

P12

MOROCCO STUN BRAZIL FOR FIRST TIME IN FRIENDLY INTERNATIONAL



P13

VALUE OF FISH OUTPUT IN OMAN TOPS RO 423 MILLION



P18

HOW TO MAKE THE INDIAN-STYLE RAMADHAN STAPLE CHICKEN BIRYANI



MUSCAT

MOBILE OUTLETS TO EMPLOY NATIONALS

Muscat Municipality has issued fresh guidelines to regulate the business and operations of street vendors, including full Omanisation of all such activities in Muscat. While stating that it is prohibited to employ expatriate workers all over Muscat Governorate in street business, those wishing to engage in mobile vending business must apply for initial approval for the required activity.

DETAILS ON P2

160 ACRES OF WHEAT CROP HARVESTED

Farmers in the Wilayat of Manah in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah began harvesting 160 acres of wheat in various villages of the wilayat. Mohammed bin Harib al Bahlani, Director of the Agriculture and Water Resources Department in the Wilayat of Manah, said that this year's wheat production is expected to reach 170 tonnes, an increase of 40 tonnes over 2022. Farmers market part of their crop in the local markets and another part is purchased through the Oman Flour Mills Company, he said.

DETAILS ON P3



INSIDE



LEBANESE SQUABBLE OVER CLOCK CHANGE

P7



AMERICA'S INTEREST IN ENDING UKRAINE CRISIS

P9

A PLACE OF GLORY AND PEACE



The Sultan Qaboos Mosque in the Wilayat of Shinas has become a prominent landmark since its opening in 2018. As a religious, cultural, and tourist landmark, the mosque has impressive features that makes it a must-visit destination for both locals and tourists. The mosque is a distinct architectural masterpiece. DETAILS ON P3

Upper trough likely to bring rains

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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Chances of formation of low clouds and fog with a fall in horizontal visibility at times will continue till early Monday morning over parts of the governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta, Dhofar and parts of the coastal areas along the Sea of Oman.

The weather alert and analysis of the National Multi-Hazard

Early Warning Centre indicates that an upper air trough is likely to affect the Sultanate of Oman starting from Monday until Wednesday evening. The peak is expected to be on Tuesday afternoon.

The general weather forecast states that partly cloudy to cloudy skies will prevail over the governorates of Musandam, Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi, Dhofar, parts of the coastal areas of Sea of

Oman and Al Hajar Mountains with chances of isolated rain and convective clouds, occasionally associated with thundershowers and hail. There are also chances of dust rising due to fresh winds over desert and open areas.

Over most of the governorates, winds will be southeasterly light to moderate occasionally fresh along the Sea of Oman and Arabian Sea coasts and over deserts and open areas.

Royal Decree amends sanctuary name

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued Royal Decree No 18/2023 reading as follows: Article (1) stipulates that the name of the “Living and Fungal Organisms Reserve in the Governorate of Al Wusta” shall be amended to “Arabian Oryx Reserve”, wherever it might occur in Royal Decree No 4/94 on the “Living and Fungal Organisms Reserve in the Governorate of Al Wusta”, and its attached Annex. Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of publication. — ONA

Smart water meter to monitor consumption

MUSCAT: Rayan bint Khamis al Kalbaniyah and Mawadda bint Sulaiman al Kheyriyah, students from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), met with success in developing a smart water meter that keeps pace with international modern technological developments. The device can be used in households and establishments.

Rayan told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the device was designed to register water consumption readings and display them in a control panel on a special website that the duo designed under the name “IoT Manager Oman.”

She added that the meter comprises a control panel through which the readings are shown in multiple forms and tables and in various colours to facilitate the process of monitoring water consumption.

It took six months to complete the project, which passed through several stages before materialising, said Rayan, noting that the team sought the assistance of Ericsson experts and studied available options and other versions of water metering devices in the market.

Mawadda pointed out that the device assumes significance as it facilitates the process of



The device was designed to register water consumption readings and display them in a control panel on a special website that the duo designed under the name IoT Manager Oman

RAYAN AL KALBANIYAH

calculating water consumption for individuals and homes, besides monitoring water use. “In our project, we envisaged possible issues that this device can resolve,” she said.

TURN TO P2

Survey aims to build a national database of species

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority, represented by the National Biodiversity Survey project's team, continues its efforts to improve the ranking of the environmental performance index of the Sultanate of Oman in the field of biodiversity.

The step aims to enhance building a national database of species, updating their areas of existence and the changes that occurred in them, in addition

to recording, monitoring and documenting elements of biodiversity in in Oman.

The working team, in cooperation with the Environment Department in the Governorate of Musandam, recently carried out two-week field survey for the National Survey of Biodiversity Project in the governorate. According to the team's division, the project included 119 survey squares from



the category of surveys of high-priority areas, which were divided into dimensions of 5x5 km across the governorate.

The team met Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam and highlighted the tasks and specialisations of the team, and the biodiversity of rare natural animal species that live in wild environments in the Sultanate of Oman and the challenges it faces. It also

spotlighted the efforts of the team and the preliminary results it has achieved since project's inception in 2022 in the Governorate of Dhofar.

The field work resulted in surveying 77 sites, equivalent to 1,925 square kilometres, and installing 45 trap cameras, which will be monitored periodically to ensure that they remain active for a period of 6 months from the date of their installation. — ONA



‘Omani rial is the third strongest in the world’

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

If you have to wonder why citizens and residents of the Sultanate of Oman feel less pinch on their pockets while travelling abroad or doing online shopping, it is because the Omani rial has a few competitors to match when it comes to purchasing power. It is the third strongest in the world.

The advantage of having a strong currency is that when travellers from the Sultanate of Oman go abroad, they have to spend less for transactions made in foreign currency, including the purchase of tickets made not in rials.

While goods imported to the country with purchases made in foreign currencies will be inexpensive, on the flip side products exported from the country will be expensive in foreign markets and less competitive.

The Forbes Adviser has listed the 10 strongest currencies in the world, based on their relative value against the US dollar.

What are the top 10 strongest currencies?Forbeshasdetermined



the strongest currencies, based on the number of dollars needed to buy one unit of each currency. The exchange rates are sourced from our currency converter, based on data from Open Exchange at the time of writing.

Here are the top 10 strongest currencies:

The Omani rial is the third-strongest currency in the world, with 1 rial buying 2.60 dollars (or \$1 equals 0.38 Omani rial). The Omani rial was introduced in the 1970s and is pegged to the dollar.

The Kuwaiti dinar is the strongest currency in the world, with 1 dinar buying 3.26 dollars (or, put another way, \$1 equals

0.31 Kuwaiti dinar). The Kuwaiti dinar was introduced in the 1960s and was initially pegged to the British pound before being re-pegged to an undisclosed basket of currencies.

The Bahraini dinar is the second-strongest currency in the world, with 1 dinar buying 2.65 dollars (or \$1 equals 0.38 Bahraini dinar). The Bahraini Dinar entered circulation in 1965 and is pegged to the dollar.

3. The Jordanian dinar is the fourth-strongest currency in the world, with 1 dinar buying 1.41 dollars (or \$1 equals 0.71 Jordanian dinars). The Jordanian

dinar entered circulation in 1950 and is pegged to the dollar.

British pound (GBP) The British pound is the fifth-strongest currency in the world, with 1 pound buying 1.22 dollars (or \$1 equals 0.82 British pounds).

The pound was first introduced in the 1400s before being decimalised in 1971. It is free-floating, not pegged to other currencies.

The Swiss franc is tied for eighth among the strongest currencies in the world, with 1 franc buying 1.08 dollars (or \$1 equals 0.92 Swiss francs). The Swiss franc was introduced in 1850 and was later briefly pegged to the euro before moving to a free float.

Euro (EUR) The euro shares the No. 8 spot among the world's strongest currencies, with 1 euro buying 1.08 dollars (or \$1 equals 0.93 euro). Euro coins and banknotes entered circulation in 2002, and the currency is free-floating.

US dollar (USD) The US dollar is the 10th-strongest currency in the world, with 1 dollar buying 1 dollar. (Obviously.) All other units of currency across the globe are worth less than a buck.

Mobile vending outlets urged to employ nationals

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Muscat Municipality has issued fresh guidelines to regulate the business and operations of street vending businesses, including the full Omanisation of all such activities in the capital.

While stating that it is prohibited to employ expatriate workers all over Muscat Governorate in the street business, those wishing to engage in the mobile vending business must apply for initial approval for the required activity, and to commit not to practice it without obtaining final approval from the municipality.

Speaking to the Observer, Khalid al Khanbashy, media coordinator at Muscat Municipality said that the regulations are part of the authority's drive to organise and support the business activities of mobile vendors, and to help ensure the preservation of the urban appearance in accordance with the regulations and laws of the municipality.

“The Muscat Municipality has reorganised mobile vending controls with a number of new panels and requirements, so to ensure that these businesses are carried out within a legal and healthy framework that ensures



compliance with the proper conditions and procedures for such activities and for the safety of the public,” Al Khanbashy said.

The regulation stipulates that only Omanis can engage in this business, and it is prohibited to employ expat workers all over Muscat Governorate. Those Omani citizens wishing to engage in mobile vending business must apply for an initial approval for the required activity, and not to practice it without obtaining the final approval from the municipality located in the requested wilayah. Additionally, all licensed vendors must adhere to the stipulated health requirements while carrying out these activities.

The Muscat Municipality has invited all mobile vendors to visit the nearby Municipality office to reconcile their conditions in accordance with the health controls and requirements.

Smart water meter to monitor consumption

FROM PAGE 1

The smart device can also solve the problem of water leakage by monitoring and comparing the actual consumption of water in different settings, she added.

She noted that the device can be used in smart agriculture as it can be programmed to provide each specific type of plant with the appropriate quantity of irrigation water. The device can be connected to sensors that measure the moisture level in the soil and then provide the quantity of water required to irrigate the plant.

The two young innovators are attempting to further develop

the control panel by including additional features that facilitate the process of monitoring water consumption, extending the device's functions, and expanding the range of problems that can be solved by the device. They expressed their hope that their invention will be supported by the relevant authorities in order to be developed and utilised on the ground.

The project is the outcome of applications of the Internet of Things (IoT) Programme and the “Centre of Excellence for Advanced Communication Technologies and IoT”.

The Centre of Excellence

focuses on 5G applications and IoT. It was established in cooperation with several departments, including the Ministry of Finance - through the “Programme of Partnership for Development (Offset)”, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), in addition to partnership with Swedish company Ericsson, the pioneering firm in providing systems of data transfer and online communication. — ONA

وزارة الطاقة والمعادن
Ministry of Energy and Minerals

Offering Announcement of Oil and Gas Concession Areas

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals announces the offering of three oil and gas concession areas for local and international oil companies.

Concession blocks	15	36	54
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During the period from March 26, 2023 to June 25, 2023, For more information, please visit the Live Data Room (LDR) at the link below:
ldr.omanbidround.com

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

For the benefit of residents from one of the fastest-growing suburbs of the capital, the Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate said the Al Nahda Health Centre in Al Amerat will provide primary and specialised care services for 24 hours.

Usually, local residents go to the nearest public hospitals such as Al Nahda Hospital in Ruwi or the emergency department of Royal Hospital and both can be crowded at times. The decision is part of the government move to relieve the load on reference hospitals.

Dr Ahmed al Hanashi, a doctor at Al Nahda Health Centre, said that the decision is in line with the population growth in the Wilayat Al Amerat and following requests



from people to open a centre that can offer treatment at night.

During Ramadhan, Al Nahda Health Centre will operate in four shifts - 8 am to 1 pm, 1 pm to 7 pm, 7 pm to 12 am, and 12 am to 8 am.

The health centre will have services such as a general medicine clinic, a diabetes clinic, a dental clinic, a physiotherapy clinic, x-rays, a laboratory, examination rooms, and operation rooms, in addition to other facilities such as a room for sterilising tools and other health facilities, waiting rooms for men and women, administrative offices and other

medical, administrative and service facilities.

Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, said that some new hospital projects will come up in the near future. “We are in the stage of improving trust between health institutions and citizens by facilitating easy access and by raising the level of quality and efficiency,” he said.

The minister said the decentralisation of the health sector is important to provide services to citizens in various governorates and avoid the need to travel to the capital for treatment.”



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3

oman

Social iftars are a blessing for many



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Social iftars have made a comeback with some good Samaritans or groups offering iftar kits containing sumptuous meals in many parts of the country.

These community iftars are aimed at helping the believers break the day-long fast that strengthens the community bond.

"I am a bachelor living in Wattayah and I was a bit worried when my friends told me that there wouldn't be any mass iftars this year. I fast everyday and this tent is a great relief for me and my friends," said Hussain, an expatriate who was seen at the huge tent, sponsored by the Malabar Gold group, built to distribute iftar meals in Ruwi.

These tents are a great relief to everyone, including the passers-by, as they aim to satisfy the believers' commitment to God as well as share food and water with

travellers who find it difficult to get a proper place for iftar.

"I am a bachelor and my family is away from Muscat for familial reasons. For people like me, this (the tent in Ruwi) is a great boon as we don't have to sweat in the kitchen making iftar meals," Mohammed Iqbal, a man living in the country for the past 35 years, told the Observer.

People gather for mass iftars and suhoor that reinstate bonhomie and camaraderie among people from different backgrounds but united with just one purpose, that is to fast and gain Allah Almighty's blessings, around the tent by 4.30pm waiting for the next two hours to break fast. A large number of labourers are seen lining themselves up for their turn to get into the tent and break their fast as the prayer call sounds from the nearby Sultan Qaboos Mosque.

In Oman, social gatherings very frequently happen as part of

iftar. Traditional dishes are often highlighted, including traditional desserts, particularly those made only during Ramadhan and international iftars are a key feature during the month.

"This is a part of our CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and we keep a portion of the charity works for such initiatives that support the society year. We are glad that our iftar tent in Ruwi has been well received and became a stop for those who are in need," said Najeeb, Regional Head of Malabar Gold. He said that this tent in downtown Ruwi caters to nearly 650 people everyday.

Similar food distribution moves have been seen in other parts of the city though in a smaller way, notwithstanding the initiatives of individuals within and from outside the capital area, but have been aiming to cater to the people who are on the move.

"I distribute food to nearly 100 people who are seen on the

road and I don't check if they are fasting or not because for a Muslim, giving is most important and not someone's identity," says Ahmed Vakil, an Omani national who distributes foods from his pickup vehicle everyday in Wadi Kabir.

Rightly as he said, giving in Islam is of great importance and it is one of the foundations of Islam. Sadaqa, as it is called, is charity given voluntarily to please God. Sadaqa also describes a voluntary charitable act towards others, whether through generosity, love, compassion or faith and can be done throughout the year and is not mandatory. However, "Zakah" is something that one must give and is calculated upon his possessions, gold, farm, crop, etc.

The acts are not necessarily physical or monetary. Simple good deeds such as a smile, or a helping hand, are seen as acts of sadaqah and can be given to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

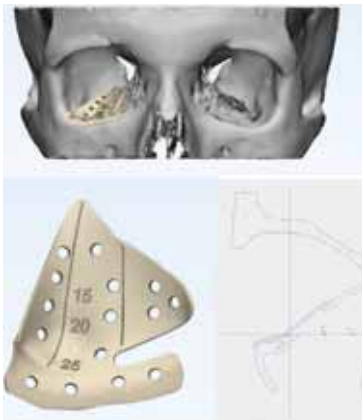
SQUH conducts rare surgery to reconstruct fractured eye orbit floor

MUSCAT: A specialised medical team from Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) succeeded in conducting a surgical operation, the first-of-its-kind in the Sultanate of Oman, to reconstruct the fractured floor of a patient's eye orbit, using a special plate.

