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PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR

04:51 AM

DHUHR

12:18 PM

ASR

03:44 PM

MAGHRIB

06:25 PM

ISHA

07:35 PM

omanobserver.com

INBRIEF

HM GREETINGS TO GREECE PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Konstantinos Tassoulas of the Republic of Greece, on the occasion of his country's National Day.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to President Tassoulas and his best wishes to the friendly people of Greece.

HM MESSAGE TO ERITREA PRESIDENT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Isaias Afwerki Abraham, of the friendly State of State of Eritrea, related to bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and peoples and ways to enhance them in various fields.

The message was delivered by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, during a meeting with the Eritrean President in the Eritrean capital, Asmara, on Monday.

During the meeting, Sayyid Badr conveyed His Majesty's greetings along with his wishes of good health and happiness to the President of Eritrea, and further progress and prosperity for the friendly Eritrean people.

The President of the State of Eritrea asked the foreign minister to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty and continued progress and prosperity for the friendly Omani people. — ONA

Tourism to contribute 3.5% to GDP by 2030

D o m e s t i c t o u r i s m s p e n d i n g a t R O 8 3 0 m i l l i o n

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

THE MAJLIS ASH'SHURA on Monday hosted Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, during its 8th regular session of the second sitting of the 10th Term.

The session dealt with the ministry's statement on its policies, plans and programmes, overall tourism development indicators, heritage sector management, tourism sector management and human resources in the heritage and tourism sectors, as well as areas of coordination and prospects of investment.

The session was chaired by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura.

The ministry's statement focused on six main topics. The minister stated that the statement highlights the ministry's most prominent efforts during the Tenth Five-Year Plan and its role in achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040, in line with the plans and targets of the economic diversification and their contribution to the gross domestic product.

Abdullah al Harthy, Chairman of the Media, Tourism and Culture Committee, said: "The statement covered everything related to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. This sector is one of the enablers of the national economy of this country. We in the Majlis hope that heritage and tourism will become one of the tributaries of the economy after oil and that there are positive indicators as the current rate of 2.5 per cent in the country's economy over the past period is a good indicator. We aspire for it to reach at least 10 per cent. This is an ambitious goal in Oman Vision 2040 and it is



Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, making a statement in the Majlis Ash'shura on Monday.

important for the ministry to work on this aspect."

Al Harthy also added that the issue of job-seekers is a topic of concern, especially since the ministry has a number of initiatives that will stimulate the economy.

The minister said that the contribution of tourism sector grew from RO 1.8 billion in 2019 to RO 2 billion in 2023 and the direct added value of tourism increased from RO 873 million in 2019 to RO 1 billion in 2023.

He added that indicators show that the contribution of tourism sector to the gross domestic product (GDP) will reach 3.5 per cent by 2030, supported by ongoing investments that amount to approximately RO 3 billion, in addition to investment plans in different

governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking about domestic tourism, the minister pointed out that the number of local visitors increased from 10 million in 2019 to 13 million in 2023, while the volume of domestic tourism spending grew from RO 732 million in 2019 to RO 830 million in 2023.

He said that the ministry is taking steps to establish, develop and renovate tourist destinations in accordance with the Royal directives. Discussing the statement, the minister said, "GCC Unified Visa will take time due to security concerns and differing views among GCC countries. Discussions are ongoing, with specific reservations about some nationalities from unstable regions." **TURN TO P3**

EGYPT MAKES NEW GAZA TRUCE OFFER AS ISRAEL KILLS 65

CAIRO: Egypt has put forward a new proposal aimed at restoring the Gaza ceasefire deal, security sources said on Monday, as Palestinian health authorities said Israeli strikes have killed at least 65 people in the enclave in the past 24 hours.

The proposal, made last week, follows an escalation in violence after Israel resumed air and ground

operations against Hamas last Tuesday, effectively ending a two-month period of relative calm.

Health officials said Israel has killed nearly 700 Palestinians since it resumed its attacks, including at least 400 women and children. Hamas said several of its senior political and security officials had also been killed. Its for Hamas to

release five Israeli captives each week, with Israel implementing the second phase of the ceasefire after the first week, two security sources said. Hamas is still holding 59 captives, with 24 of them thought to be still alive.

Both the US and Hamas agreed to the proposal, the security sources said, but Israel has not yet responded.

A Hamas official didn't confirm the proposed offer, but said that "several proposals are being discussed with the mediators to bridge the gap and to resume

negotiations to reach common ground that would pave the way to start the second phase of the agreement." The sources said the Egyptian proposal also includes a timeline for Israel's full withdrawal from Gaza, backed by US guarantees, in exchange for the release of captives.

Hamas has accused Israel of breaking the terms of the January ceasefire agreement but has said it is willing to negotiate a truce and was studying proposals from US President Donald Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff. **SEE ALSO P6**

US, Russia in Ukraine peace talks as 65 hurt in latest strike

RIYADH: US and Russian officials met in Saudi Arabia to discuss a partial ceasefire in Ukraine on Monday as dozens of people were wounded in a missile strike on a Ukrainian city. With Ukrainian negotiators waiting nearby, a day after they sat down with the US team, the Americans and Russians met in Riyadh with a Black Sea ceasefire top of the agenda.

President Donald Trump is pushing for a rapid end to the three-year war and hopes the latest round of talks will pave the way for

a breakthrough. While the talks took place at a luxury hotel in the Saudi capital, 65 people were wounded in a missile attack on Sumy in northeastern Ukraine, officials said.

The attack on a "densely populated residential area" damaged apartments and an educational facility, the regional prosecutor's office said. The city's acting mayor earlier said a hospital had been affected. The Ukrainian negotiating team was expecting a second meeting with the US delegation on Monday, a source in Kyiv said, a sign



A medical worker evacuates a wounded person from an apartment building damaged during a Russian missile strike in Sumy, Ukraine, on Monday.

that progress may have been made.

This month in Jeddah -- days after President Volodymyr Zelensky's White House dressing-down by Trump -- Ukraine agreed to a US-proposed, 30-day ceasefire that was then rejected by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Officials are now studying a possible resumption of the Black Sea Initiative, a year-long agreement that allowed millions of tonnes of grain and other food exports to be shipped from Ukraine's ports.

"The issue of the Black Sea

Initiative and all aspects related to the renewal of this initiative is on the agenda today," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said in his daily briefing.

"This was President Trump's proposal and President Putin agreed to it. It was with this mandate that our delegation travelled to Riyadh."

The US-Ukraine and US-Russia talks were originally planned to take place simultaneously to enable shuttle diplomacy, with the United States going back and forth between the delegations. — **AFP**

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SHORTTAKES



OMAN CELEBRATES 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF ARAB LEAGUE

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is joining other Arab countries in marking the 80th anniversary of the foundation of the Arab League.

The Arab League has been a cornerstone of joint Arab action since its establishment in 1945.

Since joining the League in 1971, the Sultanate of Oman has maintained its commitment to uphold the principles of Arab solidarity. It has ever since endorsed an approach based on positive cooperation with all.

Oman's stance stemmed from 'constructive balance' in dealing with regional and international issues and the adoption of dialogue and diplomacy in addressing various issues and challenges, with the prime aim of achieving stability, peace and progress. — ONA

Al Numani receives envoys



Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani holds talks with Khondker Misbah ul Azim, Bangladesh ambassador, and Idris Ahmed Mia, Syrian ambassador

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Monday Khondker Misbah ul Azim, Ambassador-designate of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the Sultanate of Oman.

At the outset of the meeting, Gen Sultan al Numani welcomed the Ambassador, wishing him success in performing his duties. The two sides also exchanged friendly talks and ways to develop bilateral relations in a manner that achieves the common

interests of the two friendly countries.

The Minister of the Royal Office also received Idris Ahmed Mia, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, Al Numani and the Syrian

Ambassador discussed the latest developments and ways to enhance existing cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Syrian Arab Republic.

The meeting also touched on issues of common concern on the regional and international arenas. — ONA



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SHORT TAKES



ROP ARRESTS MANY IN VARIOUS CASES

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

The Al Dakhiliyah Governorate Police Command, in cooperation with the Al Batinah South Governorate Police Command, foiled an attempt to smuggle more than 20 kilogrammes of crystal meth and marijuana and arrested three persons including an Asian national, for possessing drugs intended for trafficking.

Meanwhile, the Muscat Governorate Police Command seized 9 motorcycles their owners used to display dangerous stunts on roads endangering people's lives and disturbing public peace.

The Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigations arrested three people for stealing cash and gold jewellery from a house in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

The Al Sharqiyah North Governorate Police Command arrested two people for possessing fireworks for the purpose of trafficking. They smuggled them and stored them in a commercial store in the Wilayat of Sinaw. The Al Dhahirah Governorate Police Command arrested an Asian national from the Wilayat of Yanqul for smuggling a large quantity of banned cigarettes inside his vehicle. The Al Batinah North Governorate Police Command arrested three people for stealing electrical cables from a commercial store in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah. The Al Batinah North Governorate Police Command also arrested a man for stealing livestock from a farm in Suhar.

The Muscat Governorate Police Command, in cooperation with the Special Tasks Police Units in Bausher and Seeb, seized 65 vehicles and arrested a number of people late at night for drifting and disturbing the peace and tranquillity.

SPECIAL OFFICE TO PROMOTE MASIRAH ISLAND

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash'shura hosted Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, to discuss the ministry's statement on six main topics, including policies, plans and programmes; overall tourism development indicators; heritage sector management; tourism sector management; human resources in the heritage and tourism sectors; and areas of coordination and development and investment prospects.



In response to a question on the development of tourism in Masirah Island, the minister said, "There are lands available for investment

and use in Masirah, and dozens of investors from Russia, Egypt and the Gulf states have been welcomed. We need to develop the airport and other facilities and on this basis, investments will be attracted and necessary exemptions will be provided."

"A special office will be established to promote Masirah, and there is a directive to ensure basic services are provided on the island before entering into any partnerships or investments."

Omani-Bahraini Bazaar expo opens in Muscat

THE MUCH-ANTICIPATED Omani-Bahraini Bazaar Exhibition commenced at Oman Mall in the Wilayat of Bausher, Muscat Governorate. The event was inaugurated under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Held in alignment with 'Oman Vision 2040' and 'Bahrain Vision 2030', the exhibition aims to enhance the role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in economic growth. Featuring 30 exhibitors, including 17 Omanis and 13 Bahrainis, the event offers a diverse range of products such as fashion, perfumes, incense, Omani frankincense, traditional sweets, accessories, handicrafts, heritage items and household supplies.

Running until March 26, the exhibition seeks to strengthen historical ties between Oman and Bahrain, support entrepreneurs, create new investment opportunities and increase bilateral trade.

Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi, Ambassador of Bahrain to Oman, highlighted that this exhibition reflects the strong economic and diplomatic relations between the two nations. He emphasised the government's commitment to supporting entrepreneurs, fostering business growth and enhancing their contribution to GDP.

Echoing these sentiments, Radina al Hajri, Chairwoman of the Omani-



The expo, which concludes on Wednesday, seeks to strengthen historical ties between Oman and Bahrain

Bahraini Friendship Association, stressed that the exhibition is a key initiative of the Association, reinforcing economic cooperation and providing a platform for SME owners.

She noted that this is the fourth edition of the event, following the success of the January 2025 exhibition in Manama.

Looking ahead, Al Hajri announced a

series of upcoming exhibitions, seminars and conferences aimed at fostering deeper economic and cultural exchanges between Oman and Bahrain.

The event was attended by senior officials, diplomats and media representatives, reaffirming the commitment to strengthening bilateral trade and entrepreneurial collaboration. — ONA

Preparations are on to include Bisya and Salut on World Heritage List

FROM P1

The unified visa was officially approved in 2023 to increase tourism in the GCC, by making it more convenient for non-nationals living in Gulf countries to explore other countries in the region without needing to obtain separate visas.

INVESTMENTS

The statement addressed six main axes, including policies, plans and programmes; overall tourism development indicators; heritage sector management; tourism sector management; human resources in the heritage and tourism sectors; and areas of coordination and development and investment prospects.

The first axis covered the ministry's plans and programmes being implemented in the heritage and tourism sectors and their alignment with the priorities of Oman Vision 2040, the development projects for the heritage and tourism sectors and the ministry's vision for including future programmes and projects focused on developing the heritage and tourism sectors within the programmes of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan.

The second axis discussed an analysis of the tourism balance during the current

five-year plan. This is expected in the next five-year plan, through an assessment of tourism spending in all its aspects during the current plan, an assessment of the impact of domestic tourism on the sector's total output, its areas of expenditure and its future growth, in addition to the current assessment of integrated tourism complex projects and their impact in terms of investment value, job opportunities generated and inter-connectedness with other economic sectors.

HERITAGE SECTOR

The third axis of the ministerial statement was devoted to discussing the management of the heritage sector. This was achieved by addressing the management of Oman's tangible cultural heritage, the ministry's efforts to sustain it, and the management of historical and archaeological monuments. It also focused on the heritage sector's contribution to the gross domestic product and its future development and growth, both as a whole and as a sector.

The heritage sector has demonstrated steadfast commitment to managing the sustainability of architectural heritage, as evidenced by the 370 restored monuments.

A periodic maintenance programme is being



implemented according to priorities and available financial resources, while these resources are being utilised for investment through civil partnerships. The archaeological surveys and excavations programme continues to be distinguished by attracting specialised archaeological missions from around the world. The heritage sector has witnessed a doubling of efforts to develop the World Heritage sites. This includes the establishment of iconic visitor centres at the historic city of Qalhat, the Bat site, and the archaeological site

of Dibba, while preparations are underway to include the sites of Bisya and Salut on the World Heritage List.

Meanwhile, museums have witnessed significant activity through the implementation of several development and integration programmes with the Omani museum system at various levels. The Maritime History Museum project in the Wilayat of Sur represents an exemplary model of partnership between various parties and is one of the most prominent projects that translates the second edition of HH Sayyid Belarab bin Haitham

Award for Architectural Design. Preparations are also underway to relocate the Natural History Museum to its new location within the Oman Botanic Garden project, in addition to supporting private museums and heritage houses in various governorates.

GEOLOGICAL PARKS

Natural heritage, including geological and rare phenomena, also receives a share of attention and development. This includes the use and display of meteorite collections and the deployment of a digital monitoring system that tracks falls in receiving fields according to their distribution. This is in addition to the ministry's initiative to establish geological parks, beginning with the Al Hajar Geological Park project, which extends over an area of 5,400 square kilometres and encompasses three governorates. Development is progressing apace.

The fourth axis focuses on tourism sector management and contribution to the gross domestic product and highlighting the most prominent tourism projects aimed at maximising the sector's economic impact. The number of local visitors increased from 10 million in 2019 to 13 million in 2023.

Domestic tourism spending also increased from RO 732 million in 2019 to RO 830 million in 2023, underscoring the importance of domestic tourism.

ADVENTURE TOURISM

The ministry is also working to employ and support adventure tourism, while it has initiated an ambitious strategy to utilise Omani ports to promote cruise ship and luxury yacht tourism. It also recently launched a programme for medical and wellness tourism, along with other traditional and emerging tourism models.

The fifth axis addressed the issue of human resources in the heritage and tourism sectors, and the ministry's efforts to determine the supply and demand rates for national labour in the heritage and tourism sectors and improve Omanisation rates.

Ahmed al Balushi, a member of the Majlis Majlis Ash'shura representing the Wilayat of Al Seeb, said, "The tourism sector's contribution to the labour market is not satisfactory. We believe there are significant and broad opportunities to employ Omanis in various tourism sectors, whether in hotels, tourist resorts, restaurants, cafes, etc. There is a gap between educational outcomes and market needs."

Self-monitoring improves competency

An effective tool for achieving outstanding government performance and elevating the level of public service

SELF-MONITORING

is a fundamental pillar for achieving integrity and efficiency in public service, as it enhances the employee's ability to take responsibility and perform tasks efficiently without the need for external supervision, according to specialists in the field. It also contributes to adherence to ethical and professional standards, reducing errors and boosting trust between citizens and government institutions.

They stated that self-monitoring helps improve the quality of services provided and promotes transparency and integrity, emphasising its importance as an effective tool for achieving outstanding government performance and elevating the level of public service.

