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RAMADHAN
1446 AH
THURSDAY
MAR 6, 2025

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PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR
05:09 AM

DHUHR
12:23 PM

ASR
03:45 PM

MAGHRIB
06:17 PM

ISHA
07:27 PM

omanobserver.com



INBRIEF

HM GREETINGS TO GHANA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President John Dramani Mahama of the Republic of Ghana, on his country's Independence Anniversary.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments on this occasion, wishing the Republic of Ghana further progress and prosperity.

AVERAGE INFLATION AT 1.4 PER CENT



The average rate of the Sultanate of Oman's actual inflation from 2021 to the end of 2024 stood at about 1.4 per cent. It rested at a moderate rate and within the 2.8 per cent target set for the years of the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan 2021-2025. The Omani economy continues to grow at rates exceeding the inflation average. The actual average growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) at constant prices stood at 3.9 per cent between 2021 and 2023.

The budget for the current fiscal year (2025) saw the augmentation of the volume of public spending and the consolidation of the clause of contributions and other expenditures. In the same budget, public spending was estimated at about RO 11.8 billion, compared to RO 11.65 billion in 2024.

DETAILS ON P13

Salalah coastal development plan to boost tourism

MUSCAT: Salalah, on Oman's southern coast, is set to undergo a major transformation with the development of a sustainable and walkable waterfront city, a project aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

The project is executed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and international design firm Sasaki. In a statement, Sasaki, the firm leading the masterplan, emphasised that the development will integrate urban growth with environmental preservation while positioning Salalah as a model for sustainable urbanism.

The New City Salalah project will span 7.3 square km and features 12,000 residential units, accommodating approximately 60,000 residents. The development will include 3.5 million square metres of parks and open spaces, 200,000 square metres of retail space and two hospitals. A six-kilometre-long public beach will be a key highlight, reinforcing Salalah's reputation as a year-round leisure destination.

The masterplan integrates strategies to address climate resilience, particularly safeguarding the city from rising sea levels and extreme weather events during the khareef season. A wetland park and natural infrastructure solutions will be implemented to manage flooding risks and protect coastal ecosystems.

The project is part of the broader Greater Salalah Structural Plan, which seeks to enhance infrastructure, mobility and spatial planning as the city's population is projected to reach 674,000 by 2040. The development will commence later this year, starting with the construction of 5,827 residential units in the first phase. SEE P13

South Africa accuses Israel of using 'starvation' in Gaza

Europe urges 'unhindered' delivery of aid to Gazans

FRANCE, the United Kingdom and Germany on Wednesday urged Israel to ensure the "unhindered" delivery of humanitarian supplies to the war-ravaged Palestinian territory of Gaza, warning against using aid as a "political tool".

A fragile ceasefire since January 19 saw an influx of humanitarian aid into Gaza before Israel on Sunday announced it was blocking deliveries until Palestinian group Hamas accepted its terms for an extension of the truce.

"We call on the government of Israel to abide by its international obligations to ensure full, rapid, safe and unhindered provision of humanitarian assistance to the population in Gaza," the countries said in a joint statement.

"A halt on goods and supplies entering Gaza such as that announced by the government of Israel would risk violating international humanitarian law," they said.

"Humanitarian aid should never be contingent on a ceasefire or used as a political tool."

The three European nations described the humanitarian situation in Gaza as "catastrophic".

The Gaza ceasefire deal's first phase ended over the weekend after six weeks of relative calm. They included exchanges of Israeli captives for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

While Israel has said it wants to extend the first phase until mid-April, Hamas has insisted on a transition to the deal's second phase, which should lead to a permanent end to the war.



A doctor, head of the critical care department at the Beit Hanoun Hospital, has Iftar with his family outside their tent in Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. — AFP

Of the 251 captives taken on October 7, 2023, 58 remain in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military has confirmed are dead.

"It is vital that the ceasefire is sustained, all the captives are released, and continued flows of humanitarian aid to Gaza are ensured," the three European nations said.

"All captives must be unconditionally released and Hamas must end their degrading and humiliating treatment," they added.

WEAPON OF WAR

South Africa on Wednesday denounced Israel's restriction of aid into war-ravaged Gaza since the weekend, saying it amounted to using starvation as a weapon of war.

A fragile ceasefire since January saw an influx of humanitarian aid into Gaza, before Israel on Sunday announced it was blocking deliveries until Hamas accepted its terms for an extension of the truce.

"Preventing food from entering Gaza is a continuation of Israel's use of starvation as a weapon of war as part of the ongoing campaign of what the ICJ ruled to be plausible genocide against the Palestinian people," the South African foreign ministry said in a statement, referring to Pretoria's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

— Agencies

World's biggest iceberg runs aground, sparing wildlife haven

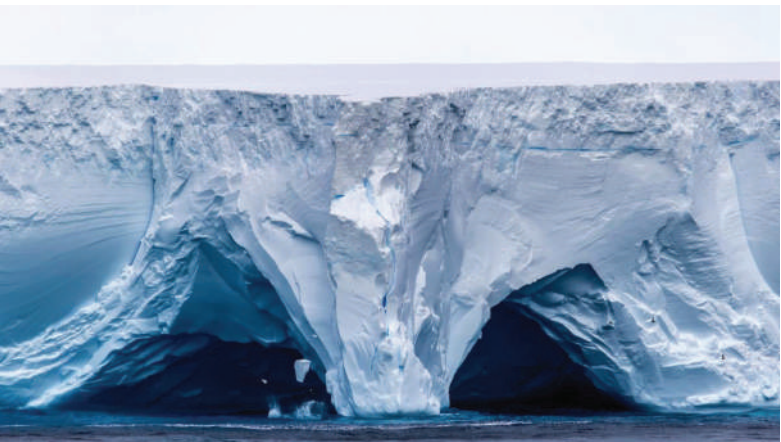
PARIS: The world's biggest iceberg appears to have run aground roughly 70 km from a remote Antarctic island, potentially sparing the crucial wildlife haven from being hit, a research organisation said.

The colossal iceberg A23a — which is more than twice the size of Greater London and weighs nearly one trillion tonnes — has been drifting north from Antarctica towards South Georgia island since 2020. This had raised fears it could collide with the island or run aground in shallower water near it, potentially disrupting the ability of penguins and seals to feed their young.

However, the gigantic wall of ice has been stuck 73 km from the island since March 1, according to a statement from the British Antarctic Survey (BAS).

"If the iceberg stays grounded, we don't expect it to significantly affect the local wildlife," BAS oceanographer Andrew Meijers said.

"In the last few decades, the



The gigantic wall of ice has been stuck 73 km from the island since March 1.

many icebergs that end up taking this route through the Southern Ocean soon break up, disperse and melt," added Meijers, who encountered A23a in late 2023 and has tracked its fate via satellite ever since.

Satellite images analysed by AFP showed that the closest edge of the roughly 3,300-square-kilometre iceberg had stopped more than 70 km from the island in late February. It remains unclear whether the iceberg is stuck for good. — AFP

CHAIRPERSON'S ANNUAL REPORT 2024

On behalf of the Board of Directors of National Bank of Oman SAOG, I am pleased to present the 2024 Annual Report for the period ended 31 December 2024.

Oman's Economy

Throughout 2024, Oman's economy has continued to perform strongly driven by its commitment to achieve Oman Vision 2040. The rising oil output, constant reforms, alongside investing in non-oil sectors have shaped higher non-oil growth.

These concerted efforts and the impact they have had on the economy were recognised with an upgrade from international credit rating agency, Standard & Poor's. Oman's sovereign credit rating was upgraded to BBB- with a stable outlook. This upgrade returned the Sultanate and its key institutions to investment-grade status, providing a more robust environment for investors and lenders and underpinning confidence in the Omani economy.

Standard & Poor's also expects real GDP to grow by about 2 per cent annually on average from 2024 to 2027, driven by an increase in average oil production until 2027, which will continue to stimulate non-oil sector growth by about 2 per cent annually. The agency notes that Oman is committed to reducing public debt, is expected to reach 29 per cent of GDP by 2027.

NBO's Operating Performance

In 2024, the Bank's Net Profit stood at OMR 63.06 million compared to OMR 58.03 million for the same period last year, reflecting an increase of 8.7 percent.

Total Operating Income for the year 2024 increased to OMR 151.33 million, from OMR 145.87 million last year, reflecting a 3.7 percent increase aided by a strong growth of 20.4 percent in Fee Income.

Operating expenses for the year ended 2024 increased to OMR 62.98 million from OMR 61.91 million for the corresponding period in 2023, an increase of 1.7 percent. The Bank continues to invest in its people, technology, and infrastructure.

Operating Profit, as a result, grew by 5.2 per cent year on year.

Net Impairment charge for the year 2024 was OMR 14.14 million, compared to OMR 15.70 million for the corresponding period last year, representing a decrease of 9.9 percent.

Gross loans and advances increased to OMR 4.09 billion, reflecting a growth of 11.7 per cent over last year. Customer deposits as of 31 December 2024 are at OMR 4.13 billion, recording a strong growth of 14.4 per cent over last year. This growth is complemented by a healthy CASA mix.

Total assets as of 31 December 2024 stood at OMR 5.24 billion, a growth of 8.7 per cent over last year.

The Bank's Core Equity and Total Capital Adequacy Ratio stood at 11.5 percent and 17.1 percent, respectively.

Our Strategy and Organizational Updates

Guided by the aspiration to 'Return to Prominence,' we have successfully advanced our five-year strategy (2021-2025), achieving remarkable progress across its strategic themes: Safeguard of Assets Quality, Value Creation, and Sustainability.

Over the first four years of the strategy, NBO has achieved sustainable growth and performed strongly across all P&L lines with improvement in key return metrics, underscoring its financial resilience and strategic acumen. Despite challenges such as rising cost of funds and interest rate cuts, NBO remains on its growth trajectory.

The Bank has sustained its leadership in digital innovation with pioneering initiatives, including the introduction of E-KYC, digital credit card application service and Eid note dispensing machines and, while further reinforcing its forward-thinking approach by launching the NBO Fintech Accelerator Programme, the first of its kind in Oman's banking sector, and organizing the NBO Hackathon, fostering creativity and collaboration to develop innovative solutions.

Muzn Islamic Banking remains a strategic priority for NBO, contributing significantly to the vision of 'Return to Prominence'. Muzn has achieved notable milestones, including the introduction of several new products, such as Corporate Term Wakala Finance, Tijarah Account, Premium and Privilege Banking, and eco-friendly Credit Cards. Muzn digital banking capabilities have been significantly upgraded, with enhanced features on the mobile app and Corporate Internet Banking, aligning with conventional standards.

At NBO, we are committed to unlock opportunities and drive growth through enhancing the overall banking experience and strengthening our customer-centric approach. In line with this approach and to enrich our team with diverse expertise, we appointed Faisal Hamad Al Wahaibi as General Manager – Chief Retail and Digital Officer, and Ali Mousa Al Abri as General Manager – Chief Human Resources Officer, strengthening our senior management team, while we provided growth opportunities to Salah Abdullah Al Sharji, appointing him as General Manager – Chief Internal Auditor, and Anil Kumar as General Manager – Chief Corporate Banking Officer.

Key Achievements

2024 was a year of success stories and milestones, highlighted by the signing of several pivotal agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), along with the launch of digital initiatives aimed at achieving our strategic priorities.

We launched a hassle-free digital credit card application service. This innovative service enables both NBO and non-NBO customers to apply for credit cards through the app with enhanced convenience, meeting KYC requirements, eligibility criteria, and utilizing digital signatures in alignment with Central Bank of Oman guidelines.

Continuing our efforts to enhance digital customer touchpoints, we launched a new e-KYC service on the NBO app. This feature allows existing customers to update their Know Your Customer (KYC) details directly through the app, enhancing efficiency and user experience by eliminating the need for branch visits.

One more notable addition to our digital offerings was the introduction of Apple Pay, Samsung Wallet, and Garmin Pay, advanced digital payment solutions that elevate the payment experience by providing customers with innovative platforms enabling them to conduct secure, contactless transactions.

One of the key highlights was the launch of the first-of-its-kind Eid note dispensing machines across five locations in Oman, at NBO Head Office, Sohar Branch, New Salalah Branch, Ibra Branch, and Bahla Branch.

Supporting innovation and fostering partnerships with fintech, we collaborated with Paymob, UnionPay International, and PayByte to introduce advanced payment solutions, , reshaping Oman's payment ecosystem and enhancing the digital payment landscape. Partnerships with PayMate India SPC, Vodafone Oman, and Zumr streamlined B2B payments, improved financial inclusion, and enhanced electronic payment services. Additionally, an MoU with Oman Data Park upgraded digital onboarding with advanced features, while collaboration with First Exchange integrated international remittance services into our API Banking Portal, providing secure and convenient solutions for customers.

Aligning with our commitment to meet the diverse financial needs of customers and support the Omani business landscape, we signed an agreement with Sohar Aluminium Co. LLC to provide a working capital facility for their operational requirements.

On the Investment side, we launched a new mutual fund product, the NBO Global Equity Fund, offering a unique opportunity to invest in large global developed and emerging equity markets while catering to the specific risk and return requirements of Omani investors.

NBO Muzn Islamic Banking

Muzn Islamic Banking continues to perform well with total income for the year 2024 growing by 19.5 per cent YoY. Gross Financing grew by 27.2 per cent YoY to reach OMR 358 million as at 31st December 2024 and customer deposits grew by 19.9 percent YoY to reach OMR 335 million as at 31st December 2024.

In 2024, NBO Muzn Islamic Banking reinforced its commitment to Shari'a compliance and digital innovation through the introduction of new products and solutions.

Muzn launched the Corporate Term Wakala Finance, a Shari'a-compliant solution that appoints the customer as an agent to manage the Bank's investment in their business, ensuring transparency and compliance. Furthermore, the Muzn Tijarah Account was introduced, providing corporates, SMEs, charities, and entrepreneurs a tiered profit-earning account that allows them to earn returns on excess cash reserves. Additionally, Muzn introduced a new Shari'a-compliant Medical Finance product, offering financing options for individuals seeking medical treatment within Oman or abroad.

Expanding to cover new categories, Muzn Islamic Banking introduced two premium banking segments: Privilege Banking and Priority Banking to offer personalized services catered to the specific needs of different income groups.

A wide range of eco-friendly, Shari'a-compliant credit cards was offered by Muzn, blending responsible banking with finance, and enabling customers to manage their finances while supporting environmental sustainability.

To enhance accessibility and convenience for its customers across the Sultanate, Muzn Islamic Banking celebrated the inauguration of a new branch in Ibra in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

People and Learning and Development

We celebrated the selection of Maha Saud Al Raisi, Assistant General Manager – Head of Products, and Mustahil Ahmed Al Mamari, Assistant General Manager – Head of Strategy and Transformation to join the Royal Academy of Management's National CEO Programme, reflecting their strong leadership and dedication to excellence.

Likewise, three of our staff members completed prestigious Programmes: Nasr Al Saleh and Talal Al Shuaibi participated in the Etimad National Leadership Programme, and Maryam Al Tubi joined the Future Leaders Programme, offered by the Royal Academy of Management.

Further demonstrating our focus on leadership development, we celebrated the graduation of participants from the Tamayuz programme, an initiative that aims to build the Bank's future leaders, through equipping graduates with essential skills delivered after comprehensive coaching sessions, technical workshops, and leadership courses along with certification opportunities in different fields.

Going further and as part of our commitment to enhance collaboration and performance, we continued the Rawabit Programme, a key initiative that highlights our core values through engaging and interactive workshops. This year, 8 Rawabit workshops were held, involving 269 employees from various departments, providing a unique opportunity to reflect on our collective purpose, explore foundational values, and align them with our long-term goals.

We continued to invest in enhancing our workforce's skills and capabilities, delivering 325 programs over a total of 14,465 man-days. Additionally, 32 staff members successfully earned professional certifications.

It is worth noting that a total of 556 higher education students were enrolled in our Internship Programme, confirming our efforts to empower the local youth and equip them with the necessary skills needed for the future job market.

Community Values

We launched the NBO Fintech Accelerator Programme to support Oman's economic growth, innovation, and economic diversification by nurturing start-ups and promoting sustainable business growth. Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the programme fosters the fintech sector, reduces reliance on traditional industries, and stimulates entrepreneurship through resources, mentorship, and financing. It also generates job opportunities and positions the region as a hub for innovation and technology, attracting foreign investment. Five startups were selected to join the programme: ThemarIP, Archon, Pyra.AI, Saree3, and InstaSpace.

To support financial literacy and streamline banking experiences, we actively took part in the Muscat Book Fair, collaborating with the Social Protection Fund to raise awareness of Childhood Benefits through the Social Protection Fund and how they could be facilitated through Children's Accounts.

We were pleased to sponsor the celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, organized by the Ministry of Social Development, reflecting our commitment to supporting initiatives that empower all members of society.

Further supporting social security families, we launched our annual CSR campaign, 'Shahr Al Atta,' featuring various initiatives designed to positively impact the community and contribute to national growth. The campaign began with an internal staff Bake Sale, promoting generosity and community engagement during Ramadan.