The operation was conducted by a team headed by Dr Abdulaziz Abdullah Bakathir, Senior Consultant of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Head of the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Unit, in addition to Dr Khamis bin Mohammed al Hassani, Specialist in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Department of Dental and Maxillofacial Surgery.

The surgery was conducted on a young man who met with a road accident and suffered injury to the eye. His eye's plate was manufactured in cooperation with Omani company 'CureTech', which designed the plate using CT coordinates of the patient.

Then, the location of the plate was planned in cooperation with the medical team through a special 3D technology programme to build the plate electronically and restore the fracture area with extreme precision.



PEEK, a polymer material that withstands high temperatures and chemical reaction, was used to form a prosthetic implant piece in the patient's body.

It took 60 minutes to conduct the operation, compared to 3 hours when using a conventional method of repairing the orbital fracture.

The CT scan after the operation showed that the restoration and reconstruction of the fracture area was carried out accurately and in accordance with pre-operative surgical planning procedure. The patient left the hospital in good health.

The technique is deemed an ideal treatment for this type of complex fracture and is approved in specialised medical centres worldwide. — ONA



160 acres of wheat crop harvested in Manah

MANAH: Farmers in the Wilayat of Manah in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate began harvesting 160 acres of wheat in various villages of the wilayat.

Mohammed bin Harib al Bahlani, Director of the Agriculture and Water Resources Department in the Wilayat of Manah, said that this year's wheat production is expected to reach 170 tonnes, an increase of 40 tonnes over 2022. Farmers market part of their crop in the local markets and another part is purchased through the Oman Flour Mills Company, he added.



He pointed out that the area cultivated with wheat within the guiding programme of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources covers 10 acres, and the number of beneficiaries is 14 farmers. He added that there are farmers outside the programme who provided the seeds themselves and cultivated an area of not less than 150 acres.

He affirmed that the department distributed this year 500 kilogrammes of fortified wheat varieties to various farmers. — ONA

OMAN AIR INCREASES MOSCOW FLIGHTS



Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, has increased the frequency of flights to Moscow as part of its summer schedule. Offering maximum comfort and convenience to its guests, the airline will be flying daily using its popular Airbus A330 wide-body aircraft. — ONA

Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Shinas — a place of glory, peace

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 26

The Sultan Qaboos Mosque in the Wilayat of Shinas has become a prominent landmark in the state since its opening in 2018. As a religious, cultural, and tourist landmark, the mosque serves impressive features that make it a must-visit destination for both locals and tourists.

Shinas is a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Muscat and is known for its agriculture and farming.

The mosque is considered one of the most important features in the state, and a distinct architectural masterpiece added to the series of mosques of the late

Sultan Qaboos, which he ordered to be built at his own expense in all the wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman to enhance the religious and spiritual aspects of citizens and residents of the country.

The Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Shinas features a main prayer hall that can accommodate 2,592 worshipers and a women's prayer hall that can accommodate 357 worshipers. It also houses a public library, several classrooms, and administration and maintenance offices. The surrounding area includes well-manicured landscaping, green spaces, external works, and ample parking.

Mohammed al Balushi expressed admiration for the



mosque. "It's truly a sight to behold. The grandeur and beauty of the mosque are simply breathtaking. It always leaves me feeling more peaceful and centred. The library and classrooms are a great resource for the community



as well," he said.

The mosque has nine chandeliers, including a massive centrepiece containing 500 luminous candles. The centrepiece is eight metres tall and weighs three tonnes. The mosque's carpet

is equally impressive, featuring seven colours that complement its various decorations, inscriptions, and interior colours. The mosque stands at a towering height of 35.6 metres, with a diameter of 24,561 metres. It is topped by two minarets

that reach a height of 48 metres.

A regular visitor to the mosque, Yousif Ali, a resident of Shinas, highlighted the cultural significance of the mosque. He stated, "The mosque serves not only as a place of worship but also as a centre for cultural and educational activities. It's great to see a religious institution that is so inclusive and welcoming to all."

As one of the most important architectural masterpieces of late Sultan Qaboos, the mosque serves not only as a religious sanctuary but also as a hub for cultural and educational activities. It hosts religious lessons, lectures, seminars, and cultural events in its halls and fully equipped library.



AHMED AL KAABI

D

uring the holy month of Ramadhan, many students find themselves juggling the demands of studying and fasting. Balancing the two can be challenging, but with a proactive approach, it is possible to stay productive and achieve your goals. It's not uncommon for students to feel short of time and overwhelmed.

ANALYSE DAILY SCHEDULE

Mohammad al Yarubi, a final-year student, said, "I learned from past experiences and take a proactive approach to manage my time during Ramadhan".

He starts by analysing his daily schedule, including school hours, Iftar and Suhoor times, and any Ramadhan programmes he wants to watch.

By doing this, he can calculate the hours of free time he has available and allocate them towards his tasks.

Yarubi said dividing study time in a measured way is important. "Taking short naps can boost your memory, especially during fasting. Eating healthy foods and moderate meals are also important factors to consider," he said.

Yarubi suggests avoiding studying during periods of physical exhaustion since it can be challenging to achieve the necessary level of concentration needed to comprehend or retain the material.

"Instead, take a break and recharge your energy for some time when you're able to study effectively," he said.

DETERMINE THE BEST TIME

Labid al Amri, a university student, suggests defining study goals and determining the best time to be active. He said that the intensity of activity varies from person to person, with some finding the early morning the best time to study, while others prefer to allocate time for studying in the evening. "Determine the best time for you and make the most of it," he said.

Amri was of the view that it is important to plan in advance to stay productive during Ramadhan. "Setting goals before bed and jotting down tasks or lessons that need to be accomplished can help maintain focus and stay organised," he said.

CONCENTRATE ON ONE SUBJECT A DAY

According to Amri, it is essential to concentrate on one subject per day and avoid getting distracted by other subjects. "By dedicating your attention solely to a single subject, you'll be able to comprehend and handle it more efficiently. Make sure to allocate different days for different subjects and avoid mixing them, which can be distracting," he said.

Although balancing studying and fasting during Ramadhan can be challenging, with careful planning and a proactive approach, students can achieve their goals and make the most out of this sacred month.



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MONDAY | MARCH 27 | 2023

5

US House speaker says lawmakers to move forward with TikTok bill

WASHINGTON: US House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy said on Sunday lawmakers will move forward with legislation to address national security worries about TikTok, alleging China's government had access to the short video app's user data.

In the United States, there are growing calls to ban TikTok, owned by China-based company ByteDance, or to pass bipartisan legislation to give President Joe Biden's administration legal authority to seek a ban. Devices owned by the US government were recently banned from having the app installed.

"The House will be moving forward with legislation to protect Americans from the technological tentacles of the Chinese Communist Party," McCarthy said on Twitter.

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew appeared before a US House Committee for about five hours on Thursday, and lawmakers from both parties grilled him about national security and other concerns involving the app, which has 150 million American users.

In Thursday's hearing, the TikTok CEO was asked if of the app, has spied on Americans at Beijing's



US House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy

request. Chew answered, "No."

Republican Representative Neal Dunn then referenced the company's disclosure in December that some China-based employees at ByteDance improperly accessed TikTok user data of two journalists and were no longer employed by the company. He repeated his question about whether ByteDance was spying.

"I don't think that spying is the right way to describe it," Chew said. He went on to describe the reports as involving an "internal investigation" before being cut off. McCarthy, a Republican, said



A person holds a smartphone as Tik Tok logo is displayed behind in this picture illustration. - Reuters

in a tweet on Sunday, "It's very concerning that the CEO of TikTok can't be honest and admit what we already know to be true - China has access to TikTok user data."

The company says it has spent more than \$1.5 billion on data security efforts under the name "Project Texas" which currently has nearly 1,500 full-time employees and is contracted with Oracle Corp to store TikTok's US user data.

Rather than appease lawmakers' concerns, Chew's appearance before Congress on

Thursday "actually increased the likelihood that Congress will take some action," Representative Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin, the Republican chairman of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, told ABC News on Sunday.

Former US President Donald Trump lost a series of court rulings in 2020 when he sought to ban TikTok and another Chinese-owned app, WeChat, a unit of Tencent. Many Democrats also have raised concerns although have not yet explicitly backed a US ban. — Reuters

Harris promises greater investment for Africa

ACCRA: US Vice President Kamala Harris said on Sunday that the United States will increase investment in Africa and help spur economic growth as she began a week long tour of the continent aimed at offering a counter to the influence of rival China.

China has invested heavily in Africa in recent decades, including in infrastructure and resource development, while Russian influence has also grown, including through the deployment of troops from Russia's private military contractor Wagner Group to aid governments in several countries.

"On this trip I intend to do work that is focused on increasing investments here on the continent and facilitating economic growth and opportunity," Harris said shortly after touching down in Ghana, the first destination in a trip that will include visits to Tanzania and Zambia.

The administration of US President Joe Biden has sought to strengthen ties with Africa, in part to offer an alternative to rival powers.

In December, ahead of a

US-Africa summit, the US committed \$55 billion to the continent over the next three years. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced \$150 million in new humanitarian aid for Africa's Sahel region during a visit to Niger this month.

Biden is yet to visit Africa as president.

On this trip, Harris will also discuss China's engagement in technology and economic issues in Africa that concern the United States, as well as China's involvement in debt restructuring, senior US officials said last week.

Harris will meet Ghana President Nana Akufo-Addo this week and will visit a former slave castle from which slaves were sent to America during the slave trade era.

Harris will be in Ghana from March 26-29, then in Tanzania from March 29-31. Her final stop is Zambia, on March 31 and April 1. She will meet with the three countries' presidents and plans to announce public- and private-sector investments.

— Reuters

Cubans head to the polls, all eyes on voter turnout

HAVANA: Cubans began voting early on Sunday for the 470 lawmakers who will represent them in the country's National Assembly in a closely watched election seen as a referendum on the communist-run government at a time of deep economic crisis.

Voting centers in the capital Havana opened at 7 am ET and bustled with activity as citizens arrived to cast ballots at the city's share of more than 23,000 official ballot sites throughout the country. Cuba's government, saddled by shortages, inflation and growing social unrest, has encouraged unity in Sunday's vote, calling on citizens to vote together in a broad show of support for the communist leadership.

Ana Lydia Velazquez, a 78-year old retired Havana resident, said that message resonated with her.

"I believe all Cubans should go to vote, to help our country improve, and advance," she said. "We are going through a critical situation and we all have to pitch in."

Anti-government forces, primarily off-island in a country that restricts dissident

political speech, have encouraged the opposite, calling on Cubans to abstain and labeling the election a "farce."

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel, who voted in his hometown of Santa Clara just after sunrise on Sunday, said the people would have the last word.

DIFFICULT ECONOMIC SITUATION

"Some people may put the difficult economic situation ahead of their willingness to vote, but I don't think it will be a majority," Diaz-Canel told reporters. The 470 candidates on Sunday's paper ballot are vying for 470 open seats. There are no opposition candidates.

A high rate of abstention would not have any immediate impact on the election's outcome, as the winners of the contest must receive more than half the votes of those who choose to cast ballots.

But political analysts say a low rate of participation in the elections would be a sign of deepening discontent with Cuba's one-party, communist-run system. Abstention has been on the rise in Cuba over several elections. — Reuters

■ PROTEST AGAINST WATER RESERVE



Riot mobile gendarmes, riding quad bikes, fire teargas shells towards protesters during a demonstration called by the collective 'Bassines non merci', the environmental movement 'Les Soulevements de la Terre' and the French trade union 'Confederation paysanne' to protest against the construction of a new water reserve for agricultural irrigation, in Sainte-Soline, central-western France. More than 3,000 police officers and gendarmes have been mobilised and 1,500 'activists' are expected to take part in the demonstration, around Sainte-Soline. The new protest against the 'bassines', a symbol of tensions over access to water, took place under tight surveillance in the Deux-Sevres department. — AFP

Nitrous oxide no laughing matter in UK as government vows ban

LONDON: Britain's government said on Sunday it plans to ban sales of small canisters of laughing gas as part of a wider crackdown on anti-social behaviour heading into elections.

Communities Secretary Michael Gove vowed to save city centres and parks from turning into "drug-taking arenas" — and denied that the government was failing to tackle woeful prosecution rates for crimes such as rape.

Public spaces should no longer be littered with the "scourge" of small canisters of nitrous oxide used by people to get a quick high, he said, even as experts warned that a ban would be counter-productive.

Gove, a former journalist, has admitted to taking cocaine in the past. He told Sky News that he had learned that taking drugs was a "mistake".

British law already bans the "knowing or reckless" supply of nitrous oxide for inhalation outside of medical uses. But the canisters are easily bought online and on the streets.

Prolonged use can cause anaemia, nerve damage and spinal injuries, doctors warn.



There were 36 deaths in Britain associated with misuse of nitrous oxide between 2001, 2016

There were 36 deaths in Britain associated with misuse of nitrous oxide between 2001 and 2016, official data show.

The Conservative government has been stepping up its get-tough rhetoric on a range of issues, including illegal immigration, as

it tries to revive its standing in opinion polls ahead of local elections in May.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is expected on Monday to outline a series of measures to tackle low-level crime, which pollsters say is rising up voters' list of concerns as a cost-of-living crisis bites.

Downing Street said the plans will include vandals and daubers of graffiti being forced to wear jumpsuits or hi-vis jackets while they carry out tasks in public as punishment.

Police will gain new powers to tackle anti-social behaviour on the spot — but critics warned that public trust in UK police forces was already at a low ebb after a series of shocking crimes by serving officers.

The opposition Labour party, which is riding high in the polls, accused the Conservatives of reheating old policies that had already failed.

"We hear these sort of re-boots and another re-boot and another announcement to get the Sunday media attention, but I think it amounts to nothing," senior Labour lawmaker Lucy Powell said on Sky. — AFP



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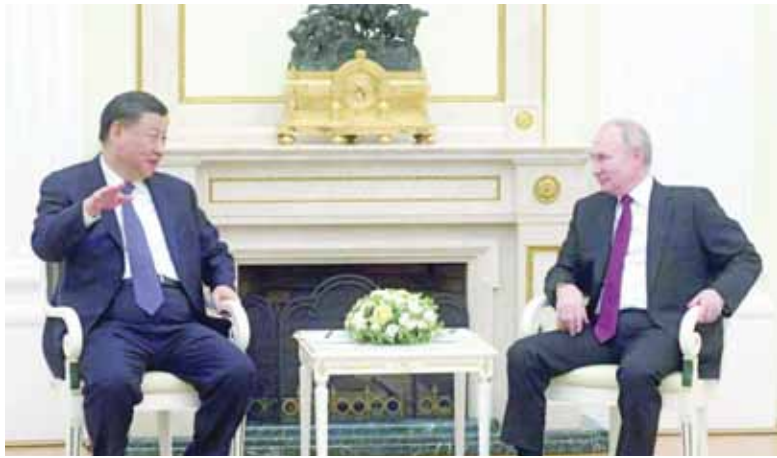
TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Muscat Finance invites specialized interested companies registered with Tender Board to participate for the following bidding:

- Tender Title:** Fit out and supply of loose furniture to New Offices for Muscat Finance on plot 318, Boushar, and Ghala Height.
- Dead line for obtaining document :** 29th March 2023
- Date of Submission of Tender :** 6th April 2023

RFQ in CD may be collected from Muscat Finance during office hours (from 9:30 AM to 2:00PM) on 29th March 2023.