Hamoud bin Sulaiman al Abri, Director of Communication and Media Department at the State Audit Institution (SAI), stated that self-monitoring is a fundamental pillar in self-control and promoting positive behaviours. It enables individuals to monitor their behaviours based on values and ethical principles without the need for external supervision.

SAI is keen to enhance this value in society due to its significant impact on improving performance and work quality. Al Abri pointed out that SAI implements a set of activities and initiatives to promote self-monitoring, including awareness lectures for the relevant entities and school students, in addition to participation in community events. A variety of awareness publications have also been produced, including a book on "Integrity Influence on Functional and Institutional Performance", as well as booklets for children.

Regarding the differences between self-monitoring and imposed monitoring, Al Abri emphasised that self-monitoring originates from the individual and is based on their values, whereas imposed monitoring relies on systems and laws that ensure compliance and improve performance. He also pointed out the importance of the Code of Conduct issued by SAI to enhance ethical values and practices among employees.

Al Abri emphasised that self-monitoring is an integral part of Omani identity, as it reflects high ethical standards and the community's commitment to virtuous values, contributing to the building of a strong and united society.

TRANSPARENCY

Dr Qais al Sabei, a legal adviser and economic expert, confirmed that the concept of self-monitoring is one of the vital foundations that every individual should possess. It means being conscious of one's actions, words and behaviours. In the professional context, self-monitoring is reflected in an employees ability to monitor their own performance and tasks, demonstrating their commitment to quality and excellence in work without the need for external supervision. He explained that self-monitoring also means prioritising the public interest over personal interests, which contributes to fostering a culture of teamwork.

Dr Al Sabei added that the impact of self-monitoring extends to all aspects of employee performance in both the public and private sectors, as it enhances the employees' sense of responsibility and makes them true contributors of professional excellence. He emphasised that an employee who possesses self-monitoring is capable of achieving positive and effective performance without requiring reminders from supervisors.

He pointed out that self-monitoring is a fundamental factor in ensuring governance,



Hamoud bin Sulaiman al Abri



Suhair al Amri



Fatima bint Khamis al Maqbaliyah



Dr Qais al Sabei

integrity and transparency within institutions. It helps establish a work environment that promotes ethical and professional values, which positively affect employee performance and increase public trust in the institutions.

QUALITY SERVICE

Fatima bint Khamis al Maqbaliyah, a lawyer and owner of Fatima Al Maqbaliyah Law and Legal Consultancy Office, emphasised that self-monitoring in workplace reflects the employees' commitment to ethical behaviour and professionalism without the need for direct external monitoring. She pointed out that self-monitoring stems from personal values and a sense of responsibility towards the work, which involves compliance with laws and regulations, avoiding conflict of interest, and acting in the public interest.

She clarified that self-monitoring improves the employees' efficiency and precision in task performance, as it encourages them to make responsible decisions and accept the consequences of those decisions. She also highlighted that monitoring helps reduce mistakes and violations, which in turn enhances the quality of public services.

She added that self-monitoring leads to improved integrity and transparency in government work, as an employee who follows the principles of self-monitoring is more committed to applying the principles of integrity and transparency, thereby reducing the opportunities for corruption and abuse of power. It also encourages the employee to report any illegal or unethical practices, creating a more transparent work environment.

She emphasised the necessity of promoting a culture of integrity and transparency through ongoing training and awareness, also providing clear mechanisms to protect employees from external pressures when reporting corruption. She urged senior management to lead by example in practicing self-monitoring and for the establishment of effective monitoring systems that support and complement self-monitoring, rather than replacing it. Additionally, she highlighted the importance of implementing incentive policies to reward employees who adhere to ethical and professional standards.

FAIR DECISIONS

Suhair al Amri, a psychologist, emphasised that self-monitoring is an essential element for achieving integrity and efficiency in public office. It contributes to improving the quality of services provided to citizens, reducing administrative faults and boosting productivity. It also helps reduce delays and job negligence, leading to improve the overall efficiency of government performance.

She explained that self-monitoring enhances employee compliance with laws and systems, thus reducing the likelihood of administrative corruption. This sense of responsibility leads to making fair decisions based on the public interest, rather than personal advantage.

She pointed out some of the challenges employees encounter in exercising this monitoring, including the lack of incentives for employees committed to self-responsibility, the weak culture of accountability and transparency in some institutions, and the job pressures as well as administrative routine leading to a loss of motivation to exercise self-monitoring. Furthermore, some work environments that do not promote self-discipline.

Suhair recommended the importance of raising awareness of the importance of self-monitoring through training courses and workshops, and establishing incentive systems for employees who demonstrate high ethical commitment at work. She also called for promoting a culture of accountability and transparency within government institutions and providing a positive work environment that encourages employees to act responsibly without external pressure.

SELF-MONITORING ADVANTAGES

Reduces delays and job negligence, leading to better overall efficiency of govt performance

Helps improve the quality of services and promotes transparency

Enhances employee compliance with laws and systems

Stems from personal values and a sense of responsibility towards the work

Capable of achieving positive and effective performance without supervisors

Prioritises the public interest over personal interests, which contributes to fostering teamwork

SHORT TAKES



Session discusses role of municipal councils in society, development

KHASAB: The Musandam branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) hosted an evening event titled ‘Municipal Councils and Their Role in Society and Development’ under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam. The event brought together key figures to discuss the pivotal role municipal councils play in fostering local development and strengthening community engagement.

Speakers highlighted how municipal councils serve as a crucial bridge between citizens and the government by addressing community needs, enhancing local services and spearheading infrastructure projects. The evening underscored the councils’ contributions to creating a more vibrant business environment through strategic planning and public-private partnerships, which have already resulted in significant improvements in the governorate. Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy remarked, “This Ramadhan evening is designed to promote open dialogue and collaboration, paving the way for sustainable development and ensuring that citizens’ aspirations are met.” The event also celebrated the OCCI’s ongoing commitment to nurturing community communication and cultivating a culture of constructive engagement.

Additional discussions during the session covered key municipal issues — from educational performance and digital transformation in Musandam to proposals for improved public services, such as potable water delivery in Khasab and the development of local crafts. These initiatives reflect a broad effort to address both current challenges and future opportunities for growth across the governorate. — ONA

OCCI TOURISM COMMITTEE HOLDS FIRST MEETING



Dr Siham al Harthy, Chairperson of OCCI Tourism Committee, chaired the meeting.

MUSCAT: The Tourism Committee of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) held its first meeting of 2025. The meeting was chaired by Dr Siham al Harthy, Chairperson of the Committee. The meeting looked into proposed initiatives and activities that constitute part of the committee’s action plan for the year 2025.

The initiatives and activities align with the OCCI’s strategic approaches, which include improving the business environment, expanding the base of economic diversification and contributing to the economic development of governorates amid updates seen by the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Dhofar Municipality discusses key infrastructure projects

SALALAH: The Municipal Council of Dhofar Governorate convened a high-level meeting to discuss various development initiatives, focusing on improving municipal services, infrastructure and community welfare. Chaired by HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar and Chairman of the Council, the meeting brought together key officials and committee representatives to review ongoing and proposed projects across the governorate.

A significant part of the discussions centred on the visit of the Council’s delegation to the Al



HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, chaired the meeting

Aqar Heritage District in the Wilayat of Nizwa. This visit was aimed at exchanging expertise and learning about best practices in heritage

district development. Officials explored innovative strategies for preserving cultural sites while integrating modern amenities to enhance their appeal for residents and tourists alike.

Among the major topics reviewed were the expansion of the fishing port in Mirbat, enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities and regulating market prices in residential areas. The Health and Environmental Affairs Committee, along with the Governorate Development and Improvement Committee, proposed an expansion plan to increase the

port’s capacity and enhance its service offerings for local fishermen and the seafood industry.

The Social Affairs Committee engaged in discussions with specialists from Dhofar Governorate Police Command to streamline procedures for obtaining specialised driving licences and facilitating vehicle modifications for individuals with physical disabilities.

The council aims to implement policies ensuring greater inclusivity and ease of mobility for this segment of the population.

The Legal Affairs Committee put forward recommendations

to introduce better oversight and regulation of commercial establishments operating in residential neighbourhoods.

This initiative seeks to ensure price stability, prevent unfair pricing practices and maintain reasonable costs of essential goods and services for the residents of Dhofar.

These deliberations reflect the council’s proactive approach towards improving municipal infrastructure, enhancing public services and fostering an economically stable environment in Dhofar Governorate. — ONA

See rare artefacts during Eid at National Museum

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM in Muscat continues to captivate history and art enthusiasts by offering a rare and enriching experience that blends Omani, Islamic and global heritage. As part of its commitment to fostering cultural awareness, the museum is currently exhibiting an exceptional collection of artefacts previously displayed at the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization.

This special showcase provides a unique opportunity for visitors to explore masterpieces of Islamic art and human history under one roof during the Eid Al Fitr holiday.

For those seeking a cultural and educational experience, the National Museum is the perfect destination. The exhibition highlights the artistic and scientific achievements of Islamic civilisations across different eras, featuring artefacts that reflect exceptional craftsmanship, intricate designs and historical significance.

Among the standout pieces is a rare incense burner from the 11th–12th century AD, crafted in Iran or Afghanistan. Made of a copper alloy and shaped like a cat, this remarkable artefact showcases the ingenuity of Muslim metalworkers. The head of the cat-shaped burner lifts to place charcoal and incense inside its hollow body, while intricate decorative holes allow the fragrance to disperse. The tail serves as a handle, demonstrating the fusion of functionality and artistic creativity that defined Islamic craftsmanship.

Another fascinating piece on display is a gilded ewer from 13th-century Kashan, Iran. This beautifully decorated vessel features a combination of cobalt blue, gold and white enamel, reflecting the evolution of ceramic techniques during the Islamic era. Such exquisite designs continue to influence artistic traditions worldwide.



A rare incense burner from the 11th-12th century AD



The National Museum aims to instil a sense of pride in Omani and Islamic heritage.

The exhibition highlights the artistic and scientific achievements of Islamic civilisations across different eras.



For those interested in historical manuscripts, the museum presents a rare medical manuscript dating back to the 9th century AD. Originally written by the renowned Greek physician Galen, it was translated into Arabic by the scholar Hubaysh Ibn Al Hasan al Dimashqi. The 180-page document, penned

in elegant Naskh script with red-inked titles, underscores the Islamic civilisation’s deep engagement with science and medicine.

Numismatics enthusiasts will also find a significant artefact in the form of one of the earliest Islamic Mongolian coins. This silver dirham, minted after the Mongols’ conquest of Baghdad in 1258 AD, marks a pivotal moment in history when Islamic governance transitioned under Mongol rule. The inscriptions on the coin document a crucial period of political and cultural transformation in the Islamic world.

The National Museum offers an interactive and educational experience for visitors of all ages. Children can engage with history through hands-on activities such as pottery making, Arabic calligraphy practice and digital exhibits that bring ancient artefacts to life. These interactive elements make the museum an ideal family-friendly destination during the festive season.

Beyond its role as a cultural institution, the National Museum aims to instil a sense of pride in Omani and Islamic heritage. By exploring the museum’s vast collection, visitors gain deeper insights into the scientific, artistic and intellectual contributions of Islamic civilisation.

Located in the heart of Muscat, the National Museum is easily accessible to residents and tourists alike. Open seven days a week, it offers guided tours and workshops designed to enhance the visitor experience.

This Eid Al Fitr, the National Museum invites the public to embark on a journey through time, discovering the artistic brilliance and historical legacy of the Islamic world. Whether admiring ancient artefacts or engaging in educational activities, visitors are sure to leave with a greater appreciation for the rich cultural heritage preserved within the museum’s walls.

ISC OMAN HOLDS DIGITAL MARKETING WORKSHOP

MUSCAT: The Indian Social Club (ISC) Oman successfully organised an insightful workshop on Digital Marketing on March 22, led by Hansika Dinesh Gagnani, a certified digital marketing professional and artist. This engaging seminar aimed to equip women with essential digital marketing skills, empowering them to enhance their online presence and navigate the digital world with confidence.

This marks Hansika’s second successful collaboration with the ISC Oman, reinforcing her dedication to supporting women in their professional and creative pursuits. She previously conducted a live workshop on decoupage art in mixed media as part of the Sisterhood Week initiative nearly two years ago.

The seminar covered core digital marketing concepts, practical tools



Hansika Dinesh Gagnani addressing a digital marketing workshop

and easy-to-implement strategies to help women grow their digital footprint. A special highlight was a segment on online safety, where participants learned how to

safeguard themselves from scams and fraud while using digital platforms.

With her dynamic and interactive approach, Hansika encouraged active participation, making the session both educational and engaging. She addressed questions with clarity and professionalism, ensuring that attendees were left with valuable, real-world insights applicable to both personal and professional growth.

It was truly inspiring to witness more women take charge of their digital skills, unlocking new opportunities in the ever-evolving digital space.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Turkish anti-riot police officers stand to disperse protesters gathering, in Istanbul. — AFP

POLICE DETAIN OVER 1,000 IN PROTESTS ACROSS TÜRKIYE

ANKARA: Turkish authorities have detained 1,133 people across Türkiye since the start of protests five days ago against the detention of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said on Monday. The detention last Wednesday of Imamoglu, President Tayyip Erdogan’s main political rival, has triggered the biggest street protests in Türkiye in more than a decade. On Sunday, a court jailed him, pending trial, on corruption charges that he denies. Despite bans on street gatherings in many cities, the mostly peaceful anti-government demonstrations continued for a fifth consecutive night on Sunday, with hundreds of thousands taking part. Yerlikaya said 123 police officers had been injured during the protests so far, adding that the government would not allow “the terrorising of the streets”. Those detained include nine journalists who covered overnight protests in several cities, the Journalists’ Union of Türkiye said on Monday. Imamoglu’s main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) has been calling for protests against the court decision to arrest the mayor, which they label as politicised and undemocratic. — Reuters

US, PHILIPPINES LAUNCH DRILLS WITH 5,000 SOLDIERS



US Marines check the M142 (HIMARS) after the live fire exercises, in Tarlac province. — Reuters

MANILA: Soldiers from the Philippine and the US armies began three weeks of joint military exercises on Monday, with drills focused on territorial defence and commanding large-scale deployments of forces, the Philippine Army said. Around 5,000 soldiers from the Philippine Army and the US Army Pacific will take part in warfighting and exchange of expertise in the first phase of this year’s Exercise Salaknib. A second phase is scheduled for later this year. US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth is expected to travel to Manila this week to meet Philippine leaders and forces, the Pentagon announced last week. The exercises will focus on enhancing combined operations between their army, large-scale manoeuvres, live-fire exercises and territorial defence, the Philippine Army said. The Salaknib exercises began in 2016 and are annual engagements between the two treaty allies, part of the broader Balikatan (shoulder-to-shoulder) training drills. Security engagements between the two nations have soared under Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who has pivoted closer to the United States. Hegseth is the first Cabinet official to visit Manila since US President Donald Trump took office in January. — Reuters

DIGITAL CORRUPTION

Tunisia probes apps for money laundering



Tunisia has launched an investigation into alleged money laundering and tax fraud involving ride-hailing applications, the interior ministry said. “The financial division of the National Guard has uncovered suspicions of money laundering and tax evasion among operators of private taxi ride-hailing apps.” Tunisian authorities said they have seized about 12 million dinars (\$3.8 million) from accounts linked to multiple ride-hailing apps. — AFP

CLASHES DISPLACE 15,000 FAMILIES IN SUDAN’S NORTH DARFUR

KHARTOUM: Fighting in Sudan’s war-torn North Darfur state displaced around “15,000 households” from the town of Al Malha within 48 hours, the United Nations’ migration agency said on Monday. From Thursday to Friday, the clashes between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and the army and its allied groups forced the families to flee “primarily to other locations” within the same area, said the International Organization for Migration.