In addition, we distributed food hampers to low-income families across the country and partnered with OCA to celebrate the joyous Qaranqasho occasion with underprivileged children.

Our dedication extends beyond Ramadan, where we also contributed to the Muscat Charity Team's Eid Event and hosted our annual SMEs Eid Marketplace Exhibition at our head office. This event celebrated Eid and provided businesses with an opportunity to showcase their products. We also contributed to the "Eid Clothing" initiative of the Muscat Charity Team as part of our social responsibility efforts.

Global Recognition

We are honored to receive The Elite Quality Recognition Award from our partner Bank J.P. Morgan for outstanding achievement and efficiency in processing US Dollar payments, a testament to our commitment to enhancing digital capabilities for seamless international transactions. Additionally, we have been named the Best Performing Company in the Large Capital category at the Alam al-Iktisaad Wal 'A'mal (AIWA) Awards, recognizing our dedication to delivering innovative and customer-centric solutions.

Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank our customers, shareholders, executive management, and the entire team of NBO for their support and efforts in implementing the Bank's strategy and achieving its goals and objectives.

We would also like to sincerely thank our regulators, the Central Bank of Oman, the Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates and the Financial Services Authority, for their constant support and dedicated efforts to develop Oman's financial industry, especially the banking sector.

We pay tribute to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, under whose visionary leadership and wise guidance Oman continues its steadfast march towards sustainable economic growth and social development.



Amal Suhail Bahwan
Chairperson

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION		
As at 31st December 2024		
	2024	2023
ASSETS	RO"000"	RO"000"
Cash	34,799	34,862
Balances with CBO	267,213	369,115
Capital deposit with CBO	500	500
Govt. & other securities	353,151	310,262
T. Bills & othe bills eligible for rediscount	18,772	81,000
Balance due from branches, principal shareholders & affiliates abroad	147	35,106
Due from banks		
a) Placements (Local)	89,430	40,047
b) Placements (Overseas)	256,081	237,273
c) Loans & advances (net of provisions)	26,706	12,494
Investments securities	101,470	70,394
Loans & advances (net of loan loss provisions & reserve interest)	3,926,147	3,506,760
Tangible fixed assets	59,467	55,893
Other assets	108,662	68,300
TOTAL ASSETS	5,242,545	4,822,006
LIABILITIES		
Deposits (including government)		
a) Demand	1,526,142	1,202,592
b) Savings	558,364	559,925
c) Time	2,044,017	1,847,426
Balance due to branches, principal shareholders & affiliates abroad	175	122
Due to banks		
a) Placements	192,763	414,087
Capital / assigned capital	162,595	162,595
Reserves	100,092	96,545
Profits carried forward	280,437	248,270
Tier 1 perpetual bond	225,037	167,133
Other liabilities	152,923	123,311
TOTAL LIABILITIES	5,242,545	4,822,006
NOTE 1: LOANS & ADVANCES	RO"000"	RO"000"
Gross loans	4,090,706	3,664,443
Less: Loan loss provision and reserved interest	(164,559)	(157,683)
Loans & advances (net of provision for bad and doubtful debts)	3,926,147	3,506,760

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME		
For the year ended 31st December 2024		
	2024	2023
PROFIT & LOSS ACCOUNT	RO"000"	RO"000"
Gross interest income	272,024	242,527
Interest expense	(163,241)	(131,985)
Net interest income	108,783	110,542
Other operating income		
Dividend income	4,346	2,258
Net fee & commission income	25,040	21,249
Net foreign exchange income (income less expense)	8,208	6,585
Other income	4,949	5,233
Gross income	151,326	145,867
General administrative expenses	(56,656)	(55,810)
Depreciation	(6,327)	(6,099)
Total operating costs	(62,983)	(61,909)
Net operating profit (profit on ordinary activities before provisions)	88,343	83,958
ECL allowance (net) charged for loans & advances	(14,267)	(13,566)
ECL allowance (net) charged for investments	(33)	(92)
ECL allowance (net) charged for placements	(56)	(30)
ECL allowance charged (net) for off-balance sheet items	220	(2,010)
Profit for the year after loan loss provision	74,207	68,260
Taxation	(11,144)	(10,231)
Net profit after taxation	63,063	58,029
Other comprehensive expenses income for the year		
Revaluation gains/(losses) on equity instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income	(382)	601
Tax effect of net movement on available for sale financial investments	(314)	(164)
Other comprehensive expenses income for the year	(696)	437
Total comprehensive expenses income for the year	62,367	58,466



Elderly in good hands

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 5

THE Sultanate of Oman pays great attention to the elderly and strives to provide them with everything they need in various fields, offering social support to improve their quality of life and ways to integrate them into society. Social care is considered an essential element of social protection that contributes to ensuring the security and cohesion of society. Social care programmes provide services to meet the needs of needy groups, including the elderly. The Ministry of Social Development relies on studying the assessment of their needs and desires to provide services for the elderly based on a sustainable system focused on empowerment, integration, capacity development, human rights, social capital and effective partnerships. “The Ministry of Social Development seeks to support the quality of life of the elderly by providing them with several services such as support devices, various medical aids, psychological and social guidance and counseling, social and recreational activities, as well as preparing homes, working to integrate them and enhancing their role and position in society, in addition to strengthening the principle of partnership and integrated work between all sectors,” said Ahood al Saadi, Head of



AHOOD AL SAADI
Head of Programmes and Standards Department

Programmes and Standards Department, Department of Elderly Affairs in the Ministry of Social Development. The alternative family is also a service that the

elderly receive to keep them in the community in which they live. It seeks to find alternative families for cases where their actual families cannot care for them or there are no relatives obligated to care for them. This ensures they are provided with the most important services to care for them. In addition, day care centres aim to maintain the elderly within their community environment, with civil society as a partner in supporting the social and development services and programmes provided to them. The Social Care Home in Rustaq houses a number of elderly people who do not have anyone from their relatives to care for them, serve them and meet their life needs. The number of residents in this home until the end of June 2024 was about 45 residents, with around 8,768 elderly people benefiting from social services through the home care programme provided to them and their families until the end of June



The Ministry of Social Development seeks to support the quality of life of the elderly.

2024. The existence of the Social Protection Fund is the best evidence of the care and attention given to the elderly in the Sultanate of Oman. The fund seeks to improve the quality of life and provide protection and social care for various segments of society, including the elderly. One of the most important advantages for the elderly in the Social Protection Fund is the elderly benefit, which provides monthly financial support to people aged 60 and above. It aims to ensure a minimum level of social cash protection for this category, enhancing stability for all citizens, especially during a person's decreased ability to earn at an advanced age. The conditions and eligibility criteria are that the beneficiary must be Omani, reside in the Sultanate of Oman and be 60 years old.

WEEKEND IRRESISTIBLE DEALS

Celebrate the spirit of Ramadan with unbeatable weekend deals at Nestlé!

OMR 0.190	OMR 0.290	OMR 0.590
OMR 8.790	OMR 1.190	OMR 3.500
OMR 0.990	OMR 0.975	OMR 2.290
OMR 0.990	OMR 0.500	OMR 2.990

HYPERMARKETS | SUPERMARKETS | DEPARTMENT STORES

OMAN | SAUDI ARABIA | KUWAIT | U.A.E | INDIA

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS WITH A RAMADAN TO REMEMBER AT SHANGRI-LA BARR AL JISSAH



For two decades, Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah has been the heart of Ramadan celebrations in Muscat, where the breathtaking Hajar mountains meet the serene seashore. Marking 20 years of heartfelt hospitality this year, the resort continues to be a cherished gathering place, embracing the spirit of togetherness and tradition. This year, the iconic destination enhances its offerings with a curated selection of Iftar and Suhoor experiences designed to enchant every palate. Guests can indulge in exquisite buffet spreads while Suhoor takes on a new level of sophistication at SiO2 Beach Lounge, set beneath the open sky for an unforgettable night by the sea. “Ramadan at Shangri-La has always been a favourite among residents of Muscat with our diverse dining experiences. As we celebrate our 20th anniversary, we have gone above and beyond to elevate our offerings, introducing unique experiences such as the ‘Iftar To Go’ box and an exciting selection of gift hampers for both Ramadan and Eid,” Philippe Kronberg, Resort General Manager of Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah and Shangri-La Al Husn, Muscat stated. **Exquisite Iftar at Al Tanoor** The resort's signature restaurant, Al Tanoor located at Al Bandar, presents a rich array of Middle Eastern flavours alongside locally inspired specialties and international cuisines. Guests can enjoy cozy indoor seating or dine in the charming *sablah* area adorned with ambient lights. This sumptuous

buffet is complemented by Arabic melodies, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. Iftar is served daily, from Maghrib time at OMR 29 net per person. **Private Cabana Iftar** For a more intimate experience, guests can dine in a private cabana, accommodating up to six people. Perfect for family gatherings or small groups, each cabana provides a peaceful and personalized setting for Iftar with a selection of beverages. OMR 34 net per person. **A Serene Suhoor at SiO2 Beach Lounge** Following Iftar, guests can retreat by the shores of Al Bandar for a sophisticated Suhoor experience at SiO2 Beach Lounge. Here, they can savour a collection of delectable appetisers, Ramadan beverages, coffee, tea and Huqqa accompanied by live entertainment in a picturesque beachside setting. Open from 8pm to 2am with a minimum spend of OMR 15 per person. **Ramadan or Eid Hamper** Perfect for gifting, the Ramadan or Eid hamper is the latest addition to this year's collection and is thoughtfully curated with premium delights. The pre-filled Ramadan Hamper is available for OMR 60 net per box, featuring a selection of handpicked Ramadan favourites. For a more personalised touch, guests can create their own box starting from OMR 12 net per box and selecting between 4 to 10 items from our exclusive range. A meaningful way to celebrate the Holy Month

and Eid with loved ones and colleagues. **Iftar To Go – Enjoy at home** For those who prefer to break their fast in the comfort of their own home, Shangri-La's ‘Iftar To Go’ box offers a generous spread of traditional Arabic dishes, including mezze, soup, main courses, and desserts. The Iftar box is designed to serve up to six people and a choice of menu options from Mandi, lamb Shuwa or grills are available. OMR 98 net per box | 24-hour prior notice required. **Ramadan Corporate Gatherings** Ideal for corporate celebrations, team gatherings, or annual traditions, Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah offers an array of buffet and venue options to accommodate corporate events. Iftar packages for groups start from OMR 27 net per person, while Suhoor is priced at OMR 18 net per person for a minimum of 30 people. Terms and conditions apply. **Special Ramadan Offer for Shangri-La Circle Members** Shangri-La Circle members residing in Oman will enjoy a 20% discount on all Ramadan dining offerings, making this the perfect opportunity to indulge in exceptional cuisine throughout the Holy Month. For reservations or more information, contact Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah at 2477 6565 or via WhatsApp at +968 7926 9247.



RAMADHAN



QURAN

RECITATION ILLUMINATES SOULS

ONE of the most frequently heard phrases during Ramadhan is that this is “the month of the Holy Quran.” Perhaps the most important and accurate statement about Ramadhan is precisely this.

To speak of Ramadhan is to speak of the Quran. Islamic scholars constantly emphasise this connection; recitations of the Quran are held in mosques and homes and with Ramadhan, the Quran is once again revealed, illuminating souls.

The connection between Ramadhan and the Quran stems from the revelation sent down this month. The Night of Power (Laylat al Qadr), the night when the Quran’s first verses were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), also falls this month. What we hear about the relationship between Ramadhan and the Quran is true: the real issue is fulfilling its requirements.

The Quran is divine speech. Muslims know that when they read their holy book, they are not reading just any ordinary words; they do not see it as just another book. A particular line of reasoning defines the framework of Muslims’

During Ramadhan, we need this kind of awareness and excitement — to look at the eternal book with fresh eyes, as if hearing revelation for the first time.

relationship with the Quran: God is the ultimate reality and one aspect of His being the ultimate reality is that His words are eternal. Therefore, His speech is not something acquired or learned — it is primordial.

We can consider three fundamental aspects of how reading the Quran directly affects our lives.

First, the Holy Quran is not confined to any particular time. To think of it as limited to a specific time is to misunderstand divine speech completely. It is a timeless book; its truth is always relevant and binding. When it was revealed, that moment did not become just another moment in history — it became the essence of time itself. The first principle we should derive from this is: “The Quran at all times.” Thus, when we say, “Ramadhan is the month of the Quran,” we mean that Ramadhan is the time when we should deeply contemplate the Quran’s timeless nature and its encompassing presence in all moments.

Second, the Quran is not confined to a specific place or geography. Although it was revealed in a particular location, its eternal nature prevents it from being restricted to that place. When divine revelation reaches a place, that place comes to represent and encompass all places. At the moment of revelation, the Hijaz was not just a region of the world — it was the whole world. The fact that the Quran was revealed to the Arabs or in the Hijaz does not make that place exclusive, nor does it mean the Quran belongs solely to that land. The Quran is a book for all geographies. The second principle to be drawn here is: “The Quran is everywhere!”

Third, Islam’s holy book addresses all of humanity. As an eternal book, it does not prioritise one group over another. For instance, it does not place men above women or disregard women. To claim that Islam differentiates between social classes, categorises people based on intelligence

or abilities, or was revealed to suit the understanding of a particular group is utterly nonsensical.

Islam, without making distinctions between men and women, gathers all of humanity under one fundamental principle: human dignity. Its prophet who received the revelation was not just an individual; he embodied all of humanity — we were all there, potentially, in that moment. The divisions and separations that arise due to our different roles and abilities in the world are united under the umbrella of the divine book, forming the true community of humanity. Thus, “The Quran is for everyone!”

Simply, the universality of Islam means the Quran at all times, everywhere and for everyone.

During Ramadhan, we need this kind of awareness and excitement — to look at the eternal book with fresh eyes, as if hearing revelation for the first time. — ONA

Dates output nears 400,000 tonnes in 2024

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 5

DATES production in Oman touched 396,775 tonnes in 2024, according to preliminary figures of the National Centre for Statistics and Information. This highlights the crucial role the date palms play in the local economy. Al Dakhiliyah Governorate ranked first in dates production in Oman, recording 70,604 tonnes, reflecting the widespread presence of palm farms in some wilayats such as Nizwa, Bahla and Manah.

Al Dhahirah Governorate followed with 66,421 tonnes, while Al Batinah South Governorate ranked third with 58,508 tonnes. Al Batinah North Governorate came fourth with a total of 55,487 tonnes.

Oman cultivates a wide variety of dates, with Khalas ranking first, accounting for 15 per cent of total production. This is followed by Naghal at 12 per cent and Fardh at 9 per cent, along with Khassab and Mabsili.

The average annual date consumption per person in Oman is estimated at 60 kg, thanks to the nutritional benefits of dates and the long harvest season. The fresh date season (Rutb) begins at the



Oman cultivates a wide variety of dates, with Khalas ranking first, accounting for 15 per cent of total production.

end of April and extends in some governorates until the first half of November, reflecting the country's geographical and climatic diversity.

Date production is a key pillar of Oman's agricultural economy, providing livelihoods for farmers and investors engaged in date-based

industries, including the production of date syrup, jam, molasses and date powders. Omani dates are also highly regarded in both local and international markets, creating opportunities for expanding exports to regional and global markets.

Oman is actively working to develop the date sector through various strategic initiatives. One of the most prominent is the "One Million Palm Tree Project," which aims to increase the number of date palms and enhance domestic production, contributing to food security and national economic growth.

The Date Palm Research Centre plays a key role in advancing food and industrial research related to date products. Notable achievements include genetic fingerprinting studies of Omani date palm varieties, which help document and preserve these unique cultivars, ensuring sustained quality and production.

With Oman's annual date production approaching 400,000 tons, enhancing supply chains, improving marketing and export strategies, and ensuring agricultural sustainability remain top priorities for relevant authorities. These efforts aim to maximise the economic benefits of this vital sector and strengthen Oman's global presence in the date market.



MUSCAT GOVERNORATE
MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. (5/2025)

Muscat Municipality invites Companies specialized in the field and registered with General Secretariat of **Tender Board**, to participate and obtain tender documents from the website via the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE/23/185	RFP for Supply, Installation & Maintenance of CCTV Surveillance System	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRE/24/295	Supply, Installation Testing & Commissioning of IP Video Cameras at different locations	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRE/24/327	Supply and Installation of Lighting in A'Seeb	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRS/25/001	Supply of Stationary for Muscat Municipality	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRS/25/002	Supply of Carpentry Materials for Muscat Municipality	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRS/25/003	Supply of Gasses for Muscat Municipality	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRS/25/004	Supply of Building Materials for Muscat Municipality	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRS/25/005	Supply of Paints for Muscat Municipality	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRE/25/012	Beautification and Development of Social Housing in Al Mahaj (AL Rabee Project)	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRE/25/020	Design and Construction of Road Connections in A'Seeb	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRE/25/021	Design and Construction of Road Connections in Al Amerat	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRE/25/028	Renewal of Licenses for the Internal and External Network Management and Monitoring Program at Muscat Municipality	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRE/25/041	Supply & Laying of Asphalt	25/03/2025	14/04/2025
PRE/25/046	Supply of Road Marking Material	25/03/2025	14/04/2025

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).