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File photo of Putin and Xi Jinping during a meeting in Moscow.

Russia, China are not creating military alliance, says Putin

MOSCOW: Russia and China are not creating a military alliance and the cooperation between their armed forces is “transparent”, President Vladimir Putin said in comments broadcast on Sunday, days after hosting Chinese leader Xi Jinping in the Kremlin.

Putin and Xi professed friendship and pledged closer ties, including in the military sphere, during their March 20-21 summit, as Russia struggles to make battlefield gains in what it calls a “special military operation” in Ukraine.

“We are not creating any military alliance with China,” Putin said on state television. “Yes, we have cooperation in the sphere of military-technical interaction. We are not hiding this.

“Everything is transparent, there is nothing secret.”

China and Russia signed a “no limits” partnership accord

in early 2022, just weeks before Putin sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine. Beijing has refrained from criticising Putin’s decision and has touted a peace plan for Ukraine.

In his televised remarks, Putin dismissed suggestions that Moscow’s increased ties with Beijing in areas such as energy and finance meant that Russia was becoming overly dependent on China, saying these were the views of “jealous people.”

“For decades many have desired turning China against the Soviet Union and Russia, and vice versa,” he said. “We understand the world we live in. We really value our mutual relations and the level they have reached in recent years.”

Putin also accused the United States and Nato of seeking to build a new global “axis” that he said bore some resemblance to the World War Two alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan. — **Reuters**

GCC appeals to US on Israeli minister’s Palestinian comments

RIYADH: The Gulf Cooperation Council said on Sunday it had written to Washington’s top diplomat condemning controversial comments from Israel’s finance minister in which he denied the existence of a Palestinian people.

The GCC, in a letter to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, called on Washington “to assume its responsibilities in responding to all measures and statements that target the Palestinian people”.

The letter from the six-member GCC’s foreign ministers also called on the United States “to play its role in reaching a just, comprehensive and lasting solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel’s far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, speaking earlier this month, said that the Palestinians did not exist as a people, comments that sparked outrage among Arab nations.

The US State Department said they had found Smotrich’s comments “to not only be inaccurate but also deeply concerning and dangerous.”

Smotrich is part of veteran Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu’s hard-right government that took office in December.

The GCC, whose foreign ministers met in Riyadh last week. Violence has intensified in the West Bank in recent months, which Israel has occupied since the Six-Day War of 1967.

On Tuesday, the State Department criticised a move



Firefighters work at a Palestinian house which Palestinians say was attacked by Israeli settlers near Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. — **Reuters**

by Israel’s parliament to annul part of a law banning Israelis from living in areas of the West Bank evacuated in 2005, calling it “provocative” and in direct contradiction of promises made to Washington at the time.

Blinken, appearing before a Senate committee, also reiterated previous US pushback on Smotrich’s comments about Palestinians, saying they do not reflect US values.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Foreign Ministry accused “Jewish terrorist elements” of an arson

attack against a family home in the occupied West Bank on Sunday, but Israeli police said the fire appeared to have been an accident.

NEW TENSIONS

West Bank tensions have been running high as Palestinians mark the holy month of Ramadhan amid a surge of violence, including a gun attack on Saturday in which two Israeli soldiers were wounded and almost nightly arrest raids by the Israeli army.

A Sinjel resident who requested

anonymity said that he saw cars whose occupants he recognised as Jewish settlers nearby minutes before the incident.

Most countries deem the settlements, which take up land Palestinians seek for a state, illegal. Over the past year, Israeli forces have made thousands of arrests in the West Bank and killed more than 250 Palestinians, including fighters and civilians.

In overnight West Bank raids, Israeli forces arrested three suspected militants, the army said on Sunday. — **Reuters/AFP**

Turkmenistan stages parliamentary election under ruling family

ASHGABAT: Gas-rich Turkmenistan on Sunday held the first parliamentary polls since the ruling family tightened its grip on the Central Asian nation.

The new president took power following a hereditary succession in March 2022, and the vote comes after the abolition of the legislature’s upper house and the creation of a supreme body.

President Serdar Berdimukhamedov and his father repeatedly stressed this election would be held according to democratic principles.

But the opposition is not taking part and censorship is in force.

“We have to pursue the efforts of the Hero-Protector and our

dear president,” polling station returning officer Ogulgurban Ezimova said in Ashgabat, referring to Berdimukhamedov senior and his son.

Eighteen-year-olds voting for the first time were given presents, flowers and “our dear protector’s books... to remember this special day in their lives”, said Ezimova.

Maia Ataeva had just received her gifts at the polling station.

“We students, we take these elections very seriously because as our dear president Serdar Berdimukhamedov said, they are a new stage in the democratisation of the country,” she said.

But beyond the polling stations, enthusiasm for the election



A student of the Institute of Telecommunications and Informatics casts her ballot during parliamentary elections at the institute's hall in Ashgabat. — **AFP**

appeared limited.

Information about any policies is hard to find. Only the biographies of the 258 candidates are listed in the “Turkmenistan Neutral”, the successor newspaper to the communist party daily in Soviet times. The candidates represent three parties and several groups of citizens.

Former dentist and health minister Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov came to power in 2006, succeeding the nation’s founding president Saparmurat Niyazov after his death.

Berdymukhamedov established a strong cult of personality before handing the reins to his son Serdar last year

after a token snap election. But he kept his position as chair of the upper house of parliament.

The council’s remit covers the main directions of Turkmenistan’s domestic and foreign policy, overshadowing the unicameral national assembly and its 125 members.

With the economy dependent on gas exports to Beijing and to a lesser extent Moscow, the new president has in recent months met China’s Xi Jinping and Russia’s Vladimir Putin.

Eight hours after polling stations opened at seven am, almost 75 per cent had already voted, the election commission said. — **AFP**

JAKARTA

Tanker ship caught on fire off Lombok island

A tanker ship caught on fire off the coast of Indonesia’s West Nusa Tenggara province on Sunday.

According to news broadcaster Kompas TV, the tanker is believed to belong to state-owned energy company Pertamina, as the vessel caught fire just off the coast of Pertamina’s oil depot in Ampenan, a city on the island of Lombok.

There were 17 people on board when the fire broke out at 3 pm local time. Of them, 14 have been evacuated from the vessel. The



remaining three reportedly died in the fire, according to witnesses and fishermen involved in evacuating the crew along with the local search and rescue agency.

TUNIS

29 Bodies recovered after vessels capsize

Tunisia’s coastguard said on Sunday the bodies of 29 migrants from sub-Saharan African countries had been recovered after three vessels capsized.

It also “rescued 11 illegal migrants of various African nationalities after their boats sank” off the central eastern coast, it said in a statement, citing three separate sinkings.

In one incident, a Tunisian fishing trawler recovered 19 bodies 58 kilometres off the coast after their boat capsized.



A coastguard patrol off the coastal city of Mahdiya also recovered eight bodies and “rescued” 11 other migrants after their boat sank as it headed towards Italy.

ISLAMABAD

Women protest against ban on girls school

More than a dozen women marched in the western part of Kabul city on Sunday to protest against the Taliban’s ban on girls’ and women’s education, chanting “education is our right.”

Several Afghan outlets operating from outside the country, such as Afghanistan International TV and the Hasht-e-Sub online paper, reported that Taliban forces intervened and halted the rally.

Despite repeated calls by Afghans and the international



community to lift the ban, the new rulers continue to refuse to do so. The hopes of millions of girls were shattered for the second consecutive year at the beginning of the new school year.



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7

In brief

■ BARRACAS



SPAIN TELLS 'FIRE TOURISTS' TO STAY AWAY FROM FIRES

Officials urged 'fire tourists' to keep away from blazes raging in eastern Spain on Sunday, saying onlookers were putting themselves at risk and disrupting efforts to quell the flames. More than 500 firefighters backed by 20 planes and helicopters were battling the fire four days after it broke out near the village of Villanueva de Viver in Valencia region, emergency services said.

Police had spotted 14 cyclists near the scene trying to get a closer look, the regional head of interior affairs in the Valencia region, told reporters. "We ask once again and above all tourists not to engage in fire tourism, not to approach the perimeter area," she said.

■ WASHINGTON



BIDEN TO MEET ARGENTINA PRESIDENT

US President Joe Biden will host his Argentine counterpart in Washington this week after a planned meeting was postponed last year, the White House has announced. Biden's meeting with President Alberto Fernandez will be held on the sidelines of the second Summit for Democracy on March 29, White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement on Saturday.

Biden and Fernandez had originally been set to meet in July last year. That meeting was postponed after the US president tested positive for Covid-19. The two leaders will "celebrate 200 years of bilateral relations."

■ NEW YORK



ACTOR JONATHAN MAJORS ARRESTED

The actor Jonathan Majors was arrested in New York City over the weekend on assault and harassment charges, leading to the US Army pulling new advertisements featuring the "Creed III" star.

Majors, who recently presented an award at the Oscars alongside his "Creed III" co-star Michael B Jordan, was arrested on Saturday morning in Manhattan following a domestic dispute, according to police and his defence lawyer. A 30-year-old woman suffered minor injuries to her head and neck and was taken to a hospital in stable condition, the New York Police Department said.

Ukraine slams Putin plan to station Russian N-weapons in Belarus

KYIV: A top security adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Sunday that Russian plans to station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus would destabilise that country, which he said had been taken "hostage" by Moscow.

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the decision on Saturday, sending a warning to Nato over its military support for Ukraine and escalating a standoff with the West.

Although the move was not unexpected and Putin said it would not violate nuclear non-proliferation promises, it is one of Russia's most pronounced nuclear signals since the beginning of its war on Ukraine 13 months ago.

Oleksiy Danilov, head of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, called it "a step towards internal destabilisation" of Belarus, adding it maximises what he called the level of "negative perception and public rejection" of Russia and Putin in Belarusian society.

"The Kremlin took Belarus as a nuclear hostage," he wrote on Twitter.

Putin likened his plans to the US stationing its weapons in Europe, and said Russia would not be transferring control of the weapons to Belarus.

"We are not handing over (the weapons). And the US does not



Galyna, 69, exits her apartment to take care of her garden in the town of Chasiv Yar, near Bachmut. — AFP

hand (them) over to its allies. We're basically doing the same thing they've been doing for a decade," Putin said.

However this could be the first time since the mid-1990s that Russia has based such weapons outside the country. Experts said the development was significant, since Russia had until now been

proud that unlike the United States, it did not deploy nuclear weapons outside its borders.

Another senior Zelenskiy adviser on Sunday scoffed at Putin's plan, saying the Russian leader is "too predictable".

"Making a statement about tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, he admits that he is afraid

of losing and all he can do is scare with tactics," Mykhailo Podolyak tweeted.

Washington, the world's other nuclear superpower, played down concerns about Putin's announcement and the potential for Moscow to use nuclear weapons in the war in Ukraine.

"We have not seen any reason

to adjust our own strategic nuclear posture nor any indications Russia is preparing to use a nuclear weapon. We remain committed to the collective defence of the Nato alliance," a senior US administration official said.

The official noted that Russia and Belarus had been speaking about the transfer of nuclear weapons for some time.

Tactical nuclear weapons refer to those used for specific gains on a battlefield rather than those with the capacity to wipe out cities. It is unclear how many such weapons Russia has, given it is an area still shrouded in Cold War secrecy. Analysts at the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War (ISW) said the risk of escalation to nuclear war "remains extremely low".

"ISW continues to assess that Putin is a risk-averse actor who repeatedly threatens to use nuclear weapons without any intention of following through," it wrote.

However, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons called Putin's announcement an extremely dangerous escalation.

"In the context of the war in Ukraine, the likelihood of miscalculation or misinterpretation is extremely high. Sharing nuclear weapons without any intention of following through," it said on Twitter. — Reuters

In times of crisis, Lebanese squabble over clock change

BEIRUT: A last-minute decision in Lebanon to delay daylight savings by a month has been met with opposition from the influential church, leaving the small country divided between two time zones.

Wracked by a crippling economic meltdown and political deadlock, a seemingly odd question was added on Sunday to the growing list of Lebanon's woes: "What time is it?"

The caretaker government announced on Thursday its decision to delay rolling clocks forward until April 20, instead of the last week of March as is usually the case in Lebanon and much of the northern hemisphere.

But institutions including the Maronite Church, schools and media outlets insisted on turning their clocks forward at midnight (22:00 GMT on Saturday).

"Had the government taken the decision a month ago, and not 48 hours in advance, then there wouldn't have been a problem," said Pierre Daher, CEO of Lebanese broadcaster LBCI.

The channel had said in a statement it would defy the government's decision as the delay would affect its operations. Three other Lebanese networks also moved clocks forward.

But Daher said his concerns went beyond programming.

"The worst thing is that the decision on when to begin summer time took a sectarian turn," he said.

While the government has



Mohamed al Arab shows the time on his watch that remained in winter time in Beirut on Sunday. — Reuters

not explained the move, a video shared widely on social media may provide an explanation. It shows a debate between caretaker prime minister Najib Mikati and parliament speaker Nabih Berri, who asks the premier to wait with the clock change until the end of the holy month Ramadhan, in what appeared to be an attempt to cater to those who fast daily until sunset.

Lebanon's Maronite Church said it would not abide by the government decision which had been taken "without consultations and without any regard for international standards".

"A decision like this should have been announced a year earlier to avoid harming people's lives," church spokesman Walid Ghayad said. "It cannot be made over a cup of coffee."

The church's move was to prevent "further isolating Lebanon," he said.

Two prominent Christian political parties have called on

the government to reverse its decision.

And Gebran Bassil, leader of one of them, the Free Patriotic Movement, tweeted: "Do not change your clocks, they will move forward automatically."

On many phones and other electronic devices, they did.

Lebanon's two major telecommunications companies advised customers over the weekend to manually set clocks on mobile phones to avoid the automatic change.

Justice Minister Henri Khoury has backed calls for Mikati to go back on the decision, which would have "catastrophic" consequences for an economy in free fall since 2019.

"The decision has created confusion and caused divisions and disturbances among religious authorities, private media and education institutions," Khoury said in a statement.

Many schools, mostly Christian, went into daylight savings time, but some other institutions have complied with the government. Flag carrier Middle East Airlines, while implementing the government-ordered delay, said it would move departure times by one hour to adhere to international flight schedules.

Lebanese slammed the uncanny dispute on social media, with some sarcastically alluding to sectarian tensions that had fuelled a bloody civil war in 1975-1990. — AFP



Aerial view of a destroyed neighbourhood in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, after a tornado touched down in the area on Saturday. — AFP

‘Everything wiped away’ as tornado hits Mississippi

ROLLING FORK, United States: At least 25 people were killed by devastating tornadoes that ripped across the southern US state of Mississippi, tearing off roofs, smashing cars and flattening entire neighbourhoods, with the region readying for more severe weather on Sunday.