Since April 2023, the war between the RSF and the army has killed tens of thousands of people, uprooted over 12 million and created the world’s largest hunger and displacement crises. In North Darfur alone, nearly 1.7 million people are displaced and around two million people face extreme food insecurity, according to UN figures. The RSF claimed to have seized Al Malha, which lies at the foot of a mountainous region 200

kilometres northeast of the North Darfur state capital El Fasher. At least 45 civilians were killed in the attack, according to a toll shared by activists in El Fasher. The RSF said they had “encircled the enemy... leaving more than 380 dead” in Al Malha. The town is one of the northernmost urban centres in the vast desert between Sudan and Libya, where the RSF and an army-allied coalition of armed groups known as the Joint Forces have battled for months. — AFP

Gaza toll nears 700 after Israel resumes strikes

ISRAELI

military strikes across the Gaza Strip killed at least 21 Palestinians, local health authorities said on Monday, as Israeli forces operated in Rafah near the border with Egypt, escalating a new week-long aerial and ground offensive. Health officials said Israel has killed nearly 700 Palestinians since it resumed attacks on Gaza last Tuesday, ending weeks of relative calm after a ceasefire in January. It said the deaths included at least 400 women and children.

Palestinian group Hamas said several of its senior political and security officials had also been killed. Israel says it resumed its military operations to force Hamas to release the remaining hostages it is holding in Gaza. It says it does its best to reduce harm to civilians and has questioned the death toll by health authorities in the Hamas-run enclave. Israel’s Defence Minister said his country was fighting against Hamas and not Gaza civilians. “But when Hamas fights in civilian dress, from civilian homes, and from behind civilians, it puts civilians in danger and they pay a horrible price. That is why we are urging Gazans to evacuate combat zones,” Katz said on X. Hamas denies using the civilian population and property for military purposes. In Rafah, the municipality said thousands of people were trapped inside the Tel Al Sultan area, where the Israeli military had sent some of its forces. “Contacts with



Palestinians gather at the site of an Israeli strike on a house, in Gaza City. — Reuters

Health officials said Israel has killed nearly 700 Palestinians since it resumed attacks on Gaza last Tuesday, ending weeks of relative calm after a ceasefire in January. It said the deaths included at least 400 women and children.

the neighbourhood are cut off completely and the fate of (people) is unknown. Families are trapped among the ruins, with no water, no food, no medicine, amid a total collapse of healthcare services,” it said in a statement. The Palestinian Civil Emergency Service said 50,000 residents remained trapped in Rafah. The Israeli military said troops had encircled Tel Al Sultan to dismantle “terror infrastructure sites and eliminate terrorists in the area.” Palestinian officials on Sunday put the death toll from nearly 18 months of conflict at over 50,000. Israel launched its offensive in Gaza after Palestinian fighters stormed southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and taking more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. Meanwhile, Egypt has put

forward a new proposal aimed at restoring the Gaza ceasefire deal, security sources said on Monday, as Palestinian health authorities said Israeli strikes have killed at least 65 people in the enclave in the past 24 hours. The proposal, made last week, follows an escalation in violence after Israel resumed air and ground operations, effectively ending a two-month period of relative calm. The Egyptian plan calls for Hamas to release five Israeli hostages each week, with Israel implementing the second phase of the ceasefire after the first week, two security sources said. Hamas is still holding 59 hostages, with 24 of them thought to be still alive. Both the US and Hamas agreed to the proposal, the security sources said, but Israel has not yet responded. — Reuters

TROOPS TO BATTLE S KOREA WILDFIRE



UISEONG: South Korean authorities said on Monday they would deploy dozens of helicopters and thousands of firefighters and soldiers as they struggle to control multiple wildfires in the southeast, which have been burning for days. Four people have been killed so far, with officials warning that high winds and rising temperatures were hindering efforts to put out the blazes. In Uiseong, nearly 7,000 hectares (17,000 acres) of land has been affected and around 600 people evacuated, Lim Sang-seop, head of the Korea Forest Service, told a press briefing. “A total of 57 wildfire fighting helicopters are to be deployed to extinguish the fire,” he said. — AFP

FUNDING APPEAL

UN seeks \$1 bn aid for Rohingya refugees



The United Nations announced it was seeking nearly \$1 billion to provide aid for some 1.5 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The UN and more than 100 partners launched a two-year 2025-26 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya crisis, amid what it called “dwindling financial resources and competing global crises”. “The Rohingya humanitarian crisis remains largely out of the international spotlight, but needs remain urgent,” the UN said. — AFP

COORDINATION TALKS

Lebanese defence minister to visit Syria



Lebanese Defence Minister Michel Menassa will visit Syria to discuss recent tensions along the border between the two countries, a Lebanese official said. “The defence minister will head a security delegation to Damascus to meet with his counterpart, Marhaf Abu Qasra,” the official said. The aim of the visit was to “discuss ways to manage the situation at the border, strengthen bilateral coordination and prevent cross-border aggression”. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Venezuelan migrants walk following their arrival on a flight, in Caracas, Venezuela. — Reuters

VENEZUELA RECEIVES DEPORTED MIGRANTS FROM US

CARACAS: A group of 199 Venezuelan migrants deported from the United States arrived on Monday after the two countries reached an agreement to restart flights, Venezuelan Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello said. A diplomatic spat last week inflamed already tense relations as the United States accused Venezuela of refusing to accept deportations flights, while Caracas accused Washington of blocking them. As that unfolded, a plane-load of deported Venezuelans had arrived from Mexico, a country that has agreed to accept migrants from other countries sent by the United States.

Cabello said flights have been inconsistent “not because of Venezuela,” adding that they will “depend on the United States.” The United States sent the deportees first to Honduras, where they were picked up by Venezuelan state airline Conviasa and arrived in Caracas. The United States does not deport migrants directly to Venezuela due to the strained diplomatic relationship between the two countries. “We expect to see a consistent flow of deportation flights to Venezuela going forward,” the US State Department’s Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs said. — Reuters

BRAZIL ’S LULA STARTS JAPAN VISIT



Brazil’s president starts a four-day state visit to Japan on Monday, accompanied by a 100-strong business delegation. The leaders will reportedly restate their commitment to free trade. “Everyone who was talking about free trade is now practising protectionism,” Lula, 79, said ahead of his departure. Lula and Ishiba will likely agree to regular leaders’ visits and to establishing strategic dialogue on security and other matters, Japanese media reported. — AFP

MERZ, SPD TRY TO NARROW DIFFERENCES IN GERMAN COALITION TALKS

BERLIN: Working groups for Germany’s election-winning conservatives and the centre-left Social Democrats will submit findings on a possible coalition on Monday, a step toward forming a government and bridging differences over issues such as migration.

Chancellor-in-waiting Friedrich Merz wants to forge a ruling coalition with the SPD by April 20 but both sides have emphasised getting the substance of the talks

right rather than toiling under self-imposed deadlines.

The two parties received a boost last week when the outgoing parliament approved plans for a huge state borrowing programme designed to revive economic growth in Europe’s largest economy and build up its armed forces. The conservatives and the SPD are likely to be the only viable coalition prospects in the new parliament, whose term begins on Tuesday.

The SPD has doubts over Merz’s

plans for tougher migration controls that include turning away asylum seekers at the border.

For their part, the conservatives want to reform welfare payments and find savings in the budget, but the SPD has qualms over how deep the changes could go. “I assume that everyone will naturally want to continue working with concentration, but we also don’t want to put ourselves under time pressure,” SPD General-Secretary Matthias Miersch said. — Reuters

Ukraine’s dangerous city craves respite from drones

THE people of the frontline Ukrainian city of Kherson have more reason than most to want an end to the three-year-old fight with Russia. But a taste of occupation and relentless attacks since Russian forces were pushed back have made them wary of peace talks.

US and Russian negotiators were meeting in Saudi Arabia to try to seal a proposed 30-day pause on Kyiv and Moscow attacking each other’s energy infrastructure and move towards a broader ceasefire. The city was once home to nearly 300,000 people, but the population has dwindled to 60,000. From March to November 2022, Russian occupying forces detained and tortured many people, residents say. The Russians, who reject allegations of abuse of civilians, were forced out by a Ukrainian counteroffensive. They now bombard relentlessly from the river’s other bank.

The other bed in the room was occupied by Ihor, a bearded 30-year-old. He too was hit by a grenade dropped from a drone, he said, in his case as he walked along the street trying to find a phone signal because Russian attacks had damaged cellphone masts. He also wanted the ceasefire to work. “I don’t want other people to be brought to the hospital like this,” he said, gesturing to his leg, whose broken bones were being held together by metal rods. “We believe that Trump will end the war this year, as he promised, and we will have peace,” said Ihor, who also declined to give his family name.

According to Oleksandr Prokudin, Governor of the Kherson region, there are between 600 and 700 drone attacks in the city each week.

“They terrorise the population,” he said of the Russian drone operators on the other bank. He said they routinely spot, through their onboard cameras, civilians going about their business, and then attack them. Russia denies deliberately targeting civilians in the conflict. Because of the threat of Russian drones, Maksym Dyak, a 38-year-old Kherson city bus driver, sits behind the wheel wearing a flak jacket and helmet.

Dyak said the vehicle he was driving had been hit by grenades dropped from drones



Municipal employees clean an area of a building which was heavily damaged, in Ukraine. — Reuters

ten times; he was at the wheel for five of those. A blown-out side window of the bus had been covered with a sheet of plywood, but he continues driving even when there are drones buzzing overhead. “It’s very scary, especially when you have little children on the bus,” he said.

The territory of the hospital where the two wounded men were being treated has been hit 21 times since November 2022, chief doctor Viktor Korolenko said. “You know, I really want all this to end ... our doctors are burning out psychologically under the bombardment,” Korolenko said, adding that many of his staff had been forced to move into the hospital after their homes were destroyed, but that he planned to stay in Kherson. At a street market in the city centre last week, residents, many of them elderly, shopped for vegetables and dried fish.

Meanwhile, Ukraine’s state-owned railway company Ukrzaliznytsia said on Monday traffic was not disrupted by a cyberattack that knocked out its online ticketing system. “Operational traffic did not stop for a single

moment. The enemy attack was aimed to stop trains, but we quickly switched to backup systems,” Oleksandr Pertsovskiy, Ukrzaliznytsia’s board chairman, told national TV. The company did not explicitly identify who was behind the attack, but describing it as the work of the enemy implicitly pointed the finger at Russia.

A Ukrainian security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Moscow’s intention appeared to be to create psychological pressure on Ukraine’s population and destabilise the social and political situation with a cyberattack.

The outage was first reported on Sunday when Ukrzaliznytsia notified users about the failure in the IT system and told passengers to buy tickets on-site or on trains. Work to restore the online ticket system has been underway since the previous day, the company said on Telegram, describing the attack as “systemic, non-trivial and multi-level”. People were queuing in long lines to buy tickets at Kyiv’s central station from Monday morning. — Reuters

Greenland PM denounces US ‘foreign interference’ ahead of visit

COPENHAGEN: Greenland’s Prime Minister, Mute Egede, accused Washington on Monday of interfering in its political affairs by sending a US delegation to the Danish territory, which is coveted by US President Donald Trump. Egede said US National Security Adviser Mike Waltz would visit Greenland this week, along with Usha Vance, the wife of US Vice President JD Vance. Usha Vance was to attend a dogsled race with her son.

Greenlandic media reports said the delegation also included US Energy Secretary Chris Wright, a former mining executive. They showed images of two US Hercules planes on the tarmac at Nuuk airport as part of an advance security team dispatched to the vast Arctic island.

Speaking to Greenlandic daily Sermitiaq, Egede said the “only purpose of the visit was a demonstration of power, and the signal should not be

misunderstood”. Since returning to power in January, Trump has insisted he wants the United States to take over Greenland for what he says are national security purposes. He has refused to rule out the use of force to achieve that aim.

Greenland — which is seeking to emancipate itself from Copenhagen — and Denmark itself have both repeatedly rebuffed Trump, insisting that only Greenlanders can decide their future. Egede said Washington had previously been told there would be “no talks” on any subject until a new Greenlandic government was in place to conduct business. The general election on March 11 left him heading a caretaker government.

“It should be said clearly that our integrity and democracy must be respected without foreign interference,” Egede said in a post on Facebook. He added that the US delegation’s visit “cannot



The consulate of the United States is pictured in Nuuk, Greenland. — AFP

be seen as just a private visit”. “(Waltz) is Trump’s confidant and closest adviser, and his presence in Greenland alone will certainly make the Americans believe in Trump’s

mission, and the pressure will increase after the visit,” Egede told Sermitiaq. Jens-Frederik Nielsen, leader of the centre-right Democrats and likely future Greenlandic prime

minister, has previously criticised Trump’s Greenland ambitions as “inappropriate”.

Egede urged the self-governing territory’s Western allies to speak up and “clearly support and back up Greenland”.

Ulrik Pram Gad of the Danish Institute for International Studies called the visit an “aggressive move” by Washington.

“They haven’t been invited by Greenlanders. They haven’t been invited by the Danes. They just announced that they will go,” he said.

Greenland’s political parties are currently in the process of negotiating a new coalition government following the election, which the Democrats won.

“Normally, as a friend or ally, you would stay out of that,” Pram Gad said. He said the visit was aimed at showing that “Denmark is not in control of Greenland”. — AFP

Investment and Trade Court to boost business environment



EDITORIAL

THE establishment of the Investment and Trade Court in Oman represents a significant advancement in the country’s legal framework aimed at enhancing its business environment and attracting foreign investment.

This initiative, directed by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, is designed to address commercial disputes with efficiency and professionalism, thereby fostering investor confidence.

The primary objective of the Investment and Trade Court is to create a specialised legal body that can handle commercial disputes swiftly. This court will ensure that litigants’ rights are protected while also aligning with international standards for dispute resolution. The need for such a court arises from the recognition that a transparent and efficient judicial system is crucial for boosting confidence among both local and foreign investors.

One of the most notable benefits of establishing this court is the expected reduction in case durations related to commercial disputes. By streamlining procedures, the court aims to deliver quicker verdicts, which will alleviate the financial burden on businesses involved in protracted legal battles. This efficiency is essential for maintaining a competitive business environment. According to the Supreme

Judiciary Council (SJC), the establishment of the Investment and Trade Court also reflects the continued commitment of the judiciary to play its role and lay the foundations of justice and reinforce the rule of law in the Sultanate of Oman.

The SJC clarified that the Investment and Trade Court has jurisdiction to hear all lawsuits that involve a trader and are related to their commercial activities. It also hears disputes arising from investment contracts including lawsuits between partners or shareholders or between any of them and the company, as the case may be, in commercial companies including public shareholding companies listed in the stock market.

The SJC affirmed that the establishment of specialised courts represents one of the most important strategic objectives of the Supreme Judicial Council’s long-term strategic plan for 2024-2040, which aims to develop the judicial system in the Sultanate of Oman and adopt the best judicial practices worldwide, including specialised judiciary.

This will make the Omani judiciary more efficient, given the speed with which specialised courts resolve disputes while enhancing performance and ensuring the legally mandated guarantees for litigants. This will achieve prompt justice, contribute to improving the business environment and accelerate economic development.

The new court reinforces Oman’s

The establishment of the Investment and Trade Court in Oman marks a pivotal step towards modernising its legal infrastructure to better accommodate foreign investments.

commitment to protecting investors’ rights. A well-structured legal system reassures potential investors about their investments’ safety, making Oman a more attractive destination for capital inflows. It is also expected that this initiative could improve Oman’s global rankings regarding ease of doing business.

By facilitating faster resolutions of trade-related disputes, the Investment and Trade Court will contribute to economic growth within Oman and a stable legal environment is vital for achieving these ambitious economic goals.

The court will be affiliated with the Supreme Judicial Council, ensuring that it operates under established judicial norms while focusing specifically on investment and trade matters. The Royal Decree No 35/2025 outlines its jurisdiction over lawsuits involving merchants and disputes arising from investment contracts.

The establishment of the Investment and Trade Court in Oman marks a pivotal step towards modernising its legal infrastructure to better accommodate foreign investments.

By prioritising swift dispute resolution and reinforcing investor protections, Oman positions itself as an increasingly attractive destination for international capital, ultimately contributing to sustainable economic development aligned with its Vision 2040 objectives.