Church marks silver jubilee

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Mar Thoma Church in Muscat celebrated the silver jubilee of its existence in Oman and the managing committee led by its vicar thanked the Oman government on the occasion.

"We are immensely grateful to the ruler, the ministers, the people and the Sultanate of Oman for the harmonious coexistence of various religions and faiths and the peace in the country," said Rev Father Sajan Varghese.

As part of the closing ceremony of the one-year-long Golden Jubilee

celebrations, a meeting was held on Saturday. The general meeting was inaugurated by Most Rev Dr Theodosius Marthoma Metropolitan in the presence of the Diocesan Bishop Rt Rev Dr Euyakim Mar Coorilos. Guests of Honours were Pankaj Kanaksi Gokaldas Khimji, Adviser for External Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, P Prasad, Minister of Agriculture, State of Kerala, India. PCO Lead Pastor Mitchel Ford, Dr Wahid bin Ali al Kharousi, the Chairman of Oman Cancer Association (OCA), Rev Sajan Varghese

and Rev Obed Samuel were also present.

Binu M Philip, General Convener of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations presented the Jubilee report by thanking the country and the government of Oman for providing the Parish all required facilities and freedom of worship in the last five decades.

Philip mentioned in his speech that the Parish responded to the needs of sick and the needy people as a part of their mission and action in the Jubilee year. This includes support to Oman Cancer Association and a Pain and Palliative Care unit in Kerala.

Do not respond to fake advertisements: ROP

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 5

The General Department of Criminal Investigations and Research has been monitoring fraudulent advertisements circulating on social media. These ads offer domestic workers at attractive prices, with the intention of withdrawing money from victims' accounts through the electronic links provided in the ads.

Social media platforms have become a fertile ground for fraudulent advertisements, taking advantage of the large user base and legitimate services. Despite efforts to limit these activities, they continue to increase.

Fraudsters use various methods to profit and deceive people, especially during Ramadhan when the demand increases. They use social media sites to promote cheap prices and attract victims.

Some fraudsters have started sending tweets, text messages, and publishing contact numbers, impersonating companies that provide domestic workers. They go as far as sending photos and CVs of supposed multinational workers, asking for money in exchange for contracts and workers. However, they never deliver on their promises and disappear with the money. The Royal Oman Police advises everyone not to respond to fake advertisements, avoid opening unknown electronic links, and refrain from disclosing personal and banking information on social media platforms.



بنك بارودا
Bank of Baroda
India's International Bank

NOTICE TO CUSTOMERS

Further to earlier announcement on 04th Feb, 2025, this is to bring to your kind notice that **Bank of Baroda, Oman Operations ("BOB Oman")** will be acquired by **Bank Dhofar SAOG** hereinafter called this transaction as **"Business Acquisition"**. The first phase of this Business Acquisition is scheduled to take effect on 07.03.2025.

Under the agreement between both the banks, from 07.03.2025 onwards Bank Dhofar will utilise the existing systems/applications Bank of Baroda, Oman Ops to ensure continued banking services to its customers until the final system migration of accounts is completed. Final migration is expected to be completed during May 2025. During this period, customers can continue using their existing Bank of Baroda accounts, cards, and services as usual under the business ownership of Bank Dhofar. During the final system migration Bank Dhofar will intimate directly all the customers with the new account and cards details and facilitate smooth transition.

We assure you that we are committed to ensuring a smooth transition of all our customer accounts/relationships to acquiring bank and we believe that this step is in the best interests of our clients and staff. We express our sincere gratitude for your valuable support and wish you a mutually beneficial relationship with Bank Dhofar. Should you have any questions or require assistance, please contact your BOB Relationship Manager or the BOB Client Services team at [+968] 71760013 (WhatsApp), [+968] 24817563, [+968] 24817373 (Ext-228), email: mktg.oman@bankofbaroda.com

Chief Executive
Bank of Baroda, Oman Ops

NOTICE AND INVITATION TO ATTEND THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING & ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of NATIONAL BANK OF OMAN SAOG (the "Bank") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting ("EGM") & Annual General Meeting ("AGM"), scheduled to be held at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, 18 March 2025 through the electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which you can log in through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that quorum was not achieved for the Extraordinary General Meeting ("EGM") & Annual General Meeting ("AGM"), the second meetings shall be held at 3 p.m. on Thursday 20 March 2025 through the above-mentioned electronic platform to discuss the following agenda items:

Extra Ordinary General Meeting Agenda:

- To approve renewal of the bank's existing EMTN Programme of USD 1.5 Billion (as approved at the Extraordinary General Meeting held by the Bank on 10th June 2015) (for 10 years from the date of EGM approval up to the year 2035 (Approved Programme)).
- To approve the Bank to carry out multiple bond issuances under the Approved Programme over the next 10 years from the date of EGM approval as the Board of Directors (the Board) may approve from time to time, taking into account the required regulatory approvals including Central Bank of Oman) and subject to prevailing market conditions. The issue size, currency of the issuances, listing / rating requirements and all relevant transaction terms shall be determined by the Board and may involve liability management tender offers (buy-back) or exchange offer exercise (the Liability Management) to be undertaken. The total amount of issuance outstanding at any given point in time shall not exceed USD 1.5 Billion equivalent.
- To approve the Bank's capital raising plans which may take the form of one or more new perpetual or other types of bonds issuances comprising Additional Tier 1 capital of the Bank depending on the regulatory requirements, over the next 5 years from the date of the EGM approval as the Board may approve from time to time, for total amount up to USD 600 million (or the OMV equivalent amount). Such instruments may be listed locally on the MSX, internationally on a foreign exchange and/or issued in regional and international markets through public subscription and/or private placements and may involve Liability Management, subject of regulatory approvals.
- To authorise the Board (and the relevant authorised signatories acting pursuant to any limits, as set out on the commercial register of the bank) together with the management team of the Bank, to take any and all required steps and actions to implement and give effect to the above issuances (or any element of them), including (but not limited to) any steps as may be required to give effect to any appointments of advisors, submissions or filings to any regulator or exchange, updates to the Transaction terms and negotiation thereof, issuances thereunder, Liability Management, amendments (including to issuance size and terms, however fundamental) pursuant to the above work streams and as per prevailing market or regulatory conditions. Further, to authorise the relevant authorised signatory or signatories of the Bank to execute the transaction documentation and any and all related documentation that may be necessary, expedient or desirable to give effect to the issuances or any element of them.

Annual General Meeting Agenda:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors about the business of the bank and its financial position for the financial year ended 31st December 2024.
- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors about the Bank's Corporate Governance during the financial year ended 31st December 2024.
- To consider and approve the Auditors Report about the Bank's audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31st December 2024.
- Notify the Shareholders regarding the report of the Sharia Board on the "Muzn" Islamic Banking for the financial year ended 31st December 2024.
- To consider and approve on the AGM date the proposal for distribution of cash dividends to the Shareholders at the rate of Baiza 9.4 per one share for the financial year ended 31st December 2024.
- To approve the availed sitting fees by the members of the Board of Directors and members of the Board's sub-committees for the previous financial year 2024 and to approve the sitting fees for the financial year ending 31st December 2025.
- To consider and approve the proposal for the distribution of remuneration of RO 300,000 to the members of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31st December 2024.
- To approve the sitting fees and remuneration availed by the members of the Sharia Board for the previous financial year 2024 and to approve the sitting fees and remuneration for the financial year ending 31st December 2025.
- Approve the appointment of Sharia Board members.
- Notify the Shareholders regarding the related parties' transactions during the financial year ended 31st December 2024.
- Notify the Shareholders regarding the donations paid to support community services during the financial year ended 31st December 2024.
- To consider and approve the allocation of RO 200,000 for community support services during the financial year ending 31st December 2025.
- To approve the criteria to evaluate the Board of Directors, for the financial year ending 31st of December 2025.
- To appoint and approve the remuneration of an independent party for the evaluation of the Board of Directors performance for the financial year ending 31st December 2025.
- To appoint the External Auditor and the External Sharia Auditor for the financial year ending 31st December 2025, and approve their remuneration.

As per the Bank's Articles of Association and the regulations of the convening of the AGMs through electronic platforms, issued by the Financial Services Authority (FSA), we would like to attract your kind attention to the following:

- Only juristic persons may give proxy to a natural person to attend the AGM and vote on their behalf through the electronic systems, provided that the deputized natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on the subject items offered for voting in the agenda starts before a period of not more than 3 days and until the end of the voting process on the Meeting's day. If the investor's balance of shares increased or decreased, his/her voting will be cancelled and they should vote again on the AGM's date.

For any queries please contact Ms. Jawaher Saud Al Tamami on 24778218 or 95108251 or e-mail at: jawaheraltamami@nbo.om

Ms. Amal Suhail Bahwan Al Mukhaini
Chairperson

National Bank of Oman
Legal Advisor

PWC
Statutory Auditors

البنك الوطني العماني
NBO

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Greece Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis looks on at the Greek Parliament in Athens. — AFP

GREECE PM VOWS TO FIGHT TRAGEDY CENSURE MOTION

ATHENS: Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis vowed on Wednesday to fight a censure motion over the country's worst train tragedy, accusing the opposition of peddling “nightmarish” lies about the accident. “I have an obligation to keep the country steady and safe in this uncertain climate,” the conservative leader told parliament as his lawmakers delivered a standing ovation.

Opposition parties are expected to table the motion, accusing the government of having tried to cover up the causes of the 2023 accident in which 57 people died. Mitsotakis' ruling New Democracy party has 156 lawmakers in the 300-seat chamber, enough to survive the censure motion.

On Tuesday, parliament voted to launch an investigation into whether a senior official dispatched by Mitsotakis to the scene after the accident authorised the bulldozing of the crash site, leading to the loss of vital evidence. Hundreds of thousands turned out at protest rallies nationwide during a general strike on Friday to demand justice for the victims, in one of the largest mobilisations recorded in Greece. — AFP

GREENLAND REJECTS TRUMP PLEDGE ON THE ISLAND



Greenland Prime Minister Mute Egede holds a press conference in Copenhagen. — AFP file photo

NUUK: Greenland's prime minister on Wednesday hit back at President Donald Trump's pledge to take the Arctic territory “one way or the other”, insisting that islanders did not see their future with the United States or even Denmark. Mute Egede rejected Trump's expansionist ambitions to annex the sparsely populated but mineral-rich and strategically placed island, in a partisan address to the US Congress in Washington.

“We don't want to be Americans, or Danes either. We are Greenlanders. The Americans and their leader must understand that,” Egede said. “We are not for sale and can't just be taken. Our future is decided by us in Greenland,” he said, six days before the island's legislative elections where the longstanding question of independence tops the agenda.

Trump said he had a message for the “incredible people” of Greenland. “We strongly support your right to determine your own future, and if you choose, we welcome you into the United States of America,” he added. — AFP

DRONE ATTACKS

Israeli strikes wound two in Lebanon



Lebanese official media said two people were wounded on Wednesday when Israeli drones struck a vehicle in the south, a day after a deadly raid and despite a ceasefire. “Israeli drones carried out more than one strike on a vehicle in Ras Naqura, south of a United Nations peacekeeping position, the National News Agency (NNA) said. “Two siblings who were collecting scrap metal” were wounded and taken to hospital, it added. — AFP

PAKISTAN HAILS RENEWED TIES WITH US AFTER SHARIFULLAH ARREST

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan trumpeted its renewal of counterterrorism cooperation with Washington after the arrest of Mohammad Sharifullah, whom it blames for a 2021 attack on US troops at Kabul airport, in a military operation along the border with Afghanistan. Wednesday's statement came hours after US President Donald Trump thanked Pakistan for the arrest during a speech to Congress, adding that Sharifullah was on his way to the United States to face justice.

FBI Director Kash Patel said later Sharifullah was in US custody, in a post on X alongside a picture of agents standing in front of the plane that he was meant to arrive on. “We will continue to partner closely with the United States in securing regional peace and stability,” Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said in a statement hours after Trump's speech. Pakistan had launched an operation along its Afghan border to capture Sharifullah, whom Sharif

described as an Afghan national and top commander for militant group Islamic State Khorasan. “We thank US President Donald Trump for acknowledging and appreciating Pakistan's role and support in counterterrorism efforts,” Sharif added. Pakistan's deputy prime minister and foreign minister, Ishaq Dar, had also spoken with US national security adviser Mike Walsh on Tuesday, according to a Pakistani foreign office statement. — Reuters

Zelensky ready for talks and deal, says Trump

US President Donald Trump said that Ukraine's leader Volodymyr Zelensky has told him Kyiv was ready for talks with Russia and the finalisation of a US minerals deal, days after the pair's explosive White House meeting. The dramatic collapse of Kyiv and Washington's wartime alliance has played out in the open since the televised dispute in the Oval Office last week, followed by Ukraine's top ally suspending crucial military aid. Zelensky has since sought to bring Trump back onside, posting on social media that their clash was “regrettable” and he wanted “to make things right”.

In his address to US Congress later on Tuesday, Trump read aloud from a letter he said he recently received from Zelensky, which matched the social media statement.



People gather during a rally in support of Ukraine near Philadelphia City Hall, in Philadelphia. s— AFP

“The letter reads, ‘Ukraine is ready to come to the negotiating table as soon as possible to bring lasting peace closer. Nobody wants peace more than the Ukrainians,’” Trump told US lawmakers in his first address since returning to office. “We do really value how much America has done to help Ukraine maintain its sovereignty and independence.” Addressing Congress, Trump added that, “regarding the agreement on minerals and security, Ukraine is ready to sign it at any time that is convenient for you.”

DONALD TRUMP

The Kremlin on Wednesday called it “positive” that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has declared himself ready for talks on ending the three-year conflict with Russia. “This approach is generally positive,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said to reporters in answer to a question. On Wednesday, Peskov cited a decree passed by Zelensky that rules out direct negotiations with Putin.

The Ukrainian leader has since said on multiple occasions he would be willing to meet Putin — but only after Kyiv and its Western allies agree a common negotiating position. Moscow has also accused Zelensky of not being a legitimate leader, citing the expiration of his five-year mandate following his 2019 election as president. Under Ukrainian martial law, elections are banned during wartime. Zelensky's key European backers have supported the suspension of votes amid Russia's offensive, though Trump has falsely claimed the Ukrainian leader is widely unpopular at home and called on

him to hold elections.

Trump announced a halt to US military aid to Kyiv this week following his clash with Zelensky in the Oval Office on Friday. Fears are growing in Kyiv and across Europe that Trump is trying to force Ukraine to accept a peace deal largely favourable to Moscow.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, a close ally of Russian leader Vladimir Putin, has meanwhile offered to host Russia-Ukraine peace talks. “Tell Trump that I expect him here with Putin and Zelensky,” Lukashenko proposed to the three leaders in a video interview with US blogger Mario Nawfal. “We are going to sit down and calmly make an accord,” said Lukashenko, adding there had to be a deal with Zelensky “since a large part of Ukrainian society is with him”. — AFP

S AFRICA ACCUSES ISRAEL AID BLOCK

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa on Wednesday denounced Israel's restriction of aid into war-ravaged Gaza since the weekend, saying it amounted to using starvation as a weapon of war. “Preventing food from entering Gaza is a continuation of Israel's use of starvation as a weapon of war as part of the ongoing campaign of what the ICJ ruled to be plausible genocide against the Palestinian people,” the foreign ministry said.

An Arab League summit announced the adoption of a “comprehensive” plan for Gaza's reconstruction, to be financed by a trust fund and urged the international community to offer its support. — AFP



ALFRED PRECAUTIONS

Australia readies as rare cyclone veers



A rare tropical cyclone veered towards Australia's densely populated eastern coast, sparking emergency warnings, closing hundreds of schools, and threatening to flood thousands of homes. Tropical Cyclone Alfred would strike on Friday morning near bustling Brisbane city, forecasters said, the first typhoon to hit the region in more than 50 years. Almost 20,000 homes in Brisbane city alone are at risk of being inundated. — AFP

TOTAL CRASH

Philippine jet wreckage, bodies found



Philippine rescuers found the wreckage of a fighter jet and the bodies of two crewmen sent to combat rebels in a mountainous region. Lieutenant General Luis Rex Bergante, commander of Eastern Mindanao Command, said that the two crewmen had been found inside the wreckage. “The bodies were found inside the aircraft. There was an attempt to open a parachute and eject,” he said. “The aircraft smashed through the trees in the mountain.” — AFP

The trinity of underdevelopment



BADR AL ABRI

The writer focuses on reconciliation and understanding and is the author of The Jurisprudence of Extremism

FOR decades, the causes of underdevelopment have often been summed up in a familiar trio: ignorance, disease and poverty. Many countries continue to suffer from these afflictions, exacerbated by civil conflicts, historical burdens, inequality and mismanagement. Yet, these conditions are not the root of underdevelopment; they are merely symptoms of deeper structural failings. After careful reflection on regions marked by persistent injustice and inequality, it becomes clear that the real drivers of underdevelopment lie in a more complex trinity: religion, politics and culture.