The powerful weather system, accompanied by thunderstorms and driving rain, cut a path of more than 60 km across the state late on Friday, slamming several towns along the way.

Mississippi's emergency management agency put the death toll at 25, and said dozens more were injured. Four people reported missing "have been found," it added.

And in Alabama, one man died after being trapped when a trailer overturned in the severe weather, the sheriff's office in Morgan County said on Twitter.

In Rolling Fork, home to fewer than 2,000 people, an entire row of houses and buildings

was demolished, leaving only scattered debris. Cars were overturned, fences ripped up and trees uprooted.

President Joe Biden ordered federal aid to Mississippi on Sunday to support local recovery efforts. The funding will provide grants for temporary housing, home repairs and low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, the White House said.

Some 4,800 customers were without power in Mississippi, and nearly 11,000 homes and businesses remained in the dark in neighbouring Alabama, monitor poweroutage.us reported.

Mississippi was meanwhile girding for more turbulent weather on Sunday, including damaging winds and hail, with the emergency management agency warning that "tornadoes cannot be ruled out."

Patricia Perkins, who works at a hardware store in Rolling Fork, said that "most everything is wiped away." — AFP

The writer is a Muscat-based master life coach

Studies have shown that practicing gratitude can hold a multitude of benefits for both our mental and physical health. Expressing gratitude has been linked to improved mood levels, reduced stress and a better quality of sleep.

With conscious effort this involves focusing on the good things that

Consciously, be fully present with all your senses to savour a delicious meal, have a heart to heart with a loved one or appreciate a beautiful sunset. The more you focus on the

Rather, it is about finding balance

So, I invite you to take a few moments right now and think about some things you are grateful for. I guarantee it will brighten up your day.

— AFP

The writer is a copy editor for the national, international sections at NYT

By this month, almost 800 Ukrainians had signed up for help, said Dr Yakov Gradinar, chief medical officer at Protez. So far, the clinic has equipped almost 60 people, most of



Wounded Ukrainian volunteer soldiers begin the long process of prosthetics fitting and learning to walk again in the rehabilitation clinic of the Protez organisation in Oakdale, Minnesota.

Protez, which is about 15 miles east of Minneapolis, is not like many other prosthetic clinics, which may work with amputees for months, fitting the prosthetic devices, doing physical therapy and teaching them how to use their new limbs.

Two of the men escaped unhurt. The third was wounded. Hryhorian, 40, lost his right arm and right leg, and ended up in Minnesota in January being fitted for new ones.

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

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What is Ramadhan?

Ramadhan holds a special significance for Muslims all over the world. Besides being the month of fasting, one of the five key pillars of Islam, it marks a different school of learning. It brings various religious, health and personal development teachings that one could learn through fasting.

All what one should do is to understand the reasons behind fasting, while understanding the values of fasting as a sacred ritual.

Observing this month and fasting is a very effective way of acquiring self-development skills in different aspects. As Ramadhan is the month of fasting, mercy, forgiveness and kindness, people become more compassionate to one another. Fasting teaches people to stay soft, compassionate, merciful and respectful to others. One can also be more supportive to his family, colleagues, friends and others. In other words, people tend to be more emotional.

Among the objectives of fasting during Ramadhan is that the Almighty Allah wanted to teach Muslims different lessons some of which are personal and social.

Fasting helps Muslims to develop and strengthen their powers of self-control, so they can resist wrongful desires and bad habits. Thus, one can control personal behaviours, thoughts, interests and desires even. The month-long fasting will be enough to urge people give up bad habits and avoid wrong deeds.

Another lesson that one can learn from Ramadhan is that by being away from all the bad things and refraining from personal desires, one can be closer to Allah.

Knowing that Allah knows what we all do and think about whether it's good or bad it intensifies the consciousness of Allah in our heart. This increases the spiritual sense of us, so we become more religious, obedient and attached to Allah during Ramadhan.

That is why one can see people more compassionate and kindhearted in



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

RAMADHAN IS THE MONTH OF FASTING, MERCY, FORGIVENESS AND KINDNESS, PEOPLE BECOME MORE COMPASSIONATE TO ONE ANOTHER

Ramadhan. As one of the lessons that fasting teaches Muslims is to think about the poor and needy people who have shortfall of food and cannot afford getting three daily meals. Therefore, fasting allows others to experience hunger like those poor families and individuals. Accordingly, Ramadhan brings focus on the importance of giving charity and voluntary work in the society. Hence, you see people striving to do different sorts of charitable tasks with the poor people and needy families. This is due to the spirit of sympathy that Ramadhan instills in people.

Luckily, people here are more considerate and they contribute in helping others through various charitable associations. Their interest to support voluntary work and charities is not only limited to this month, rather it increases in Ramadhan as the credit and reward of such deeds is getting doubled. That is why Ramadhan is called the month of generosity and giving.

As a matter of fact, fasting doesn't only promote refraining from eating and drinking, but from all kinds of selfish desires and wrong doings. Fasting is not merely intended for the body, but for the spirit as well. Thus, the physical fast symbolises and expresses the real and inner fast. Fasting is a spiritual practice that is targeting the spirit and body at the same time. It calls upon us to discover ourselves, master ourselves, and discipline ourselves. All what we should do is to realise the real message and reason behind fasting as well as to know the values of fasting.

The month of Ramadhan is an opportunity, which shouldn't be missed and undervalued. Its religious and social advantages are many and we should all invest on this time of the year, which brings blessings to one's life. Actually, it brings people together more than any other time of the year. May the Almighty Allah bestow us rewards and blessings from this month. Wish you all a rewarding fasting and a blessed time.

PRAYER BEADS



A vendor sorts displayed prayer beads at a market in Kuwait City, during the holy month of Ramadhan. – AFP

America's interest in ending the Ukraine crisis

The recent face-to-face meeting in New Delhi between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov — the first such high-level interaction since the start of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine — suggests that diplomacy may no longer be a dirty word. The ten-minute meeting on the sidelines of the G20 gathering occurred after US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan reportedly urged Ukraine to show Russia that it is open to negotiating an end to the war. Together, these recent developments offer a glimmer of hope that a ceasefire is within the realm of the possible.

The war in Ukraine, which has shaken the foundations of the international order, is in many ways a proxy war between the world's two major powers, with Russia backed by China and Ukraine backed by the United States. Over the past year, the war has triggered global energy and food crises, spurred higher inflation amid slowing global growth, and heightened the risks — underscored by Russia's recent downing of a US drone over the Black Sea — of a direct Russia-Nato conflict. And yet, after more than a year of fighting, it is clear that the conflict has settled into a war of attrition, with both sides struggling to make significant advances on the battlefield.



Brahma Chellaney

The writer is Professor of Strategic Studies at the New Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research and Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin

AFTER MORE THAN A YEAR OF FIGHTING, IT IS CLEAR THAT NEITHER SIDE IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR CAN WIN ON THE BATTLEFIELD

A ceasefire is the only way out of this military deadlock, but reaching an agreement could take a long time. The 1950-53 Korean War, for example, was deadlocked for two years before an armistice agreement was reached.

Russian President Vladimir Putin clearly believes that a prolonged war of attrition works in his favour, enabling his army to wreak havoc on Ukraine and testing Western resolve. To overwhelm Ukrainian air defences, Russia is launching more missiles simultaneously, including its Kinzhal hypersonic weapons, which are all but impossible to shoot down. Despite the flood of Western weapons systems it has received, Ukraine is in no position to thwart Russia's intensifying aerial assaults. But it is also becoming increasingly clear that Russia cannot achieve its strategic objective in Ukraine. It may have occupied nearly one-fifth of the country's territory but it has created a more hostile neighbour and reinvigorated Nato, which is now poised to admit Finland and most likely Sweden. Moreover, many of the unprecedented sanctions the West has imposed on Russia will likely endure beyond the war and inflict long-lasting damage on the

Russian economy.

At the same time, US President Joe Biden's "hybrid war" strategy, which seeks to cripple Russia through soft-power techniques and the weaponisation of global finance, has failed to bring about Putin's downfall or turn the rouble into "rubble," as Biden vowed in the early stages of the war. The US-led sanctions regime has severely limited Russia's ability to resupply its forces but has fallen short of halting the Kremlin's war machine. While the sanctions have dented its earnings from energy exports, Russia has found willing buyers for its oil and natural gas in non-Western markets (albeit at a discount).

Short of a collapse in morale

causing Russian soldiers to surrender en masse — which is a possibility, given the history of the Russian army — it is unlikely that Ukraine will be able to force Russia to withdraw fully from the territories it has occupied in the country's east and south. While the US has committed to upholding Ukraine's territorial integrity, restoring Ukrainian control over these regions seems like a distant goal at best.

Meanwhile, China is the only country that stands to benefit from a protracted conflict. As a recent report by the Washington, DC-based Free Russia Foundation says, China is already the "biggest winner" from the Western sanctions on Russia. China has

become Russia's banker and most important trade partner, using the war to implement an energy safety net by securing greater Russian oil and gas supplies that could not be disrupted.

The US may remain the world's foremost military power for now, but taking on the combined force of China and Russia would be a herculean task.

The war has already exposed the West's military shortcomings, such as depletion of supplies of critical munitions, America's struggle to scale up weapons manufacturing, and the weakening of the US-European consensus on Ukraine. All this could tempt Chinese President Xi Jinping to seek to deplete Western arsenals further.

As a recent RAND report points out, a protracted Ukraine war is not in America's interest. A prolonged conflict would lead to increased flows of US money and weapons into Ukraine, elevating the risk of a Nato-Russia conflict and hindering the ability of the US to respond to the China challenge. As Biden has already acknowledged, a "negotiated settlement" is the only way to end the war — better to seek it now than after months or years of bloodshed and devastation.

@Project Syndicate, 2022



Diplomacy may no longer be a dirty word.



Iran beat Oman in Asian Cup semifinal

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 26

The Oman national beach soccer team suffered a defeat against Iran with a score of 6-3 during the semifinal of the 2023 AFC Beach Soccer Cup held at Jomtien Arena in Pattaya, Thailand on Saturday. The second semifinal on Saturday saw Japan defeat the UAE 5-1 at the same venue.

The match started quickly between the two teams, as the Iranian team advanced first from a penalty kick that was successfully executed by Muhammad Mokhtari in the fourth minute. The Omani team responded directly to it with the equalising goal of Sami Al Balushi, taking advantage of a cross ball and putting it into the goal in the fourth minute.

The Iranian national team advanced again with a header by Mohammad Moradi in the seventh minute but Khalid al Araimi spoiled the Iranians' joy with the equalising goal from a direct free kick that settled in the left corner of the net in the 11th minute. In the second half, the competition appeared intense between the two teams, with

Mohammad Mokhtari taking advantage of the Omani defensive error to push the ball away and head it over the goalkeeper in the 18th minute and from a scissor kick, the fourth goal came from Abbas Rezaei in the 20th minute. Ali Mirshikari scored the fifth goal from a close shot that settled in the right corner of the net in the 21st minute. Iran then conceded a self goal from Muslim Mesigar

as Oman reduced deficit by 5-3 in the 22nd minute. However, Iran completed the proceedings with a sixth goal from a long shot by Amir Akbari in the 32nd minute. In the press conference after the match, Oman head coach Talib Hilal congratulated the Iranian team for reaching the final and said the match was difficult. Our players played well and scored. We missed many

chances at the same time." He added that the players lost their focus at times, despite having chances that they did not score. Speaking of the third-place match, Hilal said the team is still in the championship and will fight as they did today to secure third place. The Omani team now faces the UAE team in the third-place match.



Oman U23 side blanks Kyrgyzstan in Doha

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 26

The Oman Olympic (under-23) team blanked Kyrgyzstan team 2-0 in a friendly game on Saturday as part of the underway International U23 Friendly Championship in Doha city, Qatar. Both goals of the 'Red Warriors' were netted by substitute Nibras al Maashari in the dying minutes and ahead of the completion of match by five minutes. The triumph meant, Oman will take on Iraq for the fifth and sixth places play-off on Tuesday. The Oman boys suffered a 3-0 loss against South Korea in the opening match on Wednesday.

Oman's Olympic head coach, Akram Habresh, began the match with slight changes in the playing format and the starting line-up which featured from: Maitham al Ajmi (goalkeeper), Ayman al Nabhani, Mohammed Mukhalaf, Khalid al Ghatrifi and Mulham

In the match, Kyrgyzstan was the better side in the first half. Their forwards created several attempts including a goal that was disallowed by the referee due to offside

al Sunaidy in the defence. Ahed al Mushaikhi was in the centre besides Nasser al Rawahi, Abdulhafidh al Mukhaini, Al Faraj al Kiyoumi and Mohammed Abdulkakeem while Salim al Abdulsalam was the lone forward. In the match, Kyrgyzstan was the better side in the first half. Their forwards created several attempts including a goal that was disallowed by the referee due to offside. In the second half, coach Akram replaced many players and brought

new faces to change the result. After many scoring attempts, Nibras al Mashari converted a golden pass from Abdulmajeed al Balushi to the net to put Oman ahead in the game. Few minutes later, Nibras doubled the result by sending a strong shot from outside the box to make it 2-0. The six-day international friendly tournament is part of the team's preparation for the U23 Asian Cup qualifiers which will take place in September. The U23 Asian Cup finals, which will be held in Doha, will act as qualifiers for the 2024 Paris Olympics. Also, the Oman team will attend in the West Asian Championship which will be held in Iraq in June. Besides these events, the national Olympic team boys will aim from this tourney to prepare and shape their readiness for Asian Games in China which will take place from September 23 to October 8.

NEW SKIPPER POWELL POWERS WEST INDIES

CENTURION, South Africa: New West Indies captain Rovman Powell thrashed five sixes as he led his team to a three-wicket victory over South Africa in a rain-shortened first Twenty20 international at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Saturday.

The match was reduced to 11 overs a side but produced 263 runs and 15 wickets in a frantic contest.

Powell, who took over from Nicholas Pooran last month, hit 43 not out off 18 balls as the West Indies chased down a South African total of 131 for eight with three balls to spare.

He said the reduction in overs suited several of his players.

"A lot of the guys in the team are used to the T10 format," he said.

"We know the ball travels so much here, so 130 was gettable."

Opener Brandon King hit 23 off eight balls and Johnson Charles slammed 28 off 14 deliveries as the West Indies made an explosive start, scoring 84 for four in the first six overs.

David Miller clubbed 48 off 22 balls in South Africa's innings.

RAPID FALL

Wickets fell almost rapidly as boundaries were hit but Miller ensured a competitive total, hitting four fours and three sixes. He and burly fast bowler Sisanda Magala smacked 47 off 13 balls for the seventh wicket. Left-arm fast bowler Sheldon Cottrell took two wickets for seven runs in his first two overs but conceded 24 runs in the tenth over as Miller and Magala went on the rampage.

Magala hit a four and two sixes in an unbeaten 18 off five balls.

South African captain Aiden Markram said his team had started badly with both bat and ball.

"To take it to the last over was a great effort from the bowlers," he said.

Anrich Nortje took one for 17 in three overs of high-class fast bowling and Magala took three for 21, including two wickets in the penultimate over.

