar Jankovic last month after China's dismal Asian Cup where they failed to score a goal and went out in the group phase.

China have not reached the World Cup since their lone appearance in 2002.

Back-to-back wins against Singapore, away on Thursday and in Tianjin on Tuesday, will put China in a strong position to progress from a group that also contains South Korea and Thailand.

"I always require my team to play with passion and attacking football," said the 70-year-old Ivankovic, who takes charge of China for the first time.

"Modern football doesn't restrict you to a certain formation and players have techniques and qualities to adapt their game."

"Basically, what they have to do is to just try to execute my football philosophy."

China are second in Group C after a 2-1 win in Thailand and a 3-0 home defeat to South Korea. The top two in the group will progress to the next stage on the road to 2026.

Ivankovic is not taking anything for granted against Singapore, who have lost both games so far but are also under a new coach, Tsutomu Ogura from Japan.

"Maybe we are favourites, but that means nothing because it depends on our performance on the pitch," said Ivankovic, who led Iran to World Cup qualification in 2006. "I expect tomorrow will be a hard game and I have prepared my players in such a way."

"I have watched Singapore's last three games, but it may mean nothing because they have a new coach with new ideas and new philosophies."

Ivankovic had his first look at the squad during an intensive 10-day camp in Shenzhen before travelling to Singapore. — AFP

REAL GOALKEEPER COURTOIS SUFFERS NEW KNEE INJURY IN TRAINING



Real Madrid's Belgian goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

MADRID: Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois will be out of action for several weeks after incurring a meniscus tear in his right knee during training on Tuesday, the LaLiga club said.

On Wednesday, Courtois has undergone a successful surgery, the club said.

The Belgium international will be out of action for several weeks after incurring the injury. "Courtois will begin his recovery process in the coming days," Real said in a statement.

The 31-year-old had been expected to return to Real's squad after spending several

months on the sidelines following an ACL tear in his left knee last August. He underwent an MRI scan later on Tuesday that confirmed the damage to his right knee.

"Following tests carried out today, our player Thibaut Courtois has been diagnosed with a ruptured internal meniscus in his right knee," the club said.

The injury is a major blow for Real who will have to make do without the services of one of their key players for their highly anticipated Champions League quarter-final tie against Manchester City in early April.

The injury is a major blow for Real who will have to make do without the services of one of their key players for their highly anticipated Champions League quarterfinal tie against Manchester City in early April

Real manager Carlo Ancelotti said on Friday that he was optimistic about soon being able to count on both Courtois and Brazil

defender Eder Militao, who also suffered a torn ACL in August.

Ancelotti had said the plan was for them to play two friendlies against Real's youth team during the international break before returning to the first team for the final stretch of the season. "They (Courtois and Militao) have started to work with the group, completing normal training sessions," Ancelotti told a press conference.

"I think they will be able to make it (to the first leg against City). In fact, the idea is that they will be available on March 31st, for the LaLiga

match against Athletic Bilbao, but we won't risk anything, that's more than clear."

Courtois joined Real from Chelsea in 2018 after winning two Premier League titles, the FA Cup and the League Cup during his time at Stamford Bridge.

Real, who had only one other goalkeeper, Ukraine's Andriy Lunin, in their first team squad when Courtois sustained his injury, recruited former Chelsea keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga on a season-long loan deal, although the Ukrainian eventually won the battle to be first-choice.

— Reuters



Investments in Raysut Industrial City reach R0 563m

SALALAH: The number of investment projects in Raysut Industrial City reached 192 projects after adding 8 projects worth RO 84 million in 2023, bringing the total cumulative investment volume to RO 563 million.

Engineer Abdulqadir bin Salim al Balushi, Director General of Raysut Industrial City, said in a statement to the Oman News Agency (ONA) that the investment projects in the city are distributed among industrial, service and commercial activities, as industrial projects occupy the largest area of them with 159 projects employing 4,156 workers, with an Omanisation rate of 38%.

He pointed out that Raysut Industrial City signed an investment contract for a project to produce digital currencies on an area of 20,000 square metres for the first phase, with a foreign investment amounting to RO 80 million, in line with the government's approach towards digital transformation.

Raysut Industrial City seeks to attract more investments to



Raysut Industrial City has been contributing to advancing industrial development in Dhofar Governorate for more than 30 years.

provide job opportunities for Omanis, indicating that the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) is working to raise the efficiency of services and infrastructure.

Due to the increasing demand for investment in the industrial city to keep pace with growth and improve the business environment.

The stages of development of Raysut Industrial City included,

in 2019, the development of the infrastructure for the second phase with an area of 1,141,948 square metres, with the development of the third phase of the city in 2021, which includes the establishment of the road network and basic services.

Al Balushi confirmed that Raysut Industrial City has been contributing to advancing industrial development in Dhofar

Governorate for more than 30 years, by creating an appropriate investment environment, as there is a residential complex with integrated facilities to provide an ideal and modern environment for companies' workers to reside in the industrial city, and a civil defence centre.

It provides its services to companies and factories, following up on the implementation of



Raysut Industrial City signed an investment contract for a project to produce digital currencies with an investment amounting to RO 80 million

ENG ABDULQADIR AL BALUSHI
*Director General
Raysut Industrial City*

security and safety procedures and responding quickly to emergency situations.

The strategic location of Raysut Industrial City is one of the factors that attract investment,

due to its proximity to the port of Salalah and Salalah Airport, with import and export facilities, and the availability of flexible logistical services that contribute to enhancing the attraction of investment opportunities for the industrial city.

This is in addition to the close distance between the industrial city and the Yemeni market, as well as with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia via the Empty Quarter port.

The Masar service centre in the industrial city is one of the investor service centres available affiliated with Madayn, as the idea of these centres came to meet the needs of investors and facilitate the completion of licenses and necessary approvals for them with various investment-related entities.

Raysut Industrial City is one of the cities affiliated with Madayn, and was officially opened in 1992 on an area estimated at that time at 1.5 million square meters in the first phase, bringing the total area by the end of 2018 to 3.9 million square metres. — ONA

Investment opportunities showcased for diplomats at Invest Oman

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 20

In a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) and the Foreign Ministry, a significant gathering unfolded on Tuesday at the Invest Oman Lounge.

A number of ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions accredited to the Sultanate of Oman convened with a singular purpose: to explore the incentives and investment vistas awaiting in Oman across diverse sectors, with a keen eye on attracting foreign capital in the foreseeable future.

Eng Ammar al Kharousi, CEO of Invest Oman Lounge, spearheaded the proceedings, delivering a comprehensive visual presentation elucidating key facets of investment, tourism, and the economic landscape in Oman.

His address also delved into recent economic advancements, investment regulations, and the array of facilities proffered by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to potential investors spanning various sectors.