FAKE MEDIA SITES SOW UKRAINE DISINFORMATION

ANUJ CHOPRA

A fake news website falsely claimed that Ukraine’s president is paying Western reporters to tarnish US President Donald Trump — part of a series of deceptive reports spread by Russian-linked portals mimicking media outlets.

The disinformation tactic, amid heightened international efforts to halt the three-year war with Russia, seeks to undermine both Ukraine and public trust in mainstream media, researchers say.

This adds to the increasingly troubling trend of attributing false information to established media brands, illustrating how the news medium is being actively hijacked to advance Ukraine-related disinformation.

Earlier this month, Clear Story News falsely reported that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was using US taxpayer dollars to pay Western media journalists to target Trump.

The article was accompanied with an image of a letter purportedly sent by Zelensky’s office to the leader of Ukraine’s parliament, demanding that a “plan” be developed to “create a negative image” of Trump. The letter appeared fabricated, with the seal and signature digitally altered and the formatting inconsistent with official letters from Zelensky’s office, disinformation watchdog NewsGuard said, citing analysis from the media verification platform InVID.

NewsGuard called Clear Story News a Russian influence site linked to John Mark Dougan, a US fugitive turned Kremlin propagandist.

The article and purported letter were published a week later on USATimes.news, which researchers said was another apparently Russian-backed site.

The fake sites seek to make false information appear more credible and believable by exploiting public trust in legitimate media.

“These sites are often designed to mimic the tone, layout and branding of traditional local news in order to launder false narratives through seemingly trustworthy, independent sources,” NewsGuard researcher McKenzie Sadeghi said.

NewsGuard has identified 1,265 sites that present themselves as neutral news outlets but are backed by or tied to partisan groups or hostile governments, including Russia and Iran.

Last month, AFP’s fact-checkers debunked a false claim that Zelensky had bought Adolf Hitler’s former retreat, the Eagle’s Nest, in the German state of Bavaria. — AFP

Regret-proofing life: Lessons from Ramadhan

REGRET is a universal human experience, a lingering shadow of the past that can haunt our present. Yet, is it possible to live in a way that minimises regret? Both the Holy Quran and Western thinkers provide guidance on how to cultivate a life of purpose and mindfulness, one where regret becomes a lesson rather than a burden. Ramadhan, a month of self-discipline, reflection and renewal, offers a framework for regret-proofing our lives by instilling habits of intentionality, gratitude and resilience.

One of the most profound teachings of the Quran regarding regret is found in Surah Al Asr: “By time, indeed, mankind is in loss, except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience” (103:1-3). This verse reminds us that regret is the natural consequence of wasted time and neglected values. The antidote, then, is faith, good actions, truthfulness and perseverance — principles that Ramadhan reinforces through fasting, prayer and charity. By engaging in these acts, we cultivate a life aligned with our highest values, reducing the chances of future regret.

Western philosophy echoes this sentiment. The 19th-century thinker Henry David Thoreau famously wrote, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately... and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” His emphasis on deliberate living mirrors Ramadhan’s call to intentionality. During Ramadhan, every action is measured — what we eat, when we speak, how we treat others. This heightened awareness fosters a sense of presence,



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

Regret-proofing one’s life is not about avoiding mistakes altogether but about living intentionally, acting with integrity, and embracing gratitude. Ramadhan provides a spiritual blueprint for this, while thinkers like Thoreau, Emerson, and Aurelius offer philosophical reinforcements.



During Ramadhan, every action is measured — what we eat, when we speak, how we treat others.

allowing us to make decisions rooted in mindfulness rather than impulse. By practicing this level of awareness beyond Ramadhan, we can prevent regret from taking root in our lives.

Another key lesson from Ramadhan is the power of gratitude in regret-proofing life. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “The best of people are those who are most beneficial to others.” This aligns with the Stoic philosophy of Marcus Aurelius, who wrote, “Waste no more time arguing about what a good man should be. Be one.” Both perspectives highlight the importance of living with purpose and generosity. Regret often stems from missed opportunities to show kindness, to help others, or to fulfil our potential. Ramadhan teaches us to be present in our relationships, to give without expecting and to cherish what we have. This gratitude-centred approach shields us from the pain of looking back and wishing we had done more.

Moreover, the discipline cultivated during Ramadhan helps us resist the common sources of regret: poor decisions, wasted time and neglecting our responsibilities.

Emerson, in his essay Self-Reliance, wrote, “To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.” In a society driven by fleeting pleasures and distractions, it is easy to make choices that lead to regret. Ramadhan’s emphasis on restraint — whether in food, speech, or behaviour — trains us to make decisions aligned with our deeper values rather than immediate gratification. By strengthening our willpower, Ramadhan teaches us to resist temptations that could later become sources of remorse.

Lastly, all cultures agree on the idea of redemption. No matter how much regret we may carry, change is always possible. The Quran states, “Do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins” (39:53).

Similarly, existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre believed that human beings are not defined by their past mistakes but by their ability to choose anew. Ramadhan serves as an annual reminder of this opportunity for renewal. Through sincere repentance and commitment to positive change, we can transform regret into growth.

Regret-proofing one’s life is not about avoiding mistakes altogether but about living intentionally, acting with integrity and embracing gratitude. Ramadhan provides a spiritual blueprint for this, while thinkers like Thoreau, Emerson and Aurelius offer philosophical reinforcements. By integrating these lessons into our daily lives, we can move forward with clarity and purpose, ensuring that when we reflect on our past, we do so with peace rather than regret.

The silent supporters... trees



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor at Observer

THE holy month of Ramadhan is almost reaching its finale. People have completed more than three weeks of fasting. New thoughts and habits could have been formed by now. People have already been thinking beyond themselves, as there is an urge within to be giving. The month also creates the ambience to focus on ways we can contribute to society. A friend of mine has been concerned about a bunch of trees that have been drying up because she felt they were not getting enough water. I agreed with her on each individual adopting a tree to water it in its own natural space. “They are big trees,” she prompted. “That’s why we will go there and water them,” I suggested. A week later, she sent the pictures of the trees and said they were being watered again, and they looked fresh. She said she drove by the trees and found most of them had revived, and only a few were striving to revive. She was sure they had started watering them because she could see the moisture in the soil and found it moist. Likewise, she was relieved. It is a good gesture to protect and conserve the environment by planting more trees wherever possible, she had reflected. Trees played a prominent role in my childhood, especially one particular jackfruit tree next to the bedroom window. The garden was full of trees that had distinct personalities. Trees are silent, but you can hear them when the wind blows. The dry leaves sound different from the green leaves.

Sometimes they whisper, and at other times the rustling makes you wonder how long the wind has travelled to reach here. We have a cousin who used to be so good at climbing trees that we almost nicknamed him Tarzan. The bark of the trees varies just like the leaves. A distinct one is the guava tree. As I grew older, I found how its leaves are important as much as the fruits. And then I came across the guava leaf tea. They play host to birds and other animals. When summer arrives, trees are much in demand for their shade. So a driver will go to any extent to secure the shaded parking the tree provides completely free of charge. Oman introduced me to a totally different tree - the frankincense tree. The tree was steeped in history grows wild in Wadi Dawka in Dhofar Governorate, which is now a Unesco World Heritage Site. Unesco states, “Wadi Dawka is an outstanding example of the growth of the Frankincense tree (Boswell is sacra) from which the resin was produced, collected and traded.” A tree was actually a reason behind economic power. The societies, once upon a time, revolved around it. The resin of this tree was one of the most precious commodities that travelled across the globe. Was watching a Far Eastern series, and one of the main characters talked about his plans to travel to Mirbat. And you know what was available in Mirbat. Unesco describes, “The successive ports of Khor Rori (4th Century BC to 5th Century

Trees are silent, but you can hear them when the wind blows. The dry leaves sound different from the green leaves. Sometimes they whisper, and at other times the rustling makes you wonder how long the wind has travelled to reach here

AD) and Al Baleed (8th till 16th Century AD) and Al Baleed (8th Century till 16th Century AD) and an outpost close to the Great Desert Rub Al Khali, Shisr, about 170 km inland, represent uniquely the distribution of frankincense which was produced in the wadis of the coastal hinterland. All three sites were exceptionally fortified.” Then there is the fruit tree found in Oman and across the region that is most valued - the date palm tree. Every part of the date palm is used with a purpose. Oman’s Million Date Palm Project has 11 farms in different regions, such as Ibri, Nizwa, Al Safa and other places. They bring a distinct glory to this crop that is highly respected for its nutritional value. As climate change alters weather patterns, trees could be one of the solution providers. But this time around, we might have to be directly involved. This year during this month, the Environment Authority conveyed a message to the whole community - let us cooperate in protecting the environment from pollution and let us dispense with plastic and sources that pollute the environment. Plant a tree, reap the reward. Imagine the benefits of planting fruit bearing trees. The Acacia tree has been a shelter for so many living things for centuries. It just takes a little bit of our time to find the place to plant a tree, with all the benefits such as regulating air quality, contributing towards energy savings and sequestering carbon.

DOES ‘VIBE CODING’ MAKE EVERYONE A PROGRAMMER?

THOMAS URBAIN

Can a complete tech novice create a website using everyday language on ChatGPT? That’s the promise, misleading for some, of “vibe coding,” the latest Silicon Valley catchphrase for an advance in generative AI that some say makes computer programming as simple as chatting online. “You fully give in to the vibes, embrace exponentials, and forget that the code even exists,” OpenAI co-founder and former Tesla employee Andrej Karpathy described in early February, in a message posted on X, using the term for the first time. “I’m building a project or web app, but it’s not really coding — I just see stuff, say stuff, run stuff, and copy paste stuff, and it mostly works,” he said. The developer and entrepreneur were referring to the new generative AI models that produce lines of code on demand in everyday language, through writing or speech. The concept of “vibe coding” remained confined to the AI community until New York Times columnist Kevin Roose claimed to have created websites and apps without any knowledge of programming. “Just having an idea, and a little patience, is usually enough,” he wrote. The ChatGPT and Claude interfaces can write an entire programme line by line on demand, as can Gemini, which launched its dedicated version, Gemini Canvas, on Tuesday. Other generative AI platforms specifically dedicated to coding have also made their mark in recent months, from Cursor to Loveable, or Bolt, Replit and Windsurf. “Maybe, just maybe, we’re looking at a fundamental shift in how software is created and who creates it,” said online marketing specialist Matteo Cellini on Substack. “It’s unlikely to make coding irrelevant, but it may change the way developers work,” suggested Yangfeng Ji, professor of computer science at the University of Virginia. “This could lead to some job displacement, particularly for those focused solely on basic coding tasks.” Even before “vibe coding,” a downturn was being seen by some in IT employment as the first effects of generative AI began to be felt. The sector shed nearly 10,000 jobs in the US in February, according to the Department of Labour, and its headcount is at a three-year low. Among code novices, many find it hard to catch the vibe. “People who do not have programming expertise often struggle to use these kinds of models because they don’t have the right kinds of tools or knowledge to actually evaluate the output,” said Nikola Banovic, professor of computer science at the University of Michigan. — AFP

Public in America, Europe still stand with Ukraine



Only around one-quarter of French and Germans now see the US as an ally.

IF 2025 goes down as the year the transatlantic alliance broke down, future historians will marvel at just how far national leaders strayed from the “grassroots” in Europe and America. Despite the heavy cost of defending Ukraine’s sovereignty – and even as most Europeans have lost faith in the United States as a reliable ally – voters on both sides of the Atlantic remain surprisingly united in their support for the beleaguered country. As talks proceed between the US, France, the United Kingdom, Poland, and Germany, popular support for Ukraine will be a key finding to bear in mind. In surveys we conducted across the US and four major European countries this month, we found that clear majorities in all countries still back the key tenets of the Nato alliance. Only among far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) voters and US Republicans do significant pockets of disagreement emerge; and even in these cases, voters are divided. If US President Donald Trump and Vice President J D Vance wanted to rattle and divide Europeans, the strategy appears to have backfired. Germany’s incoming chancellor, Friedrich Merz, is widely known as the “Atlanticist’s Atlanticist,” and even he is urging Europeans to declare “independence” from the US. Fractious and exhausted as Europeans are after three years of war on the continent, they have been galvanised by the Trump administration’s swerve towards Russia. Only around one-quarter of French and Germans now see the US as an ally. And even in Britain, those who do are no longer a majority. Europeans finally seem prepared to go it alone, with majorities in every country we polled saying they want to support Ukraine even if America pulls out. Public attitudes in the US are even more striking. When it comes to Ukraine, Americans broadly agree with Europeans. While 5 per cent of Republican voters say they



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The writer is Co-Founder of More in Common

feel more sympathetic towards Russia, more than ten times as many Republicans sympathise with Ukraine. Only one in four Americans want the US to stop helping Ukraine. On the questions of who bears the blame for the war, how best to serve one’s national interests, how the war should end, and who can be trusted to secure a peace agreement, there is more common ground than disagreement. For example, pluralities of Americans, Germans, French, and Britons support sending troops to act as peacekeepers in Ukraine – though a large share in all countries (aside from the United Kingdom) oppose such a deployment, as is to be expected. Moreover, even most Republicans agree that Russia is the aggressor, and majorities on both sides of the Atlantic – and within every political bloc – view Putin as a dictator. Majorities in Europe and the US, including among Republicans, also believe that Ukraine’s defense of its sovereignty matters for their own country, and most – even among Trump’s own base – worry that Russia could soon attack other countries in Europe. Finally, when it comes to possible

peace talks, a majority of Europeans and Americans believe that Ukraine should be at the negotiating table. One in five, or fewer, think the US should be engaging in peace talks with Russia that exclude Ukraine. Where there are differences, they emerge mostly over Trump’s character and general approach to politics. Here, his loyal MAGA base makes itself known. Whereas large majorities of Britons, Germans, French, Poles, and US Democrats think Trump’s handling of the war has been poor, 71 per cent of Republicans think the opposite. Only among Republicans does a majority believe that a deal brokered by Trump in Ukraine would be good for the US. Fewer than one in five Republicans thought Trump was more disrespectful than his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelensky, when they clashed in the Oval Office. By contrast, three-quarters of US Democrats and majorities or pluralities in every European country thought so. The other country with significant pockets of divergence from transatlantic values is Germany. ©Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

WC QUALIFIERS



Oman players during a practice session.

OMAN MORALE HIGH FOR POSITIVE RESULT AGAINST KUWAIT

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

The Oman team morale is on a high for another positive result from Kuwait tie on Tuesday after the crucial late draw against South Korea last week. The Red Warriors are all set to take on the hosts Kuwait at Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium in Kuwait city on Tuesday as the match will kick off at 10:15 pm (Oman Time).

The first leg match in Muscat ended in favour of Oman by 4-0 last October. Oman's goals were scored by Abdulrahman al Mushefri (two), Mohsin al Ghassani and Abdullah Fawaz.

Coach Rasheed Jaber's side is fully aware that the triumph will move Oman to 10 points and extend the gap with the closest opponent that is Kuwait as both teams are currently in fourth and fifth positions respectively. The third and fourth-placed teams will advance to a play-off where an additional two tickets will be at stake. On the other hand, a defeat against Kuwait will dash Oman's direct qualification hopes and chances of play-off spot will reduce as the competitions will heat up in the remaining final two rounds.

The Oman team completed their few training sessions at Khaitan SC in the last two days and at Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium on Tuesday. The last warm-up sessions focused on implementing various tactical phases and scoring manoeuvres and the starting line-up was finalised.

Kuwait on the other side ended their last match with a 2-2 draw in the closing minutes after they took the lead. Kuwait head coach Antonio Pizzi admitted losing two points at the very end was a bitter pill for Kuwait as they were looking to taste their first triumph in the Asian qualifiers. Kuwait will miss the services of their striker Youssef Nasser due to yellow card accumulation. Nasser's assists were key in their goals against Iraq.

Oman coach Jaber affirmed that the team have to build up on the last match draw. "It is really important to go positive in the results and minimise our mistakes and defensive organisation is also very important. We still have a chance and we must build on Thursday's result to keep our hopes alive. The players have to show the same determination which was on display in the draw against South Korea."

Kuwait coach Pizzi said: "The draw was a painful result but we are still focused and determined. We must prepare well but I can't fault my players as they have been working hard. We have seen significant improvement in the players' performance, and we will be ready for Oman."