But spinners Bjorn Fortuin and Tabraiz Shamsi conceded a combined 69 runs off four overs.

The teams meet at the same venue on Sunday—AFP



West Indies' Rovman Powell hits a six during the second T20 against South Africa at SuperSport Park in Centurion. — AFP



Israr Ghala , Earn Trust win Knockout championship titles

MUSCAT: Israr Ghala edged past Vanderlande by 1 wicket in the Senior Knockout tournament final powered by Khimji Ramdas and Earn Trust beat Mazoon Dairy by 13 runs in the Junior Knockout tournament final powered by Khimji Ramdas at the Municipality Grounds, Al Amerat on Friday.

In the Senior Knockout final, Vanderlande scored 137-6 in 20 overs courtesy Aravindh Ramesh's (60 off 41b; 5x4,2x6) blistering half century upon losing wickets at quick intervals. Mobeen Muhammed bagged 2-22 being Israr's top bowler in restricting Vanderlande's strong batting line-up.

In reply, Israr Ghala lost three early wickets in the powerplay but Akhtar Saqib's (63 off 32; 6x4,3x6) thundering knock got Israr Ghala inch closer to the target. Late blitz from Naeem Muhammed and a match-winning six by Mubeen Muhammed sealed the victory and the title for Israr Ghala scoring 138-9 in 18.3 overs.

In the Junior Knockout final, Earn Trust elected to bat first and started steady and salient looking at a big total for the big game.

Imran Ali (39 off 29b; 4x4) and Khurram Chaudary's (41 off 28b; 5x4) responsible knocks took Earn Trust to a total of 167-8 in 20 overs.

Mazoon Dairy's Mohammed Ghafoor's 2-21 and Manish Bhatia's 2-20 helped them pull back into the game chasing a respectable total.

In reply, Mazoon Dairy opener Ali Agher (54 off 44b; 6x4) played a composed knock taking them closer to the target along with Mohammed Ghafoor's (38 off 21b; 3x4,2x6) quick runs keeping them in the chase.

Mazoon Dairy lost wickets in clusters resulting in them getting a total of 154-8 in 20 overs falling short by 13 runs.

Earn Trust's Mustansar Hussain claimed 3 wickets with Mozzam Shah and Shameer Khwaja picking 2 wickets each to get Earn Trust the championship.

Oman Cricket's treasurer Alkesh Joshi and OC Chief Development Officer Duleep Mendis presented the Man of the Match and the trophies to the winners and runners-up during the presentation ceremony for the Senior and Junior Knockout Tournament 2023.



74 games to thrill fans in new IPL format



WITH the amount of competition that all the franchise cricket around the world is providing, BCCI is not going to be leaving any stone unturned to make this 16th edition of the IPL to be as different and entertaining as possible. This would obviously require twisting and turning the rules of the MCCC, to make interesting playing conditions for their tournament.

There will be a total of 70 games in the league stage, which will be followed by 4 games in the play-off. These 74 games will be played in a roller coaster ride of 59 days. All the teams are divided between two groups of 5 teams.

Group A: Mumbai Indians, Rajasthan Royals, Kolkata Knights Riders, Delhi Challengers and Lucknow Super Giants

Group B: Chennai Super Kings,

Punjab Kings, Sunrisers Hyderabad, Royal Challengers Bangalore and Gujarat Titans.

Each team has to play the opponents of their group twice in a home and away format, which would be 8 games, in addition, they have to play four of their opponents from the other group once and the fifth team twice. So, at the end of the day, each team would be playing 7 home and 7 away games (total 14 games) in the group stage, which were all decided through a draw.

The points table for all 10 teams will be together and the top four teams will qualify for the play-offs. Teams ranked 1st and 2nd will play the first qualifier, where the winner goes to the finals and loser goes to the second qualifier. Teams ranked 3rd and 4th will play the eliminator, where the winner locks horns with the loser of first qualifier for a place in the finals.

NEW RULES/PLAYING CONDITIONS FOR IPL 2023

1. TWO TEAMS — The captain can take two teams at the time of toss and he can choose either of those teams depending on the

result of the toss. This will help a big way in removing the impact of toss.

2. DECISION REVIEW SYSTEM — Over the past few years, it has been noticed that wrong judgement of the umpires, which were very evident on the television, costed results to teams. Hence the teams will be able to challenge the decision of umpires for wrong wide and no-ball calls, in addition to the wickets.

3. IMPACT PLAYER — Both the sides have the right to bring in one Impact player through the due course of the match, when the ball is dead (not in play). The Impact player could be a foreign player only if the starting XI has 3 or less nominated foreign players, or else it has to be an Indian player. The impact player has to be chosen from the 4 substitutes nominated at the time of the toss.

4. OVER RATE PENALTY — If bowling side is not able to complete their quota of 20 overs in time (1 hour 25 minutes/innings), then the remaining number of overs would have a maximum of only 4 fielders in the outfield,

compared to the normal 5.

5. UNFAIR MOVEMENT — If any of the fielder or wicket-keeper is noticed of any unfair movement, when the ball comes into play, then the umpire would signal it as a dead ball and award 5 penalty runs to the opponent side. The ball would obviously be bowled again.

6. COVID-19 PROVISION — Even though currently the world looks stable, but it is after 3 years of struggle that IPL is being hosted in a home and away format. Hence the fear is obvious and a provision has been declared just in case if a team is not able to have 11 players due to the affect of Covid-19, then the match would either be rescheduled or the IPL Technical Committee will review the situation.

You could post us your question on our social media handles and we will pick the best question in our future articles, TWITTER — @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman OR INSTAGRAM — @OmanObserver @pranav_mehta_18. DON'T FORGET TO USE THE #OOIPL2023 FOR BETTER REACH.

Danube B beat Lions XI on opening day

MUSCAT: The Danube B team beat Lions XI by 13 runs in the opening match of the Danube Group tennis ball cricket tournament 2023 organised by the Al Hail Cricket Club on March 23.

Azhar from Danube B top-scored with 27 runs and other useful contributions came from Mohammed with 13 runs and Thamim Ansari with 14 runs. For Lions XI, Riyas Aziz took three wickets giving away 14 runs, while Muneer of Danube B was declared man of the match.

In the second match played between Boom Boom XI and Danube A Team, the Boom XI won by 18 runs.

Ayaz from Danube A top-scored with 26 runs and Zaheer Jaweed took three wickets.

Irtaza was declared man of the match.



The chief guests were Rafeeq Ahmed al Balushi and Waleed al Balushi, senior members of Al Hail management, said: "We are happy to announce the fourth edition of Danube Group Ramadan cricket tournament. There will be interesting matches going to be played in the first round. We are confident to organise such a tournament going forward. They said teams are happy and excited to have such a league format tournament during the holy month."

Hurkacz saves 5 match points to beat Kokkinakis



MIAMI GARDENS, Unites States: Hubert Hurkacz saved five match points as he fought back to beat Thanasi Kokkinakis in a three and a half hour epic while fourth-seed Daniil Medvedev got his Miami Open bid under way with an easy win on Saturday.

Hurkacz was pushed all the way by the Australian lucky loser Kokkinakis before emerging with a 6-7 (10/12), 7-6 (9/7), 7-6 (8/6) victory. The Aussie had shown his mettle by saving six set points as he won the first-set tie-break and Hurkacz, the 2021 Miami champion, saved three match points in the second-set tie-break and another two in the final-set breaker.

“It’s tough to explain for me. I was just trying to stay in there and compete, play some good shots,” said Hurkacz, the eighth seed at Hard Rock Stadium.

Kokkinakis was on serve at 6-4 up in the final set tie-break but Hurkacz produced a stunning winner up the line and that shot finally turned the tide decisively towards the Pole, who won the next three points to settle the contest.

The three hours, 31 minutes contest was the longest best-of-

three ATP match of the year so far.

In contrast, Indian Wells runner-up Medvedev barely broke sweat beating Spanish clay-court specialist Roberto Carballes Baena 6-1, 6-2 in just 62 minutes.

The Russian’s loss to Carlos Alcaraz in the Indian Wells final had ended his 19-match winning streak, but he was totally dominant as he struck 18 winners to the Carballes Baena’s five.

Medvedev made use of the drop shot, which Alcaraz had used to good effect against him last week, and joked that he had been trying to emulate the world number one.

“I thought I needed to use that shot more. I’ve always liked drop shots but it’s not a weapon in my game that I’m going to use 50 times a match,” he said.

Medvedev became the first player to reach 25 wins this season on either the ATP or WTA tours.

French players enjoyed upset wins with Quentin Halys saving three match points as he beat 18th ranked Australian Alex De Minaur 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (10/8). Gregoire Barrere, ranked 65th, beat Britain’s 12th seed Cameron Norrie 6-3, 6-2. — **AFP**



Morocco's Abdelhamid Sabiri celebrates scoring their second goal with Yahya Attiat-Allah. – Reuters

Morocco stun Brazil for first time in friendly international

TANGIERS, Morocco: Morocco stunned Brazil 2-1 in a friendly international on Saturday as the north African side recorded a first ever win over the five-time world champions.

Midfielder Sofiane Boufal, a former Southampton star, but now playing with Al Rayyan in Qatar, gave Morocco the lead after 29 minutes, scoring with a powerful turn and drive from a pass by Bilal El Khannous.

Brazil skipper Casemiro levelled in the 67th minute when his weak shot was fumbled by goalkeeper Yassine Bounou.

But on-loan Sampdoria

midfielder Abdelhamid Sabiri struck the winner with a volley in the 79th minute as Morocco showed that becoming the first Arab or African nation to reach the World Cup semi-finals last year was no fluke.

“I wouldn’t say we lacked understanding, it’s about putting into practice the ideas of a new coach,” said Manchester United’s Casemiro.

“I think we played a good game and did everything as far as possible to win.”

Only 10 of the 23-man squad that took Brazil to a disappointing quarter-final exit at the World Cup

made the trip to Morocco for the game.

The injured Neymar was again missing with his number 10 shirt passing to Real Madrid youngster Rodrygo.

Brazil also had a new manager in the dugout with interim coach Ramon Menezes having replaced Tite who stepped down after the World Cup last-eight exit at the hands of Croatia.

The Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) hopes to be able to announce the name of its new coach before the start of qualifying for the 2026 World Cup in September.

According to Brazilian media, the CBF’s first choice is Carlo Ancelotti, currently in charge of Real Madrid.

However, he is not expected to make a decision on his future before the end of the European season.

Before kick-off at the Ibn Batouta stadium, both teams paid tribute to Pele, who died last December at the age of 82.

Until Saturday, Morocco had suffered defeats in their only two other meetings with Brazil — 2-0 in a 1997 friendly and 3-0 in the group stages of the 1998 World Cup in France. — **AFP**

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Turner century helps Western Australia win Sheffield Shield final

PERTH, Australia: A dominant Western Australia thumped Victoria by nine wickets to win a second consecutive Sheffield Shield final on Sunday on the back of a fine century from Ashton Turner, cementing their status as a domestic powerhouse.

After winning the toss and sending Victoria in, they bowled the visitors out for 195 at the WACA Ground in Perth before compiling 315 in reply with player-of-the-match Turner hitting 128. His measured 227-ball knock came against a quality attack led by seamer Scott Boland and spinner Todd Murphy, both fresh from Australia’s recent Test series in India.

With Victoria on the back foot, WA turned the screws by bowling them out again for 210.

Matthew Kelly grabbed 4-41, with the only resistance from Will Sutherland (83) and captain Peter Handscomb (52), leaving WA to chase 91 to win, which they did comfortably on day four.

Opener Cameron Bancroft, the tournament’s top-scorer this season, hit the winning runs in his 39 not out. “As long as I’ve played Shield cricket, Victoria has always been the team to beat and it’s still the same today so congrats to them on a great season,” said WA skipper Sam Whiteman. — **AFP**



Online marketing now a regulated activity in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 26

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) began the implementation of the regulations of online marketing and promotion in accordance with Ministerial Resolution 619/2022 issued last December.

The Ministerial Decree stipulates that individuals must apply for a licence through the Ministry before promoting products or services on online websites and social media platforms with or without charge.

“The regulation aims to oversee the marketing or promotion of any goods or services, with or without charge, displayed and published in writing, drawing, image, symbol, sound, or by any other means on any websites or social media that allows user interaction, through what is shared with them by



means such as photos, blogs, videos, etc. to reach and interact with customers,” shared Azza bint Ibrahim al Kindiyah,

Director of the Commercial Affairs and eCommerce Department at the Ministry.

According to Al Kindiyah,

potential licensees can apply for the permit through the “Invest Easy” portal on the Ministry’s websites without charge. “The licence will be issued automatically without the need for other approvals, in order to facilitate the start of their business,”

she added.

Failure to adhere to the guidelines might result in a warning or fine not exceeding RO 1000. 23-year-old lifestyle influencer Shaima al Arawi welcomes the new regulations. She believes that the new regulations will help

reassure both parties and provide a legal safety net.

“I think that the [regulations] are a good idea, because it’s going to help people who seek the services and it will keep me safe from potential frauds.”

According to Al Arawi, there have been multiple instances where clients failed to fulfil their obligations. “It will save us a lot of work and effort, and it will be easier to report [breaches],” she said, adding, “I think it will affect my work positively because it will make me and the person approaching me to promote their products feel safe and reassured.”

Additionally, Al Arawi appreciates the permit being free of charge. “It’s actually really good, because we are already not getting enough income from what we are doing, sometimes we advertise things for free.” Al Arawi believes that it will give those who rely on

social media as a source of income a chance to compete and generate an income, arguing that a hefty licence fee would be detrimental to their potential income. According to the by-laws, licensees must display their licence number during the activity and adhere to a set of guidelines.

These include the prohibition of the promotion of counterfeit goods, tobacco and smoking in all forms and methods of consumption, and unlicensed projects.

Additionally, the guidelines will also prohibit the infringement of intellectual property within the promotional materials. Penalties to the guidelines include a warning, a fine not exceeding RO 1000, a suspension of the licence for a period no longer than a year, or the termination of the licence.

Promotional activities of non-profit practices, such as charities or voluntary work are the only exception to the guidelines.

Oman targets 1 GW of new wind energy projects by 2030

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 26

The Sultanate of Oman has lined up for implementation a flurry of wind-based Independent Power Projects (IPPs), offering an aggregate of over 1 gigawatt (GW) of capacity, by 2030.

Together with a raft of new solar-based IPPs, and a first-of-its-kind Waste-to-Energy project envisioned at Barka, these new ventures will enable the power sector to meet its goal of securing around 30 per cent of the country’s electricity requirements from renewable sources by 2030.

According to Abdullah bin Rashid al Sawafi, Chief Operating Officer of the Oman Power and Water Procurement Co (OPWP), the sole buyer of electricity and water output, as many as six new wind farms are planned for procurement over the next seven years through to 2030.

First in the series is a 100 MW scheme planned at Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, Al Sawafi said. “Our target is to have this project up and running and contribute to our system by Q4 2026, with a Request for Qualification (RfQ) planned for release in early April this year.”

Speaking at a forum, he said the pipeline of wind farm projects also envisions the development of a 200 MW capacity scheme in Duqm (Al Wusta Governorate). An RfQ for this IPP is slated to be issued in Q2 / Q3 2023, with the project set to be brought online in Q4 2026.