Meanwhile, diplomatic dignitaries embarked on an insightful tour of the Invest Oman Lounge, acquainting themselves with indispensable services and facilities tailored for investors eyeing opportunities in the country.

Their exploration encompassed a deep dive into the investment mechanism, pertinent entities, potentialities, and informational resources available to investors, alongside perusing prominent opportunities across various economic sectors within Oman.

Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Faroojiyah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion at MoCIIP underscored the gathering's significance as a platform to showcase Oman's



Eng Ammar al Kharousi, CEO of Invest Oman Lounge, spearheads the proceedings, delivering a comprehensive visual presentation elucidating key facets of investment, tourism, and the economic landscape in Oman.

facilitations and incentives.

She emphasised the importance of soliciting feedback, requirements, and perspectives from foreign ambassadors to bolster efforts in attracting foreign capital, in alignment with the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Highlighting the collaboration, Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, affirmed the ministry's concerted efforts to bolster Oman's investment and tourism potential through engagement with sisterly and friendly nations.

This event stands as a testament to the ongoing endeavours aimed at fostering stronger ties and promoting Oman's economic prospects.

MoCIIP is steadfast in its commitment to fostering a conducive business environment, further solidifying Oman's standing as a fertile ground for business and investment growth.

Through enhanced integration efforts among relevant entities, Oman continues to position itself as a premier destination for investors and entrepreneurs alike.

Oman's economic upturn signals business opportunities: Expert

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 20

The Sultanate of Oman is capitalising on its domestic and regional economic momentum, paving the way for new business prospects in the country, this according to Robert Mogielnicki, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW), a prominent think-tank.

Since the start of 2024, according to Mogielnicki in his post titled 'Oman Capitalises on Domestic, Regional Economic Momentum', Omani authorities have unveiled a series of rapid economic initiatives, including the establishment of a new sovereign fund entity, the country's inaugural government-owned investment bank, and major development projects like the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar mixed-use project.

Under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman has made substantial progress in stabilising its economy and addressing long-standing vulnerabilities.

Fiscal consolidation programmes have been implemented, government debt levels have been reduced, and inefficiencies in government-related entities have been minimised to unlock new value.

This progress has set the stage for Oman to enter a new phase of economic policymaking armed with fresh policy tools and



The Al Khuwair waterfront project aims to drive economic growth, attract residents and visitors and create a positive economic cycle in the country.

FISCAL CONSOLIDATION PROGRAMMES HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED, GOVERNMENT DEBT LEVELS HAVE BEEN REDUCED, AND INEFFICIENCIES IN GOVERNMENT-RELATED ENTITIES HAVE BEEN MINIMISED TO UNLOCK NEW VALUE

concrete development plans.

Mogielnicki said that Oman's economic foundation is strengthening, with Fitch Ratings estimating fiscal surpluses for both 2023 and 2024. The country has seen a surge in foreign direct investment, particularly from the United Kingdom and the United States.

Additionally, Oman's sovereign credit rating has been upgraded, and the government has enacted new laws to boost the tourism

sector and enhance fiscal sustainability.

The Oman Investment Authority, the country's sovereign wealth fund, launched the Future Fund Oman to bolster foreign direct investment and support small- and medium-sized enterprises. Moreover, the Oman Investment Bank, the nation's first government-owned corporate investment bank, was established to promote economic development.

Furthermore, Oman has announced ambitious development projects such as the Al Khuwair waterfront project and the Omani Mountain Destination in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

These projects aim to drive economic growth, attract residents and visitors, and create a positive economic cycle in the country.

Despite these advancements, Oman faces challenges in accelerating the pace economic diversification and its continued heavy reliance on the oil and gas sector for government revenue. The government is working on privatisation initiatives and share offerings to maintain economic momentum and create high-quality jobs for Omani citizens.

Oman's proactive economic policies amidst regional economic challenges and conflicts present a beacon of hope in the Middle East.

By leveraging its economic foundation, strategic initiatives, and partnerships with neighbouring countries, Oman is positioning itself as an attractive destination for business growth and investment opportunities.

Unimoni, Abeer Hospital conduct free health checkup



MUSCAT: Unimoni, a leading remittance and foreign currency exchange brand in the Sultanate of Oman had arranged free health checkup for public, in association with Abeer hospital, which helped people to become aware of their health conditions.

As a part of the noble campaign during Ramadhan, free health screening such as BMI and blood pressure check were offered to the public. The health checkup was carried out in Unimoni Exchange inside

Lulu Hypermarket in Ruwi street branch by the expert medical staff of Abeer Hospital.

Speaking on the occasion Boban MP, CEO, Unimoni Exchange said: “As we strive to make a positive impact beyond our business endeavours, it is in moments like these that truly reflect our commitment to the well-being of those around us. I am thankful to Abeer Hospital for joining in such initiatives and promoting wellbeing in the surroundings.”

BankDhofar holds dinner for media professionals

MUSCAT: BankDhofar organised a dinner event for media professionals from various media outlets in the Sultanate of Oman to enhance communication and exchange of opinions and ideas between them and the Bank.

During the dinner ceremony, Said bin Juma al Busaidy (pictured), Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications at BankDhofar, shared the strategic goals of BankDhofar, Initiatives and priorities for the Bank and 2023 financial results.

The Bank achieved its highest operating profit in the past eight years at 76 million riyals, while net profits reached 38.8 million riyals, an increase of 13.4 per cent compared to 2022.

Al Busaidy explained that the bank opened 55 new branches in various states of the Sultanate of



Oman during the past eighteen months, bringing the total number of branches to 118 elevating the Bank to being the second largest branch network in the Sultanate of Oman. The number of Offsite and Onsite 24/7 banking services like ATM's/ CDM's/ MFK's also increased by 36 per cent to reach more than 350. The Bank introduced several customer-centric proposition

offerings and enhancements. Based on the bank's strategy, it rolled out 'Life Cycle Banking,' a segmented approach to meet customer needs from childhood to priority bank apart from Enterprise sales function taking banking to the customers doorsteps.

BankDhofar continues to invest in its human capital by continuous training and skill

enhancement to its workforce. The Bank welcomed more than 250 workforce with an overall 92 per cent Omanisation.

The Bank prioritises technology and innovation, making it integral to enhancing customer experiences. Customers enjoy secure and user-friendly digital banking channels, with the award-winning Mobile Banking App offering exclusive services like instant transfers, cardless cash, and mobile top-ups.

The bank achieved another milestone by becoming the first bank in Oman and the Middle East to install Diebold Nixdorf's RM4V Cash Recycling Engine, offering an unparalleled customer experience.

The Bank is also launching its Private Bank during the year 2024 with a dedicated team of wealth managers.