Religion, in its broadest sense, plays a powerful role in shaping societies. Sacred texts are timeless, but human interpretations of these texts have shifted across centuries, often shaped by political ambitions and sectarian interests. What began as a message to elevate human dignity and serve the greater good has, in many cases, been repurposed to serve individual or group agendas.

For most Muslims, for example, it is believed that the sacred text was completed during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. However, only a small portion of the text deals directly with practical matters of daily life, leaving space for reason and interpretation to guide the ongoing development of society. Key aspects of modern governance and legal systems were never explicitly detailed, precisely because they were intended to evolve with

time. Yet, historical events and conflicts have often been elevated to the status of religious truth, trapping contemporary societies in disputes that belong to a bygone era.

This is evident today in the increasing popularity of historical dramas that revive figures and conflicts from early Islamic history, often presented through sectarian lenses. Rather than contributing to a richer understanding of the present or future, such productions risk anchoring public consciousness to centuries-old rivalries, distracting from today's urgent challenges of development, justice and human dignity.

The same applies to political thought. At its core, politics should aim to liberate societies from the burdens of the past, drawing on shared human values to build inclusive, just and stable communities. Instead, in many cases, politics remains trapped within sectarian boundaries, serving the interests of dominant groups and fuelling division. Rather than striving for equality and shared citizenship, political systems frequently prioritise narrow identities, often justified by demographic, historical or material considerations. When politics becomes intertwined with religion in this way, it not only narrows political discourse but also distorts the religion itself, further fuelling the cycle of underdevelopment.

Culture, too, plays a decisive role. Ideally, culture should serve as an independent space for critical reflection, challenging outdated religious interpretations and divisive political narratives. Culture has the capacity to foster

Only by rethinking the interplay of religion, politics and culture — and restoring each to a role that serves human dignity and collective progress — can societies hope to break free from the patterns of underdevelopment that have defined much of their modern history.

a broader, human-centred discourse that transcends past conflicts and moves towards building a more inclusive present. However, when cultural voices become entangled in personal interests or seek fame through allegiance to sectarian identities, they cease to act as a force for progress. Instead of guiding societies forward, they become yet another tool reinforcing the very divisions that hold them back.

In such an environment, the roles of religion, politics and culture become inseparable from the mechanisms of underdevelopment.

When religious thought is reduced to the conflicts of the past, when politics is bound by sectarian loyalties, and when culture serves narrow interests rather than universal values, societies inevitably find themselves locked in cycles of ignorance, disease and poverty.

The real challenge for any society lies not merely in tackling these outward symptoms but in addressing the deeper structures that sustain them.

Only by rethinking the interplay of religion, politics and culture — and restoring each to a role that serves human dignity and collective progress — can societies hope to break free from the patterns of underdevelopment that have defined much of their modern history.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari
The original version of the article appeared in Arabic in Oman Arabic on March 5, 2025.

Pope’s illness spreads doubt at Vatican

CLÉMENT MELKI

St Peter’s Square is bustling, but behind the Vatican’s walls, activities have slowed as the Catholic Church grapples with the uncertainty caused by the absence of Pope Francis.

Tourists take photos in the spring sunshine and streams of pilgrims marking the Catholic “Holy Year” head to the basilica, while journalists from around the world file reports on the 88-year-old’s health. Inside the tiny Vatican city state, however, departments running the pope’s notoriously packed daily schedules lie quiet.

“We are at minimum service,” Corporal Eliah Cinotti, spokesman for the Swiss Guard, which handles the pope’s security, said.

“Extraordinary services—masses, audiences, receptions of ambassadors and heads of state—are in free fall,” he said, with cardinals stepping in to lead some masses, but most events cancelled.

But the severity of his condition, and his doctors’ unwillingness to give a medical prognosis, make it difficult to make medium-term plans.

The pontiff has not appeared in public since February 14, when he was admitted to the Gemelli hospital in Rome with breathing difficulties, which developed into double pneumonia.

The window of the Apostolic Palace from which he recites the weekly Angelus prayer has remained closed for three Sundays in a row—a first since his election as head of the world’s nearly 1.4 billion Catholics in 2013.

Instead, the days are marked by two medical bulletins issued by the Vatican in a rare effort at transparency. One in the morning describes how Francis’s night went, followed by a more detailed evening update. In the press room just off St Peter’s Square, reporters used to tackling the subtitles of church law are fast becoming experts in medical terms instead. The Vatican has been through periods like this before. Between May and August 1981, Pope John Paul II spent 77 days at the Gemelli after an assassination attempt.

But the longer it goes on, the more Francis’s hospitalisation—already the longest of his papacy — weighs on morale.

Francis’s health woes have long fuelled speculation he might one day resign and his critical illness has prompted some to prepare for the next conclave — the meeting of cardinals which votes in a new pope. Italian Vatican expert Marco Politi agreed “It is a strange situation”.

“This is not the time for the cardinals to meet in secret, to plan the future,” he said, because it would undermine the “elegance of the great Catholic hierarchy”.

And no-one knows whether he will be present at Easter, the biggest event in the Catholic calendar, in 40 days time. — AFP

Understanding power in international relations

NASSER AL ABRI

POWER is a fundamental concept in international relations and security studies, shaping the behaviour of states and the international system at large. However, understanding power is complex, with various theories offering different perspectives. This article explores three primary views of power: as resources, as a causal relationship, and as a structural force—each contributing uniquely to our understanding of global politics.

POWER AS RESOURCES
The most straightforward perspective views power as resources—economic, military, or technological—that states possess and utilise. Kenneth Neal Waltz, a prominent structural realist, argued that the distribution of these capabilities determines the nature of the international system—whether it is unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar.

In his book Theory of International Politics, Waltz emphasised that the absence of a central authority in the international system forces states to act based on their security interests.

Similarly, Hans Morgenthau, a classical realist, suggested that states pursue national interests defined in terms of power, downplaying moral or ethical considerations. According to Morgenthau, power is the primary currency of international politics, and states must continuously strive to maximise it to survive.

POWER AS A CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP
A more dynamic view sees power as a causal relationship, where one state influences another’s behaviour using both material and non-material means. German sociologist Max Weber described power as “the

Power in international relations is a multifaceted concept encompassing resources, relationships, and structural forces. Understanding these dimensions is essential for navigating the complexities of today’s global landscape.

ability of an individual or group to impose their will on others, even against resistance.” He argued that power must have a sense of legitimacy to be effective and sustainable.

Expanding on Weber’s ideas, political scientist Robert Dahl defined power relationally in his book Modern Political Analysis. According to Dahl, “A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something B would not otherwise do.” This perspective emphasises influence and control rather than mere resources, highlighting the importance of legitimacy and perception in wielding power effectively.

STRUCTURAL POWER: SHAPING THE SYSTEM
A more nuanced perspective, introduced by British scholar Susan Strange, presents power as a structural force. Structural power refers to the ability to shape the frameworks that govern international relations, influencing how states interact and make decisions. According to Strange, the true essence of power lies in controlling these underlying structures rather than merely possessing resources.

Strange identified four key structures of structural power:

- 1.Security Structure: The ability to provide or deny security. For example, the United States’ military capabilities allow it to act as a security guarantor for many allies.
- 2.Production Structure: Control over global production networks and technology. China’s manufacturing dominance illustrates this form of power effectively.
- 3.Financial Structure: Dominance over global financial systems, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The US dollar’s status as the world’s reserve currency is a prime example.
- 4.Knowledge and Ideational

Structure: Control over information, education, and cultural narratives. Western dominance over media and internet infrastructure showcases this power dimension.

This structural perspective shifts the focus from tangible resources to the deeper systems that define how states operate globally.

THE PURSUIT OF POWER
The continuous pursuit of power is not only a characteristic of state behaviour but also, as Thomas Hobbes argued, an intrinsic aspect of human nature. Hobbes believed that the desire for power only ends with death, necessitating a form of political authority to regulate this appetite.

This notion of an insatiable quest for power underpins much of the realist thinking in international relations. However, not all scholars view power in conflictual terms.

Talcott Parsons offered a different perspective, defining power as a systemic resource that enables cooperation and order rather than merely a tool for conflict. This broader interpretation suggests that power is not just about domination but also about the ability to shape outcomes and influence the behaviour of others constructively.

CONCLUSION
Power in international relations is a multifaceted concept encompassing resources, relationships, and structural forces. Understanding these dimensions is essential for navigating the complexities of today’s global landscape.

As the international system evolves, so too must our understanding of power—beyond mere resources to the deeper structures that define how states interact. In a world marked by shifting alliances and emerging powers, recognising the diverse forms of power is crucial for maintaining stability and advancing national interests.

OPINION

A Ramadhan of cool winds and warmer questions



**RUMAITHA
AL BUSAIDI**

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

I step outside just before sunset, expecting the evening’s familiar warmth. Instead, a cool breeze brushes past me, an unexpected reminder of Ramadhan long forgotten. I pause, letting it settle around me and for a moment, I am transported back to a time when the nights were lighter, the fasts felt easier and the world did not seem to be changing so fast.

The last time I remember Ramadhan like this, I was still in primary school. My mother would set the table with dates and laban, and I would sit by the open window, feeling the crisp air drift through. The scent of the sea carried across the city, filling our home with a quiet comfort. Fasting felt effortless then. The nights were cool, and there was no need to seek relief from the heat.

Over the years, that relief faded. By the time I was an adult, stepping outside before iftar meant stepping into a wall of heat. The air grew heavier, the streets held onto the afternoon sun and Ramadhan became an act of endurance. The days stretched longer, the warmth deepened, and the breezy Ramadhans of my childhood became nothing

more than a distant memory.

This year, however, something feels different. The wind has returned, carrying with it the echoes of a time when the air was not so heavy and the nights were not so warm. It is a welcome change, but is it a return or just an anomaly? Climate patterns are shifting, bringing unpredictability. This breeze, as welcome as it is, is not a sign of balance returning. It is an exception, not a trend. What follows may not be as forgiving.

In Morocco, King Mohammed VI has called on citizens to forgo the Eid sacrifice this year, an unprecedented decision driven by necessity. Seven consecutive years of drought have devastated livestock numbers, making meat scarce and expensive. A thirty-eight per cent drop in livestock in just one year has forced a reconsideration of tradition, not because faith has changed, but because the land can no longer sustain the demands placed upon it. Oman has not yet faced such a decision, but we are not far from it. The signs are already here, in the shifting seasons, in the unpredictable rains, and in the growing conversation around water security. If a

Ramadhan is a time to reflect on how we live, a reminder of the balance between abundance and restraint. As we break our fasts under unusually cool skies, we must ask if we can preserve our traditions without exhausting the land that sustains them

country as rich in history and tradition as Morocco can rethink an essential ritual in the face of climate pressure, what will we have to reconsider in the years to come?

Ramadhan is a time to reflect on how we live, a reminder of the balance between abundance and restraint. As we break our fasts under unusually cool skies, we must ask if we can preserve our traditions without exhausting the land that sustains them. This breeze feels like both a gift and a warning. If we do not rethink how we consume, conserve and adapt, such moments may disappear. Faith has always been about balance and now more than ever, we should honour it not just in devotion but in how we care for the world entrusted to us.

As the adhan calls for Maghrib, I take my first sip of laban and hold onto the breeze a little longer. I do not know when I will feel it again, but I do know that what we choose today will determine whether the generations after us will experience Ramadhan like this one, or whether they will only hear stories of a time when the wind still carried the scent of the sea.

SPOTLIGHT ON RISKS FACING SMARTPHONES

MONA GUICHARD

Keeping smartphone users safe from phishing, deepfakes and malicious software is top of mind for many manufacturers and network operators this week at the world’s biggest wireless technology conference.

Cybersecurity may not be splashed across the vast screens lining the convention centre’s halls alongside omnipresent artificial intelligence features, but it has had top billing in some product announcements at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) in Barcelona.

Chinese smartphone maker Honor showed off a new tool ahead of MWC’s opening that it said would allow its smartphones to detect deepfakes — deceptive AI images and video based on the likeness of real people.

Users can request verification of a piece of content with a single click, offering it up for scan by an AI tool that Honor says can detect fakes with 99-per cent accuracy.

The GSMA telecom operators’ association, which hosts MWC in Barcelona every year, has developed a tool called “Scam signals”.

Built alongside Britain’s banking industry group, UK Finance, “Scam signals” is a service that applications can call on to detect signs of phone-based fraud, when scammers call up customers to push them to authorise transactions on their mobile banking apps.

Based on data including the length of a phone call, the system can prompt banks to “stop the transaction in progress, make sure everything is OK, before then making the transfer”, said GSMA head of industry security Samantha Knight.

Some UK networks have already adopted the tool. But fraudsters have a whole spread of methods to attack smartphones, targets of choice for their ubiquity and largely lacking protection.

Online banking fraud grew the fastest of any attack against mobile devices in 2024, according to cybersecurity firm Kaspersky.

In its annual report published to coincide with MWC, it calculated that so-called “Trojan Horse” attacks using malicious software to steal login details for bank apps had tripled year-on-year.

Users remain vulnerable to applications that can conceal harmful functions. The level of risk varies depending on the operating system, with the widely used Android remaining more vulnerable than Apple’s iOS, according to many experts.

And with many smartphone owners not using dedicated security software, the dangers can remain invisible, said Roxane Suau of cybersecurity firm Pradeo.

Users can take some control of their security with straightforward changes to their phones’ settings, she said. — AFP

Presdient Trump hiding something on Ukraine

WHENEVER President Donald Trump talks about Ukraine there is always something off, something missing, that makes you wonder what he is really up to — and his brief remarks on Ukraine to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday night was no exception.

He crazily exaggerated how much the US has contributed to Ukraine’s war effort as opposed to what our European allies have given.

When he talked about the human toll of the war, he first mourned “Russian young people” and then “Ukrainian young people” — as if they were both hit by a meteor, the one before the other.

And he declared that he has received “strong signals” from Vladimir Putin that he wants peace, but offered no details.

If there is one thing that I have learned in journalism it is that when you don’t call things by their real name, there is usually a reason — you are hiding something, some motivation, some intent.

How to explain that in Trump’s case? Well, he is either the most pliant Western negotiator against the enemies of liberty since Neville Chamberlain, making concessions to the aggressor before talks have even started, or he actually prefers the friendship of Putin over our European allies and courageous Ukrainian democrats.

Because right now the Trump administration is behaving in ways that trouble a great many patriotic Americans — sticking a knife in the back of a nation struggling for liberty, Ukraine, by cutting off its vital US weapons supplies and trying to extort its minerals, before Russia has even agreed to a ceasefire.

Imagine Trump was trying to sell a Trump Tower to a Russian — let’s call him Vladimir — and Trump brought along his banker. What would Trump think if, before the negotiating began, his banker



Residents carry out items from a house hit by a Russian drone strike in Odesa, Ukraine, on Wednesday. — Reuters



**THOMAS L.
FRIEDMAN**

The author is reporter, and NYT columnist

proclaimed, “Donald, you have no cards, we’ve just cut off your line of credit and before we even let you start negotiating to sell this building, you need to take out a second mortgage on it and give me all the money.”

That is exactly what Trump did to Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Something doesn’t smell right in this story. I don’t know where it ends, but I think I know where it starts: When it comes to the defence of liberty,

Trump does not share the values of the best of his 44 predecessors. And if that is right, Ukrainians, in the end, will never buy what Trump is selling. Our European allies won’t, either. Only Putin might, but, as Trump said in his speech, to make peace, “You have to talk to both sides.” He meant Putin, but Trump should actually start with our own allies.

They are the ones who don’t understand him. Putin does.

A time for spiritual renewal



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

THERE are certain realities we did not consider because there was no time to think about them, or they were beyond our self-centred bubble. Life is brief, and so are relationships. As we worship the holy month of Ramadhan, it is a time for self-reflection - a time for spiritual renewal.

As people age, religious celebrations gain new meanings. Each person observes their faith and traditions according to their principles, but what is interesting is that over time, people reflect on their experiences - moments, rather than years.

Everyone, young or old, can learn valuable lessons from life. These teachings, in my opinion, are about love, forgiveness, thankfulness, and ageing. No matter how young you are today, you will be old one day, assuming you are fortunate not to have your life interrupted.

People can spend the entire lives making money and building empires. They dedicate so much time and passion to organisations, yet once you deemed too old for the necessary commitment, they fade into obscurity, unlikely to be mentioned or remembered. Everything fades away in this world; family, friends, and coworkers become too absorbed in their own lives. However,

death and taxes go along with you regardless.

Building relationships over prioritising achievements would be ideal. Still, we live in a consumerist and materialistic society where relationships are judged on mutual benefits. One can have several properties and titles and the world as his playground. Still, when one reaches the winter of his life and is unable to walk, eat, or even take a bath without assistance, the accumulated wealth means little, except that you can pay for someone to bathe you.

Spending your final years in a wheelchair without enjoying the life you've worked so hard to create can be difficult to accept. The independence you previously had to get out of bed, drive yourself, meet friends, and walk about has been taken away, possibly because your entire attention was on developing a career, an empire. However, you no longer have the physical strength to enjoy the fruits of your effort.