In Dhofar Governorate, OPWP has lined up a second wind-based IPP for procurement next to Oman’s maiden wind farm, currently under operation at Fitkhit near Harweel.

To be called Dhofar II Wind IPP, this new project will be sized at around 100 MW and brought



into operation by 2026.

An RfQ for interested developers is planned to be issued in Q2/Q3 this year. Also in the pipeline are plans for a wind farm at Ras Madrakah (Al Wusta Governorate) with a capacity of 100 MW and due for commercial operation in 2027.

A similar-sized project will also launched at Sadah in Dhofar Governorate in 2028. Rounding off the list are a number of additional wind farms of an aggregate capacity of 400 MW for development at unspecified locations around Oman.

Side by side with wind farm development, OPWP also plans to procure a handful of solar-based schemes over the next several years. Thus, in addition to a 1000 MW solar scheme (Manah I Solar IPP and Manah II Solar IPP) which was awarded recently to two separate developers each with a 500 MW share, the list includes plans for a new 500 MW capacity solar project (Ibri III Solar IPP) to be constructed adjoining the existing Ibri II Solar IPP in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Another 500 MW solar scheme is also slated for development within the Main Interconnected System (MIS) by 2027.

Finally, one or more solar based projects of a total capacity of 1000 MW are proposed to be developed and launched by 2029, according to OPWP.

Value of fish output in Oman tops RO 423 million

MUSCAT: The total value of fish production in Oman at the end of 2022 reached RO 423.56 million, according to the initial statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) Fish production declined by of 21.9 per cent with 718,726 tonnes, compared to 920,241 tonnes in 2021, with a value of RO 420.92 million.

NCSI indicated that the highest amount of fish landed by artisanal fishing at the end of December 2022 came from Al Wusta Governorate, where it recorded 245,895 tonnes, followed by the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate with 206,558 tonnes. North Al Batinah and



South Al Batinah governorates recorded 206,558 tonnes and 71,639 tonnes respectively. Dhofar Governorate produced 68,968 tonnes. The governorates of Musandam and Muscat

produced 36,862 tonnes and 34,967 tonnes.

The total amount of fish landed by artisanal fishing decreased by type to 664,890 tonnes, or by 23.6 per cent by the end of December 2022, compared to 869, 968 tonnes in 2021. Small surface fish recorded the highest amount of fish landed by artisanal fishing by quality with 348,385 tonnes, followed by large surface fish recording 165,636 tonnes.

The total quantities landed in coastal fishing amounted to about 5,062 tonnes, up by 8.5 per cent at the end of December 2022 compared to the same period in 2021, when it amounted to 4,665 tonnes. — ONA

Sultanate of Oman offers three hydrocarbon blocks for investment

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 26

The Sultanate of Oman is offering three oil and gas concession areas, Blocks 15, 36 and 54, for investments by local and international local companies, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals said on Sunday. The offering is open between March 26 and June 25, according to the statement.

Of the three blocks, Block 15 is located within the Sultanate of Oman’s northern oil province some 250 km west of Muscat and 25 km southwest of provincial town of Ibri. It is located along the northeastern edge of petroleum basin. “Tight gas is the predominant play within Block 15,” the ministry said.

Over its history, Block 15 has had several owners and changed configuration.

The primary owners over the years was Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). Other companies which have owned this block are: Hydrocarbon Finders Oman E & P, Tethys Oil (Oman) Limited, Novus Oman Limited, Indago Petroleum and Conquest Exploration Oman Inc. Four exploration and one appraisal wells were drilled in 1993-2017.



The presence of hydrocarbons were identified in the Naih and Shuiba formations. The first well Jebel Aswad-1 was drilled on the Jebel Aswad structure by Conquest Exploration Oman Inc in 1993-1994.

The Wadi Sayalah 1 well was the second well drilled by Conquest Exploration Oman Inc in 1997 Jebel Aswad-2 appraisal well was drilled on the Jebel Aswad structure in 2008 by Tethys Oil. Wells Ataya 1H1&H2 were drilled by Hydrocarbon Finders Oman E & P in 2017.

Meanwhile, Block 36 which covers 18,625 sqkm area, is located

along the border with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Yemen and is at the South-Eastern edge of the Eastern Rub al Khali basin, one of the most prolific oil and gas basins in the world.

To the south of block, in neighbouring block 38, the Rub al Khali basin is terminated against the Ghudun high that runs from NE to SW and separates the Rub Al Khali from the Southern Oman Salt basin.

Over its history Block 36 has had several owners and it has also changed configuration. PDO was the primary owners of the blocks over the years. Other companies

which have owned this block are: DNO, EOG Resources Inc and Phillips Petroleum Company.

The block has been explored with significant amount of 2D seismic about 15,000 km.

During 2014, DNO reprocessed over 2,500 km of data with CGG Muscat. Six explored wells have been drilled in the block with the first in 1959 and the last in 2021. The drilled wells have indications of the presence of a working petroleum system.

Block 54 covers a 5,627 sq km area and is located in a lightly drilled area — the Eastern Flank province situated between the easternmost edge of known salt in the South Oman Salt Basin and the Mesozoic and Palaeozoic outcrops found along the Huqf Axis.

The block has been explored with 2D / 3D seismic. Nine exploration wells have been drilled in the block itself in 1982 -2010.

The owners over the years were PDO and Occidental Petroleum Corporation (Oxy). The nearest discovery was made in 1975 by PDO in Block 53, adjacent to this block’s eastern boundary.

A giant heavy oil Mukhaizna field operated by Occidental Mukhaizna is producing nearly 120,000 barrels per day.

Bank Nizwa
approves
dividend per
share for 2022



MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, Oman's leading and most trusted Islamic bank, announced a strong performance in its financial results for the fiscal year that ended December 31, 2022, owing to the bank's efforts to expand the reach of its innovative and Sharia-compliant products and services provided to its customers across the Sultanate of Oman.

To support the next stage of expansion and increase shareholder returns, the bank has devised a long-term growth strategy until 2025 in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The AGM, chaired by Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah bin Ali al Khalili, Chairman, Bank Nizwa, approved the Director's Report for the financial year ending December 31, 2022, the Bank's Corporate Governance Report, and the Bank's Audited Financial Statements, for the same fiscal year.

The AGM also disclosed the Sharia Supervisory Board's Report for the year ending December 31, 2022.

The shareholders also approved the distribution of a cash dividend for the shareholders of 4.038 baizas per share.

It is worth noting that the key financial indicators of Bank Nizwa in 2022 are crucial indicators for evaluating its financial performance and identifying its future trends.

These indicators saw growth in total assets, which reached a rate of 6%, and total equity also saw commendable growth, reaching a rate of 3%.

Additionally, the bank achieved significant progress in its financial performance during 2022, with net profits increasing by 20%, while the customer financing portfolio improved by 10% and the deposit portfolio grew by 7%. The bank's operating income also increased by 18%. These indicators reflect the efforts made by the management and employees to enhance the bank's financial performance and achieve the desired goals.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds unveils its
new base for international operations

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with an extensive retail network of over 310 outlets across 10 countries in India, the GCC, Far East and the USA, has unveiled their brand-new global base of international operations, the Malabar International Hub (M-IH) at Dubai Gold Souq in Deira, Dubai.

M-IH was inaugurated by Abdulla bin Touq al Marri, Cabinet member and UAE Minister of Economy on March 22.

The inauguration was conducted in the presence of Chairman, directors, Government officials, distinguished guests, well-wishers, and management team members of Malabar Gold & Diamonds. Celebrating its 30th year anniversary, the opening of M-IH marks a momentous landmark for Malabar Gold & Diamonds, which began their international operations in 2008 from the UAE.

The 28,000 sq ft LEED gold certified hub, that is located in the heart of Dubai's gold district has been designed to be the epicentre



of the brand's current and future business aspirations. Spread across 4 floors, houses all functions, from a global centralised supply chain to all enabling and supporting functions for existing operations in GCC, USA, Singapore, Malaysia; and set the foundation for the growth aspirations of the group to continue its ambitious expansion plans into countries such as the UK, Australia, Canada, Turkey, Bangladesh, New Zealand and

many more.

All supporting and enabling functionalities of the company's international operations, which was previously decentralised and carried out in each country of operations, has now been brought under a single roof to further streamline the process and increase the overall efficiency of the company's management.

The decision by Malabar Gold & Diamonds to setup their global base

in the UAE, comes under the wake of CEPA (Common Economic Partnership Agreement) signing between India and the UAE, a move which opened the gates to a more fruitful and collaborative commercial pathway between the two countries.

It is the opportunities presented to the brand by the signing of CEPA that directly led to the concept of the M-IH.

The Chairman of Malabar

Group, MP Ahammed commented, "With the establishment of M-IH in Dubai, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has taken one step closer to our dream of being the biggest jewellery retailer in the world. The new facility is all set to be the stepping stone of our Vision 2030 goal of scaling up our operations to conquer new markets and strengthen our presence in existing markets.

As we celebrate 30 years of providing exemplary jewellery shopping experience to our loyal customers across the world, our dedication towards quality, perfection and service has propelled us to the position of world's most trusted jewellery retailer.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my immense gratitude to our stakeholders — customers, employees, associates, shareholders, and authorities who stood with us through thick and thin and contributed towards propelling the brand to new heights."

OETC conducts site
visit to its grid stations



MUSCAT: As part of site visits to grid stations and offices of Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) in the Sultanate of Oman, Dr Mansoor al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulatory, accompanied by the Chairman of the Board of Directors of OETC Eng Ahmed al Mahrizi, CEO Eng Saleh al Rumhi, and the Executive Management Team conducted field visit to the company premises in Musandam Governorate.

The visit included Tibat grid station in Bukha, power plant station in Khasab, load dispatch centre, transmission plant in Daba, and a visit to transmission lines. In Addition, to inspecting OETC's offices, meeting employees and

follow up on the progress of the company's projects.

OETC, member of Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity in the Sultanate of Oman's network, where electricity is transferred from production stations to distributed load centres in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132 kV and above, to cover most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, whether in the north or in the south. In addition, OETC manages the interconnection lines between the Sultanate of Oman and the Gulf interconnection network with a voltage of 220 kV.

OJFA welcomes educationists
from Tokyo University to Oman

MUSCAT: Recently, the Oman Japan Friendship Association welcomed a 6-member team of renowned educationists from Tokyo University, Japan. The visit is part of Oman and Japan celebrating close to 50 years of diplomatic ties.

The Oman Japan Friendship Association (OJFA), established in 1974, always strives to build and promote lasting bonds between the two nations in diverse fields like culture, society, economy, arts and science.

The Japanese visitors were impressed with Oman's vast and diverse natural beauty. They even wholeheartedly appreciated Oman's warm and welcoming hospitality offered to them, wherever they went.

Accompanying them on their visits to various tourism sites in Oman and sharing interesting information about those sites, were professional guides from National Travel and Tourism (NTT) part of Saud Bahwan Group. The visitors praised the passionate efforts and professionalism displayed by the guides, rating the popular Travel & Tourism agency's services, as



being among the best.

During their visit here in Oman, the visitors visited Saud Bahwan Group's Corporate Centre in Wattayah.

Here they were welcomed by Abdullah bin Mohammed Bahwan, Managing Director — Corporate. On their visit, they obtained brief insights about the Group's various business processes and operations.

During their 5-day stay in Oman, the Japanese visitors went around leisurely experiencing the beauty of Oman according to a detailed itinerary specially prepared by National Travel and Tourism (NTT) a division of

Saud Bahwan Group. It included visits to the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Opera House, National Museum, Muttrah Souq, Al Alam Palace, Jalani Fort and Sunset Cruise among others.

Sharing his thoughts Abdullah bin Mohammed Bahwan, Managing Director — Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group, said, "It is a delightful moment to host such renowned Japanese educationists as guests here in Oman. Their visit here reinforces the commitment of the Oman Japan Friendship Association to use every opportunity to strengthen the warm and inspiring relationship between Oman and Japan."

Bank Muscat wins OMTB Award for 6th consecutive time

MUSCAT: Highlighting the strong trust and confidence of its customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman has won the Oman's Most Trusted Brand (OMTB) Award in the banking category for a record 6th consecutive time.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology presented the award which has been instituted by Apex Media to Abdullah bin Tamman

al Mashani, General Manager — Products, Bank Muscat, in the presence of Saleh Zakwani, Executive Chairman, Apex Media, at a glittering awards ceremony held recently at the Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

The latest edition of Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award endorsed the top brands in the Sultanate of Oman based on public feedback and generated over 900,000 votes from across 50 categories.

The award is a validation of the public trust in different brands



and recognises those who have established themselves as No. 1 in their customers' minds. Notably, the brand recall for Bank Muscat was among the highest with respondents endorsing Bank Muscat as their most trusted partner and bank of first choice in Oman.

Abdullah bin Tamman al Mashani, General Manager — Products, Bank Muscat, said: "Bank Muscat is delighted to be chosen as Oman's Most Trusted Bank for the 6th consecutive time. As an Omani

bank that always strives to be closer to the needs and aspirations of its customers in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Muscat has always been an icon of banking excellence backed by consistent innovation, customer-centricity and well demonstrated market leadership for over four decades.

We take this opportunity to thank our customers for their strong confidence and trust in the bank, and Apex Media for recognising our market leadership and brand equity."

Bitcoin is a solution looking for a problem

ANITA RAMASWAMY

Almost one year ago, billionaire Peter Thiel threw \$100 bills into the crowd from the stage at a cryptocurrency conference in Miami, likening fiat currency to toilet paper and touting bitcoin as the best alternative. Thiel has said that central banks are “bankrupt” and that the fiat money regime is coming to an end.

Since his Miami proclamations, bitcoin’s price has fallen by nearly 40%, though in the last few weeks after Silicon Valley Bank’s failure it has had a resurgence. That suggests people think that Thiel is onto something.

Those following his advice are sorely misled. Thiel’s venture capital fund quietly dumped almost all its own holdings shortly before that Miami speech, according to the Financial Times.

But others are buying. Former Andreessen Horowitz investor Balaji Srinivasan made a bet with a pseudonymous Twitter user last week that bitcoin would reach \$1 million in the next three months while hyperinflation takes hold.

At first glance, his prediction seems wildly optimistic but directionally reasonable – bitcoin has surged by over 35% since SVB’s collapse on March 10. The tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite Index and gold both rose less than 10%.

The philosophy behind that surge is that cryptocurrency will replace government-backed dollars. The trouble is bitcoin has benefitted precisely because of

GOLD IS A TANGIBLE ASSET, UNLIKE BITCOIN, AND THAT’S PRECISELY WHAT MAKES IT AN INFLATION HEDGE. IN THEORY, AS THE PRICE FOR GOODS GOES UP, GOLD FOLLOWS. IF INVESTORS HOPE TO INOCULATE THEIR PORTFOLIOS AGAINST A WEAKENING DOLLAR, THEY SHOULD HEED THIEL’S ACTIONS, NOT HIS WORDS.

actions taken by central banks.

The Federal Reserve, by the faith and good standing of the US government, has stepped up to stabilise the system with new programmes.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has also tempered his comments about plans to raise rates. What’s more, bitcoin may never have surpassed \$60,000 to reach its highest-ever price level in 2021 had the Fed not kept interest rates consistently low.