OAB launches Ramadhan auto loan campaign

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has launched its Ramadhan auto loan campaign for 2024 which will be running throughout the holy month.

Carefully designed to simplify car ownership with industry-leading financing options and exclusive benefits, the campaign promises customers speed, service, and convenience. OAB customers can also instantly apply for the auto loan with a click of a button through the OAB mobile



app.

In addition to its competitive interest rates starting from 3.9 per cent p.a., OAB's Ramadhan auto loan offers the highest financing

tenure in the market of up to ten years on new and pre-owned cars.

Customers will also be able to enjoy flexible payment options, allowing them to purchase now and start paying three months later. They will enjoy complimentary third-party insurance for the first year. As an extra perk, customers will also receive a fuel card worth RO 50 alongside numerous other benefits.

“We are delighted to offer our valued customers these

exceptional auto loan options during the holy month of Ramadhan,” said Khalid al Amri, Acting Chief Retail Banking Officer.

“Our goal is to make car ownership more affordable and enhance our customers' lives with unmatched financial solutions and benefits. This campaign is a testament to our dedication to customer satisfaction and our vision of enabling everyone to own their dream car.”

Vodafone Oman’s ‘Steps for Goodness’ initiative returns

MUSCAT: Building on its successful 2023 debut, Vodafone Oman is bringing back its “Steps for Goodness” this Ramadhan with bigger impact for customers and the community through My Vodafone App.

Founded on a simple yet profound concept, the initiative aims to foster a culture of healthy living using technology by converting steps into good deeds in partnership with Al Rahma Association.

With more than 560 million steps converted to renovate underprivileged homes in 2023, Vodafone Oman is determined for

the 2024 chapter of the campaign to give “more” back through several creative new features centred on walking, community comradery and digital content.

As such, and in addition to counting their own steps, customers are encouraged to join with families, friends, and communities to double their points and make a bigger difference.

A testament to its digital leadership, Vodafone Oman has also introduced podcast content to the campaign, offering customers the opportunity to listen, learn, walk and double their points



yet again; all through the My Vodafone App.

“Steps for Goodness is a campaign very close to our hearts,

and a reflection of who we are and what we stand for as a brand and as people”, said Usama bin Abdullah al Saifi, Vodafone Oman's Brand Manager.

“At Vodafone Oman, we believe in the joint power of collective action and technology to drive positive change and after the overwhelming feedback and participation in its inaugural year, we are proud to be bringing back “Steps for Goodness with more opportunities, more steps and more goodness. The result is the introduction of family and group step counts and the incorporation of podcasts to the campaign.

That’s not all, we have also tied up with 15 Omani influencers to amplify this collective impact.”

He added, “Another new addition this year, is how and when we are spreading the goodness. Tying up with Al Rahma Association, we will be donating funds raised on a weekly basis to one of four programmes starting with support for people with special needs, and including Gaza relief aid, Eid donations for underprivileged families and emergency support for individuals who have fallen into financial crisis through the Fak Kurba programme.”

National Finance’s Himmah team embarks on inaugural initiative

MUSCAT: Keeping with the giving spirit of Ramadhan, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, recently partnered with Dar Al Atta’a to distribute Ramadhan boxes to needy families in the Al Amerat and Barka regions.

The initiative also marked the debut of Himmah, National Finance’s first official volunteer team on their inaugural initiative, signifying a noteworthy milestone in the company’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) endeavours.

The charitable initiative, witnessed National Finance’s Himmah volunteers in action, as they extended support to disadvantaged families by providing access to essentials and provisions.

Each Ramadhan box was carefully curated with staple food items and other essential necessities to assist families in



observing the month of fasting with ease and comfort.

In line with National Finance’s Imtidad social responsibility arm, Himmah convenes a cohort of enthusiastic and proactive staff members, eager to make a profound impact on the country’s social fabric.

As depicted in the Himmah logo, the three interconnected circles signify the values by which Himmah abides – unity, solidarity and a cooperative spirit.

The circles further symbolise continuity and sustainability, underscoring the team’s goal to leave an enduring impact on

the country’s socio-economic landscape over the years.

Speaking on the occasion, HH Sayyidah Wisam al Said, AGM-Marketing, Corporate Communication, Events and ESG, at National Finance, said, “As we embrace the spirit of Ramadhan – marked by generosity, sharing, and caring for our communities – it is an honour to collaborate with Dar Al Atta’a to positively impact the lives of those in need.

As members of National Finance’s Himmah Volunteer team, we take profound pride in our company’s legacy of championing social and community welfare. We remain committed to advancing this noble cause, advocating for critical social issues, and fostering strong partnerships with key organisations and governmental bodies to enhance the well-being of the Omani people.”

OOMCO celebrates a decade of supplying high-quality lubricants with new brand identity



MUSCAT: Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) recently celebrated a decade of supplying a wide variety of high-quality lubricants that boost vehicle performance and protect engines and that recently transitioned to new packaging and brand identity.

With their updated, fresh, and contemporary aesthetic and Modern design, OOMCO’s lubricants continue to meet the requirements of customers across various segments in Oman and beyond.

Since 2013, Oman Oil lubricants have become the brand of choice for many customers in Oman and global markets.

OOMCO has become one of

the key drivers of the lubricant market growth in Oman and is positioned for further growth in domestic and international markets through diverse marketing activities and robust digital campaigns.

To keep up with the growing and ever-changing market demand, OOMCO shifted towards more innovative, meaningful, and eco-friendlier packaging of its lubricants, with a design and colour that further enhance the brand visibility.

Oman’s leading fuel marketing company sells its high-quality and petroleum-based lubricants in the Middle East and Northern African region, as well as in parts of Asia.



Dutch group explores green hydrogen cooperation with Oman

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, MARCH 20

An official delegation representing prominent European energy infrastructure company Gasunie recently wrapped up a visit to the Sultanate of Oman aimed at exploring opportunities for cooperation in the field of green hydrogen.

Gasunie, headquartered in the Netherlands, operates over 12,000 kilometres of domestic gas pipeline networks, in addition to around 3,100 km of pipeline infrastructure in northern Germany.

Of late, the wholly state-owned gas transportation utility has been evolving from a gas transporter to a clean-energy infrastructure company as part of its energy transition.

During its 3-day stay in Oman, the Gasunie team held meetings with officials of Oman's Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Hydrom — the orchestrator of the country's green hydrogen sector, OQ Gas Networks — the majority state-owned gas transportation operator, and the Port of Duqm.

"During their visit, the delegation aimed to learn more about Oman's plans for green hydrogen production and discuss potential collaborations to support the development of infrastructure and green energy production in the country," said the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the Sultanate of Oman, in a



Gasunie is currently transforming itself from a gas transporter to an energy infrastructure company.

post.