CRITICAL MATCH

Oman's experienced midfielder Harib al Saadi, affirmed that Tuesday's match against Kuwait is very critical for the team's campaign in the Asian qualifiers. "We are looking forward to keeping our high momentum from the last match against Kuwait. If we want to go further in this campaign, then we need to be full focused on Kuwait assignment and clinch the desired result," he said.

"The opponents are very tough and they are playing at home and they displayed top performance against Iraq in the last round. We need to focus on mental preparation which is equal to physical preparation and minimise the mistakes on the ground and score from the available attempts," he added.

Oman target third straight win against Bahrain

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

OMAN WILL AIM for their third straight win to secure top of Group D as they will take on Bahrain in the concluding match of group stage at the underway AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup Thailand 2025. The match will take place at the Jomtien Beach Arena. In another match from same group, Malaysia will face Vietnam at the same venue.

Coach Talib Hilal's men confirmed their spot in the quarterfinals following their essential 6-3 win over Malaysia on Sunday. The victory took the team to six points and ensured their presence in the knockout stage. Oman thumped Vietnam 7-1 in the opening match.

Abdullah al Souti opened the scoring for Oman in the opening minutes of the first period, taking advantage of the opponent's mistakes in the back line. Mashal al Oraimi raised the lead to 2-0 at the end of the opening period.

In the beginning of the second period, the Malaysian side pressed hard as they managed to score two goals through Muhamad Hafizal, who sent a driving a low shot past Younis al Owaisi to narrow the deficit and then Muhammad Quishairie pounced on a loose ball to register the equaliser.

Musallam al Araimi found the target before the end of the second period as he put Oman back in 3-2 lead. In the third and concluding period of the match, Yahya al Murkhi cushioned the lead of Oman to 5-2 as he netted two goals including a shot that took a heavy deflection and wrong-footed Syujak and another goal through slamming a low shot into the back of the net. Hafizal reduced the scoring gap for Malaysia as he scored the third goal for his team to make it 5-3. Mundher al Oraimi confirmed the victory for Oman as he netted the sixth goal in the dying minute to end it at 6-3.

MEETING EXPECTATIONS

The star of the match, Yahya al Murkhi, told AFC that he is fully aware of the expectations back home and that is spurring Oman at the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup Thailand 2025.

"We achieved the most important goal by securing full marks from two consecutive rounds, despite the challenges



An Omani player tries an acrobatic kick.

we faced against the Malaysian team, who delivered a strong performance," said Al Muraiki, who scored twice in the third period to clinch the victory after Malaysia fought back after going 2-0 down.

"We have great ambitions — first, to qualify for the World Cup Finals, and then to win the championship title with this team, which is a mix of experienced and

young players."

"Reaching the World Cup Finals five times previously doubles the responsibility on our shoulders. We must live up to the expectations of the Omani fans and continue securing victories in the tournament to go as far as possible, strengthening Oman's reputation and status in this sport," he concluded.

Sultan's Cup camel racing from April 6 to 10

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

The Royal Court Affairs represented by the Royal Camel Corps (RCC) has announced the final camel race for the season 2024-25, which is the Sultan's Cup Festival 2025.

The festival is set to take place from April 6 to 10, at the Al Fulaij Track in the Wilayat of Barka in Al Batinah South Governorate.

The event will feature 77 races across various camel categories in the corporation with Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRF).

The opening day, April 6, will be 32 races for the 'Hagayeg' category, two years old, for 4 km. 23 races will be in the morning with cash prizes for the top ten. In the afternoon, there will be nine main races with cars and four icons as prizes for the winner and cash prizes for the top 10.

The second day, April 7, will be 20 races for the 'Lagaya' category, three years old, for 5 km divided into 14 races in the morning with a cash prize for the top 10. Six main races will start in the afternoon, with six cars, and four icons for the winners



The camel festival is set to take place at the Al Fulaij Track in Barka.

and cash prizes up to 10th place.

The third day, April 8, will be nine races for the 'Yathaa' category, 4 years old, for a 6 km in the morning with three cars and two icons, as well as cash prizes for the top 10.

Additionally, the morning session will feature three races for human riders over 2 km, featuring a car and cash prizes for the top ten.

On the fourth day morning, April 9, there will be three races for the

'Thanaya' category, 5 years old, for a distance of 8 km. Four races are allocated for the 'Al Hawl' category, 6 years and above. Each category will have a car and two icons in addition to the cash prizes for the top 10.

Participation Requirements

The Royal Camel Corps has outlined general conditions for participation in the festival allocated only for purebred Omani camels wholly owned by Omani citizens.

The Oman Camel Racing Federation will ensure that participants adhere to strict anti-doping regulations, prohibiting the use of any stimulants or banned substances.

All race-winning camels will undergo testing for prohibited substances, and any violations will result in the forfeiture of prizes and the imposition of penalties per the federation's regulations.

Specific rules have also been set for human rider races; the Omani rider must be at least 18 years old.

SULTAN'S CUP COMPETITIONS

The final day will feature 6 prestigious races: (Read as round, category, race distance, prize)

First race, 'Hagayeg', 4 km, Sultan's Cup and a car

Second race, 'Lagaya', 5 km, Sultan's Cup and a car

Third race, 'Yathaa', 6 km, Sultan's Cup and a car

Fourth race, 'Thanaya', 8 km, Sultan's Cup and a car

Fifth race, 'Al Hawl', 8 km, Sultan's Cup and a car

Final race, Human Rider, 2 km, a car and icon.

IPL THRILLER



CSKs' Noor Ahmad celebrates the wicket of Mumbai Indians' Tilak Varma. — Reuters

CHENNAI, MUMBAI
SHOW VALUE OF
SPINNERS

BENGALURU: Much of the talk ahead of the 18th season of the Indian Premier League had been about teams potentially going past 300 runs but Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians showed that the bowlers, particularly spinners, will still have a huge role to play.

Afghanistan's Noor Ahmad registered the best figures for a Chennai spinner against Mumbai with 4-18, restricting the five-time champions to a below-par 155-9 and laying the foundation for his team's four-wicket victory on Sunday.

Despite having only a modest total to defend, Mumbai pushed Chennai hard, as unheralded debutant Vignesh Puthur bagged 3-32 with his left-arm wrist spin.

"It feels special to play here in the IPL," Ahmad said.

"I'm happy for the team and happy with my contribution. The focus was to land the ball in the right areas and the wicket of Suryakumar Yadav was special, the stumping from Mahendra Singh Dhoni was out of this world.

"It feels great to have someone like him behind the stumps, it's a great support for me."

Chennai skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad said his spin unit had done exactly as they expected on a turning track at home.

"Right after the auction, we were excited about bowling three spinners in tandem at Chepauk Stadium," he said, referring to the trio of Ahmad, Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Ashwin.

"Noor brings the X-factor."

Quality spinners in world cricket can sometimes be a rare commodity and Mumbai skipper Yadav was full of praise for the 24-year-old Puthur, who is yet to play senior cricket for his state, Kerala.

"It's amazing, Mumbai is known for that - giving youngsters opportunities. The scouts do this for 10 months and he (Vignesh) is a product of that," Yadav added.

"I kept one over of his in my pocket if the game went deep, but it was a no-brainer to give him the 18th over." — Reuters



Spain's Pedri celebrates with teammates after winning the penalty shoot-out against the Netherlands. — Reuters

Spain, France join Germany
and Portugal in semis

HOLDERS

SPAIN beat the Netherlands on penalties after a dramatic quarterfinal second leg in Valencia finished 3-3 on Sunday to set up a Nations League last-four clash with France, who edged Croatia in a shoot-out after a 2-2 aggregate draw.

On a dramatic night, Portugal battled past Denmark in extra time and will next face Finals hosts Germany after their tense 5-4 aggregate victory over Italy.

European champions Spain took the lead in the tie, after Thursday's 2-2 first-leg draw, when Mikel Oyarzabal picked himself up after being fouled in the box to slot home an early penalty.

The Netherlands equalised nine minutes into the second half as Memphis Depay also won and then netted a spot-kick.

Oyarzabal grabbed his second in the 67th minute after a strong run forward by Nico Williams, only for the Dutch to level again with 11 minutes remaining through Ian Maatsen's fierce strike. Lamine Yamal struck shortly before the interval in extra time, though, curling the ball into the far corner after a couple of superb touches.

There was yet another twist as Spain goalkeeper Unai Simon brought down Xavi Simons, who picked himself up to score.

Spain edged home 5-4 in the shoot-out despite a miss from Yamal, as Simon saved from Netherlands winger Donyell Malen and

Pedri struck the winning penalty.

"We're Spain and we don't have to fear anyone," Pedri told TVE of facing 2021 Nations League winners France in the semifinals in Stuttgart on June 5.

France wiped out a two-goal deficit against Croatia at the Stade de France.

Michael Olise's brilliant free-kick broke the deadlock on the night in the 52nd minute, before Ousmane Dembele swept Olise's cutback into the bottom corner to send the quarterfinal to extra time.

Theo Hernandez missed a penalty to win it for France in an eventful shoot-out, but Dayot Upamecano eventually secured a 5-4 success on penalties in sudden death.

TRINCAO FIRES PORTUGAL THROUGH

Portugal, inspired by substitute Francisco Trincao, battled back after losing the first game 1-0 to win a thrilling last-eight encounter with Denmark 5-3 on aggregate.

Cristiano Ronaldo, after a stuttering run-up, produced the tamest of early penalties which was comfortably held by Denmark goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel.

Portugal were gifted the lead on the night when Joachim Andersen put through his own net. But the Danes restored their aggregate advantage 11 minutes into the second half through Rasmus Kristensen's excellent header. Ronaldo did get his 136th international goal, though, turning the ball in after Schmeichel tipped Fernandes' shot against the post. But Portugal were caught

out in the 76th minute when Christian Eriksen tapped home.

The hosts managed to force an added half-hour when Schmeichel's weak punch fell to Mendes, who teed up Trincao to drill a shot into the bottom corner. Trincao netted his second in the first minute of extra time and Goncalo Ramos secured a meeting with Germany in Munich on June 4.

GERMANY HOLD OFF ITALY FIGHTBACK

Julian Nagelsmann's Germans survived an Italy comeback to win 5-4 on aggregate after a 3-3 draw in Dortmund.

Germany extended their overall advantage on the half-hour mark when Joshua Kimmich tucked home a spot-kick before playing a key role in a bizarre second goal.

Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma left his goal after making a save to complain at the referee and Kimmich took a quickly-taken corner which was flicked into an empty net by Jamal Musiala. Tim Kleindienst nodded in Kimmich's clipped cross on the stroke of half-time, but Moise Kean scored twice to give Italy a glimmer of hope heading into the last 20 minutes. Giacomo Raspadori converted a penalty in injury time to equalise on the night, but there was not long enough left for the Azzurri.

Elsewhere, Belgium narrowly avoided relegation to League B as two late goals from Romelu Lukaku helped them overturn a 3-1 first-leg deficit against Ukraine with a 3-0 victory. — AFP

Philippine wild card stuns Keys, Djokovic sets Masters 1000 record

MIAMI: Australian Open champion Madison Keys was dumped out of the Miami Open third round on Sunday, falling 6-4, 6-2 to Philippine wild card Alexandra Eala, while Novak Djokovic earned a record-setting 411th ATP Masters 1000 level match win.

For Eala, 19, the upset win over the American fifth seed extended her dream run in Miami where she has now toppled two Grand Slam champions having beaten 2017 French Open winner Jelena Ostapenko in the second round. "I am just in disbelief," she said. "I knew I could win from the start but the chances were low given that she is a great player, but I think my belief and the trust I had in myself is what pushed me through."

Eala, who has trained at Rafael Nadal's academy in Mallorca since she was 13, required a medical timeout for what appeared to be a leg injury but was a force from the baseline against Keys, who reached the Indian Wells semifinal last week.

Up next for Eala, who has not dropped a set in Miami, will be Spanish 10th seed Paula Badosa.

Former champion Iga Swiatek earned a 7-6(2), 6-1 win over Belgian 27th seed Elise Mertens that made the Polish second seed the first player to reach the last 16 of a WTA 1000 event in 25 consecutive appearances. Swiatek built a seemingly comfortable 5-2 lead in the first set but Mertens managed to claw back to 5-5 before the Pole



Alexandra Eala (PHI) reacts after winning a point against Madison Keys (USA) at Miami Open. — Imagn Images

ran away with the tie-breaker and breezed through the second frame.

Up next for Swiatek will be Ukrainian Elina Svitolina, who beat Czech 15th seed Karolina Muchova 6-2, 3-6, 6-2.

DJOKOVIC SETS RECORD

In other women's action, Andreeva's bid for a 'Sunshine Double' ended as American 17th seed Amanda Anisimova beat the Russian 11th seed 7-6(5) 2-6 6-3.

Anisimova will next face former US Open champion Emma Raducanu, who advanced after American McCartney Kessler retired due to a lower back injury while trailing the Briton 6-1, 3-0.

American fourth seed Jessica Pegula rallied to beat Russian Anna

Kalinskaya 6-7(3) 6-2 7-6(2) and will face Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk in the fourth round. Six-time champion Djokovic moved into the fourth round with a 6-1 7-6(1) triumph over Argentine lucky loser Camilo Ugo Carabelli that moved the Serbian fourth seed ahead of Nadal and into top spot on the all-time list of Masters 1000 match wins.

Djokovic, who is also seeking a record seventh Miami title, will next face Lorenzo Musetti after the Italian 15th seed beat Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime 4-6, 6-2, 6-3.

In other action, Bulgarian 14th seed Grigor Dimitrov, who lost in last year's final, was a 6-7(3), 6-4, 7-5 winner over Russian Khachanov and set up a clash with American Brandon Nakashima. — Reuters

SPORTS



Al Manar Racing by Team WRT's Al Faisal al Zubair will team up with Jens Klingmann and Ben Tuck this season.



The evening was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said.

Al Faisal to tackle twin challenges at GT World Challenge

AL MANAR RACING by Team WRT's Al Faisal al Zubair has announced that he will tackle both the 2025 GT World Challenge Europe Endurance and Sprint Cups this season. At an exclusive press reception and announcement at the Kempinski Hotel in Muscat on Sunday evening, the Omani confirmed that Al Manar Racing's association with Team WRT will stretch to the 10-race programme

and he will team up with Jens Klingmann and Ben Tuck this season. The evening was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, the Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. Al Zubair said: "I am excited to announce my programme for 2025. Al Manar Racing by Team WRT will be participating in the BMW M4 GT3

Evo for the full season of GT World Challenge Europe. The championship will consist of 10 rounds for both the Endurance and Sprint championships. "I'll be teaming up with Jens Klingmann and Ben Tuck for this season's Gold Cup title assault and can't wait to get it all started at Paul Ricard next month." The new chapter in Al Zubair's career and the association with

Team WRT kicked off in spectacular fashion with a stunning victory at the Dubai 24hr race with Dan Harper, Max Hesse, Ben Tuck and Darren Leung in January. Al Zubair became the first Omani driver ever to claim the overall win in the gruelling race at the Dubai Autodrome. Last year, he enjoyed a valuable season competing under the Al Manar Racing banner and won the Gold Cup category and finished

second overall at the prestigious CrowdStrike 24hr of Spa in Belgium. British team-mate Tuck drove a Ferrari for Kessel Racing in last year's GT World Challenge Europe's Endurance Cup and is a full-time endurance driver and performance coach. German racer Klingmann, 34, is a long-time BMW factory driver, who led Team WRT to a memorable win at Monza in September 2024.