It’s the prospect of lower rates – not the lack of government stability – that is opening the door to riskier bets like those on bitcoin.

The second snag is that contrary to Srinivasan and Thiel’s claims, bitcoin is too volatile to protect investors against inflation by preserving its purchasing power over long periods of time.

US inflation continues to spike even as the Fed raises rates.

Gold is a tangible asset, unlike bitcoin, and that’s precisely what makes it an inflation hedge. In theory, as the price for goods goes up, gold follows. If investors hope to inoculate their portfolios against a weakening dollar, they should heed Thiel’s actions, not his words. — Reuters

A guide to product development in the modern landscape



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant



Product development is an integral part of any business, and it requires a great deal of effort, creativity, and foresight.

In the modern entrepreneurial landscape, the process of bringing your ideas to life has become increasingly complex, with numerous factors that must be taken into consideration.

Whether you are launching a new business or improving an existing one, a well-thought-out product development strategy can be the key to success. In this article, we will explore the essential steps and best practices for product development in the modern era.

Step 1: Identify your target market

Before you start developing your product, it’s crucial to identify your target market. This will help you determine the needs and wants of your potential customers, and tailor your product accordingly.

Consider factors such as age,

gender, location, income level, and education when defining your target market. You can also conduct market research to gain a deeper understanding of your target audience. This will help you create a product that meets their needs and appeals to their preferences.

Step 2: Conduct competitor analysis

It’s also essential to analyse your competitors and understand what they are offering. Look at their product features, pricing, and marketing strategies to see how they are positioning themselves in the market. This information will help you identify opportunities for differentiation and create a unique value proposition for your product.

Step 3: Define your unique value proposition

Your unique value proposition (UVP) is a clear statement that defines the benefit your product offers to your target market.

It should communicate the solution your product provides to a specific problem or need and explain why it is better than your competitors. Your UVP should be concise, memorable, and easy to understand.

Step 4: Prototype and test

Once you have a clear understanding of your target market and UVP, it’s time to start prototyping. A prototype is a preliminary model of your product that allows you to test its functionality and refine its design. It’s essential to get feedback from your target audience during the prototyping stage to ensure that you are creating a product that meets their needs.

Step 5: Launch and refine

Once your product is ready for launch, it’s crucial to have a solid marketing and distribution plan in place. Consider leveraging digital channels, such as social media and online advertising, to reach your target audience and

generate awareness. You should also measure the performance of your product and make refinements based on customer feedback and market trends.

In conclusion, product development is a complex and ongoing process that requires careful planning and execution.

By following these steps and best practices, you can create a product that meets the needs of your target market and stands out from your competitors. The key is to remain focused, be flexible, and always be willing to make improvements based on customer feedback and market trends.

Are you ready to take your product development to the next level and learn how to conduct effective market and competitor analysis in the digital age? Stay tuned for our next article, “Knowing Your Market: How to Conduct Effective Market and Competitor Analysis in the Digital Age.”

The simplest fix for banking



JAN EECKHOUT

The author is Professor of Economics at Universitat Pompeu Fabra and author of *The Profit Paradox: How Thriving Firms Threaten the Future of Work* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

Last year, the Nobel Prize in Economics went to two economists who study the dynamics of bank runs, as well as to former US Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke for his work analysing how central banks have dealt with some of history’s worst banking crises, such as those in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Half a year later, we are witnessing another bank run whose contagious effects could destabilise economies, trigger recessions, and impose high costs on taxpayers.

Banks play a double role in the economy, taking short-term deposits and savings and then

using those savings to lend money over the long term in the form of mortgages, business loans, and other investments.

A run occurs when enough depositors come to fear that a bank may go bust, taking their savings with it. They all run to the bank to withdraw their funds, but because the bank has deployed those funds toward the other services it provides, it becomes insolvent.

Having witnessed such runs, US president Franklin Roosevelt’s administration (followed by others around the world) created insurance schemes to alleviate depositors’ fears that they would not get at least some of their money back following a run. But we now have a technological solution that could end bank runs forever.

A country’s monetary authority could introduce a central bank digital currency (CBDC) and provide all depositors (taxpayers) with interest-bearing accounts at the central bank. Such a system would eliminate many barriers to financial transactions by making the broader payments system more fluid.

This system would not be anything like the Wild West of cryptocurrencies and speculative pyramid schemes that have cropped up in recent years, nor would it be socialised banking.



There are already plenty of fintech companies (Revolut, Wise, N26) offering sleek apps and innovative services that enable instantaneous smartphone payments to other users who bank with competing operators.

These same financial operators could access CBDC balances held by the central bank and compete for customers by minimising transaction costs.

Of course, traditional banks also compete; but they do it worse and at a scandalous cost to customers. If the interbank rate charged by the central bank is 3%, your traditional bank offers you at best 1% on a deposit, taking the other two percentage points as profit.

Traditional banks can exert monopoly power because there is no instantaneous clearance for payments. In the United States, it generally takes at least two working days for a money transfer

to enter your bank account. And making matters worse, traditional banks’ excessive risk-taking transforms your risk-free deposit into a risky investment when the bank cannot meet your withdrawal request.

With an interest-bearing CBDC, a bank run is impossible. As the lender of last resort, the central bank could issue as much money as needed if depositors wanted to withdraw their money simultaneously. And, owing to fluid, instantaneous transfers between users, competition would deliver a 3% return on those deposits. Other than traditional banks, who could possibly oppose this solution?

To be sure, traditional banks are crucial for the financial system because they create value by making loans. They monitor whether households that apply for mortgages are solvent, and whether business loans will be

used for profitable investments.

Because lending is always risky, even the most competitive bank will charge a spread on a loan.

The same 3% interbank rate at which the bank can obtain funds today may result in a 5% interest rate for a mortgage, or a 9% rate for a risky investment by a tech startup. Some institution, such as a bank, is needed to evaluate and price these risks.

But, because banks can profit by playing with depositors’ money and relying on the government to bail them out, they tend to assume too much risk. That is why academics and regulators have long argued that banks should be subject to higher capital requirements.

When they cannot use households’ savings to finance risky investments or rely on government bailouts, their risk-taking will be sharply reduced.

A CBDC would bring market discipline to the banking sector. Traditional banks would be forced to focus on picking profitable loans, and they would close most of their network of retail branches.

Likewise, the credit-card oligopoly that hijacks our credit-less payment system would melt like snow in the sun. In its place, we would get a fluid payment system operated by a network of competitors offering access to

your CBDC account.

In today’s economy, households would receive 3% on deposits that are safely shielded from bank runs.

A CBDC is not imminent, though. Central bankers are scared to slaughter the cash cow of the traditional banks, under the pretext that doing so will lead to the collapse of the banking sector. The private bank lobby will strongly oppose digital innovation and seek to maintain its dominant position at the cost of the stability of the financial system.

Still, we may see CBDCs introduced sooner than anticipated. If one major economy takes the plunge, others will be forced to follow suit or risk seeing their currencies be eclipsed. That is why the Canadian central bank has already signalled its readiness to introduce a CBDC if the US decides to launch its own.

If China tries to dominate international transactions with its digital renminbi, other central banks certainly will be prompted to follow suit.

Whoever takes the first major step in disrupting the banking sector, it cannot come soon enough. We already have the tools to end bank runs and ensure financial stability. All we need is the will to use them.

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW RO SO BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

PEOPLE DON'T FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING

ramadhaan



Photo by Abdullahi Juma

Hotels, restaurants vie to offer best iftar and suhoor in town

Muslims place a great deal of significance on Iftar since it is a time when families and communities can come together to break the fast. With the rise of social media, Iftar has acquired a new dimension in recent years and has become an opportunity to sharing Iftar experiences... **P20**



QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY

We have given you plenty. So pray to your Lord and sacrifice. He who hates you is the loser.

(Al Kawthar)

HADITH A GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Dharr, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that he heard the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, saying: "No man accuses another of impiety or disbelief except that it (the accusation) rebounds on him if the one accused is not as he said".

HEALTH TIPS

During the month of Ramadhan, some people have a tendency to become more sedentary. To burn extra calories, make sure to be active by at least going for a walk everyday, two hours after having Iftar which allows you time to digest your meal.

Musa And Al-Khadir

ALLAH, THE ALMIGHTY SAYS: {And (remember) when Musa (Moses) said to his boy-servant: "I will not give up (travelling) until I reach the junction of the two seas or (until) I spend years and years in travelling." But when they reached the junction of the two seas, they forgot their fish, and it took its way through the sea as in a tunnel. So when they had passed fur-

ther on (beyond that fixed place), Musa (Moses) said to his boy-servant: "Bring us our morning meal; truly, we have suffered much fatigue in this, our journey." He said: "Do you remember when we betook ourselves to the rock? I indeed forgot the fish.; none but Shaitan (Satan) made me forget to remember it, it took its course into the sea in a strange (way)!" [Musa (Moses)] said: "That is what we have been seeking;" So they went back retracing their footsteps; Then they found one of Our slaves, on whom We had bestowed mercy from Us, and whom We had taught knowledge from Us; Musa (Moses) said to him (Al-Khadir): "May I follow you so that you teach me something of that knowledge (guidance and true path) which you have been taught (by Allah)?" He (Al-Khadir) said: "Verily you will not be able to have patience with me! And how can you have patience about a thing which you

know not;" Musa (Moses) said: "If Allah wills, you will find me patient, and I will not disobey you in aught;" He (Al-Khadir) said: "Then, if you follow me, ask me not about anything till I myself mention of it to you;" So they both proceeded, till, when they embarked the ship, he (Al-Khadir) scuttled it; Musa (Moses) said: "Have you scuttled it in order to drown its people? Verily, you have committed a thing Imr (a Munkar -evil, bad, dreadful thing);" He (Al-Khadir) said: "Did I not tell you, that you would not be able to have patience with me?" [Musa (Moses)] said: "Call me not to account for what I forgot, and be not hard upon me for my affair (with you);" Then they both proceeded, till they met a boy, and he (Al-Khadir) killed him; Musa (Moses) said: "Have you killed an innocent person who had killed none? Verily, you have committed a thing Nukr (a great Munkar prohibited, evil, dreadful thing!)" (Al- Khadir) said: "Did I not tell you that

you can have no patience with me?" [Musa (Moses)] said: "If I ask you anything after this, keep me not in your company, you have received an excuse from me;" Then they both proceeded, till, when they came to the people of a town, they asked them for food, but they refused to entertain them; Then they found therein a wall about to collapse and he (Al-Khadir) set it up straight; (Musa (Moses)) said: If you had wished, surely, you could have taken wages for it!" (Al-Khadir) said: "This is the parting between me and you, I will tell you the interpretation of (those)things over which you were unable to hold patience. As for the ship, it belonged to Masakin (poor people) working in the sea. So I wished to make a defective damage in it, as there was a king behind them who seized every ship by force. And as for the boy, his parents were believers, and we feared lest he should oppress them by rebellion and disbelief.

So we intended that their Lord should change him for them for one better in righteousness and nearer to mercy. And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the town; and there was under it a treasure belonging to them; and their father was a righteous man, and your Lord intended that they should attain their age of full strength and take out their treasure as a mercy from your Lord. And I did them not of my own accord. That is the interpretation of those (things) over which you could not hold patience). (Al Kahf, 60-82)

LESSON FROM THE STORY
The two major benefits derived from the story of Musa and Khidr are trust in Allah's plan juxtaposed with patience and humility while learning. Musa's learning endeavour is a transformational lesson, one that awakens in the reader the need to trust Allah in difficult times.

STORIES FROM THE QURAN



RECIPE

How to make the Indian-style Ramadhan staple Chicken Biryani



RAMADHAN IS A significant month for Muslims around the world, and different regions have their traditional dishes for breaking the fast. In India, one of the most popular Ramadhan dishes is biryani, which is a flavourful and aromatic rice dish that is made with various spices, meat, and vegetables. Here is a recipe for Chicken Biryani that you can try.

- INGREDIENTS:**
- 2 cups of basmati rice
 - 500g chicken
 - 2 onions, sliced
 - 3 tomatoes, chopped
 - 1 tablespoon ginger paste
 - 1 tablespoon garlic paste
 - 2 tablespoons Biryani Masala
 - 2 green cardamom pods
 - 2 cinnamon sticks
 - 2 cloves
 - 2 bay leaves
 - 2 tablespoons oil
 - Salt to taste
 - 4 cups of water

- INSTRUCTIONS:**
- Rinse the basmati rice

until the water runs clear, then soak it in water for 30 minutes. In a pot, heat the oil over medium heat and fry the onions until they are golden brown. Add the ginger and garlic paste and fry for another minute. Add the chicken to the pot and fry until it is browned on all sides. Add the tomatoes, Biryani Masala, and salt to taste. Mix well and cook for 5-7 minutes. Drain the rice and add it to the pot. Add the green cardamom pods, cinnamon sticks, cloves, and bay leaves to the pot. Mix well. Add 4 cups of water to the pot and bring it to a boil. Cover the pot with a lid and reduce the heat to low. Cook for 20-25 minutes or until the rice is cooked and the water has been absorbed. Once the biryani is cooked, remove the pot from the heat and let it sit for 5 minutes. Fluff the rice with a fork and serve hot. Hope you enjoy this dish with your family!



The Muslim community of India and their Ramadhan traditions

INDIA IS A LAND of diverse cultures and religions, and Islam has a rich and significant history in the country. The arrival of Islam in India can be traced back to the 7th century when Arab traders started visiting the western coast of India. However, it was not until the 12th century when Muslim rulers established their rule in India, which led to the spread of Islam throughout the country. The Muslim rule in India began with the conquest of Sindh in 711 AD by the Arab general Muhammad bin Qasim. The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th century marked the beginning of the Islamic rule in India. Islam flourished in India during the Mughal Empire, which lasted from the 16th to the 19th century. The Muslim rulers of India, particularly the Mughals, contributed significantly to the country's art, culture, and

architecture, leaving behind a legacy that is still admired and celebrated. The Taj Mahal, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, is a prime example of the Mughal era's architectural grandeur. As of 2021, the population of Muslims in India is estimated to be around 200 million, which is the third-largest Muslim population in the world after Indonesia and Pakistan. India's Muslim population is approximately 14.2 per cent of the total population, making it one of the countries with a significant Muslim population. However, in terms of the percentage of the Muslim population, India ranks lower than several other countries such as Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Mauritania, and others, where Muslims make up a much higher percentage of the population. Ramadhan, the holy month of fasting, is one of the most

important events in the Islamic calendar. During this month, Muslims fast from dawn to dusk, abstaining from food, drink, and other physical needs. The purpose of this fast is to purify the body and soul, practice self-discipline, and empathise with those who are less fortunate. In India, Ramadhan is celebrated with great enthusiasm and devotion. Muslims wake up before dawn to have their pre-fast meal, called Suhoor. After breaking the fast in the evening, they perform their prayers, followed by a grand feast, called Iftar, where families and friends gather to share food and celebrate the spirit of Ramadhan. In India, Ramadhan is a time of communal celebration. Mosques are filled with people who gather to pray, recite the Quran, and listen to sermons. Muslims also visit each other's homes to break the fast together. Special foods

are prepared for iftar, such as samosas, kebabs, and sweets. One of the most significant events during Ramadhan in India is the night of Laylat Al Qadr, which is considered the holiest night of the year. Muslims spend the night in prayer and reflection, seeking the blessings and forgiveness of Allah. Ramadhan culminates in the festival of Eid Al Fitr, which marks the end of the month-long fast. On this day, Muslims gather in mosques for prayers, exchange greetings and gifts, and feast with their families and friends. In India, Eid is celebrated with great fervour and is a public holiday. Several Muslim personalities in India have made significant contributions in various fields, including politics, sports, arts, and literature. One of the most popular and influential Muslim personalities in India is the former president, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, who was widely admired for his contributions to science and his role as a statesman. In the field of literature, the famous Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib is still revered for his works that reflect the essence of the Mughal era. The legendary cricketer, Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi, is also remembered for his contribution to Indian cricket and for being a trailblazer for Muslim athletes in the country.