According to the Embassy, the visit stems from a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in November 2022 by Oman and the Netherlands with the aim of strengthening cooperation on green hydrogen initiatives.

The signing took place on the sidelines of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for 2022 (COP27), hosted by Egypt.

The MoU outlined a desire by the two countries to enhance cooperation in the field of green energy. It pledged to encourage their respective energy companies

to identify export and import checkpoints for green hydrogen, associated fuel sources and raw material, serving as a gateway to Europe. It also affirmed a goal to explore potential interests in industries within the value chain of green hydrogen.

Gasunie is already taking the lead in developing key elements of the Netherlands' hydrogen infrastructure as part of the country's bid to position itself as a gateway for hydrogen into north-western Europe.

It has been tapped by the government to build the National Hydrogen Network — a 1.5-billion euro initiative to connect major

industrial areas to each other and to Germany and Belgium.

Underscoring growing green energy cooperation between Oman and the Netherlands, a Joint Study Agreement was signed by the two sides last December to explore the development of the world's first commercial-scale liquid hydrogen corridor.

Representing Oman at the JSA signing were the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, as well as Hydrom. Participating from the Netherlands were the Port of Amsterdam, energy logistics company Zenith Energy Terminals and GasLog, a leading provider of LNG shipping.

GIG Gulf wins CMA nod to provide E-insurance in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 20

GIG Gulf, one of the largest insurance providers in the MENA region including the Sultanate of Oman, has announced that it has received approval from the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) to provide digitally integrated insurance services for its customers online.

This development positions GIG Gulf as one of first two insurers authorised to offer online insurance solutions in Oman.

The approval follows a comprehensive report submission in January 2024, showcasing GIG Gulf's sophisticated digital insurance platforms and its commitment to adhering to the highest regulatory standards.

Commenting on the approval, Paul Adamson, CEO of GIG Gulf, said: "We are proud to have been granted approval by the Capital Markets Authority in Oman to offer our insurance services online.

"This authorisation is not just a regulatory milestone, it's a significant leap towards fulfilling our promise of providing unparalleled convenience and flexibility to our customers in Oman. As we strengthen our online presence, we remain committed to our omnichannel



strategy, ensuring our customers have the freedom to engage with us through their preferred channels.

"Our focus remains steadfast on enhancing the digital insurance buying and servicing experience, reinforcing our position as a leading insurer in the region."

Mehdi bin Salim al Harthy, General Manager of GIG Gulf Oman, commented: "Receiving the CMA's approval to operate our digital insurance services in Oman is a landmark achievement for us at GIG Gulf. It reflects our deep commitment to offering innovative, accessible and customer-focused insurance solutions.

"This approval not only sets us apart in the Omani market, but also reinforces our pledge to be at the forefront of the digital transformation in the insurance industry. "We are excited to leverage this opportunity to further enhance our service offerings and continue to meet the evolving needs of our customers in Oman with agility and excellence."

MSX Chairman's Dialogue to feature noted educationalist

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 20

Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) is organising the inaugural edition of the 'MSX Chairman's Dialogue' on Thursday, March 21, 2024, at the MSX Investors Hall.

The Dialogue marks the beginning of a series where distinguished personalities from finance, academia, investment and corporate leadership will be hosted.

These luminaries will share their experience and learnings, helping broaden the knowledge horizon of attending guests. MSX Chairman's Dialogue also endeavours to build a bridge between global and Omani stalwarts from their respective fields.

Mohammed bin Mahfoodh al Ardhi, Chairman, MSX, will host Dr Bradley J Cook (pictured), President of the American University of Bahrain, the first comprehensive American-model co-educational university in the Kingdom of Bahrain during the inaugural session.

The topic of the discourse is 'The Future of Higher Education in the Middle East' and it will shed light on



the theme, 'Current State of Higher Education, Key Trends Shaping the Future of Higher Education, Global Dynamics and Shifting Economies, Evolving Educational Paradigms and Vision for the Future'.

Dr Cook is a noted educationist with nearly 30 years of executive administrative experience in higher education having served as President of the Abu Dhabi Women's College in the UAE, Vice-President for Academic Affairs at Utah Valley University, and Vice-President of University Relations also at Utah Valley University.

Under his leadership, AUBH became the first US accredited university in Bahrain and among only a handful in the GCC and MENA region. Dr Cook grew up in Saudi Arabia and has lived in Egypt, Kuwait, the UAE and Bahrain. He holds a bachelor's and master's degree from Stanford University.

UK inflation slows to lowest level in almost 2.5 years

LONDON: Britain's annual inflation rate fell more than expected in February, official data showed on Wednesday, fuelling speculation that the Bank of England will start cutting interest rates in the coming months.

The Office for National Statistics said inflation reached 3.4 per cent last month — the lowest level since September 2021 — as growth in food prices eased further.

The rate came down from 4.0 per cent in January, while the Bank of England and other economists had forecast consumer prices to rise by 3.5 per cent in February.

The drop may give a boost to embattled Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and his Conservative Party as they face the prospect of losing a general election later this year amid discontent over the country's cost-of-living crisis.

But with inflation remaining well above the BoE's two-per cent target, the central bank is widely expected to keep its main interest rate on hold in an announcement due on Thursday.

This follows a regular monetary policy meeting and also an interest-rate announcement on Wednesday from the US Federal Reserve.

Economists are forecasting the Fed and European Central Bank will begin cutting rates from June — having massively hiked borrowing costs to tackle soaring prices.



A man buys produce from a fruit and vegetable market stall in London. — Reuters

For the BoE, the outlook is less clear according to economists, even if rate cuts could give a lift to Britain's recession-hit economy.

"The Bank of England has already said it's not going to cut interest rates in a hurry," Sarah Coles, head of personal finance at Hargreaves Lansdown, said following Wednesday's data.

"It's going to wait for lower inflation to bed in. It means there's a decent chance we won't see cuts until August." Other analysts said a cut was likely to occur in June. There is no BoE monetary policy meeting in July.

"Right now, the market is split between the first-rate cut coming at the June or August meeting," noted Kathleen Brooks, analyst at XTB trading group.

"Overall, there was something in this (inflation) report for both the hawks and the doves

as we lead up to Thursday's BoE meeting." On a monthly basis, the Consumer Prices Index rose 0.6 per cent last month compared with a rise of 1.1 per cent in February 2023.

The pound was down against the dollar and steady versus the euro following the latest data, while London's FTSE 100 stocks index fell slightly.

The chief economist at the statistics office, Grant Fitzner, said "almost unchanged" food prices were the "main driver" of the fall to UK inflation last month. Offsetting this were rises to petrol prices and rents, he added.

Finance Minister Jeremy Hunt welcomed the headline drop. "Inflation has not just fallen decisively but is forecast to hit the two-per cent target within months," he said in a statement.