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Rise in spoofing, cyber traffic in 2024

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

MAJORITY OMANI government-owned Omantel, the nation's biggest integrated telecom company by market share, has reported a significant increase in malicious telecom and cyber activities targeting its sizable subscriber base in the country during 2024. Publicly-traded Omantel noted in its 2024 Annual Report that its “resilient security infrastructure continues to prevent millions of signalling attacks and thousands of potential threats, ensuring uninterrupted network operations”. Malicious telecom and cyber threats burgeoned during 2024 in trend with the expanding digital footprint of individual, corporate and institutional customers, the telecom operator said. Last year alone, around 34 terabytes (TB) of “malicious bad traffic” was blocked by



Around 34 terabytes (TB) of “malicious bad traffic” was blocked by the operator’s Security Operations Centre (Picture courtesy: OCERT)

the operator’s Security Operations Centre, effectively safeguarding customers from large-scale cyber threats. Additionally, more than 8,000 “true

security incidents” were tackled by the centre by deploying AI capabilities, it said. Spoofing and voice call impersonation have been on the upsurge as well, according to the operator. An average of 600,000 “bad calls” were blocked through the implementation of advanced controls. Digital identity protection was ramped up as well with the goal of safeguarding digital identities. Significant strides were made in enhancing its cybersecurity posture in 2024, Omantel noted in its MDA report. “We have expanded our DDoS threat detection and mitigation capacity, secured our cloud infrastructure and established one of the world’s most secure signalling networks. With the rapid expansion of our 5G coverage, Omantel has proactively implemented new security measures to protect subscribers against cyber threats. Resultantly, Omantel carries the honour of its global recognition by the

international regulatory bodies, Omantel actively contributes to global cybersecurity advancements through organisations such as GSMA and ITU, shaping best practices and regulations in network security.” Omantel’s total domestic mobile subscriber base as of 2024-end comprised 3.96 million customers (including Mobile Resellers) compared to 3.62 million in 2023, its growth driven by a rise in postpaid mobile connections, mainly M2M sims. Omantel’s Mobile market share (excluding Mobile Resellers) stood at 40.2 per cent, while the fixed broadband market share as of December 2024 was 54.4 per cent. Omantel’s domestic revenues climbed to RO 622.6 million in 2024, compared to RO 606.5 million for the corresponding period 2023. The growth in domestic revenue was driven by a 6 per cent increase in Mobile Postpaid revenue and a 7 per cent rise in Fixed Broadband revenues. Net profit for the year 2024 stood at RO 69.7 million compared to RO 68.3 million.



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AIRPORTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE
ACCIONA's commitment to excellence at Muscat and Salalah International Airports helps secure top ASQ recognition for cleanliness and customer experience.

ACCIONA, a global leader in renewable energy and regenerative infrastructure solutions, has played a key role in helping two of Oman's busiest airports to be named 'Cleanest Airports in the Middle East'. Salalah International Airport and Muscat International Airport, where ACCIONA provides cleaning services, have been honored with the prestigious titles in their respective categories under the Airport Service Quality (ASQ) program, accredited by the Airports Council International (ACI).

Muscat International Airport, which serves between 5 and 15 million passengers annually, and Salalah International Airport, with close to 2 million passengers per year, received these distinctions for their outstanding efforts in maintaining exceptional cleanliness standards. These recognitions reinforce Oman Airports' commitment to providing an unparalleled travel experience for passengers.

Since 2015, ACCIONA has been providing cleaning services at Salalah International Airport, and since 2017 at Muscat International Airport. Over the years, the company's dedicated and professional team has worked closely with Oman Airports to ensure a spotless, safe, and welcoming environment for millions of travelers each year.

“We are thrilled to continue supporting Oman

Airports with our expert cleaning services. The recognition of both Muscat International and Salalah International as the Cleanest Airports in the Middle East is a testament to the high standards of cleanliness maintained at these airports and our continuous efforts in delivering excellence,” said Luis Carlos Barroso, ME Director for the Facility Management business of ACCIONA.

The Airport Service Quality (ASQ) program, which evaluates customer satisfaction in the airport industry, is a key benchmark for airport excellence worldwide. These awards are based on feedback collected through ASQ's renowned Departures and Arrivals Surveys, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a clean, safe, and comfortable environment for passengers.

ACCIONA's longstanding partnership with Oman Airports, underpinned by mutual trust and shared goals, plays a critical role in ensuring the airports' cleaning services meet the high expectations of both travelers and industry standards.

As ACCIONA continues its partnership with Oman Airports, the company is committed to enhancing its services and contributing to the ongoing success of Oman's leading international airports.



MSX CEO unveils
Renaissance Services 2024
Sustainability Report



Haitham bin Salim Al Salmi, CEO of MSX, said, “Renaissance Services has consistently demonstrated leadership in sustainability reporting and ESG best practices in Oman. Its early adoption of the MSX ESG Framework and commitment to the latest GRI Standards set a benchmark for listed companies in the country. Renaissance’s continuous focus on transparency, disclosure and global reporting standards is essential in fostering a responsible and sustainable investment environment. As the capital market advances toward responsible investment and sustainable growth, I encourage all MSX listed companies to follow Renaissance’s example by embracing sustainability and transparency practices. This shift is critical for building investor confidence, attracting capital and supporting Oman’s Vision 2040, which aims for a more diversified and sustainable economy.”

In line with its ongoing commitment to sustainability, safety and operational excellence, Renaissance invested RO 580,000 in climate risk mitigation initiatives during 2024. For this latest Sustainability Report, the company adopted the advanced ‘In Accordance’ GRI Standards 2021 framework, thereby establishing itself as a pioneer in comprehensive ESG disclosures among listed corporates. Notably, Renaissance has been voluntarily reporting on all 30 ESG metrics outlined in the MSX ESG Framework since its 2022 report, well ahead of the regulatory mandate that came into effect in 2024.

Renaissance’s latest report highlights its alignment with the Sultanate’s sustainability journey. Earlier in 2024, the company became the first and only Omani public-listed entity registered with the Science-based Targets initiative (SBTi), reinforcing its alignment with the Paris Agreement and Oman’s Net Zero 2050 target. Renaissance’s climate risk mitigation initiatives include implementation of a smart food waste management solution and an Internet of Things (IoT)/AI-based platform that reduces energy usage at its accommodation facilities. With more than 2,800 Omani employees, Renaissance is among the largest private-sector employers of Omanis and is committed to sustainable practices.

Renaissance Services, Oman’s leading integrated facilities management (IFM) and services solutions provider, listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange since 1996, has launched its Sustainability Report 2024. The launch event, held under the auspices of Haitham bin Salim Al Salmi, CEO, Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), underscored the importance of transparency and accountability in advancing Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices in Oman’s corporate sector.

Speaking on the occasion, HH Sayyid Tarik bin Shabib Al Said, member of the Board of Directors and chairman of the ESG Committee of Renaissance Services, said, “Our annual Sustainability Report reflects the company’s long-term commitment to sustainability and transparency. Sustainability is embedded in our strategy, from innovation and decarbonisation efforts to capacity building and governance. We remain focused on delivering measurable outcomes that contribute to Oman’s sustainable development.”

ADVERTORIALS

SHORT TAKES



Shareholders re-elected the incumbent board members whose terms had concluded.

Al Maha Petroleum’s AGM highlights leadership reaffirmation

MUSCAT: Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG, a leading entity in the oil marketing sector, convened its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on March 23, 2025, as scheduled. The meeting addressed several key topics concerning the company’s performance and future direction.

Shareholders re-elected the incumbent board members whose terms had concluded, reaffirming their confidence in the current leadership.

Additionally, Dr Faisal bin Abdullah al Farsi, CEO of the Social Protection Fund, was elected to the Board, bringing valuable expertise to the company’s governance.

CEO Eng Hamad Bin Salim al Maghdari expressed gratitude to shareholders for their continued support, highlighting that the Board’s extensive experience would significantly contribute to Al Maha’s progress and success.

He emphasised the company’s commitment to delivering exceptional service and innovation in the oil marketing industry. Under the leadership of Dr Saif bin Salim al Harthi, the Board will persist in striving to achieve the company’s objectives and enhance its standing in both local and international markets.

In a related development, the AGM approved a cash dividend distribution of 85% of the share capital, equating to 85 baiza per share, reflecting the company’s robust financial performance for the year. Al Maha’s consistent growth and strategic initiatives underscore its pivotal role in Oman’s economic landscape, particularly in the energy sector.

ESO reinforces commitment to Oman’s environment

MUSCAT: The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on March 18, 2025, providing an opportunity to review the organisation’s progress over the past year and outline its priorities for 2025.

The meeting brought together ESO members, corporate partners and the Board of Directors to discuss key developments, including the organisation’s 2024 conservation efforts, financial performance and strategic initiatives for the year ahead.

A key part of the AGM was the official announcement of ESO’s 2024 Annual Report, summarising major projects, research findings and public engagement programmes undertaken over the past year.

MHD Automobiles showcases versatile Jeep & RAM lineup

MHD Automobiles continues to strengthen its commitment to delivering a diverse selection of high-performance vehicles that combine exceptional capability, luxury and cutting-edge technology.

Featuring an impressive lineup — including the legendary Jeep Wrangler, the refined Jeep Grand Cherokee and the powerful RAM truck range — customers now have access to world-class vehicles at highly competitive starting prices.

The Jeep Wrangler, an undisputed off-road icon, is available in multiple variants, including the 2.0L Turbo Sport (2-Door and 4-Door), 2.0L Sahara 4-Door, 3.6L Rubicon (2-Door and 4-Door) and the mighty 6.4L V8 Rubicon 392 4-Door.

Engineered for adventure seekers, the Wrangler delivers superior off-road



performance while integrating advanced technology, comfort, and safety features — making it the ultimate exploration companion.

For those seeking the perfect balance of capability and luxury, the Jeep Grand Cherokee lineup offers a range of trims designed to meet

NBO MUZN ISLAMIC BANKING OFFERS ANNUAL FEE WAIVER FOR NEW CREDIT CARD CUSTOMERS

MUSCAT: NBO Muzn Islamic Banking has announced a waiver of the first-year annual fee for new credit card applicants. The offer, valid from March 1 to April 30, 2025, requires applicants to activate their card and complete at least one transaction within one month of issuance to take advantage of this initiative.

Salima bint Obaid al Marzooqiyah, Assistant General Manager & Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO , said, “At Muzn Islamic Banking, we remain steadfast in our mission to provide Sharia-compliant financial solutions that empower individuals and businesses with innovative banking experiences.



This endeavour reflects our dedication to supporting our customers with flexibility and

accessibility.

By offering this exclusive opportunity, we encourage responsible financial management.”

As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance customer engagement, Muzn Islamic Banking continues to deliver forward-thinking, ethical and Sharia-compliant financial services, offering a wide range of accessible and transparent banking products.

With a strong focus on customer-centricity and service excellence, Muzn Islamic Banking is committed to supporting financial well-being through tailored Islamic banking solutions that ensure customers benefit from seamless and ethical banking experiences.

Chery’s sedan range now with Ramadhan benefits

THIS Ramadhan make the most of your journeys in a feature-packed Chery vehicle. Own a Chery sedan and get exclusive Ramadhan campaign benefits.

The benefits include a chance to win an all-new Chery Arrizo 5 (STD) sedan, up to 5 years/60,000 km service, 1-year comprehensive insurance, 1-year registration, assured fuel card gifts and an unparalleled 10-year/1,000,000 km engine warranty (not applicable on Arrizo 5).

This exclusive campaign is valid until April 17, 2025. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Chery showroom for exact details.)

The all-new Arrizo 5 now in Oman, is equipped with a host of advanced features that enhance convenience and driving



Customers can visit any Chery showroom for exact details.

pleasure.

The Arrizo 5 is powered by an efficient and responsive 1.5L engine, delivering an optimal balance of power and fuel economy.

The intelligent continuously variable transmission (CVT) ensures smooth acceleration and superior handling, making both city commutes and long drives effortless.

Additionally, the advanced suspension system enhances

stability and ride comfort, contributing to a superior driving experience. The Chery Arrizo 5 is starting from RO 4275.

The Chery Arrizo 6 PRO is a sophisticated sedan designed to elevate the driving experience with its advanced technology, premium comfort and intelligent safety features.

The Arrizo 6 PRO boasts an advanced turbocharged engine, delivering an exhilarating balance of power and efficiency.

The continuously variable transmission (CVT) ensures smooth acceleration and enhanced fuel economy, making every drive effortless. The Chery Arrizo 6 PRO is starting from RO 5500.

The Arrizo 8 is a statement of sophistication. With its bold grille, sleek LED headlights and aerodynamic silhouette, the sedan exudes modernity and elegance.

The dynamic Arrizo 8, is available in both 1.6-litre and 2.0-litre engine variants. Designed to deliver a seamless blend of power, style and advanced technology, the Arrizo 8 is set to redefine driving experiences for car enthusiasts.

Both variants are equipped with cutting-edge Turbocharged Direct Injection (TDI) technology, ensuring optimal fuel economy without compromising on power. The Chery Arrizo 8 is starting from RO 8175.

In Oman, Chery vehicles are distributed by New World Autos.

BANKDHOFAR’S DIRECT SALES UNIT TAKES BANKING TO YOUR DOORSTEP

MUSCAT: BankDhofar’s Direct Sales Unit is transforming banking convenience with its doorstep banking services, a pioneering initiative that has been warmly welcomed by customers — particularly employers.

Currently operational across key governorates in the Sultanate of Oman, this service allows individuals, corporate clients and SMEs to access a wide range of banking solutions without ever stepping into a branch. From account openings and card services to insurance inquiries, the Direct Sales Unit ensures banking is more accessible than ever.

With unparalleled flexibility, the unit brings banking services directly to customers — whether at home, in the office, or at any preferred location. This eliminates the need for branch visits, saving time and effort while ensuring a seamless



This service allows individuals, corporate clients and SMEs to access a wide range of banking solutions.

experience.

The Direct Sales Unit offers an extensive suite of services, including POS machine management, salary accounts, shop insurance, health insurance for employees and card issuance. Operating

throughout the day, the team is committed to meeting the needs of SME clients efficiently, ensuring their business operations remain uninterrupted.

This innovative approach benefits a wide range of customer segments. For individuals, doorstep banking means the ease of handling financial matters from the comfort of their home or workplace.

For businesses, the service goes beyond traditional banking by facilitating payment collections and financial transactions, ensuring smooth and secure operations — especially for entities dealing with high-volume transactions.

A standout feature of the Direct Sales Unit is its Auto Mobile Office, a mobile banking service designed to reach customers in remote areas or those unable to visit branches.

and uncompromising performance.

The RAM 1500 is powered by the revolutionary 3.0L Hurricane Straight-Six Turbo engine, available in two high-performance variants:

- Standard Output: 420 hp and 635 Nm of torque — delivering an exceptional balance of power and efficiency.
- High Output: 540 hp and 706 Nm of torque — making it the most powerful six-cylinder in its class.

Complementing the lineup is the robust RAM 2500 Tradesman Regular Cab, renowned for its durability and heavy-duty capability. It comes with the 6.4L V8 Heavy Duty HEMI Engine. Designed for those who demand strength, reliability and versatility, the RAM 2500 is built to handle the toughest tasks with ease.

BUSINESS



The MoU outlines a framework for sustained cooperation between the two organisations.

OCCI AND OABC SIGN STRATEGIC MOU

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Oman American Business Council (OABC) have officially signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), marking a significant step forward in strengthening business, trade and investment ties between Oman and the United States.

The signing took place during a special Suhoor event held at Intercity Hotel in Al Khuwair, attended by over 200 OABC members. The evening not only included the announcement and signing of the MoU, but also meaningful networking with a focus on giving back, as the event spotlighted local charitable initiatives during the month of Ramadhan.

The MoU outlines a framework for sustained cooperation between the two organisations, with a focus on increased programming for US–Oman collaboration. Key areas include support for trade delegations, awareness-building around the US–Oman Free Trade Agreement and Exim Bank financing, co-hosted high-level business roundtables and joint promotion of opportunities for Omani exports to the US market.

Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), stated: “This Memorandum of Understanding represents a significant step towards strengthening economic and trade relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States.

Collaboration with the Omani American Business Council underscores the importance of enabling Oman’s private sector to benefit from investment and trade opportunities with the US market and expand commercial partnerships.

The Chamber is committed to providing a supportive environment for business owners and, through this partnership, aims to enhance trade exchange, empower Omani enterprises to access new markets; and leverage shared expertise and knowledge. This will serve common interests and contribute to sustainable economic development.”