Don't get me wrong - money can provide comfort, but good health comes first. But voila, some people and organisations profit from unhealthy lifestyles and the exploitation of medical and pharmaceutical services and supplies. We should not take our youth and health for granted.

Most of us are attached to material things such as a big house, a nice car, and expensive

Each person observes their faith and traditions according to their principles, but what is interesting is that over time, people reflect on their experiences - moments, rather than years

clothes; however, the possessions we tend to keep collecting will eventually mean nothing.

You, like all things, are left behind. Your dedication to work may slip away the week after you stop using that old chair. It is not about being forgotten; rather, it is about how much determination you have put into your life to generate money and establish empires, whether for yourself or others. If you are fortunate not to be forgotten, people will remember you for how you made them feel, not for your possessions or the long working hours or weekends you spent.

Within these thoughts, ageing is more than becoming older; it is about how one spends the time left. Some people may experience the weight of loneliness and regrets, while others may treasure the wisdom of a well-lived life. Some people have serenity in their hearts, while others wish they had done things differently.

Happiness is appreciating the small things in life and recognising what we already have. I've also realised that while forgiveness brings peacefulness, holding on to anger poisons the soul and our existence. No amount of money or dedication to work can replace the warmth of human connection. "If you see someone without a smile, give them yours." Every day is a gift, and life can change in a flash.

UK'S STARMER DOES A BALANCING ACT OVER UKRAINE

ELIZABETH PIPER

"Cool heads" is the mantra of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer as he tries to heal a rapidly growing rift between the United States, Europe and Ukraine. Starmer, who has played up his role as go-between over Ukraine, faces a diplomatic balancing act to keep both Europe and US President Donald Trump on side and protect Britain from US tariffs that would damage his country's strained finances.

He has formed an unexpected alliance with French President Emmanuel Macron, a sharp critic of Britain's departure from the European Union, and a solid relationship with Trump, who UK officials say likes Starmer's lack of pretension.

"You are a very tough negotiator... I'm not sure I like that, but okay," Trump told Starmer at a press conference after they met at the White House last Thursday. Starmer had earned his salary with his efforts to end the threat of US tariffs, Trump said, without saying that he had succeeded.

Since Trump upended Washington's supportive approach to Ukraine earlier this year, Starmer has helped to defend Kyiv's position while not offending the US leader, who wants a swift peace deal, with or without President Volodymyr Zelenskiy. After convening talks with European leaders in London on Sunday, Starmer said Britain, France and others would work on a proposed peace deal to deliver to Trump and "a coalition of the willing" to defend it. He and Macron hope their leadership can help them rescue their reputations at home and cement European security as Germany recovers from months of domestic political uncertainty.

But Starmer's announcement did not say which other nations would offer peacekeepers or step up weapons deliveries quickly. Some countries have reservations about sending troops - Poland, which a person familiar with national security said was coming under "significant pressure" to send its forces to Ukraine, says no decision will be made before elections in May.

Britain is still hopeful of getting others on board, but time is of the essence, with Trump ramping up the pressure by pausing the delivery of military support to Ukraine. Starmer urged nations on Sunday "to keep the pace behind these actions", adding "this is not a moment for more talk - It is time to act".

A trained lawyer sometimes criticised for a lack of humour, Starmer's dispassionate and methodical approach at the White House talks and subsequent meetings in London with Zelenskiy and European leaders at the weekend, has been widely praised. "This weekend he has not really put a foot wrong," former foreign minister James Cleverly from the opposition Conservative Party told parliament on Monday.

While Starmer has yet to win US security guarantees for Ukraine, he has worked to repair the unprecedented rift in US-Ukraine relations encapsulated by the heated exchange between Zelenskiy and Trump in last Friday. — Reuters

The paradox of progress

IN my previous article, I expressed the urgent need to reassess our relationship with technological systems and how we interact with them, given the profound effects they may have, effects that could steer human societies away from a healthy, humane way of life.

In this current article, we continue to explore this digital apprehension that is rapidly emerging and knocking on our doors. We must redefine our human compass according to rational frameworks and ethical principles. Our accumulated knowledge insists that scientific and technological progress embodies humanity's triumph over ignorance, disease, and poverty. Yet, with this progress, our existential problems multiply in a new guise that threatens our psychological and social stability. This raises questions about the 'price' of scientific advancement - despite all its benefits - how can progress have a dark side? And why do we feel lost and anxious as we draw closer to achieving the "technological dream"?

Decades ago, progress was seen as a means of salvation and admirable evolution. People placed their hopes in scientific advancements to solve many problems: to extend life, improve health, and ease labour burdens. Many of these wishes became reality, with increased lifespans, less fatal diseases, and machines taking over arduous tasks. However, on the other hand, scientific progress has widened the psychological and social gap. Happiness levels have declined while depression, anxiety, tension, loss of meaning, and passion have risen. Crime and suicide rates have also increased.

Technology was expected to grant us more time for rest and reflection, yet it has trapped us in an endless cycle of digital addiction, social comparisons, and meaninglessness. Instead of achieving the desired comfort, we have become slaves to smartphones, social media, and constant work. Traditional human societies, built on stable social and cultural systems that provided a sense of identity and belonging, have been dismantled by digital globalisation and technological advancement. This has led individuals to feel isolated and alienated, despite an increased connectivity among human communities due to digital activity and widespread communication platforms. At the



DR MUAMAR AL TOBI

The writer is an academic and researcher

Scientific progress has widened the psychological and social gap. Happiness levels have declined while depression, anxiety, tension, loss of meaning, and passion have risen. Crime and suicide rates have also increased



Technology should serve humanity, not imprison it

same time, these communities have become emotionally fragmented; moral values have eroded, and deep intellectual and cognitive achievements have weakened. Life has turned into an unyielding race of consumption and continuous evolution, causing humanity to lose its most innate question: Why?

I once described the modern human as a "digital human" due to our intense attachment to digital technologies that bring us vast, albeit superficial, knowledge, something that was rare in previous eras. Despite all available technological means, many still feel lost in the maze of life, overwhelmed by its dazzling yet idealistic new realities. Absolute truths seem to have vanished; philosophy has been sidelined by open-source science, and profound existential questions have turned into "non-issues" that fail to captivate our intellect. Worse, people risk losing their sense of self and purpose, how can one understand the physical world when one cannot comprehend oneself?

With the advent and rapid development of AI, this paradox has deepened and its solutions have narrowed. Once, humanity was considered the smartest being capable of understanding and solving life's mysteries without rival, yet now it faces smart artificial entities that surpass human thinking, decision-making, and creativity. This raises an important question: Are we still unique? And will humanity lose its value in a world dominated by smart algorithms? Our current reality forces us to conclude that advancements in AI and its derivatives, such as smart robots and digital communication systems, are not merely scientific achievements but existential challenges that compel us to redefine

our understanding of life's problems. Humanity's progress was once based on the uniqueness of the human mind and its central role in existence; if we lose that advantage to artificial intelligence, what remains of us? Such questions were once only theoretical, discussed within ancient philosophies, but today they have become practical issues that could determine the fate of societies and individuals. All these reflections on the paradox of scientific progress do not confine the problem solely to progress itself but focus on how we use the accompanying technologies and our ability to balance digital practices with human ones in all their dimensions. Technology should serve humanity, not imprison it in unnatural lifestyles. We need a new philosophy that keeps pace with progress, restoring balance between forgotten spirit and the chaotic, uncontrolled march of science; between materialism and meaning; between artificial intelligence and emotional intelligence.

Success and progress should be redefined not only by economic growth or scientific discoveries but by the inner peace and psychological balance they bring to our lives. We must pause and reflect before every step towards technological evolution, asking ourselves: Does this progress make us happier, or is it an endless, uncertain race? The true paradox lies not in progress itself, but in our inability to use it wisely.

As the German philosopher Martin Heidegger once said, technology is not merely a tool, it is a new way of seeing the world. If we do not control this vision and its paths, we will find ourselves in a technologically advanced world devoid of the spirit and meaning that give purpose to existence and beneficial progress.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



The team receives trophy from Noah Alireza, CEO Golf Saudi

Oman’s junior golfers win gold in GCC Championship

MUSCAT: In a groundbreaking achievement, Oman’s Under-18 junior golf team clinched its first-ever GCC Gold Medal at the GCC Golf Championships held at the Royal Greens Golf and Country Club in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The formidable trio of Mahir Sampat, Adam al Barwani and Pransh Jagwani led Oman to victory, securing the top podium finish with a cumulative score of 741 (Adam al Barwani: 234, Mahir Sampat: 253, Pransh Jagwani: 254), narrowly edging out Kuwait, who claimed the silver medal.

The championship saw fierce competition with all six GCC nations participating in the high-stakes, three-day tournament. The Oman team’s historic victory underscores their discipline, perseverance and exceptional talent, setting a new benchmark for junior golf in Oman.

An ecstatic Mahir Sampat reflected on the victory, stating, “Winning first place is an incredible achievement, but I know it wouldn’t have been possible without the hard work, discipline and perseverance that went into every step of the way.”

The Oman team collectively expressed their gratitude, emphasising that this triumph was a shared success, saying, “This victory is not just ours; it belongs to everyone who has been a part of this journey. It is a reminder that with passion, determination and the right mindset, anything is possible.”

With their sights set on future championships, Oman’s junior golfers have firmly established themselves as a rising force in the region’s golfing landscape.



Adam and Mahir Sampat hold the trophy at the Royal Greens Golf & Country Club in Jeddah

OPAZ launches Ramadhan Sports Tournament for employees

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 5

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) launched the Ramadhan Sports Tournament for employees. The sporting event aims to strengthen the relationship among employees through a variety of engaging and enjoyable sports activities. The tournament featured wide range of sports including football for men employees and padel championship for women employees beside other entraining activities like volleyball and

e-sports for men employees in collaboration with The Omani Committee for Games and Electronic Sports. This diverse lineup will allow greater number of employees to participate according to their sports interests.

This event acted as an opportunity to promote physical fitness and encourage employees to adopt a healthy and active lifestyle while fostering social connections in a competitive yet entertaining environment.

The tournament also aligns with the Authority’s commitment to supporting cancer patients and promoting sports participation



among employees, reinforcing a positive work environment, teamwork and collaboration. The tournament is expected to

feature intense competition and high-level performances with participants showcasing their athletic skills and competitive spirit. Employees of the Authority will also be present to support and cheer for their colleagues, adding vibrant atmosphere to the event.

The organising committee confirmed that the tournament will run throughout the holy month of Ramadhan. The concluding ceremony will include delivering the awards to the winning teams as this event will emphasise the significance of sports and the promotion of positive values among employees.

Real Madrid, Arsenal prevail in last 16 of CL

HOLDERS Real Madrid prevailed 2-1 against cross-town rivals Atletico Madrid in the first leg of their Champions League (CL) last 16 tie on Tuesday, while Arsenal thrashed PSV 7-1.

Madrid took the early lead in the fourth minute through Rodrygo, but Julian Alvarez levelled for Atletico with a stunning shot in the 32nd.

The record Champions League winners, however, had the final word as Brahim Diaz curled the winner into the net in the 55th.

Captain Martin Odegaard scored a brace as Arsenal were a very unpleasant guest at PSV. Jurrien Timber, Ethan Nwaneri and Mikel Merino gave the Premier League team a 3-0 lead in the first 30 minutes.

Noa Lang pulled one back for PSV before the break but Odegaard’s efforts in the 47th and 73rd plus goals from Leandro Trossard and Ricardo Calafiori had the Gunners very close to the quarter-finals.

In the other late game, Borussia Dortmund and Lille played out a 1-1 draw. Earlier, Aston Villa claimed a 3-1 away win against Club Brugge.

Los Blancos win first leg of Madrid derby

The second leg of the Madrid derby next week is poised to be an intense game, but for now Real will celebrate the narrow advantage.



Real Madrid’s Kylian Mbappe in action with Atletico Madrid’s Samuel Lino and Antoine Griezmann.



Borussia Dortmund’s Julian Ryerson reacts.

Nwaneri, who hit the Gunners’ second high into the net in the 21st.

Arsenal had a 3-0 lead after PSV saw a bit of a mess inside their box and failed to clear the ball, which fell for Merino to slot into the bottom corner in the 31st.

Lang scored from the spot in the 43rd aiming to get PSV back in the game, but hopes didn’t last long as Odegaard tapped in a fourth for Arsenal early in the second half.

Trossard added his name to the scoresheet in the 48th, while Odegaard completed his brace in the 73rd. At this point, many PSV fans decided to leave the stadium, but Arsenal kept it going as substitute Calafiori called it a day in the 85th.

“Massive performance, proud of the guys we showed we are capable of a lot and put ourselves in a good position for next week,” Timber told broadcasters Prime Video. Rice added: “We’ve been playing like this all season. We feel we’ve been playing well as a team sometimes we score five sometimes two sometimes we don’t score but tonight we did well.”

Dortmund held at home Last year’s finalists Dortmund set their sights on a home win as Karim Adeyemi collected the ball to break the deadlock in the 22nd with a first-time strike.

But Lille had a spirited response in the second half and took a deserved equaliser in the 68th. Jonathan David found the on rushing Hakon Arnar Haraldsson, who was off balance but managed to find the goal. “The 1-1 draw has put us in a very good position for the second leg. But we will have to deliver a very big game at home if we want to reach the quarter-finals,” Lille coach Bruno Génésio said.

In the early game, Aston Villa took the lead in the third minute through Leon Bailey’s half-volley, but hosts Brugge levelled thanks to Maxim De Cuyper in the 12th. Villa, however, were again ahead after Brandon Mechele slid to block Morgan Rogers’ low cross but diverted the ball into his own net in the 82nd.

Villa still had time to extend their advantage ahead of the second leg next week as Marco Asensio scored from the spot in the 88th.— dpa



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SHORTTAKES



Australia’s Smith retires from ODIs after semifinal loss

SYDNEY: Steve Smith has retired from one-day internationals following the defeat to India in the Champions Trophy semi-finals, Cricket Australia said on Wednesday.

The 35-year-old batsman, who led the team in the absence of regular skipper Pat Cummins, will continue to play Tests and T20 internationals. Smith told his team-mates of his decision to retire immediately after Australia’s four-wicket defeat in Dubai on Tuesday, having top-scored with 73 in his side’s 264 all out. “It has been a great ride and I have loved every minute of it,” Smith said in a Cricket Australia press release. After making his debut against the West Indies in 2010 as a leg-spinning all-rounder, Smith went on to play 170 ODIs, scoring 5,800 runs at an average of 43.28.

He smacked 12 centuries and 35 half-centuries, and was a member of Australia’s 2015 and 2023 World Cup-winning teams. “There have been so many amazing times and wonderful memories,” Smith said. “Winning two World Cups was a great highlight along with the many fantastic team-mates who shared the journey. “Now is a great opportunity for people to start preparing for the 2027 World Cup so it feels like the right time to make way. “Test cricket remains a priority and I am really looking forward to the World Test Championship Final (in June), the West Indies in the winter and then England at home. “I feel I still have a lot to contribute on that stage.” Smith, who also took 28 wickets at 34.67, was the Australian men’s ODI player of the year in 2015 and 2021. He was also in the ICC men’s ODI team of the year in 2015. “We fully understand and support Steve’s decision,” said Australia’s chairman of selectors George Bailey.

“Steve has said on many occasions he is approaching the remainder of his playing career on a series-by-series basis, a position which hasn’t changed and one Cricket Australia supports. “His record as a batter... is exemplary and to leave the format as a two-time World Cup winner cements his legacy as one of the great Australian ODI players.” — AFP



New Zealand’s Rachin Ravindra (L) celebrates with Kane Williamson after scoring a century at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Wednesday. — AFP

Kiwis beat South Africa, to meet India in CT final

NEW Zealand beat South Africa by 50 runs in the second semi-final of the Champions Trophy on Wednesday to secure their place in Sunday’s final against India.

Electing to bat, New Zealand racked up a tournament record 362-6 riding scintillating hundreds by Rachin Ravindra and Kane Williamson at the Gaddafi Stadium.

David Miller smashed an unbeaten 100 off 67 balls while Rassie van der Dussen and Temba Bavuma struck half-centuries but South Africa managed 312-9. New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner used seven bowlers but led by example with a match-turning 3-43.

South Africa’s bowling line-up struggled right from the start as Ravindra and Will Young (21) put on 48 for the opening stand. It was followed by a magnificent 164-run stand for the second wicket between Ravindra and Williamson that put the New Zealanders on track for a massive total, as



David Miller smashed an unbeaten 100 off 67 balls

the duo scored at will with some delightful strokes. Ravindra completed his fifth ODI hundred — all coming in ICC events — from 93 balls with a two off Kagiso Rabada. Williamson reached his 15th ODI hundred with a ramped boundary, his third three-figure score in as many matches against South Africa.

It was Rabada who finally ended the

partnership by dismissing Ravindra caught behind. Ravindra hit 13 fours and one six in total.