— AFP



ECB President Christine Lagarde gestures as she addresses a news conference in Frankfurt. — Reuters

Lagarde warns of risk of cutting rates 'too late'

FRANKFURT: European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde warned on Wednesday of the risk of acting "too late" on interest rate cuts, reaffirming the likelihood that the first reduction in borrowing costs will come in June.

The ECB has kept its interest rates steady since October, following an unprecedented series of hikes to tame red-hot inflation.

With inflation steadily declining and the euro zone economy stuttering, attention has shifted to when the ECB will start easing its monetary policy. "We cannot wait until we have all the relevant information. To do so could risk being too late in adjusting policy," Lagarde said at a conference in Frankfurt.

The ECB was therefore focusing on "two important pieces of evidence" before deciding its next move: data on euro zone wage growth and the bank's own economic forecasts.

Many wage negotiations in large sectors are still taking place, as unions across Europe push for salary hikes to compensate for higher living costs. The ECB expects to have a clearer picture on the outcome of wage agreements at the end of May, Lagarde said.

The ECB's latest projections on economic growth and inflation meanwhile will be unveiled in June. — AFP

New initiative to unlock creative industries sector in Oman

Creativity is required in any work that a person performs in his life. Masterful creative works are the ones that humanity transmits throughout its life and preserves to remain with them forever, but the mediocre works disappear, regardless of their content, size, or form, because they do not contain the required, subtle, aesthetic, and creative touches.

From this standpoint, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth recently, over two consecutive days, presented a plan for creative industries map laboratories with the participation of 170 people, including 17 sectors whose work is related to creative industries.

This is the first map of the creative industries that is presented in the first systematic



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attempt to define and measure these industries.

The work could be done by understanding the dimensions of the creative sector and collecting data related to them and to the creators in the Sultanate of Oman.

The aim of the work is to provide a comprehensive and realistic picture to decision makers that enables them to develop policies and legislation that enhance the creative sectors.

The Ministry indicated in its statement that the goal of the creative industries map is to increase dialogue and knowledge exchange about policies and best creative practices, in addition to laying the foundations for the creative economy in Oman to enhance integration and synergy between culture, arts, and education.

They aim to ensure sustainable cultural career paths, and develop talent support policies and best practices, besides enhancing intellectual property protection, and providing the required frameworks to support increasing creative activities on digital platforms.

The map of creative industries includes many issues located in several sectors, including the publishing and electronic printing sectors, music, theatre, cinema, and other sectors.

During the seminar sessions, the participants discussed many topics, including creative and best practices and measures necessary to strengthen these sectors, in addition to the legislation and laws related to them.

All these sectors need to develop a cultural strategy

for their development, while working to combine them with educational arts and creative professions to provide the best sustainable professional and cultural work, in addition to qualifying creative people in the fields of technology and innovation in the digital world.

All these initiatives require the establishment of laws that regulate the work of creative practices, and the various arts can be promoted.

Today, creative industries constitute an economic, cultural, and societal force in any country. Hence, it is given special importance in the policies of countries and local economies.

The last programme of these workshops produced good initiatives in coordination and cooperation with the National Program for Investment and

Export Development (Nazdahar) regarding creative industries by implementing three projects with an investment value of RO 15.4 million, and there are other opportunities to implement 8 other investment projects in the coming period and achieve many new initiatives in this field and sectors.

These require more efforts to exploit everything that can be offered, and it also requires exploiting the cultural diversity of the country in all possible and available sectors considering the presence of technical and educated human cadres in those fields, which will achieve a lot of artistic and economic success for the country, in addition to employing more national cadres in those fields that we preceded us in producing many industries and creative arts.

Speculative real estate development: What are the critical success factors?

At a recent hospitality event in Oman, one topic greatly stood out for me among many other relevant ones, that of speculative real estate developments.

It made me think, to some extent, aren't all real estate developments speculative? A speculative development starts without any commitment from anyone interested in buying or renting it.

This would be contrasted to a scheme which is incepted with firm commitment to buy or lease most if not all of it by end users or investors.

Some of the most well-known schemes globally were developed as speculative schemes which immediately, or eventually, became successful.

A significant portion of London's central areas was developed through speculative schemes, including Soho, and large parts of Mayfair and Westminster.

Closer to Oman, Dubai Downtown in neighbouring UAE was developed speculatively, and yet we cannot imagine those cities now without these developments.

In the absence of a clear definition of speculative development, the concept varies from one developer to another.

Most developments will fall between two extremes, 100% commitments for the product of the developer before they commence the project, or 0% commitments – two extremes of the spectrum.

In the event of no commitment, the level of speculation greatly varies.

A developer considering a residential development in a midscale city would base the decision of inception on two key numbers: the residential unit absorption rate (demand), and the housing pipeline (supply, which includes housing starts and planned).

The bigger the gap between supply and demand, the less speculative the development, as



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With its natural beauty, rich history, friendly people and strategic location, Oman has immense potential to attract a global audience.

demand is assured. Conversely, the smaller the gap or if supply exceeds demand, then the higher the speculative element.

The harder it is to ascertain demand, the higher the level of risk—emerging markets typically fall into this category, especially ones with a high percentage of expatriate workforce who tend to be more transient than the local population.

This is, of course, a highly simplified version, which links to many other variables.

So, are there steps that ensure a speculative development is successful? Let's focus on the three crucial factors of success, looking at a local example developed by Omran.

Bassa Beach Park is a new development located in Musandam, with a lot going for it.

While it may not be a mega-development, it is a well-designed, well-proportioned beach park with walkways and

children's play areas. It boasts approximately 800 sq m of retail space, situated on a stunning stretch of coastline close to Khasab, the local capital of the Musandam province.

Not surprisingly, the first and most essential aspect of its success has been the market research, which guided the project design.

Omran undertook in-depth research and based the development on the parameters identified in the research, even if that meant making significant changes to the design, especially around the retail element.

This pragmatism and business discipline to make tough decisions requires courage but is often the make-or-break factor for a development, and Omran does not shy away from that.

The second variable usually competes for the number one spot, and for good reason: location. Even average projects in an excellent location will

perform better than amazing projects in a poor location.

One might be able to change the design down the line, even alter use and scale, but not the location.

In the case of Bassa Beach Park, not only was the project well-thought out, but the site was also chosen after careful consideration.

It is already a popular destination for both locals and tourists, offering a great beach destination with some food and beverage options.

It is also located within five kilometres of all key Khasab attractions, including the port (for tourism excursions), the castle, as well as the longest overwater zipline in the world, which is the biggest new attraction in Musandam.

The third key input is accessibility and connectivity. The closer the site is to an existing transport network, the better its chances of success.

Khasab has many stunning locations, with varying degrees of access, but the planners behind Bassa Beach Park chose a location which is adjacent to the main city and situated on the main road from the UAE to Khasab.