“This MoU is not about words on paper — it’s about delivering real value,” said Ali Daud, Founder and Chairman Emeritus of the Oman American Business Council. “It reflects our shared commitment to move beyond handshakes and headlines and towards tangible outcomes that benefit businesses on both sides. With OCCI as our strategic partner, we’re doubling down on trade and investments.”

Fouad Eid, Vice President of the Oman American Business Council shared: “OABC’s mission is to improve bilateral trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States. There is still so much untapped potential in increasing Omani exports to the US and attracting US investment into Oman. With this strategic cooperation, we believe that OABC and OCCI can fulfil this mission more effectively — because we are better together.”

Rebecca Olson, CEO of the Oman American Business Council, added, “We’re proud to formalise this partnership with OCCI at such a pivotal time for US–Oman relations. This collaboration amplifies the strengths of both organisations and allows us to support our members in a deeper, more strategic way. Together, we’re building a stronger foundation for the future of business between our two nations.”

CORE SERVICES

Singapore inflation continues to fall



Singapore’s inflation rate continued to decline last month, driven by slower increases in food, entertainment and cultural services prices.

According to data released by the Department of Statistics Singapore, core inflation, which excludes housing and private transport prices, fell to 0.6% in February, compared to 0.8% in January, marking a continued decline.

FASTER PACE

Japan’s manufacturing sector declines



Economic activity in Japan’s manufacturing sector continued to decline this month at a faster pace than last month, according to the latest survey by Japan’s Jibun Bank.

Jibun Bank stated that the manufacturing purchasing managers’ index (PMI) fell to 48.3 points in March, compared to 49 points in the previous month.

ENDING WAR

Oil prices drop on ceasefire hopes



Oil prices fell on Monday as investors assessed the future of ceasefire talks aimed at ending the war between Russia and Ukraine, which could affect the flow of Russian oil to global markets. Brent crude futures fell slightly by 8 cents, or 0.1 per cent, to \$71.52 a barrel.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures fell by 5 cents, or 0.1 per cent, to \$68.23 a barrel.

LEADERSHIP REDEFINED

Embracing opportunities and driving innovation

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 24

SAOUD Al Riyami’s journey to the pinnacle of corporate leadership is a story of resilience, adaptability, and a steadfast commitment to making a meaningful impact.

As the first Omani to assume the role of Acting CEO at Ooredoo Oman, Al Riyami’s path was shaped by a philosophy of continuous learning, seizing opportunities, and fostering a culture of inclusivity.

In an exclusive interview with Oman Observer, he shared insights into his leadership journey, emphasising the importance of building strong teams, embracing challenges, and driving innovation in a rapidly evolving industry. His story is not just about personal success but about inspiring others to strive for excellence and create lasting value for their communities.

FROM TEACHING DREAMS TO TELECOM LEADERSHIP

Al Riyami’s journey to the top was anything but conventional. Initially destined to become a teacher, as per his father’s wishes, he pursued a degree in teaching at Sultan Qaboos University.

However, a transformative experience in Australia ignited his passion for connecting with people and exploring new horizons. “I never thought teaching was me,” he confessed.

Instead, he began his career as a meet-and-greet agent at the airport, where his charisma and dedication caught the attention of high-profile clients and CEOs. This serendipitous encounter marked the beginning of a career that would span industries, from hospitality to telecommunications.



Oman has a lot of talented individuals, and it’s our responsibility to provide them with opportunities to grow. Work-life balance is crucial for productivity. When employees feel supported, they perform better.

SAOUD AL RIYAMI
Acting CEO,
Ooredoo Oman

Reflecting on his journey, Al Riyami emphasised the importance of seizing opportunities.

“Opportunities surround us,” he said. “But you have to be prepared for them, even if they don’t seem ideal at the time.” His ability to adapt and thrive in diverse roles ultimately led him to Ooredoo Oman in 2009, where he climbed the ranks from a sales executive to Acting CEO.

BUILDING TEAMS AND INSPIRING INNOVATION

One of Al Riyami’s most significant achievements at Ooredoo Oman has been his focus on building strong, empowered teams. “Building teams is the biggest milestone I have achieved,” he said. “Oman has a lot of talented individuals, and it’s our responsibility to provide them with opportunities to grow.”

He believes in equipping employees with the right training, mentorship, and exposure to ensure both professional and personal growth. “Work-life balance is crucial for productivity,” he added. “When employees feel supported, they perform better.”

Under his leadership, Ooredoo Oman has embraced a culture of innovation. Al Riyami envisions a future where the company diversifies its business streams, leveraging emerging technologies like AI, IoT and FinTech.

“The telecom industry is evolving, and we must adapt to stay relevant,” he explained. “We’re not just about connectivity anymore; we’re building an ecosystem that includes data centres, submarine cables, and digital services.”

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES WITH RESILIENCE

Leadership, Al Riyami acknowledges, is not without its challenges. From economic headwinds to industry disruptions, he has faced numerous

obstacles throughout his career.

However, he views challenges as opportunities for growth. “Challenges make you more passionate to succeed,” he said. “But you don’t face them alone. A strong team is essential to overcoming any obstacle.” His inclusive leadership style has been instrumental in fostering a culture of collaboration and trust at Ooredoo Oman.

“The culture of an organisation is the culture of its CEO,” he stated. “If the CEO is passionate about change and innovation, the team will follow suit.” Al Riyami’s hands-on approach, which includes regular interactions with employees and a commitment to transparency, has earned him the respect and admiration of his colleagues.

BALANCING LEADERSHIP AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Despite his demanding role, Al Riyami prioritises personal growth and well-being. An avid sports enthusiast, he finds balance through activities like kickboxing and padel.

“I can’t have an hour of not doing something,” he admitted. “But family time is non-negotiable.” He is also pursuing a Harvard Business School leadership programme, which he describes as both challenging and rewarding. “Continuous learning is key to staying ahead,” he said. “It’s what gives you an edge in today’s fast-paced world.”

ADVICE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

To aspiring leaders, Al Riyami offers three pieces of advice: embrace continuous learning, work hard and smart and be prepared for opportunities.

“The young generation is incredibly smart,” he said. “They work differently, but they have the potential to achieve great things if they stay focused and adaptable.”

INFLATION IN OMAN RISES 1 PER CENT IN FEBRUARY 2025

MUSCAT: The inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 1 per cent in February 2025 compared to the same month in 2024, with the base year 2018, according to consumer price index data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data indicated a 6.3 per cent increase in the prices of various goods and services groups, a 3.4 per cent increase in the transportation group, and a 3.2 per cent increase in the health group.

Prices of restaurants and hotels also rose by 0.8 per cent, clothing and footwear by 0.5 per cent, and culture and entertainment by 0.4 per cent. In addition, the furniture, household equipment, and maintenance group witnessed a 0.3 per cent increase, the food and non-alcoholic beverages group by 0.1 per cent, and the education group by 0.1 per cent.

Meanwhile, the prices of housing, water, electricity, gas, other fuels, communications,



The data indicated a 6.3% increase in the prices of various goods and services groups.

and tobacco groups remained stable.

Regarding the food and beverages group for February 2025, prices for milk, cheese, and eggs increased by 3.3 per cent, food products not classified as elsewhere by 3.3 per cent, and sugar, jam, honey, and sweets by 3 per cent.

Omani deepfake scams are on the rise



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman

TWO days ago, I saw a social media post that portrays an Omani government investment opportunity specifically created for Omani residents who are over the age of 40 and are planning to leave their jobs and/or retire.

The video states that a new financial investment platform has been launched and developed by the Omani government. The platform allows locals here in Oman to invest as little as RO 100 and earn over RO 385 per week.

The video had an official from the Public Authority for Radio and TV interviewing the Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Promotion. Details on how to avail the investment were shared, and viewers were encouraged to click a link, fill in their personal and banking information, and then get the opportunity to become a millionaire.

Though the video looked somewhat legitimate, as a reality check, it was all fake. To be more precise, it is a form of deepfake (an artificial intelligence fake video). Many people would be deceived by these types of videos, yet my article today will help share some steps to keep you safe from being scammed.

Deepfake videos have increased by over 900% in the past 4 years, according to Deeptrace Labs.

A study by one of the leading cybersecurity institutions predicts that over \$5 billion in fraud would be caused due to deepfake videos. Oman's National Cybersecurity Center also issued an alert on the rise of deepfake-related videos.

What does this all mean? You, your colleague at work, and/or family members, in one way or another, will definitely encounter (or have already encountered) a deepfake video, which could scam you off to becoming wealthy or use you to spread false information that may impact others. What can you therefore do? Let me share some steps I personally do.

What I would recommend you do in order to detect a deepfake video is first, verify the source. Who sent you, where did you see it, and was it from an official body? If the video was from an unofficial channel, be careful.

Secondly, while watching the video, do you see any inconsistency, i.e., robotic tone or speech of the individuals in the video, unnatural facial expressions, and sometimes see out-of-sync speech and lips from the video? These are attributes of deepfake videos.

Third, listen carefully to the audio generated from the video; you will hear it just sounds either too perfect (but unnatural). This is how AI-generated videos today pretty much sound.

What does this all mean? You, your colleague at work and/or family members, in one way or another, will definitely encounter (or have already encountered) a deepfake video, which could scam you off to becoming wealthy or use you to spread false information that may impact others.

Fourth, do a search online and/or about the topic and video; you may find lots of references and links about it probably already.

Fifth, there are deepfake video detection tools available for free to download and use.

The one I have come across is Deepware Scanner; nevertheless, don't just blindly trust it but instead use it in conjunction with the suggestions I shared today.

Lastly, if something feels off or doesn't sound right, trust your instincts, as you may be right.

To conclude my article this week, I would like to stress that with a bit of logic, common sense, and some quality research about the video, utilizing the suggestions I shared in my article today, you and your loved ones would stay informed and safe.

Deepfake videos are becoming more advanced, localized, and customized to deceive you.

Many people have been scammed, and I trust many would be scammed too, unfortunately. Report any suspicious video content you see or receive to Oman's National Cybersecurity Centre in order to combat these scammers from taking the society for a wild ride.

Until we catch up again, I take this opportunity to wish you all a blessed and happy Eid Mubarak. Stay safe.

CHINA COSCO MAY BE SHIPPING WAR’S FIRST CASUALTY

KA SING CHAN

HONG KONG: The world’s largest shipping group is sailing into a perfect storm. Chinese state-owned Cosco Shipping doubled 2024 earnings but Washington’s proposed docking fees on China-linked vessels and tariff salvo will dent demand for its services.

Rival CK Hutchison’s \$23 billion ports sale also suggests trade will reroute to Western peers.

The \$30 billion conglomerate is the world’s third-largest container transporter and fifth-largest port terminal operator; its parent also owns the largest fleet by tonnage globally. Currently, the company boasts a leading 15% market share in the vital trans-Pacific Ocean shipping route, according to analysts at JPMorgan.

The level of heft and geographic reach has translated into a seven-fold surge in Cosco’s Hong Kong stock since 2020. Last year, the company reported record earnings of \$6.9 billion.

That’s partly thanks to robust demand from the US, where apps like Shein and Temu have boosted cross-border e-commerce flows.

The company has also benefited from the crisis in the Red Sea, a conduit for some 30% of the world’s container traffic, which has increased freight prices globally. Revenue from Cosco’s trans-Pacific route, for instance, surged 63% last year.

RISK OF HIGHER COMPLIANCE

Yet Cosco is facing choppy waters ahead. In January, under President Donald Trump’s new administration, the US Department of Defense added its parent to a list of companies it says work with the Chinese military, putting the shipping group at risk of higher compliance costs or more consequential US sanctions.

More troubling is Washington’s proposal to impose docking fees on China-built or Chinese-flagged vessels. Analysts at Citi estimate that would add 15% of additional costs on the Trans-Pacific route.

Cosco could try to pass on this expense to customers or absorb it. Either way, given Cosco has the largest Chinese fleet as a percentage of its total compared to rivals, the company is the most exposed.

Its operating profit is forecast to plunge 67% and 62% in 2025 and 2026 respectively, per analyst estimates on Visible Alpha.

Moreover, Cosco’s grand ambitions to develop a global rail-and-sea trade network complementing China’s Belt and Road infrastructure investments may be in peril.

Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison’s sale of its overseas ports spanning 23 countries to a BlackRock-led consortium augurs fiercer competition with Western rivals. Cosco may be the first casualty in what will be a long and costly shipping war. — Reuters

ICV: Oman’s economic imperative, opportunity

IN today’s interconnected world, Oman stands at an important crossroads.

As global economic patterns shift, our nation has a unique opportunity to shape its own economic destiny through the strategic implementation of In-Country Value (ICV). This approach is not just a policy requirement but a pathway to sustainable prosperity that benefits all Omanis.

At its core, ICV is about keeping more of the economic benefits from business activities within Oman. Rather than seeing profits, jobs and opportunities flow overseas, ICV ensures that our nation retains a greater share of the value created here.

This means more jobs for Omanis, stronger local businesses and a more resilient national economy. ICV encompasses several key elements: creating quality jobs for Omani citizens, developing local businesses and supply chains, transferring valuable skills and knowledge; and building infrastructure that supports long-term growth.

For too long, many resource-rich countries have focused solely on extraction, watching as the majority of benefits flowed elsewhere. ICV reverses this pattern by ensuring that Oman becomes the primary beneficiary of its own economic activities.

The numbers tell a compelling story. Countries with effective ICV programmes typically retain an additional 20-30% of economic value within their borders. For Oman, this could translate into billions of rials circulating in our economy, creating jobs and opportunities for our people.

While the government establishes the framework through policies and infrastructure, the private sector is the true engine of ICV success. Businesses both large and small play crucial roles in building a stronger Omani economy.

Experience from around the world shows that the most effective ICV programmes create environments where businesses view local integration as a competitive advantage rather than a burden. When companies recognise the



ICV ensures that our nation retains a greater share of the value created here.



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benefits of stronger local supply chains, a skilled local workforce and deeper community connections, ICV becomes a natural business strategy rather than a regulatory requirement.

Far from deterring international investment, a well-designed ICV programme actually attracts higher-quality investors to Oman.

Forward-thinking global companies increasingly recognise that countries with robust ICV frameworks offer significant advantages: more stable business environments, reliable local supply chains that reduce operational risks, skilled workforces that improve productivity, stronger community support for business activities and growing domestic markets fuelled by local prosperity.

Smart investors understand that while initial costs may be higher in countries emphasising ICV, these investments typically deliver stronger long-term returns with fewer disruptions and greater sustainability.

To maximise the benefits of ICV, Oman should focus on several key strategies. A gradual implementation gives businesses time to adapt and develop local capabilities without disrupting existing operations.

Measuring the actual economic impact rather than rigid quotas ensures that ICV truly benefits Omanis. Targeted training programmes help Omanis gain the skills needed for high-value jobs across various sectors.

Supporting local businesses to meet international standards creates a stronger domestic supply chain.

Creating mechanisms that encourage the sharing of expertise builds Oman’s intellectual capital. Rewarding genuine value creation rather than superficial compliance ensures authentic economic benefits.

In line with Oman Vision 2040, ICV represents a collective national effort. Government, private sector, educational institutions and citizens all have important roles to play in building a more self-reliant and prosperous economy.

The experience of countries like Norway demonstrates what’s possible. Through thoughtful policies, Norway transformed its oil wealth into a \$1.4 trillion sovereign wealth fund and developed world-class expertise that now exports technology and services globally.

Malaysia similarly increased local content in manufacturing from 30% to over 60% within a decade, creating thousands of high-quality jobs. In-Country Value represents a powerful opportunity for Oman to transform its economic future.

By keeping more of the benefits from economic activities within our borders, we can build a more diverse, resilient and prosperous nation.

For businesses and investors, embracing ICV means recognising the long-term advantages of deeper integration with the Omani economy.

For citizens, it means greater opportunities for meaningful employment and entrepreneurship.

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Is it permissible to pray in clothes that have a bad smell?

As long as the clothes are not impure, praying in them is permissible. However, it is preferred that prayer clothes that have a pleasant scent. And Allah knows best.





HADITH
GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Ubayy ibn Kab, may Allah be pleased with him, reported the Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, said: "Do not curse the wind. If you see what you dislike thereof, then say: 'O Allah, we ask You for the good of this wind, the good of what it contains and the good of what it is ordered to do. We seek refuge with You from the evil of this wind, the evil of what it contains and the evil of what it is ordered to do'".