Sudan's speciality 'bittersweet' Ramadhan drink

AS GENERATIONS OF Sudanese have done before her, Wissal Abdel Ghany crouched next to a fire to prepare a traditional drink, a thirst-quenching favourite enjoyed during the fasting month of Ramadhan. In Sudan, the arduously made "helo-murr", which means "bittersweet", is a drink synonymous with the Islamic holy month. It can be found on almost every table across the northeast African country at the end of the day's fast. "Without it, our table feels empty," said Abdel Ghany, wearing a bright orange headscarf. She sat in a small room in the village of Om Eshr, on the outskirts of the capital Khartoum, which teemed with a small force of women busily scraping and spreading a mixture before serving the beverage in clear glasses. The drink has satisfied thirsty fasters for decades and recipes are "inherited from our mothers and grandmothers," the 43-year-old said. Corn is harvested and left to dry in the

sun before being ground and mixed with spices such as fenugreek, cumin or even hibiscus — Sudan's other essential Ramadhan beverage. This mixture is then soaked in sugar and water for several days. Abdel Ghany spread a layer of the thick brown paste over a grill plate above the coals of a wood fire, cooking it into a thin, leather-coloured film. The resulting crepe-like layer is then peeled away and stored — ready to be soaked in the final step to create the beloved drink. Served as cold as possible, the drink is one of many ways that fasting Sudanese cool off, a significant challenge in one of the world's hottest countries. **COLLECTIVE EFFORT** The daytime fasting month of Ramadhan is one of the five pillars of Islam. Observant Muslims refrain from eating and drinking from dawn to dusk, after which they traditionally gather with family and friends to break their fast.



In Sudan, the brew is so identified with Ramadhan that even the US Embassy took to Twitter to promote its staff making it, with diplomats wielding wooden spoons over embers and sipping the amber liquid. Abdel Ghany said preparing the drink

is a collective effort, bringing "together our sisters and friends". "We make it together to share among ourselves", she said. In Sudan's cities, she added, some people don't make it themselves. "But they still have to offer it for din-

ner, so they buy it ready-made", she said. For Abdel Ghany, the preparation of helo-murr and the holy month cannot be separated. "All it takes is a whiff of the scent coming out of a home to know that Ramadhan is here," she said. — **AFP**



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Wahiba Desert, Oman

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Muscat مسقط, Oman

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IN THE KITCHEN

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FINDING THE MOON

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

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



AROUND THE WORLD

LOCAL SCENE

Ramadhan and Inshaad Praise at ROHM



THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE Muscat is delighted to present a series of concerts to take place during the holy month of Ramadhan. In keeping with the season's tradition, a programme of three evening concerts will be performed at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts. Each concert is a unique expression of devotion, offering audiences a depth of connection to the season which can elevate the mind and soul.



The first special evening will take place on April 30, at 9.30pm. Inshaad is presented by the Cairo Opera House Inshaad Ensemble. The second evening of intimate praise is presented by Inshaad groups from within the Sultanate of Oman and is



scheduled for May 6, at 9.30pm. The final evening in the series welcomes Lufti Bouchnak and his Ensemble to the stage of the House of Musical Arts on May 10, at 9.30pm.

Create new special moments with family and friends at the opera house this Ramadhan and make memories of this holy month which will last a lifetime. Ramadhan and Inshaad Praise, April 30, May 6 & 10, 9.30pm, ROHMA.

For information or to book tickets, visit the website or the ROHM app. Alternatively, you can contact the Box Office.

ENTERTAINMENT

It's no joke: club helps Jordanians win comedy gold



WHEN LIFE GAVE them lemons, two Jordanians launched a club to train people in the art of comedy in a country where years of economic woes have left little to laugh about.

Since being founded in 2019, the Amman Comedy Club (ACC) has been training aspiring comics, offering free, three- to four-month workshops in stand-up, improv, comedy sketches and satire writing. Aided by foreign institutions such as the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and with the help of Chicago-based comedy club The Second City, the club has already trained more than 140 people.

The new comedians hoping to put a smile on Jordanian faces range in age between 18 to 40 and

— and up to 50 per cent among young people.

With public debt exceeding \$47 billion, or more than 106 per cent of gross domestic product, the poverty rate also increased to an unprecedented 24 per cent that year.

- SOCIAL CRITIQUE -

Shining a light on social issues through comedy could also help the country as societies need criticism "in order to grow and be able to fix their defects," added Abu al-Rous.

Masoud lamented that "comedy did not get what the attention it deserves in Jordan."

"We have great ambitions,



include students, doctors and lawyers among others, keen to learn the art of comic timing and delivery.

"Comedy is a message, and our message is to make people laugh," said Moeen Masoud, one of the club's co-founders.

"If you come to this place and spend two hours laughing and forget about your problems and worries, this means I have fulfilled my message."

It is part of the founders' broader social mission.

"In our daily lives, we face a lot of economic, social and psychological pressures, and the best way to relieve these worries is to laugh," the other co-founder Yazan Abu al-Rous added.

Jordan's deep economic difficulties were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to official figures, unemployment rose in 2021 to about 25 per cent

beyond Jordan. We aspire to have a tour in the Arab world and the wider world for Jordanian comedians and hope to train many people around the world."

The duo has also spearheaded efforts to dispel one lingering notion about their compatriots.

"There is a stereotype that Jordanians do not laugh," said Abu al-Rous, who has a master's degree in business administration.

"We at ACC wanted to challenge this idea and prove the opposite to the world, that we love laughter and jokes."

So far, the club graduates have performed shows across Jordan and are also training students at private schools in stand-up comedy. The club also runs psychological support courses for children in areas that host Syrian refugees.

- 'FORGET WORRIES' -

Among the club's graduates are

now well-known comedians, who have amassed hundreds of thousands of followers on social media and perform weekly shows in Amman.

Graduate Abdullah Sobeih, 25, said his training taught him "how to choose topics that affect people's lives, how a comic story is built".

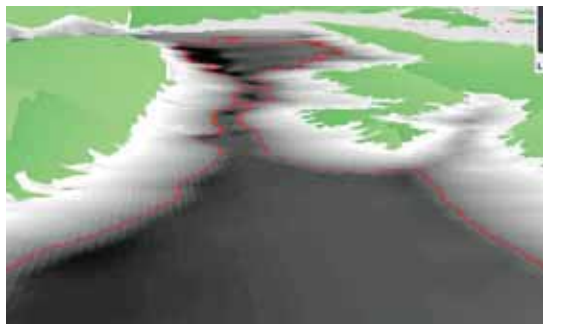
With over 340,000 followers on Instagram, the business graduate hopes his new career can help fellow Jordanians "make them forget their worries".

"We know that people suffer from problems and pressures... we are trying to bring them to this place in order to offer some relief," Sobeih said.

He is among four of the club's

DISCOVERY

Archaeologists on 'first-of-its-kind' mission to map sunken landscapes



TWO BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGISTS are set to embark on a "first-of-its-kind" mission to map ancient landscapes lost to the oceans thousands of years ago.

Dr Simon Fitch, from the University of Bradford, and Professor Richard Bates, from the University of St Andrews, will travel to Split in Croatia to begin a five-day long survey of the Adriatic seabed as part of the Life on the Edge project, which has received £1.08 million (\$1.08 million) in funding from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

They will be joined by Vedran Barbaric, from the University of Split, as part of the pilot team to map submerged landscapes in parts of the Adriatic and North Sea.

These maps can then be analysed for clues into the lives of humans who lived there between 10,000 and 24,000 years ago, during the late Paleolithic period.

Dr Fitch, a geoarchaeologist and a UKRI Future Leadership Fellow, said: "This is the first time anyone is going more than 500 metres from the coastline in the Adriatic to map the seabed."

"We know humans once lived on the land down there because trawlers regularly dredge up artefacts."

"This is about finding out who we are as a species and where we come from."

Dr Fitch said the sea levels were up to 100 metres lower during the late Paleolithic compared with the present day.

He said: "We have an incomplete picture of human history."



"If we go back in time to the period known as the late Paleolithic — so, between 10,000 and 24,000 years ago — that is when we had the last 'glacial maximum'."

"It means a lot more land was exposed and people would have lived there."

Dr Fitch added: "We know most human populations like to live on the coastline, so it's likely there were settlements on what is now the seabed."

"Our aim is to find evidence of those settlements and then recover the archaeology."

Dr Fitch's work is the first in a series of expeditions expected to take place over the next five years.

He is working with collaborators from the University of Split, and Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) in Belgium, as well as commercial companies who are already mapping seabeds as they prepare to install wind farms.

The University of Bradford's supercomputers will be used to analyse the data and turn it into maps that may reveal lost landscapes.

Dr Jessica Cook Hale, from the University of Georgia in the US, who has also joined the project, said: "We know from experience human populations like to live along the coast, so once we get an understanding of the topography, we can then make an educated guess as to where they might have lived at a time when sea levels were much lower than they are today."

In addition to the UKRI funding, the Life on the Edge project has also received £400,000 in-kind ship time from VLIZ as well as a PhD studentship from the University of Bradford. — PA Media/dpa



Hotels, restaurants vie to offer best iftar and suhoor in town

By Kabeer Yousuf

Muslims fast during Ramadhan from sunrise to sunset, forgoing all physical demands such as food and liquids. The fast is broken each day with a meal known as iftar.

Iftar has been a custom since the seventh century, during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). There is a tradition among Muslims that the Prophet Muhammad would break his fast with dates and water. By declaring, "My people will continue on the right road as long as they hasten to break the fast," the Prophet Muhammad explicitly underlined the significance of breaking the fast at the earliest opportunity.

Muslims place a great deal of significance on iftar since it is a time when families and communities can come together to break the fast. It's a season for giving, sharing, and expressing appreciation. Iftar is frequently held in mosques or other public spaces and is a common event in nations with a majority of Muslims.

With the rise of social media, iftar has acquired a new dimension in recent years. Social media has become a platform for Muslims worldwide to connect and spread the spirit of Ramadhan by sharing their iftar experiences.

As Ramadhan sets in and is backed by a lack of public iftars, hotels in the city are vying to offer the best iftar and Suhoor experiences, and indeed, the hotels in Muscat have customized their menus to the culinary choices of different ethnic backgrounds.

With the opening up of travel and tourism to a wider audience post Covid and people travelling largely, it is the hospitality sector that benefits heavily, and with the holy month setting in, the sector is heaving a sigh of relief that the scars inflicted by the pandemic are gradually being healed.

For all foodies, the chefs of these hotels are offering an impeccable iftar that will mark an exquisite gourmet experience this Ramadhan. The Arabic and international-inspired iftar buffets available in the hotel, carefully created by its professional culinary team, present a Ramadhan feast offering an unforgettable combination of authentic Middle Eastern and international cuisines under one roof.

"We always thrive to offer diverse and lavish iftar buffets that may tempt even the non-fasters," says Samir Messaoudi, General Manager of Sheraton Oman.

"We are looking forward to welcoming our guests and offering them an unforgettable experience with a collection of unique culinary options. Guests can enjoy authentic oud melodies throughout the holy month against a perfect backdrop."

As of late, the iftar offerings across different hotels and restaurants in the country vary, and depending on how much one can afford, the offerings also become more lavish.

Guests can experience an Iftar culinary journey at Al Bustan Palace's Al Khiran Kitchen for RO 24 net per person, featuring cuisines from countries beyond Oman including Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Morocco and much more from 6:30 pm till 10:30 pm. For Suhoor, visitors can kick start each day of fasting with a special Suhoor menu at the hotel's 'Layali Ramadan' over the scenic beach views from 8:30 pm till 2:00 am with daily live entertainment from 9:00 pm till midnight.

"This year, Ramadan at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah will be exceptional as we bring in incredible and authentic fla-

vours from the region with the expertise of our multi-talented Chefs. Our guests will witness an enhanced iftar experience complemented by traditional Oud performances and dazzling decor to make it even more celebratory. In line with the Ramadan spirit of giving and sharing, our resort will also be spreading some joys with lots of contests to unlock stays and dining experiences at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah" commented René D Egle, the Area General Manager of Shangri-La Barr al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn, Muscat.

Al Tanoor restaurant is serving a delicious iftar buffet, featuring a host of delectable traditional Ramadan delicacies inspired by local, regional, and international cuisines, from Maghrib prayer onwards. The extensive buffet spread that costs OMR22 will showcase live and à la minute stations including hot and cold mezze, Omani specials, a variety of regional dishes, mixed grill, and classic desserts, along with traditional Ramadan beverages and live entertainment such as Oud players.

As dining also extends to Suhoor, there are also numerous Layalina Tents popping up, not just in Al Bustan Palace and Shangri-La but also among other smaller hotels that still want to take advantage of the cooler weather with a variety of food available for guests to enjoy, including shish tawook, kebab meshui lahem meshui and assorted hot and cold mezze selections, along with the tunes of traditional entertainment paired with favourite scented flavours.

Going the extra mile, the Jumeirah Muscat Bay Hotel, one of the newest properties in town, has launched an innovative idea of delivering iftar and suhoor at home.

"Our guests can also experience a taste of Jumeirah Muscat Bay's Iftar delicacies from the comfort of their homes. From hot and cold mezze to authentic Lamb or Chicken Ouzi and Umm Ali, there are many options to relish through a specially curated iftar menu for family and friends to enjoy," a spokesperson from the hotel said.

"We are getting a great response ever since we announced delectable iftar offers to enjoy and celebrate the blessed month with loved ones with the beginning of the holy month. One can experience a unique Ramadhan atmosphere under the stars at our hotel with enchanting ocean views, the melody of the oud, and exquisite dishes including live cooking stations, gourmet desserts, and beverages to savour," she adds.

Outside of these luxury settings, smaller restaurants are also taking the opportunity to diversify their offering as the taste of iftar diners become more demanding. For these smaller restaurants, there's always date and laban to break the fast and a great selection of grilled meat and fish is always on display, including vegetable options for those wanting to stay healthy.

International desserts, freshly prepared by the talented international pastry team covering dates pudding, Umm Ali, Cheese Kunafa as well as dark chocolate cake, and fruit tarts are almost classic additions to the offering.

"The factors that play an advantage to the hotels in the country in the second Ramadhan post Covid-19 are many," says Mohammed Ali, a travel facilitator in Ruwi.

"The way the world opened up after the fear of the pandemic disappeared to a great extent and people began to travel are the most important reasons. Added to it, lack of public iftars in and around the city is yet another reason why hotels are witnessing a huge number of believers depending upon them for iftar and Suhoor these days," adds Mohammed.