This drives down development costs and prevents the need for costly infrastructure investment, resulting in a more competitive product, as otherwise, connectivity and infrastructure costs are passed on to end users.

With its natural beauty, rich history, friendly people, and strategic location, Oman has immense potential to attract a global audience and make not just Bassa Beach Park, but its other developments a success.

Challenges do remain in ascertaining true demand levels, however, with a greater variety and quantity of varied developments, the answer to this all-important question will become more predictable.

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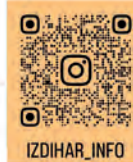
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HADITH

GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL



Marwan ibn Salim al Muqaffa' said:

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

FATWA



HIS EMINENCE
SHAIKH AHMED BIN
HAMAD AL KHALILI
GRAND MUFTI OF OMAN

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

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

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY

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

(al Feel)



Ramadhan

THURSDAY | MARCH 21, 2024 | RAMADHAN 10, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om

AN EXCEPTIONAL RAMADHAN IFTAR IN SUWGRA

BY AMAL AL RIYAMI
PHOTOS BY SAMI AL HINAI

Renowned for its breathtaking vistas, Al Jabal Akhdhar's appeal extends beyond its scenic grandeur. Today, it offers a sanctuary for adventurers and nature enthusiasts alike. Trekkers can traverse its winding trails, revealing hidden waterfalls and panoramic viewpoints that showcase the dramatic expanse of the Omani landscape. The region's cooler climate, a rare gem in the desert nation, provides respite from the scorching heat, making it an ideal



retreat for visitors seeking solace amidst nature's embrace.

Home to over 60 villages, the village of Suwgra is among those that continue to impress not just locals but foreign guests especially with its transformation from a remote stone village to becoming a unique tourist destination that offer meaningful experience to tourists.

Dating back over five centuries and perched at an elevation of 1,900 metres above sea level, Suwgra village offers a temperate climate year-round, making it an idyllic destination for seekers of tranquillity. To reach the village, one has to take a 20-minute trek down a winding stone staircase on the side of a cliff passing through a wooden hanging bridge before reaching the village's giant wooden door. The old village has now been trans-

formed into a boutique inn offering about a dozen rooms with amazing view of the mountain canyons. The old stone houses renovated and refurbished with modern amenities including comfy toilets and warm lighting.

This Ramadhan, Suwgra has emerged as an extraordinary tourist gem, drawing visitors seeking a distinctive Ramadhan experience.

Efforts by the dedicated villagers transformed this historic enclave into a magnet for tourists with its enchanting Ramadhan aura and a plethora of cultural activities during the holy month.

One of the memorable experiences the village offer is the Ramadhan iftar, boasting a tantalising array of traditional dishes crafted from locally sourced ingredients. From sumptuous harees to fragrant rice



and savoury sambusa, every bite exudes the essence of Omani culinary tradition.

Abdullah bin Nasser al Shuraiki, a Suwgra resident, reflects on the village's transformation: "Driven by our deep-rooted affection for Suwgra and cherished memories of generations past, we endeavoured to preserve its legacy. By refurbishing ancient dwellings into a heritage inn in 2016, we aimed to share its beauty with the world."

Suwgra's allure extends beyond its culi-

nary delights, inviting guests on an immersive journey through its rustic charm. Adventurous souls traverse a handmade wooden bridge, spanning the valley below, while revelling in the breathtaking vistas of nature's splendour.

Delving into the local heritage, visitors savour authentic Omani fare and indulge in refreshing beverages sourced directly from the verdant surroundings. Freshly squeezed juices, straight from the orchards, tantalise the taste buds, further



enhancing the Suwgra experience.

Sami al Hinai, a delighted visitor, shares his profound impression: "My visit in Suwgra during Ramadhan was nothing short of magical. The tranquil ambiance steeped in heritage and culture transported me to a realm of serenity."

Khalfan al Salhami echoes this sentiment, marvelling at Suwgra's pristine air and its metamorphosis into a premier tourist destination. "Suwgra's serene ambience, far removed from urban clamour, left an indelible mark on me. I eagerly anticipate my return to bask in its unique charm once more."

As a haven for seekers of spiritual fulfilment during Ramadhan, Suwgra village stands as a testament to the enduring allure of culture and heritage in an increasingly globalised world. Embrace the serenity, savour the traditions, and embark on a journey of rediscovery in this hidden oasis of tranquillity.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF MUSLIM FAITH

628

Treaty of Hdaybiyyah: A peace agreement between the Muslims and the people of Mecca.

The Treaty of Hdaybiyyah, signed in 628 CE between Prophet Muhammad and the Quraysh tribe of Mecca, showcased peaceful conflict resolution. Despite seemingly unfavourable terms, it provided strategic gains, legitimacy, and recognition for Muslims. The treaty's diplomatic success and lessons in patience remain significant in Islamic history.

HEALTH TIPS FOR RAMADHAN

GRATIFY RAMADHAN WITH A HEALTHY DIET



BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

THE COOL AND PLEASANT climate, with temperatures ranging between 20-30 degrees during the day and occasional spills of rain, has been making this Ramadhan blissful.

The first Fajr prayers around 5 am and the Maghrib prayers around 6-7 pm make it 13-14 hours of fasting a day.

Dietitian Sumaira Fatima from Apollo Hospital reflects on making the intake of food nutritious during the month of fasting.

The act of fasting is meant to remind Muslims of the less fortunate and to reinforce the need to be thankful. As one of the five pillars of Islam, fasting during the month of Ramadhan is mandatory for all healthy adult Muslims. Children who have not reached puberty, the elderly, those who are physically or mentally incapable of fasting, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and travellers are exempted. The key to making Ramadhan blessed and healthy is by serving a nutritious diet at Suhoor and Iftar with proper meal timings, hydration, and rest.

SUHOOR AND ITS IMPORTANCE

It is the pre-dawn meal; it's Sunnah to have Suhoor and is of prime importance as it provides energy for the day's fast. For people of all ages, from adolescents to adults and the elderly, especially among people with diabetes and other health disorders, Suhoor meal has significance. Keep Suhoor meal simple and easily doable. Foods like whole grain breads, cereals, and lentils with low-fat dairy products, eggs, nuts, and nut butters make it a quick and simple meal without causing much gastric trouble. Plain water is best for hydration at pre-dawn time.

IFTAR & NUTRITION

It is the meal of get-togethers with delicacies and Ramadhan happiness. It is Sunnah to break the fast with dates and water, with a variety of dates available all around like Fard, Khalas, Khunaizi, Sukkari, from half-ripened to fully ripened. Medjool dominates as the king of dates. In general, dates are blessed with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and provide instant energy. To boost up the nutrients, serve a variety of colourful fruits and vegetables at Iftar.