QURAN

VERSE OF THE DAY



"It is Allah who erected the heavens without pillars that you [can] see; then He established Himself above the Throne and made subject the sun and the moon, each running [its course] for a specified term. He arranges [each] matter; He details the signs that you may, of the meeting with your Lord, be certain."

(Surah Al Raad-2)



DUA
SUPPLICATION TO ALLAH

O Allah, on this day, bestow on me the blessings of Laylat Al Qadr, change my affairs from (being) difficult to (being) easy, accept my apologies and decrease for me [my] sins and burdens, O the Compassionate with His righteous servants.

CONTEMPLATING THE DEPTHS OF THE HOLY QURAN

BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI

ALLAH'S wisdom and kindness towards all His creations are reflected in the seasons He has designated for worship and spiritual ascension. These seasons present a unique opportunity for us to deepen our faith and encourage spiritual growth in a personal and distinctive manner. The Holy Quran holds a special place during Ramadhan, a time when people joyfully read and complete its recitation, cherishing the double rewards offered throughout this sacred month.

Muslims strive to renew their relationship with the Holy Quran during Ramadhan, viewing it as a chance to rectify their connection with it and seeking its intercession on the Day of Judgement. They are eager to embrace the days and nights of Ramadhan to complete their recitation of the Holy Quran and contemplate its verses.

Anyone who examines the verses of the Noble Quran will find that it contains numerous passages that encourage reflection and contemplation, along with their meanings. The Quran urges humanity to engage their minds, as it states in nearly 49 instances. As mentioned in the Holy Quran, Sûrah Sâd (38:29) states: "(This is) a book (the Qur'ân) which we have sent down to you, full of blessings, that they may ponder over its Verses, and that men of understanding may remember."

The seeker of truth in the great book of the Quran, Teacher Asma bint Juma Al Uraimi, who is acquired and certified (Ijazah) in the Holy Quran according to Haf's recitation from Assem, will help us realise the importance of

contemplating the Holy Quran.

"Contemplation is significant as it uncovers the deeper meanings of verses that benefit humanity everywhere and at all times. Human nature develops continuously, including intellectually. Initially, one may understand verses at a basic level, but with intellectual growth and proper reflection, the true meaning becomes clear," Teacher Asma explained.

She emphasised that having pure intentions for Allah is essential for understanding the verses. Listening to various Quranic interpreters and reflecting on their interpretations, along with the believer's personal understanding, lays the foundation for beginning the journey of contemplation in Quranic interpretation. "For instance, the interpretation of certain verses regarding fighting reveals that some of these verses refer to intellectual conflict rather than fighting on the battlefield," she shared.

She added, "The Noble Quran is Allah's message and cannot be contemplated in a short period of time. However, we can reflect on what is possible, extract its meanings, and connect the verses to understand the depth of the message. Reciting the Holy Quran during Ramadhan can help expand one's understanding of Allah's message and foster a closer relationship with Him."

Reciting the Holy Quran brings many advantages, such as cultivating an attitude that mirrors a believer's identity when engaging with different societies and cultures. Additionally, it provides the patience and perseverance needed for this act of worship, sparking a personal transformation that extends well beyond Ramadhan.

The Holy Quran's inimitability is evident in various aspects, including its terms, meanings, and information.

By scrutinising and reading the Holy Quran closely, one will uncover its uniqueness in rhetoric, style, and the eloquence of its concise expression. In the Noble Quran, Allah challenges humans and jinn to create something comparable, yet they fail.

Referring to the Noble Quran in Sûrah Al-Isrâ (17:88): "Say: 'If mankind and the jinn were to come together to produce the like of this Qur'ân, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they helped one another.'" This verse challenges the Arabs contemporaneous with the revelation of the Holy Quran, and those who came after them, proving that they could not produce anything similar, despite their strong linguistic abilities at the time.

Teacher Asma clarified the potential of using the rhetorical inimitability of the Holy Quran to support children's linguistic abilities. She stated, "Reading the Holy Quran involves extracting meanings beyond its texts. Those who excel in speech and understand Allah's intent are regarded as truly eloquent individuals. The letters and words of the Quran carry high frequencies that enhance a child's speaking skills. From a scientific perspective, this promotes balance in brain cells by activating and moving them clockwise, particularly regarding pronunciation and intonation (Tajweed)."

"I advise that contemplating the Quran involves understanding the meanings of its verses, consulting simplified interpretation books, and observing proper recitation etiquette. This includes performing ablution, facing the qiblah, seeking refuge from Satan, improving one's voice, following tajweed rules, and taking time to reflect on the verses instead of rushing," she advised.



Rewinding mid-week of Ramadhan and what it means for kids

BY AFRAH AL BALUSHI

THE SPIRIT of fun bursts forth in mid-Ramadhan, marking a cherished annual event that brings joy to little ones as they revel in delightful activities and celebrations. This special time not only highlights the deep-rooted Omani customs and traditions passed down through generations but also nurtures the bonds of community and cultural heritage.

One of the highlight customs during this joyous period is the beloved Qarankasho, held on the night of the mid-Ramadhan, which aims to light up the faces of children, promote social interaction, and instil a sense of belonging. The familiar chant, “Qarankasho, people, give us some sweets,” echoes through neighbourhoods on the fourteenth night of Ramadhan as children parade through the streets, their excitement palpable.

In various governorates across the Sultanate, Muscat leads the way in celebrating this joyous tradition. After the Maghrib prayer and Iftar, children don their finest attire and set out in groups, their large bags in tow, eagerly gathering sweets from each

home they visit. With each stop, they sing traditional Omani songs, a true reflection of their vibrant heritage, and are warmly welcomed by homeowners who delight in offering an array of treats and gifts.

Mohammed al Hasani, a resident of the Wilayat of Bousher in Muscat Governorate, reminisces about how the Qarankasho celebration once spanned every household until the midnight hour, extending even to Suhoor. Today, however, festivities are primarily enjoyed from Iftar until Tarawih prayers, ensuring that children are engaged in this cherished custom across the community.

The essence of Qarankasho lies in its ability to revive Omani customs while imparting valuable lessons about their heritage to the younger generation. For many children, this celebration is akin to a holiday, as they eagerly visit homes in search of sweets and pocket money. Various gifts, including sweets, nuts, and small toys, accompany the traditional offerings of money and dates, keeping pace with modern times and the ever-evolving desires of children. Each house competes to provide the best treats, ensuring that little ones return home brimming with joy, proudly displaying the treasures they have received.

What was once a simple exchange of money and dates has transformed into a more diverse array of gifts. Each Qarankasho fosters social interaction among children, teaching them valuable qualities such as teamwork. They learn to work together as a cohesive group, with designated leaders who guide the way, assign roles, and strategise the journey's path.

In recent years, various social institutions, associations, and commercial centres have joined in to celebrate Qarankasho by organising events that brighten the faces of both children and participants alike. This revived enthusiasm for the tradition has solidified Qarankasho as a much-anticipated occasion for children and a time when adults joyfully prepare for their participation.

According to reports from residents, this cherished custom has been handed down since ancient times, with fathers and grandfathers partaking in the celebrations. Today, children eagerly await their turn, ensuring that this remarkable tradition endures, growing in spirit and joy for generations to come. As Ramadhan unfurls, the laughter of children fills the air, carrying the legacy of Qarankasho into a bright and hopeful future.

RAMADHAN TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Zurbian (traditional rice dish), family Iftars and communal prayers in Yemen

In Yemen, Ramadhan holds immense cultural and spiritual significance as families come together to honour traditions during this sacred month. As the sun sets, it marks the beginning of Iftar, where dishes like “Zurbian,” a fragrant rice dish with meat, are shared among family and friends. Homes are filled with laughter and stories, fostering a sense of community and togetherness. Mosques serve as gathering spots for nightly prayers, where worshippers engage in collective recitation and reflection, deepening their spiritual connection. The essence of Ramadhan in Yemen extends to acts of charity, with many contributing to food distributions and communal support for the less fortunate.

DAILY HEALTH TIPS TO REMEMBER



Incorporate Healthy Fats

Incorporating healthy fats into your meals can provide sustained energy and enhance your overall diet during Ramadhan. Healthy fats, such as those found in avocados, nuts, seeds and olive oil, are vital for nutrient absorption and help keep you feeling full for longer. During Iftar and Suhoor, include sources of healthy fats to meet your nutritional needs. For instance, add avocado slices to a salad or spread them on wholegrain bread for your pre-dawn meal. Nuts and seeds make excellent snacks, packed with nutrients and healthy oils that support heart health. When cooking, use extra virgin olive oil or coconut oil and include fatty fish like salmon or mackerel for essential omega-3 fatty acids. Moderation is key, as healthy fats are calorie-dense.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS IN ISLAM



1520-1566 CE: The Reign of Suleiman the Magnificent

The reign of Suleiman the Magnificent marked the height of the Ottoman Empire’s power, territorial expansion and cultural achievements. Known as “The Lawgiver,” Suleiman implemented significant legal reforms and promoted arts and architecture, leading to remarkable works such as the Suleymaniye Mosque. His policies fostered a climate of relative religious tolerance and cultural exchange. Suleiman’s reign is celebrated in both Ottoman history and Islamic culture, representing an era of prosperity and stability, reinforcing the Ottoman legacy that significantly influenced European interactions with the Islamic world.

Extreme heat linked to accelerated aging in older Adults: Study



Extreme heat poses significant dangers for older adults, increasing their vulnerability to heatstroke and mortality. Recent research suggests that high temperatures may also affect DNA functioning, potentially accelerating the aging process.

A study published in *Science Advances* analyzed data from over 3,600 older adults in the United States. The researchers found that those living in neighborhoods frequently experiencing extreme heat—defined as temperatures of 90 degrees Fahrenheit or higher—showed more rapid biological aging at a molecular level compared to those in cooler areas.

The implications are significant, linking heat waves aggravated by climate change to chemical changes in DNA that could speed up biological aging. The researchers estimate that individuals in regions with 90-degree temperatures for 140 days or more annually may age approximately 14 months faster than individuals in locales with fewer than 10 extreme heat days each year.

The study utilized three aging biomarkers known as epigenetic clocks, derived from blood samples of individuals aged 56 and older. These clocks measure biological changes that can predict future risks of disease or mortality related to aging. According to Eun Young Choi, a postdoctoral associate at USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology and co-author of the study, while DNA remains unchanged from birth, external factors such as stress and pollution can trigger molecular alterations, leading to the activation or deactivation of genes. Choi described DNA as a blueprint, with epigenetic changes functioning like a switchboard controlling which parts of that blueprint are active.

This research marks the first population-level analysis to establish a connection between heat exposure and epigenetic aging in humans. Health expert Nancy Krieger from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health noted that the study offers valuable insights into geographical health disparities.

However, the research does not establish causation; it only suggests a link between heat exposure and accelerated aging. The authors note that additional factors might play a role, as the analysis did not include lifestyle variables such as access to air conditioning or time spent indoors.

Not all epigenetic changes are detrimental. The study does not speculate on whether these changes might represent adaptive responses to heat. Environmental epidemiologist Greg Wellenius emphasized that identifying changes at the cellular level is a crucial step toward understanding heat’s impact on health.

Significant questions remain: How do interventions like air conditioning influence epigenetic aging? Can brief exposure to high heat produce lasting effects? Jennifer Ailshire from USC Leonard Davis highlighted the need for more extensive longitudinal data to understand these issues. This study paves the way for further research into interventions, such as improved access to air conditioning and shade, potentially alleviating heat-related aging effects. Mariana Arcaya from MIT remarked that this work highlights longer-term health consequences from heat exposure, even for individuals not facing immediate health crises. —NYT



If you want to ski affordably next season, buy now

WHILE THE slopes may still be open across much of North America, it’s time to think about next season.

The major passes, including Epic and Ikon, as well as the smaller Mountain Collective, have recently announced sales for the 2025-26 season. The Indy Pass has already completed its early sales, although opportunities to purchase it will likely resurface later.

Though ski website SnowBrains found that most prices went up between 6% and 7%, spring sales are when passes are cheapest.

“Now is the time to save and go skiing for under \$100 a day,” said Dan Sherman, chief marketing officer at Ski.com, which offers ski packages.

The term “passes” has evolved to encompass prepurchased products that start with one-day tickets and aim to wean skiers off the walk-up window. Vail Resorts said three-quarters of its visitors last season used one of its Epic Passes, saving up to 65% on window prices.

The strategy, said Sherman, “is to get people locked in early and reward them with discounted pricing.”

Here’s a look at next season’s offerings.

Epic Pass

Despite a rough 2024-25 season in which patrollers at Vail’s Park City Mountain Resort waged a strike over the holiday season, Vail Resorts broke the introductory-price \$1,000 threshold for its 2025-26 Epic Pass, now on sale for \$1,051. (Last year the pass started at \$982 and ended at \$1,107).

The pass offers unlimited access to Vail’s 42 resorts, including Vail Mountain and Breckenridge in Colorado, Whistler Blackcomb in British Columbia, and Stowe in Vermont.

Next season, Epic Pass will include five days at Verbier 4 Vallées in Switzerland, with more than 250 miles of runs across six ski resorts.

Those purchasing the Epic Pass also get discounts on lift tickets for friends. Pass holders, including those with day passes, receive 20% off on-mountain food, lodging, gear rental and lessons.

At Ski.com, Sherman counted more than 50 Epic configurations across variables like age and location. The Epic Local Pass (now \$783) offers more restricted access to the Vail portfolio but unlimited access to 29 resorts, including Breckenridge, Crested Butte and Keystone in Colorado.

Epic Day Passes, which can be purchased



for intervals between one and seven days, start from \$47 to \$100 a day, depending on the resort.

Vail won’t say when prices will increase, but they tend to rise until going off sale; last year Epic passes were available until Dec. 2.

Ikon Pass

Sales of the Ikon Pass, offered by Alterra Mountain Co., begin Thursday. The \$1,329 pass offers unlimited access to 18 destinations, including Steamboat and Copper Mountain in Colorado; Mammoth Mountain and Palisades Tahoe in California; and Crystal Mountain in Washington. Passholders get up to seven days each at 41 resorts, including Aspen Snowmass in Colorado, Jackson Hole Mountain Resort in Wyoming and Killington in Vermont.

The pass also covers resorts abroad, including SkiBig3 in Alberta; Kitzbühel, Austria; and — new this year — Ischgl in Austria; Zermatt and St. Moritz in Switzerland; Niseko United in Japan; and Valle Nevado in Chile.

Ikon also has different subscription levels, including the cheaper Ikon Base Pass for \$909, with unlimited access at 14 North American destinations and up to five days at 39 destinations worldwide, with blackout dates. Also subject to blackouts, the Ikon Session Pass is available in increments of two, three or four days at one or more of 43 destinations. A two-day pass starts at \$259.

Depending on the pass, perks this year include spring skiing, 25% off the window rate for friends or family, and discounts on food at

several resorts.

The Ikon Pass is typically available through early to mid-December.

Mountain Collective

The Mountain Collective offers two days each at 26 ski areas — many overlap with Ikon resorts — without blackout dates. Currently on sale, the 2025-26 adult pass costs \$639 and includes Alta Ski Area and Snowbird in Utah, Aspen Snowmass, Jackson Hole and Sun Valley.

Abroad, it includes resorts in Australia, Canada, Chile, France, Japan and New Zealand.

Pass holders can get extra days at half off the window rate at most resorts. Friends and family get a 25% discount on one-day lift tickets, limited to eight tickets.

Indy Pass

The Indy Pass offers access to two days each at independently owned resorts, mostly in North America.

For the next season, Indy made a guarantee of no fewer than 250 resorts and has added new-to-Indy resorts, including Burke Mountain in Vermont and Corralco Mountain & Ski Resort in Chile.

Sales of the \$369 pass closed Monday, but the company suggests joining the waiting list to learn about new offers. In October, for example, it reopened sales for a few weeks, closing Nov. 10.

With just two days at each resort, Indy Pass best serves skiers interested in trying several resorts. —NYT