Williamson chipped Wiaan Mulder into the hands of Lungi Ngidi in the 40th over after hitting 10 fours and two sixes.

Mitchell and Phillips added some late impetus after South Africa had briefly dragged things back to give themselves hope of limiting the score to under 350.

Fast bowler Ngidi finished with 3-72, while Rabada ended with figures of 2-70. Australia posted the previous highest Champions Trophy total with a successful chase of 356-5 against England in the group stage, also in Lahore, giving the Proteas hope that they can still reach the final.

Brief scores: New Zealand 362-6 in 50 overs (R Ravindra 108, K Williamson 102; L Ngidi 3-72) v South Africa 312-9 in 50 overs (D Miller 100 not out, R van der Dussen 69, T Bavuma 56; M Santner 3-43, G Phillips 2-27, M Henry 2-43) — Agencies

Renaissance Cricket crowned champions in OC 2-Day Tournament

MUSCAT: Renaissance Cricket (RT) team emerged victorious in the inaugural edition of the prestigious OC 2-Day Tournament, showcasing resilience, skill and tactical brilliance to claim the championship title. The tournament, a marquee event in Oman’s domestic cricket calendar with prize money of RO 1000 announced for the first time, witnessed four of the top teams of the Premier Division battling over two rounds of league matches to claim title, reaffirming the nation’s growing cricketing standards.

The OC 2-Day Tournament, known for its elongated format, tested the endurance and strategic



depth of participating teams. The event brought together Oman’s first division cricketers, providing them with the platform to adapt to the longer format and hone their techniques.

Renaissance Cricket team claimed the title by bagging 22 points with 4 clean wins and 2 ties, while Muscat CT ended up on No 2 with 14 points winning 2 matches. Majees CT and IAS CT were the other participating teams.

Steven Thomas, CEO — Renaissance Group and Chef de Mission for Renaissance Cricket, reflecting on the teams performance said, “I am thrilled that our Renaissance team has won the

inaugural 2-Day tournament. It was another fantastic event organised by Oman Cricket and we congratulate all the teams, players, officials, support staff and organisers involved. Our boys are worthy champions and I am incredibly proud of them.”

With Renaissance Cricket setting a new benchmark for excellence, the OC 2-Day Tournament will continue to be a cornerstone of Oman’s cricketing calendar. As the sport flourishes in the Sultanate, such tournaments will play a crucial role in shaping the next generation of cricketers, paving the way for greater achievements on the global stage.



LEBRON FIRST NBA PLAYER TO SCORE 50,000 POINTS

LEBRON James reached another milestone in his unprecedented NBA career on Tuesday, becoming the first player to score 50,000 total points after hitting a three pointer in the first quarter of the Lakers’ blowout win over the Pelicans in Los Angeles.

James entered the contest with 49,999 combined regular season and playoff points and drained a shot from deep to add another landmark moment to his storied career.

“It’s a hell of a lot of points,” James said after the game.

“I’m super blessed to be able to put that many points up in the best league in the world and with the best players in the world throughout my career.

“So it’s pretty special.”

James, 40, already owns the record for most regular season points after taking the NBA scoring title from fellow Laker



LeBron (23) during first half. — Reuters

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in February 2023.

The Akron, Ohio native also holds the all-time playoff scoring record, which he snatched from Chicago Bulls legend Michael Jordan in May of 2017.

James has shown no sign of slowing down in his 22nd season in the league.

He was named NBA Western Conference Player of the Month for February, extending his league record to 41 monthly awards, including three with the Lakers.

He is also the oldest player to win the award, passing the previous record set by Karl Malone (age 37) with the Utah Jazz in November of 2000.

Four-time NBA champion James and the Lakers have been on a tear since acquiring Luka Doncic from the Dallas Mavericks in a stunning trade for Anthony Davis last month.

The growing chemistry between James and Doncic was on full display on Tuesday as they

combined for 64 points and 21 assists in the 136-115 victory.

“He is getting more and more comfortable not only with the team, not only with the sets, but with everything. The fans, LA,” James said.

“Everyday is going to get better for him health-wise because he is getting better with his calf. It’s good for our team.”

Doncic suffered a left calf strain during a Christmas Day game that sidelined him for nearly six weeks.

Tuesday’s win extends the Lakers’ current winning streak to seven games and the team has shot up to second place in the Western Conference standings.

James, who has been a leader on defence as well as a potent scorer this season, said he likes how the team is coming together.

“We’re just trying to continue to mesh well offensively and defensively and hold each other accountable,” James said.

“I think it’s working out for us so far.” — Reuters

BUSINESS

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MARKETDEBUT



The offering saw strong participation from both institutional and retail investors.

ASYAD SHIPPING IPO SEES STRONG DEMAND, RAISES RO 128.1 MILLION

MUSCAT: Asyad Shipping Company has set the final offer price for its initial public offering (IPO) at 123 baisas per share, the upper end of the announced price range of 117-123 baisas. The IPO raised RO 128.1 million (\$332.8 million) for Asyad Group, with the company's market capitalisation expected to reach RO 641 million (\$1.66 billion) upon listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange on March 12, 2025. The offering, which was oversubscribed 1.4 times, saw strong participation from both institutional and retail investors. A total of 1.04 billion shares, representing 20% of Asyad Shipping's total issued capital, were offered. Institutional investors, including key anchor investors Mars Development and Investment Company (10%) and Falcon Investment Company (20%), were allocated 75% of the offering, while 25% was reserved for individual investors. The Financial Services Authority approved the final allocation of shares, ensuring that small and large retail investors received 100% of their subscribed shares. Institutional allocations were managed in consultation with the joint global coordinator as per the conditions outlined in the prospectus. This IPO marks the first in Oman to appoint a price stabilisation manager. Asyad Group has allocated RO 10 million to Ubar Capital, which will act as the price stabilisation manager and liquidity provider for up to 30 days post-listing.— ONA

Oman inflation averages 1.4% from 2021 to 2024

THE Sultanate of Oman recorded an average inflation rate of 1.4% from 2021 until the end of 2024, maintaining a moderate level and staying within the 2.8% target set for the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025). The Omani economy continued to grow at a rate exceeding inflation, with the average real GDP growth at constant prices reaching 3.9% from 2021 to 2023, while GDP growth stood at 1.9% from January to September 2024. According to the Ministry of Economy, the global decline in inflation over the past year, driven by central banks raising interest rates, has helped reduce the pressure of imported inflation on local markets and industries. This, in turn, has supported monetary easing policies and lower lending rates. Inflation has been one of the biggest risks to global economic growth in recent years, and Oman continues to closely monitor its levels across the governorates to ensure it remains within targets. Precautionary policies and measures have played a crucial role in containing inflationary pressures, thereby safeguarding local purchasing power and economic stability. For the 2025 fiscal year, Oman's government has increased public spending to RO 11.8 billion from RO 11.65 billion in 2024. The budget includes RO 577 million for the social protection system, RO 73 million for development and housing loan interest support, RO 520 million for the electricity sector, and RO 194 million for water and sanitation. Additionally, RO 216 million has been allocated to subsidise petroleum products, food commodities, transportation and waste management. As part of its monetary policy, Oman has maintained the Omani rial's peg to the US dollar, aligning its interest rate



The global decline in inflation over the past year has helped reduce the pressure of imported inflation on local markets and industries.

policies with the US Federal Reserve. In 2024, the Central Bank of Oman reduced the repurchase rate for local banks to 5.00% following the global trend towards monetary easing. Annual inflation data indicates a continued decline, with the consumer price index showing an average inflation rate of 0.60% from January to December 2024, compared to 0.94% in the same period in 2023. The decline was driven by lower price increases in key sectors, such as food and non-alcoholic beverages, where inflation dropped to 2.8% from 3.2% in 2023. The transportation sector also recorded a price decline of 2.61% in 2024, following a 2.85% drop in 2023, while the housing, water, electricity, gas and fuel sectors saw only a minimal increase of 0.32%. Inflation rates varied across Oman's governorates in 2024. Musandam recorded the highest inflation at 1.32%, up from 0.76% in 2023, followed by Al Sharqiyah North at 1.29%, Al Wusta at 1.28% and

Al Sharqiyah South at 1.20%. Dhofar saw inflation decline to 0.90% from 1.04% in 2023, while Muscat registered the lowest rate at 0.32%, down from 1.05%. In terms of trade, import prices rose slightly by 1.1% in the third quarter of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023. This was mainly due to a 5.7% increase in food and live animal prices, a 6.7% rise in beverages and tobacco, and an 11% jump in miscellaneous manufactured goods. However, mineral fuel prices saw a sharp decline of 22.2%. The producer price index also showed a 1.7% decrease by the end of the fourth quarter of 2024, with manufacturing industry prices falling by 3.8%, electricity prices dropping by 5.2%, and water prices declining by 4.4%. Meanwhile, the mining and quarrying sector recorded a slight decline of 0.1%. These figures reflect ongoing adjustments in global and local markets as Oman navigates its economic strategy within the framework of the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan. — ONA

Oman’s new coastal development to boost tourism and urban growth

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 5

SALALAH, on Oman's southern coast, is set to undergo a major transformation with the development of a sustainable and walkable waterfront city, a project aligned with Oman Vision 2040. In a statement, Sasaki, the international design firm leading the masterplan, emphasised that the development will integrate urban growth with environmental preservation while positioning Salalah as a model for sustainable urbanism. The New City Salalah project will span 7.3 square kilometres and feature 12,000 residential units, accommodating approximately 60,000 residents. The development will include 3.5 million square metres of parks and open spaces, 200,000 square metres of retail space and two hospitals. A six-kilometre-long public beach will be a key highlight, reinforcing Salalah's reputation as a year-round leisure destination.

SUSTAINABILITY AND URBAN INNOVATION
The masterplan integrates strategies to



The development will integrate urban growth with environmental preservation while positioning Salalah as a model for sustainable urbanism. Image © Sasaki Associates

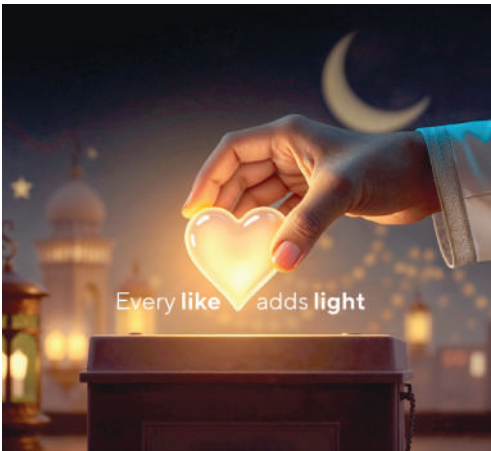
address climate resilience, particularly safeguarding the city from rising sea levels and extreme weather events during the khareef season. A wetland park and natural infrastructure solutions will be implemented to manage flooding risks and protect coastal ecosystems. The project is part of the broader Greater Salalah Structural Plan, which seeks to enhance infrastructure, mobility and spatial planning as the city's population is projected

to reach 674,000 by 2040. The phased development will commence later this year, starting with the construction of 5,827 residential units in the first phase. Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, highlighted the project's role in Oman's economic diversification: "Our plans for the evolution of Salalah epitomise Oman Vision 2040, designed to deliver a sustainable and prosperous future for the people of Oman. "It serves as an exemplar of how combining tourism and urban development is driving the diversification of Oman's economy and bringing forward compelling opportunities for the international community." "With works due to begin this year, we look forward to bringing New City Salalah to fruition alongside the Omani people and leading international partners, investors and developers," he added. A FORWARD-THINKING URBAN MODEL The project is being developed in collaboration with F&M Middle East, MIC-HUB and Cundall, as part of a broader effort by the Ministry of Housing and Urban

Planning to develop Smart Cities across the country, including in Suhar and Nizwa. The mobility framework for Salalah will prioritise pedestrian-friendly spaces, reduce car dependency, and introduce shared and on-demand transport solutions. Romil Sheth, Principal Designer at Sasaki, underscored the importance of designing a city that reflects Salalah's natural and cultural assets: "Salalah is blessed with incredible natural features and a deep history. To complement these significant assets, the Salalah New City plan adopts forward-looking urban design, placemaking, and planning practices that challenge status-quo urbanism and reflect an aspirational lifestyle for Dhofar's inhabitants." "The plan will serve as Oman's living laboratory for urban innovation and a model for sustainable urbanism in the broader region," he added. With its mix of sustainable design, smart city elements and tourism-driven urban planning, New City Salalah is poised to be a flagship development, offering a vibrant, human-scaled and environmentally responsible vision for Oman's future cities.

ADVERTORIALS

DRIVINGIMPACT



Sohar International & Sohar Islamic launch “Every Like Adds Light” campaign

MUSCAT: Combining the power of digital engagement with social responsibility, Sohar International and Sohar Islamic have been actively driving impact through their Ramadhan campaign, “Every Like Adds Light”, since the start of the holy month.

This initiative transforms online interactions into tangible contributions, with every ‘like’ on the bank’s dedicated Instagram posts converting into a 100-baisa donation — directly supporting charity organisations in implementing sustainable development programmes. By merging innovation with generosity, Sohar International and Sohar Islamic continue to empower communities, reinforcing the spirit of giving that defines Ramadhan.

Commenting on the initiative, Mazin bin Mahmood al Raissi, Chief Marketing Officer at Sohar International, stated: “This campaign captures the true spirit of Ramadhan — a time of generosity, unity and meaningful impact. It also reinforces our role as a responsible institution committed to fostering a society where opportunities and progress are within everyone’s reach.

“At Sohar International, we believe that sustainable change begins with empowerment, equipping individuals and communities with the right resources to thrive. Through this initiative, we are transforming digital interactions into real acts of kindness, inviting everyone to be part of a collective effort that drives positive change. Our commitment to compassion and innovation remains unwavering as we continue championing initiatives that make a lasting difference across the communities we serve.”

Sohar International’s commitment to social responsibility goes beyond traditional philanthropy, embracing innovative initiatives that empower the community to drive meaningful change.

By integrating digital engagement with real-world impact, the bank reaffirms its role as a financial institution that balances economic progress with social well-being. This initiative exemplifies its unique approach — where innovation aligns with purpose — ensuring that its efforts create lasting value for individuals and communities alike.

The charity organisations selected for this campaign are distinguished by their focus on capacity building and skill development.

Ensuring nationwide impact, Sohar International and Sohar Islamic have carefully selected associations from across Oman, reflecting its commitment to fostering inclusive and widespread community development.

The Al Noor Association for the Blind is launching a specialised training programme that empowers visually impaired individuals with advanced expertise in artificial intelligence, strategic planning,

SME management and professional conduct — enhancing their employability and independence.

Further reinforcing its commitment to empowering emerging female leaders, the bank is supporting the Omani Women’s Association in Al Kamil W’al Wafi in introducing “Khatawat” — a transformative initiative designed to cultivate leadership and innovation among young women, equipping them to drive meaningful change in their communities.

Start your drive of blessings with Chery

THIS Ramadhan, Chery Oman invites customers to embark on a journey of blessings with an exciting opportunity to own their dream Chery vehicle and stand a chance to win an all-new Chery Arrizo 5 (STD) sedan.

The campaign offers an array of benefits that enhance the joy of driving, including 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.)

Speaking about the campaign, a representative from New World Autos, the distributor for Chery in Oman, stated, “Chery’s innovative and feature-packed line-up has been making waves in Oman and this Ramadhan, we are excited to make ownership even more rewarding.

“Our special offers not only make it easier to drive home a Chery, but also ensure peace of mind for years to come. The exceptional 10-year/1,000,000 km engine warranty highlights a commitment to durability and trust, making Chery the perfect companion for memorable journeys. We are confident that our customers will enjoy a truly satisfying ownership experience.”

Chery Arrizo 8 is available starting from RO 8,175. This premium sedan redefines elegance and performance. It boasts a 1.6L turbocharged engine paired to a 7-speed dual-clutch transmission (DCT). Designed with cutting-edge technology and advanced safety features, the Arrizo 8 offers a seamless driving experience,



The campaign offers an array of benefits that enhance the joy of driving.

making it an excellent choice for those who seek sophistication and comfort.

Chery Arrizo 6 PRO is starting from RO 5,500. This dynamic sedan that blends power with efficiency is equipped with a 1.5L turbocharged engine and a CVT transmission, ensuring a smooth and responsive drive.

With its modern design and innovative features, the Arrizo 6 PRO caters to those who desire style and performance in one package.

Chery All-New Arrizo 5 is available starting from RO 4,275. It is a stylish and practical sedan. This new entrant in the Chery range in Oman is built for urban explorers.

Powered by a 1.5L engine and paired with a CVT transmission, this sedan offers a fuel-efficient and comfortable ride, making it a great choice for everyday driving.

Chery Tiggo 7 is available starting from RO 6,600. This SUV seamlessly blends versatility

and power. The Chery Tiggo 7 is designed for adventure and features a 1.5L turbocharged engine and a CVT transmission.

It delivers both efficiency and agility, making it the ideal SUV for families and thrill-seekers alike.