Include protein sources such as lean meats, skinless chicken, fish, beans, and yogurt. Meals can be served in two small portions using various whole grain cereals. Some of them which occupy a special place on the plates in Ramadhan are Habb Harees (Harees split), Oats Shourbah (Oats soup), Adasshourbah (Lentils soup), lean meat vegetable stew, which are not only nutritious but also palatable.

Reduce consumption of excess sugar, salt, oil, and fried foods, especially sweetened drinks, packed high-sodium foods, and junk foods. Commonly preferred healthy beverages are milk, laban, fresh juice without sugar, flavoured water, etc. Restrict tea and caffeine consumption late at night.

POST TARAAWEH REST AND EXERCISE

The time post-Taraweeh, that is after 9.30 pm, is of importance; proper rest is required, especially among the elderly and school-going children, to avoid stress and headaches. Avoid eating heavy meals post-Taraweeh. People who prefer to work out or go for walks generally feel this time is helpful. A small snack may be required in insulin users among people with diabetes.



PHOTO BY YAHYA AL HAJI

THE RICH LEGACY OF THE HISTORIC MOSQUE OF MANAH

BY AHMED AL KAABI

The Manah Historic Mosque stands as a historical gem on the outskirts of a large city. The Omani government has selected this strategically located mosque for conversion into a heritage district, showcasing Oman's beauty and heritage.

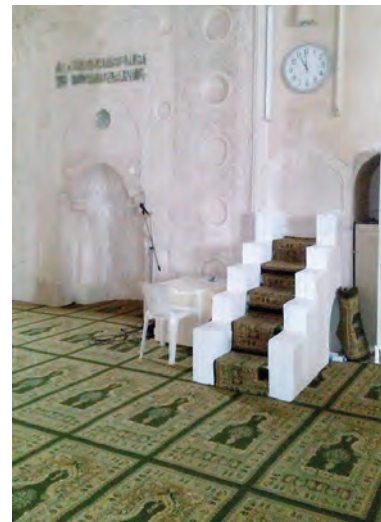
Upon entering the main building of the mosque, visitors are filled with appreciation and admiration for the vastness of its space and the grandeur of its ancient architectural design. The mosque boasts eight wooden entrances adorned with decorative arches, leading to its



interior consisting of five arcades. These arcades are characterised by five cylindrical pillars and arches connecting the sections in a geometric pattern distinct from ancient Islamic architecture in Oman.

Furthermore, the mosque showcases several historical architectural elements, with its mihrab (prayer niche) notably standing out as one of the most prominent in Omani mosques of archaeological significance. Dating back to the middle of the tenth Hijri century (941 AH / 1534 AD), the creativity of its decorative engravings is evident, as inscriptions within the mihrab attest. Al Busaidy also noted, as many agreed, that this date pertains specifically to the engraving of the mihrab, with no documented evidence or dates for the mosque's construction period as a structure thus far. The mosque predates this date.

The mosque's traditional wooden roofing reflects traditional craftsmanship, while its absence of conventional windows is compensated by ceiling openings for ventilation and lighting, creating a unique atmosphere inside and ensur-



ing even distribution of fresh air and natural light.

Constructed using simple materials like clay, gypsum, and Omani mortar, the mosque mirrors the traditional architectural style prevalent in the region during its time of construction. A small pulpit adjacent to the mihrab stands out, reminiscent of pulpits from early Islamic periods, featuring five small steps rising above the mosque's

surface for the Friday sermon.

Regarding the Manah Archaeological Mosque's role in education and Islamic culture dissemination, Shaikh Nasser affirmed its similarity to other mosques in contributing to education and spreading the Islamic message. He emphasised the mosque's importance in disseminating Islamic culture, citing its hosting of fast-breaking meals during Ramadhan and its role in

preserving and teaching the Holy Quran to area residents.

Additionally, Shaikh Nasser, who assumed management of the mosque 25 years ago, explained its restoration by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, maintaining its historical integrity without alteration. He underscored the mosque's significant role in preserving Oman's religious and cultural heritage.



How Female Chefs Are Sparkling in Istanbul

NO BIGGER THAN chickpeas and blanketed with tangy yogurt and sizzling spiced butter, the manti were so good, they could be inhaled by the dozen. My partner, Barry, and I devoured these lamb-filled Turkish dumplings, shaped into cute tufted shells, at Hatice Anne Ev Yemekleri, a homey spot in Istanbul's Kuzguncuk neighbourhood.

"There are so many unsung female cooks in this city," said Benoit Hanquet as we saluted Merve Ataoglu, the restaurant's kerchiefed manti maker. Hanquet, our guide for a Culinary Backstreets food tour of Istanbul, would later lead us on to Gule Kafe (fried doughnuts and crumbly sesame cookies) and Gunesin Sofrasi (a tasty mosaic of meze) — two more establishments serving delicious treats and overseen by women.



Exploring a city through its diverse restaurants is always rewarding. But inspired by Hanquet's tour, I decided on a subsequent Istanbul visit to focus just on kitchens run by talented women. For all its glamour and rising international fame, Istanbul's food world has until recently remained patriarchal — all dude celebrity chefs and swaggering ustas (masters) presiding over traditional specialties like baklava or kebab.

"Men ran professional kitchens; women were expected to cook at home for their families," local food media star and cookbook author Refika Birgul said. "But with the rise of modern fine dining culture in Istanbul, that dynamic is finally changing."

In the decade and a half that I've spent time in this city, I've seen a generation of female chefs emerge, quietly defining Istanbul's sophisticated style of cuisine — an idiom that often involves creative takes on Anatolian ingredients such as yogurt, tahini and pomegranate. And so, revisiting old favourites and checking out newcomers, I crossed the city in routes lit by female culinary star power.

GIRITLI
Giritli, a modern tavern in Istanbul's historic core, blends Cretan heritage

with local flavours. Chef Ayse Sensilay crafts innovative dishes like black-eyed peas with apricot slivers and seafood orzo pilaf. With a nod to progress, she champions women in the culinary world, embodying resilience and creativity in her gastronomic endeavours.

"When I started in the restaurant business, it was so hard for women," Sensilay said.

"The new generation is luckier. They can now get exceptional professional training," she continued. "Plus, modern food styles offer more creativity — appealing to women because we are innovators and reformists by nature."

HODAN
Across the Golden Horn, the Beyoglu quarter has always been Istanbul's party and restaurant playground. Its



current culinary star is Cigdem Seferoglu, who opened Hodan in 2021 in the basement space of an elegant 1901 building. With white tablecloths, an open kitchen, a tree rising from the floor and contemporary Turkish art (including a fantastical origami chandelier), Hodan has the air of a glamorous indoor-outdoor brasserie.

Riffs on traditional cuisines at our table included a pomegranate and cucumber salad crowned with a scoop of bracingly tart sour cherry sorbet, and fluffy truffled taramasalata on toast. Next came grilled octopus, diced and laced with snappy green olives, and a flame-kissed pide (flatbread) topped with unctuous tidbits of kokorec (that's, umm, roasted intestines), a gutsy homage to Istanbul street food. A voluptuous tiramisù decorated with rose petals and grassy-green local pistachios saw us off into the night, past the party kids shuffling in and out of nearby nightclubs.

SANKAI BY NAGAYA
In a surprising twist, Roka Galataport in Istanbul offers exquisite Asian cuisine, featuring raw-fish dishes and robata skewers overseen by talented chef Suna Hakyemez, formerly of England's renowned Fat Duck. Another

culinary gem, Sankai by Nagaya in Bebek, earned a Michelin star within eight months of opening. Here, sushi artisan Hiroko Shibata, a protégé of mastermind Yoshisumi Nagaya, showcases her exceptional skills, insisting on locally caught seafood for a true taste of Istanbul. Shibata's dedication to her craft shines through in each dish, from kaiseki-style morsels to buttery bonito sashimi and elegant maki rolls, making Sankai a must-visit for discerning food enthusiasts.

A protégé of the Michelin-starred Japanese chef and Sankai's mastermind, Yoshisumi Nagaya, Shibata spent years travelling around Japan sampling regional specialties while working for the Japanese navy. After an early retirement, she pursued her fish obsession in the equally male-dominated



world of sushi. "Male colleagues were so uncomfortable seeing me in the kitchen," she recalled with a laugh. "But they had to get used to it."

APARTIMAN
North of Bebek, the leafy waterside enclave of Yenikoy was only recently a sleepy area of traditional bakeries and fish restaurants with white-jacketed servers. Now it's a dining destination, thanks in part to such female-run restaurants as the Michelin-starred Araka, and the charming Apartiman, owned by chef Burcak Kazdal and her brother, Murat. With a citrus-scented back garden, Apartiman was converted by the Kazdals in 2017 from an old apartment building, and now it buzzes nightly with young locals and food industry types. The vibe is so welcoming, strangers soon feel like regulars.

A former baker, shepherd and butcher who lived and worked in San Francisco and England, Burcak Kazdal has an eclectic personal cooking style, inspired by travels, old cookbooks and her special suppliers.

That style was on delicious display in our appetisers of flavourful celery root roasted with pekmez (grape molasses) and miso and brightened with pickled radishes and in the lightly smoked

horse mackerel served over borlotti beans, grapes and jagged sourdough croutons that sopped up the warm vinaigrette underneath. As for the eriste (traditionally cut Turkish noodles) cooked in duck stock and topped with melting shreds of pulled duck and wedges of palate-cleansing persimmon, it's the kind of soulful comfort food I'd welcome every day.

SERAF VADI
Our final stop was in Vadi, an inland district of glossy skyscrapers and megamalls, to dine at Seraf Vadi. The restaurant's owner, Dogan Yildirim, is a Kurdish restaurateur so obsessed with gastronomic authenticity, he kept dismissing chefs until he offered the job to his business manager, Sinem Ozler. Ozler, who was a prodigious home cook,



travelled all over Turkey to research regional specialties for the menu at Seraf Vadi. Hence, the dishes on her current menu include Azeri hengel (floppy hand-rolled noodles with caramelised onions) from the Turkish-Armenian border, and yaglama (layers of wood-fired flatbreads moistened with tomato-y beef) from the central Anatolian city of Kayseri.

Even such familiar classics as dolma, icli kofte (meat-filled bulgur dumpling) and lahmacun ("Turkish pizza") are elevated by exalted ingredients and attention to detail. It's a thrill to savour these rootsy Anatolian flavours in a high-design room accompanied by unique Turkish wines. Sabiha Apaydin, one of the country's top wine experts, created the restaurant's 240-label list.

"Traditional Turkish cuisine is often served in humble surroundings, no alcohol," Ozler said. "Here we are proud to give it a beautiful home it deserves."

At Seraf Vadi, our food journey ended with the dish that had launched it — manti, finished in a wood-burning oven for a perfect ratio of crisp dough to succulent lamb filling. It was a dish to inspire a food pilgrimage, and a testament to the culinary prowess of Istanbul's female cooks. — NYT

A Swimming Dinosaur? Maybe Not, Study Says



SPINOSAURUS WAS one of the largest carnivorous dinosaurs, and it ate fish. That much palaeontologists agree on.

But did it just wade into rivers and snatch them out of the water like a grizzly bear? Or did it dive after its prey like a penguin or a sea lion?

This has become a question of prickly contention among dinosaur experts.

One group is convinced that Spinosaurus was a rarity among dinosaurs: one that stuck its head underwater and swam beneath the surface. Others say no way.

The latest salvo, published this month in the journal PLOS One, comes from the Spinosaurus-couldn't-swim contingent to counter a pro-swimming paper published a couple of years ago. The earlier work, published in the journal Nature, claimed that in general, animals that spend much of their time in the water, like penguins, have denser bones that provide ballast and make it easier to dive. Spinosaurus also had dense bones, and therefore was most likely a swimmer, the Nature paper concluded.

But that bone density analysis was "statistically absurd," said Nathan Myhrvold, a former chief technology officer at Microsoft and an amateur palaeontologist who led the new research with Paul Sereno, a palaeontologist at the University of Chicago.

Myhrvold and Sereno have also argued that the ungainly body shape of Spinosaurus would have made it a poor swimmer, if it could



swim at all. The weight distribution of the dinosaur would have made it top-heavy and unstable, Myhrvold said.

"It's obvious as to why it can't swim," he said.

The giant sail on its back would make it difficult for a swimming Spinosaurus to stay upright, Myhrvold said. "If it tips even the slightest amount, it'll keep tipping."

In other words, Spinosaurus would capsize and struggle to pull its sail out of the water.

In this dispute, there are points of agreement. Spinosaurus was perhaps longer and heavier than Tyrannosaurus rex. It lived about 95 million years ago in what is now the Western Sahara but was then a lush environment with deep rivers. It was also an odd-looking dinosaur, with elongated vertebrae forming a huge sail on its back.

There has been a burst of interest in Spinosaurus in the past decade after a new fossil was uncovered in Morocco by Nizar Ibrahim, who was also an author of the earlier bone density study and is now a senior lecturer at the University of Portsmouth in England. The only other fossil was found by Ernst Stromer, a German palaeontologist, in 1915, and destroyed in an aerial bombing of Munich in 1944.

In the latest study, Myhrvold and colleagues argue that the palaeontologists who made the bone density claims employed a sophisticated statistical technique without understanding its limitations. — NYT