Chery Tiggo 8 is available starting from RO 10,300. It is perfect for those who seek space and sophistication. This remarkable SUV is powered by a 1.6L turbocharged engine with a 7-speed DCT. With its premium interiors, intelligent technology and powerful performance, the Tiggo 8 ensures every journey is a luxurious experience.

Recently, Kantar and Google jointly released the 2023 Chinese Global Brand Builders Top 50. Chery is ranked as the best Chinese global brand builder in cars and 14th in the overall list and its brand power has achieved strong growth.

DRIVE INTO THE JOY OF RAMADHAN WITH SPECIAL MINI OFFERS

MUSCAT: Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, the exclusive importer of MINI in Oman, is celebrating the spirit of Ramadhan with exciting offers for those looking to experience the fun and adventurous world of MINI.

From the playful MINI 3-door to the spacious MINI 5-door, every purchase this Ramadhan promises a driving experience as unique as your lifestyle.

Throughout the holy month, customers booking a new MINI will receive an array of benefits, including MINI Service for 5 years or 100,000 km, whichever comes first, MINI Warranty for 5 years or 200,000 km, and MINI Roadside Assistance for 5



years or 200,000 km.

To make the MINI ownership experience even more rewarding, Al Jenaibi International Automobiles is also offering free first-year

registration and insurance, as well as complimentary services from AutoSpa to keep your MINI looking pristine.

Adding to the excitement,

customers purchasing a MINI this Ramadhan will also be entered into a draw for a chance to win one of three brand-new BMW vehicles, with lucky winners announced at the end of March, April and May.

Whether you’re seeking that iconic go-kart feeling behind the wheel or a car that truly complements your personality, MINI’s Ramadhan 2025 offers present the perfect opportunity to bring home a car that sparks joy every mile of the way.

Customers can visit the Al Jenaibi International Automobiles MINI showroom in Al Qurum or contact 80050008 to explore the range and take advantage of this special Ramadhan offer.

OAB hosts workshop for brokerage firms

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) organised an exclusive workshop for brokerage firms on its digital virtual system for managing payments and investor accounts at the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Recently launched as part of OAB’s suite of advanced financial services for businesses, this initiative reflects the bank’s continued investment in enhancing its digital services and staying at the forefront of global financial technology advancements.

The workshop aimed to enhance brokerage firms’ understanding of this advanced technology, which improves transaction efficiency, simplifies fund management, and ensures regulatory compliance with secure and transparent financial practices.

Held in the presence of the Financial Services Authority (FSA), the event attracted broad participation from leading brokerage firms across the Sultanate of Oman. The event aligned with the Authority’s initiative to introduce electronic trading.

During the workshop, OAB’s team delivered a comprehensive presentation on the technology’s key features, highlighting its role in automating fund management, enhancing security, and improving



This initiative reflects the bank’s continued investment in enhancing its digital services.

operational efficiency.

The system streamlines settlement processes, minimises human intervention, and enables real-time tracking of client funds through dedicated virtual accounts while ensuring financial integrity and transparency through transaction monitoring.

The workshop also featured insightful discussions on the importance of adopting digital innovations in financial services.

Sulaiman al Hinai, Chief Wholesale Banking Officer at OAB, stated: “By organising this exclusive workshop, OAB

reaffirms its commitment to supporting the development of the financial sector and sharing its expertise with brokerage firms. Our advanced financial solutions are among the most sophisticated globally and align with the evolving regulatory requirements of the Omani financial sector.”

He explained that the workshop was designed to provide financial brokers with a comprehensive understanding of OAB’s virtual solution for fund management, account settlement automation, and seamless transaction execution through direct integration between client systems and the bank’s payment system.

He added that this technology represents a major advancement in saving time, effort, and operational costs in banking and financial transactions.

It adopts the latest global, simplified, and highly efficient communication system for transmitting financial messages and transactions securely and seamlessly between clients and the bank. This innovation marks a significant leap in OAB’s business services, strengthening its support for private and public sector companies in achieving growth, success and optimal operational efficiency.

BUSINESS

NEW OPPORTUNITY



Lee Jung Kook, founder and CEO of Harbon Co and Faisal bin Abdullah al Sunaidi, founder of Ocean Experts Fisheries.

OMAN-KOREA PARTNERSHIP PRIVATE SECTOR INITIATIVE LAUNCHED

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MARCH 5

OCEAN Experts Fisheries LLC of Oman and Harbon Co of South Korea have launched Oman-Korea Partnership Initiative to serve as a business platform to boost economic and industrial cooperation between Oman and South Korea.

“While it primarily focuses on the fishery sector, we also aim to facilitate collaboration across other industries by integrating South Korean technologies and expertise into Oman’s market,” said Faisal bin Abdullah al Sunaidi, founder of Ocean Experts Fisheries LLC in an exclusive interview.

According to Lee Jung Kook, founder and CEO of Harbon Co, this initiative is a key driver in connecting South Korean entities with Oman’s business landscape. “Our goal is to accelerate technology exports, support investment opportunities and create a sustainable partnership that benefits both countries,” he said.

The main areas of collaboration that are being explored are fishery farming, technological development and industry exchange.

“We are also looking at increasing trade and investment between the two countries, as well as fostering participation in international conferences, trade shows and workshops,” explained Al Sunaidi. In addition to fisheries, the plan is to expand into other industries by facilitating technology transfer, financing investment projects and strengthening production capacity.

“Our focus is on making South Korean expertise more accessible to Omani businesses,” said Lee. South Korea has advanced technology and strong expertise in fisheries and industrial innovation; Oman, on the other hand, has vast marine resources and a strategic geographic location.

“By combining our strengths, we can drive significant advancements in sustainable fishery practices, processing and export capabilities,” said Al Sunaidi. Korea has a long history of innovation in fisheries and aquaculture.

Lee said he sees Oman as a key destination for international investment, and this partnership will enable them to implement cutting-edge solutions that enhance both productivity and sustainability in the sector.

OMAN TO HOST KEY FORUM ON FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY NEXT MONTH

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 5

OMAN will host the 7th Oman International Conference on Food Safety and Quality from April 21 to 23, 2025, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat.

Organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources through the Food Safety and Quality Centre, the event will address critical challenges and advancements in food safety and quality under the theme “Towards Resilient & Dynamic Food

Systems”.

The conference will bring together industry leaders, policymakers and experts to discuss key topics, including the role of artificial intelligence in modernising food safety, regulatory analytical methods, food fraud prevention and sustainable food supply chains.

Supported by international organisations such as the Global Food Regulatory Science Society (GForSS) and the International Union of Food Science and Technology (IUFoST), the event aims to enhance global cooperation

in food safety standards.

Among the core themes, discussions will focus on Modernising Food Safety and Quality Control, highlighting new technologies in traceability, storage and contamination detection.

Food Fraud and Ascertaining Authenticity will explore verification techniques, including chemical and genetic analysis, to protect consumer confidence.

The conference will also cover Regulatory Food Analytical Methods, ensuring compliance with legal frameworks governing food production and distribution.

Oman unveils 2025 global tourism promotion drive

THE Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has launched its 2025 External Promotional Campaigns Programme, aiming to position Oman as a top global tourism destination through strategic initiatives across key international markets.

The announcement came during the Sultanate of Oman’s participation in the International Tourism Bourse (ITB) Berlin 2025.

As part of the campaign, Oman will expand its global footprint by opening new tourism representative offices in China, Russia, Spain, Latin America, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. These offices will enhance Oman’s presence and drive visitor interest from these high-potential markets.

The ministry plans to collaborate with over 80 international tourism companies to launch joint promotional campaigns in markets such as China, India, the Gulf States, Italy, France, Germany, Russia, the Netherlands, Britain, Ireland, Spain, Switzerland, the Nordic countries and Belgium.

These efforts will focus on increasing hotel occupancy rates and generating direct economic benefits. A comprehensive advertising push will include promotions on public transportation (taxis, buses and trains), shopping malls and billboards in high-traffic locations across target markets.

Additionally, the ministry will partner with leading international media outlets to roll out over 50 media campaigns on major television



As part of the campaign, Oman will expand its global footprint by opening new tourism representative offices.

networks, amplifying Oman’s tourism appeal.

Oman will also ramp up its participation in 23 global tourism exhibitions and workshops while strengthening collaborations with international and Gulf-based airlines for joint promotional efforts.

Over 100 familiarisation trips will be organised for travel agencies and media representatives, offering firsthand experiences of Oman’s diverse tourism offerings.

The campaign will leverage digital marketing through social media channels, particularly the “Discover Oman” platform,

and partnerships with global travel websites to maximise reach. Periodic training sessions will also be held for tourism professionals in target markets to deepen their understanding of Oman’s unique experiences.

Specialised tourism segments — including marine tourism, adventure tourism, golf tourism, wedding tourism and charter trips — will be a key focus, reinforcing Oman’s appeal to niche traveller segments.

This ambitious promotional drive underscores Oman’s commitment to boosting its tourism sector and achieving sustainable growth in line with Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

OMAN-IRAN BUSINESS COUNCIL DISCUSSES STRONGER TRADE TIES

MUSCAT: The Omani-Iranian Joint Business Council convened via videoconference to discuss strategies for enhancing economic cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The meeting was co-chaired by Mohammed bin Abdul Hussein Baqer from the Omani side and Jamal Razeqi from the Iranian side.

A key topic of discussion was the development of a smart electronic platform designed to streamline commercial operations and accelerate business transactions between the two countries. The council also reviewed the allocation of dedicated spaces in Oman for Iranian companies specialising in innovation and knowledge-

based industries, aiming to attract investments in these high-growth sectors.

The meeting further explored avenues for increased collaboration in pharmaceuticals, health products and food trade. The possibility of establishing a direct shipping line between Oman and Iran was also considered as a means to strengthen

bilateral trade and logistics efficiency.

Mohammed bin Abdul Hussein Baqer emphasised that the council is committed to following up on the proposals discussed, ensuring their swift implementation. He reaffirmed the council’s goal of fostering economic and trade relations between Oman and Iran. — ONA

Oman’s OQBI achieves record production in 2024

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 5

OQ BASE Industries (SFZ) SAOG (OQBI), the majority Omani state-owned integrated producer of methanol, ammonia and LPG, achieved record output in 2024, capping a year of significant milestones that also included a successful Initial Public Offering (IPO).

Accordingly, OQBI posted a 19.7-per cent uptick in revenues, which climbed to RO 234.8 million last year, up from RO 196.2 million in 2023. Driving this growth was a significant rise in earnings from methanol exports, which jumped 44.4 per cent to RO 111.6 million, up from RO 77.3 million in 2023.

Net profit however declined 14.9 per cent to RO 40.4 million, compared to RO 47.5 million in 2023, primarily due to a 50.4-per cent increase in the notional provision of rich gas as feedstock, among other factors.

OQBI Board Chairman Ali al Lawati



Production targets were exceeded across all product streams in 2024.

described 2024 as a “period of significant transformation and growth” for the company. “We adeptly navigated various challenges, seized emerging opportunities, and delivered exceptional results across all areas of our operations.”

“A key milestone in our journey was the successful completion of an Initial Public

Offering (IPO), where 49 per cent of our share capital was offered to the public. The shares commenced trading on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on December 15, 2024, marking a pivotal moment in our corporate history,” he stated in the company’s Board of Directors’ report for the year.

Significantly, production targets were exceeded across all product streams in 2024. Methanol and ammonia output jumped to 1,538k MT in 2024, up from 1,168k MT a year earlier. The increase was due to effective plant utilisation – 106 per cent for methanol and 113 per cent for ammonia.

The LPG plant, on the other hand, achieved 117 per cent utilisation, contributing to a 8.5-per cent increase in LPG output. Production of LPG products – propane, butane, condensate and LPG (cooking gas) – rose to 364k MT in 2024, up from 336k MT a year earlier.

Commenting on the company’s operational performance, OQBI CEO Khalid al Asmi added: “Production at the methanol

and ammonia plants has reached its highest level since the commissioning of the plants in October 2024. Furthermore, the LPG plant has surpassed its annual nameplate production of 350,000 MT for the first time in our history.”

Located in Salalah Free Zone, adjoining the Port of Salalah, OQBI – part of OQ Group – owns and operates an integrated complex of three advanced plants with a combined nameplate production capacity of 1,816 ktpa. The plants process rich and lean natural gas feedstock supplied under long-term agreements with the wholly state-owned gas shipper, the Integrated Gas Company (IGC), through the gas transmission network.

While part of the LPG (cooking gas) is sold domestically in Dhofar Governorate, the rest of OQBI’s products are sold pursuant to long-term, arm’s-length exclusive take-or-pay offtake agreements with OQ Trading for export to end markets, principally in Asia and the MENA region and, to a lesser extent, Europe and Africa.

OPINION

Extravagance and waste in the holy month of Ramadhan



HAIDER AL LAWATI

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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

WHY do some Islamic countries exhibit excessive consumption of goods, products, and food during the holy month of Ramadhan, despite the desperate needs of the less fortunate?

The value of these products is substantial, making it essential to avoid extravagance and waste. While this issue exists in societies worldwide, the rate of excess consumption significantly rises during Ramadhan due to traditions and social customs surrounding Iftar and Suhoor.

Studies indicate that food waste can reach alarming levels in some countries, with 25-30% of the food prepared daily being discarded.

The financial value of this waste varies by country and food type but can amount to millions of dollars in certain cases.

Islam and the Holy Qur'an emphasize the importance of reducing food waste, encouraging moderation in consumption,

and promoting generosity toward the hungry.

These principles align with the noble human values that Islam upholds.

The Qur'an clearly advises on responsible consumption, stating: "...Eat and drink, but be not excessive."

This verse urges moderation in food and drink, as excessive consumption is a form of wastefulness that Islam forbids.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) exemplified moderation in eating and drinking, reinforcing this principle through his teachings.

He advised: "A human being should fill one-third of his stomach with food, one-third with drink, and leave one-third for breathing."

These hadiths highlight the necessity of consuming food wisely and avoiding waste. At the same time, Islam strongly encourages providing food to the poor and needy, emphasizing the importance of sharing resources rather than squandering them.

The Quran clearly advises on responsible consumption, stating: "...Eat and drink, but be not excessive." This verse urges moderation in food and drink, as excessive consumption is a form of wastefulness that Islam forbids.

Numerous Qur'anic verses and hadiths call for feeding the hungry and ensuring that surplus food is distributed fairly.

Rather than being discarded, excess food should be shared with friends, neighbors, and those in need.

Islam also places great importance on cleanliness and the preservation of food.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "If fruit falls on the ground, pick it up and do not let it go to waste."

This hadith underscores the significance of using food wisely and preventing spoilage. In general, Islam advocates moderation in all aspects of life, including food consumption.

The Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH) guide Muslims to avoid extravagance while actively helping others and ensuring that food is not wasted.

Following these teachings requires individual responsibility in reducing food waste and supporting those who lack adequate nourishment.

EUROPE HAS MONEY BUT FEW WEAPONS FOR UKRAINE

BY PIERRE BRIANCON

DONALD Trump's abrupt decision to pause military aid to Ukraine forces Europe to step in with hopes to plug the gap.

Brussels has the financial means, but not all the military equipment necessary to help Kyiv mount an effective defence. One option if it falls short is to buy from US defence companies.

Since Russia's war of Ukraine started in February 2022, Europe (including the UK, Norway and Switzerland) has provided most of Western aid to Ukraine, to the tune of 132 billion euros for civilian and military support.

The US has provided around 114 billion euros. About half of the allies' combined aid, or 120 billion euros, consisted in military aid.

If finance was the only problem, Europeans would not have much to worry about.

Making up for the 38 billion euros a year in total aid that the US has provided so far would amount to just 0.15 per cent of the bloc's combined annual GDP – a rounding fiscal policy error.

European leaders are already debating how to increase their defence budgets to 3.5% of GDP – or by a combined 320 billion euros a year – and the European Commission is proposing to set up a 150-billion euro lending facility to help them with joint funding.

But Europe will be at pains to provide Ukraine with the timely military aid it needs to keep Russian forces at bay.

According to Ukrainian officials, the country can keep fighting for another six months without US support. Kyiv is already able to manufacture some 4 million drones a year, according to President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Yet it needs tanks and air defence weapons, not to mention the intelligence provided by the US on the movement of Russian troops.

Europe can offer its Leopard tanks as substitutes for the US's Abrams. It also has French, German or Norwegian rivals to the US's crucial Patriot air defence system that has been vital for Ukraine since the Russian war.

Over the past three years defence firms like Rheinmetall, which has plans to set up a manufacturing facility in Ukraine, have begun churning out key artillery shells needed by Ukraine.

European defence companies delivered 1 million of these last year and are on track to produce 1.5 million this year.

But production would have to be cranked up to double that level to meet Ukraine's needs. Furthermore, deliveries of tanks and more heavy duty artillery cannot happen overnight.

Orders of such weapons take months to be fulfilled. Then Ukrainian forces have to be trained in the new equipment. Europe could try to buy the needed weapons from their US manufacturers.

But that would also require quick decisions, and the outcome will depend on the vagaries of the administration in Washington. European leaders are meeting on Thursday to debate about raising their military spending.

After the US retreat, they face the urgent and immediate task of helping Ukraine avoid a meltdown on the battlefield. — Reuters

CBO macroeconomic stability report: Insights

THE recently published Macroeconomic Stability Report 2024 by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) provides a comprehensive analysis of Oman's economic landscape, showcasing the nation's resilience and strategic efforts to foster sustainable growth amid global economic uncertainties.

Covering the period from January 2023 to September 2024, the report offers valuable insights into Oman's fiscal performance, monetary policy, external balance and diversification initiatives, reflecting the country's unwavering commitment to navigating a rapidly evolving global economy with foresight and stability.

The Macroeconomic Stability Report 2024 highlights Oman's moderate yet consistent economic growth throughout 2023 and the first half of 2024. Real GDP expanded by 1.2% in 2023, marking a slowdown from the remarkable 8.0% growth achieved in 2022 due to external headwinds and reduced hydrocarbon output.

Encouragingly, the first half of 2024 showed improvement, with real GDP growing by 1.9% year-on-year, primarily driven by non-hydrocarbon (NHC) sectors.

The recent projections show that the outlook for the Omani economy is solid over the medium term and will continue to recover and grow in the coming years, aligning with both national priorities and global economic opportunities.

Nominal GDP, which contracted by 3.6% in 2023 due to declining crude oil prices and reduced hydrocarbon output, rebounded in H1-2024 with a 2.6% year-on-year growth.

This recovery was fuelled by a 3.7% increase in NHC activities. The services sector contributed significantly with a 3.3% growth, while the agricultural and fishing sector posted a notable 6.6% expansion, underlining the effectiveness of Oman's diversification efforts.

FISCAL DISCIPLINE

The report underscores Oman's strong fiscal performance, with the nation recording a fiscal surplus of RO 936 million (2.3% of GDP) in 2023, significantly outperforming the budgeted deficit.

This positive momentum continued into H1-2024, with a surplus of RO 391 million (1.9% of GDP) despite global economic challenges. Oman's prudent fiscal management, coupled with higher-than-expected oil revenues,



The Macroeconomic Stability Report 2024 highlights Oman's moderate yet consistent economic growth.



FAARAH ANWAR

The writer is a Pakistan-based researcher and financial analyst.

facilitated a notable reduction in public debt. Public debt declined by 13.2% in 2023, reaching RO 15.3 billion (37.5% of GDP), and further decreased to RO 14.4 billion (33.8% of GDP) by June 2024.

The government's focus on using fiscal surpluses to repay external debt significantly strengthened Oman's fiscal position, reducing the external debt-to-current account receipts ratio to 39.2% by mid-2024.

The nation's fiscal outlook is supported by ongoing reforms, including the Social Safety Net programme and the rationalisation of public spending. These measures strike a careful balance between social welfare needs and long-term fiscal sustainability.

The ongoing efforts to reduce public debt and diversify government revenue sources further highlight Oman's proactive approach to strengthening its economic foundation. Recent series of upgrades in the country's credit rating reflects growing confidence in its economic policies and fiscal reforms.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION EFFORTS

The Macroeconomic Stability Report 2024 emphasises Oman's ongoing efforts to diversify its economy away from hydrocarbon dependency. In 2023, NHC GDP grew by 1.3%, with growth accelerating to 3.7% in H1-2024.

Key sectors, notably services, agriculture and fishing, demonstrated resilience and were instrumental in driving GDP growth. Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the government's diversification agenda

aims to expand NHC sectors and reduce economic vulnerability to oil market fluctuations.

Despite a decline in crude oil prices – averaging \$82.3 per barrel in 2023 compared to \$95.4 in 2022 – Oman's NHC sectors played a pivotal role in stabilising the economy and supporting growth.

Despite lower average prices of Oman crude oil in 2023 and 2024, relative to 2022, Oman's diversification efforts continue to mitigate risks associated with oil price volatility, underscoring the importance of accelerating investments in non-hydrocarbon sectors.

The broader economic forecast reflects optimism. Growth in non-oil sectors, driven by strategic investments and diversification initiatives, underscores the importance of expanding the economic base.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

Despite these positive developments, Oman remains exposed to global oil market volatility.

The Macroeconomic Stability Report 2024 emphasises the importance of continuing fiscal discipline, accelerating economic diversification and enhancing non-hydrocarbon exports to ensure long-term economic stability.

Projections from the Central Bank of Oman suggest a solid medium-term outlook, with continued GDP growth driven by NHC sectors. The government's commitment to fiscal sustainability, coupled with strategic investments and reforms, positions Oman to navigate future economic challenges effectively.

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Ramadhan

4

BASIC
RAMADHAN
GUIDES

FATWA

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



If a pregnant woman is bleeding during Ramadhan, can she fast?

She can fast and pray if it does not affect her health.



HADITH GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL

Abu Ayyoob Al Ansaari, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, said: "It is unlawful for a Muslim to desert his fellow Muslim for more than three nights. As they meet, both of them turn their backs on each other. However, the best of them is the one who starts by greeting the other."

QURAN VERSE OF THE DAY



But man wants to deny what is ahead of him. He asks, "When is the Day of Resurrection?" When vision is dazzled. And the moon is eclipsed. And the sun and the moon are joined together.

(Al Qiyamah)



DUA SUPPLICATION TO ALLAH

O Allah, on this day, place me among those who seek forgiveness. Place me among Your righteous and obedient servants, and place me among Your close friends, by Your kindness, O the most Merciful.



HOW SMARTWATCHES AND WALKING CAN TRANSFORM YOUR WELL-BEING

BY NAJAH AL RIYAMI

THE ERA OF the quantified self has arrived. With smartwatches tracking our steps and smartphones analysing screen time, data is everywhere. But what will we do with it? The choice is ours.

The smartwatch acts as our data analyst (analyst not included), and even our iPhones tell us things like how many hours we've worked (Google Docs, anyone?), or how much time we've spent on Instagram or any particular app. The data is all there for your convenience. Today, we have intricate information about ourselves that we never had access to before; what will we do with it? The choice is ours.

Get more hours of sleep, spend less time on Instagram, and take more steps; at least for this writer, these goals align. Data is a powerful tool; understanding where your time goes and what you do with it gives you a means to organise it better, thus allowing for more mindful living and improved organisation.

Smartwatches have significantly

contributed to our physical well-being. They have revolutionised the way we approach physical activity, particularly walking. By providing real-time data — like step counts, distance covered and calories burned — these devices transform a simple walk into a measurable achievement. This information not only helps you set realistic goals, but also motivates you to remain consistent. For example, seeing that you're just a few hundred steps away from your daily target can inspire you to take the stairs instead of the lift or head out for an evening stroll. This consistent feedback turns walking into a habit that supports overall health and well-being.

Walking is one of the simplest yet most effective ways to improve your health. A daily stroll can strengthen your heart, lower blood pressure and improve circulation — reducing the risk of heart disease by nearly 20%. It also keeps your joints flexible and your muscles strong, easing arthritis symptoms and supporting long-term mobility. Studies show that walking for 30 minutes a day can reduce the risk of heart disease by 19%.

Beyond the physical benefits, walking boosts mental well-being by reducing

stress, anxiety and depression, thanks to the release of endorphins. It aids in weight management, improves bone density and enhances sleep quality, making it a well-rounded activity for overall health. Additionally, walking improves digestion, strengthens the immune system and has even been linked to increased longevity. Best of all, it's accessible to nearly everyone — requiring nothing more than comfortable shoes and a commitment to stepping out.

The best part? It doesn't require special equipment or skills — just a good pair of shoes and a willingness to step out! Where will your next walk take you?

By measuring steps, distance and calories burned, smartwatches encourage consistency and make it easy to set and achieve fitness goals. So, lace up your shoes, check your smartwatch and take that first step towards a healthier, happier you.

This Ramadhan, let us remember to take our health into consideration. Embrace walking and mindful living during this holy month, ensuring that our physical and mental well-being is nurtured as we observe our fasts.

Where will your next walk take you?



Sustainable Iftar for a better world

BY KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

AS WE embrace the spirit of a sustainable Ramadhan, the traditions of Iftar and Suhoor demand our urgent attention. Each day during this holy month, tonnes of food are discarded, and taking legitimate action could save countless meals from waste.

Every morsel of food represents hours of hard work, natural resources, and various factors of production, including gas, electricity and water. Therefore, it’s crucial to examine our food practices meticulously.

A significant portion of the food waste occurs at hotels, which offer a multitude of Iftar and Suhoor options. Households are also responsible for a considerable share of this waste.

The Quran clearly addresses the issue of food wastage in verse 31 of Surah Al A’raf, reminding us: “O children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer; eat and drink; but waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasteful.”

Wastefulness is not only frowned upon in Islam; it is vehemently discouraged. As highlighted in verses 26 and 27 of Surah Al Isra’, we are instructed: “Render to the kindred their due rights, as (also) to those in want, and to the wayfarer; but squander not in the manner of

a spendthrift. Verily spendthrifts are brothers of Satan; and Satan is ungrateful to his Lord.”

Estimates suggest that food waste during Ramadhan can reach alarming levels, with as much as 40 per cent of cooked food being discarded each day. Some communities tend towards indulgence and excess during this sacred month, despite the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advocating for moderation in all aspects of life.

Oman boasts a variety of hotels across different star ratings, each vying to attract guests with enticing Ramadhan packages. Embracing a sustainable Ramadhan programme is not just relevant; it is essential.

In an interview with the Observer, Ozge Yilmaz, General Manager of Hilton Garden Inn Muscat, shared insights into their ongoing sustainability programme and ‘Green Iftar’ initiative, which encompasses various facets of sustainability.

“Our Sustainable Ramadhan Iftar initiative exemplifies our commitment to creating a Ramadhan experience that is both meaningful and practical. We have launched our sustainable Ramadhan initiatives, focusing on a harmonious blend of tradition and environmental responsibility, designed to positively impact the community through conscious choices and actions,” she stated.

According to hotel representatives, the Sustainable Ramadhan initiative encompasses several key elements aimed at promoting sustainability.

These include reducing food wastage, minimising the use of single-use plastic utensils, and sourcing ingredients and other raw materials locally. Additionally, the initiative supports local communities and businesses, donates surplus food to the Oman Food Bank and promotes behavioural change through zero-waste recipes. The emphasis on Local Food Sourcing highlights the significance of supporting local communities; the Sustainable Ramadhan Iftar initiative prioritises sourcing ingredients from local farmers and producers. This approach not only strengthens regional economies, but also reduces carbon footprints and provides fresher, seasonal ingredients for a healthier Iftar experience.

Recognising the environmental and health advantages of a plant-based diet, the initiative encourages the inclusion of plant-based dishes in traditional Iftar menus, contributing to lower greenhouse gas emissions and fostering a more compassionate approach to food consumption.

To tackle food wastage effectively, hotels have begun implementing strict measures throughout their Sustainable Ramadhan Iftar operations. By precisely estimating quantities, optimising portion sizes and collaborating with local charities, the initiative aims to significantly lessen food wastage and ensure that every meal served benefits the community.

Comprehensive measures to limit plastic usage will also be enforced as part of the Sustainable Ramadhan Iftar initiative. This commitment not only helps reduce plastic pollution, but also promotes a cleaner environment.

Hotels should establish strategic partnerships with local food banks, such as the Oman Food Bank, to extend the impact of the Sustainable Ramadhan Iftar initiative. Surplus food from Iftar events will be donated to support their mission of alleviating food insecurity, ensuring that the benefits of this initiative reach beyond the immediate community.

By embracing these sustainable practices, we can all contribute to a better, more responsible way of observing this holy month.

RAMADHAN TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

IFTAR STREET FOOD STALLS, SPECIAL PRAYERS AT MOSQUES IN INDIA

During Ramadhan in India, a vibrant tapestry of faith and cultural diversity comes to life. With one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, cities buzz with the spirit of this sacred month. Families eagerly break their fast with Iftar, indulging in lively street foods such as biryani, kebabs and sweet treats like sheer khurma. The call to prayer, or azan, resonates, drawing communities for special prayers at mosques, which fill with devoted worshippers. Evenings are dedicated to prayers and Quran recitations, with many engaging in charitable acts to support the underprivileged. Ramadhan markets thrive, offering a wide array of delicious foods. This month not only fosters devotion, but also strengthens family bonds through shared meals and cherished memories. As Muslims in India observe Ramadhan, they celebrate unity, compassion and the richness of their culture, making it a period of reflection and renewal.

DAILY HEALTH TIPS TO REMEMBER



LIMIT FRIED FOODS

Fried foods are a common indulgence during Ramadhan, often dominating Iftar tables. While tempting, it is advisable to limit their consumption for several reasons. Fried foods are usually high in unhealthy fats and calories, leading to weight gain and offering little nutritional value. Additionally, they can cause digestive discomfort and feelings of lethargy, which are not conducive to a day of fasting and spiritual reflection.

Instead of frying, consider healthier cooking methods such as grilling, baking, or steaming, which preserve flavour while reducing unnecessary fat. For example, grilled chicken or fish can be satisfying when marinated with spices and herbs.

If you desire a crispy texture, try oven-baking vegetables or whole grains. Opting for healthier oils like olive or coconut oil in moderation or using an air fryer can also help achieve that crunchy texture with fewer calories. Pairing main dishes with fresh salads or steamed vegetables can create a more balanced meal.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL EVENTS IN ISLAM



624 CE: The Battle of Badr

The Battle of Badr occurred on the 17th of Ramadhan and is a significant event in early Islamic history. Prophet Muhammad and his followers confronted the Quraysh of Mecca, who vastly outnumbered them. Despite the odds, the Muslims achieved a decisive victory, seen by believers as divine intervention. This battle reinforced the resolve of the Muslim community and strengthened their faith. It established the Prophet’s leadership and gained respect.

FEATURES

BY KHALED ABDUL MALAK

THE MAGAN civilisation, often associated with the region of modern-day Oman, played a significant role in the trade networks of the ancient world, particularly during the Bronze Age. Frequently mentioned in Mesopotamian texts, Magan is renowned for its rich resources, especially copper, which was vital for various industries of the time.

Magan is believed to be located in the southeastern Arabian Peninsula, primarily in what is now Oman. Its strategic position enabled extensive trade with neighbouring regions, including Mesopotamia. This advantageous location facilitated the exchange of goods and ideas, establishing Magan as a crucial player in ancient trade networks.

The Mesopotamians greatly valued Magan for its high-quality copper, essential for crafting bronze tools and weapons. In return, Magan imported bitumen, a valuable resource used for waterproofing boats and construction. The trade routes connecting Magan to Mesopotamia not only facilitated the exchange of tangible goods, but also fostered cultural and technological interactions, underscoring the interconnectedness of ancient civilisations.

The Magan civilisation is often linked to the Indus Valley Civilisation through archaeological findings and trade artefacts. This connection suggests a complex network of trade that extended across the Arabian Sea, influencing cultural exchanges between these ancient societies. Similar artistic and architectural styles indicate a rich tapestry of interactions that shaped the development of both civilisations.

Among the most distinctive features of the Magan civilisation are the beehive-shaped tombs found throughout northern Oman. These stone structures reflect the social complexity of the time and offer insights into the burial practices and belief systems of the Magan people. The design of these tombs bears a resemblance to similar structures in the Indus Valley, suggesting a shared culture and ideology.

In the National Geographic programme featuring Albert Lin, the exploration of ancient trade routes and civilisations sheds light on the significance of Magan. Lin's work underscores the importance of archaeological research in understanding the complexities of ancient trade networks and their impact on the development of civilisations.

I was fortunate to work alongside Albert Lin, a renowned presenter for National Geographic, in guiding him and his team through fascinating petroglyphs and beehive tombs in Wadi Tanuf in 2023. This exploration formed part of an episode about the Magan civilisation in the series "Lost Civilisations".

Working with Albert was an inspiring experience. He is not only an accomplished engineer and scientist but also an adventurer who has triumphed over significant challenges. Following a severe accident in 2016 that resulted in the amputation of part of his right leg, Albert has continued to lead physically demanding expeditions with the aid of a high-tech prosthetic limb. His capacity to climb and navigate challenging terrains during our explorations was truly impressive. Among our adventures was a descent into the 7th hole, a major sinkhole in the Selma Plateau.

One of the most intriguing petroglyphs we encountered in Wadi Tanuf depicts a central human figure flanked by two Indian cattle,



The Magan Civilisation: A glimpse into ancient trade and culture



signifying close ties to the Indus Valley — an image that stirred curiosity about the cultural narratives of the time. This rock art panel was first discovered by my dear friend Jeffrey Rose, a renowned archaeologist who has dedicated over 20 years to exploring human prehistory in Oman.

The Magan civilisation stands as a fascinating example of how trade and cultural exchange shaped the ancient world and nurtured its prosperity. Its connections with Mesopotamia and the

Indus Valley highlight the significance of regional interactions in the development of early societies. As research continues, our understanding of Magan's role in the broader context of ancient history will undoubtedly deepen, revealing more about the intricate web of human connections that defined the Bronze Age. Through ongoing exploration and study, we can uncover the rich legacy of this remarkable civilisation and its contributions to the tapestry of human history.